

AREA OF APHRODITE'S SANCTUARY IN APHAEA SKARAMAGAS, ATTICA: PROPOSAL OF LANDSCAPE DESIGN

DOI: 10.26341/issn.2241-4002-2019-1a-1

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Abstract

The significance of the area in ancient times, as an important stopover of the Eleusinian procession, an area to rest and accommodate wayfarers and pilgrims depicted in the archaeological site of the Aphrodite's Sanctuary and in the well-preserved part of the ancient road, excavated from the temple towards lake Reiton, along with the uniqueness of Attica's landscape the effort to revive it, were a source of inspiration for this research.

Main objectives are:

- *Integration of the large green-planted-areas of Mount Poikilo and Mount Aigaleo, as well as the settlement of Aphaea with Mount Aigaleo.*
- *The emergence of Aphrodite's Sanctuary through the green areas integration together with a network of open-air areas and information infrastructures.*
- *Connecting the area with the ancient route part of the Sacred Way (Iera Odos) from Echo's Hill to Lake Reiton.*
- *Highlighting the two streams in the area.*
- *Creating infrastructure (playgrounds and sports facilities, information and accommodation infrastructures, green land leisure areas) which will attract more visitors to Aphrodite's Sanctuary and will activate the settlement.*

The methodology used was primarily locating the sites of archaeological and environmental interest through research in bibliography and then identifying the problematic ones along with any dynamics that can benefit the area development. Subsequently, site surveys located the individual landmarks in the area. Finally, having in mind to develop the appropriate conditions and infrastructures that will highlight the region's history and activate the settlement of Aphaia, design redevelopment steps are being proposed.

The design proposal is based on making Iera Odos (Sacred Way) road underground in this section and the formation of a unified space above that emphasizes both cultural (Aphrodite's Sanctuary and the traces of the ancient Sacred Way towards Lake Reiton) and natural elements (streams, forest areas of Mount Aigaleo and Mount Poikilo).

