

Community Archaeology in Pergamon – A Short Report on Activities of the Pergamon Excavation of the German Archaeological Institute

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Archaeological research in Pergamon has been taken place for more than 140 years. First steps towards community archaeology can be observed already when Alexander Conze, the director of the Imperial Prussian Museums, was keen not to leave the city hill behind like a heap of rubble, or when Carl Humann felt responsible for clearing up the site of the Great Altar and restoring the monument in the Athena Sanctuary after excavation. About Wilhelm Dörpfeld is said he put stones back into their original position already during excavation and he is known for building a series of so-called architectural samples which partially visualize the originally existing buildings (fig. 1). Until recently, the concept stayed more or less the same: Parallel to the scientific exploration of the site conservation and reconstruction projects were conducted with the aim to preserve and represent ancient buildings. With the development of tourism in the second half of the 20th century international tourists became the main recipients of these efforts. With the construction of a cable car to the Acropolis of Pergamon in 2007, the presentation of the site was adapted even more to mass tourism, so that visitors explore only the Acropolis in a very short time and miss the main part of the ancient city on the slopes of the city hill and the more recent historic city below.

Fig. 1: Re-assembled architectural pieces of two Hellenistic exedrae at the upper terrace of the Gymnasium, 1st decade of the 20th century (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut (DAI) Athen, Fotothek D-DAI-ATH-1556)



Since 2012 the excavation follows in making decisions about conservational and reconstructive work the plan to install a visitor path which connects the Acropolis with the so called Red Hall sanctuary in the lower town of Bergama (fig. 2). The path passes the city excavation with a partly reconstructed Heroon and the Peristyle House Bau Z with its interior decorations, the monumental gymnasium with a partial reconstruction of its Peristyle (fig. 3), the Attalos house with frescoes, the lower Agora and the main Gate of the Hellenistic city which releases the visitor in the narrow streets of the Ottoman town. The aim of this tour is to encourage visitors to stay longer and to explore not only the Acropolis but also the ancient city of Pergamon and the Ottoman historical living quarters which cover the Roman town at the foot of the city hill. Conveying Pergamon as a city embedded in a multi-layered cultural landscape that links past and present in many aspects is in line with the definition of Bergama-Pergamon as a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2014. One might ask at this point why we want to support tourism when it has so many dark sides – be it the flooding of historic sites with short-term visitors or the gentrification of cities as a result of the creation of accommodation in a huge scale. That would be a valid question but we can only accept that Pergamon-Bergama is a tourist attraction and we need to think about how to support and develop the positive aspects of this situation. One opportunity is to support sustainable and individual tourism which brings visitors in the historical living quarters of Bergama and enable the inhabitants to take part in the tourism business to a moderate extent. There is no doubt that participation is an important prerequisite for effective protection of cultural heritage. If the residents of the old town experience their historical environment as an opportunity to make a living, cultural awareness increases and economic participation can enable them to preserve and maintain their historic houses.

Until such long term developments show effect we follow also other concepts in the wider range of community archaeology for the local inhabitants. One opportunity is to educate young people from Pergamon in stone masonry. The one year courses enable them to work in a challenging handicraft with a strong relationship to the preservation of historical or even ancient architecture. The apprenticeships became possible by funding from the Gerda Henkel Foundation and run already for two years. With the planned transformation of a truck shed into a stone workshop this educational training will be based on the tourist route between the

