

Original article

AN UNPUBLISHED TERRACOTTA STATUETTE OF A BOY SERVANT FROM THE EGYPTIAN MUSEUM IN CAIRO

Zaied, M.

History and Archaeology dept., College of Arts and Humanities, King Khalid Univ., Abha, KSA
E-mail address: mzaied@kku.edu.sa

Article info.

Article history:

Received: 10-8-2023

Accepted: 4-3-2024

Doi: 10.21608/ejars.2024.396689

Keywords:

Terracotta
Statuette
Boy servant
Artificial hair
Egyptian Museum.

EJARS – Vol. 14 (2) – Dec. 2024: 223-226

Abstract:

The research aims to shed the light on an unpublished rare terracotta statuette at Gallery No. 39 in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, Registry No. 27367. This terracotta statuette was never studied before, therefore the researcher discuss, by descriptive and analytical study, the figurine which to represent boy servant who is holding a hydria vase and is emptying it in a large amphora vase. So, this research paper discusses the profession of this boy, his identity, and his position in the Egyptian society at that time. The study also aims to try to search for the source of this distinguished piece of art and interpret it artistically according to the accompanying utensils as well as its technical attributes, and then try to date it accurately according to these attributes.

1. Introduction

Terracotta is a word of Latin origin consisting of two syllables; the first syllable terra, which means earth, soil, or mud, and the second syllable cotta or cocta, which means cooked, and then the word literally means burnt or cooked mud [1], and the word terminology refers to figurines that were made out of raw clay, then used for red-colored earthenware statues and statuettes [2]. Terracotta is one of the most important types of minor arts in classical art, especially in Egypt in the Ptolemaic and Roman eras. Where this art included all the specifics of the ancient Egyptian religion as well as all aspects of daily life, and since art is a true mirror of society, the terracotta art mainly reflects the common people [3], and then reflects the most important professions and crafts in Egyptian society during the Ptolemaic and Roman eras clearly and specifically [4]. They were cheaply made of fired Nile clay and display a wealth of motifs unparalleled in any other terracotta workshops from the ancient world [5]. This art in Egypt is rich in innovation whether in hand-made figurines or those modeled. It is also rich as far as variety of themes is concerned [4,5]. The terracotta art is skillfully produced and is even superior to other arts as regards the diversity of its themes, so it necessarily expresses the plebs, the common people, as it is not an official art, but it can be called the street art. The Egyptian Museum in Cairo owns a large collection of terracotta dating back to the Ptolemaic and Roman eras. These are groups, the majority of which have not been previously published or studied in an adequate scientific study. Therefore, this

research paper aims to publish this statuette made of terracotta, a descriptive and analytical study, and moreover, an attempt shall be made to define its dating based on their artistic features or models, through comparing it to their peers.

2. Terracotta Statuette

Terracotta statuette is preserving at Gallery No. 39 in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, (Registry No. 27367), fig. (1, a & b). It's a yellowish-brown color, and double moulded. Hollow to the interior with two holes; each of them is in the front of base, and the second is in the middle back of the statuette. Its height is 21.5 cm, supreme of width is 7.3 cm, thickness is 2.4 cm and source is unknown.



Figure (1) a. front, b. back of the statuette

A figurine represents a boy standing on a base, fig. (1-a) stretching forward the left leg and holding a hydria vase [6,7] in a horizontal position. It seems more likely that he is emptying it in a large amphora vase [8] down his right leg. This boy is depicted as naked leaning on his left foot and leaning the hydria vase on his left thigh too. The boy's head is shaven and covered by artificial hair, a wig, whose curls are hanging down on his shoulders. However, the wig does not hide his very short hair. Covering the two ears, the wig is divided into horizontal curls and is adorned by a wavy-shaped ribbon on the two sides. The forehead is wide and is separated from the short head's hair by a separating line. The face is plump especially on the two sides of the forehead above the two eyebrows, the two cheeks and down the chin, which is consistent with the fleshy neck. The eyes are wide with puffy eyelids. Moreover, the pupil of the eyes is not accurately demarcated; rather, it is replaced with a small cavity between the puffy eyelids. The nose is depicted as very small and plump to be in line with the face. Furthermore, the mouth is small and the two lips are fine. A faint smile is on the face that is signified by the little joyful stretch of the face muscles in the area between the two cheeks and the mouth. The body is so streamlined and is depicted in an active position indicated by the fact that the left leg is advanced forward and the right leg a bit backwards. No doubt, this signifies that the boy actively performed his job. Moreover, the chest and abdomen muscles are in line with the baby face of the boy, which indicates a deep perception of the structure of the human body in this age.