Keywords: *Sacred Way, Aphaea Skaramagas, Landscape design, cultural network.*

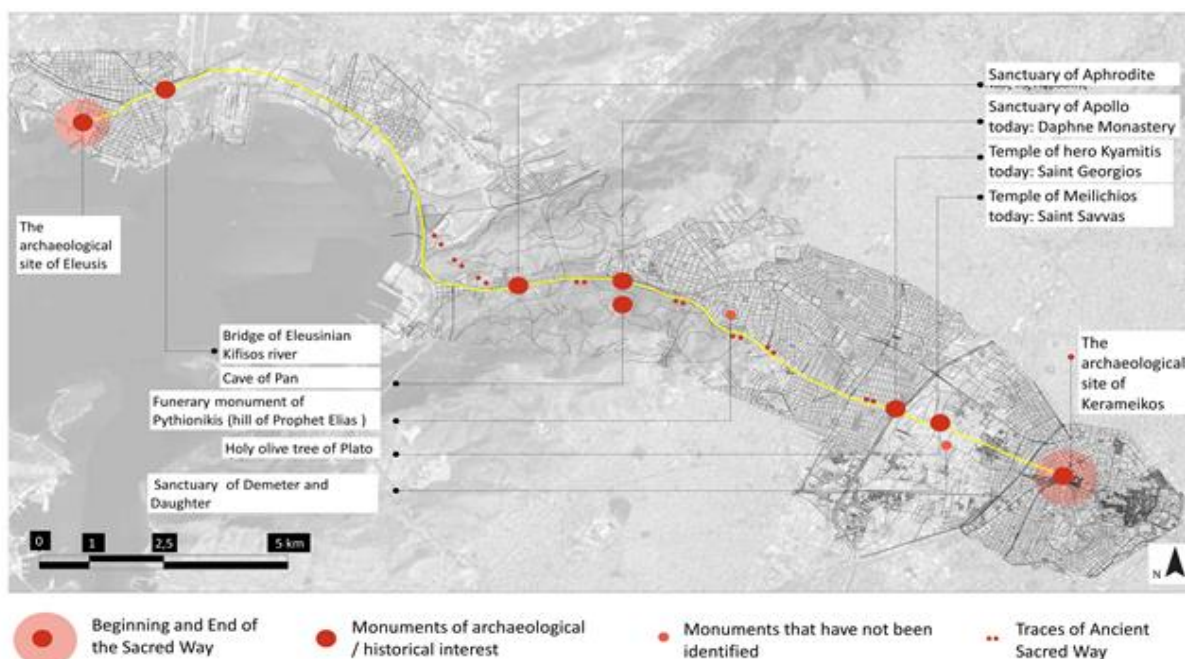
Inspiration

During classical antiquity, the Sanctuary of Aphrodite, in Aphaea Skaramagas, served a dual purpose. It was a place of hospitality for pilgrims and travelers, while it doubled as a stop for the Eleusinian procession. This dual function is depicted in findings at the Sanctuary itself, as well as in the portion of the Sacred Way (Iera Odos) that has been unearthed between the Sanctuary and Lake Reiton. This work has been inspired by the findings relative to the Sanctuary's purpose, as well as by a recent effort to highlight the virtues of the unique Attica landscape.



Figure 1. Site map at the Sanctuary of Aphrodite, in Aphaea Skaramagas (The Athens Archaeological Society, 1938)

Sacred Way



Map 1. Places of archaeological interest (Monuments and traces of the ancient Sacred Way) (provided by the author)

The Sacred Way was a road that connected Athens with Eleusis. It stretched from the Holy Gate of Kerameikos, in Athens, to the Sanctuary of Eleusis, a distance of around 22

kilometers. The Sacred Way was 5 meters wide and according to archaeologists and historians, it is considered to be the oldest known road in Europe. It was named Sacred because it was the route taken by the annual Eleusinian procession. The Sacred Way served the commerce needs of that era and had a cultural value too, as it was decorated with temples, altars, sanctuaries, tombs, statues of Gods, heroes, and common citizens, as described by Polem and Pausanias.

There are several sites of archaeological interest along the Sacred Way. The archaeological site of Kerameikos, Skiron, and Eleonas, are located in Athens, at the beginning of the Sacred Way. There is also historic evidence of the existence of the funerary monument of Pythionikis on the hill of Prophet Elias, but it has not been found yet.

Continuing along the Sacred Way, are the churches of Saint Savvas, at the site of the ancient altar and temple of Meilichios Zeus, and Saint Georgios, at the site of an ancient shrine dedicated to hero Kyamitis.

Further along the Sacred Way is the 6th century A.D. Daphne Monastery, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, built on the site of the ancient Sanctuary of Apollo. A column of the ancient Sanctuary is built into the present-day church.

Arriving at Skaramagas, there is a sanctuary dedicated to goddess Aphrodite followed by the local Reiton streams, existing since antiquity.

Finally, approaching Eleusis, the Sacred Way crosses Eleusinian Kifisos river. A four arc bridge was erected at the site by Emperor Hadrian, preserved to this day.

On Map1 the large red dots indicate the identified archaeological sites. The medium size red dots indicate the location of archaeological sites that have not been identified as of yet. Finally, the small red dots indicate the path followed by the ancient Sacred Way.

Sanctuary of Aphrodite in Aphaea Skaramagas

Pausanias mentions "Then there is a temple of Aphrodite, and in front of it a wall of unmarked stones." located after the sanctuary of Apollo (Map 1). A well-built structure has been revealed on the south side of the sanctuary, and it has been identified as the residence of priests serving the goddess. The structure must have also served as a guesthouse for pilgrims and travelers. On the south-east side of the structure a large and well-preserved portion of the ancient Sacred Way has been unearthed (Figure1).



Figures 2.&3. Section of the Sacred Way in front of the Sanctuary of Aphrodite in Aphaea Skaramagas (The Athens Archaeological Society, 1938)



Figures 4.&5. Contemporary views of the Sanctuary of Aphrodite (provided by the author)

Traces of Ancient Sacred Way

Past the Sanctuary of Aphrodite, the Sacred Way forked into two branches. The northern branch of the road went through the present day settlement of Aphaea and then turned northwest where it crossed over some local streams, and eventually, arrived to the top of Echo Hill. From there, the northern branch of the Sacred Way headed down to Lake Reiton (Koumoundourou). On the other hand, the southern branch of the Sacred Way ran along the Sanctuary of Aphrodite, and then, it passed through the same spot as the main road of modern day town of Aphaea, right next to the National Highway. Finally, the southern branch of the Sacred Way continued downhill towards the southwest, and after bypassing mount Aigaleo, it reached Lake Reiton (Koumoundourou) too, where it merged again with the northern branch of the Sacred Way (Map 2).



