History, Trade, and the Terracottas

Figure 1. Terracotta figurines set up in the University Museum for workshops at Cyrene for the study of the author. It is only when seeing votive objects as an ensemble that one can begin to understand their importance to the cults in whose service they were offered.

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Over 4,000 terracotta figures spanning some 800 years, from the 7th century B.C. to the 1st century of the Christian era, were recovered from the Sanctuary of Demeter and Persephone at Cyrene (Fig. 1). Individually, they represent countless acts of piety motivated by the need to supplicate or to express gratitude. Manufactured in clay and mass-produced by the hundreds with the aid of the mold, these figurines satisfied the broad popular demand for easily obtainable objects that could be placed before the divinity in order to establish a lasting bond between godhead and mortal.

Ancient sources have provided much information on the dedications of votive objects as an ensemble that one can begin to understand their importance to the cults in whose service they were offered.

The Archaeology of the Figurines

Terracotta figurines and their related votive vessels were found intermixed with other votives in varying concentrations throughout the Middle-Terracotta of the Sanctuary. The archaeological record reveals little information concerning their specific role in cult practices at the Sanctuary, aside from their obvious function as religious donations to Demeter and Persephone. In no instance could the figurines be definitively associated with cult buildings, nor, given the successive remodeling of the Sanctuary, was there evidence to suggest that any were actually found in situ. Yet figurines from several areas in particular appear to fall within clear chronological limits, and it is difficult to escape the impression that they were moved as a relatively undisturbed mass, perhaps not far from their original location.

In one instance, for example, over 450 fragments of terracotta figurines and figurative vessels were recovered from earth that formed part of the constructional backfill of the wall T10 erected in the early Imperial era (see Fig. 9 in "The Sanctuary's History and Architecture"). Composed of the pottery and other finds from this area, the figurines form a relatively homogeneous ensemble dating from the early 7th to the early 5th centuries B.C. The homogeneous character of this ensemble is not unlike that of the large votive deposits that mark most extramural sanctuary sites around the Greek world.

The offerings that accumulated in a sanctuary or shrine were periodically removed and, as possessions of the divinity, carefully buried within the sanctuary grounds. In time such grounds could consist of several series of contiguous pits or trenches housing massive accumulations of votives. This is most clearly documented at the Sanctuary of Demeter Malphoros at Selinus in western Sicily, where the typological and chronological range of the figurines parallels that found at the Sanctuary of Demeter and Persephone at Cyrene.

Roughly 85 percent of all these figurines, regardless of size, were found without their heads.

Evidence for Cult Practice

The condition in which the figurines were found shed a little light on the ritual practices of the worshipers who brought them to the Sanctuary. The figurines from the 5th century, which comprised mainly Greek figurative vessels and figurines from the city of Mileta as well as local copies (see below), were recovered in varying states of preservation, with no discernable pattern of breakage or wear. Clearly, these objects, many of them containing perfume, were simply buried within the Sanctuary grounds and broken only by the accidents associated with the later remodeling of the Sanctuary and the consequent moving of earth for backfill.

For the figurines from the 5th century B.C. and later, however, a consistent pattern of breakage emerges. Roughly 85 percent of all these figurines, regardless of size, were found without their heads. This circumstance has been encountered in many sanctuary deposits around the Greek world, and especially at the more rural sanctuaries located outside of city walls, such as our sanctuary here. At one extramural sanctuary in southern Italy, a deep well, fallen into disuse, contained tons of thousands of female heads broken from figurines. It was as if their donors cast them down into what was believed to be the bowels of the earth. It may be that a snapping off of the head was part of a purification ritual that took place when the figurine was offered so that it could not be reused by anyone else.
Rhodian Figurines and the Founding of Cyrene

The evidence presented by certain individual examples or classes of figurines demonstrates the broad usefulness of terracottas in the reconstruction of the past. Among the terracottas found at the Sanctuary there are a handful that help to illuminate aspects of the early history of Cyrene.

The most widely accepted account of Cyrene's founding is told by Herodotus in his 4th book of *The Histories*. Herodotus relates that colonists, predominately from Thera, following instructions received from the oracle at Delphi, eventually settled on the shores of Libya in 631 B.C. Another version of the founding, however, is provided by the Lindian Temple Chronicle, a document written on Rhodes in the early 1st century B.C.

This source links the Theraians with a group of Romans, who were led by a certain Parnic. Even though the terminology of the Chronicle suggests that the Rhodians were among the original settlers of Cyrene, in contradiction to Herodotus's account, it is generally accepted that the Rhodians arrived in Libya only with a second wave of colonists believed to have emigrated around 380 B.C.

Among the earliest terracottas recovered from the Sanctuary there are fragments of at least four figurines of a type otherwise known only from Rhodian contexts, and fragments of two other known from Rhodes as well as Samos also were recovered. The first group comprises the mold-made heads of presumably female figurines, wearing a cylindrical type of crown called a *polos* (Fig. 4). The other two fragments belong to large statuettes that when complete must have measured 25 to 30 centimeters (Fig. 5). Chronologically, the heads and statuette fragments can be placed in the first decade of the 7th century and therefore predate the founding of Cyrene by some 60 years. They represent, then, the earliest finds from anywhere in the city, and is tempting to see in these early figurines precious documentation for a Rhodian presence among the original colonists.

