

Sandrine Huber, *Eretria XIV. L'Aire sacrificielle au nord du Sanctuaire d'Apollon Daphnéphoros. Un rituel des époques géométrique et archaïque*, avec une contribution de Isabelle Chenal-Velarde et Jaqueline Studer, Gollion 2003. 189 + 72 p. 4 tables, 142 plates.

In 1978 to 1981, the Swiss archaeological school resumed excavations at the sanctuary of Apollo Daphnéphoros at Eretria to explore the northern and eastern limits of the sanctuary, with additional investigations undertaken in 1990. To the north of the temple of the god the excavations revealed an area of cult, *l'Aire sacrificielle Nord*, with an immensely rich votive deposit, consisting of several thousand miniature hydrias and other ceramic vessels, as well as objects from Italy, the Syro-Phoenician sphere and Luristan. The deposit also contained a large number of animal bones. The results of these investigations are published and analysed by Sandrine Huber in two excellent volumes of text and images. This study greatly enriches our knowledge not only of Geometric-Archaic Eretria, but also of Greek religion at large, as it consists of the earliest cult attested in an urban sanctuary in the Greek world.

The *Introduction* (p. 19-25) sets out the aims of the study: to place the *Aire sacrificielle Nord* within its larger context, and to try to determine its function, the rituals performed at the site, the identity of both the divinity and the worshippers, and its relation to the area dedicated to Apollo Daphnéphoros. The sacrificial area was located on the northern bank of a small seasonal stream, facing the sanctuary of Apollo. In the middle of the 6th century, the stream was diverted to the west of the city and the stream bed transformed into a street, becoming the principal north-south route of the settlement, leading from the West Gate to the agora and the eastern harbour. To orient the reader, Huber also gives a precise description of the Geometric and Archaic remains under and around the 6th-century temple of Apollo.

Chapter 1 (p. 27-43) offers a detailed account of the excavations, presenting the stratigraphy and the structures found in a chronological sequence. The extent of the *Aire sacrificielle Nord* could not be established due to profound later disturbances and the cult area continues under the modern buildings. The area is small, 42 m², with a complex stratigraphy and containing the remains of a number of walls, many of which cannot be dated precisely. The cult place was established in the Late Geometric period (ca 750 BC) around a circular dry wall construction (no. 45) with a diameter of 2.85 m, filled with small stones and sandy clay. From its construction until the end of the 6th century, successive layers of clay and sand, heavily mixed with a high amount of votive offerings, organic matter, ash and charcoal accumulated around the structure, eventually covering it entirely. The material seems to have been deposited in intervals and levelled from time to time. In the Archaic period, a pit (no. 49), ca 1.5 m in diameter and 2.50 m deep, was dug into the Geometric levels ca 4 m to the east of the circular structure. It was filled with sandy soil, thousands of sherds and small objects of the same kind as those in the layers around no. 45, animal bones and fragments of burnt clay plaques, charcoal and ash. The material dates from the 7th to the first half of the 5th century.

After the Archaic period, the area was probably used for cultic purposes down to Classical-Hellenistic times, when a pi-shaped monumental foundation (no. 41) was erected to the south, consisting of a marble threshold and the two poros blocks supporting columns. The precise time when the area was abandoned cannot be determined due to the upper layers being contaminated by later evidence, but in early Christian times, the area was used for burials.

Chapter 2 (p. 45-68) analyses the ceramic finds, which were very rich – around 165 900 sherds were recovered. This is too many to be studied exhaustively, and Huber has chosen to focus the analysis primarily on the uses of the pottery (the material is described and illustrated in Volume II). Two shapes stand out, miniature hydriai and high-necked jugs.

