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“Thucydides II.15 on primitive Athens: a new interpretation”

Thucydides’ narrative on the settlement in Athens before Theseus\(^1\) is one of the most discussed passages among scholars, both historians and archaeologists, and is cited in almost every study of either history or topography of primitive Athens. From as early as the 18\(^\text{th}\) century onwards, attempts have been made to interpret the information provided by the historian, concerning the character of the area, whether it was indeed the center of a primitive settlement and the nature of its sanctity, or the exact period, to which he refers, that is, Bronze Age, Early Iron Age, or the transitional period between the two.

Although research has provided many important conclusions on specific topics, there are still unanswered questions and, more importantly, a lack in an interpretation that explains efficiently all of the information provided in the passage. Why does Thucydides refer to the south of the Acropolis, but then describes the south of the Olympieion area? When was worship introduced to the sanctuaries of the area and are they connected to an early settlement?

This paper attempts to provide answers to the above through a diachronic and synthetic examination of the archaeological evidence of the region south of the Acropolis and towards Ilissus. Utilizing all the available evidence, from both old and new excavations, we shall try to determine the use of space in consecutive periods and examine whether it is possible to connect the results of our research to specific information given by Thucydides. Through this perspective we are able to acquire a more concrete knowledge of the area and propose a new interpretation of the passage.

\(^1\) τὸ δὲ πρὸ τοῦ ἥ ἀκρόπολις ἡ νῦν οὖσα πόλις ἦν, καὶ τὸ ὑπ’ αὐτὴν πρὸς νότον μᾶλλον τετραμμένον (...), Thuc., 2.15.3.