

CHAPTER SIX: THE TERRACOTTA MALE YOUTH FIGURINE

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A terracotta figurine was found during the 1992 excavation at Achziv, which was led by Eilat Mazar (figs. 113, 129). The figurine was discovered in the Northern Cemetery in a surface layer. As such, it is not possible to date the figurine based on stratigraphy and it is therefore necessary to rely on style and technique to determine the period from which it came.

DESCRIPTION

The figurine is about 13 cm long (though the bottom part is missing) and is made from beige (pink/light orange) clay. In terms of technique, the figurine is hollow and was made in a single mould. This means that only the front side of the figurine was made in a mould, while the back side was closed by smoothing down a strip of clay. The figurine is a male youth who is draped in a cloak and the sleeves of his garment are wide and cover both of his elbows. He is standing straight ahead with his hands raised to grasp a semi circular band which covers both of his shoulders. The band has a line engraved through its center. His hands curl into fists around the band and it is possible to see the separation between his fingers. Most notable are his thumbs which poke through on the other side of the band, showing that his hands are wrapped completely around it. This proves that the band is not the border of the cloak, but is some additional type of garment, perhaps a stole or some other type of vestment. The face of the figurine is very sweet and almost feminine in appearance, however parallel finds have led us to believe that it is not a female (Negbi, O. 1966 pl10.63). The youth has rounded cheeks, giving him an innocent appearance. He has short hair with a border of ringlets and his ears are visible beneath the hair. His face and hair show a Hellenized influence.

PARALLELS

Tel Sippor

A parallel figurine was discovered at Tel Sippor, which is a small site located 17 km. east of Ashkelon (Negbi, O. 1966 p.1, pl10.63). This figurine is also hollow and was made from a single mold; however, the clay was white in contrast to the beige color of our figurine. It depicts a male standing straight ahead on a rectangular base and it is likely that our figurine also stood on a rectangular base which broke off. Negbi describes the male as a man with an attitude characteristic of boys (Negbi, O. 1966 p.16) but later identifies him as a draped youth or boy (Negbi, O. 1966 pl10.63). E. Stern identifies the figurine as a western style clothed boy (Stern, E. 1982 p.172-173).

The most striking similarities between the two figurines have to do with the clothing, the position of the arms, and the rectangular shape of the bodies from the midsection down. Like our figurine, this figurine is wrapped in a cloak with heavy sleeves and raises his right arm to grasp a semi-circular band. His left arm is missing so it is not clear whether it was also grasping the band, however it is likely. Negbi suggests that the band might have been the border



FIGURE 129.

of the cloak (Negbi, O. 1966 p.16) and K.Y. Yoon agrees with this possibility, but also suggests that the band may have been some sort of a stole (Yoon, K.Y. 2009 p.46). Since the figurine is so similar to ours and because we have shown that the band on our figurine is not the border of a cloak, the latter suggestion is most likely the correct one. The head of the figurine is bare and does not have the same short curly hair as our figurine; however the features of the face (such as the rounded cheeks) display a similar quality of innocence and youth.

The figurine from Tel Sippor was found in a pit among many other figurines and statues. On the basis of style and technique, Negbi dated this figurine and most of the figurines found in the pit from 530 to 350 BCE (the Persian period) (Negbi, O. 1966 p. 8). Based on the striking similarities between the two figurines as well as further parallels that I will describe below, it is possible to date our figurine to sometime in the Persian period.

Apollo type figurines/sculptures

As I mentioned, our figurine shows characteristics that are similar to the Hellenistic style and influence. The Apollo type figurine is a nude youth which was sometimes used as a votary to Apollo. In most, a cloak covers the shoulders and the front nude part of the body is conspicuous. The hands hang at the side or grasp the end of the cloak (Stern, E. 1982 p.172-173; Pryce, F.N., 1930 p. 42-44). It is clear that our figurine is not nude and is not an Apollo type figurine. However, similarities between the Apollo type sculpture (type 12) found in Cyprus and our figurine are apparent in the face and the head. This can be seen in the youthful and sweet expressions of the face as well as the short, cap-like head of hair, with a distinct border of ringlets that stops just above the ears (Pryce, F.N. 1930, p. 42-44, figs 54-59). The Apollo type sculptures (type 12) from Cyprus date to the Persian period.

