

THE FORGOTTEN SANCTUARY OF ZEUS ON MOUNT PARNES

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In 1959 an extensive cult deposit – dating from the Late Geometric to the Late Archaic period – was uncovered on the highest summit of Mt. Parnes in northern Attica. While the finds were reported to be extensive, including a wide range of pottery types and usually large number of iron knives, nothing more than a summary of the finds was ever published. This article attempts to fit what little is known of the enigmatic site within the cult record of Early Iron Age and Archaic Attica and place it within its historical context. It is argued that the sanctuary emerged through an effort by the elite of the northern pedion to control the northern border of Attica and dominate interregional exchange between Attica, Boeotia, and the Megarid.

Introduction

A brief notice in the Greek daily newspaper *Kathimerini* of August 7th 1959 summarily discussed the results of a rescue excavation at a cave-site near the Ozea, Mt. Parnes' highest peak at 1412 m above sea level (Fig. 1)¹. The inspection of the cave site was undertaken to allow for the construction of a military installation. The major feature of the site was described – erroneously it would turn out – as a funeral pyre for a great number of warriors killed in battle. Since the publication of this short note, the area has been hermetically sealed by the military, preventing on site inspection of the environmental conditions, which remain ill-understood.

A short overview of the finds will illustrate the importance of this largely neglected site. A thick (*ca.* 2 m) layer of ash was excavated over an area measuring approximately 100 m². It proved to be filled with small animal bones and bronze and iron finds, including numerous spearheads, swords, spits, sickles, axe heads pins, shields and cauldron fragments. While this listing in itself would be enough to justify an abundant publication (none has been produced to date), what really captures the imagination is the staggering find of some three thousand iron knives². Pottery ranges from Late Protogeometric to Late Archaic and includes

¹ Summarized in Vanderpool 1960, 269; Daux 1960, 658; Hood 1959-60, 8; 1960-61, 5.

² Some of these objects are now on display in the archaeological museum of Piraeus.

Late (and Sub-)Geometric oinochoai, oinochoiskai and aryballoi as well as kylikes and kantharoi. Furthermore, several hundred fragments of Proto-Corinthian and Corinthian alabastra and aryballoi were found, some dating as early as 700 BC. Judging from the declining quantity of Black and the lack of Red Figure pottery the site seems to have been decommissioned in the sixth century³. If the previous account of the finds on Mt. Parnes is correct, the site represents one of the largest religious deposits of pre-classical Attica.

For years after the newspaper 1959 report, nothing was heard about the Parnes site. The first official publication of material from the site appeared as late as 1983, when one of the excavators, Evthymios Mastrokostas, lifted a tip of the veil in a short paper, containing little more than a summary of the finds and a short discussion of the (Proto-)Corinthian aryballoi (Mastrokostas 1983). A full publication of the excavation and its intriguing finds is thus still sorely missed⁴.

This paper does not set out to fill this gap, nor is its author in any position to do so for lack of access to the finds. What is attainable, however, is to analyze what little information we do possess in the context of cult practice elsewhere in Attica, in the hope of bettering our understanding of this important but understudied site and its position within the Attic sacred landscape at large.

Identification of the site on Mt. Parnes

There has been some confusion about the exact location of the altar. Mastrokostas' report mentions a cave, situated inside a chasm running N-S (Mastrokostas 1983, 339). The mouth of the cave apparently opened to the south – presumably overlooking the *pedion* – had more or less vertical sides and measured *ca.* 3 x 5.5 m. Mastrokostas seems to imply that the cave itself was the altar⁵. Presumably the cave was located very close to the top, effectively rendering both part of the same cultic space. For the moment this is impossible to prove as the area has been hermetically sealed by the military, preventing on-site inspection of the environmental context.

In 1976 M. Langdon published his influential monograph of the sanctuary of Zeus on Mt. Hymettos. Based on the finds as represented in *Kathimerini*, and inspired by analogies between this and many similar sites throughout Attica, he identified the Parnes site as yet another mountain-peak sanctuary, an identifica-

³ In addition, the reports mention some Roman lamps.

⁴ At the moment, Lydia Palaiokrassa, associate professor at the university of Athens, is preparing a full publication of the material found on this Attic mountain range.

