The Annual of the British School at Athens

<http://journals.cambridge.org/ATH>

Additional services for *The Annual of the British School at Athens*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)

Terracotta Plaques from Praesos, East Crete

Edward S. Forster

The Annual of the British School at Athens / Volume 11 / November 1905, pp 243 - 257

DOI: 10.1017/S0068245400002598, Published online: 18 October 2013

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0068245400002598

How to cite this article:

Edward S. Forster (1905). Terracotta Plaques from Praesos, East Crete. The Annual of the British School at Athens, 11, pp 243-257 doi:10.1017/S0068245400002598

Request Permissions : [Click here](#)

TERRACOTTA PLAQUES FROM PRAESOS, EAST CRETE.

WITH the larger terracottas excavated by the British School of Athens at Praesos in 1900 I have already dealt elsewhere (*B.S.A.* viii. pp. 271 ff.). My purpose here is to treat of the interesting series of plaques discovered during the same excavations, of which I was then only able to give but a summary account. Their interest lies not so much in their artistic merit as in the light they throw on the customs and beliefs of the Eteocretan people during a long period extending from the archaic to the Hellenistic age.

The sites from which they come are two in number, the fountain at Vavelloi (see map in *B.S.A.* viii. Pl. VII.), and the trial pit on the fourth terrace below and to the west of the so-called 'Acropolis I.' The former site had been excavated before the Cretan Revolution, by Prof. Halbherr, who discovered and published (*A.J.A.* v. (1901) pp. 371-392 and Plates X.-XII.) seventeen varieties, specimens of all of which except three were again found in 1901, when the total number of different types unearthed was rather over thirty. The site was also dug over by the peasants during the Revolution, and a number of the specimens found were purchased and sent to the Candia Museum by the Bishop of Hierapetra. The immense richness of the site may be inferred from the fact that several hundred specimens are now included in the collection at Candia, while many more must have been scattered during the Revolution, and many, again, destroyed by the plough.

The fabric of which they are made is the light-red clay of the district. The plaque or *πίναξ* shape is one which is found sporadically in other districts, but never elsewhere as the universal form of practically all the

terracottas on a single site. It is found, for example, as an exceptional form at Goulas and Cavousi. The convenience of the plaque lies in the fact that it can easily be hung up either in a shrine or as an *εἰκὼν* in a private dwelling; some specimens from Praesos have a suspension hole for this purpose. The size of the plaques varies from '05 to '2 m. in height. They are all made in moulds and show no traces of paint. The broken state of most of the specimens points to the fact that on both sites they formed part of a deposit of offerings cleared out from shrines. Since they were of no commercial value it was the custom to break up and bury the accumulation of dedications when they became too numerous, to prevent their use for a second time. That this was frequently done can be seen from many other sites, and the custom is referred to in an inscription (*C.I.G.* i. 1570). The blunt contours of many of the figures show that the moulds were in use over a very long period.

In giving an account of the series the best arrangement seems to be that of chronological order as far as this is possible. For convenience the types may be roughly divided into three periods—an Archaic period, a Middle period roughly corresponding with the best period of Greek Art, and a Hellenistic period.

THE FIRST PERIOD.—ARCHAIC TERRACOTTAS.

Three most primitive terracottas of the series are of the nude 'Oriental goddess' type, which is common in E. Crete, exactly similar representations having been found both on plaques and in the round on most of the neighbouring sites and in Cyprus. An example procured by Prof. Halbherr has three characters Δ ο φ incised on the back (*A.J.A.* v. Pl. X. No. 4b), and is dated by him as early as the seventh century B.C.

The examples of this type from Praesos are from at least three different moulds, all presenting the same general characteristics.

(1) The smallest and apparently most primitive type is made in two moulds (*A.J.A.* *l.c.* Pl. X. No. 4a). The forms of the body are exceedingly meagre and the waist thin: a tall head-dress is worn from which the hair falls in heavy masses over the shoulders. The height of the plaque is '13 m.

(2) A second variant, which, though common, exists only in fragments, is larger and better modelled (*A.J.A.* *l.c.* Pl. X. No. 1).

(3) A third type is slightly larger still and more carefully moulded, and more attempt is made to render the features (*A.J.A. l.c.* Pl. X. No. 2).

The style of these three types is feeble, and in most cases, owing to the worn state of the moulds, the figures have lost all expression.

Four somewhat similar figures, of which only one, or at most two, specimens have occurred, come under the same general class.

