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Vassiliki D. Georgaka

Introduction

- 1 A group of 61 handmade, terracotta animal figurines was unpacked from the Acropolis storerooms, inventoried at the Acropolis Ephorate archives during the years 1989-1991, and subsequently put on display in the Acropolis Museum (1st floor, display case 21). They were part of a larger terracotta group of handmade figurines lacking excavation reports but believed to have been found at the same place on the Acropolis during the major archaeological excavations of the 19th century. They represent 14 % of the total number of the handmade terracotta figurines discovered on the Acropolis, a common, but not a surprising, percentage for the handmade terracotta figurines of animals during the Archaic period (Fig. 1).¹

Fig.1 – The north wing of the Periklean Propylaia, the “Pinakotheke” was used as a storeroom during the first years after Independence and it housed all the finds from the first archaeological excavations.



PHOTO : JAMES ROBERTSON, 1853-4

Provenance

- 2 Unfortunately no excavation reports or any kind of archaeological information was found regarding the specific find spot of these figurines, as well as the associated place of worship or dedication. However, continuity in the registration numbering of the animal figurines in the Acropolis archives (MA 14...) gives us some evidence of a common provenance with 430 handmade terracotta figurines depicting human figures that were found inside an apothete-bothros north east of the monumental gateway of the Acropolis, the Propylaia.² Consequently, the animal figurines were most probably found during the same excavation period and therefore they came from the area north east of the Propylaia. The general Ephor of Antiquities in 1864-1884 Panagiotis Efstratiades excavated the aforementioned place prior to the proposed erection of a museum in 1864. It was here that he found unexpected archaeological finds: “the foundations of a significant construction,” as well as votive terracotta figurines.³ The works for the erection of the new museum were abandoned due to the exposure of the architectural remains. All the finds were hurriedly housed at various places on the Acropolis that were used as storerooms during the first years after the Greek War of Independence, one being the north wing of the Propylaia, the so called “Pinakotheke” (i.e. Picture gallery).

Description-Technique

- 3 The majority of these animal figurines depict horses and horsemen (Figs. 2, 3, 4),

Fig. 2, 3, 4 – Handmade terracotta figurines depicting horsemen and horses were popular offerings during the Archaic period in Athens. (Acropolis Museum, 1st floor-showcase 21, nos 21--23).



© Acropolis Museum. Photo : V. Tsiamis.

as well as some dogs (Figs. 5, 6),

Fig.5, 6 – Handmade dog figurines.



© Acropolis Museum. Photo : V. Tsiamis.

birds, possibly doves (Fig. 7),

Fig.7 – Handmade bird figurine. (Acropolis Museum, 1st floor-showcase 21, no 13 and 12).



© Acropolis Museum. Photo : V. Tsiamis.

and bovines (Fig. 8).

Fig.8 – A typical type of Archaic handmade bovine figurine from the Acropolis. (Acropolis Museum, 1st floor-showcase 21, no 14a).



© Acropolis Museum. Photo : V. Tsiamis.

- 4 Pigs and goats have also been found among them. These figurines were handmade using the characteristic attic clay (5 YR 7/4)⁴ and covered with a white, fine-grained, thick, kaolin suspension. After firing, they were mostly decorated with red and black paint, known in archaeological literature as “red/black on white technique.”⁵ This is a very common technique of finish, polychrome painted decoration that applies colored clay suspensions on a white slip. This technique was also commonly used on other coroplastic works,⁶ on Attic relief plaques, “pinakes,”⁷ as well as on the decoration of Protoattic vases

of this period. The colors used for the decoration of the figurines are water-based, mat and derive from organic and inorganic combinations. They are limited to the following :

- A. Reddish brown paint (Munsell SCC 10 R 4/6 και 4/8- Red) is red ochre. It is the most commonly used and consists of lead oxide (minium).
- B. Black dye (soot).⁸

Their Interpretation - The Comparanda

- 5 Attic, handmade, terracotta animal figurines from the Acropolis were dedicated to Athena, the patron goddess of Athens, as well as to various other deities worshipped on the Hill.⁹ In many sanctuaries, apart from the worship of the honored deity, that of other deities is also attested.¹⁰ On the Acropolis for example, apart from the principal worship of Athena, the worship of other deities was also practiced, including Artemis Vravroneia, Cybele, and others.
- 6 These figurines represent a typical kind of common offering during the Archaic period and the early 5th century B.C. in places located within the wider area of archaic Athens and Attica: the Acropolis and its slopes,¹¹ the Agora,¹² Eleusis,¹³ Piraeus,¹⁴ Brauron,¹⁵ Sounion,¹⁶ Aegina¹⁷ and many more Archaic sites, the finds of which still remain unpublished. They are also typologically related to examples from other sites on the Greek mainland (Boeotia, Laconia, and the Argolid), as well as Greek islands (Rhodes, Samos).

NOTES

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