

THE “BURIAL” OF TENEA’S FUNERARY KOUROI AND THE BIRTH OF DEMOCRACY (THE REMOVAL OF TYRANNY IN ARCHAIC CORINTH)

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Abstract: Observing that many funerary statues in Corinth and other city-states of the archaic period have been very well preserved, perhaps due to their «burial», I propose some historical conclusions for the social changes that took place in the whole region of the independent Greek city-states during the 6th c. BC.

In my presentation in Buzău in 2014 (Tsaravopoulos 2014), based on the remarkable preservation, up to today, of the archaic Attic statues that were deliberately buried, I made the assumption that their burial had taken place immediately after the establishment of the democratic regime in Athens. After that colloquium, I noticed that the same phenomenon, the good preservation (due to the burial?) of statues was observed in other city-states of archaic Greece too (Corinth, Melos, Kea and Santorini).

In Corinthia, at Tenea, in 1846, the so-called “Kouros of Tenea” (Fig. 1) was found and transported to Munich (München) in Bavaria¹, while in 2011 in the same area two other kouroi were found complete, now exhibited in the Archaeological Museum of Corinth (broken by the crane that passed over them) (Figs. 2-3). From Tanagra (Boeotia) a “double” funerary complex was preserved, set up by the father, Amfalkes, for his prematurely lost sons, Dermys and Kytalos (Athens, National Museum –NM– 56). From Melos an “elegant” kouros was preserved intact (Athens, NM 1558) and from Kea a kouros was preserved almost intact too (Athens, NM 3686). At Thera the so-called “Apollo of Thera” (Athens, NM 5295) was found in 1836, and in 1965 an almost intact statue of a kouros² was found on the same island, while in 2000 Charalampos Sigalas³ found in small depth a remarkably preserved statue of a kore (Fig. 4). Historical information for the archaic history of the above sites is incomplete or nonexistent and is difficult to link the excellent preservation of these monuments with conscious “ideological” burial, similarly to the territory of Athens. Only for the territory of Corinth there is little historical information and archaeological evidence that allow the hypothesis that in Corinth the extraordinary preservation of the funerary monuments that adorned the tombs can be linked with conscious burial too.

According to the information kept in the archives of the Munich Museum, given by the looters, the Kouros of Tenea was not only “buried”, but for extra protection the head of the statue

¹ The kingdom of Bavaria, independent kingdom at that time. From 1833 to 1862 king of the newborn Greek state was Otto the son of the Bavarian king Ludwig.

² The sculptures found after 1960 are housed in the Archaeological Museum of Santorini (Thera).

³ Charalampos Sigalas 1941-2005. Greek archaeologist, member of the Archaeological Service of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, responsible for the island of Santorini (Thera) (HOROS 17-21 (2004-2009): 9-10).

had been placed inside a wide-mouth pithos vessel (Lullies-Hirmer 1960, p. 61, figs. 31-38). The other two Corinthian Kouroi, saved by the hands of the potential looters in 2011, were also found in Tenea, “buried”, as after their fragmentation by the crane were fully restored without any completions⁴.

Is there any evidence that could lead to a phenomenon similar to the Attic? Is it possible to link the extraordinary preservation of the monuments – their “burial” – with the radical social change that occurred in Corinth, when the tyranny of Cypselides was overcome? After the overturn, what kind of regime was established?

In Herodotus (5.92) one can read:

“... *These were the words of the Lacedaemonians, but their words were ill-received by the greater part of their allies. The rest then keeping silence, Sosicles, a Corinthian, said: In truth heaven will be beneath the earth and the earth aloft above the heaven, and men will dwell in the sea and fishes when men dwelt before, now that you, Lacedaemonians, are destroying the rule of equals (isocracy) and making ready to bring back tyranny into the cities, tyranny, a thing more unrighteous and bloodthirsty than anything else on this earth*” (transl. A. D. Godley. Cambridge. Harvard University Press, 1920).

This is the intervention of the representative of Corinth, Sosicles, in the allied gathering, motivated by the Spartans in 507 BC, with the aim of restoring the tyrant Hippias to Athens, when they noticed that the dynamism provoked by the new democratic regime would put in danger their military primacy in the Greek world.

The passionate support of the Corinthian representative reveals that in his city, which until that time was the most important naval, craft industry and commercial city state of the continental Greece, the anti-tyranny spirit was strong, as a consequence of the earlier expulsion of the tyrants. Of course, could feel that if Corinth allowed the continuous military involvement of Sparta in the Greek affairs, would have to submit to Sparta over time⁵.

