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A Terracotta Figurine from Thessaly with a Curious Headdress. A Coroplastic Query

Elina Salminen



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REFERENCES

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- 1 I am writing this as something of a call for help. I am working on analyzing and publishing the terracottas from the site of Kastro Kallithea in Thessaly, and one of the terracotta fragments we have brought to light there (fig. 1) has proven difficult for me—especially since I am not (yet!) an expert in the field. I would therefore be grateful for any comparanda that could be suggested.

Fig. 1 – Head broken from a figurine of a standing woman, from Kastro Kallithea, Thessaly



Photo: Margriet Haagsma

- 2 The site is still in the process of being published, but here is some background information that I can provide at this point. Kastro Kallithea is a Hellenistic town on a hilltop in Thessaly that was excavated by the 15th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities and the University of Alberta between 2007-2013 under the direction of Sofia Karapanou and Margriet Haagsma. The project focused on excavating a domestic building, and the figurine fragment was found in a deposit in one of the rooms of this building. The tentative date for the deposit with the terracotta is either during the reign of Antigonos Gonatas (277-239 BCE) or, more probably, around the mid-second century BCE.
- 3 The fragment in question comprises a mold-made head 11 cm in height, adorned with a beautiful but curious headdress in the form of a high lunette embellished with rosettes; an applied band of clay runs across the lower part of the headdress covering the forehead of the figure. This configuration is a puzzle to me. At first, I thought the head might belong to a reclining banqueter, such as the common type from Taranto, but last summer I was able to join other fragments to the neck, and it now seems clear that the figurine was female, standing, full-length, and only finished on the front side. I have looked at a range of material from Thessaly to Magna Graecia for comparanda but with little success. Especially problematic is the lunette-like contour of the headdress and the band across the forehead, elements that have proven elusive outside of a Dionysiac context. However, this head very clearly lacks the overflowing fruit and leaf decoration characteristic of Bacchic headdresses. The headdress in question is elaborate and large enough for its elements to appear important, so that comparanda lacking the band and the other embellishments seem unsatisfactory. As a result, any and all leads would be received with gratitude!

AUTHORS

ELINA SALMINEN

University of Michigan
salminen@umich.edu