3. Results

Based on the previous analytical data, the following results can be deduced:

- a) This statuette is of one of the slaves who were included in the wealthy families, and he carries out the profession of carrying water from the fountain and storing it in the house for one family, and does not practice the profession of watering, as indicated by the statuette of Naucratis, which is confirmed by the papyrus documents (see below), which used to call them birth slaves.
- b) The statuette showed the use of classical cultural elements, which is specific to utensils for transporting and storing water, such as hydria and amphora (see above), which indicates that the Egyptian society at that time was influenced by the Hellenic culture in food and drink.
- c) The study also showed the continuity of the habit of shaving the heads of slaves from the house servants, especially those who supervise food and drink from the dynastic era until the Roman era - the dating of the statuette from us, the study found - and a borrowed wigs was used to incite the hygiene, then the public health on the one hand, and protect them from cold and heat from another side.

4. Discussion

The light or yellowish brown color indicates that the type of mud used to produce this figurine is taken from a desert area, which makes the color of this figurine is completely different from that of the Naucratis statuette Naucratis [9 -11]; a city

that locates in Delta, whose soil is rich in organic elements especially iron [12]. The color of the mud forming this agricultural soil ranges from pink, reddish brown, red and leaden to dark red when the mud is dry. Once burnt, the color turns into brown or red. Since the desert soil is not rich in the iron element, the color of mud is usually yellowish orange and can be also yellowish brown or orange. Therefore, it takes a light color after burning [13,14]. Since this distinguished piece of art is of an unknown source, its terracotta color suggests that it is made in a desert city, I think that any city from Fayoum region [15,16], and it's compare with the terracotta statuette of kyphosis old man, Registry No. 33425 at Gallery No. 39 in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, from Qasr Al Banat, site of Euhemeria, in Fayoum in terms of the degree of color of and it's technique [17]. Thus, it is completely different from the terracotta color of the Naucratis statuette. It is noteworthy that this figurine is not glazed as was the case with the Naucratis figurine, which reflects the difference in the care provided to each of them [9-11]. As far as the technique is concerned, the figurine was made through modeling since the back of the figurine was left unformed [18-20]. This is indicated by two holes, one of them in the base in front of the figurine, fig. (1-a) and the other in the back of the figurine, fig. (1-b). It is likely that that these two holes were designed to help attach the front part to the back part before burning and to help color the figurine after burning. This suggestion is also supported by the fact that the two holes are in two unformed areas. However, it is noteworthy that there are some opinions to the effect that these holes are used in terracotta figurines to extract vapors during the burning process [21,22]. The first view is the preferable one since many pottery figurines were put into the furnace without holes. It seems that terracotta statuettes from Karanis, holes were necessary for figurines that were made through modeling to fit all the parts of the figurine together before burning and to color it after burning, it's difference between the two burning processes for each of vases and terracotta figurines, the terracotta figurines require higher temperature than vases and that the product color and solidity of each of them is different [21-23]. As for the theme represented by the figurine, it is a boy, who is more likely a servant, whose job is to transfer the water from the fountain outside to the storage container inside the house to meet the needs of the family members. The artist skillfully and incomparably shaped the hydria, the container used to carry the water, as a part that is protruding from the figurine's forefront. As for the amphora, the storage container [6-8], it is shaped by the artist beside the boy because of its big size on the one hand and being fastened on another base on the other. In fact, this is a successful employment of the portrayed theme and a realistic reflection of daily life [23-25]. In addition, it is likely that the boy belongs to the slave class owned by rich families and regarded as family members. It is also noteworthy that the job performed by this boy is different from the irrigation profession portrayed by the Naucratis statuette [9-11]. The irrigator in the first theme irrigates the people of the city or the town in return for a wage, which indicates that it is his own profession. As for this boy,

