

Sanctuaries dedicated to the Goddesses in ancient Macedonian Pella: Analysis of artifacts

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Abstract

The present article analyzes the artifacts unearthed in two Sanctuaries dedicated to the Goddesses, that of the Mother of the Gods and of Aphrodite, and that of Demeter, at the ancient Pella, in order to distinguish the characteristics and the role of them. The analysis is made by use of terracotta figurines, earthenware vessels etc.. The result of the analysis testifies that two Sanctuaries had served the religious needs of people in broad social level, providing their protection and blessing which their nature yields.

Key words

Pella, the Mother of the Gods, Aphrodite, Demeter, cult, Ancient Macedonia.

1. Introduction

Ancient Macedonians had worshipped many deities as southern Greeks did so. They had celebrated not only their own local deities, but also the Greek Pantheon adopted from southern Greeks. Pella, the Hellenistic Macedonian capital, had enjoyed a rich religious life, which the recent archaeological research has revealed (Fig. 1, 2). Up to now, cult attested in the city is that of the Mother of the Gods, Aphrodite, Demeter, Darron, Athena, Poseidon, Dionysus and so on¹. Three sanctuaries had been dedicated to the former four deities by the inhabitants, which were unveiled by the systematic excavation in the decade 1980-1990². Amongst these, the sanctuary dedicated to the goddesses, namely the sanctuary of the Mother of the Gods and of Aphrodite

and Thesmophorion (that of Demeter) seem to have played important role in Pella, which is indicated by an astonishing number of the terracotta figurines, mostly female figures, scattered and obtained elsewhere in the ancient city³.

The main purpose of this paper is to examine the characteristics and the role of these two Sanctuaries. In the concrete, the analysis is made by use of the finds unearthed in Sanctuaries, to compare the characteristics of the cult and to discuss how these divinities were worshipped among inhabitants.

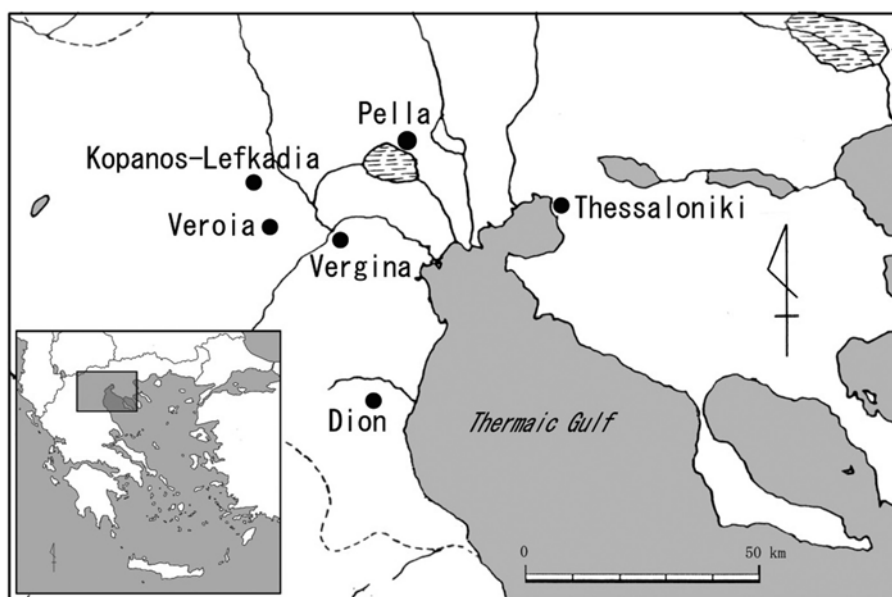


Fig. 1 Map of the central Macedonia with the locations of Pella and other major archaeological sites related to the ancient Macedonia (Lower left: Map of Greece. The Fig. 1 is the enlarged figure of the gray part in this map.)

2. Materials and Methods

The materials of the present study are the published archaeological data of two sanctuaries at Pella.

First of all, the general archaeological background of the site is briefly reviewed here. The first excavation of the ancient Pella itself began in 1914⁴. The systematic excavation works took place from 1957-1963 and has been ongoing since 1977. The result of the excavations indicates us that the ancient city extends over an area of about 400 hectares (running approximately 2.5 km

N-S and 1.5 km E-W) and that it is laid out on a regular grid plan (Fig. 2). It is evident from long year archaeological work that the palace, the Agora, the sanctuaries, the houses, and other constructions are integrated harmoniously into this urban grid.

