

The Functional Conception of Female Figurines in the Domestic Spheres during the Ptolemaic and Roman Period.

Khaled Ismail

The Grand Egyptian Museum
Khlaedessasmismail@gmail.com

Introduction :

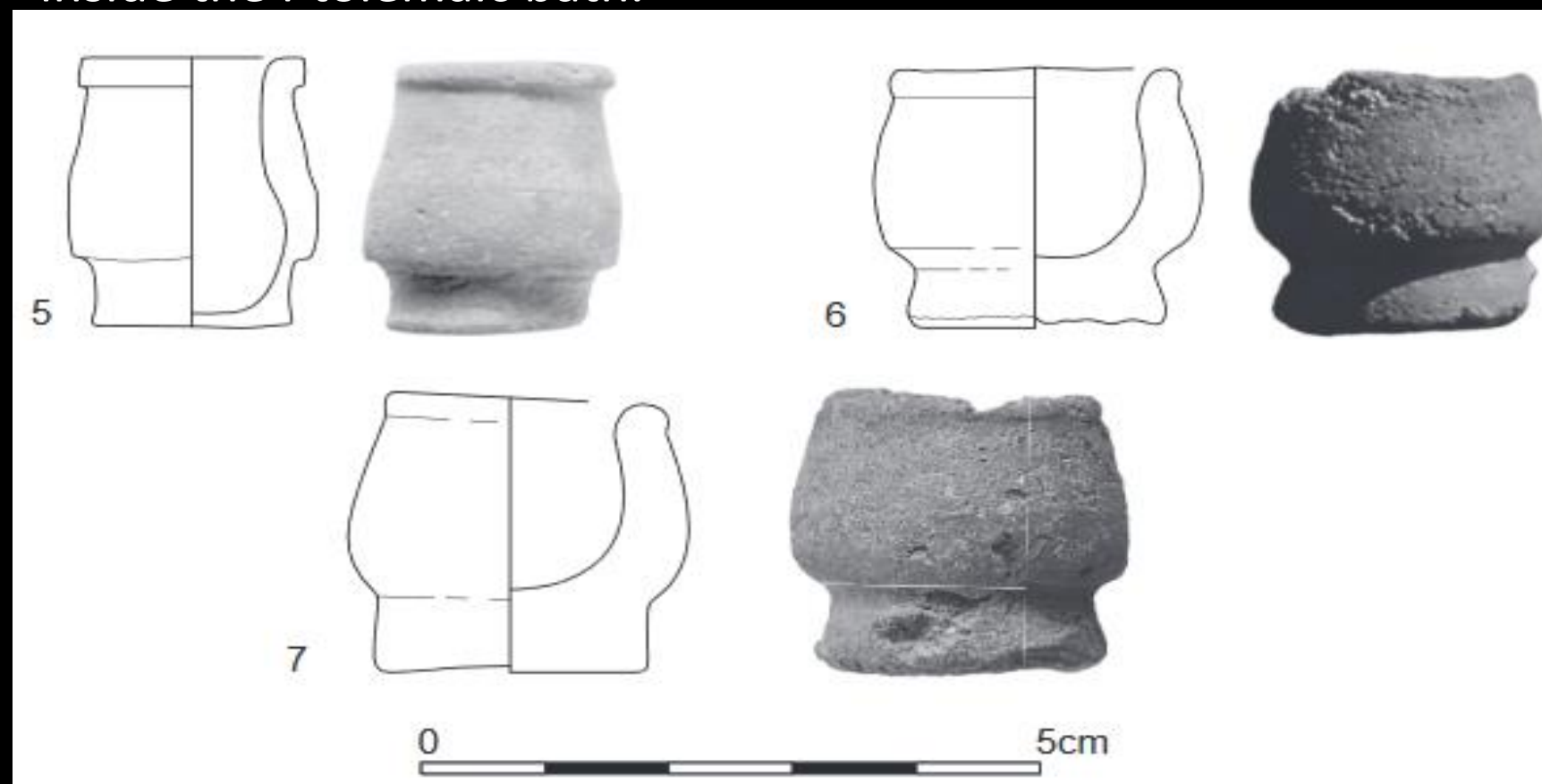
The Greco-Roman female figurines were found in various contexts (funerary, sacred and domestic) across Egypt. Among these groups of female figurines, we found unique types of women holding small round pots in their hands, which were frequently excavated in domestic contexts. This paper will concern and examine basically these types of figurines with a descriptive and analytical approach. The aims of the study is to figure out the context of figurines which were excavated domestic building such as the public baths complex and houses. I will discuss some question still open for discussion: what do these figurines represent? To which divinities they were related? What are the functions and conceptions of these figurines in the domestic spheres, and where and how were they used? Are these figurines related to the rituals of pregnancy and motherhood in the houses?



There are some extraordinary types of nude figurines holding the small round pots in their hands produced in Egypt during the Ptolemaic and Roman period. They formed a distinct category of the terracotta female figurines. There has been much discussion of these figurines, which are attested in several catalogues and publications since the twentieth century. There is general agreement among the first scholars that these nude figurines can describe as "Baubo". They interpreted their symbolism as figurines indicate to the promising of fertility and to give the good luck in the pregnancy. I expect that the conceptions of those female figurines in association with the domestic Spheres still unclear. I suggest that we should need to be more cautions to interpret the function of these figurines. There is possible to suppose that the female figurines have various purposes, functions and contexts.

Methodology:

This paper will present some unique examples of figurines that were excavated in the Greco-Roman houses at Fayoum, and Herakleopolis, and also some examples of figurines that were recently excavated by the Polish-Egyptian mission in the Ptolemaic baths at Tell-Atrib in the Delta. I will analyze the find contexts and archaeological data in order to explore new aspects of these female figurines in the domestic sphere. I intend also to investigate the relationship between these figurines and their archaeological contexts. I will investigate some resources (demotic and Greek magical and medical texts) to better understand the functions of these figurines. In addition, I cannot deny the archaeological evidences that were excavated in the sites. Between 1985 and 1995, the Polish-Egyptian mission in Tell-Atrib excavated a corpus of small round vessels made of pottery nearby the Ptolemaic bath complex. The excavators, Adam Lajtar and Anna Poludnikiewicz investigated and studied these vessels of Tell-Atrib. They posited the hypothesis that the vessels were used for medical properties. They suggested that these small containers were probably connected with the purification and healing activities inside the Ptolemaic bath.



© A. Lajtar and A. Poludnikiewicz, Medicinal Vessels from Tell Atrib (Egypt), études et Travaux XXX (2017), 334.

Conclusion:

The proposed research would like to prove that these figurines were mainly used in the domestic buildings as an ex-voto for purification. The mass production of these terracotta figurines in the domestic contexts shows a clear concern popular cultic practices in Roman Egypt. Such of these votive female figures probably used as protective figurines of the motherhood and newborn. These extraordinary types of figurines, in particular those who holding a small pot in their hands are the best examples to express the private purification for the women in the public baths complex or at their private houses. We have also recognized that the women have used small pots to wash their genitals as a part of very private ritual purification in the houses during the Roman period.