The question that arises after the reading of the speech of Herodotus is the following:

What kind of regime had replaced the tyranny in Corinth? An **oligarchic**, like the Spartan, or an **“isocracy”**, as Sosicles named the Athenian democracy?

The few ancient sources, with the earliest at least two centuries after tyranny’s overthrow, suggest that probably the regime, immediately after, was rather oligarchic without giving any details about it⁶. To these conclusions the sources arrive by judging from the Corinthian regime of their time. Only *Nicholas of Damascus* (Jacoby, FgrHist, 90 Fr.60.2) more than five hundred years later, mentioned that ... *the “demos” and not a group of conspirators expelled violently every remnant of tyranny and set up the council of eight probouloi and representatives of the nine tribes (as Cleisthenes created the ten Athenian tribes), and therefore a more demo-cratic state structure, since its power was driven by the will of demos.*

⁴ Their early rescue, by the archaeologists from the Corinthia Archeology Department of Antiquities, who conducted excavation at the site, gave the possibility of the total completion of the two statues that adorn today the Archaeological Museum of Corinth.

⁵ When the aforementioned dialogue was taking place, the Athenian craft production and commercial activity had already started to excess the corresponding Corinthian, and despite the competitive tendency, the Corinthian representative supports the new Athenian democratic regime passionately.

⁶ The sources that give little, vague information about the nature of the regime established after the overthrow of tyranny and the newer attempts to interpret them are discussed by Will in the chapter *La Constitution Corinthienne après la Tyrannie* (Will 1953, p. 609-619).

I will try to answer the above question by examining the few historical parallels, but also the strong indications provided by the archaeological data and I will refer, as is usual, to Athenian parallels, better known from sources.

We should not forget that modern historians of Corinth, who, as almost unique sources for the Archaic period, have the above mentioned words of Sosicles from Herodotus (5.92) and the few details mentioned by Nicholas of Damascus (FgrHist, 90 Fr.59, 60), compare Corinth with the archaic history of Athens, as better known, from the reforms of Solon to the tyranny of Peisistratidai. The scholars consider that the social phenomena and social behaviors that took place in Athens during the archaic period, had as parallel, and **possibly as precursor**, the social developments that had taken place in Corinth.

In order to be able to interpret the social structure, but also the nature of changes and conflicts that appear to have occurred in Corinth, they turned to the well-known Athenian situations. Characteristic is Will's statement, the historian of ancient Corinth:

"... Le problème central de la cite grecque est et reste le problème du sol, ce problem qui nous apparaît si nettement dans l'Athènes présolennienne, solennienne et pisistratique, et don't nous pourrions relever des indices à Corinthe." (Will 1953, p. 471)

Corinth preceded Athens, due to its strategic position, at the craft and export trade development, affiliated so closely with shipping. The post-Solon rapid development of the Athenian craft production and export trade led to the repetition of social phenomena that had occurred to the earlier developed Corinth.

It is probable that the developments in Corinth, after the demise of tyranny, were similar and **earlier** in relation to what occurred in Attica with the establishment of the democratic regime. Returning now to our subject, to Corinth and to the kouroi found, we will observe, as mentioned above, two archaeological data that bear similarities with the corresponding Attic case:

a) The burials of kouroi: There are similarities in the hiding-burial of the funerary archaic statues of Attica and Corinth, and the conclusions that can be drawn are:

The first is the fact that the three Kouroi were erected over funeral monuments found in Corinthia, had been placed, as in Attica, in the most productive agricultural area of Corinthia, at the region where the land properties of the great aristocratic families were located. It is not coincidental the new Greek name of the modern settlement they were found: *Chiliomodi*, which expresses precisely the great agricultural production and capacity of the region [*Chilia* (χίλια) –thousands; *modion* (μόδιον) – 500 okades of olives / 640 Kg].

b) The second, similar to what was observed in Attica, is the fact of the burials of the Kouroi, of these impressive and expensive funerary monuments. And if for the last Kouroi, the looting action, similarly to Attica, removed the evidence regarding the finding conditions and context, the fact that the head of the first kouros found in 1846 was protected inside a pithos vessel, strengthens the information that the statue was consciously buried.

If we compare these evidence with what was observed in the Mesogeia of Attica – the most productive agricultural area of the Geometric and Archaic period that belonged to the great landowners/aristocrats (Tsaravopoulos 2014, p. 376) – and the fact that with the establishment of the democratic regime, in order to stop the provocative manifestations of wealth, i.e. equalization of all the citizens in front of the state, monumental funerary complexes were forbidden – we could argue that we are faced with a parallel social phenomenon, the establishment of a type of democratic regime in Corinth too. In fact, as in Attica, the burial of the funerary statues and not

their destruction⁷, reveals that in Corinth too, the group that contributed to the democratic change had, if not as leaders at least as beginners, also members of the great Corinthian aristocratic families, members to whom the monuments belonged.