As it has been noted above, the sacred areas of the ancient city were intensively investigated in the decade 1980-90. Firstly, the small rural sanctuary, Thesmophorion, was discovered in the NE section of the ancient city, and investigated in 1980-1981 by rescue excavation⁵. Immediately after this work, in 1982, the surface collection leded the excavation of the sanctuary of the Mother of the Gods and of Aphrodite adjacent to the Agora,

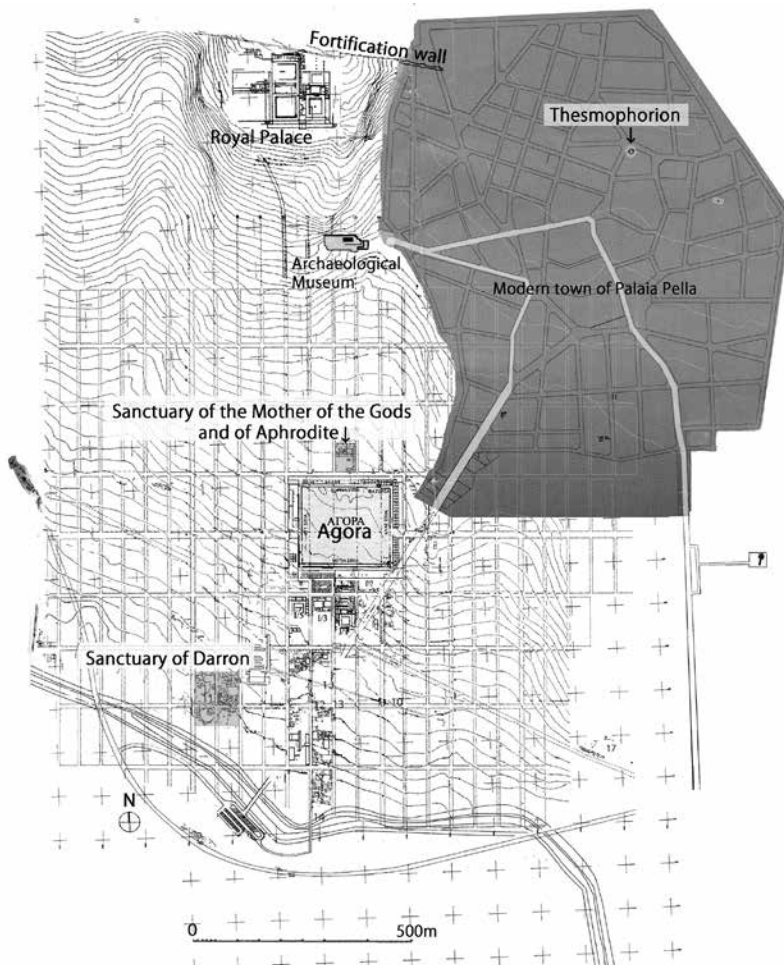


Fig. 2 Plan of the ancient city of Pella with the locations of the Sanctuaries (The plan cited from Akamatis 2008: 628 is partly modified by the author.)

which was wholly integrated into the layout of the city. The work continued in 1983, in 1985, and was completed in 1988, with the supplemental work 1996-1997. As for the third sanctuary of Darron, local divinity associated with healing, which discovered in the SW section of the ancient city, the excavation was already carried out in 1964-65⁶. The work was resumed in 1984 and was completed in the period 1987-1999.

The result of above-mentioned excavation works, shows us the following appearance of two Sanctuaries.

The construction of two Sanctuaries is dated to the last quarter of the 4th century, a period of intense building activity at Pella. Both Sanctuaries are poles apart in the location and the size of cult building.

The Sanctuary of the Mother of the Gods and of Aphrodite is occupied vast extent, at the center of the ancient city (Fig. 2). Its Temenos occupies the whole width of the urban block, 47m, which lies exactly in the center of the E-W axis of the Agora. The length of the excavation area (N-S) measures 66m. The cult building had been large building-complex with many facilities, including open-spaces with a temple, large galleries, a dining room, an underground reservoir, storage areas and workshops⁷ (Fig. 3). The sanctuary was reorganized at the end of the 3rd century or the beginning of the 2nd century BC.

