

## SOME TERRACOTTA FIGURINES FROM TELL FARAMA (PELUSIUM)

Szymon Maślak

Limited excavations in the theater at Tell Farama West (ancient Pelusium) and its nearest surroundings brought to light a great deal of terracotta fragments. This report includes the finds from the season in 2004,<sup>1</sup> as well as objects only mentioned in earlier reports,<sup>2</sup> altogether 38 registered pieces.

All of the terracottas from the theatre were poorly preserved, some of them only in small fragments, making it difficult or impossible to identify the subject. Thus, it seems reasonable to consider these fragments from the technological point of view before dealing with their iconographical features.

The terracottas were generally produced of medium coarse, but mostly purified clay. The occasional inclusions include small-fraction gravel, small fragments of crushed rock and/or isolated grains of sand (quartz). Mica typically occurs in the clay in relative abundance, and is usually discernible on the surface as tiny scattered flakes. Nile silt seems, therefore, an obvious choice as far as fabric is concerned.

The thin-walled figurines are usually fired a uniform color inside and out, displaying a grayish core only in the thicker parts. By contrast, the solid and thick-

walled terracottas have a dark or light gray core, sometimes turning to reddish or purple just under the surface. The surface color ranges from dark and light brown through reddish-brown to red and light red. At least one example seems to have been overfired. Few figurines included fillers in the clay, most often chopped straw, which left voids after burning. Another but less frequent type of filler is sand (quartz).

Virtually all the terracottas from the theater can be regarded as fragments of hollow figurines open at the base. Solid examples, which are extremely rare, were produced in the same manner as the parts of hollow figurines, the clay being finger-pressed into a mould. In the hollow pieces, fingerprints can be discerned on the inner surface. In the solid terracottas, the back could be smoothed, but it was also modeled by hand, leaving blurred fingerprints. Strokes and fingerprints appear also on the joints between the front and back, sometimes even overlapping on the front. Some figurines bear traces of modeling with a thin and sharp tool after removal from the mould.

As the figurines remained for a very long time in a humid and salty environment, the painted decoration has been preserved but

1 See report by K. Jakubiak in this volume.

2 M. Gawlikowski, "Tell Farama. Preliminary Report on a Season of Polish-Egyptian Excavations", *PAM XV, Reports 2003* (2004), 71 passim; K. Jakubiak, "Tell Farama. Preliminary Remarks on the Stratigraphy and Pottery", *PAM XV*, op. cit., 74.

on a few examples. A primer coating of gypsum is all that remains.<sup>3</sup> Coarser figurines could have been dipped in gypsum wash, rather than having a coating brushed on it. Remnants of painting proper – the colors turquoise, red and pink – are still visible on four of the pieces.

It is generally possible to attribute some of our terracotta fragments to particular types. Of the recorded 38 pieces, seven could belong to the so-called *Nackte*

*Göttin* type, figuring a naked woman, legs squeezed together and arms extended along the body, featuring a complicated hairstyle. Some of these fragments could be dated to the 1st century BC-2nd century AD.<sup>4</sup> Of the other female figures, a piece representing a sitting woman playing the harp is particularly noteworthy [*Fig. 1*]. The head is missing. In style, it closely approaches two fragments of Alexandrian origin; thus it could have been manu-



*Fig. 1. Terracotta figurine of a sitting woman playing the harp  
(Photo K. Jakubiak)*

3 Cf. J. Fischer, *Griechisch-römische Terrakotten aus Ägypten. Die Sammlungen Sieglin und Schreiber*. Dresden, Leipzig, Stuttgart, Tübingen (Tübingen 1994), 22 ("Ein Überzug aus Gips diente der Farbe gewöhnlich als Untergrund."). Török consistently referred to it as "limewash", see L. Török, *Hellenistic and Roman Terracottas from Egypt* (Roma 1995), 27 ff.

4 Cf. Fischer, *op. cit.*, 330-332, Pls. 85-86, nos. 810, 812-813, and W. Weber, *Die ägyptisch-griechischen Terrakotten* (Berlin 1914), 134, Pl. 20, no. 205.

factured around the first half of the 2nd century AD.<sup>5</sup> A fragment of a Tanagra-type figurine, preserving only the lower part of a draped garment with a shoe, can be regarded as the oldest piece discovered in the theatre. It could go back to the end of the 3rd or the 2nd century BC.<sup>6</sup>

Apart from other fragments representing human or human-like figures, like Satyr (?), young boy dancing (?), sitting person with round object held on the knee, or bared female buttocks, one finds also pieces of animal representations. A horse head is doubtless among the finest and best

preserved terracotta fragments from the last two seasons [Fig. 2]. Another fragment, a cock's wing and legs [Fig. 3], should be dated to the Roman period.<sup>7</sup>

Dating remains the most problematic issue. Contextually, the terracottas come largely from mixed deposits that could be described as either rubbish heaps of Late Hellenistic date or later accumulations inside the abandoned ruin.<sup>8</sup> However, stylistic analysis would rather point to a chronological range from the end of the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC to the 2nd century AD, in similarity to most of the pottery from the theatre.



Fig. 2. *Terracotta horse head*  
(Photo K. Jakubiak)



Fig. 3. *Terracotta cock's wing and legs*  
(Photo K. Jakubiak)

5 Cf. E. Breccia, *Terracotte figurate greche et greco-egizie di Museo di Alessandria, Monuments de l'Égypte gréco-romaine*, vol. II, fasc. II (Bergamo 1934), 52, Pl. LVIII, no. 341 (8036), and Fischer, *op. cit.*, 381, Pl. 104, no. 977.

6 Cf. Fischer, *op. cit.*, 125-126, Pl. 6, nos. 40-41; P.G. Leyenaar-Plaisier, *Les terres cuites grecques et romaines. Catalogue de la Collection du Musée National des Antiquités à Leiden*, vol. I-III (Leiden 1979), 107, Pl. 37, no. 215.

7 Cf. Weber, *op. cit.*, 247, Pl. 40, no. 454; Leyenaar-Plaisier, *op. cit.*, 548, Pl. 208, no. 1588.

8 Cf. Gawlikowski, *PAM XV*, *op. cit.*, 70-71; Jakubiak, *PAM XV*, *op. cit.*, 74; also excavation report in this volume.