(4) The first represents a headless fragment of a draped female holding her breasts with both hands (Fig. 1 (*a*)): it may be compared with that figured by Halbherr (*A.J.A.* v. Pl. X. No. 5). For the motive, compare *B. M.*

FIG. 1 (*a*).—DRAPED
FEMALE FIGURE.

FIG. 1 (*b*).—DO. WITH
HIGH HEAD-DRESS.

Cat. of Terracottas, A 91 (from Larnaka, Cyprus), Heuzey, *Terres-cuites du Louvre*, Pl. IX. Fig. 4, and Winter, *Die Antiken Terrakotten*, iii. p. 14, Fig. 6, and p. 19, Figs. 5 and 6.

(5) Another figure of cylindrical form (Fig. 1 (*b*)) shows a woman with a high head-dress and long hair. The left arm is bent at a right angle and laid across the waist; an excrescence above it may perhaps be some attribute which she held. The right arm is extended downwards so that the hand may cover the middle of the body. The *xoanon*-like treatment of the lower part of the body is noticeable.

(6) Two fragments, one headless and the other representing the lower

part of the body, give another type of female figure (Fig. 2). Like some of the early sixth-century *xoanon*-like sculptures, it is draped, and shows the forms of the body indistinctly through the flat surface of the drapery. The left hand rests on the left thigh and does not screen the middle of the body, though this no doubt was the original motive (cp. *A.J.A.* v. Pl. X. No. 6, not from Praesos).

(7) Another fragment of a male figure seems to have formed part of a group of two (Fig. 3). His companion was on the right and held one arm round the neck of our figure; the hand is preserved on the left shoulder.

FIG. 2.—ANOTHER TYPE.

FIG. 3.—MALE FIGURE FORMING PART OF A GROUP.

Probably the hand which rests on the right side of the body of our figure also belongs to his companion, and his right hand passed round the neck of the lost figure. For the position we may compare the well-known group in marble from Tanagra.

It is an unusually complicated motive and must have necessitated the use of at least two moulds. The right shoulder and the hand are in different planes. The hand shows a bracelet, or perhaps the end of a sleeve, on the wrist where it is broken off.

The figure is in a bolder style than the common plaques, and has a freshness and charm which the other early types have lost through

mechanical repetition. The head-dress in particular is carefully worked out; it consists of two rows of locks treated as spirals, five in the upper and six in the lower row. The group might possibly represent the Dioscuri.

In all the figures of which we have treated hitherto may be noticed an Egyptianising tendency, particularly in the treatment of the hair. The influence of Egyptian clay figurines, which are common in the Delta, is remarkable; these Egyptian figurines can be dated to the seventh and sixth centuries B.C.

Figures very similar to those from Praesos have been found in Crete at Krousonas (Mariani, *Mon. Ant.* vi. p. 38, Fig. 22), and at μετόχι of Stamatakī near Heraklion (Mariani, *l.c.* p. 39, Fig. 25). The well-known figures from Eleutherna and Tegea (*Rendiconti dei Lincei*, 1891, p. 599; *Rev. Arch.* xxi. p. 10 and Plates III. and IV.) show similar characteristics in the round.

(8) Another primitive type, 12 m. in height, of which a large number of specimens have been found, represents a small draped male figure advancing to the left (*A.J.A. l.c.* Pl. XII. Nos. 1 and 2). The hair is brushed back and tied behind; the eyes are not in profile; the nose and chin are long and pointed, and the forehead recedes. The waist is thin and the feet are planted flat on the ground. The figure wears close-fitting drapery reaching below the knees and a *chlamys* over the shoulders and left arm. The right hand is raised, the left is held at right angles close to the body; both thumbs point upwards. There is no indication either in the general type or from the presence of attributes which suggests that a god is represented; it may portray a worshipper, or perhaps a priest engaged in an act of ritual. Two plaques from the same mould were obtained by Mr. D. G. Hogarth near Epano Zakro (*B.S.A.* vii. p. 148).

(9) Another common type (Fig. 4, cp. *A.J.A.* v. p. 391, Fig. 21), which is difficult to explain, represents a female figure in a flowing robe, grasping in both hands a cord by which is suspended round her neck a circular drum or *tympanum*, decorated with two concentric circles enclosing a series

FIG. 4.—FEMALE FIGURE WITH DRUM.

of small studs or bosses. It is .22 m. in height. For the motive of the *tympanum* we may perhaps compare *B.M. Cat. of Terracottas*, B 380, 381, 383, from Sardinia; Winter, *loc. cit.* p. 17, Fig. 6. The figure has probably some reference to a local cult, perhaps that of the Mother of the gods. Rhea must have been worshipped by the Eteocretans, since the Dictaeon Zeus had the cultus-title of *Κούρος*, and she is expressly named in the Hymn discovered at Palaikastro.