While, the Thesmophorion, lies in the NE part of the ancient city, or just outside the fortified enceinte, the course of which is not clear yet, on a building lot now within the modern town⁸ (Fig. 2). M. Lilimbaki-Akamati assumes that the sanctuary should have been located inside the fortification wall, namely that the northern wall should have passed immediately north to the site⁹. Anyway, it is evident that the Sanctuary should have not been integrated in the layout of the ancient city. The cult building is a simple circle (inner diameter, 10m) in shape, with no roof. Two walls, with opposite orientations NE-SW and SE-NW, project into the area¹⁰ (Fig. 4).

Thus, the location and the architectural remains of two Sanctuaries could give us two contrasting images. The Thesmophorion, the cult of which was relatively older in Macedonia¹¹, had served the religious needs of Macedonian ordinary people, like farmers, stock-raisers and women who lived in rural

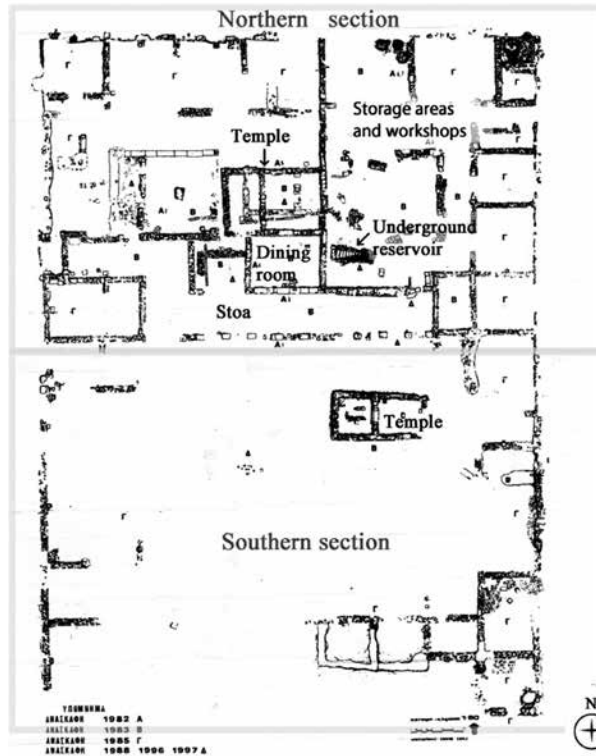


Fig. 3 Plan of the architectural remains of the Sanctuary of the Mother of the Gods and of Aphrodite. (The plan cited from Lilimbaki 2000: 7 pl.3, is partly added by the author.)

areas. The main goddess, Demeter, had given them her protection of agriculture, fertility and prosperity. As for the first Sanctuary, on the other hand, the state might have constructed it by introducing the new mother cult in order to protect the city and the state¹². Consequently, the Sanctuary should have been officially organized by states. Yet we know that much still remains to be settled here for accepting thoroughly this assumption. Was there any distinction in social rank between two groups of followers who had visited Sanctuaries? How were the cult activities conducted in these Sanctuaries? In the first place, why did two closely-related goddesses with maternity aspect co-exist in the ancient Pella? No previous study can give us any answer about these questions. Only a closer study is necessary to explore the details about these Sanctuaries.