he serves only one family and fulfills all their needs including carrying the water from outside to the house and constantly filling water storage containers. To explain how such a young boy performed such a burdensome task as revealed by study, perhaps that boy was a slave's son who is brought up as a member of the family [26]. Thus, he helped his father or replaced him for the former's death or for any other reason. This hypothesis is supported by the papyri belonging to the Roman era that were discovered in Egypt. One of them [27] signifies a contract dividing the ownership of many slaves owned by a man called Tiberius Julius Theon in 111 AD. It seems that those slaves and their sons were given a distinctively high rank since they were called the house-born slaves. In fact, these sons, who were of big numbers, were the property of their master [28]. The artistic features of this figurine, including the smile, eye portrayal, plump face and eyebrows in relief, are in line with the prevailing artistic features characterizing the personal portraits of the Trajan era [29]. This is in addition to the artificial air, the shaven head and incomplete or incompletely-carved pupil of the eye. All these artistic features can be compared to a carved limestone head excavated in Hawara, Fayoum, and preserved in the British Museum dated at the late first century and the early second century A.D [30]. Accordingly, this figurine can be dated at the late first century and the early second century A.D [31, 32]. It is noteworthy that the shaven head covered by the artificial hair signify that the paterfamilias was meticulous about cleanliness of slaves through shaving their heads. Perhaps this slave replaced his shaven hair with the artificial hair to protect his head against the heat of the sun while performing his job. It is also likely that this was a type of ornament or a protective hygienic measure against insects and the like. It is also worth mentioning that applying artificial hair is an ancient Egyptian custom which seemingly influenced Romans. Thus, it was an acquired custom that was reflected in carving figurines following the idea of interaction prevailing in the Egyptian society at that time [33,34]. The industry of artificial hair boomed in ancient Egypt. Many forms of artificial hair spread and were applied by both males and females belonging to all social classes whether inside or outside houses. Artificial hair was used to indicate a high class and to protect against insects and the heat of the sun [33,34]. Moreover, artificial hair constituted a very important element of personal ornament in occasions. It was decorated with beads, ribbons with braids and coronas. However, clergy men did not wear artificial hair. During the era of the Ancient Kingdom, artificial hair was made of animals' skin. Moreover, wealthy people during the end of the Middle Kingdom and the whole the New Kingdom even the Roman era applied artificial hair that is made of human hair. They used to make neat haircuts and applied to their hair a lotion made of beeswax to keep the braids stable and strengthen the hair [35], which indicates the new settlers were affected by the constituents of the Egyptian civilization, which reflects the idea of interaction

5. Conclusion

The research paper proved that the terracotta statuette represents a boy whose age does not exceed twelve years, and he is often a

servant slave who was brought up in the homes of the wealthy, and that his profession is to serve the house and take care of it. The study also showed the extent of cultural admixture in Egypt during the Roman era, where the study showed that this artwork combines a habit of the ancient Egyptians, which is shaving the hair of the heads of household servants in order to preserve public health, and at the same time using forms of pottery vases and their uses derived from the Hellenic civilization.

