

COROPLASTIC STUDIES IN THE EARLY 21ST CENTURY

BY JAIMEE PUGLIESE UHLENBROCK

CAMARINA: LE TERRECOTTE FIGURATE E LA CERAMICA DA UNA FORNACE DI V E IV SECOLO A.C., by *Marcella Pisani*. Pp. 249, b&w figs. 22, color figs. 11, b&w pls. 27, color pls. 5, tables 2. L'Erma di Bretschneider, Rome 2008. €140. ISBN 978-88-8265-482-5 (cloth).

MARESHA EXCAVATIONS FINAL REPORT II: HELLENISTIC TERRACOTTA FIGURINES FROM THE 1989–1996 SEASONS, by *Adi Erlich* and *Amos Kloner*. Pp. x + 189, b&w figs. 14, b&w pls. 51, color pl. 1, tables 19, plan 1. Israel Antiquities Authority, Jerusalem 2008. \$37. ISBN 978-965-406-212-1 (paper).

TANAGRÉENNES D'ALEXANDRIE: FIGURINES DE TERRE CUITE HELLÉNISTIQUES DES NECROPOLES ORIENTALES, by *Dominique Kassab Tezgör*. Pp. ix + 495, b&w pls. 81, color pls. 6. Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, Cairo 2007. €55. ISBN 978-2-7247-0462-4 (paper).

The study of terracotta figurines, or coroplastic studies, has benefited considerably over the last three decades from an increasing number of specialized monographs devoted to legally excavated, well-stratified corpora of Greek and Roman terracottas to iconographic and typological studies, as well as to museum and private collections and exhibitions of terracotta figurines.¹ Although the study and appreciation of Greek and Roman terracottas have their origins in the antiquarian interests of the 19th century, it is only recently that a specialized discipline has come of age with unique characteristics and problems. Recognition

of the need to enunciate and clarify these characteristics inherent in the study of mold-made terracotta objects and their processes of mass production led to the organization of the first international colloquium to focus on these issues. “Le moulage en terre cuite dans l'Antiquité” was held in Lille in 1995, and the colloquium proceedings, published in 1997,² contain 19 papers, of which two are devoted to the establishment of an international vocabulary, or lexicon, by which all phases of mass production, or derivative production, could be articulated.

It took more than 10 years for a second forum devoted to coroplastic studies to be organized. The “Izmir International Conference on Greek and Roman Terracottas in the Eastern Mediterranean,” held in 2007, had 160 participants presenting papers or posters, and the conference proceedings, when published, will contain some 100 articles. The impressive level of participation at the Izmir conference illustrates the increasing attention now being paid to coroplastic material, both by the specialist and by those new to coroplastic studies. This is also illustrated by the recent formation of the Coroplastic Studies Interest Group,³ which includes approximately 100 members from 18 countries. Researchers can now have a much greater grasp of the role played by terracotta figurines in the religious, social, domestic, economic, and political spheres of Greek and Roman life. Moreover, technical analyses of fabrics are beginning to reveal clay sources that have increased our understanding of the distribution of figurines and related objects, while analyses of pigment used for coloring

¹ Consult <http://www.coroplasticstudies.org/bibliography.html> for bibliographic references.

²Muller 1997.

³<http://www.coroplasticstudies.org>.

figurines promise to shed more light on the craft of the coroplast.

This evident intensification of interest in terracotta figurines has fueled the drive toward the study and timely publication of recently excavated material, as in the case of *Maresha Excavations Final Report II: Hellenistic Terracotta Figurines from the 1989–1996 Seasons*, as well as coroplastic corpora from excavations carried out over the course of the last century. The latter is the case for Pisani's *Camarina: Le terracotte figurate e la ceramica da una fornace di V e IV secolo a.C.*, whose material was excavated in 1968, and Kassab Tezgör's *Tanagréennes d'Alexandrie: Figurines de terre cuite hellénistiques des necropoles orientales*, which focuses on figurines brought to light during sporadic campaigns carried out between 1905 and 1950. The differing contexts presented by these publications (domestic for Maresha, industrial for Camarina, funerary for Alexandria) highlight the ubiquitous presence of these modest items in most aspects of Greek life.

