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New Finds of Terracottas from the Sanctuary of the Nymphs and Demos on the Hill of the Nymphs in Athens

Maria Dourou and Vassiliki D. Georgaka

The hills to the west of the Acropolis

- 1 According to the archaeological evidence, the first attested activity on the hills to the west of the Acropolis took place with the foundation of the Assembly of the Citizens (Ekklesia tou Demou) on the Pnyx, as well as the launching of the road that led from Athens to Piraeus, known as “road through Koile” (Fig. 1) (Herodotus 6, 103). This road connected Athens with Piraeus through the Long Walls that crossed the urban fabric of the city.¹ After the Persian wars, the Western Hills were incorporated into the organized classical city of Athens (Thucydides I, 89,3 and 93,1) protected by the Themistoclean Wall (479–478 B.C.E.). Being densely inhabited, the whole area was transformed into two of the most important demes of Athens, that of Melite² and Koile,³ which flourished during the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E.

Fig.1. Plan of the western hills

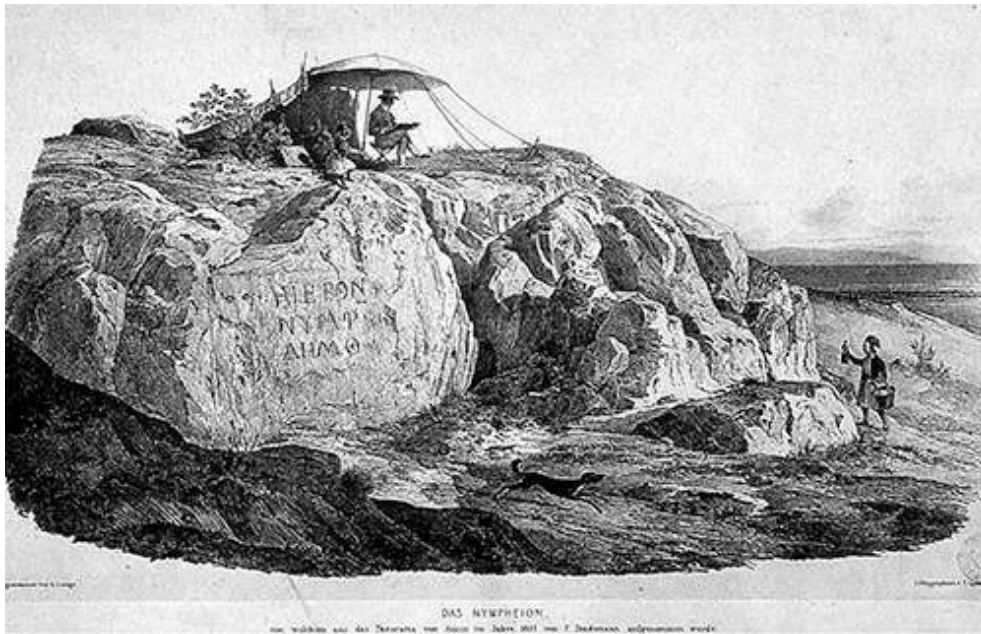


After Curtius and Kaupert 1878

The Nymphs and Demos Sanctuary

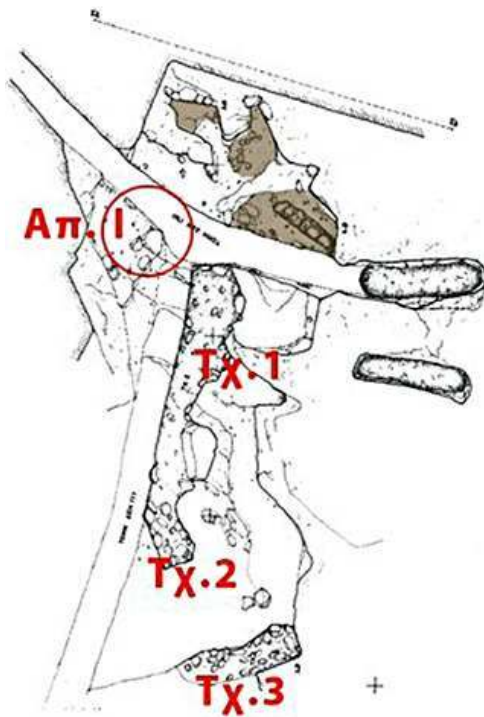
- 2 The Nymphs and Demos Sanctuary was identified by Kyriakos Pittakis in 1835, who discovered on the top of the Hill of the Nymphs the rupestral inscription HIEPON NYMΦ [QN] ΔEMO (IG I³ 1065) that was dated to the fifth century B.C.E.⁴ (Fig. 2). This inscription is carved into the local hard limestone⁵ that has numerous natural cavities and niches, an ideal place for a house of the Nymphs.⁶ The sanctuary was founded at the summit of the hill in the early Archaic period at the end of the seventh century B.C.E., but it flourished during the sixth and fifth centuries. Belonging to the Melite deme, it was protected by the Themistoclean enclosure. Around the middle of the fifth century the cult of the personified Athenian Demos⁷ was introduced into the sanctuary as a result of the democratic innovations of Ephialtes.⁸

Fig.2. The Sanctuary of the Nymphs and the Demos



After Stademann 1841

Fig. 3. Deposit (apothetes) I



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






Repository I

- 3 The Sanctuary of the Nymphs was excavated in 2000 when two repositories (I, II) were brought to light. Repository I is a semi-circular cutting in the rock to the south-west of the inscription.⁹ Its contents consisted of fragmentary pottery and handmade terracotta