Map 2. The two branches of the Sacred Way, passing the Sanctuary of Aphrodite (Travlos, J., 1971)



Figure 7. The best preserved segment of the Sacred Way, on the west of the Sanctuary of Aphrodite, in Aphaea, Skaramagas (The Athens Archaeological Society, 1938)



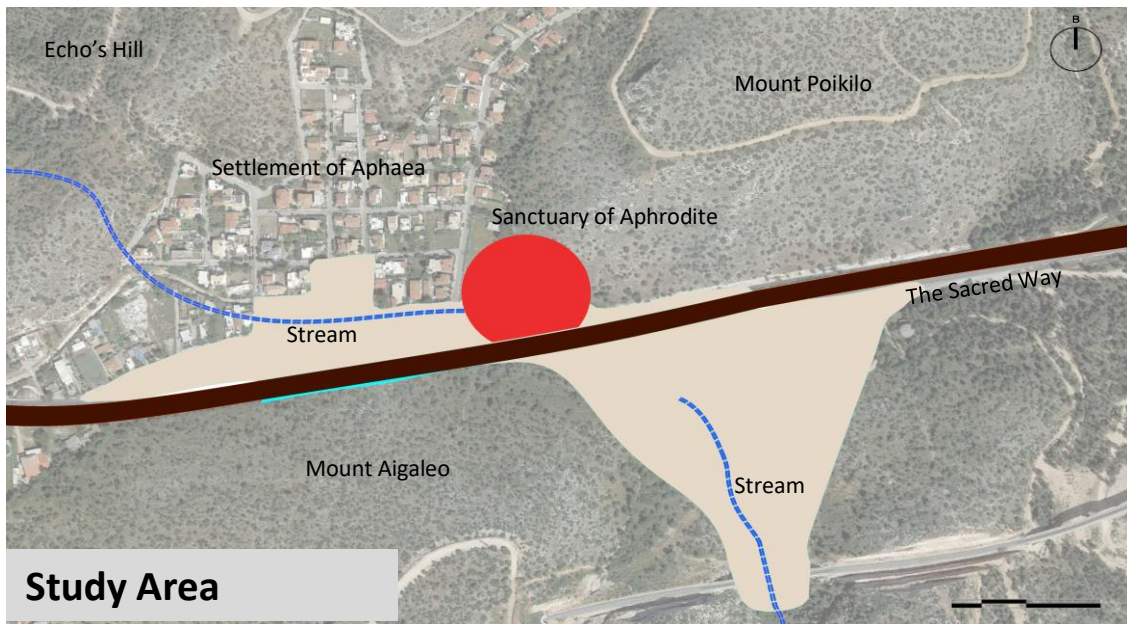
Figure 8. Contemporary view of the southwest branch of the Sacred Way (provided by the author)

Summarizing the field trip findings, there is a number of sites and monuments of archaeological importance along the Sacred Way. In addition, some of the surviving portions of the Sacred Way are in a fairly good condition. Yet, there is a need to restore and to maintain the sites and monuments along the Sacred Way, as well as to associate them with the rest of Athens' archaeological sites network.

