

# TWO UNPUBLISHED TERRACOTTA FIGURINES IN BERLIN



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## Abstract

Terracotta figurines had many uses, including votive figurines placed in temples or placed in the home to protect dwellings and people, but they could also be used to decorate furniture and walls or used as lamps for lighting. The current study tackles two unpublished terracotta figurines kept in the antiquities basement of the Egyptian Museum in Berlin. The first of them, although it is incomplete, I think it is Harpocrates, and the second figurine is surely Harpocrates. The paper discusses, investigates and analyses the techniques of the two figurines' manufacture. Moreover, the paper compares them to other known-dated examples from other museum collections with the purpose of determining their provenance and approximate date.

**Keywords:** Ptolemaic-Roman Egypt, Harpocrates, Berlin, Terracotta, Alexandria, Fayoum.

## ملخص البحث

كانت التماثيل المصنوعة من الطين المحروق ( التراكوتا ) تستخدم في عدد من الاستخدامات، بما في ذلك تماثيل التراكوتا التي توضع في المعابد كتماثيل نذرية أو توضع في المنازل لحماية المساكن والأشخاص، ولكن يمكن استخدامها أيضاً لتزيين الأثاث والجدران أو استخدامها كمصابيح للإضاءة. تتناول هذه الورقة البحثية دراسة تماثيل من الطين المحروق ( التراكوتا ) غير منشورين محفوظين في مخزن المتحف المصري في برلين. الأول، على الرغم من أنه غير مكتمل، أعتقد أنه للمعبود حربوقراط، والثاني هو بوضوح لحربوقراط. تناقش الورقة وتحقق وتحلل تقنيات تصنيعهما، وتجري مقارنة مع نماذج أخرى معروفة التاريخ من مجموعات المتاحف الأخرى من أجل معرفة المصدر الذي جاء منه التمثالان وتحديد التاريخ التقريبي للتماثيل. الكلمات الدالة: البطلمية والرومانية، حربوقراط، برلين، التراكوتا، الإسكندرية، الفيوم.

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## Introduction

The importance of studying the terracotta figurines individually is confirmed by Bailey, one of the most important specialists in terracotta, who mentioned that most terracottas were not found through professional excavations, and not much is known about the dating of its manufacture. Therefore, only a small number of terracotta figurines from the Ptolemaic and Roman period in Egypt have been published with a known provenance and dating.<sup>1</sup> In addition, terracotta figurines are one of the sources that give us information about popular religion and the beliefs of the common people in Egypt during the Graeco-Roman era.

Terracotta figurines appeared with the founding of the city of Naucratis and after that, their production increased during the Ptolemaic-Roman era, with a great diversity in types.<sup>2</sup> Most of the terracotta figurines depicting deities with mixed iconography come from the Fayoum and its villages. However, the city of Alexandria should not be ignored. The lack of information about the workshops and the absence of a certain provenance and dating make it very difficult to determine the origins and development of individual figurines. It is also not possible to be certain whether figurines have been found at a particular site or have ended being there through trade. The method of manufacture and the nature of the clay used to make the figurines may ultimately help to determine where the figurine was made.<sup>3</sup> In this paper I am studying two unpublished figurines of Harpocrates and compare them with others to determine the place and date of manufacture. I studied and photographed the two pieces at the Egyptian Museum basement in Berlin and I thank the museum administrative staff for allowing me to do this.

Most of the terracotta came from temples, tombs, houses inside cities, and villages where their owners used them for protection and considered them a protection for the family and childbirth and an aid to fertility as a representation of the popular religion that was known and spread in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods.<sup>4</sup> Harpocrates is the child form of Horus. He was part of the Alexandrian triad of Serapis, Isis, and Harpocrates, founded by the Ptolemaic king Ptolemy I Soter, who was assisted by a religious committee that included the Egyptian priest Manetho and the Greek priest Timotheus. Although the Serapeum in Alexandria was a temple dedicated to the god Serapis alone, Isis and Harpocrates were worshipped in the side chapels.<sup>5</sup> In Egyptian iconography, Horus was depicted as a man with a falcon's head or a falcon

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<sup>1</sup> Bailey, D. M. (1988), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Cladakis-Manolis, H. ( 1994), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Cladakis-Manolis, H. ( 1994), 11.