⁵ Mastrokostas 1983, 339 speaks of the excavation of a “βωμό ξ” and then continues to describe the cave. The Italian résumé is clearer when it states: “Anzi la grotta stessa era un altare” (Mastrokostas, 1983, 342). Andrea Mersch, in her compilation of archaeological sites in Attica, concluded that there were two cult spots, one on the peak and one inside the cave (Mersch 1996, 167-168, nos. 53.1-2), but this appears to be a misinterpretation of Mastrokostas' scanty account.

tion still standing today⁶. Langdon connected it with the cult of Zeus Ombrios and Zeus Apemios, who, according to Pausanias, *Guide to Greece* 1.32.2, shared a common altar in the Parnes range. Pausanias also mentions a cult of Zeus Semaleos who had an altar and Zeus Parnethios who had a statue nearby, although it is impossible to tell whether Zeus was already called by any of these names as early as the Archaic period. According to two graffiti bearing these names, he seems to have been worshipped at the ash altar as Zeus Parnesios and Zeus Hikesios as early as the seventh century BC⁷.

Archaeology

The deposits uncovered in 1959 consisted of an approximate 200 m³ of ashes filled with pottery, numerous iron and bronze objects and animal bone. But while one early report mentioned that the deposit contained the incinerated remains of soldiers from the Atheno-Megarian war (Vanderpool 1960, 269), there can be no doubt that the ash layer represents the remains of offering rituals. The wide range and quantity of pottery found as well as the enormous amount of ashes, which included great amounts of animal bone, may be held as sufficient evidence for prolonged and consistently practiced sacrifice.

The earliest sherds seem to date to the late 10th century BC (Late Protogeometric), the latest perhaps belonging to the final years of the sixth century BC. The early date of the oldest sherds merits our attention, as it places the Parnes summit among the first Attic cult sites, together with the cult of Zeus on Mt. Hymettos and, perhaps, the cult of Artemis on the Mounychia peninsula (Fig. 1)⁸. The Protogeometric pottery on Mt. Parnes, mainly consisting of oinochoai and kantharoi, serves well in a cultic setting as requisites for drinking and libation. These types continue into the Geometric and Early Archaic period when the assemblage is expanded with such types as miniature oinochoai, aryballoi and various cups and kylikes, all comfortably fitting within a cultic context of drinking and liba-

⁶ Langdon 1976, 100-101. Cf. also Mazarakis Ainian 1997, 315; Mersch 1996, 167-168, nos. 53.1-2; Parker 1996, 18, 31-32, ns. 2-4; Wickens 1986, vol. I, 158-159, 165, vol. II, 243-245, site no. 46. Some of this material had already been noticed in a paper by Esther Smith and Harriet Lowry in 1954, held at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens.

⁷ *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* 33 (1983), 81-82, no. 244. Langdon also postulates a second altar, to Zeus Semeleos, on Harma (+ 867 m) near Phyle, based on Pausanias' description, Langdon 1976, 101. In the Classical period lightning bolts were interpreted here as signs to send offerings to Delphi. There is, however, no evidence to suggest (or disprove) that this site originated in the Archaic period.

⁸ It has often been suggested that Athena was worshipped on the Acropolis continuously throughout the Dark Ages, but thus far no positive evidence has been adduced for any cult activity there before the eighth century BC, cf. van den Eijnde 2010, 93-94. The Protogeometric (= PG) wares found on the Acropolis are best explained as resulting from domestic use (or perhaps even funeral). At Mounychia, the PG sherds are found at the later sanctuary of Artemis with no clear indication for domestic or funerary activity, rendering it likely that they stemmed from a cultic context.

