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# Cyrenaica in Antiquity

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Graeme Barker, John Lloyd and  
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# **B.A.R.**

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## **25. Terracotta Figurines from the Demeter Sanctuary at Cyrene : Models for Trade**

**J. Pugliese Uhlenbrock**

During the course of ten seasons of excavation in the Demeter Sanctuary at Cyrene by the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania, an enormous quantity of terracotta figurines was brought to light. In comparison to bulk finds of figurines at sanctuaries elsewhere, the ensemble from the Demeter Sanctuary is one of the richest known in the eastern Mediterranean. More than 4500 mould-made figurines were recovered, together with masses of pottery fragments, marble sculpture, bronzes, lamps, coins, glass, inscriptions and miscellaneous small finds which formed part of the fill of the Middle Sanctuary (White, 1981:12). Of all the classes of objects found the figurines are the most numerous and are the only class which provides a continuous sequence of votives from the early 7th century BC through the 2nd century AD (Plate 25.I, 1-2). The majority of the early figurines were imported, in the early 7th century from Rhodes and perhaps Crete, in the 6th century from Ionia and later, to a lesser degree, from Corinth. In addition, for the late 6th and 5th centuries there are representative figurines from almost every major manufacturing centre, from Sicily to Ionia, with a least one example of almost every known type. The richness of the ensemble and the sheer numbers of figurines found provide excellent evidence to lend support to theories I have developed concerning the terracotta figurine trade, particularly in the Archaic Period. This is the period during which figurines were most widely exported from just a few manufacturing centres.

The presence of imported figurines in archaic votive deposits provides evidence for overseas traffic which obviously can be used to illustrate deliberate overseas trade of various types, or immigration. The quantity of figurines found is often the determining factor in the recognition of which kind of overseas traffic occurred. This clearly is telling for the social and economic history of a site. For example, among the earliest terracottas recovered from the Demeter Sanctuary are ten fragments of Daedalic figurines. Together they form a homogeneous group stylistically related in some respects to Cretan sculpture (Rizza, 1967:231, 9). As motives for their transport to Cyrene one is tempted to consider early colonial or even pre-colonisation trade, perhaps from Crete. However, variations in the shape of faces, which





1



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Plate 25.I Terracotta figurines from the Demeter Sanctuary at Cyrene

range from strict triangles with coarse features (Plate 25.I, 3) to a more rectangular outline (Plate 25.I, 4), suggest that as many as 70 years may separate some from others. Spread across the 7th century these ten figurines can hardly reflect mercantile activity. Instead, more likely agents for their appearance at Cyrene are the early immigrants for whom a Cretan association is historically documented (Herodotus 4.151, 3).

For the early years of the 6th century the continued sporadic appearance of imported figurines perhaps from Ephesos (Plate 25.II, 1), or Sparta (Plate 25.II, 2), also cannot be taken as a significant indicator of overseas commerce. Clear evidence for actual trade is only apparent from the middle of the 6th century when there is a sudden increase in the number of imported figurines from Ionia, an increase unrelated to the distribution of pottery at the site and therefore unrelated to demographic changes. The middle of the 6th century also witnessed the beginning of a rather poor and limited local production.

While investigations have been made on the nature of the pottery trade (Cook, 1959; Finley, 1979; Hoppér, 1979), little has been written concerning the mechanisms behind the distribution of terracotta figurines. It should be noted that imported figurines do not necessarily accompany the imported pottery of a given site. Masses of Early Corinthian vases were found at the Demeter Sanctuary, yet no Early Corinthian figurines have been brought to light, unlike their frequent appearance in mainland Greek contexts (Stillwell, 1952); nor are there any archaic Attic figurines found with the volume of Attic black figure pottery. The nature of the commerce involved in the exporting of figurines clearly sometimes must have differed from that of pottery. Being non-utilitarian objects, and therefore having a more limited market value, figurines were most likely produced in more limited quantities. Yet, figurines were obviously mass-produced and, judging from the numbers of imports uncovered in many deposits, were produced in excess of local demands, presumably for an export trade. It is the mechanisms of this trade that warrant a more detailed examination.

The contents of more than 40 archaic votive deposits have been examined by this author as part of a continuing survey of 6th century votive ensembles containing a predominance of figurines. This survey has revealed that by the second half of the 6th century many sites around the Mediterranean had workshops actively producing figurines of a distinctive local typology.