Hence the current study presents, as the result of analysis, the several lists

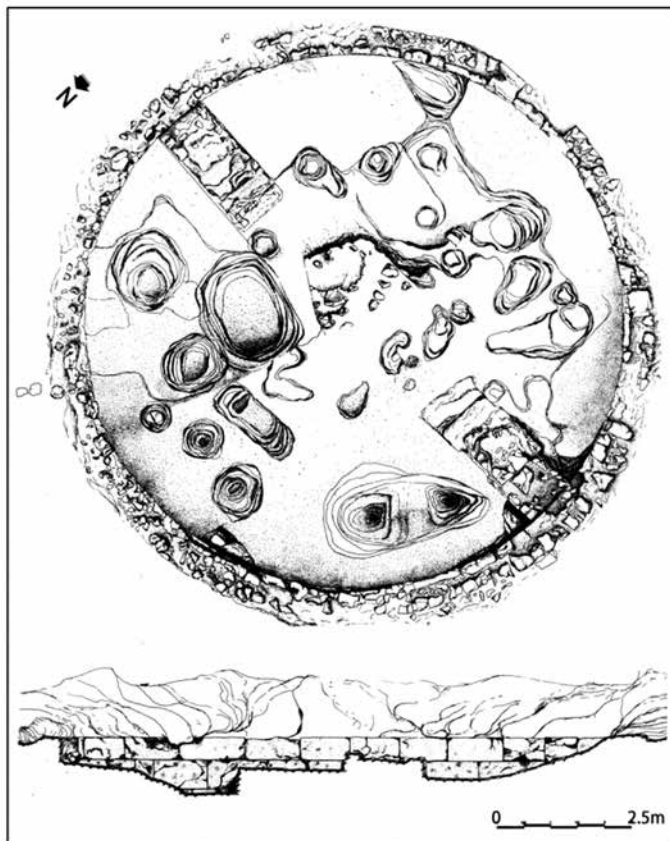


Fig. 4 Above: Plan of the architectural remains of the Thesmophorion, Below: Sectional plan of the remains. (Lilimbaki 1996: 21, pl.A)

of finds unearthed in these 2 Sanctuaries in order to clarify the details of cult, cult practices and various activities which should have been carried out.

3. Results

Lists of the finds uncovered in the two Sanctuaries are offered in Tables 1, 2.1, and 2.2.

Table 1 shows the general list of finds from two Sanctuaries¹³. These finds can be divided into the following 8 categories: stone / marble artifacts, terracotta figurines, earthenware vessels, other earthen objects, metal objects, glass objects, pieces of bone / paint, and Coins. The most numerous of the finds from both sanctuaries are the terracotta figurines. Earthenware vessels

Table 1 List of finds unearthed in 2 sanctuaries dedicated to the Goddesses at Pella

	Stone and marble artifacts	Earthen objects			Metal objects					Glass objects	Pieces of bone, paint	Coins	Total Sum
		Terracotta figurines	Earthenware vessels	Other earthen objects	Gold	Bronze	Iron	Lead	Sum				
Sanctuary of the Mother of the Gods and of Aphrodite	108	262	97	7	–	33	52	8	93	7	4	91	669
Thesmophorion	–	251	121	14	1	4	1	1	7	4	–	59	456

Table 2.1 List of the terracotta figurines unearthed in 2 Sanctuaries dedicated to the Goddesses at Pella

	Female															Eros	Twin figures	Male	Related to Dionysiac circle	Animals	Heads of figurines (Excepting female)	Parts of figurines (Excepting female)	Others (various)	Total Sum
	Aphrodite		Aphrodite with Eros	Athena	Athena	Nike	Clothed	Seated	Pro-tomes	Iero-douloi	Ydriaphoros figures	Archaic figures	Heads of female figurines	Parts of female figurines	Sum									
	Naked	Half-naked																						
Sanctuary of the Mother of the Gods and of Aphrodite	2	13	5	7	–	–	28	8	10	3	–	–	50	33	159	18	4	12	–	17	8	28	16	262
Thesmophorion	1	–	12	5	5	14	30	5	–	4	11	2	71	2	162	1	–	34	12	26	–	–	16	251

Table 2.2 List of the earthenware vessels unearthed in 2 Sanctuaries dedicated to the Goddesses at Pella

	Amphora	Ydria	Oinochoe	Aryter (Chytra)	Chytra-like vases	Skyphos / small Skyphos	Lekani	Plates	Kanthalos	Lagynos	Unguentaria	Pyxides	Lamps	Miniature vases	Other vases	Total Sum
Sanctuary of the Mother of the Gods and of Aphrodite	10	–	3	5	–	29	–	8	3	–	3	12	14	–	10	97
Thesmophorion	–	8	–	–	12	29	25	4	2	1	12	22	1	4	1	121

and coins are also enough in number. Conversely, the first Sanctuary solely offers stone / marble artifacts, and numerous metal objects.

Given above-mentioned general information, it seems necessary to examine details of figurines and of earthenware vessels, which 2 sanctuaries share as numerous finds.

