

Original article

THREE UNPUBLISHED SCULPTURE WORKS IN THE COPTIC MUSEUM

Gabr, M.

Greek & Roman Archaeology dept., Faculty of Archaeology, Cairo Univ., Cairo, Egypt

E-mail: monagabr@hotmail.com

Received 14/6/2017

Accepted 30/12/2017

Abstract

This article gives publication and full study of three sculpture works preserved in the Coptic Museum. Two of them are funerary figures, or Portrait Stelae, several examples of this type were found in many orts and cities of Middle and Upper Egypt, in Fayoum, Ihnasia, Antonioplis, El-Bahnasa, Bauit, Qift, and Kom el-Rahieb opposite of Samalout in Minia, and the third is a portrait of a mature man. These three pieces arrived to the Coptic Museum since more than thirty years. The museum Kept them under Nrs. 13247, 13248, 13178. The Article contains also an analytic and dating study, together with spotting more lights upon the religious and cultural life, so also on the main characteristics of artworks during the era of Late Roman and early Coptic Art.

Keywords: *Portrait stelae, Funerary figures, Coptic museum, Sculpture, Reliefs, Palleum*

1. Introduction

The collection of Mr. Kamel Hammoda granted to The Coptic Museum in Cairo since the eighties of the 20th contains about 225 valuable pieces, among them standing Stelae, Naoses, portraits, friezes, and other masonry elements and sculpture works. This collection is preserved in the wide separate hall, named "The Great Tachtaboush magazine within the Coptic Museum^(a). This article betakes three sculpture works out of this collection. Two

of them; Nr. 13247, 13248 are funerary figures, or Portrait stelae, and the third, Nr. 13178 is a portrait of a mature man. The Main aim of this Article is to publish, For the first time three sculpture Works of lime stone, The Above mentioned, accompanied with a full analytic and dating study, together with spotting more lights upon the religious and cultural life, so also on the main characteristics of artworks during the era of Late Roman Art.

2. Material

2.1. The 1st piece of portrait stela of a mature man, fig. (1)

Description: A part of a funerary Stela of a mature man, it appears in very bad condition, salt absorbent, it was broken into 3 parts, which has been gathered together with a metal stand. This stela depicts the man from front appx. in life size, with oval face, full cheeks, straight

nose, narrow eyes, short hair, permanent sight to front, standing in an attitude of dignity and respect. He wears a long Tunic, and the Palleum. The right arm is also broken, while the left hand holding edge of Palleum, traces of colors appear in head and face.

- **Registration:** Coptic Museum, Great Tachtaboush magazine Nr. 132477
- **Provenance:** Unknown
- **Material:** Limestone
- **Measurements:** height 144 cm., width 55 cm.
- **Dating:** Late Roman Period
- **Bibliography:** Unpublished



Figure (1) Shows portrait stela of a mature man N.13247, (by Author)

2.2. The 2nd piece of portrait stela of a mature man, fig. (2)

Description: A part of a funerary Stela of a mature man, it appears in bad condition, losing some parts from the right hand, and some other parts of sides, while traces of colors appear in head and face. This Stela depicts the man from front, approximately in life size, with oval face, full cheeks, straight nose, short hair and permanent sight to front, standing in an

attitude of dignity and respect. He wears a long Tunic, and the Pallium, upon them the Prsthood scarf on the left shoulder surrounding the body from back to front. The right arm of the man is spread along body side, while holding a small round vase, full of some sort of offering; water, wine, or sacred oil (?) by his left hand.

- **Registration:** Coptic Museum, Great Tachtaboush magazine Nr. 13248
- **Provenance:** Unknown
- **Material:** Limestone
- **Measurements:** height 157 cm., width 50 cm.
- **Dating:** Late Roman Period
- **Bibliography:** Unpublished



Figure (2) Shows portrait stela of a mature man N. 13247, (by Author)

2.3. The 3rd piece of portrait of an adult man, fig. (3)

Description: Portrait of an adult man, three dimension sculpture, it was roughly cut and seems in bad condition, having some traces of colors, and losing

some parts mainly in the neck and left side. The portrait gives impression of a man of dignity, with short hair, oval face, wide eyes, long straight nose.

Registration: Coptic Museum, Great Tachtaboush magazine Nr. 13178

Provenance: Unknown

Material: Limestone

Measurements: height 29 cm.