Alternative explanations can be found for the appearance of these Rhodian figurines at Cyrene but none is satisfactory. One might argue that the figurines imported to Cyrene were not for the fact that there is no evidence for the circulation of Rhodian figurines, aside from these Cyreneeexemplars, at this early date. That they were carried as "heirlooms" by colonists who arrived during the second wave of colonization also seems possible. But would they have been over 100 years old, and the likelihood of terracottas surviving in a domestic context for that period of time is not very strong. Instead, one could postulate that these objects, only several generations old, were brought from a sanctuary on Rhodes by Rhodians participating in the founding of Cyrene, so that cultic continuity could be established. Such was the case, in fact, with the statues of Pallas and Heracles mentioned in the Lindian Temple Chronicle that were brought from Rhodes and dedicated by the Rhodians in the Temple of Pallas Athena at Cyrene. Could the two large statuettes from the Sanctuary have been cult statues? While it is conceivable that these figurines could have been brought to Cyrene by Rhodians at any time in the city's early years, they do lend credence to the account of Cyrene's founding as narrated in the Lindian Temple Chronicle.

Evidence for Trade

Almost every important center of terracotta manufacture in the ancient Greek world is represented by figurines found at the Sanctuary. These imports can be associated with their specific centers by virtue of their distinctive clay and characteristic typologies (see box on manufacture of terracottas). The geographical ranges of the imported figurines support the evidence provided by the other finds from the Sanctuary and elsewhere in Cyrene. They speak of a vigorous city with broad-reaching commercial ties to the major centers of trade in the Greek world. An examination of groups of terracottas from well-known centers of production for the 6th and early 5th centuries B.C. can illustrate some of the differing systems of trade responsible for the arrival of imported figurines at the Sanctuary.

Sometimes the system was straightforward and direct. For example, there is a large group of statues from the Sanctuary that were manufactured in the fine, pale cream-colored clay of Corinth. As suggested by their shapes, these figurines are several types represented by, for example, seven or eight figures from the same mold (Fig. 3); they have a consistency of craftsmanship suggestive of a single workshop. It is striking that these mold-related figurines should remain together so far away from the place of origin, and the speculation that they traveled as a group directly to the Sanctuary from a workshop in Corinth is very strong. Perhaps the knowledge of an upcoming festival prompted a traveler to visit in a basketful of figurines to sell at a gestive offerings at the distant port of Cyrene.

This evidence for the direct transmission of goods from Corinth to Cyrene is in contrast to that presented by numerous fragments of well-crafted figurines and figurative perfume vessels of a fine, dusky rose or orange colored clay, rich in small particles of mica (Fig. 2). This clay has been shown to have originated in the East Greek city of Milos (Jones 1965:67). This city was a center of a vigorous perfume industry. Figurative vessels were manufactured there as perfume containers, and undoubtedly, the scented oils they contained played a role in the cultic activities surrounding the worship of Demeter and Persephone. Among the groups of figurative vessels from the Sanctuary, the absence of mold cavities in craftsmanship, the varying types of different workshops, strongly suggest that these Milosian products came to the Sanctuary by way of a long and complicated trade route. Sold and resold all along the eastern Mediterranean coast, figures from related mold families were separated as they formed part of the merchandise of many small markets and bazaars before arriving at the Sanctuary. Cyrene may have been one of the final outputs of such a circuitous trading network.

Evidence for Influences from Abroad

Toward the end of the 6th century B.C., the finely crafted East Greek perfume vases and figurines from Milos became available to the inhabitants of Cyrene, perhaps because of the Persian advance and the consequent disruption of trade toward the latter part of the 6th century. Even so, some of the Milosian types were imitated at Cyrene and remained in production for several decades. Shortly after the beginning of the 5th century, a new type of seated female figure became fixed as the standard votive type at the Sanctuary and replaced the older Milesian products. This new type also was exported from East Greece, but its exact place of origin still remains unknown. Scores of imported examples found their way to the Sanctuary to be extensively imitated by local artisans (Fig. 6). This model, a simple figure lacking detail in any part but the head, lent itself to rapid mass-production.

The coroplastae (see box) at Cyrene were also influenced by the presence of Athenian types, especially the standing or seated *pelephonos* representing a woman wearing a simple garment known as a *peplos*. Local imitations of these began to appear at the Sanctuary around the

Figure 4. Even though it is only a fragment, this Rhodian terracotta head may document the early presence of Rhodians at Cyrene. Ca. 630 B.C.

Figure 5. Dating from the beginning of the 7th century B.C., this Rhodian head represents the oldest Greek object found to date anywhere in Cyrenaica.

Figure 7. One of the most characteristic votive types for the 5th century is that of the standing female figurine set in a simple garment known as a *peplos*.

