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## The apotropaic and prophylactic in the Artemision of Thassos: a contextual interpretation of the black-figure pottery from the Archaic period

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**Abstract:** This paper is centered on Thassos, an island situated in the Northern Aegean, settled by Greeks from Paros. We focus on the Archaic Period, more specifically on the sixth century BC, the peak

of local production. Departing from the archaeological contexts through excavation reports, we analyze significant social and religious connections among votive materials associated with the Thasian black-figure pottery. These connections brought us elements that allowed us to interpret the multiculturalism imbricated within the objects, the mimicry and the innovations in the decoration of this black-figure pottery, as well as the particular demand in quantitative terms of a type of vessel called *lekane*, an object that was loaded with information and religious and apotropaic meaning. In addition, those same elements also showed us traits that reveal votive practices, judging by the way the pottery was exhibited, and its decorative features, which to date are only attested in Thassos. The research revealed intrinsic relationships linked to the various facets of Artemis, the protection of women in childbirth, revealed through the analysis of the objects in context.

**Keywords:** Apotropaic and Prophylactic; Archaic period; Artemision; Thassos; Black Figure Pottery

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## Artemision of Thassos

This sanctuary was installed at the beginning of the foundation of Thassos (in the 7th century BC), with a monumental altar built in the beginning of the 5th century BC. The south side draws attention because it was occupied by a portico that housed female statues. Adolphe Joseph Reinach, in an excavation report published in CRAI (1912),<sup>1</sup> says that two bases were first found with female statues in the 1911 campaign, which could possibly be of Artemis-Polos (Maffre; Tichit, 2011, 159). Subsequently, a perimeter wall was found where other statues and other wall foundations were (Reinach, 1912, 222). The excavation on the lower terrace, dating from the Archaic period, revealed a significant number of statuettes, painted

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<sup>1</sup> *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres.*

vases, among them the *lekane*, the main object of analysis in this article (Muller; Mulliez, 2012, 14).

## **Thassos and cultural reception: Thasian black-figure pottery**

Thassos imported, since the 6th century B.C., and in abundance during the 5th century B.C., Attic black-figured *lekanai*, which were a source of inspiration for the dominant forms in Thasian black-figure pottery ateliers.<sup>2</sup> The adoption of an Attic-influenced decoration is very marked by the presence of florals, symmetrical compositions, and the expansion of the animal repertoire (mainly swans) in addition to human representations (Coulié, 2002, 174).

The Corinthian influence on Thasian vessels is noted by L. Ghali-Kahil: "This style with black figures is strongly inspired by Corinthian pottery" (Ghali-Kahil, 1960, 52). Anne Coulié disagrees with the statement, as it would be very difficult to identify specific exchanges, in her opinion. The animal style, and even more the human figures that decorate these vases, owed little to Corinth. The strongest trends occurred with the influences of the Chios and North Ionian workshops. However, she also recalls that these two places also adopted a decoration inspired by the Corinthian ateliers (Coulié, 2002, 175). There would be no way to confirm the direct influence of the Corinthian workshops in Thassos, since they are received from the import of the vessels produced in Eastern Greece (Coulié, 2000, 113-115).

The reception of influences came mainly from Chios, Northern Ionia and Troas. The geographical factor favored contacts with the North Aegean region (**Cf. Map in Figure 1**) In the case of Attic influences, according to Anne Coulié (2002, 173), they were facilitated by the impact of Athens' abundant exports during the 6th

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<sup>2</sup> The *lekane*, also called *lekanis* in Greek, is defined as a flat, wide vase with two horizontal handles. They could be used to transport food or as a gift to a bride, as depicted in vase scenes from the 5th and 4th centuries BC Cf. (Lioutas, 1987, 12).

and 5th centuries BC, which, according to Croissant, was not so intense in Corinth (Croissant, 1983, 27).



Figure 1: Map of Thrace (North Aegean). Credit image: Rodrigo Lima (2018).

## Thasian black figures and their specificities: Thasian ateliers

Although the whole Thasian black-figure pottery atelier is yet to be found in Limenas (an urban area located to the north of Polis), the existence of local production<sup>3</sup> has been affirmed and defended since the 1960s for Thassos (Ghali-Kahil, 1960, 35). This atelier, after 550 B.C., was the center of this production. Previously, between the 7th and 6th centuries B.C., there was an oriental phase inspired by cycladic models from the metropolis Paros. Therefore, it is necessary to consider the physical proximity of Thassos with Chios and other

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<sup>3</sup> The definition of “local” used in the text refers to studies of local specificities compared to studies of globalization. According to Hans Beck, the formation of polis in the Aegean, connected in multiple circles of identity, were linked in a local, regional and universal Panhellenic sphere (Beck, 2020, 3).

region in order to understand the technical and stylistic processes of this studio. In fact, this pottery is very close stylistically to Chios, but the local brand is in the non-systematic use of slipware and the appearance of *lekane* as its main form. Anna Lémos, a ceramic researcher from Chios, proposes the emigration of the Chios style to Thassos and northern Macedonia (Lémos, 1991, 184).

