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on Ancient Bronzes

edited by Dávid Bartus, Zsolt Mráv and Melinda Szabó

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Edited by  
Dávid BARTUS – Zsolt MRÁV – Melinda SZABÓ

Budapest, 2024

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## The arm of a large-scale bronze statue from Aigion, Achaëa, Greece

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**Abstract:** The arm of the large-scale bronze statue presented in the current research was handed over in 1951 to the Ephorate of Antiquities in Aigio of Achaia and constitutes a typical yet exquisite example of Peloponnesian oversized statuary in bronze. The area where the arm was found coincides with the location of the ancient agora, as well as, according to previous excavation works, the place where the temenos of Zeus Soter, patron deity of the ancient polis of Aigion, is located. Based on the surviving fragment/limb, several issues regarding statue typology are further discussed, while its posture is suggested as ‘standing in grandeur’.

The identification of a divine figure, probably that of Zeus, is supported by the location of discovery and the object it was supposedly holding, combined with the numismatic issues of Aigion depicting the same type of statuary of the supreme god. The dating of the statue in mid Hellenistic years onwards agrees with the scientific analysis of the alloy, carried out in the laboratories of the National Archaeological Museum in Athens.

**Keywords:** Aigion, temenos, arm, Zeus

The left arm of a bronze statue, which is the object of the following study, was found in 1951 in Aigion. According to its registration in the entry book of the Archaeological Museum of Patras, no. BE 557, it was handed over by Athanasios Stylianidis. The latter found it during the digging of foundations for the construction of the building that housed the old IKA (Social Insurance Institute) of Aigion, on nowadays 11 N. Plastira Street. From the excavation on the specific plot there is no other find or any information in the archives of the Ephorate for carrying out an excavation investigation. As well known, Aigion, a coastal city of eastern Achaëa, was the capital of the Achaean League and the institutions of the Confederation (Fig. 1).

From the location of its discovery, it follows that the arm comes from the excavation of a plot located in the old agora of the town (Fig. 2.6). The building of the old IKA now hosting the Services of the Municipality of Aigialeia, is located on the south-eastern edge of the Mycenaean Acropolis of Aigion, on the edge of the natural terrace, on the way up to the ancient town from its seaside coast<sup>1</sup>. In this area, both based on rescue excavation data as much as on the information attested

1 Regarding Aigion, the necessary research monograph on the antiquities found beneath the modern city grid is still missing. The unpublished thesis of Lena Papazoglou *The Mycenaean settlement of Aigion and the early Mycenaean Era in Achaia* (Athens, 1998), will continue being a book of reference on the prehistoric settlement. The study of L. Papakosta in 1991 is outdated by following studies (PAPAKOSTA 1991). Generally, on the history and archaeology of Aigion, see RIZAKIS 2008, 159–167; VORDOS 2012. Especially on the pottery, see GADOLOU 2008; PAPAKOSTA 2011a; PAPAKOSTA 2011b; KOLIA 2011; FILIS 2018; FILIS 2019; VORDOS 2020, and VORDOS – FILIS (to be published).

by Pausanias during his tour, we locate the agora of the Classical and Hellenistic times<sup>2</sup>. However, it should be noted that, of the buildings mentioned by the Traveller, only the theatre has been identified based on excavation data constituting from then on a steady topographic reference (Fig. 2.1).<sup>3</sup>

The arm got conserved and assessed in the laboratories of the National Archaeological Museum in Athens. The results are attested in the following text.<sup>4</sup> The member is almost vertically broken off, high on the growing of the arm and bended on the elbow at wide angle (Fig. 3.1–2). Prior to its conservation, it was still possible to spot many bumps on its surface while small parts of the elbow and forearm are missing, which, as mentioned in the deliver-acceptance protocol, were ‘caused by the foundation mining tools’.

