

Jonas Eiring:

TcN 53: A RUNNING FIGURE ON A TERRACOTTA RELIEF

The fragment of a small terracotta relief **TcN 53** (Tex no. 461, inv. no. 3924) was found in the stratigraphical unit E7/20 (the second layer with bronze objects, with mixed material),¹ on 16.07.1993.

The fragment represents a figure, probably female, in the *Knielauf* position. She is preserved from neck to thighs, her arms are broken off below the elbow. Height 4.0, width 4.9, thickness 1.5 cm. Reddish-yellow, very soft clay with many small, mixed, white inclusions. The surface is badly worn, with marks from the cleaning brush, and no traces of any paint have survived. There are patches of encrusted soil.

This poorly preserved figurine adds to the repertoire of shapes among the figurines found in the votive dump north of the temple. However difficult it may be to discern in the photograph, our figure is running in the *Knielauf* position towards the right; the legs are seen in profile, the left one put forward, whereas what remains of the right thigh is closest to the viewer. The upper body is seen frontally. The bulging chest could be taken to indicate the female sex, but it might also be what remains of a breastplate. From the right shoulder and down to the waist a strip of clay is attached to the body, in the manner characteristic of Argive terracottas.² What this strip of clay, with a thickening at the upper end, is meant to represent is difficult to say. The right arm of the figure is raised, elbow bent, and broken off at the mid-point of the forearm. The left arm is held elbow out with the forearm bent forwards and downwards, as indicated by the position of the break at the elbow. Beneath the arms, a flat background is formed by what looks like a cloak, but more probably it is the lower part of a pair of wings. The back of the figurine is nearly flat.

No parallels for the shape have been found among published terracotta figurines from the Peloponnese, but there can be no doubt that similar objects exist in the storerooms of museums.

Parallels from other media are never exact, but do

provide us with an indication of what our fragmentary object might have looked like. An attempt at reconstruction is not helped, however, by the very damaged condition of the figurine. Whether or not the wings protruded above the shoulders is impossible to tell. The latter seems to be the case, but the clay is so soft that unintentional smoothing of the surface could have made a break on the shoulder invisible. A bronze figurine (or *Attasche*) in Paris, probably from a Laconian workshop, sports wings that are kept below shoulder height.³

As for the interpretation of the clay object on the chest, one might suggest a snake, creeping up from the girdle. Such a scheme is not unusual in the 6th century B.C. One example is an Attic black-figured olpe signed by Amasis: the Gorgo, who is about to have her head cut off by Perseus, has two pairs of wings, one of which does not go above the shoulders.⁴ In large-scale sculpture, the obvious example of a Gorgo in the *Knielauf* position, also adorned by snakes rising from the girdle, is the central pedimental figure from the temple of Artemis in Corfu.⁵

The running Gorgo is a common motif on shield bands from Olympia,⁶ and other examples of bronze with some resemblance to our figurine include a Laconian running female figurine (who, however, keeps her hands on the hips).⁷ An Athena from Lykosoura has the ‘correct’ position of the arms, but she is not running.⁸

To sum up, although no good parallels seem to exist amongst the published material, we should be able

³ Th.G. Karagiorga, “Λακωνικά γοργόνεια,” *ArchDelt* 19.A, 1964, 121, pl. 70.a (“τρέχων περρωτός δαίμων,” mid-6th century B.C.); *LIMC* IV (1988), 308 no. 252 (S.-C. Dahlinger; listed under “Gorgo, Gorgones” in spite of the beard).

⁴ *ABV* 153.32; D. von Bothmer, *The Amasis Painter and his world*, New York and London 1985, 150–2 no. 31, col. pl. p. 65 (after mid-6th century B.C.).

⁵ G. Rodenwaldt, *Korkyra II, Die Bildwerke des Artemistempels in Korkyra*, Berlin 1939, pls 2–5; H. Knell, *Mythos und Polis*, Darmstadt 1990, 12 fig. 19 (early 6th century B.C.).

⁶ E. Kunze, *Archaische Schildbänder (OIForsch 2)*, Berlin 1950, 65–71.

⁷ M. Herfort-Koch, *Archaische Bronzoplastik Lakoniens (Boreas Beih. 4)*, Münster 1986, 27, pl. 6.2.

⁸ F. Felten, “Archaische arkadische Bronzestatuetten,” in K. Gschwandtler and A. Bernhard-Walcher (eds), *Griechische und römische Statuetten und Großbronzen, Akten der 9. Internationale Tagung über antike Bronzen (Wien 1986)*, Vienna 1988, 242, fig. 10.

¹ See section iv (Tarditi), 67 for information on this unit.

² Tegean figurines in the 6th century B.C. “are in most respects like those of Argos, differing only in the clay and in the style of the heads. The clay is of an intenser colour than the Argive, and frequently contains white particles”: R.A. Higgins, *Catalogue of the terracottas in the British Museum I*, London 1954, 272. Tegean figurines: *ibid.*, pls 139–140; Argive, pl. 138, esp. no. 981.

to reconstruct with some confidence our figurine as a running figure – possibly a Gorgon, if only because this is the most common identity of the *Knielauf*-figures in the Archaic period. The figurine is probably of local, Arcadian production, and should be dated towards the middle of the 6th century B.C.

In the following century, the so-called Melian reliefs include some examples from mainland Greece of running figures in the same medium. In his publication from 1931, Paul Jacobsthal claimed that these winged Gorgos represented a “Festhalten eines archaischen Typus”.⁹ He did not, however, refer to any such type in particular, and was presumably thinking of the bronze reliefs or of black-figured vase painting. With the fragment from Tegea we may well have found a forerunner to these Classical terracotta reliefs.

⁹ P. Jacobsthal, *Die Melischen Reliefs*, Berlin 1931, 89–90, pl. 66.a.



Figure 1. TcN 53. (Photo: E. Østby)