Kourion in Cyprus

A hollow votary figurine with a similar characteristic to ours was found in Kourion in the archaic precinct fill and was dated to the early 6th century BCE (Young, J. and Young, S. 1955 p. 22-23, plate 5-364). Unlike our figurine, the body was made by coiling. The upper body, head, left forearm and right hand were also missing. The parallel characteristic to our figurine is that this figurine is wearing a similar semi-circular band over its shoulders, although the band is wider than in our figurine. Young, J. and Young, S. believe that the band is a mantle-like garment (Young, J. and Young, S. 1955 p. 23, plate 5-364). The figurine is not wearing a cloak with heavy sleeves like our figurine and in fact the sleeves of its garment are rather short and end above the elbow. The light nature of the garment does not match with the wide and heavier looking band, which makes it clear that the band is an additional garment, perhaps some sort of a stole-like vestment or mantle-like garment like Young and Young suggested.

The assumption that the band is an additional type of garment is in agreement with the conclusions we made about the band on our figurine.

CONCLUSIONS

The Date

Based on the above parallels, it is clear that our figurine dates to sometime in the Persian period (530-330 BCE). In her study of Persian period and Hellenistic period figurines from Acre, Messika determined that the former part of the Persian period was characterized by the solid/hand-made technique while the latter part of the Persian period was characterized by the hollow/mould made technique (Messika 1996 p. 45-51). If she is correct, then our figurine can be dated to the latter part of the Persian period. However, it should be noted that in terms of technology, the Persian period figurines fall into a period of transition between the Iron Age and the Hellenistic period and the technical traditions sometimes blend together. Because the technology did not abruptly begin or fade away, it is not always possible to date a figurine based on its method of manufacture (Yoon, K.Y. 2009 p.27-29).

The Style

The most significant parallel to our figurine was the figurine from Tel Sippor; the features of both of these figurines show similar Greek styles. According to E. Stern, the terracotta figurines from the Persian period are generally divided into two stylistic groups. These two groups are represented by the eastern style and the western style. The eastern style consists of a synthesis of Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Canaanite-Phoenician, and Babylonian-Persian elements (Stern, E. 1982 P.181-182; Negbi, O. 1966 p.5-6) while the western group consists of figurines that were formed in a purely Greek style (Stern, E. 1982 p. 172). Our figurine falls into the western group of figurines.

The Origin

The diverse style of Persian period figurines has been attributed to the Phoenician seafarers who introduced and brought together various cultures through trade. Ciasca believes that the Greek elements in the Persian period figurines represent a peripheral Hellenization that was brought to Israel by the Phoenicians through Cyprus and the Phoenician coast (Ciasca, A. 1963 p.45-63). Although we have not performed a petrographic analysis on our figurine, Negbi performed a mineralogical analysis on the parallel figurine from Tel Sippor and determined that it most likely originated on the Phoenician coast (Negbi, O. 1966 p. 6-7).

Discussion

Male youths and boys in the western style were often used as votaries (Stern, E. 2010 p.17) and it is therefore likely that our terracotta figurine was used in some sort of cultic context, perhaps as a votary. This assumption is further substantiated by the parallel examples which were all ascribed to a cultic association. The fact that our figurine was discovered in a cemetery that was largely used for the burial of children may be important in identifying its cultic significance. It is possible that it was used in some sort of burial ritual; however, since it was found out of context, it is difficult to draw conclusions that are built upon anything more substantial than speculation. One matter that stands out in our figurine is the semi-circular band that we have identified as a stole or some other type of vestment. The fact that our youth and the youth from Tel Sippor are posed grasping the bands with both hands seems significant to us. We would like to suggest that the stole like vestment was used in some sort of ritual ceremony in which youths served prominent roles, perhaps as temple boys or youth or as participants in an initiation ceremony. It would stand then that the figurine may have been used as a votary in such a ceremony.

Summary

The terracotta figurine found at Achziv is a male youth that can be dated to the latter part of the Persian period. It was made in the western style which is associated with a Greek and Hellenized influence and parallel finds were discovered at Tel Sippor and Cyprus. The figurine may represent a votary in a cultic context that may have been related to a ceremony that involved youths or it may simply represent a figure of a temple boy/youth.

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