Dating: Late Roman Period

Bibliography: Unpublished



Figure (3) Shows portrait stela of a mature man N. 13178, (by Author)

3. Dating, Analysis and Discussion

As for both pieces N. 13247 and 13248, they related to the style known as: Funerary figures [1] or Aedicula-type stelae [2], while this piece is formed in two-dimensions-sculpture, it gives the impression of sculpture-in-the-round [3], it depicts frequently the deceased, in life size [4], inside some niche symboling the tomb, or funerary chapel [5]. Several examples of this type were found in many orsts and cities of middle and upper Egypt [6], in *Fayyum, Ihnasia, Antoniopolis, El-Bahnasa, Bait, Qift, and Kom el-Rahieb* opposite of *Samalout* in *Minia* [7]. These sculptures are preserved in several museums and private collections all over the world [8], pieces of this type express accurate portraits of either men, women, or also children [9], which were deposited in, or outside the tombs of their owners^(b) [10]. Both pieces; i.e. Nr. 13247, 13248 show great influences from the Roman portrait of the 4th century A.D. in head and facial features^(c), while gives classical

body-forms [11], with some Egyptian touches, known in the 3rd Century A.D. [9], it shows also some traces of colors, which gives good idea about costume details, cultural factors [2], and some other indications to some social and stratum positions [5], more than giving information about ethnic routes, origin, or land [1], as they all were joint together by vigorous cultural factors, originated throughout all the Classical, and thereafter, Roman world [2]. The funerary stela Nr. 13247 was cut in smooth way, with extra care to the eyes, it shows pure Roman Style in the Hair style, and also in the *Palleum*^(d) [12] with the fine drapery, It shows itself also within just as well "The style of *Cos island*"^(e) [13], or normal way, the abovementioned indications refer then to some date at the beginning of the 4th century A.D. [14]. The second stela, namely Nr. 13248 displays a portrait of a middle aged man, who seems to be a priest, wearing the *Palleum* of priesthood, espe-

cially those of goddess Isis^(f), which match with the "Orariom (or Orarion)" [15] worn later on by the Christian priests. This man holds also a small round vase, so such these forms could be interpreted as Roman so as Coptic as well [16]. This piece N. 13248 was rather cut roughly, with narrow eyes, the other facial features, i.e. nose, mouth, express calmness and dignity, the drapery of his coat designed in successive layers witness for dating from the second half of the 4th century to the beginning of the 5th century, about 350-400 A.D. [2]. This dating goes together with views of some other scholars, who defined this type within the transition period between Roman and Coptic Arts^(g) [17]. So we can say, that we have here a stamp of some Middle Egyptian workshop, with preponderance to Oxyrhynchus or Heracleopolis^(h) [18]. Both the Tonic and the Palleum of these two pieces were considered to be an important completion to the form and attitude of the elite class of men as a cultural choice [19], in the meanwhile they aimed, by keeping wearing them also in funerary portraits [20] to gain good position also in the other world

[21]. The third piece Nr. 13178 displays a portrait of a mature man in full three dimensions sculpture, it was cut roughly as known by the late Roman portraits in general [22]. Despite the obvious influences of the Alexandrian school [23], and the classical principals on this piece, it shows also some likeness with the formal style of the Roman Empire from the reign of Great Constantenios [24], especially in facial feature; full cheeks, wide eyes, and hair dress leaning back [25]. This Portrait, Nr. 13178, is a prototype of private individual portraits known from the reign of Hadrian (117-138 A.D.) until the fifth century [26], as a style of local representations, which were found in many Metropolis in Egypt and some other districts throughout the Roman World⁽ⁱ⁾ [27]. This era witnesses the existence of different influences on the Egyptian portraits from many other territories of the Roman Empire [28], especially, from Syria, Constaniopole and Rome [29]; so this portrait expresses clearly the harmony between the late Roman, and early Coptic sculpture, that gives possibility to date it from the 4th century A.D [30].

4. Conclusion

These three sculpture pieces show some art styles, which could be dated from the transition period between Roman and Coptic arts namely, Late Roman art. The two works; numbers: 13247 & 13248 give stylistic cult figures of local limestone, cut in fine finishing, then colored. They show a state of equilibrium & steadiness in form and direction, with giving some extra solicitude to the head and facial features to express a deep impression of dignity for the deceased, which can compared somewhat with that of saints and holy persons. This art of cult figures, or Aedicula-type Stelaere present men, women, or scarcely children, by holding some funerary gifts like a small vase, or a bouquet of flowers, to pass with the calm & respective attitude of the portrait. The third piece, Nr. 13178, is a prototype of the personal portraits of its time; numerous examples thereof were found in many districts in Egypt, and some other metropolises throughout the Roman Empire.