For Anne Coulié (1998), it is necessary to dimension Thassos atelier in terms of the attribution given to painters, taking into account the contemporaneity of its artisans. The black-figures technique was an important time marker, from the beginning of the 6th century B.C. The work with the individualization of painters allows us to resume the old definition of artisan as *techne*. This categorization allows us to insert the Thasian pottery painters into the social environment of the process, through a network of loans of expertise and affiliations that define the process of collaborations and apprenticeship (Coulié, 1998, 724). For Philippe Bruneau, the exchange of knowledge took place collectively, in collaboration with many artists, mutually defining their productions in a dialectical relationship with the same tangible reality (Bruneau, 1975). According to Anne Coulié, from comparative analysis concluded that, besides style, decoration and technique, another brand of the Thasian atelier is in the shape of the *lekane*. Relatively rare in the Greek world, in Thassos the form is the most representative of the Aegean workshops (Coulié, 1998; Lioutas, 1987) (**See Figure 1**). The atelier's century-span longevity seems to have surpassed Attic, Boeotian and Evian production, places that brought the models of *lekane* to Thasian painters (Lioutas, 1987, 44). In Thassos, *lekane* presents itself with several peculiar characteristics: decoration of the foot support surface, frequency of presentation of rare inverted figurative friezes, decorated internal medallions, edges that do not imply cover.

## Thasian ateliers: Painters

The reflection on the production workshops is part of the process of contextualizing pottery, at a complex level of identification of

local painters and workshops. Anne Coulié argues that, on the one hand, for the specific case of Thasian black-figure pottery atelier, the attributive methodology may seem outdated, but on the other hand, it allows to trace a traditional trajectory of certain studios, including the possibility of evaluating the productive dimension of them, as seen above (Coulié, 1998, 719).

The Thasian workshop was divided by Anne Coulié<sup>4</sup> in “generations of painters”, designated first, second, third and last generations (Coulié, 1998, 7-138). In the first generation, four hands were identified in 150 pots: “Tradition Painter”, “Chios Painter”, “Poseidon Painter” and “Big Plates Painter”. Chronologically, these painters worked from 590 to 560 B.C. In the second generation, more than 100 vases were assigned and two painters were identified, who followed the previous generation: the “Faithful Painter”, who was influenced by the “Poseidon Painter”, and the “Troïlo Painter”, who was a follower of the “Chios Painter”. The second generation spans from 560 to 525 B.C. The third generation had only one painter identified, called “Palestra Painter”. The innovation of the figurative scene was identified in a set of 60 vases attributed to him and the chronology ranges from 525 to 501 B.C. The fourth generation (also called last generation) consisted of anonymous painters to which more than 80 vessels were attributed, dating from the end of the 6th century B.C.

### **Thasian *lekane*: main influences**

The *lekane* shape is the most present in Thassos black-figure pottery atelier. Unknown in the Cycladic workshops of the 7th century BC, the *lekane* was created in the 6th century B.C. In Thassos, it coincides with the phase of decorative influences of Chios and Northern Ionia in the region (Cf. Figure 2). Particularly, in Chios and in the Northern area from the Thrace region, *lekane* is not found,

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4 Ane Coulié has attributed name to Thasian painters and established the cronology for the ateliers.

which differs from Northwest Asia Minor, where it was found in Eleonte (Waiblinger, 1999, 97-103). In Thassos, the inverse or inverted decoration<sup>5</sup> on this specific vase form is found in large quantities in the context of sanctuaries and residences. As we can see in **Figure 2**, the painted animals have their feet turned towards the edge, not towards the base of the vessel. The inverted decoration is attributed to the Beocian and Euboean influences, whereas the handle and the edge are influenced by the Attic *lekane* of the same period. See Figure 2 (Coulié, 2002, 143).



Figure 2. Drawing of part of a black-figure *lekane* fragment figures with inverted decoration (the border of the design is located in the direction of the legs of the animal). Attributed to the so-called Painter of Chios, it has strong stylistic characteristics such as the use of Chios rosettes, incisions, heraldic lions and the insertion of herbivores. Decoration inspired by Chios and northern Ionia. (Ink drawing modified from Lygia Ferreira Rocco from Cf. A, Coulié, 1998, Pl. XXXII, 131)

More than half of Thassos' *lekanai* has inverted decoration. The most accepted explanation for this is directly related to its use, since

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<sup>5</sup> Inverted decoration: a type of decoration that is opposite to the direction of the vase feet, for example, if there is an animal decoration on the vase frieze, the animal's feet will be facing the edge, not the vase feet, as it is most common to find.

it was hanged by its handle. In any case, according to Clarrisse Prêtre, hanged objects like vases and others can be clearly attested in the 2nd century B.C (Prêtre, 1999, 394).

## Methodology

The methodology developed for this research guided us to the unveiling of archaeological contexts and their relationship with black figure potteries in Thassos. For analyses, we used the construction of the databases, a tool that was proposed to be the basis for our methodology, it was possible to cross the data, organize them, create tables and graphs capable of an even more precise targeting of our research hypotheses (Hora, 2018, 96, chapter 3).