Study area

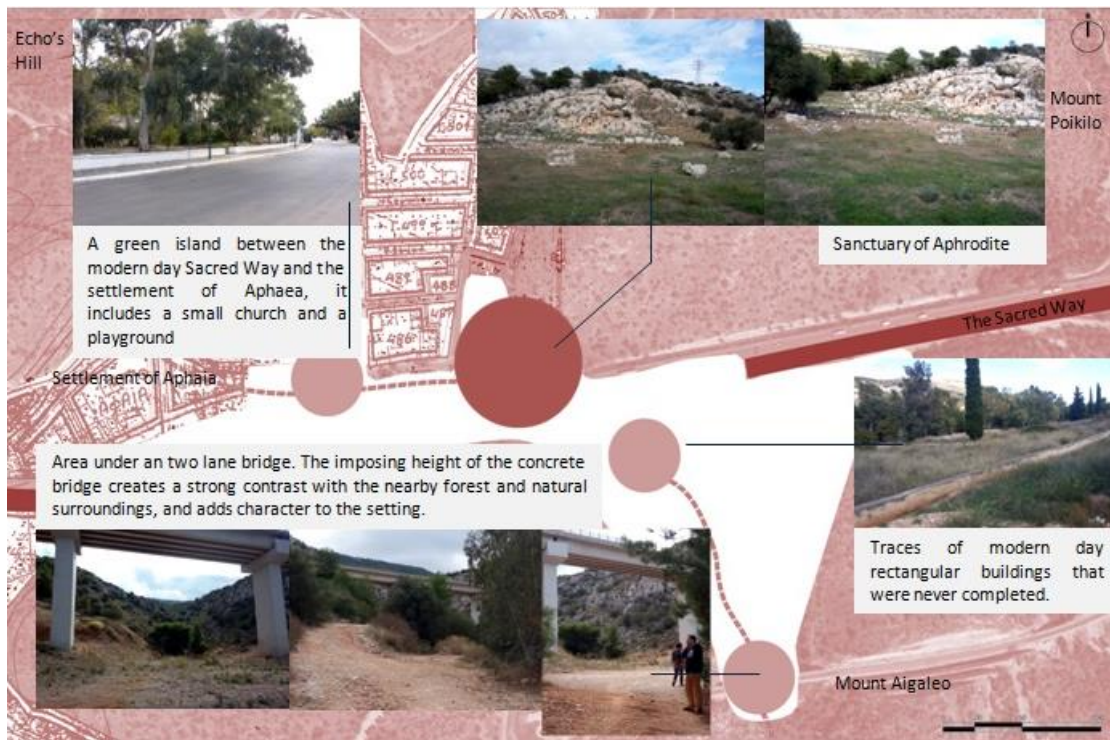
The area of the Sanctuary of Aphrodite at Aphaea Skaramagas (study area) is depicted on Map 3. The archaeological sites of the Sanctuary of Aphrodite as well as traces of the original Sacred Way, near Echo Hill, are marked on the map. Moreover, the points of environmental interest are indicated on the same map (mount Poikilo, mount Aigaleo, the streams, and the settlement of Aphaea Skaramagas).

Map 4 identifies some additional points of reference around the study area.



Study Area

Map 3. Sanctuary of Aphrodite area - Points of archaeological and environmental interest (provided by the author)



Map 4. Study Area - Additional reference point (provided by the author)

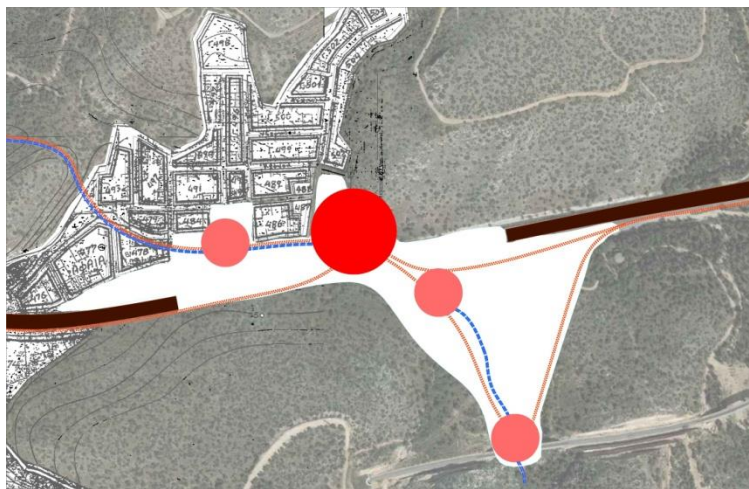
Main goals

In order to create the appropriate conditions and infrastructure to highlight the region's history and revive the town of Aphaea, some steps are proposed (Moulin, C. and Boniface, Pr., 2001), (Papageorgiou, M. et al, 2010), (Avgerinos – Kolonia, S., 2011).

The main design objectives are:

- Creation of a unified area including the forests of Mount Poikilo and Mount Aigaleo, as well as the settlement of Aphaea.
- Highlight the importance of the Sanctuary of Aphrodite by creating a unified area that includes the Sanctuary, the nearby forest, a recreation area, and visitor's information infrastructure
- Connection of the area around the Sanctuary with the ancient route of the Sacred Way towards Echo Hill and Lake Reiton.
- Highlighting the two streams of the area.
- Creating infrastructure (playgrounds and sports facilities, information and accommodation infrastructures, green land leisure areas) which will attract more visitors to Aphrodite's Sanctuary and will activate the settlement.