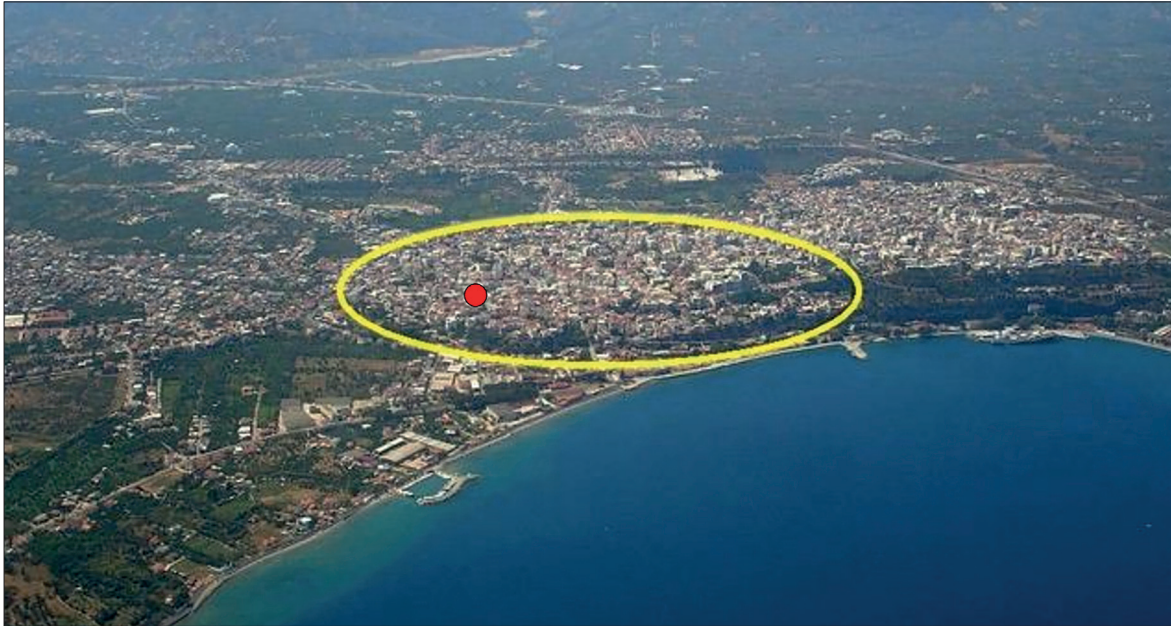


Fig. 1. The city of Aigion. The borders of the ancient settlement and the location of the agora are marked.

The dimensions of the arm on its outer side, from the broken edge of the arm up to the elbow is 36 cm long and from the elbow to the crooked forefinger is 66 cm long. The maximum depth, or rather the diameter on the breaking point of the arm measures 19.5 cm. It is therefore a case of an arm belonging to a statue of supernatural dimensions. We need to calculate, according to the proportions of limbs and torso, but also the effortless expression of slenderness by the execution of the plastic parts of the member, that the total height of the statue would slightly exceed the three meters, a fact that would discourage its attribution to a mortal. According to the proportions of the works mentioned by Vitruvius, *De architectura* 3.1.2: “pes vero altitudinis corporis sextae, cubitum quartae pectus item quartae,” the height of the statue is estimated at 3.08 m. The appearance of the view of

- 2 Paus. VII, 23, 9–24, 1. Reaching Patras from Aigion by sea, the Traveller mentions nine sanctuaries, two temene, a house building and a grove, located so much on the coastline as much as on the plateau of the main city grid. Most of these are detected on the plateau, and only five at the sea. Even though the Traveller gives us this generic testimony, it is still not safe to place the buildings in the space, within the borders of each sector as mentioned by PAPACHATZIS 1980, 140–147; RIZAKIS 1995, 65–68.
- 3 On the rescue excavation see KYRIAKOU 1980; RIZAKIS 1995, 199, 300 and mainly BRESSEN 2009, 65–68.
- 4 In 2019, the arm was transferred to the laboratories of the National Archaeological Museum for analysis and conservation. It was returned to the Museum of Aigion in 2022. Special thanks go to my colleague N. Petropoulos, the colleagues of the Conservation Department of NAM that contributed to its study and presentation, as well as to Alexandra Kotsaki for translating the text into English.



the whole statue is at first easily perceived. The perfectly crafted member with detailed plasticity apparently rose above the head of the figure, and with a slight twist of the forearm, it moved slightly diagonally to the torso. That indicates, given also the arrangement of the fingers, that the main view of the statue was single, that being the front one. It is not however implied that the artist's intention was not a prominent work, a conspicuous figure. The arm would extend almost horizontally with the shoulder having elongated the curve stating the inflated bicep, whilst the fold on the flexor surface of the elbow is clearly indicated. With the same, almost geometric precision, the shallow cavities at the genesis of the forearm are shaped. A particularly naturalistic detail, but without the intention to exaggerate, constitutes the distinction of the vein, internally indicated from the beginning of the arm's breakage, and while running an open sigmoid line, ends clearly at the wrist.