A thorough survey was carried out on the archaeological contexts, where fragments of Thassos black figures were found and documented along with other votive objects in excavation reports<sup>6</sup>. Many elements came to the fore that we didn't at first foresee in our research, such as the multiple characteristics of Artemis observed in Artemision specifically; significantly feminine and apotropaic/prophylactic objects, part of datas I will present for discussion in this paper.

### **Elements of mounstrous decoration in *lekanai* from Artemision. Why have Thasian painters chosen to represent some imagetic signs?**

For an archaeological relational analysis of objects in their contexts, it is necessary to take into account the images painted on the objects, since there are deliberate intentions behind the decorative choices, based on a specific demand for apotropaic and prophylactic elements and the need for images that can really represent protection and ward off evil and dangers According to Sourvinou-Inwood, theories of art and myth have shown that, to really understand these

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<sup>6</sup> *Bulletin Correspondance Hélienique* (BCH's).



visual representations, it is necessary to understand the cultural and historical context in which they were produced. Once the context has been established, we can employ the methodology of reading these images in order to gain insights into the Greek worldview during a specific period in history. All the themes that we analyzed in this article directed our reflections to the sphere that involves the feminine element in the sanctuary of Artemis, its demands and the phases related to the different epicleses of the goddess, in addition to understanding the reception of multicultural elements in Thassos as *mimesis*.<sup>7</sup> These elements are inserted in the local ateliers, by adopting patterns that are part of a decorative repertoire of East Greece, at the same time marking innovations in the choice of signs (Sourvinow-Inwood, 1990, 395-445).

### **Apotropism and prophylaxis.**

Among the decorative signs present in the repertoire of Tasian vessels, the roosters (considered animals that represent prophylaxis) and the so-called hybrids, monsters (considered apotropaic) stand out, as we will discuss later. Apotropaic and prophylactic elements are related to fertility rituals and are present in the rites experienced in Artemision, as well as in the cults of various deities, as is the case with the Demeter and Core *Thesmophorias*. In these festivals, apotropism and prophylaxis are marked by rituals in order to promote and ensure the abundance of fertility. The ritual aims to purify amulets and symbols that ward off evil (apotropaic) and provide protection (prophylactic). Fertility is protected by prophylactic magic and apotrophic devices. In this sense, Henderson states that it is problematic to talk about prophylactic amulets without linking them to apotropaic elements, since the terms are very intertwined in the Greek προφυλά (γ), ω (protect) with φυλαχτό (amulet) (Henderson,

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<sup>7</sup> H. Bhabha studied the subversive aspects of imitating the culture of the conqueror. For him, *mimesis* is never a true copy of reality, but interpretation and translation. Processes of imitation can be understood as a way to reshape both the image of the colonizer and that of local populations. Cf. Bhabha, 2012.

1991). According to Porto (2020) “tutelar and prophylactic practices are therefore both aspects of apotropaic magic. One of the most well-known apotropaic symbols is the blue and white “eye”; its function is to ward off evil. This object is commonly found in modern countries, such as Greece, Turkey, and Syria” (Porto, 2020, 493).

What drew our attention to these hybrid insertions was the question of the intrusion of signs in the symbolic scope, that is, what they could represent in the Artemision context. The apotropaic elements were revealed from the small objects of use, such as amulets to request for protection<sup>8</sup> (Prêtre, 2016, 142 apud Hora, 2018, 161-162, chapter 4). As *lekanai* play a very important role within archaeological contexts in areas of sanctuary and houses, and within the category of black-figure pottery from Thassos, we believe that the representative symbols used, however common they may be, were part of a cult linked to Artemis by epiclese Eileithyia and/or associated with an obscure character of Hecate in the context in question (Hora, 2018, 209, chapter 5).

The association of Artemis and Hecate in Thassos is documented in the first half of the 5th century BC, known to us through two inscriptions in the Stele from the Harbour: one related to a civil regulation of 460 BC, in which the infractions are reported to the deity Artemis -Hecate; and the other, an epigraphy from the year 450 BC, where there is a dedication to a triple deity, Ἀρτέμιδος Ἐπαιουλῆς Ἑκάτης (IG XII 8, 359) (Duchêne, 1992). The mention of Artemis-Hecate in epigraphs should, according to Clarisse Prêtre, be linked to civil regulations and the stages of women's lives in Thassos, including the stage of childbirth. There is a mention in Aeschylus (*The suppliants*, verse 677) in which "Artemis-Hecate" appears in the pleas of women at risk during labor (Prêtre, 2016, 133, chapter 4). The *lekanai*, objects mainly made for Artemision, have very particular

