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NEW EARLY CYCLADIC FIGURINE AT NEA STYRA

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ABSTRACT

The existence of an Early Bronze Age coastal site in the district of Nea Styra has been known since the end of the 19th century when three marble figurines of early Cycladic type had been found in the area. During the 20th century survey investigations conducted by Greek and foreign archaeologists offered new evidence which demonstrated the significance of the site during the Early and Middle Helladic periods. A new figurine of early Cycladic type, which recently came to light at Nea Styra due to the control of building permits by the 11th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, reaffirms the identification of the area as one of the three most important sites on Euboea during the Early Helladic II period. This paper focuses on a newly discovered figurine and its typological character. The new find is compared to the figurines that had been found in the 19th century at Nea Styra. We hope that the scheduled excavations on the private land plot where the new figurine was found will offer new data leading to a better understanding of the character of the Early Helladic settlement in this part of southern Euboea.

KEYWORDS: Nea Styra, Gkisouri, Lefka, Cycladic marble figurine, Early Helladic, Bronze Age settlement, Bronze Age cemetery

In the summer of 2008, due to the control of building permits performed throughout the island of Euboea by the 11th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, a series of trial trenches were made by a mechanic excavator on the private land plot of an individual, who wished to construct country houses. The plot is located at Gkisouri, in the district of Nea Styra (fig.1). The discovery of architectural remains, sherds, and bones led to the immediate stop of mechanical excavations.

In the following days a modest excavation took place and brought to light obsidian blades, sherds of Early Helladic pottery, part of the head of a Cycladic marble figurine, and the upper part of a marble bowl with lugs.

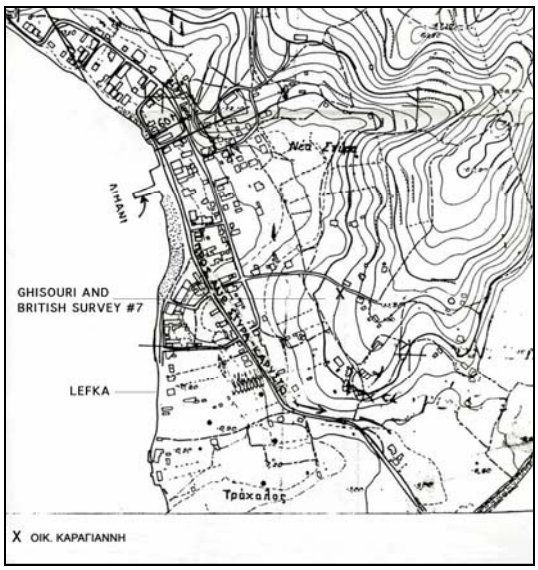

Fig. 1 Map of the Greek Geographical Service with the district of New Styra. The location of the private land plot, at which the early Cycladic figurine was found, is marked with "X".

At the same time, soil from the previous trial trenches was examined and revealed a large number of elaborate obsidian blades, bones, and sherds of coarse and fine Early Helladic II pottery (including rim fragments of sauce boats with the characteristic Urfirnis glaze of the period). Also found were fragments of marble and stone vessels (rims and body fragments of drinking vessels, probably bowls and also part of the base of a spool - shaped pyxis) and the torso of a Cycladic marble figurine (Karystos Museum inventory number KM 1252), which shall be the object of the present paper. Almost 118 years ago, in the summer of 1890, the discovery of three Cycladic marble figurines in the district of Nea Styra led to the hypothesis of an Early Bronze Age coastal site (Wolters 1891). Subsequent survey investigations, conducted by Greek (Theocharis 1959) and foreign (Sackett et al. 1966) archaeological expeditions, confirmed the presence of a prehistoric settlement, which was oriented towards the sea, and must have controlled the broad bay to the west, and possibly the nearby island of Aigilia, (known today as Megalonisi). This settlement, which has been characterized by scholars as the second most important Early Helladic site in Euboea after Manika, is situated in Lefka, a level area along the length of the shore, south of the present harbor in Nea Styra. In the area of Lefka there are several robber pits, dug for the supply of building material or simply in an attempt to unearth antiquities. In addition, it is believed that some walls visible in the sea also belong to buildings of the Early Helladic II settlement. The same area has also produced some Middle Helladic sherds, but no Late Helladic material has been found. When Wolters published the three Cycladic marble figurines in 1891, the exact location and the circumstances of discovery were not reported, however, it was generally believed that they were found in the locality of Gkisouri, the low hill inland and east of the flat coastal area of Lefka. The British archaeological survey (Sackett

