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A Study of the Votive Terracotta Figurines from the Athana Lindia Sanctuary

Sanne Hoffmann

- ¹ The votive terracotta figurines from the Athana Lindia sanctuary in Lindos, Rhodes, has been the subject of my MA thesis from Copenhagen University in 2011—in *Danish : Mellem Guddom og Giver—En analyse af kulten i Athana Lindia—helligdommen med udgangspunkt i*

terrakottafiguriner” (Between Deity and Donor—an analysis of the cult in the Athana Lindia Sanctuary based on terracotta figurines).

PHOTO : COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF DENMARK

- 2 The main purpose of this thesis was to clarify whether it was possible to identify cult characteristics in a group of terracotta figurines given as votive offerings, in order to specify the nature of the cult. Since the name of the deity was given in this sanctuary, it was a study of the specific local role, rather than a matter of identification. The terracottas have been published by Chr. Blinkenberg in *Lindos—Fouille des L'Acropole 1902-1914*, I, *Les Petits Objects*, Berlin 1931. The complete assemblage accounts for more than 2700 terracottas that can be dated from the Geometric period to the end of the Classical period, though only a few figurines can be connected to the earlier period.
- 3 The terracottas are varied but mainly portray females. In the study several traits of the figurines were taken under consideration, such as posture, gesture, dress and headgear, but the primary focus was the attributes and general symbolism of the terracottas. The attributes included—in a rough general view—children, fruits, flowers, animals, instruments, and containers. In the detailed study, among the figurines at the Athana Lindia sanctuary it was possible to identify specific cult traits. These included different aspects of the divinity, such as several fertility aspects, Potnia Theron, war goddess, and protector of arts and crafts. Also references to ritual acts in the sanctuary were identified, such as rites of passage, tithe, and first fruit offerings. The figurines also carried objects of ritual relevance, such as torches and instruments. However, a large group of figurines and protomes were depicted without attributes. Most likely these types should be considered to symbolize the prayer itself, comparable to candles being lit in a church.
- 4 The analysis of the overall concept of the goddess Athena in general indicated that there were similarities between concept and the local divinity Athana Lindia, but, also that there were several differences. The local goddess was still very much a nature and

fertility deity. This seems to indicate that there was a difference between the overall concept and the local goddess, perhaps due to the fact that generally the syncretism between old cults and the Olympian gods of Greek mythology could be limited to acquiring the name only. Local needs and tradition would be what determined the function and design of the cult, rather than the name.

- 5 Based on the detailed analysis of the terracotta figurines, and votive offerings in general, there can be little doubt that the amount of information to be gathered here to enlighten our understanding of specific cults is massive. It is, however, essential that the objects are treated in detail, and not in general, as this can obscure the information. It is the intention to publish the results from the MA thesis, but the study of these terracottas and votive terracottas in general, will be taken further in my future PhD studies on the subject at the National Museum of Denmark.

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