figurines¹⁰ dating from the late seventh to the early fifth century B.C.E. ¹¹ Repository II included both mould-made and handmade terracotta figurines and fragmentary pottery that dated from the middle of sixth to the middle of fifth century B.C.E.¹² For the purposes of this note, however, attention is focused only on the handmade figurines from Repository I, since the mould-made examples from both deposits will be presented in another study.

- 4 These handmade figurines represent standing figures with no gender characteristics. Very schematic in their representation, they comprise a cylindrical body¹³ with a bird-faced head and triangular, outstretched arms, and are embellished with a dark red or brownish color over a white slip. The head is distinctively formed by the coroplast's thumb and index fingers that pinch the nose into shape, the only facial feature portrayed in clay. The eyes of figurines, as indicated by traces of paint preserved on several examples, are depicted with a black-painted dot. The top of the head, pinched flat by the coroplast's index finger and thumb, is rounded and is usually covered entirely with paint or decorated with one or two bands. Some figurines present a horizontal decorative band (single or double) around the neck that resembles a necklace. The upper torso is flat or concave and the arms are represented as outward projections from the shoulders. Sometimes these projections are short and slant downwards resembling fins and are therefore described as "fin-shaped;" in rare cases they slant upwards. The arms of others are simply outstretched to the side, while in still other cases the arms have triangular terminations that appear "spearhead-shaped" or that clearly project forward.
- 5 Although many of these figurines are only partially preserved, enough remains so that they can be classified according to the typological classification of handmade terracotta figurines of the Archaic period from the Athenian Acropolis that was proposed and published in the *CSIG News*.¹⁴ Within the context of the Classification Chart for these figurines as presented in Fig. 4, one can observe that the lower body of the handmade figurines in the first category "Handmade" (HM) Ia,i is cylindrical without indication of the separation of legs; this has resulted in the designation "column-shaped" used by some scholars (Figs. 5, 6). This cylindrical lower body widens into a conical base that is hollow underneath and is usually decorated on the front only with painted horizontal bands. A garment is sometimes indicated that usually bears densely painted decoration at the chest area in a linear crosshatched pattern of vertical black and red lines. Many also have one or two horizontal bands under the chest and at the point where the base widens, possibly a schematic representation of the termination of the figure's garment.