Thus, Table 2.1 shows details of the figurines¹⁴. At first glance, both sanctuaries share general picture of figurines: total sum is almost same and female figurines surpass others in number. However, the list shows slight but significant distinction between 2 sanctuaries. The first sanctuary provides more number of Aphrodite, Eros, and Twin figures, which indicates the characteristics of Aphrodite and the Mother of the Gods. Although the number

of “Aphrodite with Eros” is less than that of Thesmophorion, Aphrodite figurines in the first sanctuary include the very goddess naked and wearing sandals, semi-naked in free pose (Fig.5), leaning on a pillar etc.. Erotes include some figures resting on columns of Herms, others in the form of flying child. Naturally, there are figures with the appearance of the Mother of the Gods in the standard representation, seated on a throne with a phiale and drum in her hands and a seated lion next to the throne. As familiar types from the Hellenistic period, a Twin-type, a pair of female figures, presents in the character of Mother-Kore, Eros and Psyche and there are other female forms wearing the chiton and mantle. Yet the Thesmophorion provides classical-type figurines like Hydriaphoros (hydria-bearer) female or Archaic ones. Amongst deities, Aphrodite, Athena, Artemis and Nike are identified, while a number of figures wearing the polos have been identified as Demeter, the main goddess honored at the festival which had been taken place here. The number of figurines related to Dionysiatic circle is distinguished, and there are more male and animal figurines (Fig. 6) than that of the first Sanctuary. Amongst the male figurines, the figures of Pluto, Herakles and Hermes have been identified.



Fig. 5 Terracotta figurine of semi-naked Aphrodite unearthed from the Sanctuary of the Mother of the Gods and of Aphrodite, Pella (Akamatis 2004: pl.69; Lilimbaki-Akamati 2000: cat.no. 5.1983.79 (pl.40a))



Fig. 6 Terracotta figurine of a pig unearthed from Thesmophorion, Pella (Akamatis 2004: pl.75; Lilimbaki-Akamati 1996: cat.no. 209.1981/575 (pl.26a))

Table 2.2 shows details of the earthenware vessels which are classified into approximately 14 shapes¹⁵. Generally speaking, shapes of vessels are restricted, most of which are objects of everyday use, in both sanctuaries. The predominant shapes are skyphoi (bowls) and pyxides.

Interestingly enough, the vases of the Thesmophorion surpass those of the first Sanctuary in number. Besides, the Thesmophorion offers more various shapes than that of the first sanctuary: 5 shapes are absent in the first sanctuary, while 3 shapes in the Thesmophorion. The existence of Hydrias, Chytra-like vases and Lekanes in the Thesmophorion are distinguished. Conversely, the almost absence of lamps in the Thesmophorion is also noteworthy, since the cult of Demeter is often associated with lamps¹⁶. Most vessels of the Thesmophorion are unpainted and simple one, although several potsherds have relief, red figure and “West Slope” decoration on them. There are also several potsherds with relief decoration, stamped handles of amphora in the first Sanctuary.

As already seen above, only the first Sanctuary yields stone / marble artifacts, and numerous metal objects. Details of them are offered as follows.

Most of stone finds are fragmentary, not in good condition¹⁷. The typical local limestone which was yielded in the district of Pella, was mainly building material in the Sanctuary. While, the important objects or constructive parts like altar, relief, religious image are made of marble (Fig. 7)¹⁸. These



Fig. 7 Inscribed marble altar dedicated to the Mother of the Gods, unearthed from the Sanctuary of the Mother of the Gods and of Aphrodite, Pella (Akamatis 2004: pl.67; Lilimbaki-Akamati 2000: cat.no. 619.1983.1047 (pl.166b))

marble works seem to have a late Hellenistic style in technique. Other stone works, namely most of the naiskoi stelai, votive offerings and cult images of the goddess, are the work of less quality¹⁹.

The metal objects found bronze, iron and lead can be divided into the following categories: parts of furniture and doors, sections of vessels, everyday utensils, tool attachments to garments, jewelry and weights²⁰. Most of the tools were found in parts of the eastern section of the building complex where workshops must have been located.

4. Discussion

From examining finds unearthed, we reconstruct the following images of two Sanctuaries at Pella, but simultaneously with showing some unclear and controversial points.

