



Five Terracotta Figurines Objects at the Coptic Museum: New Publishing

Asmaa Bahgat Mohamed Ahmed Alkady¹, Mervet Abd El Hady Abd Elatif², Samah Abd Alrhman Mahmood³, Hany Mohamed Roshdy²

¹ Postgraduate Student, Tourist Guiding Department, Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Fayoum University, Egypt.

² Tourist Guiding Department, Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Fayoum University, Egypt.

³ Tourist Guiding Department, Faculty of Tourism and Hotels, Minia University, Egypt.

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Coptic museum,
Coptic art,
terracotta figurines,
decorative motifs,
decorative techniques

ABSTRACT

This research concentrates on studying the multi-cultural collection of unpublished Teracotta figurines statuettes from Coptic museum in Cairo, discusses, investigates and analysis the decorative motifs and related techniques of this multi-cultural collection, with comparable models of other dated collections from other museums in order to compare them and dated these undated objects of the studied collection, in attempting to determine – as much as possible – approximate date. the research examines the decorative motifs employed to investigate the classical art styles that influenced the production of the objects of the studied collection.

1. Methodology

The study Based on the descriptive, analytical and comparative methodology.

Introduction:

* Coptic Terracotta Figurines:

Statuettes of Coptic terra-cotta figurines for popular have not received great attention from historians and archeologists. few studies have been dealt with them. they are of great artistic value as they are the best evidence for multi-cultural heritage of Coptic

art combined with ancient Egyptian, Hellenistic, and Roman artistic traditions. Despite the low cost or material row that they were made of, they are richly in iconographic, concept, and technique.

*Centers of Manufacture:

Coptic figurines have been excavated in pilgrimage centers such as Abu Mina which is considered one of the most important workshops provided many provenances with great amount of these figurines. (Martens, 1975, p. 75) Some female figurines were

found there near an oven of the workshop (Kaufmann et al., 1908, pp. 58–66).and from other sites of habitation like Ihnasyha ,Kôm el Dikka (Alexandrie) , Bawit, Medamoud,and Elephantine (Gempeler, 1976, p. 106).

Iconographic Types of Coptic figurines:

Coptic figurines in general and this collection in particular are varied in its form like female figurines, male, and animals' statuette (lion, camel, and horse) according to the purpose to which they were made and the workshop they were produced in.

Female Figurines

Coptic female figurines are represented in great variations. They are generally displayed standing, their legs joined, with numerous attitudes of the arms (one rested up on her abdomen in pregnancy attitude and headed statuette with coiffure (pl. Sometimes arms were crossed or raised up in a prayer attitude. They were known as votive statuettes. Some of them are carrying her children imitating Isis carrying her child "Hors", and holy virgin Mary with her child the Jesus Christ (pl .know .:II) those whom came from Abu Mina, (Kaufmann et al., 1908, p. 73, pl. 11, 18; Torok, 1993, p. 30).

These female statuettes are usually had some traditional features, they are wearing a long tunic of one piece decorated with vertical

bands on the chest and back. They are also wearing necklaces and bracelets. Their noses are modeled; their eyes, eyebrows, and mouths are painted black. Coptic museum contains unpublished large number of hollow figurines made in double mould and side partly or entirely hand modelled terracottas, dating from Coptic period have been found in great abundance from Nubia to Delta numerous iconographical types are presented. as well as a wide range of quality and styles of executions. most of the types seems to have remained in fashion for long periods, perhaps even for several countries the most enduring and popular types belongs to the representations of standing or seated elaborately dressed or naked female figures.

The standing figurines may raise her arms in the gesture of orans or put one hand on the abdomen and the other hand on her breast.

The standing female figurine in another group of the type variants holds a child in her arms (pl. II) and in another type they offer her breast to her child related to iconographical type of imitating Isis suckling her child "Horus". All subtypes go back to Hellenistic and Roman Egyptian prototypes and they are doubtlessly connected to similar or related beliefs and costumes .(Torok, 1993, p. 30)

The figurines produced at Abu Mena are remarkable by their fine pale yellow fabric and some of terracotta figurines of the studies

collection are fall within this type, - according to the Coptic museum records- are related to Abu Mena work shop .they are also of fine pale yellow fabric, the majority of these orans female figurines could also have been put or buried in burials and came from habitation sites.

female figurines preserved in Coptic museums are divided into two groups.