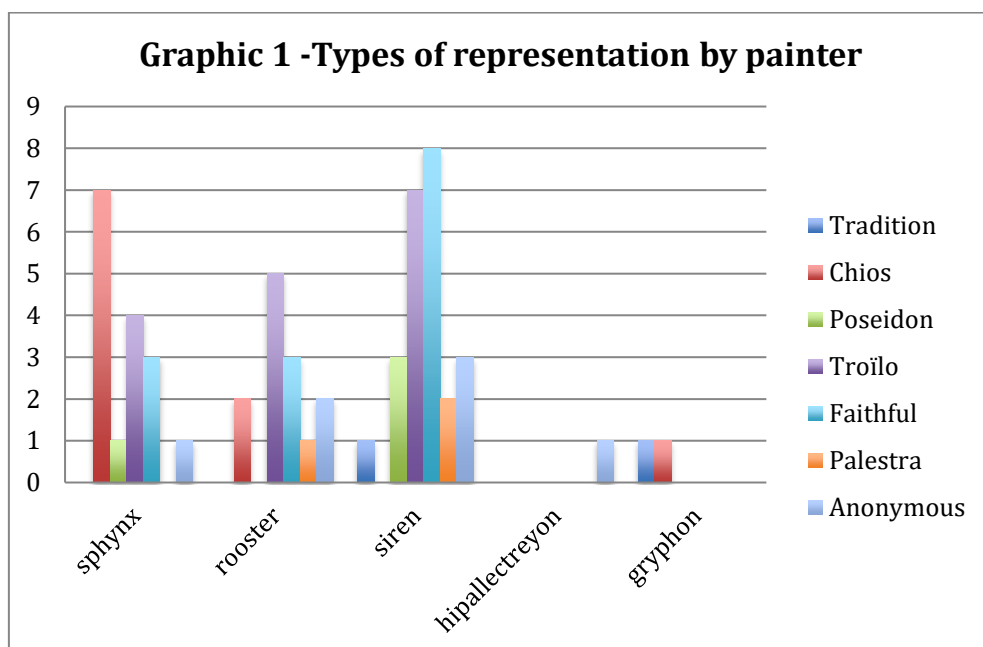
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<sup>8</sup> *Lekanoi* and their peculiarities enhanced the possibility of being votive objects, and that their formal and decorative elements, immersed in eclectic influences from Eastern Greece, were being innovated and guided by non-arbitrary choices of an apotropaic imagery repertoire.

formal characteristics, as we saw earlier. In its animal decoration, it is possible to notice its own peculiarities and eclecticism, decisive decorative choices framed by each generation of painters.

## Painters and monstrous creatures

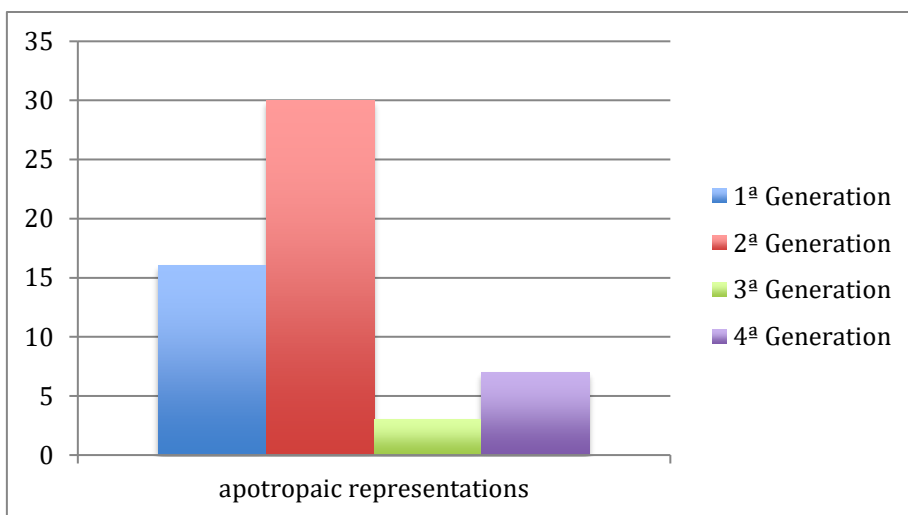
We analyzed the main painters of black-figures in Thassos and the quantity of monstrous decorative elements by generations, using the data available on **Graph 1** below.



Graphic 1. Types of representation by painter (Hora, 2018, 212).

We separated five main elements: sphynx, gryphon, siren, rooster and hippallectrioin. We realized that the first generation of painters have few examples of hybrid elements. The Tradition Painter, for example, prioritize the gryph and the siren. Other first generation painters, such as Chios Painter and the Troilo Painter, insert greater number of sphinxes, roosters and sirens. Second generation painters, namely Faithful Painter and Troilo Painter, offer more of these

elements in their repertoires, with a number of sphinxes, roosters and sirens together with animals of the so-called “Wild Goat Style” or goat style wild. In the so-called third generation of painters, with their only representative, the Palestra Painter, these hybrid creatures drastically decrease in representations in *lekanai*. Human figures are more represented in the repertoire of this specific painter. The anonymous painters of this generation also bring few specimens, highlighting sphinxes and roosters and a specimen of the hippallectrioin hybrid figure. Of the 123 *lekanai* analyzed in my doctoral thesis, 52 of them presented signs considered apotropaic and/or prophylactic, that is, approximately 43% of the entire repertoire of *lekanai* in Artemision. As we can see in **Graph 2**, we have a chronological predominance of these representations between the first and the second generation of painters, between 575 to 525 B.C.



Graphic 2 – Apotropaic and prophylactic representation by generation of painters (Hora, 2018, 211).