Fig. 4. Typological classification of the handmade Archaic terracotta figurines of the Athenian Acropolis

ARCHAIC HANDMADE TERRACOTTA CLASSIFICATION					
Technical characteristics		Morphological characteristics		Description (morphological & technical characteristics)	Figures
Technique	Form	Body	Face		
HM Hand-made	I Standing	A Cylindrical Body	I Without pubic	standing terracotta figurines with bird-head head and cylindrical body	 HM Ia
			B With pubic	standing with bird-head head with a thin strip wrapped round the top of the head called "pubic" and cylindrical body	 HM Ia, B
HM Hand-made	I Standing	B Flat Body	I Without pubic	standing with flat body and bird-head head	 HM Ib
			B With pubic	standing with flat body and bird-head head but with a clay strip wrapped round the top of the head called "pubic"	 HM Ib, B
	II Seated	A Flat Body	With pubic	seated with flat body and bird-head head	 HM IIa
MY Mixed Technique	I Standing	A Cylindrical Body	I Without pubic	standing figurines with cylindrical body and mould-made face	 MY Ia
			B With pubic	standing with flat body and mould-made face	 MY Ia, B
	II Seated	A Flat Body	With pubic	seated with flat body and mould-made face	 MY IIa

Dr. Vasileki Georgakou - Hellenic Ministry of Culture - Ist EPICA

After Georgakou 2008

Fig. 5. Handmade figurines of Group HM Ia,I from the Hill of the Nymphs



Author photo

Fig. 6. Handmade terracotta figurines from the sanctuary of the Nymphs end Demos



Author photo

- 6 The second group in the Classification Chart on Fig 3 (HM Ia,ii) includes figurines of the same type as those of the HM Ia,I group, but with an additional clay strip on the head that resembles a polos, while Group HM Ib,i consists of standing, flat-bodied figurines with a bird-shaped head. Handmade, seated, flat-bodied figurines with a bird-shaped face are classified in group HM IIb,ii.
- 7 Along with the completely handmade figurines that represent the majority in this corpus, there are also a small number of figurines of mixed technique. The group “Mixed Technique” (MT) Ia,ii, which is a variation of group HM Ia,i, includes cylindrical figurines with a mold-made head. Group MT Ib,ii, which is a variation of group HM Ib,i, includes flat-bodied figurines with a mold-made head. Even in cases where the head is not preserved, the traces of the joining of the mold-made head onto the figurines’ shoulders and neck indicate their inclusion into group MT Ib,ii. Finally, seated flat-bodied figurines with a mold-made head are incorporated in group MT IIb,ii. The pottery that accompanied these figurines in Deposit I included miniature vessels, such as skyphoi, oinochoai, lekythoi, pyxides and hydriai that parallel the simple votive offerings found in other Nymph sanctuaries in Attica.¹⁵ Some scholars assume that these miniature vases are thought to copy the corresponding full-sized vessels, without commenting on the reasons behind this cult practice.¹⁶ Water vessels, such as hydriai, have been associated with land fertility, while pyxides have been linked with marriage and the daily lives of women.¹⁷ Most of the pottery can be dated from the mid-sixth to the early fifth century B.C.E.

The wider context

- 8 Figurines of the types belonging to the above-mentioned groups were in widespread use in Attica, such as those found in a deposit on the Acropolis, north-east of the Propylaea, along with a great quantity of archaic pottery and terracotta figurines¹⁸ in the base of the cult statue from the pre-Kallikratean temple of Athena Nike.¹⁹ A review of the overall technical characteristics of the handmade figurines from these Attic sanctuaries has

revealed that they were made of different clays, which indicates the existence of several coroplastic workshops in Attica, all following the same coroplastic tradition. This common tradition appears at the end of the seventh century B.C.E. and flourishes throughout the sixth century, while some examples have been dated as late as the early fifth century B.C.E.

