

# LATE-ARCHAIC TEMPLE ARCHITECTURE IN OLBIA PONTICA III: A PALMETTE AKROTERION

Alla Bujskikh\*

**Keywords:** Olbia Pontica, temple, architectural terracotta, palmette akroterion.

**Abstract:** Olbia Pontica hosts a remarkable terracotta detail – a frontal palmette akroterion, found at the Western temenos. The stylistic analysis of some separate fragments allowed them to be joined in a single detail, that had to decorate the temple façade, and to propose its possible reconstruction. In addition, the sima fragments gave the possibility to reconstruct the connection of the akroterion with the drainage system on the apex of the temple's fronton. The dedication graffito on the back side of the akroterion attributed it as belonging to the temple of Apollo Hietros. Looking at the other two frontal akroteria, from limestone and terracotta, that were attributed earlier as those that could have decorated the same temple, they were decided to be the result of the constant repairs made at this temple. Stylistically identical terracotta details were also found in Miletus, Histria, and Leuke island. The artisan production of the terracotta temple decorations came from the metropolis, Miletus, that had to supply her daughter-cities in the north-western Pontus with the decoration of the model temple.

**Rezumat:** Olbia Pontica găzduiește un fragment de teracotă remarcabil – o acroteră frontală cu palmetă – descoperit în temenosul Vestic. Analiza stilistică a unor fragmente distincte a condus la recompunerea și, în final, la reconstituirea lor într-un unic ansamblu, care încorona fațada templului. De asemenea, fragmentele de sima au dat posibilitatea de a se reconstitui conexiunea acroterei cu sistemul de drenare din axul frontonului templului. *Graffito*-ul cu dedicația de pe suprafața dorsală a acroterei face posibilă atribuirea acestuia templului lui Apollo Hietros. Privind celelalte două acrotere frontale, din calcar și teracotta, care au fost atribuite anterior ca aparținând aceluiași templu, s-a tras concluzia că acestea ar fi fost rezultatul unor reparații curente. Teracote similare din punct stilistic au fost descoperite în Mileat, Histria și Leuke. Producția artizanală a decorației teracotelor templelor își are originea în metropolă, Miletul.

A study of the Olbian collection of architectural terracotta allowed for the separation of several pieces that were considered to have been composing one complete detail – a frontal akroterion with a crowning palmette. The pieces were found in 1984, 1986, 1988, and 1990 on the territory of the Western sacred zone; they must have belonged to a single detail, as is suggested by their stylistic particularities, dimensions, manner of painting, and clay composition. They are: a central part of an akroterion with the fragments of two volutes scrolled in opposite directions; a core of a frontal palmette with an indentation for its junction and fixing on the top; a core and the rest of the lower palmette that closed a corner between the volutes (fig. 1, 1-2) on the bottom; a large fragment of a volute with an outer side profile (fig. 2); five smaller parts of a volute, three of which belonged to the central part of the volute, one – to its outer side (fig. 3, 1-5). A small part of a frontal palmette, a slim petal with an arrowhead-like ending between the petals, was also preserved (fig. 4). All the pieces were manufactured from the same clay with small inclusions of rare silver and golden mica, lime, quartz, sometimes crushed ceramic pieces, 2.5YR 6/4-5/4. All the pieces in the cut preserved the same traces of firing in the process of manufacturing.

The author of the excavations at the Western temenos, Anna Rusyaeva, published the central part of the detail (Rusyaeva 1988, fig. 9, 2). Later, together with other publishers (Kryzhitskii, Rusyaeva, Nazarchuk 2005, p. 7, table I, 1; Kryzhitskii, Rusyaeva, Nazarchuk 2006, p. 102, fig. 97, 1), she gave its description and the correct attribution in general, and there was proposed a possible reconstructed dimension of both volutes and the entire detail, occupying nearly 1 m of façade length.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, my re-examination of the terracotta detail collection allowed the attribution of more broken pieces that could have belonged to this frontal akroterion. This made me sample all the items together, clarifying their dimensions, and, as a result – proposing a possible version of graphic reconstruction of the whole detail, that

\* Institut of Archaeology, National academy of Sciences of Ukraine, e-mail: abujskikh@ukr.net

<sup>1</sup> A volute fragment was published separately and without connection with the central part; another piece was only mentioned in a footnote (Kryzhitskii, Rusyaeva, Nazarchuk 2005, p. 9, table I, 2).