

giving the feeling of wondering in the dark hallways of Hades. This feeling was enhanced by three arched iron gates, symbolizing the gates to the Underworld. The first one was an entrance, the second was about halfway down the hallway and the third one would lead directly to the Room of the Spectrums.

### Main sanctuary (13)

This is a square tower-like structure, with an entrance on the southern side, located on the NW corner of the eastern complex. Its external walls, of a distinctive polygonal and carefully built structure, are preserved at a height of about 3.50m and are impressively thick (3.30m). On the internal part, two parallel walls, as carefully constructed as the external ones but not as thick, divide the building into three areas of the same width.

The central area seems to have been one room, the so-called Room of the Spectrums, where, probably with the aid of a device, the ghosts of the dead would appear before the pilgrims. In the two areas in the corners, two vertical walls create three equal in size square rooms in each.

### The Crypt (14)

Right beneath the Room of the Spectrums, and having the same dimensions, is an underground room 3.25m high, carved on the rock. Its construction is quite distinctive, since the floor of the room above is at the same time the ceiling of the room beneath, which in turn is supported by 15 porous arches on semi-columns. The room's dimensions, location and construction indicate it was built at the same time as the sanctuary. Possibly it replaced the prehistoric cave, where the initial nucleus of worship would have been and where, according to tradition, was the dark palace of the Underworld gods, Hades and Persephone.

### Church of St John the Baptist (15)

The church of St John the Baptist, also known as the Monastery of Thanesa, was built on the ruins of the Hellenistic Nekromanteion's main sanctuary, possibly in the 16th century. The katholikon and the cells, which have been brought down, were surrounded by an independent precinct. The type of the katholikon is that of a simple single-room timber-roofed

church, decorated with partially preserved wall paintings dating to 1740, according to the inscription from the church's ktetor. Plenty of materials from the deserted ancient sanctuary were used for its construction.

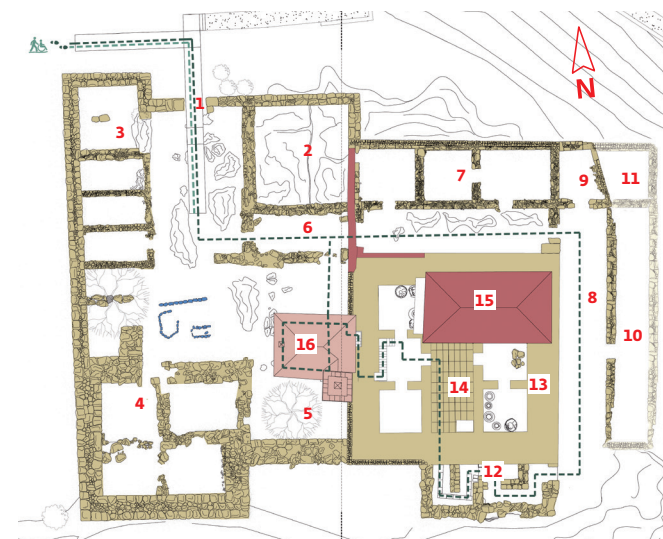
### Ottoman koulia (16)

Near the katholikon is the *koulia*, the tower house of the Ottoman feudal lord. It is built on the western side of the wall of the main sanctuary. In terms of architecture, it comprises a rectangular two-storey building and a tower and is dated to the first half of the 19th century.

*\* The plan of the Nekromanteion was created based on a design from the archive of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Preveza.*

Front cover: Head of Persephone wearing a high "polos" decorated with all kinds of fruits in relief and a headscarf (3rd c. BC), Archaeological Museum of Ioannina. © Ephorate of Antiquities of Ioannina/Ministry of Culture – Fund of Archaeological Proceeds.

Below: View of the Nekromanteion archaeological site from the northwest.



- Prehistoric Period (burials)
- Hellenistic Period (Nekromanteion complex)
- Post-Byzantine Period (Monastery of Hagios Ioannis or St John the Baptist)
- Ottoman Period (tower house – *koulia*)

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|---|--|
| 1 Entrance to the archaeological site                       | 8 Eastern hallway of the main sanctuary                |
| 2 Semi-basement room  | 9 Room of the eastern hallway                          |
| 3 A series of rooms west to the entrance of the sanctuary   | 10 External eastern hallway of the main sanctuary      |
| 4 Hellenistic rooms on the NW corner of the western complex | 11 Room of the external eastern hallway                |
| 5 Hellenistic rooms on the NE corner of the western complex | 12 Southern hallway of the main sanctuary or Labyrinth |
| 6 Northern hallway of the main sanctuary                    | 13 Main sanctuary                                      |
| 7 Rooms of the northern hallway                             | 14 The Crypt   |
|   | 15 Church of St John the Baptist                       |
|   | 16 Ottoman <i>koulia</i>                               |