et al. 1966) in the mid 1960 placed their Nea Styra Site 7 also at Gkisouri, but expressed the opinion that the Wolters figurines probably originated in the area of the larger settlement at Lefka near the sea (fig.1). Kalligas (1983) suggested that the three figurines were probably found in graves, which might also argue for a location in the flat coastal area of Lefka rather than the hill at Gkisouri. The 2008 discovery of new figurines at the building plot in Gkisouri, however, adds credibility to the turn of the century belief that the Wolters figurines came from Gkisouri. The newly found figurine torso, (the fourth Cycladic marble figurine discovered at Nea Styra, or fifth if the non-matching head fragment, discussed below, is included) has an oblique break between the forearms, which has been mended. The head and both legs are missing. The upper parts of both shoulders are damaged and there is some chipping around the oblique break. The back of the figurine is more heavily encrusted than the front. The preserved part of the torso is almost 11 cm in height (fig. 2, 3).

Fig. 2 Front view of the figurine KM 1252

The trapezoidal torso is characterized by broad angular shoulders and wide-spaced pointed breasts. The forearms are folded beneath the breast. No fingers are incised on the hands. The arms, which are differentiated from the torso on the front by shallow incisions, protrude markedly to the sides, thus giving the characteristic shape to the figurine. The outline of the body from the waist to the point where the thighs are preserved is rendered curvilinear. The pubic triangle is quite broad, covering almost the total pelvis, bisected at its apex by a continuation of the leg-cleft, thus indicating the vulva. A slightly bulging belly is emphasized even more by the arched arrangement of the tapering forearms.

Fig. 3 Rear view of the figurine KM 1252

The treatment of the back is even more abstract: the arms are not differentiated from the torso and a shallow V - shaped incision has been used for the rendering of the neckline. The shallow vertical incision that indicates the spinal column isn't aligned with the rear leg cleft. The buttocks are angular. The figurine is a typical representation of the canonical type (See Thimme 1975) or folded - arm figurine (See Renfrew 1969) and chronologically dates to the Early Cycladic II period, also known as the Keros Syros culture (See Renfrew 1991), which corresponds to the mature phase of the Cycladic Culture and dates between 2700 – 2300 B.C. The most distinctive feature of the figurines belonging to this group, the folding of the arms beneath the breast, is a motif seen in earlier figurines, but the dominant traits of the new type include the standardization

of the forearms known as the "canonical arrangement," meaning the placement of the left forearm always above the right. Also canonical in this group is the strict frontality, the triangular or lyre–shaped head tilted backwards with a flat surface at the crown, which seems to symbolize some kind of head cover or special coiffure (See Stampolidis and Sotirakopoulou 2007), and united legs, with the feet angled downwards as if the figure is standing on tiptoe. The KM 1252 figurine from Gkisouri presents great similarities with the marble figurines, which have been attributed by many scholars (See Getz - Preziosi 1987) to the "Schuster Sculptor" (the artist named after the late owner of the only complete figurine from his hand now available for study). The Schuster group consists typologically of a masterful combination of the later examples of the Spedos variety (named after a cemetery on Naxos) and earlier examples of the Dokathismata variety (named after a cemetery on Amorgos). The general impression given by KM 1252 presents affinities to the figurines of the above group, for example, the figurine belonging to the ex Kahane Collection in Zurich (Getz - Preziosi 2001) or that in the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts (Sotirakopoulou 2008; Getz - Preziosi 2001) (fig. 4). Since the KM 1252 figurine is only preserved to the thighs, we do not know if the outline of the lower body and the legs would have been rendered with the same curvilinear and plastic way as in these figurines. However, the treatment of the upper body with the broad angular shoulders and the trapezoidal torso, which is a salient feature of the Schuster artist's style, are seen in all three examples. A closer examination, however, reveals the presence of further diversifications. In the examples attributed to the "Schuster Artist" the neckline at the front is curved, whereas in KM 1252 it is V - shaped; the vertical incision that indicates the spine is aligned with the leg cleft, while in our example these two lines aren't aligned; and finally, in the figurines attributed to the "Shuster Artist" the arms on the rear are differentiated from the torso with broad grooves, while the only incisions on the back of KM 1252 are those of the spine and the neck.