The evidence known from the literary sources proves: a) that the speech of Sosisles shows that the phenomenon of “democratization” occurred in Corinth before that in Athens and b) that Cleisthenes, the aristocrat leader of Democracy in Athens had direct connection with the affairs in the northeastern Peloponnese, as being the grandson of the “progressive tyrant” of Sikyon *Cleisthenes*, and of course he would know and would be inspired, if he did not copy, many of the democratic reforms which were applied after the overthrow of tyranny in Corinth. Thus, the establishment of Democracy in Corinth seems to have preceded that in Athens. However, why this information did not become known in the history that was provided to us by ancient authors?

As Will mentions: the impressive battle of Marathon brought directly Athens to confront the dangerous – for all Greek cities –, Persian empire, Themistocles’ intelligent movement to create fleet –when the new rich silver veins were discovered in the region of Lavreotiki, as well as the subsequent victory in Salamis, brought Athens to the top of the Greek cities, sending thus Corinth to a second, if not a third, plan⁸ (Will 1953, p. 663). The historians, from Herodotus and beyond, as well as philosophers were mainly concerned about the historical events of Athens⁹.

Our incomplete knowledge about other cities (Melos, Thera, Kea etc), where conscious burial of archaic expensive and prestigious funerary monuments has been identified or is suspected, does not allow drawing similar conclusions that link the finds with that emblematic constitutional-social change.

To conclude, as it was discussed above, the contribution of Corinth, the first city of the continental archaic Greece, to the most important social change that occurred in antiquity remained unknown, a social change that until today has not been overcome: Democracy.

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⁷ If members of the poorer classes had exclusively led the fierce social change, the monuments would have been destroyed as belonging to the overthrown class.

⁸ E. Will discusses the change in Corinth and notes that even in Athens the “democratic regime” was oligarchic, as the allocation of land ownership was not foreseen and in fact almost throughout the whole 5th century BC and later, the control of the power for the city was claimed and practiced by descendants of the great landowners families, although they were “elected” or even “exiled/ostracized” by the demos assembly/ekklesia (Will 1953, p. 615-624).

⁹ The attribution to the Athenians of the “primacy” in the historic innovations is not limited to historical-social reforms, but also to the appearance and formation of theatrical activities, types of poetry etc (Burkert 1990, Chapter 1).