Two of the largest of all the plaques from Praesos represent warriors; specimens of both are very numerous.

(10) The more primitive, which measures .26 m. in height, represents a warrior advancing to the left, holding in his right hand a spear, in his left a shield with a central *umbo* covering the body as far as the waist (*A.J.A.* v. p. 390, Fig. 19). He wears a helmet with a long crest. The features of the face are archaic; the eyes, which are set unnaturally low in the face, are not in profile, and the end of the mouth slopes upwards. The neck, waist, and legs, particularly at the knees, which by the common archaic convention are bent to represent motion, are thin and meagre. The whole effect is feeble and ugly. Though the figure is moving to the left, the body from the waist to the shoulders faces to the front—a scheme not uncommon in early art, and found, for instance, in the Europa metope from Selinus. The plaque is made in three moulds—the first extends downwards as far as the centre of the shield, where it forms a *chevron*-like line, the second from that point to the knees, and the third from the knees downwards.

FIG. 5.—MALE FIGURE
WEARING A BELT.

(11) The second type (*A.J.A.* v. Pl. XII. No. 3) measures .27 m. in height and is in the same position and bears similar weapons, except that the shield is decorated with a ram's head. The flowing crest seems to imitate horsehair. The work is less deeply cut and the style even feebler than the earlier figure.

In both these types the slender form of the waist and the girdle which contracts it recall the male figures from Knossos and elsewhere (*e.g.* *B.S.A.* vii. Figs. 13 and 31).

(12) Mention may here be made also of another male figure of which

four fragments have been found representing only the upper part of the body (Fig. 5). The hair stands out on either side of the head and is carefully arranged in locks over the forehead. The left hand is pressed against the waist, which is here again contracted by a close-fitting belt.

THE MIDDLE PERIOD.

In this period the most common type consists of various forms of seated female figures, such as are common on almost every site where terracottas have been found in Greek lands.

FIG. 6.

FIG. 7.

FIG. 8.

FIGS. 6, 7, 8.—SEATED FEMALE FIGURES.

(13) One of these, '17 m. in height, represents a figure clad in a single garment showing the forms of the body, which are heavy and carelessly rendered. The hair is rolled back over the forehead, and separate coils fall over the shoulders and breast. The hands rest on the knees, and between them is a round object, possibly an attribute. The chair has a curved back with sides bending inwards, and under the feet is a footstool. Like the

seated figures from Branchidae, the figure seems to be one with the throne on which it is seated.

A similar, but headless, fragment shows the knees and legs of a seated figure with the over- and under-garments carefully rendered. Another headless fragment measures '14 m. Another and smaller fragment shows the feet of a seated figure, clumsy in shape, but with the details carefully rendered. Another version is figured by Halbherr (*A.J.A.* v. p. 388, Fig. 17).

For the type represented by all these variants, cp. Mariani, *Mon. Ant.* vi. p. 41, Fig. 27; *B.M. Cat.* Plates IX. and XI., from Sicily and Rhodes; Winter, *l.c. passim*; the nearest parallels being from Sicily, Sardinia, and S. Italy, pp. 120-129; these have the same characteristic head-dress. These seated figurines are generally supposed to represent Chthonian deities.

(14) Another common seated type represents a female figure, '13 m. in height, seated between the columns of a small temple or chapel (Fig. 6). It faces the front and is clad in close-fitting drapery with a veil over the head. The temple consists of two columns of square construction with a triglyph above. The right hand is wrapped in drapery and apparently raised to the face, the left hand is laid on the lap and supports the right elbow.

FIG. 9.—STANDING FEMALE FIGURE.

(15) In a fragment of a slightly varying type the left hand holds the drapery on the lap, and probably also supports the right elbow (Fig. 7). It differs from the last type mainly in the absence of the columns.

(16) In another variant the columns are present, but the position of the hands is different (Fig. 8); the left hand is raised to the face, and the right hand is also lifted and perhaps held an attribute.

Three other female types seem also to belong to this period; they appear to represent mortals rather than deities, and their dedication may well signify the personal devotion of the dedicators.