Yet only the products of an unnamed East Greek centre, believed to have been located on Rhodes (Breitenstein, 1945:123), Samos (Diehl, 1964:493) or perhaps Miletos (Boardman, 1966:75), those from Corinth, and, towards the turn of the century, Attic figurines were actually widely traded outside of their immediate neighbourhoods. A quantitative study of the East Greek and Corinthian figurines found at each of these 40 sites has resulted in the recognition of possibly three different kinds of commerce.

The first is a classic bulk trade, recognisable particularly at Sicilian sites. To account for this bulk trade one may reconstruct a hypothetical situation. Naukleroi, or merchant shippers, receive repeated orders for, let us say, 300 or 400 East Greek figurines which are to be sold directly to the inhabitants of a given city to satisfy their cultic needs. Such may have been the case at Gela where homogeneous groups of hundreds of figurines contemporary with one another, and representing relatively few mould families, can be documented over a period of roughly 30 years (Orlandini, 1966:24). It



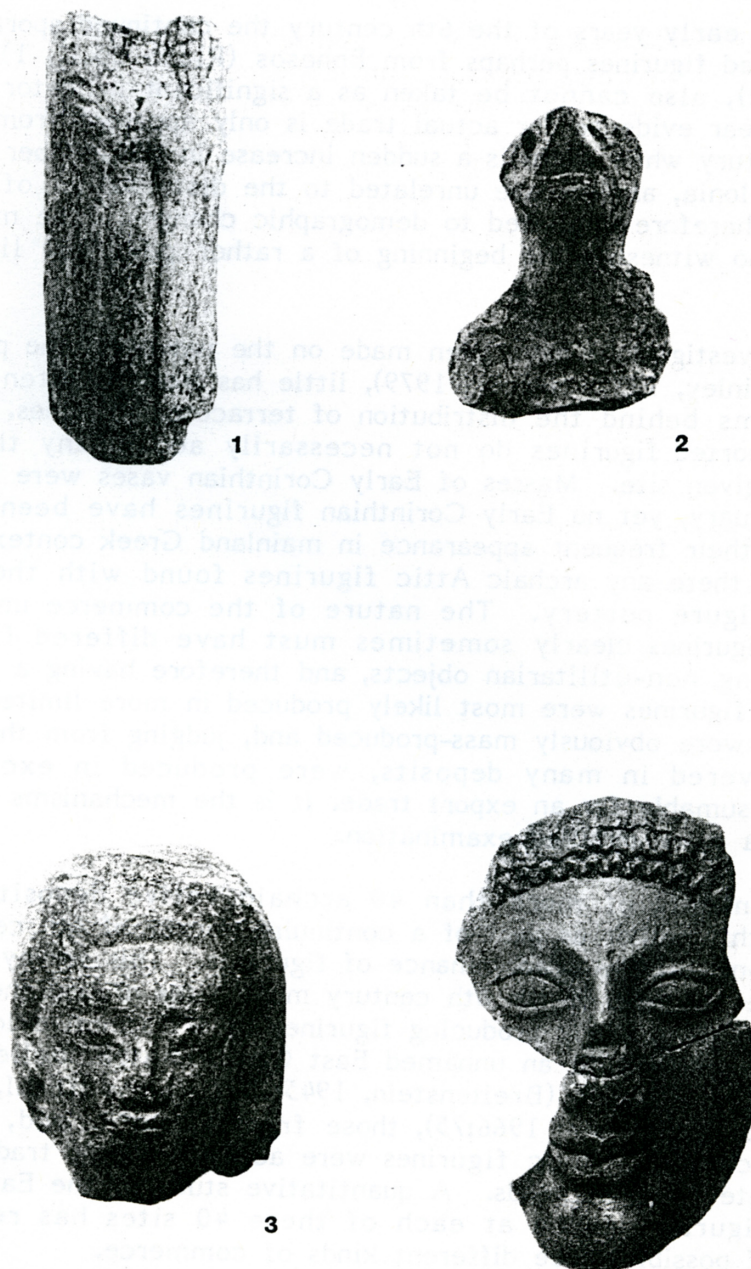


Plate 25.II Terracotta figurines from the Demeter Sanctuary at Cyrene

should be noted that such a bulk trade is not evidenced by the finds from the Demeter Sanctuary at Cyrene. This fact in itself is of some importance and one which will be discussed shortly.