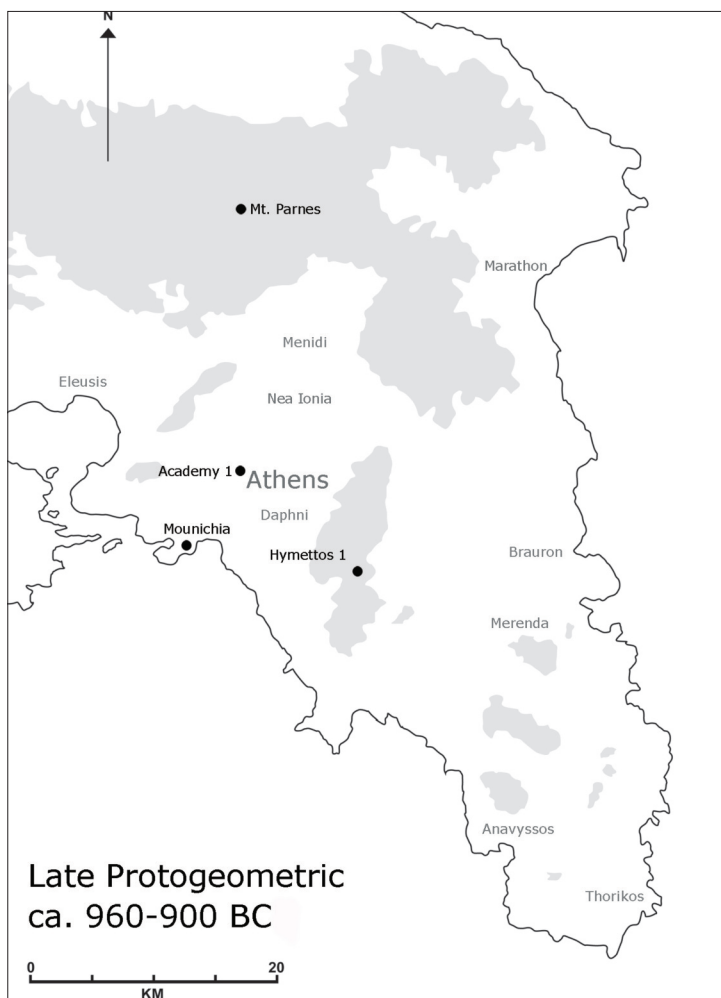


Fig. 1. Cult sites in Attica, 960-900 BCE (map: author).

tion. The excavator has claimed that the pottery differs from that found in funerary contexts, presumably referring to finds in the Agora and Kerameikos. The Geometric sequence runs into the conventional early seventh century sub-Geometric; but where Proto-Attic complements the cult assemblage at many sanctuaries⁹, none was found on Mt. Parnes. Rather, Proto-Corinthian and Corinthian come up besides the Late Geometric and sub-Geometric types. The former consist

⁹ Proto-Attic pottery was found at Agrieliki, the Acropolis, the Agora, Charaka, Hymettos, Kiapha Thiti, Thorikos and Tourkovouni, see van den Eijnde 2010.



Fig. 2. Peak shrines in Attica (map: author).

of a few very early alabastra, dating in the later eighth-century, and a large number of 215 aryballoi, to which we will return in a moment. Here it suffices to say that no other Attic mountain shrine has yielded anywhere near this amount of Corinthian ware.

The other finds are, however, equally, if not more impressive. While some uncertainty exists over the precise amount and date of the finds, the general outline of the assemblage is clear. Although Mastrokostas does not treat them, the archaeological reports summarizing the archaeological effort of 1959 speak of 3000 iron knives or swords found mixed in between the ashes, a staggering amount, espe-

cially considering that nothing of the kind has been retrieved at any of the other early Attic shrines. Bronze finds include pins and shields as well as a few more knives. While we will have to await the final publication of the finds to be able to date these finds precisely, it seems most sensible to date them with the main group of the Protocorinthian and Corinthian wares, which surely date to the seventh and early sixth century BC.

The early sixth century, at last, saw the deposition of some Corinthian pottery before cult practice was discontinued here. A few Black Figure sherds represent the last firm evidence of cult activity.

Other Peak sanctuaries

The chronology of the Parnes site agrees well with what we know of other Attic peak shrines. In all, Langdon noted cult activity on nine peaks¹⁰. Since the publication of his book in 1976, six more possible sites have been identified, thanks to the effort of the German scholars Lauter and Lohmann (Fig. 2)¹¹. Many of these sites consisted of little more than a simple ash altar with a find assemblage generally confined to a few, mostly Subgeometric, sherds, which place the *floruit* of these shrines in the seventh and early sixth century. Not only does this agree chronologically with the great number of Proto-Corinthian and Corinthian aryballoi found on Mt. Parnes, it also places the peak sanctuaries at the center of Attic religious life in a period, which has been called the “Seventh Century Gap” (Whitley 2001, 233-243; Osborne 1989), a term referring to the general lack of finds from this period in Attica. A general decline of cult practice on mountain-peaks occurs from 600 BC onward. By the fifth century this type of worship had all but vanished. As I have argued elsewhere, the absence of many shrines and the decline of others in the plains below represent a shift toward regionalism, with each local community investing in its own nearby mountain cult (van den Eijnde 2010, 357-405, esp. 404).

