



Poli, Nicoletta

Collezione Tarentina del Civico Museo di Storia ed Arte di Trieste. Coroplastica Arcaica e Classica

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The volume examines a corpus of ca. 700 votive terracottas, the major part of the collection of artifacts from the Spartan colony of Tarentum (Taras) at the Civico Museo di Storia ed Arte in Trieste. The collection comprises objects bought in the antiquities market at the beginning of the 20th century. As a result, the exact archaeological context of these pieces remains unknown. The study is divided into two main parts. The first part discusses the creation of the collection and proposes a possible reconstruction of the original contexts of the artifacts. The second part consists of a catalogue of the terracotta objects.

The first part – further subdivided into smaller sections – provides the necessary information on the Tarentine collection. The author begins by tracing the origins of the collection, whose genesis is due to the antiquities market that flourished in Italy during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Most of the ca. 1900 objects at the Trieste Museum were purchased in Tarentum thanks to the intermediation of some of the most prominent protagonists of the antiquities market in Puglia between 1887 and 1894. Among them were also Vito Panzera and Giuseppe Sartorio, collectors who donated a conspicuous quantity of artifacts to the Museum. Given the ways in which the collection was formed, it comes as no surprise that the inventories and archives do not record any information or reference to the original context of the acquired objects. This makes a reconstruction of the cultic and cultural meaning of the objects particularly difficult. Next, Poli focuses on the original context of the analyzed material. To start, the author offers an overview of the historical and topographical framework of Greek Tarentum from its foundation at the end of the 8th century B.C. to the Roman conquest. Especially important is the brief history of the discovery of the Spartan colony. In the second half of the 19th century, when the ancient city was first discovered, the vast majority of the archaeological finds from cemeteries and votive deposits were recovered without recording any information about the exact provenances of the artifacts. The activity of Quintino Quagliati in Puglia between 1898 and 1927 represents a turning point in the history of archaeological research in the region. Quagliati promoted a modern and more scientific approach to archaeological investigations. Finally, from 1950 to 1970, archaeological research at Tarentum was intensified, although the main objective of these explorations was the recovery of finds rather than a careful analysis of archaeological contexts. It was only during the 1990s that a research project was set out to catalogue the ca. 12,000 tombs of the Tarentine cemeteries. In developing the catalogue, the researchers sought to reconstruct the original contexts of the artifacts in order to overcome the pervasive antiquarian and utterly outdated approach to Tarentine archaeology. Following the history of archaeological research in Tarentum, the author engages in a discussion of the vexata quaestio on the topographic distribution of the votive deposits of Tarentum. There are two main hypotheses on this issue. On the one side, C. Iacobone recognizes three sacred areas: the Fondo Giovinazzi, the area between the roads Minniti and F.lli Mellone, and Pizzone. This reconstruction does not really take into consideration the important fact that most of the votive deposits are located in funerary areas. According to Iacobone, the difficulty in interpreting the Tarentine votive deposits and their nature – funerary or not – depends on the limits of archaeological documentation or the lack thereof. On the other, E. Lipolis considers the topographic location of the votive deposits a crucial point for the understanding of their nature and meaning. He argues that the votive deposits located within the boundaries of a cemetery were certainly connected with funerary rituals rather than with other cult practices. Considering the interpretative problems with the original contexts of the votive deposits, Poli focuses her attention on the issue of the composition of the Tarentine votive deposits, which present a heterogeneous iconographic repertoire. In her interpretation of the attested repertoire, the author utilizes an approach that privileges the archaeological and thus cultural and social context of the terracotta objects. Attention is therefore shifted from the aesthetics of the object per se to the votaries, that is, to the social and historical context of the offering itself. In the last section of the introduction, the author proposes an interpretation of the original provenances of the analyzed terracotta objects. According to Poli's reconstruction, the objects come from both the deposit of Fondo Giovinazzi and that of Pizzone. Indeed, the discovery of the two deposits coincides with the creation of the collection. Poli's reconstruction is further corroborated by thematic and typological characteristics that both terracotta deposits and examples in the Museum's collection share. The Fondo Giovinazzi deposit was probably located within a sanctuary area situated at the Ospedale Militare. The site had an almost exclusive funerary function. Given the deposit's location within a cemetery and the huge quantity of terracotta figurines representing reclining males, the so-called recumbenti, it is plausible that the cult was associated with funerary ritual activities. According to the archaeological finds, the area was frequented from the late 6th to the 4th century B.C.. The votive deposit of Pizzone is located on the northeastern side of the modern city. Despite the lack of archaeological records, the study of the votive terracotta objects (female figurines, protomes with attributes associated with Demeter, animals, and a pottery inscription referring to Gaia dating to the 6th century B.C.) revealed the chthonic nature of the cult and its connection to the concepts of fertility and reproduction. The massive quantity of votive objects discovered at the site demonstrates that the sanctuary may have played a crucial role in the religious life of the polis.

The catalogue of the terracotta objects represents the second part of the volume. The catalogue entries are preceded by a brief in-

roduction, which provides technical information on the artifacts (clay, manufacturing details, typological classification criteria). Particularly valuable is a discussion on the methodological problems connected to the study of coroplastic art. Given the fact that in most publications there is only a very general reference to the term ‘type’, the distinction between coroplastic and iconographic types is of special interest. Whereas the coroplastic type is connected to techniques of manufacture, the iconographic type, on the other hand, is associated with representational schemata, which have nothing to do with technical factors. The catalogue, which accounts for the bulk of the volume, is chronologically organized in two parts. The first presents the Archaic terracotta objects, which range in date from the end of the 7th to the early 5th century B.C., while the second part is dedicated to the examples from the Classical period, which date more specifically from 480/460 B.C. to the last decades of the 4th century.

The terracotta figurines are divided into thematic groups according to their subject. The genesis, development, and chronology of these groups are fully illustrated and discussed in the sections that precede the catalogue entries on each group. Within these groups, the classification is based on the identification of the types. Each entry records the inventory number, state of conservation, measurements, type of clay, manufacture techniques, typological classification, chronology (or rather stylistic dating of the prototype, given the lack of archaeological provenance and context of the artifact), bibliography (if published), bibliographical references for comparanda, and a detailed description. The quality of the photographs is generally good, and they appear at the end of each section.

Altogether, Poli’s book is a very careful publication, which marks an important step both in reassembling the *disiecta membra* of the Tarentine votive deposits and reconstructing their historical and cultural nature. Beyond the important merit of classifying and dating the terracotta objects, the study deserves high praise for attempting to reconstruct the original context of the terracotta figurines of the Trieste Museum from the Tarentine deposits at Fondo Giovinazzi and Pizzone. As E. Lippolis points out in the prefatory pages to the volume, it is the meticulous archival research aimed at reconstructing the history of the Tarentine collection and the author’s profound knowledge of Tarentum and of the Tarentine votive deposits that have helped her reach such important conclusions on cults and ritual activities in Tarentum.

Therefore, and despite the limits imposed by the lack of archaeological context, Poli’s book is not merely a catalogue of fictile objects but rather a means for shedding invaluable light on ritual activities in the Spartan colony of Tarentum. In doing so and by being able to reconstruct their original context, Poli restored to the votive terracotta figurines in the Collezione Tarentina at the Trieste Museum their nature as historical and cultural sources.

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