<sup>4</sup> Bailey, D. M. (1988), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Pfeiffer, S. ( 2008), 395.



with a man's head and wearing various crowns. However, Har-pa-khered "Horus the Child" was depicted in a purely human manner; his images in the later period generally show him naked with childish side curls and his finger in his mouth. The ideas of the gods changed from the Ptolemaic and Roman periods onwards, when they were depicted in clay. They were no longer depicted statically, but more actively and living a human-like life. The image of Harpocrates also changed radically. Suddenly we find Harpocrates with grapes in his hand, riding an animal or playing with a goose.<sup>6</sup>

The influence of the Greek tradition in the depiction of the gods is based on this clear change. There is much evidence of new forms and attributes in the representation of Harpocrates, which represent a new trend. The new attributes were often a round or oval bowl, a cornucopia, or an amphora. These could appear singly or in combination, and Harpocrates might hold them or place them beside him. The proliferation of his images indicates the rise of his cult.<sup>7</sup> Some studies have examined the appearances and types of Harpocrates and their development.

### The First Figurine Description

Terracotta figurine of Harpocrates, 12 cm high and 6.3 cm wide, kept in the Egyptian Museum in Berlin, Inv. Nr. 27934 (Fig.1). The child Harpocrates is depicted standing, leaning on a rectangular pillar or base in a frontal position slightly tilted to his left, where the base is. The head and left arm are missing. Harpocrates is depicted here in the stage of youth and strong body. Harpocrates points the index finger of his right hand to his mouth. The left leg is slightly bent in a relaxed position in line with the position of leaning on the pillar, while the right leg is stretched straight. The pillar was often used to balance the artwork (statue).

Between the pillar and the figurine hangs a side of a cloak with its folds arranged in a vertical position. The pillar is cylindrical in shape, raised to a level slightly higher than Harpocrates' waist, and the traces of a round vessel, which was used to depict Harpocrates in many terracotta figurines, appear on it, as well as the claws of a bird. The base is defined by a sunken line, while its top is defined by a protrusion. It is noted that there is a crack on the left side of the child statue in a vertical position, and there is also a horizontal crack above the pillar, which suggests that the process of firing the lantern took place before it dried. The child's body appears to have been added in a solid and shaped form after the mold was made, and water and moisture may have seeped into the figurine from the clay of the figurine, causing it to crack when fired in the kiln.

<sup>6</sup> Hussein, N. (2016), 47.

<sup>7</sup> Hussein, N. (2016), 48.

## Comparative Study

Harpocrates was depicted standing, leaning his left arm on a pillar or base in many terracotta figurines, such as the marble statue of Harpocrates dated back to the second Century AD,<sup>8</sup> and was discovered on October 29, 1936 in the Temple of Ras al-Suda in Alexandria, kept now in the Greco-Roman Museum of Alexandria, (Fig. 2), depicted as a naked adolescent in a posture that is contrary to the norms of Praxiteles of the 4th century BC. His non-weight-bearing leg is bent at the knee and turned to one side, with its foot resting on a rock. His robe is draped over a column that serves as a pillar for his left forearm, which bears a damaged feature, which looks like a miniature cornucopia,<sup>9</sup> and the index finger of his left hand is raised to his lips to indicate that he is the keeper of the cult's secrets. Harpocrates has also been depicted outside Egypt in this Praxitelean pose, as in the marble statue found in Tivoli, dated back to the era of the Emperor Hadrian and kept in the Capitoline Museum in Rome (Fig. 3).<sup>10</sup>

The pillar is also depicted in similar unfinished and unknown provenance terracotta figurine kept in Dresden, dated to the 1st century AD.<sup>11</sup> A one-shouldered mantle can also be seen hanging from the forearm between the pillar and the left leg (Fig. 4).