Pisani's volume examines the finds from the Provide kiln site, a small industrial complex located outside the walls of Camarina in southeastern Sicily, where the production of terracotta figurines, pottery, terracotta antefixes, and other household items took place variously from the last quarter of the fifth century B.C.E. into the third quarter of the fourth. While it is recognized that the entire Provide corpus and its kiln make up an important complex for the history of Camarina, only the coroplastic material is discussed in this review. This is of particular interest, as it fills a gap in our knowledge of coroplastic activity at Camarina and highlights the role it played as an important terracotta-producing center during the turbulent reigns of the Syracusan tyrants Dionysios I and his son Dionysios II. The nearly 200 terracotta figurines, pottery, seven mold fragments, and at least one antefix were discarded over time, outside the kiln itself in a dump that lacked any clear stratigraphic demarcation. Nevertheless, an attentive study of the pottery revealed three distinct phases of activity, characterized by intensification—and then slackening off—of coroplastic production.

The first phase of activity, dated by the pottery from the third quarter of the fifth century B.C.E. to the beginning of the fourth, is characterized by the greatest concentration of terracottas (although of a limited number of types) and the presence of figurine molds. The second phase covers the first half of the fourth

century, during which time the production of figurines seems to have waned, although that of pottery accelerated. During the third phase of activity, from the mid fourth century into its third quarter, the figurines were few in number, while the increase in pottery production continued. It was here with this most recent material that a single terracotta antefix was found.

In all, some 197 terracotta figurines were brought to light. These are presented in a traditional catalogue format that is organized according to typology. Pisani contends that this material illustrates a lively local production that betrays reciprocal influences involving the products of Gela, Agrigento, and Syracuse, among other terracotta-producing centers of southeastern and south-central Sicily at the end of the fifth century B.C.E. and into the first quarter of the fourth. At the same time, the material demonstrates what she calls an autonomy of expressive language and a creative force that sets it apart. She believes that the prototypes for these figurines originated at different centers in eastern and south-central Sicily, rather than at Syracuse alone, and rejects the long-held idea of a cultural or artistic koine for the first half of the fourth century.

The general typological range of the figurines from the Provide kiln site is rather limited and suggests that the coroplast or coroplasts using that kiln specialized. Thus, the most numerous figurines are female pig holders, of which one mold type in particular, based on a Geloan model of the late fifth century, is known in more than 50 replicas, while five other types of pig holders are represented by multiples that range from two to seven examples. A disparate group of figurines of Sicilian Artemis make up the second most numerous of the iconographic themes from the Provide dump, with 45 examples showing late fifth- to early fourth-century types of Artemis variously standing with a deer or dog and a mid fourth-century type of Artemis seated on a deer. These are of particular importance to Pisani, who believes that they attest to an Artemision at Camarina, which, however, is still to be discovered. Seventeen figurines, from the same mold or mold family, of a seated female type were elaborated to represent Athena Ergane by the addition of hand-modeled arms and a helmet that Pisani believes to have been inspired by the helmet of the Athena Parthenos. For her, this reflects the privileged relationship that Camarina had with Athens, which also is documented by the

increased amount of Attic pottery at the site. A few other types also were found, but in single numbers.

The inclusion, in catalogue format, of every terracotta fragment belonging to a given type is much appreciated by this reviewer, as this highlights the extent to which certain types were produced. Equally as profitable would have been the mention in the catalogue of the particular phase of activity at the kiln within which a particular fragment was found. This surely would have helped the reader to understand better the production duration of a given type. Also absent is any consideration of coroplastic technique, which ideally also should include a discussion of clay and possible clay sources. While this is not a “terracotta book” per se—since pottery also is discussed at length, as is the kiln itself—nevertheless, in the opinion of this reviewer, technical observations would have deepened our understanding of the craft of the artisans who used the Provide kiln. While this aspect of coroplastic studies often is the least interesting to read, it frequently is the most rewarding in bringing the reader as close as possible to the hands of the coroplasts, as can be seen in Kassab Tezgör’s study of the Alexandrian Tanagras. In particular, the seven mold fragments that received lengthy iconographic discussions should have been looked at from a technical perspective as well. An attentive examination of their interior surfaces might have prevented the continual use of the term “matrice stanca” for figurines believed to have been produced from molds that were worn out from use. This is a concept that needs to be reexamined. A figurine that lacks clarity of detail was more likely the product of a later phase of derivative production during which these details became progressively indistinct. The mold that produced such a figurine also could have been fresh, rather than worn, if it was molded from a figurine of a later generation.

