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# THE SPOTIA EXPEDITION I TOWARDS A REGIONAL HISTORY

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by Björn Forsén

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Cover: The Early Hellenistic fortress Agios Donatos of Zervochori seen from the south.  
Photo: Esko Tikkala.

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# The Rural Sanctuary at Kyra Panagia

Irini Svana

The Kokytos river valley lies in the inland of Thesprotia, between the mountains of Paramythia and the hills of Margariti. Towards the south the Kokytos river flows into the plain of Phanari, which is intersected by the Acheron river. During antiquity this area was the territory of the Thesprotian Eleans. The town of Elea, the political and economic center of the Eleans, is situated on a flat summit dominating the valley, to the south of Paramythia, next to the village Chrysavgi (Veliani). It was founded in the fourth century BC and most likely abandoned after the Roman destruction of Epirus in 167 BC.<sup>1</sup> The main center of religious reference for the Eleans was the *Nekyomanteion* located at the junction of the Kokytos and Acheron rivers.<sup>2</sup>

Recently important new archaeological findings have been brought to light in the Kokytos river valley.<sup>3</sup> Roughly 10 years ago a small rural sanctuary was found and excavated by the Greek Archaeological Service.<sup>4</sup> It lies next to the foot of the Liminari hill in the western part of the valley, 200 m southeast of Agia Paraskevi of Kyra Panagia. To the east of the small rectangular temple an altar was found.<sup>5</sup> Many votive offerings (fragments of figurines, pots, coins, jewellery) were found in the small sanctuary. The figurines are the most frequently occurring type of votive offering. On the basis of iconography they can be classified into the following categories.



Fig. 1.

## Standing women

This group includes fragments of figurines depicting draped women. The completely preserved examples have a low base on which the figurine rests (e.g. ΘΕ 5675). Figurines preserving the head are surmounted by a sort of a 'polos' or a 'diadem' (ΘΕ 5761, ΘΕ 5766 [Fig. 1]). Almost all figures of this type carry an object that might be an offering to

<sup>1</sup> Dakaris 1972, 37-39, 97-99, 119-120, 139.

<sup>2</sup> Dakaris 1996, 6.

<sup>3</sup> See Riginos 1996, 171-180, with further references. See also the reports of the 8th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities in *ArchDelt* during the last decade as well as this volume in general

<sup>4</sup> The excavation was carried out by the 8th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities periodically from 1997 to 1999, at first under the supervision of Mrs. K. Preka and since August 1997 of Mr. G. Riginos. For preliminary reports, see Preka 1997, 610 and Riginos 1998, 538-540. In this article only finds that were made between September 1997 and July 1999 are discussed. I would like to express gratitude to Mr. Riginos for inviting me to work with him on this subject. The archaeologists and conservators, who worked in the storerooms on Corfu and in Thesprotia preserving and registering the objects, also contributed substantially to my work. I thank them all and in particular Ms. L. Fatsiou, Ms. O. Palli and Mr. A. Thanos.

<sup>5</sup> Riginos 1998, 538-540, with the ground plan of the revealed building on p. 540.

the deity or an indication of taking part in a ritual activity (ΘE 5761, ΘE 5766, ΘE 5675). Some of the earliest figurines – dated to the early fifth century BC – belong to this group (ΘE 5766, ΘE 5675).

## Hydrophoroi

This group includes fragments of small hydriae, obviously belonging to female figurines carrying a water pitcher on the shoulder or on the head.<sup>6</sup> Only one example maintains a part of the arm joining the pot to the shoulder of the figure (ΘE 5767). The hydrophoroi probably symbolize a sort of ritual related to the carriage of water as long as it was considered that the water had purifying virtues.<sup>7</sup> Such figures are frequently found during the Classical through Early Hellenistic period.<sup>8</sup>

## Woman leaning on a statue

Among figurines depicting full-figures there is one piece (ΘE 5713) of a standing draped woman in a relaxed pose, leaning on a statue representing the goddess Athena (Fig. 2). Figurines like this one that rest on a pillar, a herm, a small column or on models of various objects constitute a common type in the Hellenistic coroplastic tradition.<sup>9</sup>

## Female busts

Fragments representing busts of female figures occur frequently among the offerings of the temple.<sup>10</sup> Besides busts completely or partially preserved, some concave heads unworked at the back have been presumably attached to busts (ΘE 5801). Most of the figurines ascribed to this type depict figures draped over the upper arms without showing the lower part of the arms (ΘE 5714 [Fig. 4a], ΘE 5432 [Fig. 3]). There is also an example of a bust with no indication of clothing (ΘE 5790 [Fig. 4b]). Regarding the treatment of the hair there is a



Fig. 2.