Figure 6. East Greek seated female figure, perhaps a goddess. Ca. 480 B.C.
The Manufacture of Terracotta Figurines

The word terracotta means baked clay, and it is the term generally used to indicate figurines modeled in clay by hand or mass-produced with the aid of molds. The clay used is usually red or maroon in color or marl, and the shapes are often approximations of the gods and goddesses that the ancient Athenians worshiped. The clay was often modeled in the form of a female figure, and the details were added with a tool. The figures were then fired in an oven to harden them. The finished figures were then polished and glazed with a variety of colors, such as red, yellow, or green. The figures were then put into a kiln to be fired again, and the process was repeated until the figures were ready to be sold or displayed.

The ability to differentiate imported local terracotta figurines rests primarily on the character of the clay fabric used on the terracotta figurines. The local Cypriot fabric is soft and powdery in feel, and pale yellow in color. In Greece, the fabric is harder and more reddish or brownish. The local Cypriot figurines are often made with the same clay as the local figurines, while the Greek figurines are made with a variety of different clays.

Once imported figurines arrived at Cyrene, they were often reproduced by local clay artists. The clay artists would use the imported figurines as a guide, and then create their own versions of the figures. They would often modify the figures to make them more suitable for the local market, or to make them more appealing to the local people. The local clay artists would then sell the figurines to the locals, who would use them as decorations or as souvenirs.

In addition to the terracotta figurines, there were also imported figurines that were made in other materials, such as wood or ivory. These figurines were often more expensive than the terracotta figurines, and were only available to the wealthy. The wealthy would often use these figurines to decorate their homes, or to give as gifts to their friends and family.

The Terracotta Female Deities of the Hellenistic East

The most popular terracotta figurines of the Hellenistic East were the female deities. These figurines were often used as escorts or as symbols of fertility. The most popular figurine was the female deity known as Tanagra, who was associated with the goddess Demeter. The figurines of Tanagra were often displayed in workshops, and were popular with the locals. The figurines were often made in a variety of sizes, and were used as decorations or as souvenirs.
any goddess, at least several others appear to have evolved in direct response to the particularly local needs of the inhabitants of Cyrene. This is the case with the so-called silphium-holder, which depicts a standing female figure clutching a leafy plant stalk to her breast (Fig. 14), or holding it down at her side, while in the other hand she holds a small vessel. Silphium, a plant that grew wild in the area around Cyrene, was highly prized for the medicinal value of the juice extracted from its roots and stalk. Exported in quantity throughout the Greek world, it was an important factor in the economic development of early Cyrene. Its profitable production no doubt was closely allied to the cult of Demeter, the goddess of fertility, and her daughter Persephone (see box on silphium in "The sanctuary's History and Architecture," this issue). Offerings of silphium must have been made at the sanctuary, along with terracottas that may represent votaries carrying stalks of the valued plant, and the small vessels in which its juice was stored. It is of interest that the silphium-holder as a type was developed only toward the end of the 5th century and continued to appear in votive contexts around Cyrene with increasing frequency in the 4th century and later. This was the time during which the silphium fields were decreasing both in size and in yield, and figurines of silphium-holders must have represented a preoccupation with the threatened productivity of the crop. Large terracotta bull and horse heads also were found at the sanctuary and represent a class of votives not normally associated with Demeter and Persephone, whose animal par excellence was the pig. Figures of pigs in both terracotta and stone were uncovered among the votives (Fig. 15), and the bones of sacrificed pigs were in the majority for the faunal remains from the sanctuary. Yet the bull and horse heads remind us that stockbreeding was a vital part of the economy of Cyrene and must have been placed under the protection of the fertility goddesses, whose realm encompassed the growth and reproductive forces of Nature in all its aspects (see box on Demeter and Persephone in "The Sanctuary's History and Architecture").

The finds from the Sanctuary suggest that the nature of religious expression may have changed during the Hellenistic period. The terracottas thus far recovered document a sharp slackening off of the practice of offering terracotta figures to the goddesses. This is accompanied by an increase in the offerings of stone sculpture and by a monumentalization of the architectural character of the Sanctuary.

By the end of the 1st century B.C., terracotta figurines were offered only occasionally at the Sanctuary, although further exploration at the site may alter this view. The thousands of figurines once placed before the goddesses already had ceased to be a presence centuries before. Economic and social conditions may have been such that the craft of the coroplast no longer was considered an appropriate vehicle for religious expression. Thus, buried and inadvertently incorporated into building fill, thousands of terracotta figurines, representing the throngs and aspirations of twenty generations, were preserved, if only in precious fragments, to provide us with a glimpse of cult, economy, and society in ancient Cyrene.

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Figure 13. The presence of the piglet in the area of this female figure link it to the worship of the goddess Persephone. Late 5th to 4th century B.C.

Figure 14. Fragmentary figure holding to her chest a silphium stalk, the emblematic plant of Cyrene. 4th century B.C.

Figure 15. Votive terracotta pig, perhaps offered as an inanimate surrogate for the living animal that was most frequently sacrificed to Demeter and consumed in her ritual meals. 5th century B.C.