Two of these cults stand out from the rest in terms of finds and architecture: the first is the one mentioned before on Mt. Hymettos, which was published by Langdon (Fig. 6), and the second on Mt. Tourkovouni (Fig. 5), a few miles north of the Acropolis, published by Hans Lauter (1985). We will return to these sites momentarily, but for the moment it suffices to note that, here too, the late eighth and seventh century BC shows an intensification of this type of cult activity, with Late Geometric, Proto-attic and Subgeometric dominating the find assemblage. However, the Parnes site also differs in some aspects. First, hardly any Corinthian ware has been reported from the other mountain shrines, whereas an unusual amount of Corinthian pottery was found in the Parnes ash deposit. Secondly, the enormous amount of iron knives/daggers found in the fill is without parallel at

¹⁰ Langdon 1976, 100-106. Cf. also his list for other peaks shrines in Greece, *ibid.*, 107-112. For other sanctuaries such as Pherai and Dodona, cf. Langdon 2000.

¹¹ Lohmann 1993, 379-380, 388, 504; Lauter/Hagel 1990; Lauter/Lauter-Bufe 1986; Lauter 1985, 12, 415 (PH5), fig. 68, pl. 123, 1-2; 388 (CH60); 504 (AN 21); 379-380 (CH60).

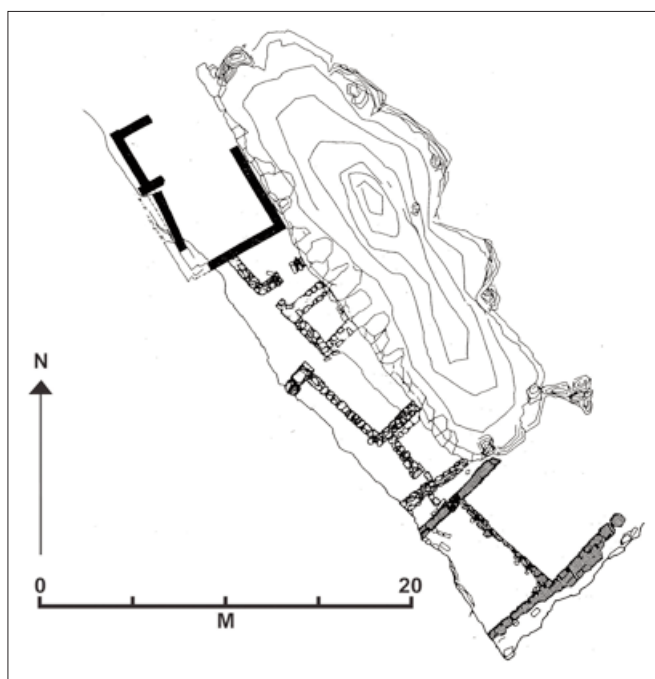


Fig. 3. So-called “Cave of Iphigeneia” at Brauron
(source: Papadimitriou 1957, 42-47, fig. 1).

any of the other peak shrines, most of which may well be labeled as “poor”. Metal objects were found in relatively large numbers at shrines other than on mountain peaks, most notably in the sanctuaries of Athena on the Acropolis and at Sounion¹². Elsewhere such finds are an occasional, if not rare occurrence. It testifies to the relative importance of the Parnes sanctuary in the 7th century BC. A third idiosyncrasy is the presence of a cave at the cult site.

The Cave

The cave was suitably placed near the top, inviting its use as a shelter against the rough weather conditions. The fact that the ash altar appears to have been found inside the cave suggests that the two were functionally related. Caves were used throughout Greece as sanctuaries, notable examples are the caves on Mt. Ida and Mt. Dikte (Psychro) on Crete¹³, as well as the cave of the Nymphs on Ithaca and

¹² Cf. van den Eijnde 2010, 91-92 (Athens, cult of Athena) and 249-258 (Sounion), both with references and bibliography.

¹³ Mt. Ida: Sakellarakis 1985; Mt. Dikte: Rutkowski/Nowicki 1996; Watrous 1996.



Fig. 4. The “Spilia-tou-Daveli” cave near Anavyssos
(source: Oikonomakou 1994, 27δ).

the Corycian cave on Mt. Parnassus near Delphi¹⁴. In Attica some sanctuaries were wont to make use of nearby caves as well. It has been argued that the cave at the sanctuary of Artemis at *Brauron* was used for ritual banquets and as a storage place for votives and other ritual paraphernalia (Fig. 3) (Ekroth 2003, 82-87). I would suggest a similar function for the cave on Mt. Parnes. The presence of the rubble walls and pavement inside the caves at Parnes and Brauron suggest that the caves may have had similar functions and that the former too may have been used for ritual dining, storage of ritual utensils, votives and the offering ritual itself.

