

## Taming Women and Making Men at Thermon: The Metopes of Temple C

Temple C at Thermon in Aitolia is among the earliest Greek temples to display an elaborate program of figural decoration. This included mold-made terracottas shaped like the heads of women and lions, as well as—more unusually for this period—metopes painted in the style of contemporary Corinthian pottery. Although the surviving metopes are poorly preserved, several bear recognizable subjects (Antonetti 1990: 173-185). A few show beasts, including a gorgoneion, a lion, and possibly a sphinx, while several more show episodes identifiable from myth. These include Perseus fleeing a gorgon, Aedon and Khelidon murdering Itys, a hunter (possibly Meleager, Orion, or a local hero) returning from the hunt, and two seminude women who have been plausibly identified as Proitides. Finally, a metope showing a seated triad (either a group of goddesses or the Letoids) dates to the temple's Hellenistic restoration (Stucky 1988), although it is painted in the Archaic style and may reproduce the subject of an earlier metope (Anguissola 2007).

Temple decoration from elsewhere in the Archaic Greek world provides a context for understanding the beasts and repeated frontal faces of Temple C: as Marconi has argued, such figures would instill in the worshipper the awe and terror that encounters with the sacred demanded (2004: 221-222). The metopes with narrative content, however, present greater interpretive challenges. Their poor state of preservation, the paucity of contemporary local comparanda, and our uncertainty about the identity of the deity to whom the early temple belonged have made it difficult to determine why these themes were represented together or what suited them to this site. In a rare attempt to make sense of these problems, Antonetti suggested that two of the subjects (the hunter and the Proitides) have initiatory themes, and that the program as a whole reflected the memory of pre- and proto-Hellenic worship at the site (1990:

173-185); others, however, profess little hope of recovering a coherent program (Osborne 2000: 236).

Without suggesting that our evidence allows for a full understanding of the temple's decorative program, I propose that the surviving metopes present a more coherent picture than scholars have yet recognized. It is striking that three of the subjects involve female collectivities who are improperly controlled by men or male institutions: the Proitides insult Hera, the patron of marriage, and consequently turn wild, overcome by lust and mooing like cows; Aedon shows loyalty to her sister rather than her husband and punishes the latter by destroying his son (and thus his lineage); and the gorgons are a monstrous inversion of the maiden cohort toward whom gods and heroes typically direct sexual attention (Topper 2007, Langdon 2008: 110-114). The need for men's control over such wild creatures is made explicit in the metope depicting the hunter, a figure whose association with adult masculinity is well documented.

I suggest, then, that the articulation of normative gender roles was one concern of the metopes of Temple C, and that the images offered mythological reflections upon this theme, stressing the consequences of transgression and the need for the order imposed by social institutions. It is difficult to say precisely how this imagery related to ritual activities at the site, since we do not know who was worshiped there in this early period. The presence of Apollo and Artemis—gods associated with maturation—at Thermon in later centuries, however, suggests that the gendered socialization of young people may have been a focus of early cult there. If so, the metopes would have functioned, as Marconi has suggested for the metopes at Foce del Sele, “as visual equivalents of ... hymns ... and fulfilled the same educational role of such hymns by reasserting the cultural and social values of the community” (2004: 223).

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