Of the hydrias, a selection of 228 specimens is catalogued. The vessels, 15-20 cm high, were recovered in all levels from the mid-8th to the end of the 6th century. In the Geometric period the decoration consisted of birds, horses, human figures, cauldrons and snake-shaped bands. The orientalizing hydriai were decorated with animals, human figures and geometric patterns, while the 7th and 6th century examples mainly bear horizontal bands or are completely covered by monochrome paint. The high-necked jugs have a small, rounded body, a conical foot and a vertical, flat handle and are between 13 and 40 cm high. The majority bear only geometric adornments, while around 20 vessels have a figurative decoration, encircling the high neck, showing one or several women moving to the right, with the faces drawn in a simple outline and the arms raised. By comparison to Eretrian funerary amphorai, the high-necked jugs can be dated from the early 7th to the early 6th century BC. The rest of the pottery, only 10 % of the ceramic material in total, consists of various kinds of drinking vessels, aryballoi, large closed shapes, cooking pots, coarse ware and some miniatures. Most vessels are locally manufactured; imports are mainly present in the later periods in the form of Attic black- and red-figure.

The non-ceramic finds are discussed in *Chapter 3* (p. 69-108) and presented in detail in the catalogue in Volume II. The huge effort undertaken by the author to contextualize and date this group of finds, so diverse as to material, origin and function, is commendable, as it clearly allows the reader to grasp the importance of this evidence.

There are vases of faïence, glass and gypsum. The terracotta figurines consist of a few fragments of quadrupeds and a cock, as well as human figurines, for example a Geometric enthroned goddess, an Archaic “Brettidol” and parts of so-called dolls. The metal objects include a number of interesting pieces, such as a miniature tripod cauldron of the type known from Olympia, a pierced handle of a tube shaped as a goat, probably originating in Luristan or Urartu, more than 900 pieces or fragments of jewellery, among which are rings in electrum, silver and bronze, ear rings, fibulae (some of which are of Italic origin), chains and pins. There are more than 160 thin gold plaques with repoussé decoration which could have been attached to furniture or clothes. Among the metal finds are also iron arrowheads, iron picks or mattocks and a lead disk which may have been a weight for a fishing net.

Hundreds of beads of glass, faïence, amber, stone, bone and shell, some of which clearly are Eastern imports, were recovered. The seal stones contain a Late Helladic stone example and a great number of scarabs of faïence, glass, stone, amber and bone or ivory from the Aegean Islands, the eastern Mediterranean and New Kingdom Egypt, including a very beautiful example from the Lyre Player group. There are also Egyptian and Egyptianizing amulets representing Egyptian divinities. The terracotta material contains objects connected with the production of textiles, such as a fragment of an epinetron, loom weights, a bobbin, spindle whorls, pierced spheres and discs, as well as 33 lamps from the 6th and 5th centuries BC, some of which are Corinthian or Attic. Finally, the Archaic pit yielded a number of fragments of unburnt clay plaques with a coarsely smoothed surface bearing impressed decoration and imprints of straw on the back, which may have covered a wall or a ceiling.

The detailed presentation of the evidence in Ch. 2 and 3 gives Huber a good foundation for the discussion of the ritual activities in *Chapter 4* (p. 109-140). The main structure of interest is the circular construction no. 45, convincingly interpreted as an altar due to the ash and charcoal accumulated on its top as well as the burnt animal bones recovered. The structure seems to have been crowned by a layer of clay to create an even surface for the sacrifices. The linking of this altar to the “walled-pits” of Yavis’ altar typology tentatively suggested on p. 112 is best avoided, as the Eretria altar is not a pit, but a solid construction, and this fact should make us question whether the early “pit altars” at Mycenae and Tiryns actually were hollow from the beginning. Early altars of this type have few archaeological parallels and even the circular “altar” in front of the temple of Apollo at Didyma, which is

brought into the discussion, is not certain, as this structure has also been interpreted as a small *tholos* used as a dining room.¹

