Original article

THREE UNPUBLISHED SCULPTURE WORKS IN THE COPTIC MUSEUM

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Abstract

This article gives publication and full study of three sculpture works preserved in the Coptic Museum. Two of them are funerary figures, or Portrait Stelae, several examples of this type were found in many arts and cities of Middle and Upper Egypt, in Fayyum, Ilnhasia, Antoniopolis, El-Bahmaha, Baut, Qift, and Kom el-Rahieb opposite of Samalout in Minia, and the third is a portrait of a mature man. These three pieces arrived to the Coptic Museum since more than thirty years. The museum Kept them under Nrs. 13247, 13248, 13178. The Article contains also an analytic and dating study, together with spotting more lights upon the religious and cultural life, so also on the main characteristics of artworks during the era of Late Roman and early Coptic Art.

Keywords: Portrait stelae, Funerary figures, Coptic museum, Sculpture, Reliefs, Palleum

1. Introduction

The collection of Mr. Kamel Hammoda granted to The Coptic Museum in Cairo since the eighties of the 20th contains about 225 valuable pieces, among them standing Stelae, Naoses, portraits, friezes, and other masonry elements and sculpture works. This collection is preserved in the wide separate hall, named "The Great Tachtaboush magazine within the Coptic Museum". This article betakes three sculpture works out of this collection. Two of them; Nr. 13247, 13248 are funerary figures, or Portrait stelae, and the third, Nr. 13178 is a portrait of a mature man. The Main aim of this Article is to publish, For the first time three sculpture Works of lime stone, The Above mentioned, accompanied with a full analytic and dating study, together with spotting more lights upon the religious and cultural life, so also on the main characteristics of artworks during the era of Late Roman Art.

2. Material

2.1. The 1st piece of portrait stela of a mature man, fig. (1)

Description: A part of a funerary Stela of a mature man, it appears in very bad condition, salt absorbent, it was broken into 3 parts, which has been gathered together with a metal stand. This stela depicts the man from front appx. in life size, with oval face, full cheeks, straight nose, narrow eyes, short hair, permanent sight to front, standing in an attitude of dignity and respect. He wears a long Tunic, and the Palleum. The right arm is also broken, while the left hand holding edge of Palleum, traces of colors appear in head and face.
Registration: Coptic Museum, Great Tachtaboush magazine Nr. 132477
Provenance: Unknown
Material: Limestone
Measurements: height 144 cm., width 55 cm.
Dating: Late Roman Period
Bibliography: Unpublished

2.2. The 2nd piece of portrait stela of a mature man, fig. (2)

Description: A part of a funerary Stela of a mature man, it appears in bad condition, losing some parts from the right hand, and some other parts of sides, while traces of colors appear in head and face. This Stela depicts the man from front, approximately in life size, with oval face, full cheeks, straight nose, short hair and permanent sight to front, standing in an attitude of dignity and respect. He wears a long Tunic, and the Palleum, upon them the Prsthood scarf on the left shoulder surrounding the body from back to front. The right arm of the man is spread along body side, while holding a small round vase, full of some sort of offering; water, wine, or sacred oil (?) by his left hand.
• **Registration:** Coptic Museum, Great Tachtaboush magazine Nr. 13248  
• **Provenance:** Unknown  
• **Material:** Limestone  
• **Measurements:** height 157 cm., width 50 cm.  
• **Dating:** Late Roman Period  
• **Bibliography:** Unpublished

Figure (2) Shows portrait stela of a mature man N. 13247, (by Author)

2.3. **The 3rd piece of portrait of an adult man, fig. (3)**

**Description:** Portrait of an adult man, three dimension sculpture, it was roughly cut and seems in bad condition, having some traces of colors, and losing some parts mainly in the neck and left side. The portrait gives impression of a man of dignity, with short hair, oval face, wide eyes, long straight nose.

**Registration:** Coptic Museum, Great Tachtaboush magazine Nr. 13178  
**Provenance:** Unknown  
**Material:** Limestone  
**Measurements:** height 29 cm.  
**Dating:** Late Roman Period  
**Bibliography:** Unpublished
3. Dating, Analysis and Discussion