(17) Of the largest of these, which measures '17 m., there is a perfect specimen in the Bishop of Hierapetra's collection (Fig. 9). It faces to the front; the right hand is laid upon the breast, the left hangs at the side. Some attention has been paid to the forms of the body, and the under- and

over-garments are carefully indicated. The hair is gathered in a mass over the centre of the forehead. There is no modelling at the back, which is a mere screen of clay pierced with a square hole.

(18) Another slightly smaller type, '15 m. in height, represents a female figure in a similar position. The left foot is slightly advanced. The rendering of the drapery is inadequate, and the whole figure very rough and sketchy.

FIG. 10.

FIG. 11.

FIG. 12.

FIG. 13.

FRAGMENTS, OF ARCHAISTIC STYLE.

(19) Another type, '13 m. in height, shows a female figure carrying a water-pot on her head. The close-fitting drapery shows the forms of the body in rough outline. The right hand supports the vessel, the left hangs at the side. The right foot is advanced, the left slightly withdrawn. A similar figure from an unknown source—probably from Praesos—is figured by Mariani, *l.c.* p. 43, Fig. 33b. The *hydrophoros* type is exceedingly common (cp. *B.M. Cat. passim* and Winter, *l.c.* pp. 156-159).

(20) An isolated fragment may be mentioned here, representing the headless torso of an Athena moving to the left and carrying a shield decorated with a *gorgoneion* on her left arm. Some locks of hair are visible on the neck. The workmanship is rough.

Four fragments all archaistic in style may be classed together.

(21) One represents a female head with long braided tresses, wearing a crested Corinthian helmet (Fig. 10). The upper part of the shield is preserved. Athena is undoubtedly the subject of this plaque.

(22) Another fragment (Fig. 11) represents the lower half of a female figure, turning to the left, clad in drapery which shows the outline of the limbs. The right foot is flat on the ground, the left is raised. The fragment is interesting as showing a characteristic scheme of archaistic sculpture on a small scale.

(23) A third fragment shows the upper half of a female figure turned to the right (Fig. 12). Her hair is arranged in curls beneath, a head-dress, and flows in long locks over her neck. Her right hand is raised, her left is bent at a right angle and holds an apple.

(24) The fourth fragment represents the upper part of the figure of an *ephebus*, clad in a *petasus* and a *chlamys* fastened with a large brooch at the neck (Fig. 13). He advances towards the right; the left arm is held out behind him, the right arm is raised. Considerable care has been bestowed on the rendering of the muscles.

All these four fragments are markedly archaistic. If not imported, which is possible from the fact that they are all isolated specimens, they at least show foreign influence. Somewhat of the same character are the reliefs from Locri (e.g. *B.M. Cat.* B 484).

THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD.

In the third and latest period the most common type represents a nude standing boy; it exists in several varieties.

(25) The most common of these types, fourteen specimens of which were discovered in 1900, measures 13 m. (*A.J.A.* v. p. 392, Fig. 24). The figure faces to the front; the left hand is placed on the hip, the right hangs at the side, the right leg is slightly advanced. The proportions and modelling are good.

(26) Fragments were discovered of a very similar figure on a slightly larger scale.

(27) Of a similar plaque on a still larger scale, measuring about '17 m., no complete specimen has come to light, but numerous fragments enable it to be restored. The left hand hangs at the side, the right is placed on the hips, the left leg is slightly withdrawn, and the weight of the body is being transferred to the right leg—a position which recalls the favourite scheme of Polykleitos.

FIG. 14.—VEILED FEMALE FIGURE.

FIG. 15.—DRAPED FIGURE (RESTORED).

FIG. 16.—APHRODITE AND EROS. FRAGMENT (RESTORED).

These three types undoubtedly belong to the class of *ephebe*-dedications, very commonly found on Greek sites (cp. Winter, *l.c.* pp. 182–188).

(28) Two fragments show the graceful figure of a woman lifting her veil with her right hand (Fig. 14). Great attention has here been paid to the folds of the garment, which shows the forms of the body. The proportions of the arms are exceedingly meagre, but the whole figure is not displeasing.

Of two larger plaques fragments have been published by Mariani (*l.c.*,

p. 188); newly discovered fragments complete the figures in both cases.

(29) The first represents a standing female figure, '25 m. in height (Fig. 15). The right arm is extended below the breast, and the hand holds

FIG. 17.—DANCING GIRL.

the folds of draperies which fall over the left shoulder; the left arm, which is half hidden in the drapery, is bent at the elbow.