The fact that the sanctuary on Mt. Parnes was situated in a cave is somewhat surprising, but not wholly unprecedented. While none of the other peak sanctuaries in Attica were connected to a cave, caves did attract cult activity at other locations. The so-called “Spilia-tou-Daveli” at Anavyssos may have housed a cult of the Nymphs as early as the last quarter of the eighth century BC (Fig. 4)¹⁵. The so-called cave of Antiope near Eleutherae was used as a focus of worship as early as the 8th century BC¹⁶. Finally, at Hymettos, what is known to the locals as the “Lion’s Cave” may have been used as a shrine in the seventh century BC¹⁷.

The combination of a cave cult and a summit shrine on Mt. Parnes seems to be no

¹⁴ Polis Cave: Benton 1934-35 and 1938-39; Coulson 1991; Corycian cave: Larson 2001, 234.

¹⁵ Oikonomakou 1994, 67-68 and van den Eijnde 2010, 81-82 with further references.

¹⁶ Munn/Zimmerman-Munn 1990, 36-37 and van den Eijnde 2010, 189 (with full bibliography).

¹⁷ Mersch 1996; Küper 1989; Wickens 1986; Vanderpool 1967; van den Eijnde 2010, 287.

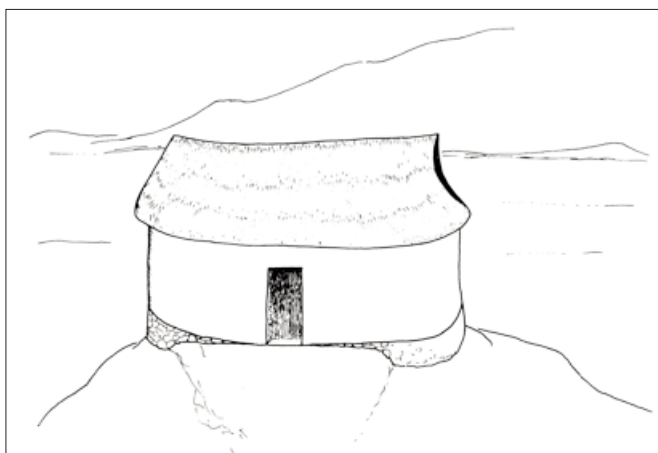


Fig. 5. The “Ostbau” on the summit of Mt. Tourkovouni
(source: Lauter 1985, fig. 20).

more than a coincidence due to the particular layout of the natural environment at this location. At the highest point in Attica, overlooking the peninsula to the south and neighboring Boeotia to the north, it was surely the mountaintop itself that attracted the ritual activity. The cave, on the other hand, was suitably placed near the top, inviting its use as a place of storage and as shelter against rough weather. We may never know precisely what transpired in the cave before, during and after the fire offerings. The few reported traces of walls and stone paving point to protracted ritual use other than the fire offering at the altar. A wall was constructed toward the back of the cave (north) and paving appeared underneath the altar at 2.20 m below the excavated surface. If the wall-remains do indicate partitioning screens inside the cave, it is not unlikely that the resulting inner chamber played an instrumental role in the rituals. Since we can exclude a profane function for these walls at this remote location, it is tempting to ponder what may have transpired inside this inner room.

Fortunately, we have some comparative data to work with. Ritual architecture is not uncommon in 8th and 7th centuries BC Attic sanctuaries. But while the experiment with temple construction largely bypassed the peninsula¹⁸, architectural practice within Attica leads us in a different direction. Two examples may serve to illuminate this point. Hans Lauter, who excavated and published the peak sanctuary on Mt. Tourkovouni, reconstructed an oval-shaped building at the highest point of the hill (Lauter 1985, 123-143). This so-called “Ostbau” (Fig. 5) appears

¹⁸ The exception being the Athena cult on the Acropolis, which seems to have had a simple temple at least from the 7th, perhaps as early as the late 8th century BC, cf. van den Eijnde 2010, 98-99 (with extensive bibliography on p. 91); Nylander 1962.

