

## NEW BOOK ON EARLY CRETAN TERRACOTTAS

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*FRÜHE MATRIZENGEFORMTE TERRAKOTTEN AUF KRETA.**VOTIVPRAXIS UND GESELLSCHAFTSSTRUKTUR IN SPÄTGEOMETRISCHER UND FRÜHARCHAISCHER ZEIT*

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Not only is the island of Crete the place where the use of molds enabling the serial production of clay plaques and figurines is first attested in the Greek world, it is also by far the richest source of early moldmade terracottas. In this book, the moldmade Cretan terracottas of the Late Geometric and Early Archaic period are comprehensively examined for the first time. In addition to the better known material, I present several previously unpublished figurines and plaques. The study, originally submitted as a doctoral dissertation at the University of Jena in 2008, provides a detailed discussion of the typology, production, iconography, and chronology of the material. My primary interest in writing this book, however, was to correlate the consumption patterns of early moldmade terracottas with the social structure of the Cretan communities of the late 8<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.

The first chapter focuses on a general typology of early moldmade Cretan terracottas, as well as different aspects of their production, including manufacturing technique, workshop organization, and social status of coroplasts. As for the typology, two main variants of moldmade terracottas can be discerned. The more common variant is the single standing female—and, exceptionally, male—figurine with flat or slightly convex back (Fig. 1). These plaque-like figurines, which I refer to as *Relieffiguren* in the German text, have consistently been associated with the Near Eastern “Astarte plaques” in previous scholarship. In fact, it has been argued that the Cretan terracotta plaques showing naked or dressed females typologically depend on their Near Eastern counterparts. However, a number of reasons clearly speak against this assumption. Recent finds and the restudy of already known material indicate that the mold technique is documented in Crete well before the first moldmade plaques depicting naked female figures appear. Furthermore, Crete has yet to yield a single imported Near Eastern “Astarte plaque”. On the other hand, typological and stylistic features link the Cretan terracotta plaques with imported Near Eastern ivory handle or ap-



Fig. 1: Left. Plaque-like figurine from Gortyn (Courtesy Scuola Archeologica Italiana di Atene)

Fig. 2: Above. Cut-out relief plaque from Gortyn (Courtesy Scuola Archeologica Italiana di Atene)

plique figures and their local imitations. It is therefore much more likely that the Cretan plaques imitate such ivory carvings in a cheaper material. The appearance of the plaque-like clay figurines is thus probably related to an increasing demand for readily available objects resembling luxury items, such as ivory handle and applique figures. A closer look at an early example (Fig. 2) of the second typological variant, the rectangular relief plaque or pinax, pro-

vides additional evidence for the notion that the Cretan moldmade terracottas were inspired by imported Near Eastern ivory carvings and their local Greek imitations. The background of the relief has been cut away along the outline of the sphinx. This feature clearly resembles cut-out ivory plaques depicting animals and mythical creatures. Moreover, it has not been noticed so far that the Cretan cut-out clay plaques are early forerunners of the so-called Melian reliefs.

In the second chapter, more than 40 sanctuary and settlement contexts yielding early moldmade terracottas are investigated. Findspots are concentrated in the east of the island, namely, in the Lasithi Plain and around Praisos and Lato. In central Crete there are numerous finds from two sanctuaries at Gortyn and Axos, whereas in western Crete moldmade terracottas are unattested before the Classical period. Occurring only very rarely in habitations and completely lacking in burials, the vast majority of the plaques and figurines were dedicated as personal votive offerings in cult places. Moreover, moldmade terracottas are especially common in sanctu-

aries situated in suburban locations. At these cult places, usually sacred to female deities, community-based ritual activities, which reinforced local identities, were likely to have been performed. Conversely, moldmade plaques and figurines are notably absent from the large, extrurban cult places, such as the sanctuaries of Zeus in the Idaean Cave and at Palaikastro. This is probably due not only to the fact that terracottas are primarily associated with cults of female deities, but also to the comparatively low intrinsic value of the plaques and figurines. In extrurban sanctuaries, members of the aristocratic elite engaged in competition by means of the dedication of precious metal objects, such as tripods and shields in bronze. It seems that clay plaques and figurines were unattractive to cult participants interested in social representation and competition through the dedication of costly votive offerings.