The second kind of commerce documented for terracotta figurines I call 'basket trade'. This commerce is a more restricted type of merchandising than one finds with bulk trade, but one which is as direct. For example, a ship loaded with Corinthian pottery for export may carry a single basket of figurines from a specific Corinthian workshop for direct sale at a well-known religious festival at some distant port. Because the naukleros is assured of a good market at such a festival the risky investment in non-functional items is bound to realise a good return. Such a distribution--that is, by 'basket trade'--may be documented archaeologically by the presence in a votive deposit of several dozen terracottas of the same date, fabric, technique and, most importantly same or similar mould families. The statistical survey of the types of figurines found in archaic votive deposits indicates that 'basket trade' in archaic figurines can not often be documented. Yet the homogeneity of a group of Late Archaic Corinthian figurines among the votives from the Demeter Sanctuary at Cyrene suggests that they travelled as a group from their Corinthian atelier. At least 30 fragments of 'spes' figurines, so well known at mainland sites (Stillwell, 1952:85), represent six mould families; eleven fragments of seated figures represent three mould families; and several other contemporary types have been recovered in runs of three or four from the same mould. The appearance at the Demeter Sanctuary of several gross of Corinthian figurines where Corinthian pottery was the main type of imported pottery for the Archaic Period should not be significant were it not for the fact that Corinthian figurines rarely left the mainland for direct sale at a foreign port. While hundreds of Corinthian figurines are known at mainland sites, they are most rare in the Aegean and the Greek East. The ensemble from the Demeter Sanctuary, then, represents the largest known quantity of Corinthian figurines outside the Greek mainland. These figurines may have arrived at Cyrene by what I have termed 'basket trade'.

A third kind of commercial activity can be documented at the Demeter Sanctuary. This type of commerce I believe to have been the most common, not only for figurines, but for all other non-functional items which could be classified as trinkets. In contrast to 'basket trade', this trade in trinkets was indirect and can have little or no relationship to standard pottery routes. For this kind of trade Fernand Braudel (1972) has provided the model. Although Braudel describes the activities of merchant ships in the Mediterranean in the 16th century, on the basis of my statistical study of figurine distribution, I believe that these activities were essentially the same in antiquity.

Braudel, in his discussion of coastal routes and the practice of stopping at port every night, mentions 'tramping':

Tramping also made it possible to take on cargo. It gave ample opportunity for bargaining and for making the most of price differences. Every sailor from captain to cabin boy would have his bundle of merchandise aboard, and merchants or their representatives would travel with their wares. The round trip, which could last several weeks or months was a long succession of selling, buying and exchanging, organised within a complicated itinerary. In



the course of the voyage the cargo often would have completely altered its nature...Only the big salt or grain ships had any resemblance to the destination-conscious shipping of to-day. The others were more like travelling bazaars (1972:107).

Braudel's travelling bazaars were, I suggest, the main commercial agents at Cyrene for that conspicuous class of Ionian plastic vases and figurines commonly called 'Rhodian', but which I prefer to call East Greek. They are distinguished by an orange, to pink, highly micaceous fabric and a technique and workmanship generally considered excellent. At the Demeter Sanctuary roughly 200 of these figurines have been found to date. They comprise plastic vases of various types, kore alabastra and protome vases, seated goddesses, protomai, grotesques, dove and siren vases and figurines of pigs and turtles. Chronologically they start with the kore alabastra of the second quarter of the 6th century (Plate 25.II, 3) and end with the developed protomai stylistically associated with the sculptural trends of late archaism (Plate 25.II, 4).

An alternative suggestion for the presence of this East Greek material at Cyrene is that it found its way there with the Rhodian colonists who responded to Battos II's call for more immigrants (Schaus, forthcoming). This may indeed be the case although the unfortunate part of this suggestion is the assumption it makes that these figurines were manufactured on Rhodes. It must be stressed that the presence of East Greek figurines at the Demeter Sanctuary is merely a local manifestation of a broad phenomenon occurring at most Greek and some non-Greek sites around the fringes of the Mediterranean and Black Seas, as well as at Delos, Paros, Thasos, and Thera in the Aegean (Uhlenbrock, 1978). By far the greatest concentrations of these figurines are at West Greek sites. They are known by the thousands at Selinus (Gabrici, 1927:216), Gela (Orlandini, 1966:24) and Catania (Rizza, 1960), and by the hundreds elsewhere. On mainland Greece, however, they are found only sporadically while Corinthian, Argive and Attic figurines predominate.

