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The Terracotta 'Enthroned Goddess' of Sicily

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- 1 Terracotta statuettes were a popular ex-voto in Greek antiquity, varying in size and design. The use of a mold for terracotta figurines was introduced by Greek colonists in the 7th century B.C. to the indigenous people of Sicily. From that moment onwards there was an ongoing interaction between the cultic expressions of these different peoples, which reflected the changed social structures and the production and economic values of votive terracottas. This reciprocal interaction is visible in the design and application of the new techniques: newly invented motives and use of the votives in different contexts. It marks the beginning of new symbols, values, and traditions in a multicultural society.
- 2 My project is based on the assumption that a mixed state of the newly formed communities containing Greeks colonists and indigenous populations of different origins is reflected in the rendering of the terracottas. Terracotta votives were produced in Sicily at local workshops from nearby available clay, and would have been used by the indigenous artisans as well. Though actual statuettes or molds were also imported by the colonists, their design was altered or new types were created. The way different elements are shaped and decorated attests to a dialogue between religions and cultures that was taking place between Greeks, Sikels, Sicans, Elymians, and Punics.
- 3 A particular type unknown on mainland Greece is favored on the island, but is also found in south Italy: a goddess, often seated on a throne, carefully dressed and adorned. Compared to the almost schematic rendering of the body, lacking indications of the female anatomy, the jewellery is abundant. Most strikingly are pendants on one or more chains that are draped across the chest (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. A statuette from the city sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Agrigento. Her 'sitting position' is indicated by her backward lean (H. 17.6 Inv. 8).



Museo archeologico regionale di Agrigento, S 1149.

- 4 These are modeled as representing items from various cultural backgrounds. By exploring their origin and symbolic use, the different roots of the newly-invented forms of religious expression will be investigated. For example, one of these pendants is in the form of a bearded head with a satyr-like shape. It could point to the Corinthian bull-horned river god Achelooos, who appears on coins and in a later period as an antefix. As a symbol of rivers in general he would have been adopted.
- 5 This research will analyse to what extent the founders of the cities in Sicily – who were of different ethnic origins – defined their identity through the dedication of these votive statuettes, and how a link was made to the local religious customs. The social lay-out of the society can be read from the distinctive design and local production of the terracottas. By certain local designs a new expression of identity for the city as a whole was created. Both in physical, as well as in a political sense, the early period, the 7th and 6th centuries B.C. is the time of coming into being of the polis structure. A fixed identity is not established yet, neither in the religious aspects nor political. Identity, though in itself continuously dynamic, evolves in a package of cultural identifiers: customs, traditions and practices. Therefore I would like to research how this process evolved and which practices became traditions and defined a certain cultural identity within the ethnical mixed groups in the colonies. To achieve this goal roughly 200 terracotta statuettes from Akragas and other settlements in this region will be compared with another 300 objects found in and around other Greek colonies such as Gela, Syrakousai, and Selinous dating from the 7th century B.C. onwards. As preparatory work, around 200 votive terracottas from Akragas have already been studied iconographically in 2011 -2012 in the archaeological museum of Agrigento.
- 6 This project will not only use various branches of iconographic analysis, such as typology studies and semiotics, but also will use a strong, analytical, innovative approach in experimental and analytical archaeology. Terracottas will be investigated combining a

detailed macroscopic and microscopic (fabric) study. This integrated methodology focuses on reconstructing the *chaîne opératoire* of material production, leading to the identification of features relating to the production sequence, from raw material procurement to forming techniques and use. In this way, interpretative focus is on the choices made by craftsmen of the material at hand. By analysing the objects in an interdisciplinary way some of the choices made by ancient communities can be discovered.

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