As for the Sanctuary of the Mother of the Gods and of Aphrodite, the uncovering of many stone artifacts, most of which seems to be building materials, leads us an hypothesis that the building-complex should have been a large and impressive one with many sophisticated facilities for meeting religious needs of the inhabitants of the ancient city. It is also natural to say so when we consider the vast area where the architectural structures extends, and its location at the center of the ancient city. However, we are not sure actually how was the quality of the building as one state-running or official temple. While marble artifacts seem to be mediocre in quality at least, other many stone works are that of humble stone carvers, not works of the highest quality from an artistic point of view²¹. According to M. Lilimbaki, they are the characteristic offerings of people from the lower ranks of society, produced in large numbers and sold close to the shrine of the goddess²². As seen above, most of stone objects are not in good condition: these are fragmentary and obtained by surface collection before the excavation. What has brought the building to this condition? What were the original conditions? What happened to the sanctuary after the destruction by the earthquake, if so²³. Was all precious artifacts rooted out in the aftermath of the earthquake?

The numerous number of terracotta figurines unearthed in the Sanctuary should have been dedicated by ordinary people. These figurines were mass-produced goods made at the workshops in the ancient city²⁴. The sanctuary yields also many earthenware vessels, most of which are objects of everyday use. It is possible that the number of these vessels seems to be not enough if compared with that of Thesmophorion. One may suppose that the metal objects could have made up for the deficiency of the clay vessels. However, most of metal objects yielded in the area are part of furniture and doors, sections of vessels, everyday utensils, and so on²⁵: namely, no complete metal vessel has been uncovered yet.

As for the Thesmophorion, the absence of the stone objects from the site can be easily explained by the assumption that the cult building was a simple one with no roof. The building should have been the only place which serves the religious needs of believers who are simple people like farmers, stock-raisers, women, etc.. The most important dedications found here were also the terracotta figurines which were almost all made in moulds, by mass-produced so as in the first Sanctuary²⁶. The earthenware vessels seem to be also sufficient in number: the predominant shapes are unpainted cooking pots and bowls. It is evident that the numerous amount of clay goods should have been used for meeting religious needs of ordinary people. The noteworthy point is that we can see the association with water in both clay goods. There are some hydriaphoros female figures in figurines and some hydrias in vessels. Neither is found in the first Sanctuary. An abundant supply of water is necessary for rituals of Demeter²⁷. What is puzzling here, is scarcely any lamp which should have been common in the sanctuaries of Demeter. Lamps serve usually practical purposes, by means of lighting and ritual purposes, as votives and cult vessels in her sanctuaries²⁸. Similar common goods were, as seen in the other Macedonian sanctuary of Demeter, kernoi, jewelry and miniature vases²⁹. It is noteworthy that from these goods, only miniature vases are found in the Thesmophorion at Pella.

5. Conclusions and Future Prospects

From examining the results and the findings, we reach the following conclusion.

Providing protection and blessing appropriate for each goddess' nature, two Sanctuaries seem not to have much difference in quality and atmosphere. Namely, both Sanctuaries are supposed to have been opened to all people in broad social level. The believers had gathered, dedicated votive offerings, prayed, carried out the rituals and eating together in the Sanctuaries. In particular, the Sanctuary of the Mother of the Gods and of Aphrodite should have been opened to all people in a relaxed atmosphere, although one might suppose that the Sanctuary should have been considerably organized,

creating a formal, sophisticated and aristocratic atmosphere, appropriate to seek goddesses protection of the state. In fact, the building-complex is neither monumental nor particularly impressive in spite of its location and size. In addition, the related items found in the site are generally mediocre in quality. While, as for the Thesmophorion, it is possible that the visitors were relatively restricted to country people since the aspect of the goddess is the protection of agriculture and giving fertility and prosperity. From the absence of some common factors of the cult of Demeter, cult activities like rituals might have been carried out in a relatively private manner if compared with that of other major sanctuaries.

We have made it clear the details of the appearance of two significant Sanctuaries at Pella. I believe that the current study make a certain contribution toward the theme, though there remains several unclear and unsettled points. Further consideration will be needed to investigate thoroughly. For the future prospects, the following two subjects can be put forward:

1. A study of twin goddesses of the Sanctuary of the Mother of the Gods and of Aphrodite. The result of the present study is suggestive about the role of Aphrodite. That is to say, she might have been celebrated as the daughter of the Mother of the Gods. The Mother of the Gods has great similarity with Demeter. Yet the relation of Aphrodite with the Eleusinian deities is common in the Greek world. Especially the chthonic nature was predominant in Aphrodite that was linked to Persephone³⁰. Further consideration of this theme may lead to explore the reason of co-existence of two closely-related goddesses who possess maternal aspect in the ancient Pella.
2. Comparative study of other sanctuaries. Three directions of study can be presented. Firstly, that of the Sanctuary of Darron at the ancient Pella. Secondly, that of the Sanctuaries dedicated to the goddesses in the ancient Macedonia. Thirdly, the study of this kind of Sanctuaries in the southern Greek world. These studies will promote a lot of knowledge concerning the current theme. At the same time, a steady development of the excavations in northern Greece will be expected.