As much as these elements have orientalizing influences, they were not painted without an intention. We agree with Alexandre Carneiro Lima, for whom the signs present in the frieze of the vase are intentionally inserted as part of the artificer's activity in his *ergasthérion* (Lima, 2014, 152-154). Thus, the artisan chooses and

elaborates his representation based on references and ideas related to the ideological issues of his society. This author, invites us to think about this theme, arguing that the animal frieze pattern would not only be filling empty spaces in the vase, and it would, in fact, represent more than merely decorative signs (Lima, 2014 147-159). So, for the construction of an archaeological analysis that relates the ceramical objects to other objects in the context, it is important to consider the figures painted on the objects, and their intentionality, marked by deliberate choices and a specific demand of apotropaic elements of figures that can ward off evil influences and dangers.

## **General characteristics of the hybrid creatures**

### **Sphinx**

According to Patrícia Pontin, sphinx - in Greek, σφινξ - comes from the verb σφινγγειν, “to wrap, to squeeze, to compress, to suffocate”. According to the author, it is a monster sometimes composed of a female face, chest, lion's tail and with wings (Pontin, 2016, 247). According to Serra, the sphinx was received by the Greeks of the Near East as one of the oldest icons, dating back to 2600 B.C. The introduction of the sphinx occurs mainly in the representation of Protocorinthian, Protoattic, Corinthian, Rhodium, Laconian, Milonian and Cretan orientalizing vessels, among other variations (Serra, 2012, 171). According to Delcourt, this mythical being was linked to the religious spirit and belief in the souls of the dead (Cf. **Figure 3**) (Delcourt, 1981, 104).



Figure 3. Drawing fragment of *lekane* - Black Figures from Thassos. Sphinx representation with incised rosette. Modified graphite drawing by Denise Dal Pino from Coulié, 2022, PI XXV.

## Gryphon

According to Sanchez, the hybrid physical form of the gryphon is dichotomous. James Scott Spaid, specialist in the symbolism of this mythical creature, says that the entity is not only hybrid in its physical aspect, but also carries with it a dualism that manifests itself in other spheres: "good and evil, fearful and gentle, wild and domesticated..." (Sanchez, 2016). As for its symbolic meaning, Filippucci brings the attribution of elements that link this creature to the nobility, incorporated with divine power. The root of this symbol is "Middle Eastern" Mesopotamian, being absorbed by Greeks and Etruscans in their mythologies (Fillipucci, 2009, 73-90).

## Siren

Lidiane Carderaro dos Santos, in her master's dissertation defended in 2015, suggests that Greek vase iconography portrayed sirens following an oriental model over time. We observed this in Palestra Painter works. The variations of the representation of the sirens in the Attic pottery in the 7th and 6th centuries B.C. become

expressive based on this representation, symbolizing a magical characteristic, extremely linked to the moral power expressed in the Homeric hymn (Santos, 2015, 24).

In the region of Campania, in Magna Graecia, there was a strong presence of a cult to sirens, to whom temples were dedicated and whose apotrophic function was quite marked. According to Santos, Strabo (*Geographica* 5.4.9) and Suetonius (*Augustus* 92), among other authors, say that in that region there was a temple dedicated to sirens in individual worship (Tsiafakis, 2003, 74-103).

### **Hippalectryon and rooster.**

The monstrous hybrid figures of the North Aegean come from the Ionic and Attic representations of the 6th century B.C. The hippalectryon has combinations formed by the head and body of a horse and the tail of a rooster (Pedrizet, 1904, 12). Pedrizet drew attention to the fact that the superstition related to this hybrid being is late. According to Pedrizet, roosters have a song that puts demons on flights and that makes them protection animals par excellence; that is also why they were offered to chthonic or infernal gods. However, the hippalectryon is not an ordinary rooster, but a monstrous rooster. In this way, according to written sources from Roman times, such as Horace, who in an excerpt Epistle to the Pisons, says that the creature is laughable, and for this reason, it would ward off evil (Pedrizet, 1904, 18). For Pedrizet, the hippalectryon appears in Archaic times and disappears in the 5th century B.C., being no longer represented in the Classical period, alongside a reduction of sirens, sphinxes, gryphons and other hybrid monsters (Pedrizet, 1904, 30). In Thassos there is a ceramic fragment in which rooster appears in the context of Artemision, as we see in **Figure 4** below.



**Figure 4.** Drawing of fragment *lekane* - Black figure of Thassos. Hippalectryon and rooster representation with incisions. Modified graphite drawing by Denise Dal Pino from Coulié, 2002, Pl. LIV.

In the Greek imaginary, rooster meat was a taboo food. In Eleusis services, it was offered to chthonic gods. Another account by Plutarch (*Ages.* 39), says that the Spartans, after a day of war, sacrificed a rooster (Pedrizet, 1904, 12). For the victims of diseases, the rooster was sacrificed for magical rites. In Plato (*Phd.* 118a), the sacrifice of the rooster in the Asclepeion of Titane is narrated and, in Plutarch (*Quaest. Conv.* VI), in the sanctuary of Heracles Alexicacos. The Greeks call it ἀλέκτωρ, ἀλεκτρούων, that is, "one who discards evil" (Pedrizet, 1904, 13).