Maps 5. & 6. show an illustration of the proposed plan



Map 5. Study Area - Diagram of proposal



Map 6. Diagram of proposal of Landscape Design

Proposal of Landscape Design

The proposed design is based on the creation of a wide overpass over modern day Sacred Way to create a continuous area that will highlight both the cultural elements of the site (the

Sanctuary of Aphrodite and the traces of the ancient Sacred Way towards Lake Reiton) as well as the natural streams and forest of mounts Aigaleo and Poikilo (Figure 15)

Infrastructure will be added to support recreational activities (Figure 10, 11, & 12), including sporting facilities, a playground (Figures 8 & 9), as well as biking and hiking trails, surrounded by green space. The biking and hiking trails will form natural curved shapes to blend in with the natural landscape (Figure 13, 14). Visitors' information and hospitality facilities will be added too, along with parking space.

The goal of the proposed plan is to attract the public to visit the archaeological site and to engage in recreational activities too, thus reviving the area stretching from the Sanctuary of Aphrodite and the town of Aphaea all the way to Echo Hill, along the path of the ancient Sacred Way.

Natural materials (wood, stone and dirt), colors and textures are proposed in order to be in harmony with the natural landscape and the archaeological site.



Figure 8. & 9. Playground Configuration



Figure 10.,11.& 12. Recreation areas configuration

Segments of the stream will be spanned to allow for easy pedestrian and biker crossing. In addition, stops will be added along the stream to allow the visitors to take rest and enjoy the surrounding view as well (Figure 13).

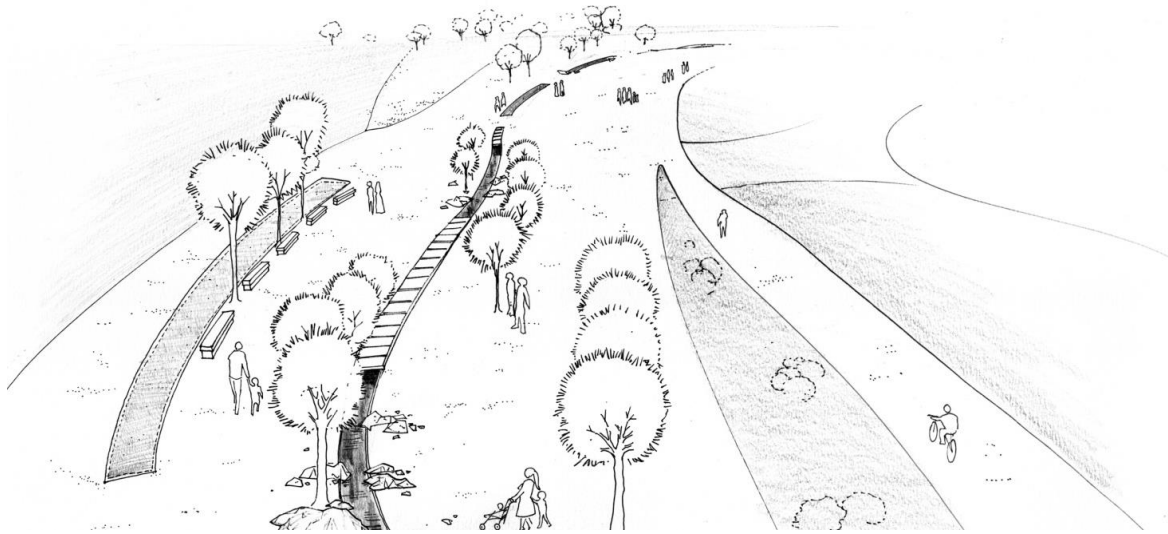


Figure 13. A sketch of the biking and hiking trails (Area B)



Figure 14. An illustration of the proposed biking and hiking trails on either side of the stream



Master plan Scale: 1:2500

Sketch of the main proposed route (selected position 2)

Suggested master plan for the Sanctuary of Aphrodite, in Aphaea Skaramagas (Scale 1:5000)

A scale of 1:2000 is used in Figures 16, 17, and 18, which illustrates restored areas A, B & C.



