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Section 2 Work in Progress

Lucrezia MASTROPIETRO (Scuola Superiore Meridionale)
lucrezia.mastropietro@unina.it

PhD thesis: Βοιωτικοὶ Κοῦροι: An Ancient “Heritage Community”? New Analyses for a Regional Sculptural Production

Overview

The doctoral project focuses on Archaic Boeotian sculpture, with particular attention to the kouroi from the Ptoion sanctuary. Since Ducat's publication (*Les Kouros du Ptoion*, 1971), the kouroi have received comparatively little attention in studies of Archaic Greek sculpture. Historically regarded as “indigenous” and isolated, Boeotian art was often negatively appraised; however, more recent scholarship has emphasised the region's ability to rapidly absorb artistic innovations. This project aims to identify the distinctive and autonomous character of Boeotian sculptural production, in both style and form, from the Early Archaic period onwards, exploring possible local workshops and the presence of a specific ‘school’, while highlighting how the production of kouroi reflects communal values and shared cultural practices.

Objectives and Methodology

The project undertakes a direct study of the kouroi preserved in Athens and Thebes, including photographic documentation, measurements, and reconstructions. The collected data are organised into a chronological, topographical, and production-related dataset, aimed at reconstructing the phases of sculptural production, stylistic identity, potential external

suggestions, patronage, and workshop organisation. The second part focuses on reconstructing the sacred landscape of the Ptoion and the display of kouroi in religious and/or funerary contexts, examining the relationship between the community, cult practices, and identity self-representation. The approach combines art-historical methods, technical analyses, statistical-quantitative studies, and the investigation of the socio-cultural environment.

The work specifically seeks to answer the following questions:

- How and where does the sculptural workshop operate?
- How is the exploitation of materials, both local and non-local, carried out?
- What are the relations with the outside world?
- How are the kouroi presented in the sanctuary of Ptoion and in funerary contexts?
- Why did the community, or communities, choose the Ptoion as the setting for this form of self-representation, and what meanings are associated with the choice of the kouros?

All the documentation gathered during the various stages of investigation flows into a new, organised, and complete collection of the archaic sculptures of Boeotia, structured around broad themes:

- a) Records and descriptions of all sculptural materials, with the corresponding photographic documentation.
- b) Description of all data obtained through statistical-quantitative analyses, with graphical representations, and the identification of a local sculptural school.
- c) Reconstruction of the landscape (and its seasonality), and the “socio-cultural environment.”

Preliminary Results

The ongoing research highlights the extraordinary scale and coherence of Boeotian kouroi, the largest corpus in Greece. The catalogue compiled includes 189 objects, incorporating previously unstudied material. Analysis shows that production spans roughly a century, with notable peaks in activity. Kouroi vary in size and material, with local and imported marbles commonly used, reflecting connections between resources, stylistic choices, and production practices. Three broad stylistic tendencies—local, Attic, and insular—can be identified, yet all share a coherent Boeotian character, indicating a deliberate expression of community identity. Examination of

fragments, anatomical features, and proportions allows the identification of patterns in Boeotian sculptural production, including early stages and later adaptations that selectively incorporate external influences while maintaining local traditions. Functionally, the kouroi served as dedications, markers of social or communal status, and expressions of collective identity within sanctuary contexts. The scale and distribution of these dedications suggest participation from multiple communities, highlighting the Ptoion's role as a regional centre of religious, social, and cultural interaction within a broader network of Boeotian sanctuaries.

Overall, the preliminary results demonstrate that Boeotian kouroi were not merely artistic exercises but active expressions of collective identity, stylistic autonomy, and socio-political engagement, showing a deliberate interplay between tradition, innovation, and community self-representation.