The representation of the rooster as a protector is attested throughout Antiquity, both in the decorative use of funerary monuments and in the decoration of vases, in addition to the frequent use of amulets with the head of a rooster. In the Archaic period, the rooster was, according to Pedrizet, the favorite bird in prophylactic use. In **Figure 5** (below) the rooster is represented in the sarcophagus of Klazomenai, from the Archaic period (Pedrizet, 1904, 14).





Figure 5. Apotropaic representation of a rooster in a sarcophagus scene found in Klazomenai (Pedrizet, 1904, 14).

## Apotropism in the many phases of woman's life

We observe that, in Thassos, Artemis-Hecate may have been associated to healing powers and protection in the chthonic sense already in the Archaic period. The small objects that were considered apotropaic by Clarisse Prêtre, such as amulets, crystals and offerings of gold jewelry, show the feminine character of the votive offerings of the attendees at various stages of life. The Artemision's *lekanai* may have been connected to a network of votive offerings primarily associated to women's universe (Hora, 2018, 220, chapter 5).

For J.-J. Maffre and A. Tichit (2011, 143), in the case of Artemision, it is safe to say that part of the material found is votive, that is, dedicated to the goddess in the sanctuary. The case of *lekanai*, in particular, is relevant, as some of them were intended for votive use, since their decoration is arranged on the reverse side, allowing for its suspension, while they could still be used in services. According to Mazet (2016) the plates seems to prevail at the beginning of the 6th century B.C. This is the second form of vase best represented in the Thassos' Artemision, already appearing at the end of the 7th century B.C.

Mazet emphasizes the Parian, Thasian and Minor Asian productions and the richness of a decoration with human figures, animals and hybrid monsters, which invites us to consider these as

privileged elements in votive offerings, exposed in the sanctuary's worship space. Such offerings would form a visual system directly perceptible to the worshiper and, we would say, more visible to the entire community that partakes in exchanges between humans and gods (Mazet, 2016, 31). Hollow plates and pinakes are the most common ways to be hung on the wall by a support attached with nails or hooks. The phials were also suspended on the wall right after the libation and, for Mazet, the Thasian black-figured *lekanai* would also be suspended shortly after the libation. The image was made to be seen right after its reuse as votive material.

As for associating the magical, chthonic use, linked to the world of small crystal objects and astragalus, there are late mentions from the Roman period which bring a kind of curious use to the *lekanai*, plates and phials, the so-called lekanemancy, with a rite was known as a “shallow bowl”. This rite consisted of filling the lidless tubes or the phial with water and oil to function as a mirror, where images would be seen for divination purposes (**Figure 6**, below). Most of the evidence on this practice is from the Hellenistic period (Cooke, 1913, 168). However, it is possible that *lekanai* from the Archaic period could also have been imbued with the same magical sense as those that were documented centuries later. We believe that this is a direction worth pursuing by the analysis of small objects.

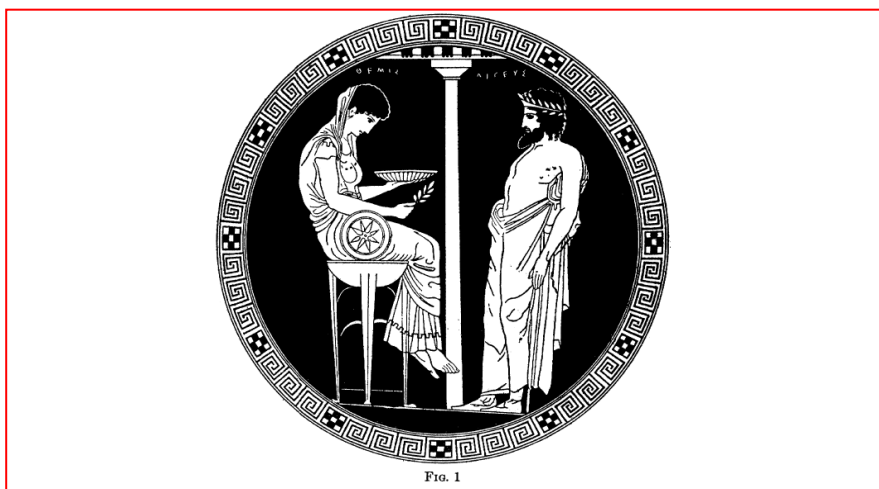


FIG. 1

Figure 6. Attic cup with the representation of Aegeus consulting the Oracle about him not having children. 4th century B.C. (Source: F, E. Robbins, 1916, 289).

We have found that *lekanai* were a very particular object of the feminine world. In Thassos - as much as the painters reproduced Boeotian, Attic or Euboic models - peculiarities well marked their differences, including habits intrinsic to the context, such as recent studies are pointing. We have observed, as Clarisse Prêtre affirms that the magic element is present in small objects and this stimulates us to attribute apotropaic meaning to the representative signs of the so-called hybrid animals present in the Artemision's *lekane* frames, as both of them bring us indications that magical elements of divination could be present in the relationship between worshippers and goddess (Prêtre, 2016, 143).