The first group of the female figurines were made with two techniques; heads and bodies molded, the arms and some accessories modeled the hair arranged in rolls, imitating Hellenistic, and Roman styles.

only the heads are preserved (pl. no .I).some of standing female figures are depicted with both hands positioned on or below , the breast or on the hips, holding an object such as a discus, a crown or a child (pl.II) They are excavated at Abu Mina (Kaufmann et al., 1908, p. pl. 73; Torok, 1993, p. 31) (see fig.1).

The second group is known as orants or votive statuette (fig.2), with arms raised or stretched out. They are made in molding techniques in two parts. The face with large eyes is sketched in with a stroke of paint, is crowned with a triangular coiffure and pierced at the top with a hole so that the figure

supposes to hang up. the hair in some styles is decorated with small circles with beads and bands . (شكل 14، 17، 8-7، ص. هرmina، 2011). (18) Two other holes in the ears for wearing earrings (Gempeler, 1976, p. 109). A necklace, from which a cross hung on some figurines, adorns the neck. Some references stated that the orants of female figurines imitating ancient Egyptian style of art and closely connected with the Hellenistic and Roman Isis-Aphrodite and her followers (Polaczek-Zdanowicz, 1975, pp. 136, 149).

- **Male Figurines:**

Male figurines are less common than female figurines. Abu Mina excavations, and Alexandria were the main sources for these types of terracotta statuettes who were widespread all over Egypt. these groups are varied between; horseman riding a horse (pl .III) , horseman in Hellenistic and roman styles but (without horse) (fig.3) (Kaufmann et al., 1908, p. pls. 74-75).

Although the bad state of preservation for this collection, they provided great artistic value because they present a combination of multi-cultural arts and heritages. They display different techniques molding and modeling as the previous collection of female figurines. They appeared to be wearing long garments. The hands are put on the hips, or crossed on the chest, or holding an object .(Kaufmann et al., 1908, p. pls. 75 (3, 10), 76 (14-16); Torok, 1993, p. 31)

In male figurines, the proportions is not successfully depicted in; the anatomy and the garments of the horseman .In modeled

figurines, the sense and details are highly developed in the pointed hat folded down in front and shield on the arm as seen in the head of Horus and the horseman pl .II) of the studied collection.

Horus Harpocrates

There is another type of Coptic male figurines of "Horus Harpocrates" represented child wearing a transparent garment showing the details of his body, all signs of childhood which reflects the ancient Egyptian influence are clearly represented in; finger in the mouth, the lock of his hair hanging down, and the baby face smile on his features (fig no.4) Also the Hellenistic influences clearly adopted in attitude and the garment.(pl. IV)

animal figurines:

Abu Mina excavations presents very unique collections of terracotta figurines for animals and winged creatures, among them lions and lionesses (goddess sehkmet of war in ancient Egypt) (pl. VI), horse headed (pl. V), dogs, gazelles, monkeys, and cockerels. (Kaufmann et al., 1908, p. pls. 77-78).

These figurines are usually covered with white paint, but some traces still exist. Animal figurines, like horses, lions, and camels are the most common among the figurines statuettes that existed in Coptic Museum. This group of animal figurines were executed with two main decorative

technique, Molding and modeling. they are also underlined by strokes of paint. (Ballet, 1991, p. 515).

Camels' statuette figurines were less familiar than horses and lions, and lionesses, are of very good technical quality. Some of them were found in Abu Mina and the other of Medamoud (Bisson de la Roque, 1930, p. 56, fig. 52)¹. (fig.: 5,6,7)

The purpose of these statuettes:

The general nature of ancient beliefs and customs as well as the ancient cultural heritages (ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Roman) may well explain how and why pagan beliefs represented in pagan figurines types were able to survive in the early Christian period and even constitute an important part of terracotta industry of the pilgrimage center around the tomb of ST. Menas. It appears that Coptic female figurines with or without child were bought and offered as ex-voto, by women who wanted to be cured from infertility wanted a safe delivery or simply needed super natural aid in matters of love and marriage(Wulff, 1909, p. 282).