References

1. Goodwin, T. (1874). *Latin-English dictionary*, Legare Street Press, London.
2. Ardet, A. & Ardet, L. (2018). Anthropomorphic terracotta unguentaria from Roman Dacia. In: Lafli, E. & Kan Şahin, G. (eds.) *Unguentarium. A Terracotta Vessel form and other Related Vessels in the Hellenistic, Roman and early Byzantine Mediterranean*, Dokuz Eylül Univ., Izmir, 13 p.
3. Barrett, C. (2015). *Egyptianizing figurines from delos: A study in Hellenistic religion*, Brill, Leiden.
4. Thomas, R. (2015). *Ptolemaic and Roman figures, models and coffin-fittings in terracotta*, The British Museum press, London.
5. Bailey, D. (2008). *Catalogue of terracottas in the British Museum, Vol. IV: Ptolemaic and Roman terracottas from Egypt*, British Museum Press, London.
6. Richter, G. & Milne, M. (1935). *Shapes and names of Athenian Vases*, Metropolitan Museum of Art Press, NY.
7. Lane, A. (1971). *Greek pottery*, Faber and Faber, London.
8. Cook, R. (1985). *Greek painted pottery*, Routledge, London.
9. Capponi, L. (2005). *Augustan Egypt: Creation of a Roman Province*, Routledge, NY.
10. Vandorpe, K. (2012). Identity in Roman Egypt, Ch 16. In: Riggs, C. (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 260-276.
11. Zaied, M. (2019). Publication and study of a rare terracotta piece from Naucratis preserved in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo", *IJHCS*, Vol. 5 (2), pp. 30-38.
12. Shier, L. (1906). *Terracotta lamps from Karanis*, University of Michigan Press, Michigan.
13. Bailey, D. (2006). Terracotta and plaster figurines, sealings and a stone group. In: Maxfield, V. & Peacock D. (eds). *Mons Claudianus 3, Ceramic vessels and related objects*, IFAO, Cairo, pp. 261-288,
14. Bailey, D. (1983). Terracotta revetments, figurines and lamps. In Henig, M. (ed.) *A Handbook of Roman Art*, Phaidon Press, pp 191-199.
15. Perdrizet, P. (1921). *Les terres cuites grecques d'Egypte de la collection Fouquet*, l'Université de Lorraine Presse, Paris.
16. Gazda, E. (2004). *Karanis: An Egyptian town in Roman times, Discoveries of the University of Michigan Expedition to Egypt 1924-1935*, Ann Arbor. Kelsey Museum Pub. 1., University of Michigan, USA.
17. Karoglou, K. (2016). The collection of Greek terracotta figurines at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Les Carnets de l'ACoSt*, Vol. 14, doi: 10.4000/acost.798.

18. Zaiied, M. (2020). The terracotta of Kyphosis old man from Fayoum preserved in Egyptian Museum in Cairo: publication and study, *IJHCS*, Vol. 6 (3), pp. 1-9.
19. Walters, H. (1903). *Catalogue of the terracottas in the British Museum*, British Museum Press, London.
20. Breccia, E. (1922). *Alexandria ad Ægyptum: A guide to the ancient and modern town, and to its graeco-roman museum*: Istituto italiano d'arti grafiche, Bergamo.
21. Török, L. (1995). *Hellenistic and Roman terracottas from Egypt*, L'ERMA di Bretschneider, Rome.
22. Breccia, E. (1943). Monuments de l'Égypte Gréco-Romaine. Tome 2 (1), Terrecotte figurate greche e grecoegizie del Museo di Alessandria, Société Royale D'archéologie D'Alexandrie, Bergamo.
23. Higgins, R. (1969). *Terracottas of Greek and Roman Antiquities in the British Museum*, British Museum Press, London.
24. Richter, G. (1946). *Attic red – figured vases*, Yale Univ. Press, London.
25. Dunand, F. (1990). *Catalogue des terres cuites Greco Romain d'Égypte* Réunion des musées nationaux, Paris.
26. Buckland. W. (2010). *The Roman law of Slavery: The condition of the Slave in private law from Augustus to Justinian*, Cambridge Univ. Press. London
27. Grenfell, P. & Hunt, A. (1916). P. Oxy. 12, 1451, Cambridge, University Library Add. Ms. 6359.
28. Straus, J. (2014). Slavery in Greco-Roman Egypt, law and legal practice in Egypt from Alexander to the Arab Conquest. In: Keenan, J. (eds) *Law and Legal Practice in Egypt from Alexander to the Arab Conquest. A Selection of Papyrological Sources in Translation, with Introductions and Commentary*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 452-461.
29. Bonanno, A. (1976). *Portraits and others heads on Roman historical relief up to the ages of Septimius Severus*, Anthony Bonanno, Oxford.
30. Qadus, E. (2000). A carved limestone head excavated in Hawara, Fayoum, preserved in the British Museum, *ArabArch J.* 1: 89-91.
31. Kleiner, D. (1992). *Roman sculpture*, Yale Univ. Press, New Haven.
32. Edgar, C. (1903). Greek Sculptur', *Catalogue general des antiquities, Egyptiennes du Musee du Caire*, Le Caire.
33. Grimm, G. (1974). *Die romische Mumienmasken aus Agypten*, F. Steiner, Wiesbadenn.
34. Doxiadis, E. (1995). *The mysterious Fayum portraits faces from ancient Egypt*, Thames & Hudson Ltd, London.
35. Ruiz, A. (2005). *Rouh Misr el-kadima (The spirit of ancient Egypt)*, Trans. by Yussuf, I., Supreme Council for Culture, Cairo.