Huber compares the altar at Eretria with the iconographical evidence, which is Attic and dates to the 5th and early 4th centuries BC, and offers two interesting observations on the vase-paintings (p. 114).² First of all, the plaques crowning the altars depicted as constructed of fieldstones may have been layers of clay, as apparently was the case at Eretria, and not stone plaques, as is usually assumed, and, second, the low fieldstone altars seen on some vases may in fact represent high altars that have been partly buried in votive and sacrificial debris, instead of constructions having intentionally been built this low. This latter suggestion offers a completely new manner of understanding the “low” altars seen not only on vase-paintings, but also on votive reliefs.³

Of the pottery the small hydriai are of particular interest since they are found in huge quantities (more than 150 000 sherds and at least 1300 vessels deposited in the Archaic pit alone) and consequently must have had a specific function within the cult. The high-necked jugs are found less frequently, only 43 specimens in all, but their dimensions, unique shape and the originality of decoration are taken to indicate that they were used by privileged participants, such as priests or priestesses or affluent worshippers, or that they may have been linked to a particular ritual. The votive material has a wide geographical origin but the objects are largely personal ones, especially such as are linked to women, though the figurines contain an unusually low percentage of female representations if compared to other sanctuaries both at Eretria and elsewhere. A series of objects are related to the manufacture of textiles, while the metal picks/mattocks may have been used for mining, wood work or the extraction of clays, but may also have served as sacrificial equipment.

A third kind of evidence for the cult is the iconography on the ceramic vessels. One Subgeometric hydria (H125) is interpreted as showing a religious scene, with a cult statue of a female divinity on a base in the centre, flanked by a worshipper, a person next to a burning altar, and a figure, perhaps a warrior, apparently seated on an animal. Huber suggests that the scene perhaps was inspired by the iconography of Near Eastern seals. The interpretation of the pyramid-shaped object as an altar is attractive but far from certain, however, especially as a smaller object of the same shape in front of it is left unaccounted for. The richest iconographical evidence is offered by the high-necked jugs, taken to depict stages of the ritual performed at the *Aire sacrificielle Nord*, in analogy with the krateriskoi from Brauron or the loutrophoroi from the sanctuary of the Nympe at Athens. One scene (C 41) is proposed to represent a priestess in front of a goddess, next to a loom or piece of textile. Another vase (C 37) shows two women facing each other, perhaps in front of an altar topped by a metal grid, which may be a depiction of the Geometric altar (no. 45).⁴ The final category of material is the animal bones, the discussion of which is based on the study of the osteological evidence

¹ See F. Cooper & S. Morris, ‘Dining in round buildings’, in *Symptica. A symposium on the symposion*, ed. O. Murray, Oxford 1990, 69-70.

² For the iconographic material, see also G. Ekroth, ‘Altars on Attic vases: the identification of *bomos* and *eschara*’, in *Ceramics in context. Proceeding of the Internordic Colloquium on ancient pottery held at Stockholm, 13-15 June 1997* (Stockholm studies in Classical archaeology 12), ed. Ch. Scheffer, Stockholm 2001, 115-126.

³ See, for example, the “low” fieldstone altar on the votive relief Athens 1410, *LIMC VI* (1992), s.v. Heros Equitans, no. 45.

⁴ When discussing the use of metal grids on Greek altars, an erroneous comparison is made to an altar of bricks on a mortar base at the sanctuary of Artemis at Eleusis, here said to date from the 7th century BC (p. 134). This altar is in fact Roman, though underneath are the remains of a 6th century BC polygonal wall as well as a curved 8th-7th century BC wall, none of which belong to an altar, see A. Mazarakis Ainian, *From rulers’ dwellings to temples. Architecture, religion and society in Early Iron Age Greece (1100-700 BC)* (SIMA 121), Jonsered 1997, 96 and fig. 183.

by Isabelle Chenal-Velarde and Jaqueline Studer, published in an appendix to the volume (see further below).