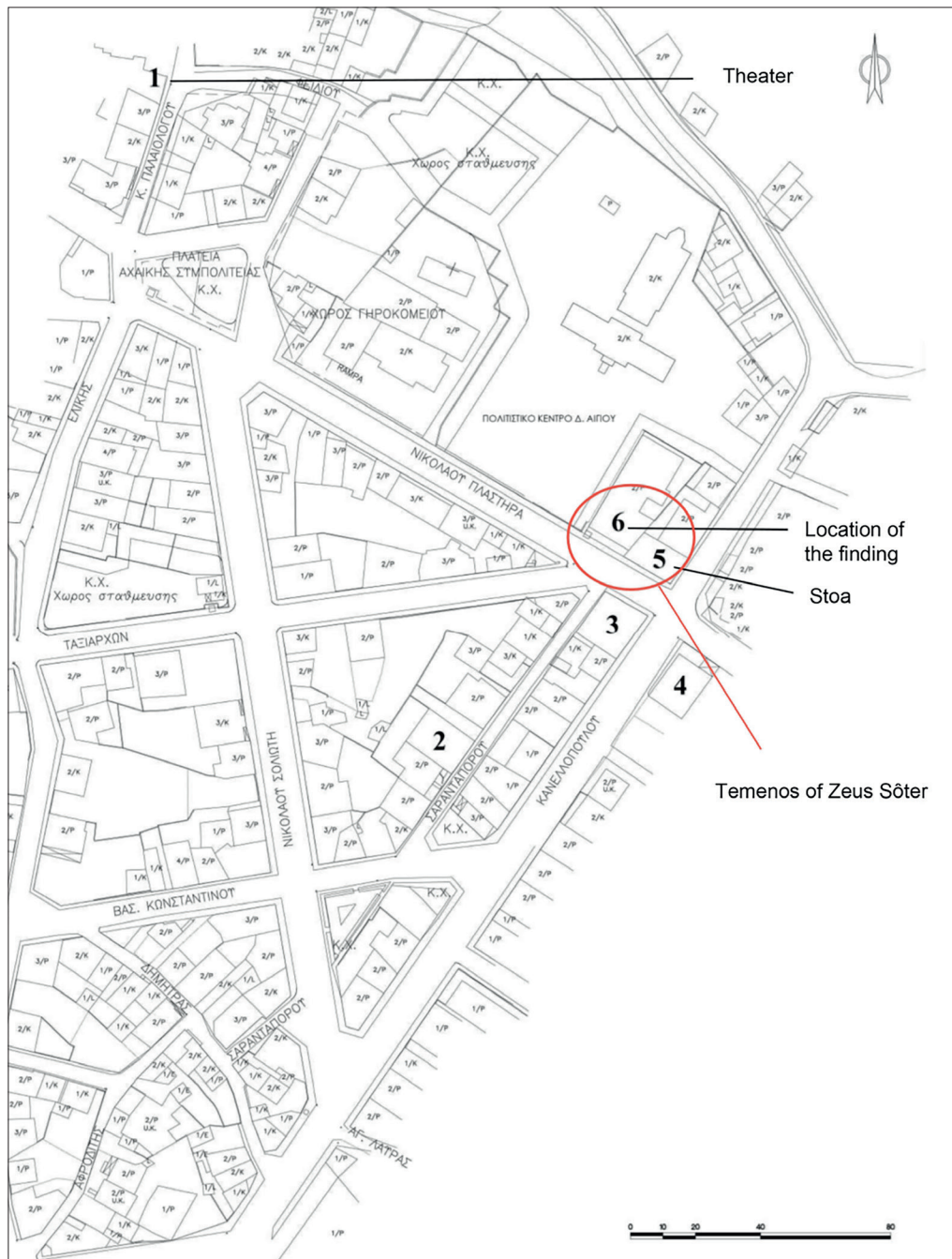


Fig. 2. Part of Aigion with the locations of the monuments. In nos. 2, 3 and 4, remains of public buildings. Edited by the author.



The forearm is depicted slender, slightly pressed on its sides and somewhat strongly tapering towards the end of the hand. The continuous contour, with soft lines and subtly prominent volumes, agrees with its slight inward twist, which ends in its turn in the somewhat intense downward bending of the wrist, from which the end of the hand is grown.



Fig. 3. The arm of the statue. 1 – Front view (Photo: A. Themelis. Cop. EF.A.ACH), 2 – Back view (Photo: Author. Cop. EF.A.ACH).