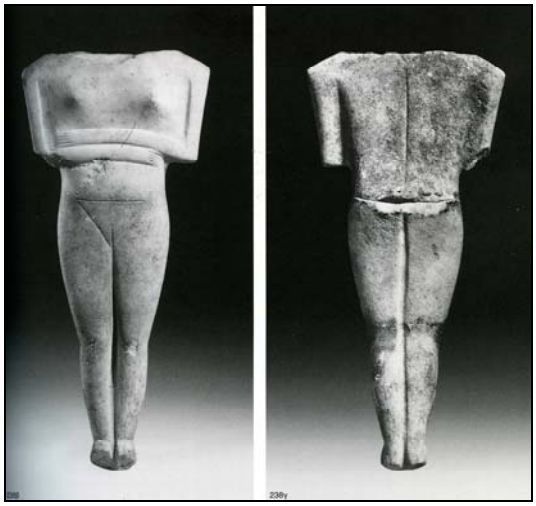

Fig. 4 The figurine in the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts. After P. Sotirakopoulou 2005

Yet the main feature of KM 1252, which provides a particular nature to it, is the arrangement of the forearms: in the figurines attributed to the "Schuster Artist," the elbows of the folded arms are situated on the same level. In some Schuster examples the left forearm of the figure is extending to the right upper arm, in others there is a clear termination of the left forearm before the right arm. It is not clear if this arrangement represents a chronological element (See Getz - Gentle 2001). In the Nea Styra figurine the left forearm extends to the right upper arm, but the right forearm is extensively long and does not end on the left side of the body as usual: on the contrary, it is tapering at its end,

which is found under the left elbow. This arrangement creates the illusion that both left and right hand are put on the same level, an illusion enhanced by the continuous incision that links the hands. Both similarities and variations presented between KM 1252 and the other figurines attributed to the "Schuster Artist" confirm the opinion already expressed by many scholars that the types and varieties of Cycladic marble figurines with folded arms are not restricted to the currently established catalog of examples. If the marble figurines that present close resemblances to each other may be assigned to individual artists or sculptors, if this is a procedure that might be reconstructed through our knowledge for the social structures of the third millennium B.C. and if finally Styra's new figurine may be attributed to the "Schuster Artist" are questions beyond the intended scope of this paper. The blending of curved outlines for rendering the waist, the belly, and the pelvis, as well as the use of straight angular outlines for the torso, however, places our figurine within the type of Cycladic figurines with combined characteristics from both the Spedos and Dokathismata varieties. Equivalent finds have been distinguished by Christos Doumas as forebears of the Dokathismata variety (Doumas 1994), whereas similar examples coming from the "Keros Hoard" have been considered to be an intermediate type between the late Spedos and the early Dokathismata varieties (Sotirakopoulou 2008).

Similarly, the two marble figurines (fig. 5) (there is no drawing for the fragmentary third figurine) that were unearthed at the end of the 19th century in the district of Nea Styra, as represented in Wilhelm's drawings, belong to the canonical type with folded arms. Although our knowledge is based only on these drawings and there is no evidence regarding the treatment of the back, it is believed that they can be assigned to the later examples of the Spedos variety. The almost horizontal and rounded shoulders that characterize one of the examples, the curved incision at the base of the neck, the deep cleft between the joined legs in order to differentiate them, and the shallow incisions for rendering the ankles, are distinctive features of the Spedos variety. The obvious absence of rendering the waist and the minimized free space between the lower forearm and the pubic triangle, however, are basic characteristics of the latter examples of the variety. The knees are not depicted with horizontal incisions.

