

THESPIES of BOETIA

With 1.529 inhabitants Thespies is a village of the prefecture of Boeotia. In the past the village was called Erimokastro, but its name changed to Thespies, due to its vicinity with the city of Ancient Thespieae.

Ancient Thespieae

Thespieae (Greek: Thespiái) was an ancient Greek city (polis) in Boeotia. It stood on level ground commanded by the low range of hills which run eastward from the foot of Mount Helicon to Thebes, near modern Thespies.



A kantharos from Thespieae (450–425 BC) inscribed in the Boeotian alphabet



Silver Obol from Thespieae, 431-424 BC. Obverse: Boeotian shield Reverse: crescent, ΘΕΣ(ΠΙΕΩΝ) of *Thespians*.

Mythology

Thespieae, took their name from king Thespios, son of Erechtheas. Erechtheas, according to mythology, was the son of Gaea (=earth) and god Hephestos and was king of Athens, the rapporteur of the Eleusinian mysteries and the founder of the feast of Panathinaea.

At the sanctuary of the Muses (=9 goddesses that were protector deities of poetry, music, astronomy etc.) and on the homonymous river, beautiful Narkissos was mirrored and admired himself.



Furthermore, as Hercules was going to the Mountain of Kitheron to kill the lion, stopped for a night at Thespieae and asked for the hospitality of king Thespios. He let him stay at his palace and asked him in his turn to have children with his 50 daughters! Hercules did not object and after nine months Thespios had 50 grandsons, all bearing the blood of the great hero Hercules.

History

Several traditions agree that the Boeotians were a people expelled from Thessaly some time after the Trojan War, and who colonised the Boeotian plain over a series of generations. Other traditions suggest that they were of Mycenaean origin.

In the history of ancient Greece, Thespieae was one of the cities of the federal league known as the Boeotian League.

However, during the period of the Persian Wars, Thespians diversified from the rest of the Boeotians and joined the PanHellenic alliance, together with the people of Plataeae. In the battle of Thermopylae, 480 bC, 700 Thespians under Dimofilos, fought next to the 300 Spartans of Leonidas. It is mentioned that despite the fact that they were given the permission to leave the battle field and return to their city to defend it, in case needed, the Thespians decided not to leave the Spartans alone and remained in Thermopylae.

It goes without saying, that Xerxis, the king of Persians, after his victory in Thermopylae, burned the city of Thespieae. Its inhabitants found shelter in Peloponnesus. The Thespians took also part, with 2.500 men, in the victorious for the Greeks battle of Plataeae, which ended the Persian wars.

Other wars followed, the city was destroyed and rebuilt many times, but there were even periods of peace and prosperity. It is worth mentioning that during the Roman era, the Thespians were in their can acne and the only city in mainland Greece that was never occupied by them.

Thespieae, is the city of origin of the courtesan Fryni, the great love of the well known ancient sculpture Praxiteles. He used her as his model.

Love and the Muses

According to Pausanias, the deity most worshipped at Thespieae was Eros, whose primitive image was an unwrought stone. The city contained many works of art, among them the Eros of Praxiteles, one of the most famous statues in the ancient world; it drew crowds of people to Thespieae. It was carried off to Rome by Caligula, restored by Claudius, and again carried off by Nero. Another work by Praxiteles associated with Thespieae was an Aphrodite, after which the Venus of Arles is thought to have been modeled. There was also a bronze statue of Eros by Lysippos.

The Thespians also worshipped the Muses, honored by a shrine in the Valley of the Muses and celebrated in a festival in the sacred grove on Mount Helicon.