Endnotes

- (a) My deep thanks to Dr. Atif Naguib, General Director of the Coptic museum for his Kind help by choosing, photographing, and investigating pieces displayed in this Article.
- (b) For other examples compare: Kamel, I. (1987), Coptic Funerary Stelae, Catalogue general des antiquites du musee Copt: Nos. 1-253, Le Caire, p.p. 11-19.; Riggs, (2015), "Egypt", P. 561.

- (c) Compare: Beckwith, (1979), Early Christian and byzantine Art, London, pp. 25-26; Thomas, (2000), Late Antique Egyptian Funerary Sculpture, p. 40.; Morey, Ch. (1953), Early Christian Art London-Oxford, p. 81; Gabra, G. & Eaton-kraus, M. (2001), The Treasures of Coptic Art, Cairo - New York, pp. 7-9.

- (d) *Palleum* is the Roman name of Greek *Himation*; Gabr, M. (2010), *Styles of Male Costumes in Egypt during Graeco-Roman periods*, Unpublished PhD., Cairo Univ., (In Arabic).; Bieber, M. (1977), "Ancient copies", a Contribution to the History of Greek and Roman art, New York, pp. 134-135; Aubert, M. & Cortopassi, R. (2004), *Portraits funéraires de l'Égypte romaine*, Musée du Louver, département des antiquités égyptiennes, Paris, pp. 29-30.
- (e) This Type "Cos Island" is named regarding a definite collection of Hellenistic statues found in this island and branded by wearing the *Palleum* (*Himation*) in the same way. For more information: Riggs, Ch. (2005), *The Beautiful Burial in Roman Egypt*, Oxford, pp. 88-89; Gabr, M. (2010), *Styles of male costumes* p. 133-138.
- (f) For more information about scarf of priests: Traunecker, C. (1986), *L'etole diaconale cote et ses antecedents*, cahiers de la Bibliotheque Copte 3, pp. 93-110; Gabr, M. (2010). *Styles of male costumes*, pp. 104-106.
- (g) Compare these stelae with other examples by: Parlasca, K. & Seemann, H. (1999), *Au Genblicke, mumien portats und agypttische grab Kunst aus romischer Zeit*, Frankfurt, pp. 26, 191, 327-328; Bianchi, R. & Others, (2013). *The Omar Toussoun Collection in The Graeco-Roman museum*, Series 2, Alexandria, pp. 64-65; Russmann, E. (2009), *Unearthing the Truth: Egypt's Pagan and Coptic Sculpture*, Exhibition Brooklyn museum 10-13 May 2009, Brooklyn, p. 54.; Petrie, W. (1925), *Tombs of the courtiers and Oxyrhynchus*, London, pp. 68-74.; De Villard, M. (1923), *La Scultura ad ahnas*, Note sull' Origine dell' arte Copta, Milano, pp. 98-99; Kamel, I. (1987), *Coptic Funerary Stelae*, N. 114, 119, 124; Spanel, D. (2001) *JARCE* 38, pp. 105-106; Jongste, P. & Emmerzeel, M. (1994), N. 4, 6; Török, L. (1970), "On the Chronology of the Ahnas Sculpture" *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 22, pp. 163-164; Hermena. G., (2017), *The Encyclopedia of Coptic Art (Arabic Edition)*, Cairo, Vol. 10.
- (h) Compare also: Török, L. (1998). *The hunting centaur*, pp. 59-61; id, after the pharaohs (2005), pp. 64-67; Ashour, S. (2010) *Unpublished Group of Bahnasa Reliefs*, pp.75-77; Spanel, D. (2001) *JARCE* 38, p. 92; Riggs, Ch. (2015) *Egypt*, p. 561.
- (i) Compare some parallel examples: Breckenridge, J. (1979), "portraiture Imperial" 286; Beckwith, (1963), *Coptic sculpture*, pp. 8-9, Tiraditti, F., (2001) *The Treasures of the Egyptian Museum*, Cairo, p. 331; Lübcke. G., (1996) *Ägy-pten Schatze aus dem wüstensand Kunst am Nil*, wiesbaden, cat, I, 4,5,6.