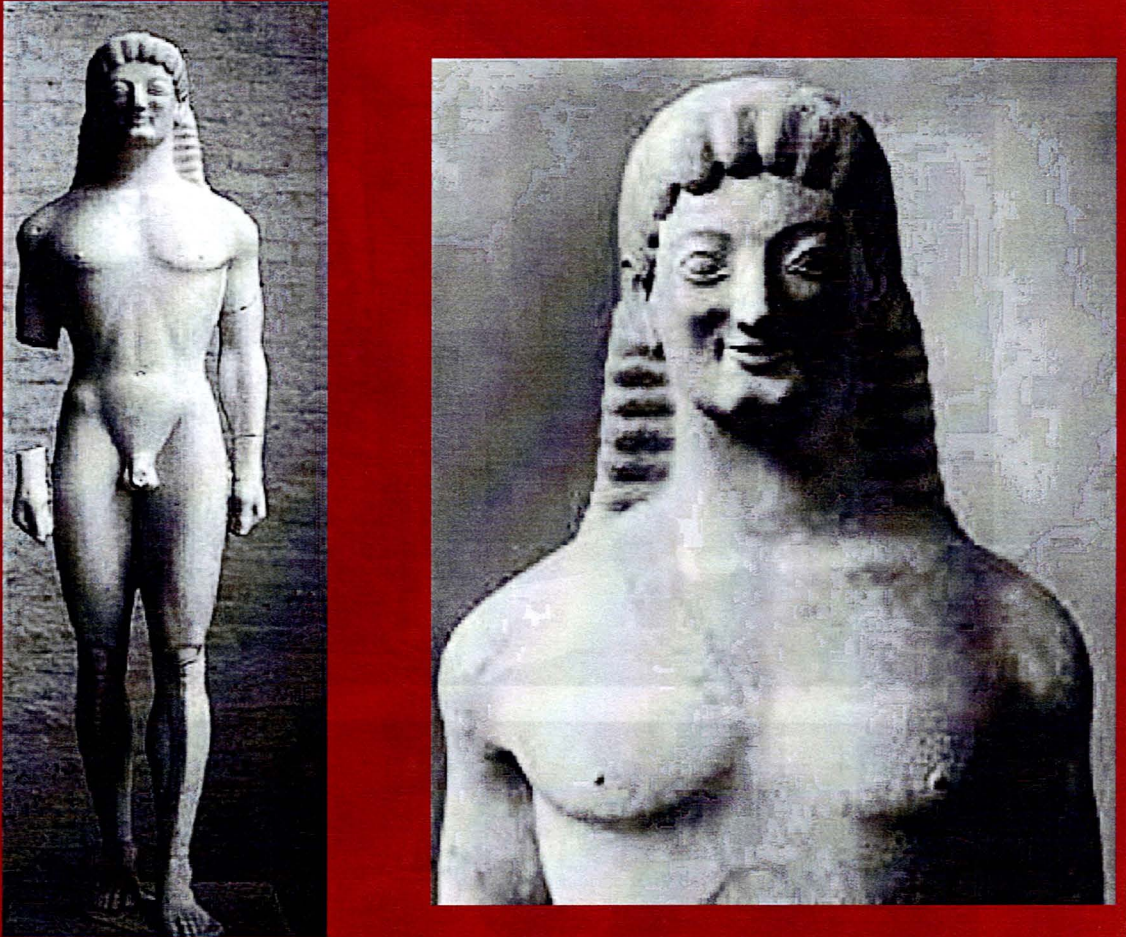


Fig. 1. The "Tenea Kouros", Munich Glyptothek.

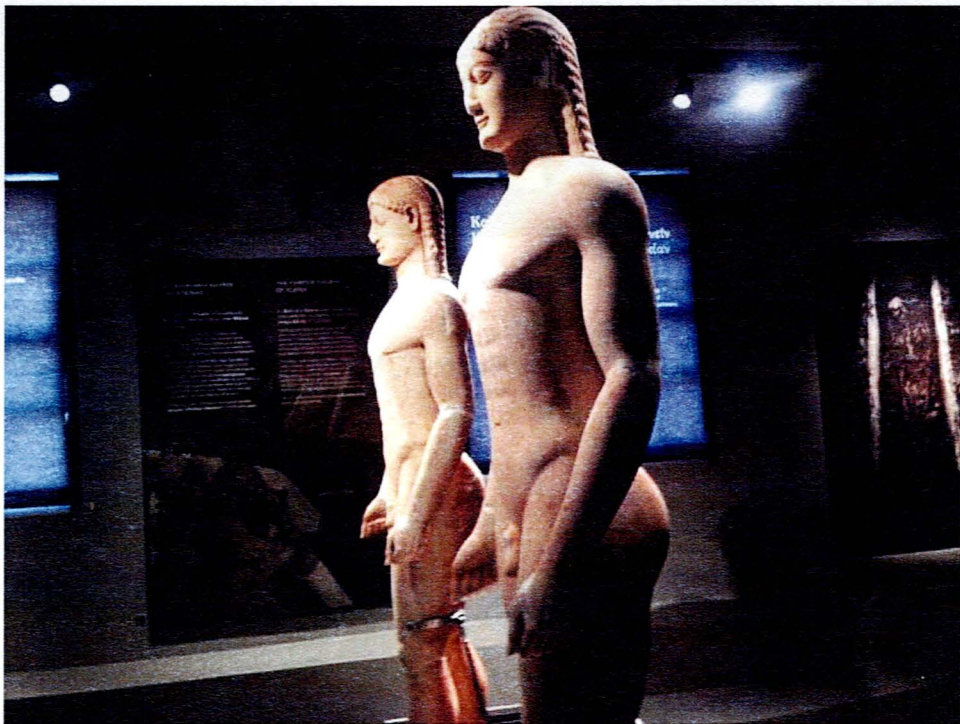
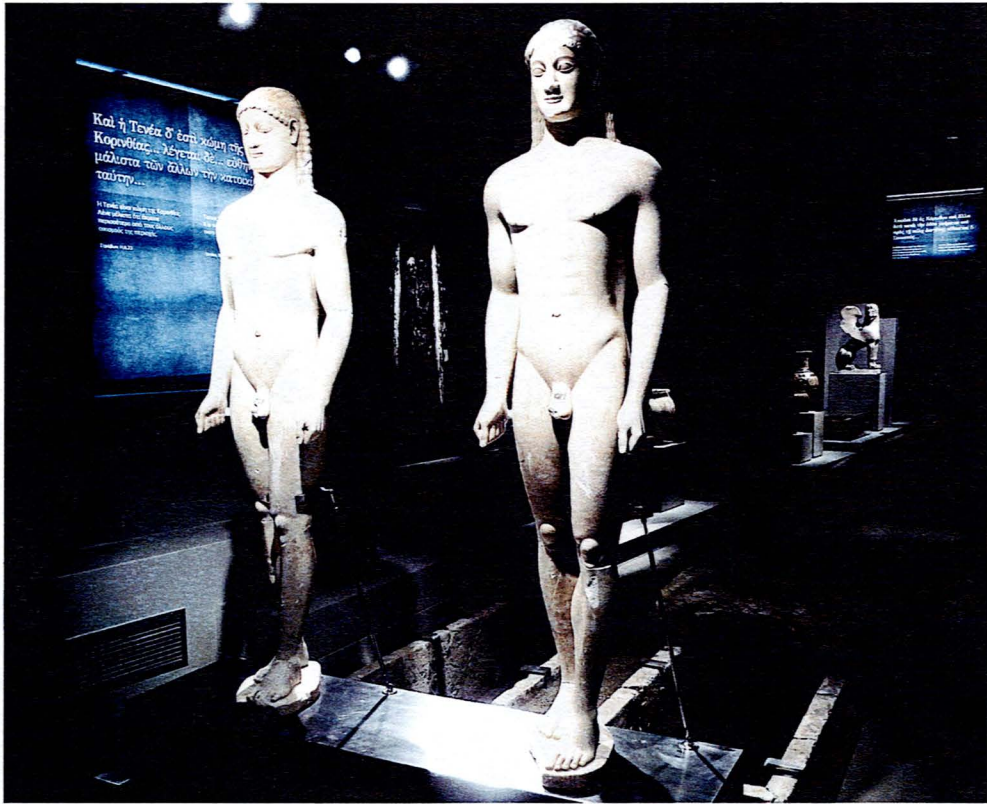