<sup>6</sup> See e.g. Lilibaki-Akamati 1996, 50-51, pl. 15, 16, 17.

<sup>7</sup> Lilibaki-Akamati 1996, 53.

<sup>8</sup> Lilibaki-Akamati 1996, 51.

<sup>9</sup> See e.g. Besques 1986, no. D 3540 (third cent. BC), no. E 308 (first cent. BC).

<sup>10</sup> Compare also with the findings from the so-called *sanctuary of Aphrodite* in Dyrrachio (Muller *et al.* 2004).





Fig. 3.



Fig. 4a.

Fig. 4b.



Fig. 5.

great variety of coiffures according to the dating of the figures. The examples of the preserved busts coming from the sanctuary of Kyra Panagia are dated from the fourth to the first century BC.

### Seated women

Fewer and fragmentary are the examples of seated women, always representing draped figures seated on a throne. They hold an object either against the chest or they lay it on their knees (ΘΕ 5814 [Fig. 5], ΘΕ 5792). One of the seated women dates to the early fifth century BC (ΘΕ 5814), whereas the rest date to the Classical period.

### Banqueter

The unique fragment of a figurine representing a male bearded figure must be particularly mentioned (ΘΕ 5764, Fig. 6). This specific type is associated with figurines known as banqueters and can be dated to the late sixth through early fifth century BC. It has been suggested that they depict the participants of a ritual meal.<sup>11</sup>

Besides the examples already mentioned which can be ascribed to particular types of figurines since they are well-preserved, numerous heads or fragments detached from the faces of the figurines were found in the



Fig. 6.

<sup>11</sup> See Besques 1954, pl. XLIII, B431 (late sixth cent. BC); pl. XLVI, no. 503 (mid-sixth cent. BC); pl. XCVI, no. 454 (early fifth cent. BC).

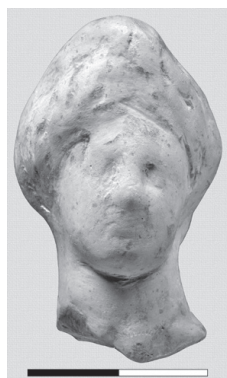


Fig. 7.

sanctuary. Some of them are veiled while others have a sophisticated coiffure. Most of them are inspired by the 'Tanagra Style' (Fig. 7) and date to the Hellenistic period.<sup>12</sup> This coroplastic tradition is also reflected on a fragment of a figurine depicting an aged figure having the head veiled (ΘΕ 5755).

Finally a brief reference should be made to three female heads with polos, which can be dated to the Late Archaic period (ΘΕ 5753 [Fig. 8], ΘΕ 5815, ΘΕ 5794). The fragment of a small plaque with the depiction of a female head (ΘΕ 5758) constitutes in its turn a unique find.

Most of the figurines seem to be produced by local workshops. However, the true prototypes for these specific objects should be sought among the most significant centers of coroplastic production of the ancient world such as Corinth, probably Corfu and the cities of Sicily as well. An influence coming from Macedonia cannot be excluded.

According to the numerous findings, the sanctuary of Kyra Panagia must have been in function since the early fifth or possibly even late sixth century BC. Three female heads, some of the standing women, a seated woman (ΘΕ 5814) and the banqueter belong to the earliest findings of the sanctuary, dating to the Late Archaic period. The Hellenistic period is represented by the majority of the busts and also by the heads of figurines in 'Tanagra style', some of which date as late as to the first century BC (ΘΕ 5790, ΘΕ 5793, ΘΕ 5800).<sup>13</sup> Also coins from the sanctuary indicate activity during the Late Classical and Hellenistic age. They are partly issued in Epirus (Elea, the Epirote Alliance), and partly brought from elsewhere in the Greek world.<sup>14</sup> The majority of the miniature vases of different shapes (*skyphoi*, *kotyle*, *pitchers*) found in the sanctuary date to the Hellenistic period.<sup>15</sup>

The deity worshipped in the small sanctuary cannot be identified with certainty. However, it is well known that the Eleans had a very special relation to the cult of Persephone, daughter of goddess Demeter, who was worshipped at the *Nekyomanteion* and whose image is represented on Elean coins.<sup>16</sup> Possibly also the worship at our sanctuary, which is located in the middle



Fig. 8.