As for the traces on the pillar, Harpocrates appeared many times holding cornucopia in his hand in many figurines, such as this beautiful figurine kept in the Egyptian Museum in Berlin (Fig 5). He also appeared in many representations holding or riding a goose, such as this incomplete figurine from Crocodipolis in Fayoum (Fig.6), which dates back to the first century AD.<sup>12</sup> However, the traces on the pillar of the figurine of the study resemble more the claws of a falcon. In one of the figurines of Harpocrates kept in the Louvre Museum (Fig 7), Harpocrates depicted standing, head bent, curly hair, crown of flowers with ribbons topped with the pschent, left leg bent, leaning on a pillar with a molded base. Dunand mentioned that there are traces of a bird on the pillar.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the depiction of falcon standing on a base is also seen in the tomb of Tigrane in Alexandria, where two falcons stand on two bases on either side of the main mummification scene in the tomb. When the artist drew the two bases, he tried to make them look like marble (Fig. 8). The two falcons are identical in their depiction, except for the falcon on the left, which wears the crown of Lower Egypt, and the falcon on the right, which wears the crown of the pschent.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, I think that these traces in

<sup>8</sup> Savvopoulos, K. & Bianchi, R.S. (2012), 164.

<sup>9</sup> Savvopoulos, K. & Bianchi, R.S. (2012), 164.

<sup>10</sup> LIMC. (1988), fig. 39a.

<sup>11</sup> Fischer, J. (1994), 271.

<sup>12</sup> Hussein, N. (2016), 141.

<sup>13</sup> Dunand, F. (1990), 77.

<sup>14</sup> Venit, M.S. (1997), 712.

the figurine of this study are traces of a falcon, as it cannot be ignored that Harpocrates means the child Horus and the falcon was the animal manifestation of Horus.

Perhaps the function of this first figurine was as a votive figurine placed in the temple or taken by people to their houses or tombs, as it is noted that there is no sign of its use as lantern. The terracotta figurines were sacred objects, which people took to their houses and even to their tombs, believing that they were able to extend the power of the divine image from the confines of the temple into the relevant private sphere.<sup>15</sup>

## Provenance and Dating

There were many types of clay from which terracotta was made, such as Nile Valley clay, which when fired turns brown or red.<sup>16</sup> In addition to the Nile Valley silt clay, the Alexandrian clay (marl) tended to be pale in colour,<sup>17</sup> while the Delta clay was covered with a shiny glaze, and the Fayoum clay was dark red in colour.<sup>18</sup> The first figurine of our study was made of marl clay. Marl is generally a medium to soft, medium to rough textured clay. It is light brown, reddish yellow, yellow and light red in colour. This is clearly shown on the figurine I am studying. The terracotta made of soft marl clay, archaeologists agreed that it was made in the workshops of Alexandria.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, we can say that the provenance of our figurine is the city of Alexandria. In addition the style of Harpocrates standing and leaning his left arm on a pillar was more widespread in Alexandria than in any other region.

We can also date our figurine to the 2nd Century AD according to the style of sculpture and the common shape of the clay figurine in the Louvre and the marble statue in Alexandria and Rome, In addition, Breccia published several terracotta figurines from Alexandria depicting Harpocrates standing and leaning on a pillar, with which our figurine can be compared, confirming to us that Alexandria is the provenance of the figurine (Fig. 9).<sup>20</sup>

## The Second Figurine Description

Terracotta figurine of Harpocrates, 17.9 cm high and 9 cm wide, kept in the Egyptian Museum in Berlin, Inv. Nr. 27932 (Fig. 10). The figurine was used as lantern, as the oil opening is located to the left and does not show any traces of soot, which suggests that the lamp was not used and may have been offered as a votive offering. The opening is in

<sup>15</sup> Savvopoulos, K. (2019), 2.