Figure 16. Area A



Figure 17. Area B

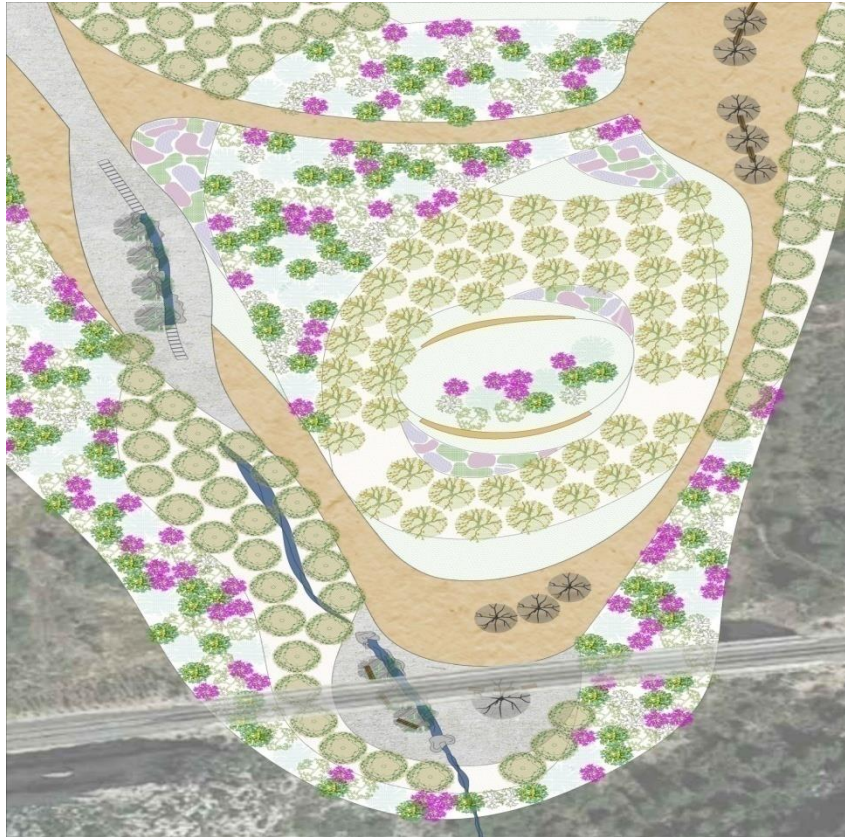


Figure 18. Area C

Figure 19 shows the types of trees, shrubs, and flowers proposed in the restoration, as well as the types of flooring material that will be used in some areas of the restored site (like safety flooring material in the playground, etc.)