<sup>12</sup> About the use of the term *Tanagra* and the relevant coroplastic tradition see Lazaridis 1960, 20.

<sup>13</sup> According to Lambrou 2006, 263, some other figurines from the sanctuary, not included in this study, may date as late as to the early second century AD.

<sup>14</sup> AK 2139: Coin of Elea (second half of the fourth cent. BC), AK 2130: Coin of the Epirote Alliance (after 300 BC). Two silver coins have also been recorded, one from Corinth (fourth to third cent. BC) and the other Macedonian, minted by Alexander the Great (Preka 1997, 610; Riginos 1998, 539).

<sup>15</sup> Compare e.g. Drougou 1991, 110 with illustrations on p. 114 (early third cent. BC); 122 and 126, with illustrations on p. 128 (early third to second cent. BC) / Edwards 1975, 32, pls. 2 and 44, nos. 52 and 55 (late fourth cent. BC).

<sup>16</sup> Tzouvara-Souli 1979, 99-110 (particularly 104); Dakaris 1972, 117-118.

of lush fields, was associated with the fertility of the soil and the breeding of animals. Some of the figurines from our sanctuary, such as the ones wearing either a *polos* or another sort of ‘diadem’, could perhaps be associated with Persephone. Such attributes are usually believed to have given a divine nature to a figure, at least during early antiquity.<sup>17</sup> The hydrophoroi could also be associated with the worship of Demeter and Kore.<sup>18</sup> Finally, a miniature vessel with the graffito ΠΕ (Fig. 9) may be connected with the cult of Persephone. However, it must be noted that neither bones nor figurines depicting animals which are related to the cult of the two deities and the rituals performed in their honor were found in the excavation.



Fig. 9.

Female busts that have been found in sanctuaries have also sometimes been related to divine figures, and then mostly to Aphrodite.<sup>19</sup> Aphrodite was worshipped throughout Epirus as the daughter of Zeus and Dione, and she was related to the cult of nature.<sup>20</sup> Yet there is not much real evidence suggesting a cult of Aphrodite in the sanctuary of Kyra Panagia. Still, we should not forget that several deities could be worshipped parallel with each other in Greek sanctuaries. Many deities, especially those who protected the growth and the harvesting of plants, could be worshipped at the same place.<sup>21</sup>

Female figurines offered in a sanctuary need not depict a deity – they may as well represent the dedicators themselves. The figurines can for instance be seen as substitutes for the women taking part in the cult. In this way, the dedicators either put themselves under the protection of the goddess or emphasized that they had participated in a certain ceremony or ritual.<sup>22</sup> This may also be the case with a large part of the figurines found in the rural sanctuary of Kyra Panagia (including the banqueter).

The small sanctuary could have constituted a meeting point for the rural populations living and exploiting the Kokytos river valley.<sup>23</sup> The sanctuary may have been located next to an ancient road linking the Thesprotian inland with the coast and the Corinthian colonies settled there. Rural buildings dating from the late third century BC onward have also been excavated in the immediate neighborhood of the sanctuary.<sup>24</sup> The existence of the sanctuary may have been the motive for the founding of this settlement.

The rural sanctuary in Kyra Panagia provides important information about the history and the religious life of the Thesprotians, especially because it seems to have existed long before the town of Elea is considered to have been founded in connection with the general Epirote urbanization process of the fourth century BC. It also seems to have stayed in use after the Roman destruction of Epirus in 167 BC.

<sup>17</sup> Lilibaki-Akamati 1996, 53; Bonias 1998, 73, about the concept of *polos* during the Archaic period.

<sup>18</sup> Lilibaki-Akamati 1996, 53.

<sup>19</sup> Bonias 1998, 86-87; Lilibaki-Akamati 2000, 52.

<sup>20</sup> Lilibaki-Akamati 2000, 213.

<sup>21</sup> Lilibaki-Akamati 1996, 53-55.

<sup>22</sup> Muller *et al.* 2004, 620.

<sup>23</sup> Dakaris 1972, 139-140, mentions e.g. a small acropolis (only 0.1 ha) at Agios Arsenios of Sevasto and graves to the north of the modern village of Sevasto. These sites are located at a distance of 1.5-2 km from the rural sanctuary of Kyra Panagia.