<sup>16</sup> Lucas, A. (1948), 420-421.

<sup>17</sup> Hayes, J. W. (1980), 93.

<sup>18</sup> Ibrahiem, M. M.(2024), 5.

<sup>19</sup> Török, L. (1995), 18.

<sup>20</sup> Breccia, E. (1934), Pl.XVII,67.



the middle of a semi-spherical swelling. Harpocrates is depicted here naked in a frontal position, reclining in a half-sitting position. Harpocrates is depicted with curly hair and a crown of flowers (Lotus flowers), in the middle of which is the crown of the pschent or the crown of Upper and Lower Egypt. Harpocrates bends his right leg. It seems that Harpocrates is holding a snake in his left hand. His left leg disappears completely behind the snake and he puts the index finger of his right hand in his mouth. The body is full and the signs of physical strength are evident in the strength of the forearm. The face is round and full, with plump lips and a relatively swollen nose tip, while the eyes have eroded and next to it is the head of a cobra in a frontal position. The snake is large in size compared to the size of the child Harpocrates.

The artist meticulously depicted the erect snake's head, highlighting the striations that define its skin. Furthermore, the mouth opening is clearly defined, and the snake is crowned with a crown featuring a sun disk in the center. The child Harpocrates is depicted in the stage of adolescence, his body relatively full, and the features of a comfortable childhood still appear on him, next to the erected cobra.

### Comparative Study

The molding method was used in the manufacture of this figurine. This means that there is a pre-made template in which the clay to be shaped is placed. The molding system for pottery and terracotta was first introduced to the Greek world in the 8th or 7th century BC and its use increased and became common from the 5th century BC, and then the multi-purpose (hollow molding) technique developed and appeared.<sup>21</sup> Harpocrates is depicted with the crown of upper and Lower Egypt in many figurines (Figs. 11-12),<sup>22</sup> and this crown and lotus flowers are considered one of the main features that distinguished the statues of Harpocrates.<sup>23</sup> In a similar representation of the head, Hussein published a similar terracotta head of Harpocrates from the Fayoum and dated it to the 3rd century AD (Fig. 13). The figure of the child god has a full round face framed by curled hair tied back on the forehead. At the back, the hair is gathered into a braid that rests on the back of the head.

The child places the index finger on the lower lip, the upper lip is full, and the Cupid's bow is pronounced. The forehead is flat and broad, and the eyes are bulging. The god is crowned with the double crown between lotus buds.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Kelsey Museum of Archaeology (1989), 3.

<sup>22</sup> Török, L. (1995), figs. 58-59.

<sup>23</sup> Török, L. (1995), 57.

<sup>24</sup> Hussein, N. (2016), 154 fig. 44.



Harpocrates was associated with the snake as he was depicted on magic stelae standing on the back of a crocodile and carrying snakes, and these stelae were covered and washed with water in the courtyards of the temples, and then this water was reused to treat people from diseases, as Harpocrates was associated with his strength and ability to heal. He was depicted also in astronomical scenes holding a snake, such as the scene on the ceiling of the tomb of Petosiris in Tuna el-Gebel (Fig. 14), where Harpocrates stands on two crocodiles and holds two snakes.<sup>25</sup>