The decorative elements, such as the hybrid creatures and the rooster, drew our attention to the apotropaic and prophylactic elements that they carry with them. These aspects led us to the interpretation of the feminine and its various phases, with Artemis-Hecate being another facet of this polyform goddess. We understand the object itself is a support for a decoration intended to be votive and we discard the hypothesis of the symbolic arbitrariness of the decoration.

The choice of hybrid creatures, considered monstrous, may be linked to the protective and warding facets of Artemis. In this sense, we believe that the *lekanai* from Thassos could be a response to demands directly related to the social functioning of this city. Therefore, next we will offer a reflection about the symbolism present in the materiality of the *lekane* and its votive use linked to the functioning of the *oikos* in the Archaic period, i.e. a need to control nucleus family.

## **The symbolism present in materiality: votive use linked to the function of the *oikos* in the Archaic period.**

The success of the stages of a woman's life in Archaic society was directly linked to the protective deities and, in this case, to Artemis *eileithyia*, one of the epiclesis of the deity who took care of childbirth and therefore had a fundamental role in protecting new mothers. Certain archaeological finds in Artemision, such as jewelry and gold objects confirm this role. We know that in the great Artemision of Brauron and of Miletus, of which we have inventories, the girls often dedicate their clothes in gratitude for having a happy birth (Vikela, 2008, 79-87). The belt is particularly symbolic in this difficult time. According to Maffre and Tichit, the decree in honor of *Epie*<sup>9</sup> testifies to this practice in the Artemision de Thassos during the Hellenistic period (Pingiatoglou, 1981, 98-119). In addition to the belt, the fibulae are strong votive evidence that attest to the offering to this goddess (Maffre; Tichit, 2011, 162). Added to this are the apotropaic elements represented, which together form part of a magical universe of protection against death linked to Artemis-Hecate.

All these elements were present in the context of Artemision of Thassos. Therefore, the archaeological data and written documentation led us to associate the offerings with protection at different situations, from the prophylactic care for prevention to the apotropaic use of warding from evil. It is not possible to dissociate the artifacts found in these contexts with the votive element.

The association of *lekanai* with apotropaic and prophylactic representation, based on the hybrid creatures or so-called monsters in this pottery, caught our attention in the context of Artemision. From the analysis carried out about this site we could observe that the choices and insertions of apotropaic signs could not be random, as

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9 A decree in honor of *Epie* attested to the epiclesis of Artemis *eileithyia* in Thassos Cf. Salviat (1959)

we take into account elements such as the strength of cults and religion in the Archaic period and the ritual continuity that brought us evidence of the multiplicity of the cult to protective Artemis in Thassos - in addition to considering elements that may associate this material with the offerings to Artemis-Hecate already in the aforementioned period, contrary to what had been proposed by the bibliography. Apotropism has already appeared in the inquiries of Clarisse Prêtre and her study of the small objects found in Artemision. The multiple Artemis was born from the association with a winged deity highlighted in the beginning of the 7th century B.C., through representations of Potnia Théron in orientalizing votive plates from the Cyclades. In 680 B.C. many places of worship were delineated from the presence of votive objects deposited in sacred places on the arrival of the Parians in Thassos. Those objects led us to further understand the process of votive deposits throughout the 7th and 6th centuries B.C., as we observed the transformation and the outline of an Artemis kourotrophos, protector of women, with its chthonic facet and obscure protection against the harm that could occur in childbirth and in risky situations.

The necessity of control and affirmation as an independent and autonomous polis is revealed in a system in which women, frequent visitors in the public-religious space, offer *lekanai* with a decoration marked by many significant apotropaic and prophylactic elements, in a support that presupposed its visibility (large dimensions and mostly with inverted decoration), in addition to personal objects, amulets and apotropaic forms, for a deity that has been present in Thassos since its foundation by Paros, transforming itself according to the needs of the city, with emphasis on Artemis-Hecate or a triple Hecate, who protects the city gates but also protects women. According to Haiganuch Sarian, Hecate was related to the chthonic and funerary world, but it was also related to the protection of the city. Many testimonies reinforce this protective function of Artemis-Hecate in Thassos, as, for example, a fragment of a column in which there is a votive mention of Hecate dated to the end of 5th century B.C., found in one of the gates of Thassos (Sarian, 2004, 313-314).

## **The apotropaic and its meaning as image and energy.**

Apotropaic elements have a fundamental role in imagetic representations from the Archaic period in all sets of paintings of black-figure pottery in the Mediterranean. Yet, what would make the Thasian black figures, and more specifically the *lekanai*, worthy of thinking the “monster” elements as apotropaic in Artemision? We would say that, in the first place, it is the archaeological context, and secondly, the correlation between the specificities of the produced *lekanai* and the painters of the local atelier with the aim to meet certain votive demands, by all indications (Hora, 2018, 144-167, chapter 4).

To Florenzano, the Greeks expected something out of images, and in the Archaic period they were directly linked to some kind of religiosity, in the sense of giving something to ward off evil (Florenzano, 1995, 226). The question is: would it be possible to suppose, in the case of the Archaic Greek society, that energies would be fixed in imagery?

