



THE ATHENS GREEK RELIGION SEMINAR, Tuesday, October 14, 2025

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Terracotta votives from Hellenistic Demetrias. What can we learn about votive practices in a cosmopolitan Hellenistic harbour in ancient Thessaly?

ABSTRACT

Demetrias, a Macedonian royal foundation in Thessaly, became a cosmopolitan harbour city which attracted people from all over the Mediterranean. Famous for its painted tombstones, it has also yielded a large number of votive terracottas from a variety of sanctuaries. The ancient city has been excavated sporadically over a span of 120 years. The excavations of A.S. Arvanitopoulos in the early 20th century, the German Archaeological Institute, and the rescue excavations of the Ephorate of Antiquities of Magnesia have yielded over 800 terracottas in votive contexts. This corpus allows for a thorough discussion of the city's coroplastic production, terracotta distribution, votive practices and choices among the different sanctuaries and shrines in the city. This paper will use as case studies the sanctuaries of Pasikrata, the Favissa on Hill 35, the Metroon, and the "Thesmophorion", and will discuss the votive practices in the city through the terracotta offerings and what they can tell us about the character of the cult in each site. I will also discuss the iconography of the terracottas and how it fits and is explained by the character of the cults. I will argue that even though the terracottas dedicated in sanctuaries are for the most part generic images which are equally appropriate for dedication to various deities, in Demetrias it seems that the cult of the Mother of the Gods 'demanded' terracottas more closely connected to her cult.

The seminar takes place Tuesday, October 14, 2025, at 17.00 (Athens) in a hybrid format with live presence at the Swedish Institute at Athens and online via Zoom.

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