

My Lykaion Project, Implications for Continuity of Cult

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Excavations at the ash altar of Zeus on Mt. Lykaion, conducted from 2007-2010, have yielded hundreds of Mycenaean kylikes and other drinking vessels, as well as terracotta figurines, suggesting the existence of a Mycenaean shrine on bedrock. Mixed in with this material were also found large amounts of Final Neolithic through Middle Helladic ceramics. In association with this pottery and throughout all levels of the trench were found burnt animal bones, specifically femurs, patellas, and tailbones of goat and sheep, as well as ash, and botanical remains. The faunal remains have provided an ideal test case for the C-14 dating method for burnt bone, undertaken as a part of NSF Grant for scientific analysis at Mt. Lykaion at the University of Arizona AMS lab. Drs. Starkovich and Hodgins established a protocol for dating heavily burned (calcined) animal bones, which is a recently developed technique in the field of radiocarbon dating. The results of the C-14 dating reveal that earliest examples of burnt femurs from bedrock can be dated from 1527 BC \pm 97 indicating that the ritual practice of offering burned animal sacrifice is associated with the early Mycenaean period. The C14 samples of the burnt bone, taken from a vertical column in the lower part of the ash altar, range in date from the Late Helladic through the Archaic period. Evidence for the offering of burnt animal sacrifice is more commonly known in Iron Age contexts. Previously published evidence for burned animal bone from the Bronze Age is extremely limited, known only from a few sites such as at Pylos and Methana. The ritual practice of *thysia* (or the offering of burnt animal sacrifice) at Greek sanctuary sites is attested in Homeric and other Greek texts, and was the heart of Greek ritual practice. These new C-14 results now allow us to push back the date for the practice of *thysia* to the early Mycenaean period, and suggest continuity of this ritual practice spanning many centuries at Mt. Lykaion.