Fig. 2-3. The pair of “Kouroi” found in 2011 in the region of ancient Tenea exposed in the Archaeological Museum of Corinth.

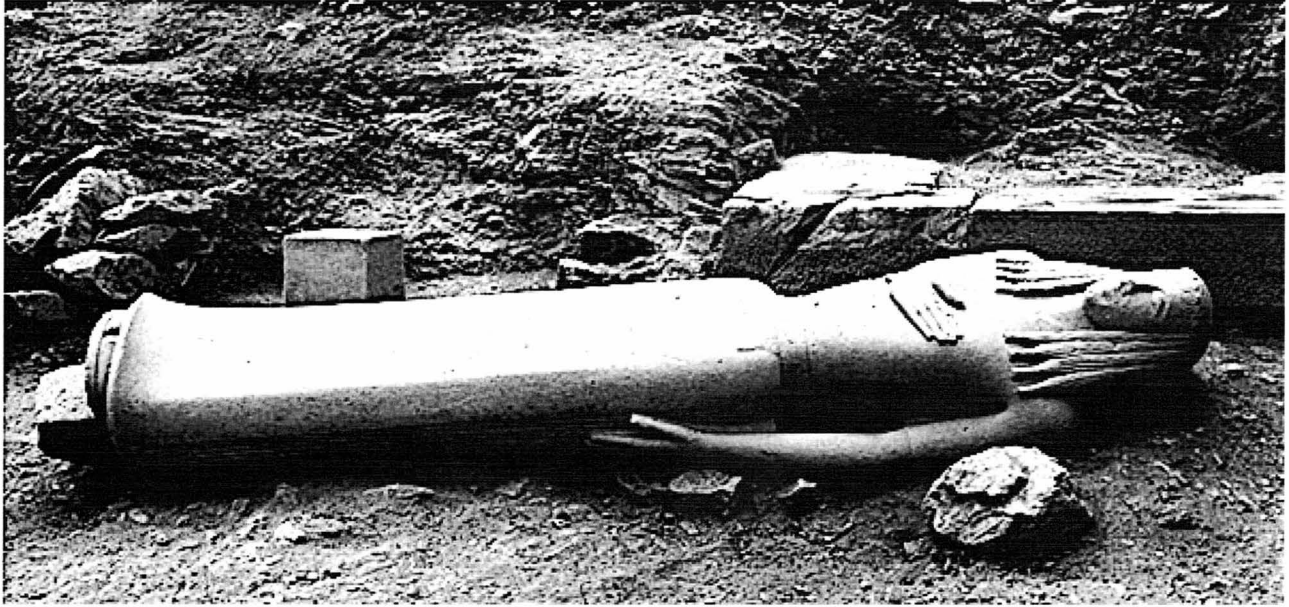


Fig. 4. The “Kore” found in 2000 in the ancient cemetery of Thera (Santorini).