Chapter 5 proposes a synthesis of the ritual and an attempt to identify the deity worshipped. On the basis of iconography on the high-necked jugs it is suggested that the cult contained processions or dances by women, perhaps leading to a dedication of a piece of clothing to the deity worshipped, a *peplophoria*. The great number of Geometric hydriai indicates the importance of libations, while the performance of animal sacrifice is clearly demonstrated by the presence of animal bones. The osteological analysis shows that at least 32 sheep or goats were sacrificed in the Geometric period, a number tentatively connected with the period of use of the altar as estimated from the archaeological remains, thirty years, which would mean about one animal per year. Based on the clay fragments altered by burning, Huber proposes that the altar was equipped with a new clay cap after each sacrifice, an interesting interpretation, and as the clay fragments give evidence for a new type of altar covering, it would have been useful to have them better documented, or at least photographed. The presence of a metal grill is suggested by the iconography of the high-necked jug C 37, but the need for such an installation on top of the flat, clay-covered surface is left unexplained. Ritual meals followed the sacrifices, but there is no osteological evidence for such activity from the Geometric period, though sherds of drinking vessels from the same period may indicate that such activities took place. In the Archaic period, the preparation of meals is evident from the bone material in the votive pit (no. 49), a quantity of drinking vessels and cooking pots. After the conclusion of the rituals, the vessels were abandoned around the altar or thrown into the Archaic pit mixed with other votives, ash and bones.

There are no inscriptions or graffiti which may help identify the divinity worshipped at the *Aire sacrificielle Nord*, but Huber makes a convincing case for Artemis, a deity occupying an important role within the Eretrian pantheon. The importance of water is a clear link to Artemis: the altar was located just next to the stream and the predominant ritual vessel was the hydria. Objects connected with textile production, as well as arrowheads, are suitable offerings to this goddess, as are the possible depictions on the pottery of a dedication of clothing to a goddess (C41) and the adoration of a tree (C10). The proximity to the sanctuary of Apollo suggests that the *Aire sacrificielle Nord* may in fact be a sanctuary of Artemis that epigraphical evidence mentions as situated near that of the god. The character of the offerings further suggests that they were made individually, especially by women. The social standing of these women may have been high and their aristocratic origins are indicated by representations of horses, warriors and cauldrons on the pottery. Also the number of imported offerings can be a sign of involvement of the leading class of Eretria and their external connections.

The *Conclusions* (p. 163-174) define the place of the *Aire sacrificielle Nord* within Eretria, both topographically and functionally. The sanctuary of Apollo Daphnephoros and the *Aire sacrificielle Nord* should be considered as two distinct topographical entities, initially separated by the stream, but belonging together. Round stone altars are found at both cult places, but that of the Apollo sanctuary, structure no. 12, is slightly older and was not surrounded by layers of votive deposits in the same manner as the altar in the *Aire sacrificielle Nord*. Also, bones have only been recovered from a series of hearths north of altar no. 12, but they are unburnt and represent dinner debris, and there are no burnt bones corresponding to the god's share. In the sanctuary of Apollo Daphnephoros monumental kraters seem to have been the offering *par excellence* connected to the cult of the main poliadic deity, while hydriai of smaller size were preferred at the *Aire sacrificielle Nord*. Artemis had an important sanctuary in Amarynthos outside the city, and Huber suggests that the *Aire sacrificielle Nord* may have functioned as an annex to that sanctuary, perhaps linked to it by the processions leading from the agora. The Classical-Hellenistic propylon no. 41 may

have been used as a starting point at these processions and the sacrifices initiating the festival of the goddess were performed at the *Aire sacrificielle Nord*.

At the end of the Archaic period the cultic activity seems to cease for unknown reasons. The institution of democracy in around 500 is cited as a possible cause, as the power of the *hippeis*, the social group which may have been the prime worshippers at the site, decreased, but also the partial destruction of the city by the Persians could have affected the cult. If seen within the wider geographical perspective, the *Aire sacrificielle Nord* clearly confirms the importance of Eretria in the Mediterranean at large during the 8th century BC, as the cult place has yielded an impressive amount of imported offerings from the Aegean islands, the East (Rhodes, the coasts of the eastern Mediterranean, Egypt and the Luristan region) and the West (the Italic peninsula), in particular if one considers the limited area investigated (42 m²).