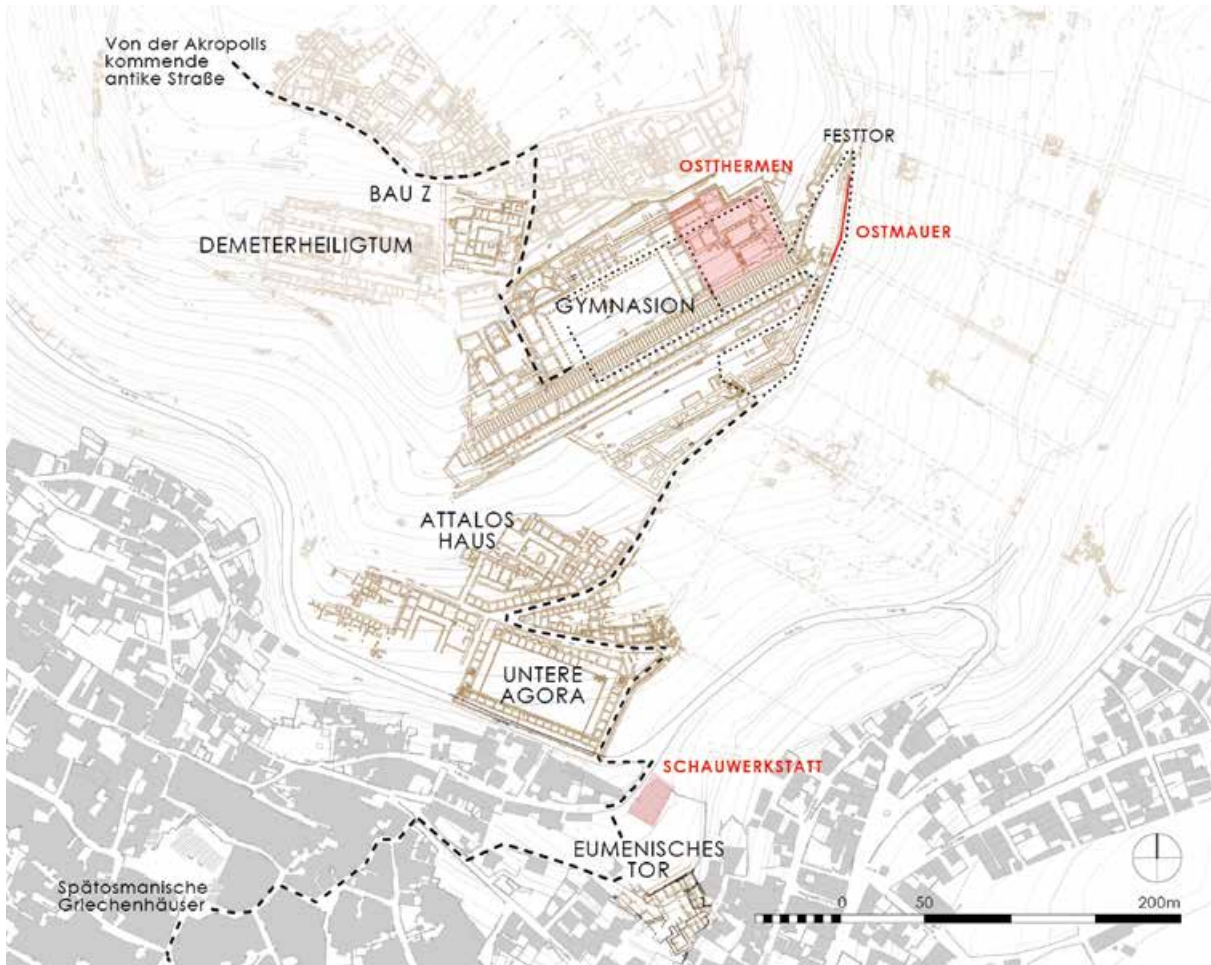


Fig. 2: Map of the lower city hill of Pergamon and the Ottoman quarter at its foot with the course of visitor's path between Acropolis and the so-called Red Hall in the lower town (DAI-Pergamon Excavation, 2018)

Fig. 3: View on the upper terrace of the Gymnasium with the recently re-erected north-western peristyle corner (Photo: DAI-Pergamon Excavation D-DAI-PE2018-01832, 2018)





Fig. 4: View over the so-called Kale Mahallesi with its historical houses to the city hill of Pergamon (Photo: Edgar Lissel, 2006)

ancient city and the historical town of Bergama. The workshop will be designed as a showroom where visitors can get insight in our work. Furthermore we want to establish an opportunity there where inhabitants of the neighbourhood can borrow tools for maintaining their historical houses.

