“Humble votives and folk religion in archaic Athens: terracotta figurines and textile tools from sanctuaries on the Acropolis and its surroundings”

Recent studies of some old finds, i.e. archaic handmade terracotta figurines and clay spindle whorls, from several sites on the Athenian Acropolis and from the Sanctuary of the Nymph on its south slope discovered during excavations in the 19th and 20th centuries produced some interesting observations and suggestions about the use of such items as votives in relation and context to the contemporary social status of the women and their role in the Athenian society. These have been recently confirmed by the study of similar objects found in deposits of the sanctuary of the Nymphs on the homonymous West Hill of the Acropolis.

The archaic handmade terracotta figurines are essentially representative examples of the coroplastic art of Attica and constitute a common popular dedication in the sanctuaries of the Athenian Acropolis and its surroundings correspond well within the development of terracottas from the middle of the 7th cent. B.C. to the period of the Persian Wars.

The spindle whorls found on the Acropolis within deposits dated just at the time of the Persian wars are some tools used in the everyday life of the Athenian women within Oikos and as such they were offered to the main deity of Athens, goddess Athena in the area of its official cult. In contrast, the spindle whorls found within the deposits of the Sanctuary of the Nymph, which was the main sanctuary outside the Acropolis where the dedications related to marriages were offered, at the time after the ceremonies related to them, seem to be rather special tools, along with other objects, like the loutrophoroi. This seems to change by the end of this period, as the finds from the sanctuary of the Nymphs suggest.

Moreover the wide use of such humble clay objects as votives offered in the contemporary cult practice in all the sanctuaries, official and others nearby, provides some more evidence for their significance within the frame of the rather invisible folk religion practiced by the Athenians before the Persian Wars.

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