(30) The other represents Aphrodite and Eros, and measures '19 m. in height. An outline sketch is given here, made up from various fragments to illustrate the general scheme of the group (Fig. 16). The goddess has

the upper part of the body bare, the lower half being covered with heavy folds of drapery. The right hand hangs down, the left holds the drapery at the hip. The right leg is crossed over the left, the left foot being curiously foreshortened. To the right is a nude Eros, winged and kneeling, facing towards the right. The exact motive of the figure is uncertain. The workmanship of the group is coarse and clumsy.

Both these plaques show the influence of the terracotta work of the Hellenistic age in Greece proper, of which the discoveries at Tanagra are typical. The draped female figure is clearly the *κόρη* of Tanagra imitated in a plaque by a Praesian artist, while the Aphrodite group can be paralleled exactly in a terracotta in the National Museum at Athens.

(31) Another very common type represents a dancing girl; it is found in two sizes, the larger being '23 m. in height (Fig. 17, cp. *A.J.A.* v. Pl. XII. No. 5), the other slightly smaller. She dances towards the right, the weight of the body resting on the right leg. The left hand is held with the palm upwards, the right arm is held on a level with the waist. The figure wears a high *polos* and a short, sleeveless *chiton*, which is shaken into graceful folds by her swift movement. The background on her left is filled by a tall, bending plant, apparently a reed. This plaque is the best composed and most carefully finished of the whole series. The filling in of the background recalls the reliefs of the Hellenistic age, to which this plaque undoubtedly belongs. (For the type of 'Laconian' dancing girl with *kalathiskos*, see Furtwängler, *Meisterwerke*, p. 202.)

There still remains to be mentioned a group of four plaques, of a type rather different from the rest, and so closely alike that they form a class by themselves. They are all more or less square in shape, and for the most part have holes for suspension. Three of the four represent animals; the relief is in all cases very flat.

(32) The first represents a sphinx advancing to the left (Fig. 18). The details of the hair, wings, and tail are carefully worked out in a decorative and conventional fashion. There are numerous similar figures in the Candia Museum, from Goulas, they are from a different mould, but serve to illustrate the popularity of the type.

(33) A second plaque, of which enough fragments exist to enable a restoration to be made, represents a griffin advancing to the right (Fig. 19).

It is in every respect a pendant to the sphinx; it shows the same conventional rendering of the wings, the same spiral in the hair and tail.

(34) A similar plaque from Praesos representing a lion is published by

FIG. 18.

FIG. 19.

FIG. 20.

THREE SQUARE PLAQUES.

Mariani (*l.c.* p. 34, Fig. 10). There is no example of it in the Candia Museum; it is noted here for the sake of completeness.

(35) The last of the series represents Silenus dipping a vessel into a large *amphora* (Fig. 20). It is very fragmentary. A fragment figured by Halbherr (*A.J.A. l.c.* p. 390, Fig. 20 and note) seems to belong to the same type.

We may now turn to a general criticism of the series. In the Archaic period we find connections with Egypt and Cyprus, and also with Sardinia. In this period the types are hieratic, and probably had a close connection with the religious beliefs of the Eteocretan people. They seem to point to the widespread worship of a nature-goddess, probably akin to the Phoenician Astarte, and perhaps also to the cult of a local war-god, to whom, besides the warrior plaques, the bronze models of arms from the Altar Hill (*B.S.A.* viii. 258-259 and Pl. X.) were possibly offered. The large number of these archaic figurines shows that they persisted for a long period by the side of more modern productions, a supposition also borne out by the fact that some specimens—to use a metaphor from engraving—are in a much 'earlier state' than others, which are less sharp through the wearing of the moulds. The persistence of archaic types also implies the survival of primitive cults among the Eteocretans.

The Middle period calls for little comment, except that here we find the types less hieratic, and less appropriate as offerings to deities, the human element predominating over the divine. They also betray a local art far less advanced than contemporary art on the Greek mainland.

The latest period shows the complete dominance of Greek Art over native style and craftsmanship, though the *πίναξ* form is still retained. The *κοινή διάλεκτος* of art in the Hellenistic Age has spread to Praesos as to other remote places, which then came within the all-embracing sphere of Hellenic influence.

In conclusion, I wish to thank Mr. R. C. Bosanquet not only for allowing me to publish his discoveries, but also for valuable help and advice. Mr. Bosanquet was good enough to spend much valuable time cleaning the terracottas discovered in 1900 and collating them with the specimens in the Bishop of Hierapetia's collection, and in superintending the drawings, which are from the pen of Mr. Frank Orr.

EDWARD S. FORSTER