- 9 The chronological spectrum of the pottery from the Sanctuary of the Nymphs and the Demos also indicates that the sanctuary was in continual use from the late seventh to at least the early fifth century B.C.E., testifying to it a popular place of worship frequented by women to ensure fertility and a successful marriage. However, by the mid-fifth century the new cult of the personified Athenian Demos had already been installed, as is indicated by the inscription. Yet, the importance of the cult of the Nymphs on the Hill of the Nymphs perhaps is best reflected in the Roman sanctuary of Pan and the Nymphs that was discovered in a chamber carved in the rock on the north slope of the Pnyx.²⁰ This is near the ancient sanctuary of a Byzantine church dedicated to St. Marina, protector of newborns, sick children, and pregnant women, aspects that mirror the concerns that were associated with the worship of the Nymphs in antiquity.

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ENDNOTES

1. Judeich 1931, 174,180,186; Thompson-Scranton 1943, 312–313, Lauter 1982, 45–46; Travlos 1993, 80,122; Lazaridou 1997, 39–43, Dakoura-Vogiatzoglou 2009, 220–235; Dakoura-Vogiatzoglou 2013, 196.
2. Milchhöfer 1892, 29; Judeich 1931, 168–169, pl. 14, 389–391; Dakoura-Vogiatzoglou 2013, 195.
3. Leake 1821, 181; Leake 1841,23; Gardner 1902, 66, 74–75; Travlos 1993,42, pl. II; Lauter, Bufe-Lauter 1971, 123; Dakoura-Vogiatzoglou 2013, 196.
4. Pittakis 1835, 459; *APMA* 3 (1998), 109, Λ.520 (αα, 459), *AE* 1852, 670. On the eastern spur of the Hill of the Nymphs Pittakis also discovered two other rupestal inscriptions HOROS ΔΙΟΣ (IG I 1055A) and HOROS (IG I 1055B) dated between the late sixth and early fifth centuries. The inscriptions attest to the cults both of Nymphs and Zeus on this hill (Kron 1979, 75; Lalonde 2006, 1–12).
5. Ζερεφός-Βογιατζόγλου 2013, 38–39.
6. Ervin 1959, 155.
7. Kron 1979, 66.
8. *LIMC* III.1, 375, s.v. Demos [Alexandri-Tzahou].
9. Langdon 1976, 1–8, fig. 3; Themelis 1992, 35; Miles 1998, 16–20, pl. 24–26.
10. Szabó 1994, 111–115; Georgaka 2008, 33, pl. 1–13, 53.
11. Dourou 2013a, 215–229, fig. 13,16,17; Dourou 2013b, 199–208.
12. Dourou 2013a, 220–221, fig. 8 and fig. 15.
13. The term “column-shaped” is also found in the literature.
14. Georgaka 2013, 5–6.
15. See Arapoyianni 2000.
16. For miniatures as votive offerings see Coldstream 1973, 183; Payne 1940/1962, II, 290–291; Schattner, Zuchtriegel 2013, 259–265; Lindstrom, Pilz 2013, 267–274.
17. Brann 1961, 365–366; Kurtz, Boardman 1971, 210–211.
18. Balanos 1956, 785; Giraud 1994, 32–34, pl. 102.
19. Georgaka 2008, 15–29.
20. Dakoura-Vogiatzoglou, Lazaridou, 2004, 26.

ABSTRACTS

The archaeological area encompassing the hills to the west of the Athenian Acropolis, namely the Hill of the Muses (Philopappos Hill), the Pnyx, and the Hill of the Nymphs, (Asteroskopeion Hill),

comprises a rocky formation of some 700 acres. Because of their key geographic location these hills played a crucial role in the history of the city of ancient Athens. Archaeological exploration at the summit of the Hill of the Nymphs revealed a sanctuary dedicated to the Nymphs that can be traced back to the late seventh century B.C.E.; by the mid-fifth century this had become known as the sanctuary of the Nymphs and Demos. A large number of handmade terracotta figurines belonging to the typical Attic repertoire of the sixth century B.C.E. found in many sanctuaries of female deities in Attica were unearthed from repositories in this sanctuary. Their presence reinforces the Nymphs' reputation as protectors of fertility and marriage, as these figurines were popular offerings at the sanctuary for a period of a century and a half.

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