At this exact point, the hand, the image of the closed palm, the flexibility of the whole and the anatomical—even sophisticated—details in the rendering of the veins of the back of the hand (Fig. 4.1–2), advocate the belief that we are in the presence of a small fragment which, however, reflects the image of a large monument, of particular artistic value, as well as the creation of a great sculptor. The opinion that this is an original work and not a copy of antiquity is guaranteed to overcome any argument, as well as the view that the statue depicts a deity—and it is not only its size that contributes to that.<sup>5</sup>

The key to the identification of the divine form is given precisely by the closed, yet not clenched, palm, and in fact of what it held in its left hand. The fingers are formed gradually, more and more loosely between them, from the middle to the index. This arrangement leaves no doubt that the rod-shaped opening with a diameter of 2.3 cm received an elongated and probably uniform rod, which the thumb and especially the index finger subtly grasp, with the latter shaped higher and effortlessly bending<sup>6</sup> (Fig. 4.3). This is the usual way, known from other monuments, in which the trident is held by Poseidon and the sceptre by Zeus.<sup>7</sup> But which of the two should we recognize in the case of

5 In ancient literature, there are frequent references to colossal bronze statues of gods and heroes that adorned sanctuaries and cities throughout the Greek world, especially from the Hellenistic years onwards. See e.g., ZIMMER – BAIRAMI 2008, 28.

6 On the inside of the palm there is no indication of the attachment of the object he was holding. On the contrary, during the conservation works of the member, many vertical parallel scratches (rasping) appeared, caused by a tool grinding the surface of the palm in order to adapt the object to it.

7 The most characteristic, even though not the oldest, example, is the Poseidon of Artemision. See KAROUZOS 1931, Figs 5–8. There will probably be endless debate and arguments on both sides about whether

Aigion, and also which could we suggest as the most likely style for the statue? Regarding the style, the representation of the entire statue, I think the hand itself suffices to reveal it, based on its form. The break, very high, exactly at the origin of the arm, which leaves the armpit free and open, the twisting of the forearm combined with the bending of the end of the hand and above all, the obtuse angle formed by the member, leave no particular doubts that the statue was depicted standing and, as already noted, in a majestic posture facing the viewer.



Fig. 4. 1 – Detail of the back of the hand (Photo: A. Themelis. Cop. EF.A.ACH), 2 – Detail of the arrangement of the fingers. Front view (Photo: A. Themelis. Cop. EF.A.ACH), 3 – Detail of the rod-shaped opening in the palm of the hand (Photo: P. Feleris. Cop. EF.A.ACH).

It is precarious to date such a member when key stylistic elements of the sculpture are missing. The analysis of the alloy in the laboratory of NAM, which is listed below, presented a high content in lead, characteristic of bronze works from the Hellenistic years onwards.<sup>8</sup>

The answer to the question concerning the identification of the depicted deity may emerge with relative certainty, after taking into account the testimonies from the written sources—Pausanias in this case—the Aigion coinage and thus the location of discovery—as mentioned above, in the agora of the ancient town. Consequently, if we focus on the number of statues mentioned by the Traveller in Aigion on those that he clearly states that he saw in the sanctuaries of the agora, then we are

the god of Artemision is Poseidon or Zeus. Certainly, the motives of the two statues, of Artemision and Aigion, are completely different, both morphologically and chronologically. It should be noted, however, their striking similarity in holding an elongated rod which, in the case of Artemision—and Karouzos' arguments are solid—is hardly consistent with a lightning bolt. See latest: [POLLINI 2016](#).

8 Similar monuments are known to us that are chronologically close to the statue of Aigion such as the figurative statue of a dynast in Rome, [POLLITT 1986](#), 72, Fig. 74; [HIMMELMANN 1989](#), 126, Fig. 143–147; [MATTUSCH 1996](#), 76, Fig. 3.2, of Poseidon of Milos in NAM, [SCHÄFER 1968](#), 55, Fig. 1–15, Pls 38–41; [FUCHS 1983](#), 139, Fig. 133, LIMC VII, s.v. *Poseidon*, [C. Maderna-Lauter] 452, no. 32, Fig. 354; [DAMASKOS 1999](#), 78–79; [KALTSAS 2002](#), 290, Fig. 611, of Claudius from Herculaneum, [KREIKENBOM 1992](#), 201; [LAHUSEN – FORMIGLI 2007](#), 70, but also from very distant regions of the Hellenistic world as in ancient Elymais of today's Iran, see [LINDSTRÖM 2017](#). The origin of this particular motif is discussed in connection with the Houston Doryphoros (Spear Bearer), by [OLIVER-SMITH 1975](#), especially 104–105, Pls 42–46. From the bronze works of minor-sculpture, cf. Zeus of Dodoni, [ALSCHER 1956](#), Fig. 17. In particular, for Poseidon, his worship and monuments in the Peloponnese, see [MYLONOPOULOS 2003](#). Roman emperors are often depicted in the same majestic posture holding a sceptre: [NIEMEYER 1968](#), 14, 16, 18, 24, 27, 30, 34, 39.