When considering the numbers of each type of East Greek figurine uncovered at sites in the Eastern Mediterranean, the finds from Cyrene can be taken to be typical. The frequency of East Greek types found there to date indicates that they were only an occasional votive until approximately the third quarter of the 6th century. At this time a greater influx can be documented, particularly of late protomai and kore alabastra types. This is coincident with the abrupt disappearance of East Greek imports in the West, being supplanted by a very lively local production (Orlandini, 1966:31). But at Cyrene, and at other sites in the East, even these late types are rather limited in number. There is no evidence for the bulk trade well documented for Sicily. Nor do we seem to be dealing with basket trade. Roughly 30 heads of kore alabastra were recovered at Cyrene, not one of which shared a mould sequence with the other. The diversity of kore types is striking, as is the uneven quality of the technique. Of the 20 or so imported siren vases only two are mould related; the others differ widely in shape, facial iconography and date. The same holds true for the figurines of the seated goddesses. The sporadic character of these East Greek groups, and their rather limited quantities, impressive in contrast to the more unified character of the Sicilian groups, is not, I believe, due to the accidents of preservation or to the selective process that usually accompanies archaeological excavation, for I believe that similar circumstances could arise from the indirect, or 'bazaar', trade. For example, a naukleros, or even a passenger, may purchase

a small group of figurines from a workshop, knowing that at the next port there is a weekly market. Some of the figurines from this group would be sold to hawkers, others carried along by the naukleros or even the passenger to be disbursed at the next port. The hawker now sells part of his lot with other diverse items to yet another trader who takes them up or down the coast. Eventually a local inhabitant would purchase a single figurine for cultic purposes. In this way, as it must be apparent, it would be highly unlikely that mould families would stay intact. Rather, as one finds at the Demeter Sanctuary, there would be a great diversity only remotely referring back to any one atelier.

It has been the prevailing belief that these East Greek figurines appear in great numbers in the eastern Mediterranean. This is not the case. At the most, only several hundred fragments or complete figurines of this fabric have ever been recovered from any sanctuary site in the East, including the 'grand dépôt' of the Athenaion at Lindos (Blinkenberg, 1931), from the deposit of the archaic Artemision on Thasos (Amandry, 1959), from the Heraion on Delos (Laumonier, 1956), from Cos (Herzog, 1901), Theangela (Isik, 1980), Erythrai (Bayburtluoglu, 1977), and, of course, from the Demeter Sanctuary at Tocra (Boardman and Hayes, 1966), among other places. Furthermore, the character of the East Greek groups at these sites is as sporadic as that of the groups from Cyrene.

The limited appearance of East Greek figurines at the above named sanctuaries is, I believe, representative of an indirect trade, the so-called 'bazaar trade'. It establishes a pattern that links sites on the north, east and now, with the Tocra and Cyrene finds, the south shores of the Mediterranean, as well as with the Aegean islands mentioned above. This pattern is fundamentally different from that presented by finds of figurines in deposits on the Greek mainland, where East Greek figurines in any quantity are virtually absent, and from the pattern apparent in the Greek West where bulk trade can be documented.

I would like to suggest, then, that indirect, or 'bazaar trade' was the prevailing type of commerce responsible for the presence of East Greek figurines in the East. This can be explained if one considers the East Greek production to be primarily an export trade, with the bulk of the material always destined directly for the Greek West. The figurines at Lindos, Delos, Cos, Cyrene and the other sites mentioned above, represent what was available to the casual trade only after the large orders were shipped out. Furthermore, I suggest that this export production was abruptly curtailed around 530—perhaps because of the turmoil created by the Persian advance—and the export trade to the West was abruptly halted. At the same time, a shift in focus to the eastern market may perhaps be documented by the greater numbers of late archaic East Greek types, and the inhabitants of Cyrene, and of other sites around the eastern Mediterranean, benefited from the increased availability of fine imported figurines.

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