<sup>24</sup> Svana 2004, 209-212.



## Catalogue of terracotta figurines

Registr. no.	Figurine type	Date	References
ΘE 5432	Female bust	Early fourth cent. BC	Higgins 1954, 394, pl. 203, no.1493
ΘE 5674	Standing woman, lower part		
ΘE 5675	Standing woman	Early fifth cent. BC	Stillwell 1952, 87, pl. 16
ΘE 5713	Woman leaning on statue	Third to first cent. BC	Besques 1986, pl. 36c, nos. D3540 and E308; Higgins 1967, 115, pl. 53D (second cent. BC)
ΘE 5714	Female bust	Late fourth cent. BC	Besques 1986, 122-123 and 167, pl. 119, nos. D4001-D4009; Muller et al. 2004, 612-613, figs. 7-8
ΘE 5738	Female bust	Early first cent. BC	Leyenaar-Plaisier 1979, 336-337, pl. 122, nos. 912-914
ΘE 5753	Female head with polos	Early fifth cent. BC	Bonias 1998, 164, pl.35, no. 262; Stillwell 1952, 95, pl. 17, no. XI,3
ΘE 5754	<i>Tanagra</i> style figurine	Early first cent. BC	Leyenaar-Plaisier 1979, 336-337, pl. 122, nos. 912-914
ΘE 5755	<i>Tanagra</i> style figurine	Early first cent. BC	Leyenaar-Plaisier 1979, 545-546, pl. 206, no. 1580
ΘE 5756	Hydrophoros	Fifth to third cent. BC	Lilibaki-Akamati 1996, 50-51, pl. 15ε-16
ΘE 5758	Plaque fragment	Fourth cent. BC	Besques 1986, 122, no. D4002, pl. 119a
ΘE 5759	Hydrophoros	Fifth to third cent. BC	Lilibaki-Akamati 1996, 50-51, pl. 15ε-16
ΘE 5760	Hydrophoros	Fifth to third cent. BC	Lilibaki-Akamati 1996, 50-51, pl. 15ε-16
ΘE 5761	Standing woman	Late fifth to early fourth cent. BC	Leyenaar-Plaisier 1979, 33, pl. 10, nos. 53 and 44, pl. 15, nos. 72, 74, 75
ΘE 5764	Banqueter	Late sixth to early fifth cent. BC	Besques 1954, pl. XLIII B431, pl. XLVI, no. 503, pl. XCVI, no. 454
ΘE 5766	Standing woman	Early fifth cent. BC	Leyenaar-Plaisier 1979, 47, pl. 16, no. 78
ΘE 5767	Hydrophoros	Fifth to third cent. BC	Lilibaki-Akamati 1996, 50-51, pl. 15ε-16
ΘE 5778	Hydrophoros	Fifth to third cent. BC	Lilibaki-Akamati 1996, 50-51, pl. 15ε-16
ΘE 5790	Female bust	First cent. BC	Leyenaar-Plaisier 1979, 336, pl. 122, no. 912
ΘE 5792	Seated woman	Second half of the fourth cent. BC	Leyenaar-Plaisier 1979, 55, pl. 18, no. 94
ΘE 5793	Female bust	First cent. BC	Leyenaar-Plaisier 1979, 336, pl. 122, nos. 912, 914
ΘE 5794	Female head with polos	Early fifth cent. BC	Leyenaar-Plaisier 1979, 47, pl. 16, no. 78
ΘE 5800	Female bust	First cent. BC	Leyenaar-Plaisier 1979, 336, pl. 122, no. 912

ΘΕ 5801	Female bust	Late fourth cent. BC	Besques 1986, 122 and 167, pl. 119a, no. D4002
ΘΕ 5814	Seated woman	Early fifth cent. BC	Bonias 1998, 167, pl. 37, no. 280; Merker 2000, 42-44, 90, pl. 8, no. c74
ΘΕ 5815	Female head with polos	Early fifth cent. BC	Leyenaar-Plaisier 1979, 47, pl. 16, no. 78
ΘΕ 5906	Hydrophoros	Fifth to third cent. BC	Lilibaki-Akamati 1996, 50-51, pl. 15ε-16
ΘΕ 5907	Hydrophoros	Fifth to third cent. BC	Lilibaki-Akamati 1996, 50-51, pl. 15ε-16

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