

Evidence for a Communal Dining Group in Early Classical Athens

In 1936 the Excavations of the Athenian Agora discovered two related closed deposits of pottery on the Kolonos Agoraios (the hill with the Temple of Hephaistos). The deposits and other strata of fills in the area contained a substantial quantity of similar fine pottery dating from 480-450 B.C. Although one of these deposits, C 9:6, is over 30 meters from the Temple of Hephaistos (conventionally dated to ca. 450 B.C.) W. B. Dinsmoor (1941) speculated that the fine pottery in it could be votive pottery from a pre-temple cult of Hephaistos, although no architectural remains were found pre-dating the stone temple. Neither deposit of pottery has been published in full.

The author restudied the pottery from both deposits over the summer of 2014. This paper proposes that the deposits do not relate to votive or cultic activities, and thus should be disassociated with the cult of Hephaistos. Although the deposits do include a few votive objects, there is overwhelming evidence for group drinking: an estimated minimum of 250 drinking cups and 30 kraters were preserved in both deposits. This is far more than a household would need, and the number compares favorably to deposits associated with civic dining around the Agora.

There is no evidence for civic (public) dining on top of the Kolonos Agoraios; however, there is evidence for a shrine, the Eurysakeion, used by a *genos*, the Salaminioi, as their meeting location. Activities of the *genos* of the Salaminioi are recorded on a series of inscribed stelai self-instructing to be set up in the Eurysakeion (Lambert 1997; Taylor 1997). Three inscriptions, although dating up to 150 years later, were found within 10 meters of the pottery deposits. *Gene* were private associations that had official civic and religious duties but were also a membership club with a shared bond of some sort. *Gene* used banqueting to create bonds and an identity (van

den Eijnde 2010), so it is possible that the pottery found near and pre-dating the Hephaisteion was once used by this group.

A *genos* typically shared some aspect of identity, and scholars debate whether the Salaminioi included only people with a Salaminian family lineage or some Athenians with property on Salamis (Valdés Guía 2005). The membership criteria are irrelevant to this study, but the Eurysakeion was dedicated to Eurysakes, the grandson of Salaminian Aias. It would not be surprising if any Athenian with real or invented connections to Salamis rode high in the years after the Battle of Salamis. It is precisely to this period that the pottery dates, so the *genos* and its shrine may have seen a flurry of attention following the Persian Wars.

What prompted the discard of a vast amount of pottery is unclear, but it is possible an earthquake, accident, or even relocation of the *genos*' dining facility during the construction of the Hephaisteion was responsible. One of the deposits contained pottery and a layer of working chips from the trimming of the Hephaisteion's marble blocks thus indicating that the pottery was deposited during the period of the Hephaisteion's construction.

Bibliography

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