

Ancient History

All ancient writers, from Herodotus to Pausanias, provide us with information about Palaio Faliro. So we know that the founder of Palaio Faliro was a local hero, FALIROΣ, son of Alkon and grandson of Eretheas, the King of Athens, and that, according to tradition, he helped the Lapithes, along with Theseus, with their fight against the Centaurs.

It is said that Faliros was one of the Argonauts who took part in the Argonautic Expedition with Jason as their leader (1226 – 1225 B.C.), and that he also founded a colony in Southern Italy named FALIRON (Pausanias, Attika, AI 4, Strabon n.246, Stefanos Vizantios, 656, s.v.p.).

Later this colony became the home for Greeks coming from Kymi, Halkida, Pithikoussa, Athens and they named the town PARTHENOPI, honoring one of the Sirens, Parthenopi, who threw herself into the sea and drowned because Ulysses didn't fall for her and her body washed up on this beach. On this beach was the Siren's grave.

LOCATION OF ANCIENT FALIRO

The territorial range of Palaio Faliro in the ancient times seems to be the same as today. This is justified by the fact that the ancient Faliro was mentioned as the first and most ancient "seaport" of Athens. *"The pier was at the point where the sea came closer to the city"*. So, as it was mentioned by K. Papahantzis, it must have been where, during the Christian years, the small church of St. George was built and still stands until today (renovated in 1985).

Of course the port of Palaio Faliro must have been fairly big,

since the port of Piraeus was not yet created and it began from Tzitzifies or the Delta area up to TROCADERO (as it was called in the past) and the area of the Flisvos Marina today. But even later, when Themistocles and later Pericles formed the Port of Piraeus, Palaio Faliro was still the second biggest port of Athens at all times.

The fact that the ancient Palaio Faliro was situated at the same area as today is also confirmed by the excavations by K.Kourouniotis in 1911 and Efstratios Pelekidis in 1915-16, as the Ancient Cemetery of Faliro was discovered between the area of the old Aircraft State Factory (KEA) and the Delta area (Hippodrome).

TEMPLES, MONUMENTS, CEREMONIES

Our ancient writers talk about important events in the mythological (prehistoric) as well as the historic period. They also mention temples, monuments, famous persons and religious ceremonies that took place in P. Faliro. So we know that Theseus set off from the Faliro Port for his journey to Crete, along with 7 young girls and 7 young boys, to kill Minotaur and relieve his country from this humiliating death toll.

And when he returned in triumph from Crete **at the Faliro port**, he sacrificed to Poseidon and the other gods showing his gratitude. From then on, they held nautical celebrations each year, the "Kivernisia", to honour the two seamen Nafsithoos (captain) and Faiakas, that commanded Theseus' ship.

PAFSANIAS (110-180 A.C.) who travelled through Attica (148-150

A.C.) mentions that Faliro was still one of the four ports of Athens and that the Themistocles Wall was destroyed. But the **GATE OF FALIRO** that led the way from Athens to Faliro, was saved, even though it was in ruins, as well as the Itonian Gates close to the Olympian Zeus Columns.

We can understand the importance of the Faliro Port also from another fact: The **FALIRO WALL**, which was built (Thoukididis, II.13) for the protection of the port, was 35 stadiums long (1 stadium=6,4 kms) and it ended up only to the Faliro Port. Pausanias saw in Faliro the temple of Athena of Skiros, built, according to tradition, by Skiros, a diviner from the area of Dodoni. He also saw a temple of Skiros along with the two temples built for the sailors Nafsithoos and Faiakas, mentioned earlier.

FALIRO DURING THE PERSIAN WARS

When Herodotus describes in his "Persians" the battles between the Greeks and the Persians (490 – 179 B.C), he often refers to Faliro. After the glorious battle in Marathon (September 490 B.C.), the Persian fleet sailed by Sounio and moved towards Faliro in order to disembark the army and attack Athens before the Athenian army could return from Marathon.

However, Miltiades anticipated the Persian actions and convinced the Marathon warriors (exhausted from the ferocious battle) to put wings on their feet and return to Athens the same night, camping in the area of Kynosarges. The Persians arrived with their ships in the Faliro Port at night, planning to attack the Athenians in the morning, at their own pace.

Indeed, they appeared in the open sea of Faliro the next morning but, as they saw the Athenians lined up ready for battle, they held their ships for a while and then turned away

sailing off to Asia (Herodotus, vi,116). Ten years later, the Persians marched out once more against Greece. Following the Thermopyles battle and Leonida's sacrifice, the Persian fleet arrives at the Faliro Bay. The Athenians had left their city for Salamina, Aigina, Poros, Trizina.

Xerxis went ashore in Tzitzifies (as it is called today) where he held a war council (21st September 480 B.C.). At the same time, the Greek headquarters held their meeting in Salamina. When night fell, the Persian infantry entered the empty city of Athens. The Persians set on fire the temples and the houses and enormous flames surrounded the Acropolis and spread until the suburbs. The Athenians, shocked by the view, watched in terror from Salamina.

The famous Naval Battle of Salamina took place the next day, the Persian fleet was routed *and the Barbarians left sailing towards Faliro* (Herodotus, vii, 91-92). From there they sailed with the highest possible speed to arrive at Ellispondos before the Greeks could catch up with them and destroy the rafts that Xerxis had used to bridge Ellispondos, thus putting the Persian fleet in a dramatic situation.

PERSONALITIES ASSOCIATED WITH FALIRO IN THE ANCIENT TIMES

Mousaios, Plato, Demosthenis, Dimitrios Falireus

The greatest of all philosophers, Plato, introduces his "Symposium" as a narration by Apollodoros, a friend of Socrates from Faliro, and his friend Glafkonas, while they were walking from Faliro to Athens (Plato's Symposium, 1 or

172-173).

Another personality associated with Faliro is the masterly orator, Demosthenis. Showing uncompromising will and strength, he struggled with his numerous physiological and psychological problems, using his own methods.

History says that when the weather was stormy and the waves crushed on the beach in Faliro, he used to walk and deliver his own improvised speeches, thus wanting to practice and keep his cool while his loud fellow citizens, in the Municipality, could put him in an awkward situation.

FALIRO IN THE ROMAN AND PRE-CHRISTIAN PERIOD

Paul the Apostle in Athens

During the first Christian years around 50 A.C., about 100 years before Pafsanias, Paul the Apostle passed by the city of Athens. Of course he disembarked in the Port of Faliro (where the small church of St. George was built later) and from there he followed a country road to Athens

When he arrived in the area where today is the church of Agioi Theodoroi, he saw the temples *for the unknown gods* built by the Athenians, according to Pafsanias (Pafs. Attika, A 1, 4, Apostles' Actions 17, 23). However, we know that the temples were at that spot because there are still 2 Ionian columns lying in the yard, along with other architectural parts that were used by the people as building materials.