Some of them – like camels and horses, dogs - serving as toys for children, and are buried with theme in their tombs. While some others

¹ Louvre, nos. E12781 and E14158

had great functions - maybe- as amulets protecting from evil spirits and bring benefits and preventing devil. As in the head statuette of goddesses "skhmet". as an inherited cultural heritage related to ancient Egyptians.

Dating of these terracotta figures of Abu Mena

Coptic style terracotta of the studies collection whom related to Abu Mena workshops could be date back to (5th -7th) century A.D , as they may be comparable with a group of Coptic style terracotta preserved in the museum of fine arts in Budapest. (Torok, 1993, p. 31).

Descriptive study

Pl.no. I

Inv.no:120

Coptic museum storeroom

Provenance: Abu Mena excavations.

Dimension: H.; 8. 5 diameters: 6 cm

Date: 6th 7th scenturies A.D.

Material: light yellow clay with white paint slip

Publishing: unpublished

Description:

Head of Coptic votive statue for a female. This fragment of a hollow statuette was made out of fine pale-yellow clay with traces of

white paint. the back of figurines is flat , while the face is modeled and has heavy slanting eyebrow , large slanting eyes painted in black, and the style of coiffeur recalls a highly characteristic features of Hellenistic art (Torok, 1993, pp. 28–31, figs. 28–29) the rest of the statuette is lost except for this head with a part of this neck . while the ears are pierced, and the head had a hole, maybe for hanging it, as it was served as an amulet or votive statuette.

Abu Mena figurines are easily recognizable by their fine pale-yellow fabric and related to 6th – 7th centuries A.D.

Parallel:

(Torok, 1993, p. pl. XXXII, G 15-16, pl. XXXV. G 20)

Pl.no. II

Inv.no:8108

Coptic museum storeroom

Provenance: Abu Mena excavations.

Dimension: H.8-5CM / 10CM. 2.5 cm

Date: 6th – 7th centuries A.D.

Material: coarse dark brick red clay

Publishing: unpublished

Description:

Solid statuette made in two worn moulds of coarse dark brick red clay with traces of straw

temper. traces of white painting on front and back

Roughly shaped female figure standing with a child sitting on her left arm the body of the mother is lost even the head or torso large flat semicircular headdress of the child carried out in roughly fabric.

Bibliography and parallels.

It may be comparable with (pl. no G7 v.no : szM 84.52 AD and PL. Gg no: S.M. 84.48.A in (Torok, 1993, p. 35)

Pl.No.. III

Inv.no:8053.

Coptic museum storeroom

Provenance: Abu Mena excavations.

Dimension: H: 6.7 cm

Date: 6th – 7th centuries A.D.

Material: fine pale-yellow marl clay

Publishing: unpublished.

Description:

This head of a horse man is a part of equestrian statuette, but the rest of the statue was damaged. it is made out of fine pale-yellow marl clay hand modelled fragment of equestrian statuette.

Rudimentarily modelled head of man large, pinched nose pointed chine he is wearing a curious bonnet like hat with the brim turned

up of over the forehead and the pointed tip rolled in at the front probably Thracian helmet is represented.

The statuettes of this type especially the equestrian statuettes: the style of helmet heads style suggests that piece related to the 5th – 7th century AD according to "Rodziewicz", and " Torok".

Bibliography and parallel:

(Rodziewicz, 1984, p. pl. 61/268)

(Torok, 1993, p. 52, figs. J6, J7)

Pl.No.: IV

Inv. No:11574.

Coptic museum storeroom

Provenance: Abu Mena excavations.

Dimension: H:11 cm

Date: 5th – 6th centuries A.D.

Material: red marl clay

Publishing: unpublished.

Description:

This statuette of " Horus Harpocrates, is another type of male figurines of Abu Mena excavations.it represents a child wearing a transparent garment showing the details of his body, and his belly stomach. all signs of childhood which were represented in ancient Egyptian art, and reflecting the ancient Egyptian influences, are clearly adopted in; finger in the mouth ,the lock of his hair hanging down, and the baby face smile on his features. Also, the Hellenistic influences clearly adopted in attitude and the garment.