That said, this book is a welcome addition to the literature on Sicilian terracottas, particularly those of the late fifth and first half of the fourth centuries B.C.E. This is a period for which much evidence has been brought to light but on which relatively little has been published thus far. The evidence Pisani presents in support of activity at the Provide kiln site both before and immediately after the destruction of Camarina by the Carthaginians in 405 is compelling and suggests that this event was not as disastrous to life in the city

as previously thought. The addition of new mold types, based on models from elsewhere in south and southeastern Sicily that Pisani ascribes to the ingenuity of the Camarinan coroplasts, sheds further light on the complex interconnections that characterize terracotta production in Sicily at the end of the fifth and into the fourth century. The publication of this modest ensemble of terracottas from Camarina and the resulting new picture it presents for coroplastic production during the reigns of the Dionysioi throw into even higher relief the necessity for publication of the massive coroplastic corpora from the Piazza San Francesco in Catania; from the Piazza della Vittoria, Scala Greca, and Belvedere in Syracuse; and from Eoro, among other places in eastern Sicily. Until this material becomes available for comparison, all attempts to reconstruct reciprocal influences must remain tentative.

The second book under review, *Maresha Excavations Final Report II: Hellenistic Terracotta Figurines from the 1989–1996 Seasons*, by Erlich and Kloner, focuses on a corpus of Hellenistic terracottas from Maresha, an Idumean city in the southern Levant. Another assemblage of figurines from the Iron Age through the Persian period is undergoing study, as are the Hellenistic figurines found since 1997. All these terracottas were recovered mostly from subterranean complexes beneath residential areas of the lower city.

In the Hellenistic period, Maresha was one of the most important centers of Idumea and had a culture that was strongly affected by its mixed population of Edomeans, Greeks, Egyptians, and Phoenicians, among others. Thus, the typological range of the Hellenistic terracottas discussed by Erlich and Kloner make up the kind of heterogeneous assemblage of disparate types that one would expect to find in the houses of an eastern city of mixed population during the Hellenistic period. These terracottas comprise a relatively small corpus of 283 objects, including 17 plastic vases, a group of 18 figured rhyta, and eight molds, all of the Hellenistic period and all dating from the late fourth century B.C.E. to 112–111 B.C.E., when the city was abandoned. However, subsequent discoveries of terracottas at Maresha have more than doubled this corpus since the present study was concluded, and the quantity is expected to continue to increase, given the ongoing archaeological campaigns. The rapid publication of this first group of figurines was driven by the knowledge that—even as an

incomplete corpus—it would be the largest assemblage of Hellenistic terracottas from Israel to be published, and thus could provide a valuable backdrop against which future discoveries of terracottas could be studied.

The catalogue, which forms the core of this study, is similar to that of Pisani's, with a discussion of related iconographic types followed by detailed catalogue entries that also include clay color referenced by the Munsell Soil Color Chart. The terracottas in the catalogue, while fragmentary, present a typology that is extremely varied, with only a few figurines being mold related. This alone suggests that the coroplastic industry at Maresha must have been much more prolific than discoveries to date have suggested. Petrographic analyses have confirmed the Maresha origin of the majority of terracottas, so this broad typological spectrum was not due to imports, although a few imported figurines and plastic vases have been found.

The local figurine types make up provincial versions of known Hellenistic themes, such as standing draped females, nude males, kourotrophoi, hydrophoroi, Erotes standing and on horseback, musicians, figure groups, and some theatrical types, among others, as well as an unusual type of rider on a dromedary, documented in at least five examples from the same mold. All these figurines, stylistically attributable to the Hellenistic period, are accompanied by a remarkable group of un-Hellenistic "pillar" figurines thus far unique to Maresha and its vicinity, which are composed of lumpish, cylindrical forms that carry crude, moldmade faces and hand-modeled breasts. Also present are imported and local Magenta Ware and Black-Slipped Ware and a disparate group of figured rhyta, purportedly the only ones known in Israel from the Hellenistic period. These include a small group of hand-modeled horse rhyta executed with such crudeness and naïveté that, were it not for their Hellenistic contexts, could easily be assigned a much earlier date.