You can tour the site by using the ground plan. To listen to or download the file of the audio-guide, scan with your cell phone the QR code on the left or type in the link: [https://www.archaeology.wiki/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Nekromanteion\\_Acheron.mp3](https://www.archaeology.wiki/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Nekromanteion_Acheron.mp3)



# THE NEKROMANTEION OF ACHERON

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The Nekromanteion of the river Acheron, renowned in antiquity, is located in the Fanari Valley of the Preveza region, on a hill near the Mesopotamos village.

The hill seems to have been frequented by humans as early as the Late Bronze Age. Findings from the Archaic and Classical Periods include a repository with fragments of vases and clay figurines of Persephone. On the grounds of these discoveries archaeologist S. Dakaris concluded that there was an archaic sanctuary of Persephone at the top of the hill. The sanctuary functioned in the Classical Period as well.

In the Hellenistic Period it was replaced by a larger one, the ruins of which are evident today. In this period the main sanctuary with its winding hallways was constructed. That is when the underground cave was carved on the rock, right beneath the Room of the Spectrums, hosting the dark palace of Hades and Persephone. In the late 3rd–early 2nd c. BC, on the west to the original structure, a complex of rooms and storage rooms was added. In 167 BC, the Nekromanteion was set on fire and it was completely destroyed by the Romans. Since the 1st c. BC, the area, having lost its worship significance, is fully occupied with private residences. In the 16th century, on top of the Hellenistic Nekromanteion, the church of St John the Baptist (Hagios Ioannis) was constructed.

Pilgrims would come to the Nekromanteion so as to be initiated and contact the dead. To this end they performed a ritual for several days (cleansing baths, prayers, special diet etc.).

To reach the site they would flow up the Acheron on a boat, passing through the grove of Persephone and the Acherousian Lake, and then they would walk up to the top of the hill.

Leaving the Nekromanteion, pilgrims were bound by a strict oath of silence regarding their experience in the sanctuary. Revealing secrets from Hades was punished with death.

### Entrance to the archaeological site (1)

The entrance gate is located in the middle of the northern side of the western complex, where the ancient entrance would have been as well.

### Western complex (2–5)

When entering the western complex, visitors see on their left a square semi-basement room (2), carved on the rock, which was used for storage and as a repository for the rubbish from the sanctuary.



01 The underground crypt of the Nekromanteion.

02 A “west slope” painted vase (late 3rd c. BC–167 BC). Archaeological Museum of Ioannina. © Ephorate of Antiquities of Ioannina/Ministry of Culture – Fund of Archaeological Proceeds.



03 A black-glazed amphorisk with relief decoration (late 3rd c. BC–167 BC). Archaeological Museum of Ioannina. © Ephorate of Antiquities of Ioannina/Ministry of Culture – Fund of Archaeological Proceeds.



On the west to the entrance, a square room was revealed, dating to the Hellenistic Period, and a bit more to the south three consecutive rectangular rooms (3) dating to the Roman Period (1st c. BC).

On the southwest corner of the western complex, three rooms were found, also dating to the Hellenistic Period (4). The one at the north was an antechamber to the two on the south, which were dormitories for pilgrims while they were preparing before being guided into the main sanctuary.

On the southeastern corner of the western complex, the foundations of four more rooms are evident, having the same use and function as the two aforementioned ones, which, having been built on downhill ground, have been swept off and are not preserved today (5).

### Northern hallway of the main sanctuary (6, 7)

When visitors head towards the main sanctuary, they follow a route to the right, as pilgrims would have done in antiquity, crossing the northern hallway (6). On the northern external side of this hallway three rooms have been unearthed (7): the first two were hosting the pilgrims, also serving to their final preparation, and the third one was a bath.

### Eastern hallway of the main sanctuary (8, 9)

The northern hallway is succeeded by the eastern one (8). Its main feature are the extremely thick walls, which are actually preserved at their initial height. On the northern part of the eastern hallway another room was found (9), which is the natural continuation of the three adjacent rooms of the northern hallway and which was a temporary lodging area.

### External eastern hallway of the main sanctuary (10, 11)

Along the eastern hallway there is an external one, from where pilgrims would exit the sanctuary (10). On the northern part of the external eastern hallway, excavations have yielded traces of foundations, possibly of one more room (11).

### The Labyrinth (12)

The southern hallway of the Nekromanteion is not as long or wide as the others. It was designed in a meander style hence it is known as the Labyrinth,