The recharge of energy of an object was represented by paintings of animals, manifestations of nature and, to the already mentioned author, also by hybrid deities. According to Walter Burkert, the ritual charge, at the time of the votive sacrifices or the libation (for example, in situations of distress) imposed the voluntary surrender of something, and the vote should have been spoken aloud, before witnesses, through prayer (Burkert, 1993, 150). This act was imbued with ritual energy, of fixing the control of the energies by means of the surrendering of something and the imposition of voice.

### **Multiple Artemis in Thassos**

Artemis was a deity that has been transformed over time. Initially, in the period of the foundation of the polis, its roots may have been associated to the cult of Potnia Théron; from the Archaic to the Hellenistic periods, its cult was associated to Hecate. We defend

the hypothesis that apotropaic elements are present both in the decorative representations in the *lekanai* and in the small objects found in Artemision, associated to divine protection and to women in their experiences of marriage, pregnancy and childbirth.

According to A. Coulié in 2002, the *lekanai* are the predominant vases in Thassos' Artemision. The choice of the decorative units of those *lekanai* was stimulated by certain types of representation that recall a pattern of decorative signs, part of an imagery repertoire of great circulation in North of Aegean. From these observations, it can be noted that some images considered as apotropaic are inserted in the black figures of the *lekanai*. On the basis of our analysis, some of these *lekanai*, made by local painters, may have been offered to the goddess as a votive object in the Sanctuary of Artemis.

It must be observed the peculiarities that mark the different choices made by painters, such as apotropaic elements, human figures and certain animals. Those three elements are not arbitrary choices; they were signs from a social imaginary influenced by the Greeks that circulated in the Mediterranean. In other words, those signs, inserted in the painted representations of the *lekanai*, are additions that made sense in a specific context.

We sought to emphasize the archaeological contextualization to enable the comparison between Artemision's operation mechanisms and other contexts. The aim was to understand the relationship between the *lekanai*, the painters, and the choice of specific images – focusing on monstrous creatures and the relation between all this with other non-arbitrary decorative types. We sought to show that the logic of these correlations is not only descriptive but relational. From the conceptual point of view, these correlations show that social agents are the creators of society through material culture (Hodder, 2003, 67).

## **Triple Hecate and the representation of hybrid creatures.**

The sentiments of strangeness and fascination that the viewer is brought to feel in front of those fantastic images, often with wings and other divine iconographic codification, causes the hybrid and monstrous creatures - such as gryphons, gorgons, centaurs, the hippalectryon e Potnia Théron - to provoke multiple symbolic meanings.

Athanassia Zografou observed, in 2010, that Hecate's triplicity is, in essence, monstrous (Zografou, 2010, 58). This relates to Johnston saying, in 1991, that, beyond its monstrous forms, the relation that surrounds Hecate is phantasmagorical, since it is part of the wandering world of the dead (Johnston, 1991, 223). Was Hecate's protection aspect directly linked to this world of the dead? For Kraus, the triple Hecate was originally a chthonic deity, evoking as evidence the first epithet of Hecate, nominally τρικαρηνος "with three heads", an association to Cerberus (Laflamme, 2007, 101). According to this hypothesis it is precisely the chthonic and monstrous aspects that give Hecate an apotropaic power.

Considering in an isolated way the figures of hybrid creatures and/or laden with symbolic meanings of protection, we may notice apotropaic elements in each one of the phases and generations of Thassos' painters; and that allowed us to reach a comprehension about the symbolic construction of the votive offerings in the context of Artemision, by means of a feminine social system that was consuming images and a type of pottery specific to answer requests of protection.

## **Conclusion**

This article aimed to show the interpretation of the sample data of the apotropaic and prophylactic representations present in the pottery shards found in the Artemision de Thassos and more precisely the black-figure *lekane*. Within this perspective, we sought to relate



the *lekanai* and other contextualized objects with the magical elements present in the monstrous decoration linked to the Artemis-Hecate cult. The women's offerings of Thasian *lekanai* in the sanctuary of Artemis signaled an important relationship with the local and regional worship, the painters, the deliberately monstrous decoration and the religious universe of prophylaxis and apotropism. The relationship between this materiality and the functioning of *oikos* made us see how the offerings of protection are closely linked to the local religious system and the control of female reproduction. The votive system works from the apotropism linked to the amulets and to the apotropaic and prophylactic representations in the vessels, more specifically in the local black figures. The balance of offerings of the divinities like Artemis in their multiple faces encompasses an important cycle of the functioning of the Thassos polis, which has a very different character in local and regional practices. Political-religious practice depended on a civic order, which involved women and the perspicacity to control the order in the *oîkos* through the security of divine protection. This same political-religious practice developed by Tasos, at the same time that it was strongly experienced in the North of the Aegean, brings traces of singularities that this article aimed to highlight. The association of *lekanai* with the apotropaic and prophylactic representation, through hybrid representative signs or the so called monsters, drew our attention in the context of Artemision. In this paper we defend that the choices and insertions of apotropaic signs are not random, since we take into consideration all elements that are involved in the interpretation of the objects in archaeological contexts, such as the force of cults and religion in the Archaic period and the ritual continuity that gave us evidences of the multiplicity of cults for Artemis, protector in Thassos - besides considering elements that associate this material with the offerings to Artemis-Hecate already in the Archaic period.<sup>10</sup>

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