Of particular interest are three molds of similar fabric that were found together, from which actual figurines were made. Although no evidence for a workshop is at hand thus far, the presence of molds and figurines related to those molds strongly suggests that one could have been located in the vicinity. According to Erlich and Kloner, these workshops were not those of coroplasts who specialized in figurines, but rather were places where artisans

also produced moldmade lamps and plastic vases. They believe that this could account for the total lack of coroplastic skill demonstrated by the majority of local figurines.

A chapter devoted to production methods and technique highlights this aspect of the Maresha corpus. Many terracottas produced in these workshops, while generally related to Greek forms of expression, are striking for their extraordinary technical clumsiness and misunderstanding of the natural world. These are the unifying features of a coroplastic corpus that otherwise is especially distinctive in its lack of a stylistic, iconographic, or thematic cohesiveness.

It is clear that these terracottas provide tantalizing glimpses into the cultural preferences of the inhabitants of Maresha, about which little has been known. It also is obvious that this publication breaks new ground in its examination of a local coroplastic industry in the eastern Mediterranean during the Hellenistic period, for which few parallels are at hand. One can only assume that this is the reason the authors continually look to distant, but well-known, sites, such as Corinth, for explanations and comparable material. The researcher not familiar with this material might be led to believe (falsely) that some special relationship between the two cities is being inferred.

Nevertheless, this introduction to the coroplastic industry of a city in the southern Levant during the Hellenistic period increases one's desire to know more about the figurines from subsequent seasons, and it is hoped that these will be published with the same speed as the present volume. The scrappy coroplastic evidence currently at hand in this volume for the identification of the popular cults of Maresha (e.g., one Aphrodite, four Athenas, four Artemids, two bearded males, who could be Asklepios) needs to be weightier before any worthwhile observations can be made, as the authors themselves have noted. But based on the meticulous and careful presentation, the future researcher can be assured that Erlich and Kloner will extract every shred of evidence from the as yet unpublished figurines, and that better documentation for these popular cults will result.

Completely different in approach is Kassab Tezgör's *Tanagrénnes d'Alexandrie: Figurines de terre cuite hellénistiques des necropoles orientales*. The goal of this study is an examination of the Hellenistic coroplastic production of Alexandria, using as a vehicle selected figurines from

Alexandria's eastern necropoleis of Chatby, Ibrahimieh, and Hadra. In the course of this examination, the author attempts to trace each phase in the life of these figurines, from their manufacture to their sale and ultimately to their final deposition.

To realize this goal, Kassab Tezgör singles out 272 mostly unpublished examples from all the Alexandrian Tanagras now in the Graeco-Roman Museum. Her choices are governed by the presence of particular iconographic, stylistic, serial, or technical characteristics that she believes are illustrative of Alexandrian coroplastic production and which can be fixed in time by the associated funerary contexts within which each figurine was found. Of special importance are the serially related figurines that occur in different Alexandrian burials. In this way, Kassab Tezgör is sometimes able to determine their physical relationship to other Tanagras from the eastern necropoleis. The complex network of interrelated figurines from the Alexandrian cemeteries revealed by this approach results in a coherent relative chronology for the production of Tanagras at Alexandria.

A highly detailed catalogue is organized according to necropolis and then by reconstructions of individual burials rather than by typology. While it is more difficult for the researcher to find parallels in a catalogue of this nature, the advantage of seeing figurines on the same pages that were found together in the same grave far outweigh the inconvenience of having to flip through the plates to find a specific type. A good case in point is the coroplastic Ensemble 03 from Chatby, which includes 12 figurines; three come from the same mold but share a head with another figurine of a different iconographic body type, and five are from two generations of the same mold series. Thus, the emphasis Kassab Tezgör places on the information provided by these discrete funerary ensembles renders more plausible her supposition that such groups were purchased together from the same workshop for that specific deposition in which they were found.

A selection of the Alexandrian figurines is attributed to 12 iconographic groups on the basis of posture, gesture, and drapery, as they correspond to these features in Attic and Boeotian figurines. This naturally results in the grouping

together of all figurines from the same series, whether they are from Attica, Boeotia, or Alexandria. Consequently, in some cases, Kassab Tezgör is able to trace the genealogy of specific Alexandrian figurines back to their Attic or, in most cases, Boeotian prototypes. But this also results in the recognition that at least four iconographic types, one of a siren and three representing boys wearing a *kausia*, who are either standing, seated, or on horseback, are unparalleled outside Alexandria and therefore must be local creations.