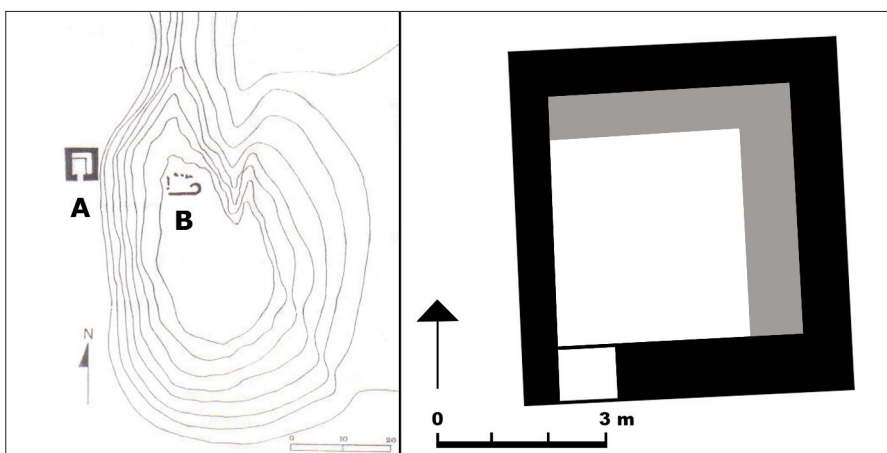


Fig. 6. Sanctuary of Zeus on Mt. Hymettos. General plan (left), with rectangular remains (A) (source: Langdon 1976, fig. 4). Right: restored ground plan of building A.

to have been used as a banqueting hall for a core group of worshippers, providing ample protection against the harsh winds at this altitude. Merle Langdon, who published the peak sanctuary on Mt. Hymettos, attributed the rectangular remains at this site to an altar (Fig. 6) (Langdon 1976, 1; cf. also Mazarakis Ainian 1997, 143). However, no offering remains were found at this location, but at a rather more easterly point, inside a natural depression in the terrain. Furthermore, the lack of comparative evidence from similar altars during this period and in this region invites an alternative explanation. I would suggest that the structure on Mt. Hymettos was used as a banqueting hall, which has the benefit of explaining the extreme thickness of the northern and eastern walls, which may have partly served as benches. Benches have been attested inside other cult buildings, such as the seventh and sixth century BC Tholos building in Lathouriza (Seiler 1986, 7-24). Another space that may well have served as a banqueting hall is the easternmost room of the so-called “Sacred House” at Eleusis.

Thus, it appears that on-site banqueting was a common practice in early Archaic Attica and it was to this end that the Athenians applied their architecture, both at mountain shrines and elsewhere. I would propose that the cave on Mt. Parnes, too, may have possessed an inner room, inside the cave, expressly constructed for ritual dining and adding a sense of intimacy and shelter – not to mention secrecy – to the cave’s most inner part. A similar attempt at sheltering may be found at the “Spilia tou Daveli”, mentioned before, where a wall was constructed near the entrance in the Classical period to fence off the inside.

Social context

The two most diagnostic features in social terms are the hoard of seventh century (Proto-)Corinthian aryballoi and the enormous amount of iron knives (for the aryballoi cf. Mastrokostas, 1983, 341-342). Since none of the other peak sanctuaries have yielded anything resembling these finds, it will be useful to place them in a somewhat larger social context¹⁹.

The type of Corinthian wares, and the aryballoi in particular, may indicate a specific ritual preference such as pouring ointment over the fire altar. On the other hand, the aryballoi are of course also found in other contexts, such as graves, where fire rituals were absent. In any case, it remains to be explained why this is an important feature of the Parnes sanctuary, while it is largely absent at the other peaks. Secondly, it also does not explain why some of the other vessels, for which perfectly good Attic equivalents existed, were Corinthian imports²⁰. In fact, the Attic equivalent to Corinthian wares (Proto-Attic) appears to be wholly absent; the luxury ware of choice here seems to have consisted exclusively of Corinthian shapes²¹. Since no satisfactory solution to this problem has been presented on purely ritual grounds, the answer is, in my view, better framed in an ideological, rather than a functionalist context. In general, we may state that the use of Corinthian wares in Attic contexts was complementary to Proto-Attic, *i.e.* both were a luxurious (orientalizing) alternative to the plain sub-geometric. Being more elaborately decorated, both styles were essentially status objects targeted on the elite. However, while Proto-Attic vessels could be obtained on the local market, the Corinthian wares had to be acquired through trade at obvious additional cost²².