References

- [1] Thomas Th., (2000). *Late antique Egyptian funerary sculpture*, Princeton Univ. Press, Princeton.
- [2] Török. L., (2005). *After the pharaohs: Treasures of Coptic art from Egyptian collections catalogue*, Museum of find Arts, Budapest.
- [3] Török. L., (1977). Notes on pre-Coptic and Coptic art: Romano-Egyptian and Coptic antiquities in a private Collection, *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hongaricae*, Vol. 29, pp: 136-143.
- [4] Cooney. J., (1943). *Late Egyptian and Coptic Art, an introduction to the collections in the Brooklyn Museum*, Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn.
- [5] Ashour, S., (2010). *Unpublished group of Bahnasa reliefs publications of the archaeological society of Alexandria*, *Archaeological & Historical Studies*, Vol. 13, pp: 63-105.
- [6] Riggs, Ch., (2015). *Egypt*, in: Gazda. E. (ed.) *The Oxford handbook of Roman sculpture*, Oxford, pp: 550-562.

- [7] Spanel, D., (2001). Coptic sculpture and relief in the Brooklyn Museum, *JARCE*, Vol. 38, pp: 88-93.
- [8] Borg, B., (2012). *Portraits: The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*, in: Riggs, Ch. (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*, pp. 601-620.
- [9] Török, L., (1998). *The hunting centaur: A monument of Egyptian Hellenism from the fourth century*, Museum of Fine Arts Press, Budapest.
- [10] Thomas Th., (2010). *Egyptian art of late antiquity* in: Lloyd, A. (ed.) *A companion to ancient Egypt*, Vol. II, Oxford Univ. Press. pp: 1025-1041
- [11] Jongste, P. & Immerzeel, M., (1994), Coptic sculpture techniques-A study of the manufacturing traces of some Coptic reliefs in the collection of the Rijksmuseum Van Oudheden in Leiden, *OMRO*, Vol. 74, pp: 114-116.
- [12] Gabr, M., (2010), *Styles of male costumes in Egypt during Graeco-Roman Periods*, PhD dissertation, Egyptology dept. Faculty of Archaeology, Cairo Univ., (In Arabic).
- [13] Bieber, M., (1977). *Ancient copies, a contributions to the history of Greek and Roman art*, New York Univ. Press, NY.
- [14] Aaubert, M. & Cortopassi, R., (2004). *Portraits funéraires de l' Egypte romaine, musée du Louver, dept. des antiquites égyptiennes*, Musée du Louvre Presse, Paris.
- [15] Duthuit, G., (1931). *La sculpture Copte: Statues & bas-reliefs*, Musée du Louvre Presse, Paris.
- [16] Ashour, S., (2007). *Representations of male official and craftsmen in Egypt during Ptolemaic and Roman ages: A study in plastic arts*, Doctoral dissertation, Greek & Roman Archaeology and Studies dept. Faculty of Arts, Alexandria Univ.
- [17] Russmann, E., (2009). *Unearthing the truth: Egypt's pagan and Coptic sculpture*, Exhibition Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn.
- [18] Török, L., (1970). On the chronology of the Ahnas sculpture", *Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, Vol. 22, pp: 160-174.
- [19] Smith, R., (1998). Honorific portrait Statues", *JRS*, Vol. 88, pp: 50-68.
- [20] Bieber, M., (1961). *The sculpture of the Hellenistic age*, Columbia Univ. Press, NY.
- [21] Beckwith, J., (1963). *Coptic sculpture 300-1300*, Alec Tiranti Press, London.
- [22] Breckenridge, J., (1979). *Portraiture. Imperial, age of spirituality, late antique and early Christian art, third to seventh century*, in: Weitzmann, K. (ed.), *Catalogue of the Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York, pp.10-25.
- [23] Kadous, E., (2000). Coptic sculpture: The popular vision in Egyptian art, Egyptology at the dawn of the twenty-first century, in: Hawass, Z. (ed.), *18th Int. Cong. of Egyptologists*, Vol. 2, Cairo, New York, pp.339-344.
- [24] Stokstad, M., (2008). *Art history, a view of the West*, Pearson Prentice Hall Press, New Jersey.
- [25] Lazaridou, A., (2011). *Transition to Christianity, art of late antiquity 3rd-7th century A. D.*, New York Press, NY.
- [26] Beckwith, J., (1979). *Early Christian and Byzantine art*, Alec Tiranti Press, London.
- [27] Severin, H. (1992). *Das museum Für Spätantike und Byzantinische Kunst*, Staatliche Museenzu Berlin, Berlin.
- [28] Gilbert, P., (1954). La valeur de la statuaire égyptienne aux époques greque et romaine *CdE*, Vol. 29, pp : 15-28.
- [29] Graindor, P., (1937). *Bustes et statues-portraits d'Egypteromaine*, IFAO Press, Le Caire.
- [30] Kleiner, D., (1992). *Roman sculpture*, Publications in the History of Art, New Haven, Yale Univ. Press, London.