It seems clear that in ancient Egypt the cult of the serpent was an important element of any fertility cult, and the serpent became a symbol of fertility for both mother goddesses and gods. The goddess Wadjet is an example to understand it. Starting from the totemic use of the predynastic period, when she was mainly worshipped in Buto, and probably linked to the fertility cult, her name means “she (who belongs) to the *papyrus*”.<sup>26</sup> In the Graeco-Roman period Renenutet/Isis-Thermouthis appeared to complete the pharaonic tradition. Renenutet is already mentioned in the Pyramid Texts and her cult is attested from the 4th Dynasty. Her cult began as a royal cult with the construction of her temple at Madi and the temple of Sobek in the capital Shedet, during the reign of Amenemhat III. From this moment Renenutet was the intermediary for the glorification of the prosperity and power of the reigning king with Sobek, the chief god of the Fayoum.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, Renenutet, as goddess of the harvest, and Sobek, as lord of the whole Fayoum, are two benevolent deities, distributing goods and provisions to the king’s table.” Renenutet, associated with the agricultural world, and called the Lady of the Silo to which people offered sacrifices on the first day of the wheat harvest, was depicted seated like a mother goddess with a serpent’s head, suckling a child; or in another case with a serpent’s head and a human body. This serpent goddess fed, suckled, nursed and raised a child. Isis- Thermouthis. In the Greek era, she represented two different goddesses: Isis and the snake goddess Renenutet, whose name was translated into Greek as Thermouthis. She became primarily associated with the fertility of the soil and became associated with everything that is good and spreads happiness.<sup>28</sup> Kaufmann included in his collection of Fayoum terracottas a figurine depicting Harpocrates holding a cobra in a representation similar to the Berlin figurine (Fig.15).<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Soliman, W. S. (2015), 696-7.

<sup>26</sup> Franci, M. (2016), 35.

<sup>27</sup> Franci, M. (2016), 35.

<sup>28</sup> Franci, M. (2016), 38.

<sup>29</sup> Kaufmann, C. M. (1915), fig. 129.



Another similar example is in the Louvre Museum (Fig. 16), where Harpocrates is naked, riding a serpent or cobra. Harpocrates is depicted with curly hair and a crown of flowers, in the middle of which is the crown of the pschent or the crown of Upper and Lower Egypt. Harpocrates' right index finger is directed to his mouth, and on his left arm is a horn of plenty.

The cobra, with its head turned to the right, has a swollen and striped neck; on its head is a crown of flowers, topped by a crown with two horns, in the middle of which is the sun disk.<sup>30</sup>

But the most similar figurine is the one kept in Tübingen, of unknown provenance and dated to the first century AD,<sup>31</sup> where Harpocrates is depicted carrying a cobra on his left arm (Fig.17). Thus, the depiction of Harpocrates with the snake in the figurine of our article can be understood. The difference here is that our figurine is completely naked, while in the Tübingen figurine Harpocrates wears a chiton. In fact, although Harpocrates was often depicted accompanying another figure, whether a horse or a goose, etc., his depictions with a cobra are few, which gives importance to our figurine.

### Provenance and Dating

As for the second figurine, it is most likely from Fayoum because the color of the terracotta is brown tending toward red, which was characteristic of the Fayoum workshops. Very red or dark brown terracotta is considered a distinctive feature of Fayoum terracotta due to the intense heat used in the kilns. The kilns or ovens in which the vessels were fired did not differ greatly from those used for the production of earthenware. They were all built of clay, which was given greater stability by bricks, fragments of jars, etc. At the bottom, a semi-elliptical hole led into the fire passage and this led to the heating channels, the clay roof of which was perforated like a sieve by hot-air openings (pipes), which conveyed the heat to the actual combustion chamber. In the Fayoum, as in the pottery factories of Abu Mina area, they limited themselves to keeping more powerful kilns for firing large amphorae, jugs, etc., but smaller items, whether earthenware, figurines, or lamps, were produced separately.<sup>32</sup> The firing of figurative pottery required careful control of the kiln temperature, as these objects required a lower temperature than bowls and plates. The firing temperature of the most common classes of Abu Mena pottery was about a hundred degrees or slightly higher, but the same cannot be said of the Fayoum vessels made of the sharper clay. They constantly required greater heating

<sup>30</sup> Dunand, F. (1990), 94.

<sup>31</sup> Fischer, J. (1994), 269.

<sup>32</sup> Kaufmann, C. M. (1915), 19.





power, while the weaker firing was a feature of Coptic and early Christian goods in some areas.<sup>33</sup> Thus we can avoid dating our figurine to the Coptic or Late Roman period and can suggest the first or second century AD as the date of manufacture.

