

Athena, Horses, and a Clay Impression at Ancient Corinth

In 1908, during David M. Robinson's exploration of the theater at ancient Corinth, he uncovered a fill below the Roman cavea that contained many terracotta figurines, moulds and other material probably from a Hellenistic coroplast's workshop. Among these finds was a clay mould or impression (MF 1045) taken from a small bust of the Athena Parthenos. Robinson published this object in 1911 (*Hesperia* 15, pp. 482 – 503) and Weinberg later included it in *Corinth* XII. The clay impression has also appeared in studies on the Athena Parthenos. Made of local pale Corinthian clay, ca .145 m. high, it depicts Athena Parthenos from the top of her triple-crested helmet to just beneath her aegis. The Pegasus crest holders on her helmet were rendered in profile rather than frontally. In fact, it is one of only a few Parthenos reflections that presents her this way. A modern plaster cast was made at Corinth from this possible mould. At some point Robinson had an impression taken from this cast. Made of red-orange clay and painted with a brown glaze, it resides in his collection of antiquities at the University of Mississippi.

But what else can be said about the Corinthian original? First of all, its edges are uneven, rather than flattened and uniform all around, as in a proper mould intended to produce a figurine. This piece is probably is an impression, clay pressed around some object to replicate the image for study or perhaps the first step in reproducing it. Secondly, most of the details are crisp and sharply outlined, suggesting that the lost prototype was metallic. Then there is the shape of this clay object. Pointed at top and bottom, it is roughly rhomboidal, with curved rather than angular sides.

Shape and scale relate this terracotta object to a series of Hellenistic metal adornments for horses' bridles, the so-called *prometidia*. These metal decorations were attached to the strap of the bridle running down the horse's muzzle. Several silver examples survive, depicting winged Nikai and Erotes, and there are more clay impressions from metal examples. Furthermore, a group of clay disks found in the Athenian Agora present similar versions of Athena Promachos' head, with the Pegasoi on her helmet flattened out so they can be seen in profile. It is just possible that these pieces relate to metal rondels that also adorned bridles, and that disks and the Corinth *prometidion* represent elements from sets of bridle decorations depicting Athena Promachos.

Returning to Corinth, the impression in local clay of a metal *prometidion* suggests that it was produced there using a metal object available at the site. The association of Athena with horses at ancient Corinth brings up one more intriguing point. At Corinth, according to Pausanias (2.4.1), there was a sanctuary for Athena Chalinitis, Athena of the Bridle, said to have tamed Pegasus for Bellerophon. From the perigete's passage through the Forum, this shrine appears to have been on the west side, near the Fountain of Glauke and the now lost tomb of Medea's children. In 1925 and 1926 a long, narrow trench, the so-called Athena trench, was excavated just east of the Odeion and Theater. At the time of this investigation, Pausanias' route toward Sicyon was thought to have taken him east of the Odeion and Theatre.

More recent work on the road east of the theater at Corinth, coupled with a reevaluation of Pausanias' route to Sicyon, suggest that the traveler actually walked south of the Odeion before turning north toward the Sicyon gate. Thus, the Athena Chalinitis shrine should be located somewhere south of the Odeion. Oscar Broneer, who dug this building in the 1920's, included among the sculptural finds a large, fragmentary Roman statue of Athena wearing a bandolier

style aegis. A glance at the excavation notebook reveals that it actually was discovered some fifteen meters south of the Odeion, in association with well-built Roman walls. The findspot of this Athena statue could in fact be a clue to the whereabouts of the Chalinitis precinct, which we now expect to have been located south or southwest of the Odeion.

The clay impression at Corinth from a metal *prometidion* depicting Athena may come from the remains of a Hellenistic workshop. The association of Athena and horses at Corinth suggests that the bridle decoration had a special meaning for someone, artist or client. It is just possible that the clay impression was taken from an object at the sanctuary and or was used to produce another metal replica, perhaps a Hellenistic offering for Athena at Corinth.