Meticulous examinations of technique and style result in the recognition of three homogeneous categories of figurines: the pre-Tanagran, the Tanagran, and the post-Tanagran, with the Tanagran category recognized as distinctly Alexandrian and dating to the first three-quarters of the third century B.C.E. The post-Tanagran figurines, dating as late as the early second century B.C.E., present a more varied typology and are considered to be local reinterpretations, rather than copies, of mainland Greek models. It is among these post-Tanagran figurines that the use of plaster molds can be detected.

For the researcher who focuses on coroplastic issues, Kassab Tezgör's examination of the stages of derivative production for the Alexandrian figurines may be of special interest. While she already has outlined this in the Lille colloquium proceedings of 1997,⁴ the present volume allows for a more extensive discussion. Referring to the techniques of present-day artisans in Provence known as *santonniers*, who make terracotta figurines for nativity scenes, Kassab Tezgör notes that the original hand-modeled archetype is never fired and consequently is destroyed in the process of extracting it from the mold. She believes that this also may have been the case in ancient Greek workshops, where only one mold, which she calls the "moule-mère," could ever have been produced from any given hand-modeled archetype. Thus, from this mother mold were descended intermediate prototypes in the form of casts, and from these casts, "moule de travail," or working molds, were taken. She believes that these were not used for mass production, however, but rather were kept as a kind of archive. These working molds produced figurines that served as secondary prototypes, which could be varied at will. It was

⁴Kassab Tezgör and Abd'el Fattah 1997.

only at this stage, according to Kassab Tezgör, that true mass production began, with these figurines serving as secondary prototypes for secondary working molds. While this reviewer is not convinced that an unfired archetype can be demonstrated with the material at hand, Kassab Tezgör's departure from the generally accepted principles of derivative, or serial, production emphasizes the need for continued discussion of this aspect of coroplastic studies, for which scholars still have not reached consensus.

The final chapter of the book is dedicated to workshops, artisans, and clientele. Kassab Tezgör argues for the presence of coroplasts' workshops, or at least stalls, near the necropoleis, although none has been revealed to date. These, she proposes, belonged to Greek artisans, rather than to Egyptians, given the purely Greek character of the iconography and technique of the figurines. However, she is careful to add that this proposition is not based on the presence of Athenian or Boeotian coroplasts at Alexandria but rather on the general artistic milieu of the time and the economic ties that Alexandria had with the Greek mainland. Those who bought these figurines also were Greeks, who at times purchased from one workshop groups belonging to the same mold series or related molds for the specific purpose of a burial. That multiple examples of a single figurine type were chosen by an individual to accompany the deceased suggests to Kassab Tezgör the particularly funerary nature of these figurines, whose repetition in the grave reveals the insistence on their funerary symbolism that the individual wished to convey.

It is clear that *Tanagréennes d'Alexandrie* was written for the specialist. The exacting catalogue entries and intricate presentation of the iconographic groups, not to mention the complexity of Kassab Tezgör's concept of derivative production, are not for the fainthearted or those unfamiliar with publications treating coroplastic material. However, the last two chapters admirably summarize the conclusions reached by means of the detailed study of these figurines and render this book accessible to a much wider audience. The superb illustrations, which include alternate views of many figurines, reach a level of quality that is not often matched in coroplastic publications.

In only one aspect of this study would this reviewer caution the reader to be particularly attentive. Many of Kassab Tezgör's conclusions are prefaced by "probablement," "il est tout à fait probable que," "on peut supposer," and "selon toute vraisemblance," among other such phrases. While probable behaviors are often the only characteristics that can be deduced from a given body of archaeological evidence, once they appear in print they often become established in subsequent archaeological literature as actual behaviors, in spite of the original author's intention to indicate the absence of absolutes.

The three publications discussed in this review make important contributions to our understanding of Greek terracotta production, distribution, and reciprocal influences at their respective sites. Pisani eloquently and persuasively argues for continuous coroplastic and ceramic activity at Camarina during the period of the two Dionysioi and defines the independent and creative impulses of the local coroplasts. Erlich and Kloner present a body of material that effectively opens a new chapter on coroplastic research of the Hellenistic period in the Levant, while Kassab Tezgör unravels the complicated relationships that existed between Alexandrian Tanagras and those of Attica and Boeotia, and proposes a new model for derivative production.

DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
NEW PALTZ, NEW YORK 12561
UHLENBRJ@NEWPALTZ.EDU

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