## Conclusion

Harpocrates was the most frequently depicted god in terracotta, but with such a large number it became difficult to determine the place and date of manufacture of each figurine, especially with the lack of information about the provenance of the figurine, the date of the excavation, and the place or building where it was found. Therefore, in studying these two figurines, which are published for the first time, comparisons were made with similar figurines or parts of the figurines, and the method of manufacture, the style of sculpture, and the material from which they were made were studied and compared to the nature of the clay used in the workshops of Alexandria and Fayoum, the method of firing, and the relationship between the gods in cult of the Ptolemaic and Roman era.

This comparative and analytical study led us to conclude that the first figurine came from Alexandria and dated back to the second century AD, and the second figurine came from Fayoum and dates back to the first or second century AD, as the depiction of Harpocrates standing in the Praxitelean position was widespread in the statues and statuettes of Alexandria. Moreover, the use of marl clay and the light red colour of terracotta were characteristics of Alexandrian terracotta, which is clearly shown in the first figurine, while Fayoum terracotta figurines tended toward a dark colour. In addition, the more vigorous firing method was also characteristic of the terracottas of the first three centuries of the Roman era in Fayoum, which is clear in the second figurine, as the terracottas of the late Roman era were weakly fired and was a characteristic of Coptic terracottas.

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<sup>33</sup> Kaufmann, C. M. (1915), 20.



**Fig.1** Terracotta figurine of Harpocrates kept in the basement of the Egyptian Museum in Berlin, Inv. Nr. 27934, and published for the first time. Ref. Photographed by the researcher



**Fig.2** Marble statue of Harpocrates kept in Graeco-Roman Museum of Alexandria. Ref. Savvopoulos, K. & Bianchi, R.S. (2012), fig. 48B



**Fig.3** Marble statue of Harpocrates found in Tivoli and kept in the Capitoline Museum in Rome. Ref. LIMC. (1988), fig. 39a



**Fig.4** Incomplete terracotta figurine of Harpocrates kept in Dresden. Ref. Fischer, J. (1994), fig. 597



**Fig. 5 Harpocrates holding cornucopia.**  
Ref. Philipp, H. (1972), 5



**Fig. 6 Harpocrates with a goose.**  
Ref. Hussein, N. (2016), fig. 13





**Fig.7 Harpocrates figurine kept in the Louvre Museum. Ref. Dunand, F. (1990), fig.151**



**Fig. 8 Painting of the central niche of Tigrane tomb in Alexandria. Ref. Venit, M.S. (1997), fig.7**



**Fig. 9 Terracotta figurine of Harpocrates from Alexandria. Ref. Breccia, E. (1934), Pl. XVII, 67**



**Fig. 10 Terracotta figurine of Harpocrates kept in the basement of the Egyptian Museum in Berlin, Inv. Nr. 27932, and published for the first time. Ref. Photographed by the researcher**



**Fig.11 Terracotta figurine of Harpocrates kept in Budapest Museum.  
Ref. Török, L. (1995), fig. 58**



**Fig. 12 Terracotta figurine of Harpocrates head kept in Budapest Museum.  
Ref. Török, L. (1995), fig. 59**





**Fig. 13** Terracotta head of Harpocrates from the Fayoum. Ref. Hussein, N. (2016), fig. 44



**Fig. 14** Scene from the ceiling of the tomb of Petosiris in Tuna el-Gebel. Ref. Soliman, W. S. (2015), fig. 36



**Fig. 15** Harpocrates holding in his left hand a cobra. Ref. Kaufmann, C. M. (1915), fig. 129



**Fig. 16** Terracotta figurine of Harpocrates kept in Louvre Museum. Ref. Dunand, F. (1990), fig. 206



**Fig. 17** Harpocrates is depicted carrying a cobra on his left arm. Ref. Fischer, J. (1994), fig. 590



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