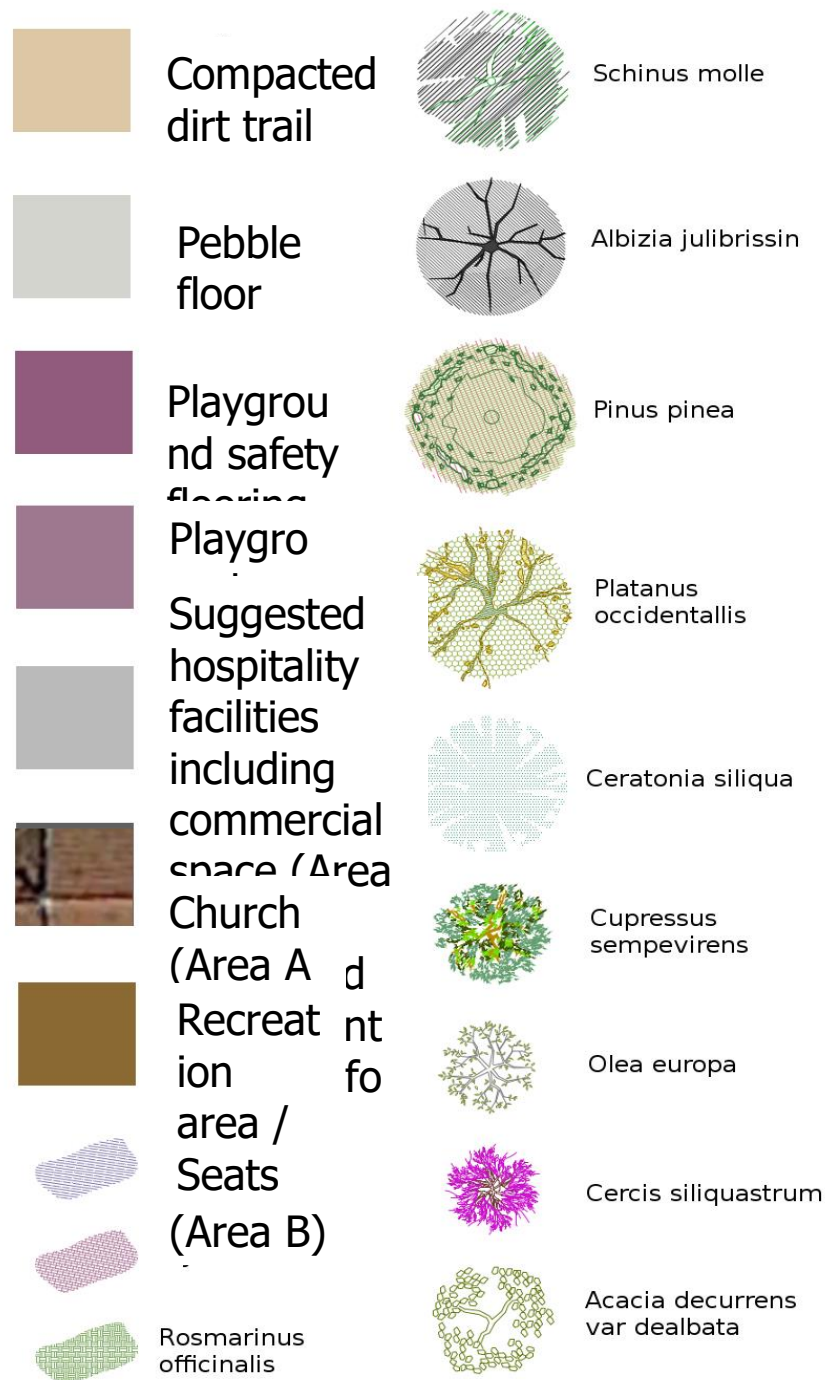


Figure 19. List of plants, shrubs, flowers, and flooring materials for the proposed restoration (Figure 16, 17&18)

Trees, plants, and floral decoration

The plants will be evergreen and deciduous trees as well as Mediterranean evergreen shrubs, to maintain a green backdrop throughout the year. Pine trees and cypresses will ensure consistency and continuity with the nearby forest. *Platanus accidentalis* will be added along the stream, to create a shadow during the summer months and will also be placed in area C of

the park. Finally, the use of lavender, myrtle, and rosemary, will add color and a natural floral scent to the site.