As for both pieces N. 13247 and 13248, they related to the style known as: Funerary figures [1] or Aedicula-type stelae [2], while this piece is formed in two-dimensions-sculpture, it gives the impression of sculpture-in-the round [3], it depicts frequently the deceased, in life size [4], inside some niche symboling the tomb, or funerary chapel [5]. Several examples of this type were found in many orfs and cities of middle and upper Egypt [6], in Fayyum, Ihnasia, Antoniopolis, El-Bahmasa, Bautit, Qift, and Kom el-Rahieb opposite of Samalout in Minia [7]. These sculptures are preserved in several museums and private collections all over the world [8], pieces of this type express accurate portraits of either men, women, or also children [9], which were deposited in, or outside the tombs of their owners [b] [10]. Both pieces; i.e. Nr. 13247, 13248 show great influences from the Roman portrait of the 4th century A.D. in head and facial features [c], while gives classical body-forms [11], with some Egyptian touches, known in the 3rd Century A.D. [9], it shows also some traces of colors, which gives good idea about costume details, cultural factors [2], and some other indications to some social and stratum positions [5], more than giving information about ethnic routes, origin, or land [1], as they all were joint together by vigorous cultural factors, originated throughout all the Classical, and thereafter, Roman world [2]. The funerary stela Nr. 13247 was cut in smooth way, with extra care to the eyes, it shows pure Roman Style in the Hair style, and also in the Palleum [d] [12] with the fine drapery. It shows itself also within just as well "The style of Cos island" [e] [13], or normal way, the abovementioned indications refer then to some date at the beginning of the 4th century A.D. [14]. The second stela, namely Nr. 13248 displays a portrait of a middle aged man, who seems to be a priest, wearing the Palleum of priesthood, espe-
cially those of goddess Isis\(^{(0)}\), which match with the "Orariom (or Orarion"\(^{[15]}\) worn later on by the Christian priests. This man holds also a small round vase, so such these forms could be interpreted as Roman so as Coptic as well \(^{[16]}\). This piece N. 13248 was rather cut roughly, with narrow eyes, the other facial features, i.e. nose, mouth, express calmness and dignity, the drapery of his coat designed in successive layers witness for dating from the second half of the 4\(^{th}\) century to the beginning of the 5\(^{th}\) century, about 350-400 A.D. \(^{[2]}\). This dating goes together with views of some other scholars, who defined this type within the transition period between Roman and Coptic Arts\(^{(2)}\) \(^{[17]}\). So we can say, that we have here a stamp of some Middle Egyptian workshop, with preponderance to Oxyrhynchus or Heracleopolis\(^{(b)}\) \(^{[18]}\). Both the Tonic and the Palleum of these two pieces were considered to be an important completion to the form and attitude of the elite class of men as a cultural choice \(^{[19]}\), in the meanwhile they aimed, by keeping wearing them also in funerary portraits \(^{[20]}\) to gain good position also in the other world \(^{[21]}\). The third piece Nr. 13178 displays a portrait of a mature man in full three dimensions sculpture, it was cut roughly as known by the late Roman portraits in general \(^{[22]}\). Despite the obvious influences of the Alexandrian school \(^{[23]}\), and the classical principals on this piece, it shows also some likeness with the formal style of the Roman Empire from the reign of Great Constantenios \(^{[24]}\), especially in facial feature; full cheeks, wide eyes, and hair dress leaning back \(^{[25]}\). This Portrait, Nr. 13178, is a prototype of private individual portraits known from the reign of Hadrian (117-138 A.D.) until the fifth century \(^{[26]}\), as a style of local representations, which were found in many Metropolises in Egypt and some other districts throughout the Roman World\(^{(d)}\) \(^{[27]}\). This era witnesses the existence of different influences on the Egyptian portraits from many other territories of the Roman Empire \(^{[28]}\), especially, from Syria, Constantinople and Rome \(^{[29]}\); so this portrait expresses clearly the harmony between the late Roman, and early Coptic sculpture, that gives possibility to date it from the 4\(^{th}\) century A.D \(^{[30]}\).

4. Conclusion

These three sculpture pieces show some art styles, which could be dated from the transition period between Roman and Coptic arts namely, Late Roman art. The two works; numbers: 13247 & 13248 give stylistic cult figures of local limestone, cut in fine finishing, then colored. They show a state of equilibrium & steadiness in form and direction, with giving some extra solicitude to the head and facial features to express a deep impression of dignity for the deceased, which can compared somewhat with that of saints and holy persons. This art of cult figures, or Aedicula-type Stelaere present men, women, or scarcely children, by holding some funerary gafs like a small vase, or a bouquet of flowers, to pass with the calm & respective attitude of the portrait. The third piece, Nr. 13178, is a prototype of the personal portraits of its time; numerous examples thereof were found in many districts in Egypt, and some other metropolises throughout the Roman Empire.

Endnotes

(a) My deep thanks to Dr. Atif Naguib, General Director of the Coptic museum for his Kind help by choosing, photographing, and investigating pieces displayed in this Article.

(e) This Type "Cos Island" is named regarding a definite collection of Hellenistic statues found in this island and branded by wearing the Palleum (Himation) in the same way. For more information: Riggs, Ch. (2005), The Beautiful Burial in Roman Egypt, Oxford, pp. 88-89; Gabr, M. (2010), Styles of male costumes p. 133-138.


References


The museum's own holdings in Coptic work, which include several recent and hitherto unexposed acquisitions, and the rarely seen collection formed in Egypt by the late Morris Nadler. An industrialist whose family, Austrian by descent, settled in Alexandria in 1910, Mr. Nadler moved to New York City in the 1950's, bringing his art with him. In some of the later textiles - the show ends in the 11th century - both figures and animals begin to look like the geometricized motifs in Turkish rugs. Bernard Bothner, former chairman of the Brooklyn Museum's Egyptian and classical departments, has said that Coptic art "expresses the sentiments of the native lower and middle classes." These three pieces arrived to the Coptic Museum since more than thirty years. The museum kept them under Nrs. 13247, 13248, 13178. This article gives publication and full study of three sculpture works preserved in the Coptic Museum. Two of them are funerary figures, or Portrait Steleae, several examples of this type were found in many orts and cities of Middle and Upper Egypt, in Fayoum, Ihnasia, Antoniopolis, El-Bahhnaa, Buit, Qift, and Kom el-Rahieb opposite of Samalout in Minia, and the third is a portrait of a mature man. These three pieces arrived to the Coptic Museum since more than thirty years. The museum kept them under Nrs. 13247, 13248, 13178. – Conch-shaped crowning of a recess (National Museum in Warsaw) (2 F). – Volute capital with floral decorations (National Museum in Warsaw) (2 F). Media in category "Coptic sculptures in the National Museum in Warsaw". The following 6 files are in this category, out of 6 total.