This statuette has great artistic value for the combination of multi-cultural arts and heritages. it displays different techniques and styles (ancient Egyptian, Hellenistic, and Coptic) on one stylistic piece of

Bibliography and parallel:

This piece- may be -comparable with an almost identical piece preserved in the museum of fine arts Budapest no: T 417.fig.

(هرمينا, 2011, 8, شكل 11)

Pl.no: V

Inv.no: 10049

Coptic museum storeroom

Provenance: Abu Mena excavations.

Dimension: H. 11cm W. 7.5 cm

Date: 5th – 7th centuries A.D.

Material: fine pale-yellow marl clay

Publishing: unpublished.

Description:

A head of a horse, e it seems to be a fragment of equestrian statuette made out of medium coarse brick red Nile site hand modelled. the lower part of the horse including legs, tail, and may be the rider are missing.

The statuette is covered with traces of red and white paints. The detail of this head is perfectly performed in the white ribs around its neck imitating hair.

Bibliography pararel:

This piece related back to the 5th – 6th centuries AD as previous parallel. (Torok, 1993, pp. 33, J1, J2)

Pl. No: V I

Inv. No: 12299

Dimensions: H. 8.5 cm / W. 4 cm

Period :(6th – 7th) century AD.

Provenence Abu Mena excavations

Material: medium coarse of brick red Nile silt

Publishing: unpublished.

Description:

Lioness head goddess shmt statuette

This ex - voto head of goddess shmt of ancient Egypt in the form of a lioness, made out of medium coarse of brick red Nile silt. The head is depicted in a roughly manner without polishing or smoothness. the facial feature of the lioness is almost muted except for some details such as nose, mouth , part of its neck , and one eyes and ears .there is a holes hangs from its neck, indicating that it may be used as amulet and hanging in side Coptic tombs as a kind of protection and super power of the goddess "shmt" adopted by early Coptic and connected with ancient Egyptian heritage.

Results:

- This research published 5 unpublished masterpieces from Coptic Museum with unknown date. The researcher attempted – as much as possible to describe them and dated them by comparing this collection with another dated models from several museums such as, museum of fine art at Budapest, bearing –almost – identical decorative motifs and techniques.

- This study concludes, with conclusive evidence the purposes of such terracotta statuettes, where they were found in pilgrimage centers around the tomb of ST. Menas. They are dated back from the 5th to 7th centuries A.D. as they may be comparable with a group of Coptic style terracotta preserved in the museum of fine arts in Budapest.
- Coptic female figurines with or without child were bought and offered as ex-voto, by women who wanted to be cured from infertility wanted a safe delivery or simply needed supernatural aid in matters of love and marriage.
- Some of these animal terracotta figurines – like camels and horses, dogs - serving as toys for children, and buried with them in their tombs. While some others had great functions - maybe - as amulets protecting from evil spirits, bringing benefits and preventing the devil. Like in the head statuette of goddesses "skhmet". as an inherited cultural heritage related to ancient Egyptians cultural and heritage.

References

- Ballet, P. (1991). Coptic Ceramic. In Coptic Encyclopedia.
- Bisson de la Roque, F. (1885-1958). (1930). Rapport sur les fouilles de Médamoud (1930) (1931) (Vol. 8). Institut français d'archéologie orientale. <http://archive.org/details/FIFAO-8.1>
- Gempeler, R. (1976). Stadt und Tempel von Elephantine. Sechster Grabungsbericht. Mitteilungen Des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo, 32, 68–107.
- Kaufmann, C. M., Falls, J. C. E., & Hartmann, A. (1908). La Decouverte Des Sanctuaires De Menas Dans Le Desert De Mareotis. Kessinger Publishing.
- Martens, M. (1975). Figurines en terre cuite coptes découvertes à Kôm el Dikka (Alexandrie). Bulletin de La Société Archéologique d'Alexandrie, 43, 53–77.
- Polaczek-Zdanowicz, K. (1975). The Genesis and Evolution of the Orant Statuettes against a Background of Developing Coptic Art. Études et Travaux, 8, 135–149.
- Rodziewicz, M. (1984). Les habitations romaines tardives d'Alexandrie: À la lumière des fouilles polonaises à Kôm el-Dikka. Editions scientifiques de Pologne.
- Torok, L. (1993). Coptic Antiquities I: Stone Sculpture, Bronze Objects; Ceramic Coffin Lids and Vessels; Terracotta Statuettes, Bone, Wood, and Glass Artefacts. ... Extra Fines Hungariae Reperta). L'Erma Di Bretschneider.
- Wulff, O. (1909). Altchristliche und mittelalterliche byzantinische und italienische Bildwerke, I, Altchristliche Bildwerke (Königliche Museen zu Berlin. Beschreibung der Bildwerke der christlichen Epochen, 2).
- هرمينيا, ج. (2011). الفخار القبطي. دار الكتب.