Huber's study of the excavation is closed by a highly interesting publication of the animal bones by Isabelle Chenal-Velarde and Jaqueline Studer, 'La part des dieux et celles des hommes : offrandes d'animaux et restes culinaires dans l'Aire sacrificielle Nord' (p. 175-184). This report constitutes an important contribution to the growing empirical osteological evidence for Greek sacrificial ritual.⁵ Chenal-Velarde and Studer also place the osteological material within a wider context of bone findings from Greek sanctuaries, discussing how this evidence confirms and completes our iconographical and written sources.

The bone assemblage corresponds well to the written and iconographical evidence concerning *thysia* sacrifice, but it also offers additional insights. The Geometric material consisted almost exclusively of heavily burnt thighbones and kneecaps of ovicaprines (the species could not be separated), some bearing knife marks showing that the *femora* had been carefully removed with a knife. There are also a few burnt vertebrae (at least three caudal ones), indicating that tails occasionally may have been put on the altar. Of the animal bones from the Archaic pit, half came from ovicaprines, a fifth from pig and a little less from cattle, while 9 % came from dogs. The very low number of thighbones, kneecaps and vertebrae, and the presence of most other parts of the skeleton, as well as the fact that the bones were unburnt and bear cut marks, indicate that these are the leftovers of meals. Of particular interest are the dog bones, coming from two individuals, as the variety of parts, the fragmentation and the butchering marks suggest that they are also the remains of eaten animals. A cattle skull bears evidence of the animal having been struck in the forehead, probably to kill or stun it, or to remove the brain.

In all, Sandrine Huber's study is an excellent publication of a remarkable cult place, the importance of which is due in particular to the inconspicuous nature of the architectural remains. Many Greek cult-places must have resembled the *Aire sacrificielle Nord*, but we know very little about them. The publication brings out the use of the site over the centuries and the very interesting fact that the altar was gradually allowed to "drown" in the sacrificial and votive debris. The organisation of the study, proceeding from the detailed presentation of the empirical evidence to its interpretation within an increasingly wider context and level of abstraction is well executed, and constantly allows Huber to back up her suggestions with the help of the archaeological material. The book constitutes a successful attempt to explore the results of the excavation as fully as possible, taking all possible aspects into consideration, while carefully noting when the material will not allow us to proceed further. The catalogues

⁵ See, for example, E. Kotjabopoulou *et al.* (eds.), *Zoarchaeology in Greece. Recent advances* (British School at Athens studies 9), Athens 2003; M. Leguilloux, 'Bibliographie archéozoologique', in *Thesaurus cultus et rituum antiquorum (ThesCRA)* I (2004), 64; D.S. Reese, 'Faunal remains from Greek sanctuaries: A survey', in *Greek sacrificial ritual, Olympian and chthonian. Proceedings of the Sixth International Seminar on Ancient Greek Cult, organized by the Department of Classical Archaeology and Ancient History, Göteborg University, 25-27 April 1997* (ActaAth-8^o, 18), eds. R. Hägg & B. Alroth, Stockholm 2005, 121-123; M. MacKinnon, 'Osteological research in Classical archaeology', *AJA* 111, 2007, 490-491.

in Volume II present the relevant material in drawings and photographs of excellent quality.

This study offers a number of most interesting and noteworthy interpretations of the evidence, and one is impressed by the creativity and flexibility with which Huber has approached the material. To mention one example, on p. 119 it is proposed that a small number of hand-made hydriai, among the thousands of wheel-made examples, may have been manufactured by private individuals not having the means to buy wheel-made hydrias, or by worshippers preferring to make their own votives as a way of taking a more active part in the cult. This is a most interesting suggestion, perhaps giving us a rare glimpse of the choices of the people once worshipping at the *Aire sacrificielle Nord*.

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