As it is previously emphasized above, one aspect of the capacity building project¹ of the Pergamon excavation aims to enhance the awareness of the local inhabitants, particularly in regard to the preservation of their own historical houses (fig. 4). In this framework, a survey was conducted in order to obtain and analyse the socio-economic background, physical conditions of the environment and common needs. The survey provided insights on various aspects, e.g. most of the historical houses are owned by people with low-income, who, therefore, cannot afford regular maintenance of their houses, which must be in accordance with regulations defined by law. On the other hand, one problem was proved to be quite common and its reason was well-known: decay of a house usually starts from its roof and when it is not properly repaired on time, the decay accelerates and affects the entire house until also main structural elements get dam-

Fig. 5: Maintained roofs can protect houses in longer terms, while neglected roofs instantly transfer the decay (Photo: DAI-Pergamon Excavation, Ulrich Mania)



aged. The survey also included a series of meetings, where the Pergamon excavation has come together with the target group – the local inhabitants – but also representatives of institutions were invited. In workshops and with the support of the local museum and the municipality of Bergama participants were informed about bureaucratic procedures in preparation of maintenance work and comprehensive restoration of historical houses. The survey and the follow-up meetings resulted in the decision to repair roofs of historical dwellings as the most efficient and resident-oriented measure (fig. 5). Subsequently, this idea was presented to local authorities and stakeholders, and received local confirmation, recognition and support.

In the course of two years (2019–2020) of the capacity building project, roofs of eight historical houses have been repaired (fig. 6). In fact, at one of the houses, owners continued the maintenance with their own efforts. Soon after, they received the honorary prize at a competition organised by Izmir Municipality, with the title “Respect to History” (fig. 7). This unveiled the potential, that roof repairs may encourage the inhabitants to continue the rest of the maintenance on their own. These reflections of the project encouraged local players to collaborate, such as Bergama Municipality and Chamber of Commerce.

In the second year, not only roofs of historical houses are repaired but also one historical house was completely restored, as a community house. This building is a property of the Bergama Municipality, which is agreed to be assigned for public use in return for its restoration and will eventually be specialised for the common benefit of the local community in the immediate surrounding (fig. 8). Possible functions for the community house were voted by the inhabitants. However, the declaration of the function as well as the opening ceremony had to be postponed due to the pandemic. Yet, the management model for the house has become clear: It will host multiple functions, each of which can be scheduled in different time-slots. Responsibility as well as scheduling the functions will be on the headman (muhtar) of the community. Among the suggested functions are, house for

Fig. 6: Roofs are repaired in the most economic manner, saving as much of original elements as possible (Photo: DAI-Pergamon Excavation, Seçil Tezer Altay)





Fig. 7: After the owners renovated the front facade of their house, following the roof repair, they received the honorary prize for protecting their historical house (Photo: DAI-Pergamon Excavation, Ulrich Mania)



Fig. 8: A Community house will serve for common needs of the town, that are voted by the inhabitants (Photo: DAI-Pergamon Excavation, Ilgin Kemaller)

children to get art courses and sales shop for local products produced by the community, mainly by women.

In both projects, namely the roof repairs and the restoration of the community house, experienced local craftsman have worked and also trained unskilled juniors. All of them were also inhabitants of the neighbourhood. This was another crucial aspect of the project, supporting locals, using as much of their own workforce as possible, in their own environment and eventually for their neighbours. By doing so, as many locals as possible could be engaged in the processes of saving cultural heritage.

For Pergamon excavation team, “working with locals” is not a new concept, since all these years local workforce has been preferred in conducting excavations and realisation of restoration projects. However, “placing locals in the focus” became a new concept, where the essential aim is to help preserving our multi-layered cultural heritage altogether. Saving of the cultural heritage should be ensured permanently and comprehensively on a local scale together with local actors. The capacity building project aims to sustain its impact by making locals and local authorities taking an active part in saving cultural heritage.

¹ “Capacity Building in a Social Context” funded by Gerda Henkel Foundation in 2019–2020.