limited to the temenos of Zeus Soter, the patron deity, and the building opposite its entrance.<sup>9</sup> The above, as will be argued below, supports the identification of a statue of the supreme god.

Entering the temple, the Traveller mentions two bronze statues of Zeus that he saw ἐν ἀριστερᾷ, to the left, noting only that one is beardless. Suppose the statues were set up in a space within the temenos but outside the temple, were therefore not cult statues? By reading Pausanias, it is not always easy to decide if any of the statues he saw in the sanctuaries of the cities were cult images. Looking at the statues inside the temples, as well as the cult statues themselves, normally was not forbidden to the worshippers—unless specific local, religious and cult practices objected to that, such as the statues of Hera and Sotireia in Aigion.<sup>10</sup> In the building he saw opposite the temenos entrance, Pausanias notes four more bronze statues: of Poseidon, Herakles, Zeus and Athena, also bronze, which he calls “gods from Argos”.<sup>11</sup> The exact use of this building or stoa, according to L. Papazoglou, does not emerge from the excavation of the adjoining plot to the west (Fig. 2.5).<sup>12</sup> The presence and establishment of such monuments, buildings, houses and arcades in the temene and agoras of the cities respond to needs of both a political and religious nature which include the exhibition of works of art, as well as official, public symposia after sacrifices to the gods.<sup>13</sup>

Precisely here, in the case of Aigion, the information given by Pausanias, regarding the argument-sophistry of the Aegians, to keep the statues from Argos in their city, becomes particularly important. When the Argives asked for the statues of the gods to be returned to them, the Aegians demanded to be reimbursed for the expenses of the daily sacrifices offered to them. It is therefore very likely that in this temenos building, where the statues from Argos were housed, the sacrificial ceremonies in their honour and the public meals that followed took place. However, these reports of Pausanias, as usual, are not accompanied by any additional information regarding the statuary type of the images he saw in the temenos and building.<sup>14</sup> Of the three statues of Zeus, only two possibly agree with the motif to which the hand belongs, as it also agrees with that of Poseidon. An exception must be made for the statue of the beardless Zeus, a type of which appears on a pedestal, on the obverse of the coins of Aigion, with a thunderbolt in the raised right hand, an eagle in the proposed left, and the inscriptions ΑΙΓΙΕΩΝ ΠΑΙΣ and ΖΕΥΣ ΜΕΓΑΣ in the field.<sup>15</sup> On the contrary, the two statues of Zeus,



Fig. 5. Tetrachalcon (hemiobol).  
After BCD Peloponnesos 426.

9 Paus. VII, 23, 9: “Ἔστι δὲ καὶ Διὸς ἐπὶ κλησὶν σωτήρος ἐν τῇ ἀγορᾷ τέμενος καὶ ἀγάλματα ἐσελθόντων ἐν ἀριστερᾷ, χαλκοῦ μὲν ἀμφοτέρω, τὸ δὲ οὐκ ἔχον πω γένεια ἐφαίνετο ἀρχαιότερον εἶναι μοι.