- 1 Others are that of Pan, Heracles, Asclepius, Artemis, the Great Gods of Samothrace, and Persephone. Lilimbaki-Akamati 2004: 53-54.
- 2 Lilimbaki-Akamati 2004 *ibid.*: 53-59; 1996: 11.
- 3 Lilimbaki-Akamati 2004 *ibid.*; Lilimbaki-Akamati and Akamatis 2015: 26-30. For general summaries of terracotta figurines and workshops of Pella, see Lilimbaki-Akamati and Akamatis 2017: 113-116.
- 4 Akamatis 2004 *ibid.*: 16-17.
- 5 Lilimbaki-Akamati 1996 (*supra* n.2): 19-26.
- 6 Lilimbaki-Akamati 1997.
- 7 Lilimbaki-Akamati 2000: 5-33.
- 8 Lilimbaki-Akamati 1996 (*supra* n.2): 19.
- 9 Lilimbaki-Akamati 1996 *ibid.*, especially, see n.4.
- 10 With their upper surfaces slope slightly, these walls seem to have acted as ramps by which people descended into the sanctuary. See Lilimbaki-Akamati 1996 (*supra* n.2): 19-26.
- 11 The cult of Demeter seems to have had an older tradition in the ancient Macedonia although the earlier establishment of the Thesmophorion remains uncertain as compared with the other Sanctuary at Pella. See Matsuo and Yasunaga 2016: 116.
- 12 Matsuo and Yasunaga 2016 *ibid.*: 116-117.
- 13 As for the first Sanctuary, a catalogue of finds is given in Lilimbaki-Akamati 2000 (*supra* n.7). Especially for that of terracotta figurines, see 37-115, that of earthenware vases, 115-142, that of metal objects, 142-157, that of bones and so on, 157-158, that of coins, 158-173, that of stone objects, 174-199. As for the Thesmophorion, a catalogue of finds is given in Lilimbaki-Akamati 1996 (*supra* n.2). Especially for that of terracotta figurines, see 27-80, that of earthenware vases, 80-93, that of metal objects, 94-95, that of glass objects, 95, that of coins, 95-100.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 *Supra* n.13.
- 16 See below.
- 17 Lilimbaki-Akamati 2000 (*supra* n.7): 174-176.
- 18 To take some examples, a marble female head from a relief stele and a miniature marble altar are found in the ante-chamber of the temple in the southern section of the complex. An area in the north-eastern section of the complex, where sculptors had their workshops, yielded two pieces from the base of a votive offering with an inscription referring to Aphrodite, as well as most of the marble and stone artifacts unearthed by the excavation. A miniature marble, which bears an inscription referring to the Mother of the Gods was also found in the southern stoa. Lilimbaki-Akamati 2000 *ibid.*
- 19 For example, two stone reliefs with the typical representation of the Mother of the Gods were found in the above mentioned ante-chamber of the temple in the southern section. Lilimbaki-Akamati 2000 *ibid.*
- 20 Lilimbaki-Akamati 2000 *ibid.*: 142-143.
- 21 Lilimbaki-Akamati 2000 *ibid.*: 174-175.
- 22 Lilimbaki-Akamati 2000 *ibid.*: 37-39; 2017 (*supra* n.3): 115.

- 23 According to the excavators, the sanctuary was destroyed at the same time as the destruction of the Agora, at the beginning of the 1st century BC, probably as a result of the same earthquake. Lilimbaki-Akamati 2000 *ibid.*: 200-201.
- 24 Lilimbaki-Akamati 2000 *ibid.*: 37.
- 25 Lilimbaki-Akamati 2000 *ibid.*: 142-157.
- 26 Lilimbaki-Akamati 1996 (*supra* n.2): 77-80.
- 27 Pingiatoglou 2015: 168.
- 28 Pingiatoglou 2015 *ibid.*: 171-172.
- 29 Pingiatoglou 2015 *ibid.*: 171.
- 30 Pingiatoglou 2015 *ibid.*: 163.

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