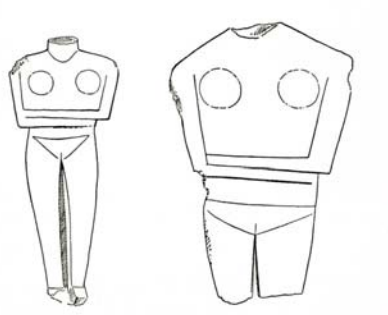

Fig. 5 Drawing of the two Cycladic figurines, which are discovered the summer of 1890 at New Styra. After P. Wolters 1891, 54-55

The modest excavation carried out by the Greek Archaeological Service in the summer of 2008 also yielded, as noted above, part of a head belonging to a marble figurine (KM 1251) (fig. 6). The chin and the neck of the head are not preserved, however, features such as the triangular shape and the straight cheeks make it obvious that it falls within the Dokathismata variety. The initial thought that KM 1251 and KM 1252 might belonged to the same figurine was proved wrong after the completion of conservation. KM 1251 and KM 1252 are made out of different materials: the head is made

out of white, fine - grained marble with great transparency, and the torso of white coarse - grained marble with gray veins. It should be noted that neither of the marbles are found in the geology of Styra.

Fig. 6 The marble head with inventory number KM 1251

A new excavation was started in June of 2009 on the private land plot. This is a first and important step towards studying the prehistoric remains at New Styra, because for the first time information will be derived from an excavation context rather than surface finds. Furthermore, the site at Nea Styra appears to be the first known major Early Helladic II residential center in southern Euboea (Sampson 1980), whereas much of the occupation in this part of Euboea at this time is represented by scattered and smaller sites. It is hoped that further results from the excavation will prove or disprove Wolters' suggestion in 1890 that Gkisouri is the location of the cemetery of the EH II settlement. Although the Gkisouri excavations have only begun, the material recovered, including the artifacts from the earlier salvage stage of work, gives evidence for a strong link to the Cycladic Culture. This material includes the Cycladic figurines and fragments of marble vessels in typical Cycladic shapes such as a spool - shaped pyxis and a bowl with four lugs at the rim. This evidence for close contacts between southern Euboea and the Cyclades recalls the ongoing debate and discussions regarding the nature of this contact. Renfrew (2006), for example, argues that Cycladic material found in the Helladic settlements of Attica and Euboea indicates only a strong cultural influence and not an indication of Cycladic settlements or colonies. Other EH mainland sites with strong Cycladic influences include Aghios Kosmas (Mylonas 1959) and Marathon (Marinatos 1971). In the case of Marathon, Marinatos (1971) and Doumas (1977) argue for an actual Cycladic colony. Pandelidou - Gkofa (2005) in the final publication of the EH I cemetery of Tsepi at Marathon, however, states that the local features and distinctive attributes of the material does not support the theory of a Cycladic settlement. In the case of Manika in central Euboea (Theocharis 1959; Sampson 1988), some scholars interpret the Cycladic features of the finds as indications of mere commercial exchanges, stressing that the presence of Cycladic attributes in the artifacts do not over rule the purely Helladic character of the settlement. On the other hand, according to other scholars (Sapouna - Sakellaraki 1986/87; Sakellarakis 1987; Doumas 1976), the lack of local ware from specific parts of the Manika cemetery indicates that the individuals buried there were Cycladic islanders. At this early stage of research at Gkisouri, it is not possible to speak of Cycladic settlement versus influences, or imports versus local imitations. The dual goal of the present paper is: first, to present new evidence about the remains at an EH coastal site in southern Euboea, directly across the Euboean Gulf from the contemporary flourishing settlements of

Rafina, Askitario, and Tsepi in Attica and to stress the potential for reciprocal relations between these sites, as suggested by Kalligas (1983). Secondly, to present news of recent investigations to the local Styra community in order to encourage the interest and involvement of the community in the process of reconstructing the history of their area.

ABBREVIATIONS

AAA Αρχαιολογικά Ανάλεκτα εξ Αθηνών (Athens Annals of Archaeology)
AEM Αρχείο Ευβοϊκών Μελετών (Archive of Euboea Studies)
AJA American Journal of Archaeology
AntK Antike Kunst
AM Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archaeologischen Instituts, Athenische Abteilung
BSA Annual of the British School at Athens
ΠΑΕ Πρακτικά της εν Αθήνας Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας (Proceedings of the Archaeological Society of Athens)
SIMA Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology

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