At the other peak sanctuaries, however, Proto-Attic is much preferred; only three (!) Corinthian sherds have been found on Hymettos, a few more have been reported at the other peak shrines²³. It appears that special significance and prestige was thus attached to the sanctuary on Mt. Parnes, as the choice for Corinthian in favor of the local style set it apart from other sanctuaries and presumably entailed additional expenditure. The question we should thus ask is: what caused this partiality for Corinthian wares?

¹⁹ The original *Kathimerini* article mentioned transmigrant (Corinthian?) shepherds participating in the rituals. This view has been rightfully discounted by Langdon 1976, 101, n. 3.

²⁰ Mastrokostas 1983, 340, speaks of oinochoai, oinochoiskai, cups, kylikes and kantharoi.

²¹ We have to bear in mind, however, that only a small part of the pottery was mentioned in Mastrokostas' preliminary report. The full publication of this material by Lydia Palaiokrassa is therefore anxiously awaited.

²² Note that Whitley 1994, 224-225 has drawn attention to the aristocratic value of the orientalizing pottery, the use of which he attributes to the elite and to liminal contexts such as tomb cult and ancestor cult.

²³ Langdon 1976, 70, nos. 314-316 lists fragments of an aryballos, an alabastron and a closed vessel from Hymettos. All belong to the "Ripe" Corinthian style (dating *post* 625 BC). In addition, there are two fragments from Proto-Corinthian (= PC) aryballoi at Profitis Ilias and a PC kalathos and some Proto-Corinthianizing kotylai at Tourkovouni, cf. van den Eijnde 2010, 246 and 268 (both with additional bibliography).

The most obvious difference between the Zeus altar on Parnes and the other sites is its location. The peak sanctuaries of Attica are dispersed over much of its territory, but the only cult site situated on the border is the Zeus sanctuary on Mt. Parnes. As the highest mountain range in Attica, Parnes was bound to receive religious attention, but its placement on its northern border seems to have rendered it especially significant in a cultic sense. Parnes divides Attica from Boeotia and the Megarid, two regions that were not merely politically separate, but, according to Coldstream, also represented two differentiated cultural zones (Coldstream 1983). And indeed, there is evidence for cross-border attendance. An inscription in the Boeotian script on a Proto-Corinthian sherd suggests that people on the farther side of Parnes were aware of the shrine and acknowledged its existence (Mastrokostas 1983, 341). To what degree Boeotians were involved in the rituals is difficult to ascertain, but the absence of Boeotian wares seems to indicate that inhabitants of Attica controlled the cult²⁴. We cannot be sure as to who the participants were on the Athenian side of the border, but another graffito of the same period has *Eroiades* inscribed on it, which may refer to people living in the area of the Cleisthenic deme *Eroiadai* near Mt. Aigaleos in the upper *pedion*²⁵. The graffito thus may reveal something of the particular importance of this sanctuary in the upper *pedion*.

I would suggest that the unusually large amount of Corinthian wares and daggers on Mt. Parnes are best understood as the result of cross-cultural rivalry, mediated by the display of (relatively) expensive votives. Corinthian pottery was universally used in Greece during this period. Assuming that the ideological scope of this sanctuary extended to the other side of the Attic-Boeotian border, Corinthian wares are intelligible as prestige objects carrying an intelligible message for both parties. This also helps to explain the general absence of Corinthian wares at the other mountain shrines, which were not situated along the border.

The great promulgation of these sites from the late eighth century BC seems to have been caused by the fact that the numerous disparate communities of Attica required a peak shrine at close distance to fulfill their religious needs. This entails that these sites had little value as centers of social mediation with outside groups as they were primarily focused on the local community itself. Their primary emphasis lies on a specific, group-internal functionality, serving as focal points for ritual performances and social cohesion within local communities (van den Eijnde 2010, chapter 7, esp. 404-405). In contrast with Parnes, these sites never attracted the same prestigious votives, presumably as a result of the absence of

²⁴ Awaiting final publication of the pottery, it is difficult to assess its precise content. Corinthian is followed by Attic Black Figure and seems to have been preceded by Attic Geometric.

²⁵ Mastrokostas 1983, 341. Interestingly, and perhaps significantly, Mt. Aigaleos has not yielded any concrete evidence of a peak sanctuary, cf. van den Eijnde 2010, 293; Langdon 1976, 105. There was also another deme called *Eroiadai* from the tribe Antiochis, which has not been located, though it may have been near its namesake.



