

Dedications at Dodona



Maria Fotiadi * School of Arts & Law, University of Birmingham, UK * E-mail: mxf273@bham.ac.uk



Introduction

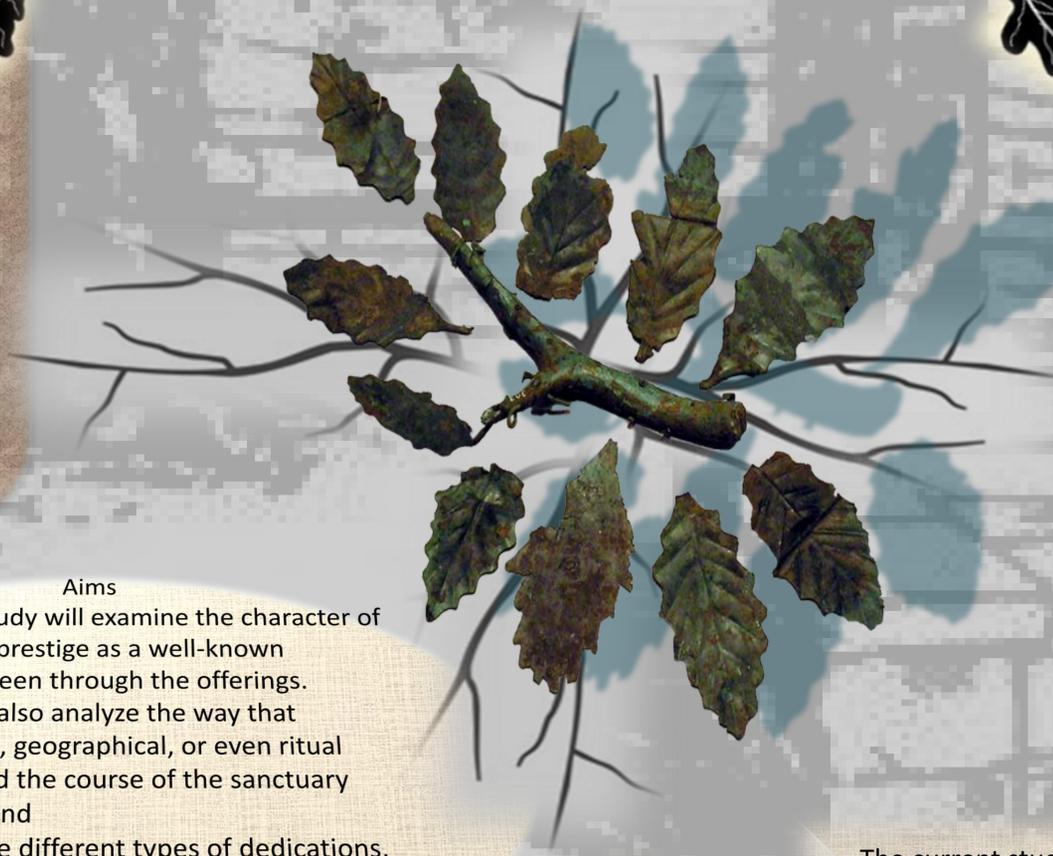
The sanctuary of Dodona, the oldest oracle of ancient Greece is located at the center of Tomaros Valley, near Ioannina, Western Greece. The oracle was also the religious political and social center of the local tribes. The site started as a small prehistoric settlement (from second millennium BC), but on Homeric Epics it is mentioned as a very important oracle. Dedicated to Zeus Naios, the oracle kept intact the primitive cult of the sacred oak tree (Phegos). From the 4th century, new buildings constructed (the sacred House/Temple of Zeus, Temples of Aphrodite, Dione, Hercules, and Themis). The sanctuary gain prestige and glory during Pyrrhus of Epirus reign. During that time (3rd century BC), the theater and stadium had constructed. The end of the oracle came along with the new Christian religion (4th century).

Through the centuries, many people paid tributes to Dodonaioi Zeus and dedicated many bronze offerings of all types (tripods, statuettes, statues, bronze reliefs, jewels, weapons, vessels etc). With these finds, it is easier to identify the corresponding reputation of the oracle and its character through centuries.

Methodology

The study used:

- Historical material such as ancient literature sources, excavation reports, catalogues from Museums (Antikensammlung Berlin, British Museum, Archaeological Museum of Ioannina, and National Archeological Museum of Athens) and modern bibliography as well various archaeological guides for Dodona.
- Archaeological material from excavations, for the creation of a catalogue with more than 200 offerings presented with a full description and images or sketches of the finds.
- Photos from the actual site of Dodona; maps of the area and 3D images of the sanctuary were used to reveal the various construction phases.



Conclusion

The study of the dedications revealed the character of the oracle and its role at the Greek political scene. During prehistoric and mainly during archaic period, the oracle faced a massive success and reputation and the finds revealed the prosperity of the oracle and its impact. This prosperity continued during sixth and 5th century with fewer dedications but of high quality. From the 4th century, there is a decline on the dedications. The political circumstances at Epirus, affected the course of the oracle. The late political development of Epirus, the later strong influence of Molossian State over Dodona, along with the growing reputation of Delphi, brought the decline. Dodona could not cover the propagandistic needs of display of the Hellenistic kings as Delphi did. However, the oracle retained its respect as the older oracle of the Greek world, even though it met many destructions and looting and lost its former glory. The ongoing excavations and research, along with the current and future publications, reveal only a tiny part of the treasures and the rich history of the Oracle of Dodona.



Aims

- The current study will examine the character of the oracle, its prestige as a well-known sanctuary, as seen through the offerings.
- The study will also analyze the way that political, social, geographical, or even ritual factors affected the course of the sanctuary through time and
- Will explore the different types of dedications, the social or political background of the dedicators and the distinctive role of the oracle at the political and religious scene of Epirus.

Discussion

The current study will try to find an answer on different questions concerning the oracle and the dedications:

- Which social, political, geographical, or religious factors affected the identity and the character of the oracle and to what extent?
- What kind of dedications the oracle had? What that reveals of the dedicators?
- What was the character of Dodona, in comparison with Delphi and Olympia? (Spatial development & political organization)
- The primitive nature of the cult practices at Dodona, affected the choice of pilgrims to visit the oracle and in what way?
- What was the development of the oracle through centuries, according to literature sources, excavation reports and of course the votive offerings?
- What was the role of excavations and publications? Do they give a clear view of the oracle's character?



References

- Archaeological Museum of Ioannina (<http://www.amio.gr>)
- British Museum (http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online)
- Dakaris, S.I. 1998. Δωδώνη: αρχαιολογικός οδηγός, Ioannina
- Musée du Louvre (<http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/winged-horse>)
- National Archaeological Museum of Athens (<http://www.namuseum.gr/collections/bronze/index-gr.html>)
- Parke, H.W. 1967. The Oracles of Zeus, Oxford.

List of Illustrations

- Top left: Winged horse from Dodona, an utensil decoration; third quarter of 4th century (Museum of Louvre)
- Silver coin of Zeus wearing an oak wreath and Dione wearing laureate wreath and veil; 238-168 BC/ Epirotic League (British Museum)
- Top right: Bronze statuette of an eagle. Probably a part of a sceptre of a larger bronze statue; 4th Ioannina
- Bottom left: Bronze statuette of Epirotic General (Kineas ?); 300 BC
- Bronze statuette of a girl-runner; 550-540 BC (Athens)
- Bottom right: Bronze cheek-piece relief, depicting two warriors fighting; 400 BC (Athens)
- Central fig.: Bronze leaves of an oak tree with embossed veins; 300 BC (Athens)