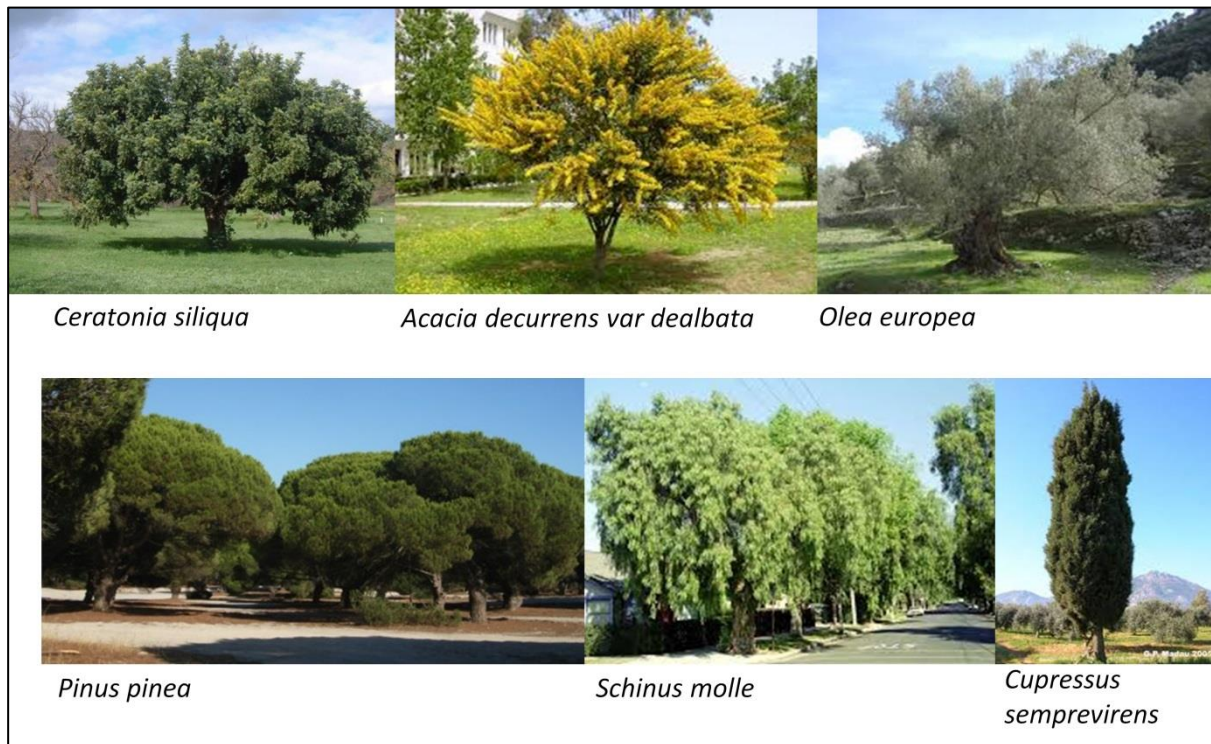


Figure 20. Images of the proposed evergreen trees

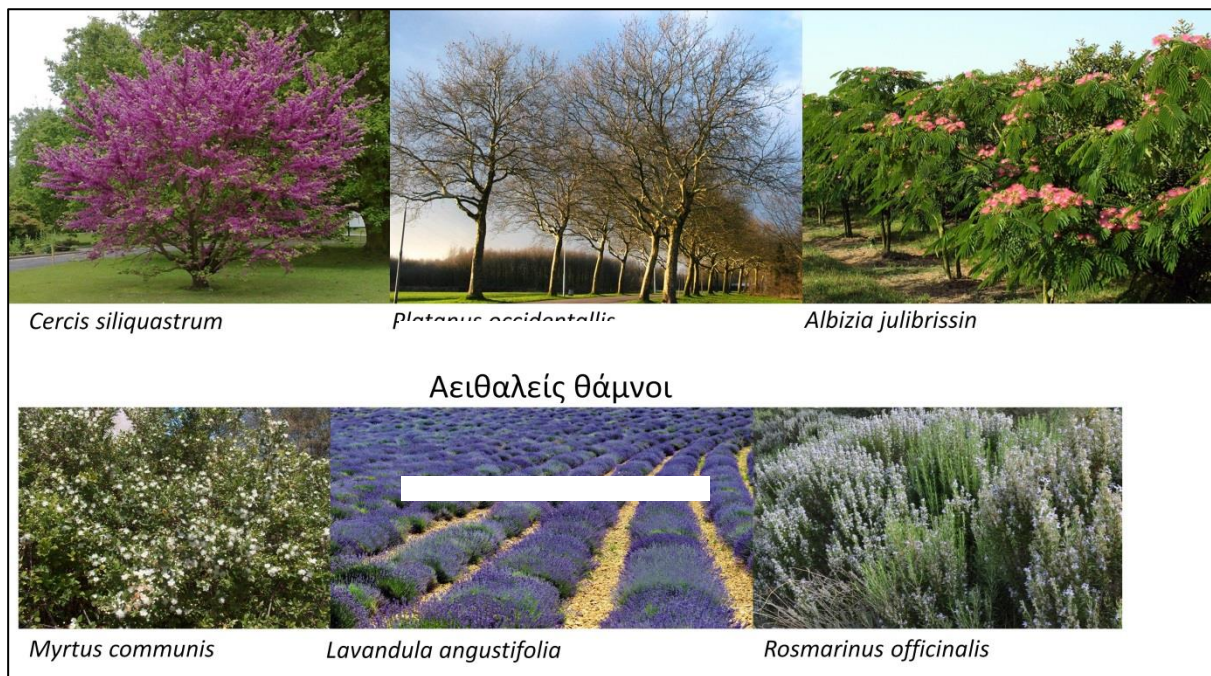


Figure 21. Images of the proposed deciduous trees (up) and evergreen shrubs (bottom)

Conclusions

The proposed design for the area around Aphaea Skaramagas creates the right conditions to highlight the merits of the Sanctuary of Aphrodite and the surrounding areas, in a sustainable way. This includes segments of the ancient Sacred Way passing through the area that will be blended with the natural surroundings in an ecological manner.

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