Fig. 7. Corinthian helmet dedicated at Olympia (7th century BC) (source: wikimedia).

social or cultural tension between the various groups that made up the cult community. Since all visitors of these cult sites can safely be held to have been inhabitants of Attica, there was no need for expensive votives such as foreign imports to communicate with nearby social groupings.

The same applies to the knives, which represent another feature not shared with the other Attic peak sanctuaries²⁶. They seem to fit the same mold as the Corinthian wares as objects dedicated with an eye on competing social groups across the border. The offering of deadly tools, rare in the Attic sacred landscape, can be interpreted as a clear show of strength towards a socio-politically distinct group of people. Here it may be useful to point at the case of Olympia, where military gear of all kind was dedicated in a show of masculine prowess and political prestige toward other elites, and thus playing a role in inter-group communication (Fig. 7) (Mallwitz 1972, 24-34). The example of Olympia underscores the importance of the Parnes sanctuary as a conduit of Attic-Boeotian relations.

Conclusion

Returning to Attica, we may conclude by noting that, beside the Parnes sanctuary, metal dedications were made in bulk only at the sanctuaries of Sounion and the Acropolis – both not located on mountaintops. Weapons reminiscent of those reported from Mt. Parnes have only been published in the case of the sanctuary of Athena at Sounion (Fig. 8)²⁷. The dedication of expensive metal votives is generally considered to be a sign of elite rivalry suggesting wider regional appeal

²⁶ Elsewhere the practice of depositing expensive votives on mountaintops has been attested. Sakellarakis 1985 mentions weapons dedicated at the common sanctuary in the Zeus Cave on Mt. Ida on Crete: bronze and iron weapons, arrowheads and fibula with warrior scenes. See also Chaniotis 2006, 203.

²⁷ The Acropolis deposits were too hastily excavated and summarily published to say anything conclusive.



Fig. 8. Votive offerings from the sanctuary of Athena at Sounion, including iron swords, bronze miniature shields, pins and tripods (source: Staïs 1917, fig. 18).

(e.g. de Polignac 1984 and Morgan 1990). The sanctuary of Zeus at Mt. Parnes seems to have been principally geared towards the communities of the upper Athenian plain, but given the great wealth of the deposit may have involved elites elsewhere in Attica as well. As such, it deserves a place in between the other great regional sanctuaries of the peninsula, which include Athens, Sounion, Brauron and Eleusis²⁸. One of the least known of the early Attic sanctuaries should thus be considered as one of the principal cult sites during the still badly understood period between 900 and 600 BC.

What set the Parnes sanctuary apart from the other regional sanctuaries was its position on the Boeotian border. Frontier shrines, a quite common element in many Greek religious landscapes, were essentially absent in Attica, the sanctuary of Zeus being an important exception²⁹. The proximity of the geographical and social border caused the members of the northern *pedion* to choose as a location for their main sanctuary the mountain range that divided Attica from Boeotia (and the Megarid), a place where a statement of wealth and military valor could be transmitted to their neighbors to the north and west³⁰. As suggested before, it is

²⁸ Brauron (Papadimitriou 1948, 86; 1949, 79) and Eleusis (Kokkou-Vyridi 1991, A 175-185; 188-189, pl. 56, 58) have yielded some gold sheet and few metal objects, but nothing of the kind comparable to Sounion and Athens, cf. above.

²⁹ For border sanctuaries, cf. *i.a.* Bergquist 1967, 108-136 and Forsén *e.a.*, 1999. The cults of Eleusis cannot be considered frontier shrines as they clearly served the population of the surrounding Thriasian plain, cf. van den Eijnde 2010, 374-377. The same may hold for the sanctuary of Rhamnous, which in any case was established only toward the end of the seventh century at the earliest, cf. van den Eijnde 2010, 247.

³⁰ Perhaps we are right to see a reflection of that same military prowess in the warlike reputation of the demesmen of Acharnae in the northern *pedion* in the classical period and later, when the inhospitable Parnes sanctuary had become obsolete. The Acharnians were known to be staunch worshippers of Ares in later times, Traill 1986, 142 ff.; Whitehead 1986, 396 ff. and the martial reputation of the Acharnians was renowned throughout the Greek world, cf. Pindaros, *Nemean Odes* 2.16.

not inconceivable that elites from elsewhere in the peninsula joined the inhabitants of the northern *pedion* in a pan-Attic effort to define a common border, especially toward the end of the seventh century BC, when Attica was beginning to move toward political integration (van den Eijnde 2010, 413).

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