10 Paus. VII, 23, 9 and 24, 3. See: OSANNA 1996, 188–189, and mainly CORBETT 1970.

11 Paus. VII, 23, 10–11: ἐν δὲ οἰκίματι κατευθὺ τῆς ἐσόδου, χαλκοῦ καὶ ταῦτα, ἔστι μὲν Ποσειδῶν καὶ Ἡρακλῆς, ἔστι δὲ Ζεὺς τε καὶ Ἀθηνᾶ· θεοὺς δὲ σφᾶς καλοῦσιν ἐξ Ἄργους, ὡς μὲν ὁ ἀργείων ἔχει λόγος, ὅτι ἐποιήθησαν ἐν τῇ πόλει τῶν ἀργείων, ὡς δὲ αὐτοὶ λέγουσιν οἱ αἰγεῖς, παρακαταθήκην σφίσις ὑπὸ ἀργείων ἐδόθη <τὰ> ἀγάλματα. Καὶ αὐτοῖς καὶ τάδε ἔτι προσταχθῆναι φασι, ἐκάστη τοῖς ἀγάλμασις ἡμέρᾳ θύειν· αὐτοὶ δὲ σόφισμα εὐρόντες θύειν μὲν πλεῖστα ὅσα, κατενοχοῦμένοις δὲ τὰ ἱερεῖα ἐν κοινῷ ἀνάλωμα οὐδὲν ἐς αὐτὰ γίνεσθαι· τέλος δὲ ἀπαιτεῖσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν ἀργείων καὶ αὐτοὺς τὰ ἐς τὰς θυσίας ἀναλούμενα ἀπαιτεῖν· τοὺς δὲ (οὐ γὰρ ἔχειν ἐκτίσαι) καταλειπεῖν σφίσις αὐτοὺς τὰ ἀγάλματα.

12 PAPAZOGLOU 1984, 94. For the exact location of the Temple of Zeus Soter in the agora of Aigion, see Vordos under publication.

13 See MARTIN 1951, 495–499; OSANNA 1996, 189–191.

14 Rarely does the Traveller comment on statuary types, such as, for example, the statue of Eileithyia, the work of Damophon, Paus. VII, 23, 5, which is depicted on numismatic issues of Aigion holding torches. See: NCP 83–84, Pl. R VI–VIII; RIZAKIS 1995, 198, 296; PAPACHATZIS 1980, 139, Fig. 103.1.

15 NCP 84–85, Pl. R XII–XIV; LACROIX 1949, 228, no. 2; PAPACHATZIS 1980, 139, Fig. 103.5–6. For the worship



as well as that of Poseidon, could certainly render the motif of the statue which compels us to accept the preserved hand. And in this case, the numismatic issues are also indicative, which reproduce analogous visual images of the two gods, but without allowing us to identify and attribute the member in question to any of the specific works; such as, for example, on the obverse of a tetrachalkon (hemiobol) of the Achaean Commonwealth depicting Zeus standing with a sceptre in his left hand and Victory in his right (Fig. 5)<sup>16</sup> and on a bronze diassarion -a provincial issue under Caracalla- with Poseidon depicted on the reverse standing, with a trident in his left hand and a dolphin in his right hand (Fig. 6).<sup>17</sup>



Fig. 6. Bronze diassarion. After SNG Cop 139.

There is no doubt that Zeus is the one who, not only as the capital god of Aigion but also with a primary role as the protector of the Achaean League with Aigion itself being the meeting place of the assembly, occupies a prominent place in collective piety and additional political symbolism.<sup>18</sup> It is, therefore, reasonable that the visual depictions of the patron Zeus exceed in number all the rest depicting other deities, not only in numismatic issues<sup>19</sup> but also in works that decorated the sanctuaries of the city; even more so, in the temenos dedicated to him.

The number of monuments similar to this hand that have come down to us is not great, especially the bronze ones, and this in itself makes it important. The fact, moreover, that a fragment of exquisite art and of this size comes from Aigion, represents on one hand to the least the richness and value of the works that once adorned the sanctuaries of the city—we know this from the sources—and on the other hand somewhat compensates us for the degree of their, probably, forever loss.

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of the Zeus-child at Aigion, as well as for the statue type attributed to Argeios Ageladas see: OSANNA 1996, 195–196; RIZAKIS (forthcoming).

16 It is an issue of 191–146 BC. BCD Peloponnesos 426; PΑΡΑΧΑΤΖΙΣ 1980, 140, Fig. 104.3.

17 SNG Cop 139.

18 For the location and significance of the sanctuary of Zeus Homagyrios at Aigion and the additional political significance of the cult of Zeus in the Achaean cities, see: RIZAKIS 1995, 200–201; VORDOS 2012, 337; RIZAKIS 2013, 14, and 31, VORDOS 2016, 205–206. For the most ancient roots, the Mycenaean heritage of the worship of Zeus and Athena in Aigion and their connection with the world of Argos, see RIZAKIS (forthcoming).

19 PΑΡΑΧΑΤΖΙΣ 1980, 140.

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