Figures

Figure. 1: Models of female figures, representing women carrying their child, imitating Isis carrying God Horus, museum of fine art, Budapest.



after: (Torok, 1993, p. pl. G 33)

Figure. 2: Models of female figures, representing women as votive statuette museum of fine art, Budapest.



after: (Torok, 1993, p. pl. G 3).

Figure. 3: Models of male figures, representing a horseman and the horse is lost , museum of fine art, Budapest.



after :(Torok, 1993, p. pl. G).

Figure. 4: statuette of Horus Harpocratis, museum of fine art, Budapest.



after :(شکل 11, هر مینا, 2011).

Figure. 5: Comparable models of animal figurines (horses heads, and hoses with a horse men, Abu Mena excavations, museum of fine art, Budapest.



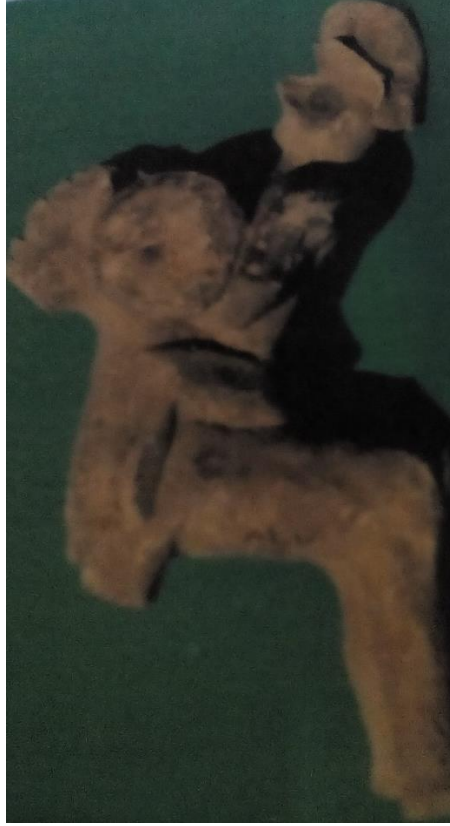
after :(Torok, 1993, p. pl. p 3).

Figure. 6: models of Coptic animal figurines of horses and horseman.



after :(Torok, 1993, p. pl. J (4-5)).

Figure. 7: models of Coptic animal figurines of horses and horseman, louvre museum.



after : (شكل 238, هر مينا, 2011)

Plates:



(Pl. I): Head of Coptic votive statue for a female, dates back from 6th to 7th centuries, Abu Mina excavations, Inv.no: 120 82, Coptic museum storeroom.



(Pl. II): figurine statuette of standing woman carrying a child, dates back from 6th to 7th centuries, Abu Mina excavations, Inv.no: 8108, Coptic museum storeroom.



(Pl. III): Head of a horse man, is a part of equestrian statuette, dates back from 6th to 7th centuries, Abu Mina excavations, Inv.no: 8053, Coptic museum storeroom



(Pl.IV): statuette of " Horus Harpocratis, Abu Mena excavations.it represents a child wearing a transparent garment showing the details of his body, coptic museum 4th -5th century A.D.



(Pl. V): A head of a horse or a fragment of equestrian statuette, dates back from 5th to 7th centuries, Abu Mina excavations, Inv.no: 10049, Coptic Museum storeroom.



(Pl. V I): Lioness head of goddess shmt, dates back from 5th to 7th centuries, Abu Mina excavations, Inv.no: 12299, Coptic Museum storeroom.