The third chapter deals with the iconography, stylistic development, and absolute chronology of the early Cretan moldmade terracottas. As already pointed out, plaque-like figurines showing naked and dressed females form the largest group of moldmade terracottas. Figurines depicting males occur in small numbers at two sites in East Crete, Lato and Anavlochos. The pinakes offer a much wider range of iconographic schemes. At Praisos, three plaque types belonging to the earliest stylistic group show naked dancers and armed warriors. In addition, a plaque type representing a dressed youth (Fig. 3) was widely diffused in East Crete in the later 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Plaques with sphinxes and, more rarely, griffins, lions, and panthers were widespread in both central and east Crete. Moreover, single plaque types show multiple figures, the Mistress or Master of Animals, and so-called *hieros gamos* scenes. Of particular interest are the few plaques with mythological representations. Even though confined to a handful of types, kourtophonic imagery occurs with both plaque-like figurines and relief plaques. As for the relative and absolute chronology, the material is divided into 5 stylistic groups comprising the period from the late 8<sup>th</sup> to the first quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. In fact, the above-mentioned plaque types of Late Geometric style from Praisos suggest that the series



Fig. 3: Relief plaque from Praisos (Courtesy Musée du Louvre)

of Cretan moldmade terracottas started somewhat earlier than formerly assumed. In addition, I propose to date several east Cretan plaque types to the first decades of the 6<sup>th</sup> century rather than to the late 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C., as they previously have been assigned.

In order to draw further conclusions about the consumption of moldmade terracottas—particularly the occasions of their dedication—the fourth chapter of the study examines the specific meaning of the different iconographic schemes. The main focus here is on the association of terracotta dedications with maturation rites, an aspect that has been much emphasized in recent research.<sup>1</sup> Although this undoubtedly is a valuable interpretation, it should not be pushed too far. It has recently been argued that the Cretan plaque-like figurines were dedicated in the context of rites of passage for girls. However, the youthful appearance of the idealized female figures appearing on the plaques should not be taken as an actual reference to the age of their dedicants. Consequently, it would be reductive to exclusively link this imagery with a specific age group. The dedica-

tion of such votive offerings most likely involved a wider range of concerns, probably including human fecundity, as well as female sexuality and health in general. Another important issue dealt with in the final section is the gender and social status of the dedicants. We can assume a certain degree of identification between the female and male imagery of the figurines and plaques (Figs. 1, 3) and their donors, and therefore it seems plausible that moldmade terracottas were dedicated by both sexes. As rather unexpensive items, moldmade terracottas must have been easily accessible. However, it would be fallacious to conclude that they were solely dedicated by members of the lower social strata. In fact, the consumption patterns suggest that those better-off—adhering to common votive practices in suburban sanctuaries—likewise dedicated moldmade plaques and figurines.

Typological and stylistic similarities imply that moldmade Cretan terracottas initially imitated ivory carvings and were produced in response to a growing demand for votive offerings resembling such luxury items. Throughout the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C., moldmade clay figurines and plaques were predominately dedicated in important suburban sanctuaries. The fairly homogenous character of the votive offerings indicates that the rituals performed at these cult places fulfilled integrative functions by means of creating and reinforcing collective identities—and it is not by coincidence that the rise of these suburban community sanctuaries occurred in concomitance with the emergence of the polis as a new form of political and social organization.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>See also O. Pilz, Some Remarks on Meaning and Function of Terracotta Relief Plaques Depicting Naked and Dressed Female Figures, in C. PRÉTRE (ed.), *Le donateur, l'offrande et la déesse: systèmes votifs des sanctuaires de déesses dans le monde grec*. Actes du 31<sup>e</sup> Colloque international organisé par l'URM Halma-Ipel (Université Charles-de-Gaulle/Lille 3, 13-15 décembre 2007 (*Kernos* suppl., 23), Liège 2009, pp. 97-110.

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