

Ilaria BATTILORO, Antonio BRUSCELLA, Massimo OSANNA, *Ninfe ad Heraklea Lucana? Il santuario extra-urbano di Masseria Petrulla nella Valle del Sinni (Policoro – MT)*

Abstract: During the 1970s, Dinu Adamesteanu uncovered a small sacred place within the *chora* of Heraklea. It is an open-air sanctuary, constituted by an area bounded by a *temenos* wall, with an altar and a small *naiskos* inside. A votive deposit was located within the *temenos*, which was filled with a large quantity of ritual and votive material, placed in the hole when the sacred place was abandoned. The architectural structures and a selection of the finds were first published by Dinu Adamesteanu himself. He identified this small sacred place with Chalcas' *heroon*, which is recorded in Lycophron's famous passage. The subject of this contribution is a comprehensive re-examination of this sacred place – architectural structures as well as published and un-published finds – which allows us to present a different scenario from that first proposed by Adamesteanu. Most of the Black-Glaze vases pertain to the practice of the *symposium*, while the common wares suggest that food was usually prepared in order to be given as a gift to deities. The Red-Figure vases present interesting figural depictions, which tend to refer to Dionysian subjects and to the theme of weddings.

With regard to coroplastic objects, three fragmentary life-size terracotta statues have been found. At least two of these represent young, beautiful women, seated on thrones and wearing lavish clothes. A number of small terracotta figurines show diverse iconographies, which pertain to the spheres of *kourotropheia* and *sanatio*, but there are also “erotic” subjects, referring to the Aphrodisian sphere, and votive clay fruits, which suggest the chthonian aspect of this cult.

In light of this comprehensive analysis of archaeological data, a clearer and more detailed picture emerges of the Contrada Petrulla sanctuary. The sacred area was probably dedicated to feminine deities, who can be identified with the Nymphs, peripheral figures of Aphrodite's circle. These feminine deities who have chthonian characteristics, personify water (generally a water spring), oversee the passage from a virginal condition to the status of *nymphai*, have a kourotrophic nature, and are ultimately associated with the Dionysian world. Therefore, the life-size seated statues found in the votive deposit can be considered as cult statues (depictions of the Nymphs themselves?). Previously, the statues had been located in the small *naiskos*, which was placed within the *temenos* wall and was open to the altar.