

The Sanctuary of Hermes and Aphrodite at Syme Viannou. Vol. 4, Animal Images of Clay

By Polymnia Muhly, with a contribution by Eleni Nodarou and Christina Rathossi (Library of the Archaeological Society at Athens 256). Pp. xxii + 214, figs. 6, b&w pls. 64, color pls. 5, tables 3. Archaeological Society at Athens, Athens 2008. Price not available. ISBN 978-960-8145-71-9 (paper).

The volume under review is the most recent contribution to the series published by the Archaeological Society at Athens presenting the results of research carried out in the extra-urban sanctuary at Kato Syme in east Crete. Written in English with a brief summary in Greek and with a commendably simple structure, the volume analyzes 324 clay animal figurines (handmade statuettes, attachments, and moldmade plaques) mostly ranging from the ninth to the seventh centuries B.C.E., making it a significant addition to the small number of publications of clay figurines currently available for Early Iron Age Crete (e.g., A.L. D'Agata, *Statuine minoiche e post-minoiche dai vecchi scavi di Haghia Triada* [Padua 1999]; J.C. Shaw and M.C. Kommos, *Kommos*. Vol. 4, *The Greek Sanctuary* [Princeton 2000]). Written for specialists in the Bronze and Iron Age Aegean, the bibliography on the sanctuary at Kato Syme could assume to have been read, but in view of the extraordinary continuity in the site occupation (more than 27 centuries of occupation from the beginning of the second millennium B.C.E. to the sixth–seventh centuries C.E.), a brief resume of the sanctuary's long history would have been helpful, with a concise list of the categories of materials contemporary with those published here. It also would have been useful to have a topographic map of the cult site showing where the figurines were found, together with the contemporary architectonic structures. One undoubted shortcoming of this publication is the lack of any graphical documentation for most of the materials in the catalogue. Such a record could have served as

the basis for a systematic typology and would have made it easy to compare this material with that from other sites.

The excavations at Kato Syme, carried out under the direction of Angeliki Lebessi since 1972, have been crucial in reconstructing complex religious rituals of male maturation: to date, the archaeological evidence found here is unique with respect to the whole of the Greek world. Described by Ephoros and Strabo, these rituals alluded to the learning of the art of hunting and the symposium by the young initiates and involved animal sacrifices to honor the gods. The thick deposits of carbonized material, ashes, and animal horns identified at Kato Syme show that the cult activity included sacrifices, communal meals, libations, and various kinds of votive offerings, bearing out the literary sources. Given the collective nature of the rites and the remarkable temporal continuity of the depositions, none of the votive offerings dating from the Early Iron Age at Kato Syme can be attributed to a definite stratigraphic context, and this makes analysis of the materials, especially the figurative items, extremely difficult. As we said, the volume presents handmade figurines, featuring above all horses and cattle, which probably represent the most humble type of offerings deposited. The great majority dates from the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E. and were found in the area of the altar that, from the Protogeometric through to the Archaic period, constituted the focus of cult activity at Kato Syme. The author takes a rigorous approach to the figurative material. She starts with a general outline of the stylistic development

of bronze and clay handmade figurines in the Aegean and goes on to attempt to identify this development in the materials she is analyzing, providing dated stratigraphic correspondences for the individual figurines that conform to this trend. In addition, she lists the specific details of figurine manufacture that are chronologically significant. In spite of the limited amount of available data, this is undoubtedly a valid methodological approach. Perhaps, however, this stylistic approach—based on the sequence of Greek mainland figurative materials—could have been accompanied by a typological organization of the figurines, founded on a systematic and unitary vision of type and the graphical documentation of all the items found at Kato Syme under consideration. As it is, a predominantly art historical approach is able to provide a plausible chronological sequence for the handmade clay figurines from the sanctuary at Kato Syme, but it does not reveal a regional dimension for their production.

Located on the southern slopes of Mount Dikte, on a natural terrace looking out over the Libyan Sea, the sanctuary is situated at more than 1200 masl in a remote area that dominates, and is oriented toward, the southern side of the mountain and the island's southeastern coastline. Thus, it is likely that the sanctuary served above all the sites located in this area, such as Khorakia, Vigla, and Kastri Keratokambou to the east (possibly stretching as far as Afrati in the northeast) and Mithi Leniko, Kalamavka, and Malles in the west, bordering on the region of Mirabello. The regional (i.e., not linked to any specific site), rather than local, dimension emerges clearly from the archaeometric analysis carried out by Nodarou and Rathossi on the clays used for production of some of the figurines. In fact, the results show that the composition of the raw material is largely compatible with the geological landscape that characterizes the area in question. Since Kato Syme was close to the easiest route leading from the Mesara plain to the Ierapetra isthmus, it also could have attracted pilgrims from regions immediately beyond the ones we have just outlined. Nonetheless, imported materials are notably few in Kato Syme during all phases of its existence. In all likelihood, in the Early Iron Age, the sanctuary fulfilled a primarily political function at the regional level, tending to foster the definition and redefinition of territorial possession and alliances between individual settlements through the sharing of a common cult-based identity. Thus we can ask:

if the sanctuary was mostly frequented and maintained by the settlements located on the southern slopes of Mount Dikte, what types of clay figurine can be identified as typical of the workshops that produced the votive offerings in use here? Or rather, is it possible to identify a regional physiognomy for the figurative clay production in this area? Certainly, the fragmentary nature of the material published is a serious handicap in attempting such an analysis, but even just a typology of the decorative motifs found could have helped in identifying diagnostic elements for the area in question.

A second aspect that would have merited more in-depth analysis is the predominance of the horse, by far the most commonly represented animal species. This circumstance is unique in Crete, while it does recur in some sanctuaries on the Greek mainland. According to the author, the clay horse figurines were "cheap" imitations of that unmistakable status symbol in Geometric times, the bronze horse, produced for the benefit of less-affluent groups of worshipers. However, this explanation does not suffice to explain the difference that distinguishes Kato Syme from the other Cretan sanctuaries. In fact, I would suggest that the horse, symbolizing the process of domestication, could allude to the new status acquired by the youths initiated into adulthood, thereby providing a precise parallel to the numerous representations of horses depicted, often in isolation, on mainland pottery of Geometric times, above all in the Argolid. Thus, in addition to the generic reference to the ideology of manhood, the emphasis on the horse at Kato Syme could have a specific link with the rites of male maturation that took place in the sanctuary.

In conclusion, the shortcomings mentioned do not alter the fact that this is an important book on an important group of votive materials of the Cretan Early Iron Age. All libraries dealing with humanistic studies of the Mediterranean should have a copy on their shelves, and it is bound to figure in the fundamental literature about Aegean sanctuaries for the foreseeable future.

ANNA LUCIA D'AGATA

NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL, INSTITUTE FOR
STUDIES ON AEGEAN AND NEAR EASTERN
CIVILIZATIONS
VIA GIANO DELLA BELLA 18
00162 ROME
ITALY
ANNALUCIA@TISCALI.IT