

**Rabe, Britta.**

ZWISCHEN ENTWURF UND PRODUKT: DIE GRIECHISCH-RÖMISCHEN GIPSFORMEN AUS ÄGYPTEN IM MUSEUM AUGUST KESTNER, HANNOVER PHILIPPIKA. Marburger altertumskundliche Abhandlungen 44. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011. 196 pages, 351 b/w figs., plus CD with 368 pages of additional color figs. ISBN 9783447064842. €39.90.

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This slim but useful volume publishes a substantial corpus of plaster molds used to produce figurines of bronze, terracotta, and possibly faience, as well as vessels, lamps, and attachments for furniture and other equipment. The molds from the collections of the Museum August Kestner in Hannover have been largely unpublished aside from a few brief articles on specific pieces. This book thus represents a valuable resource, making an important collection available to the scholarly community. The collection contains 397 mold fragments from a total of 343 molds, as well as three ancient castings; a number of now-lost additional molds are known only from museum records. The objects entered the museum's collection in the 1920s, and despite imprecision in the existing documentation, Rabe argues for a provenience at Mit Rahina (ancient Memphis). Of the molds, 272 were used for the production of figurines, and the remainder for assorted "Gerät" (see below).

The bulk of the book is the catalog itself, accounting for 158 of a total 196 pages. In Chapter 1, Rabe notes that the book derives from a six-month research project; she intends the publication not to provide the last word on all aspects of the molds' production and use, but to make the corpus available to scholars and facilitate further discussion and analysis (pp. 11 and 25). In that regard the volume is extremely successful, as the objects are presented handsomely and accessibly, and the numerous high-resolution color photographs far exceed the usual standard of images for a museum publication of this type. The printed catalog contains black-and-white photographs of castings made from each mold. These are useful, but the real prize is the 368-page PDF on the accompanying CD, presenting color photographs of both molds and castings and displaying multiple views of each object. The author and publishers are to be commended for presenting the images in this format. The CD enables the presentation of many more images – in color and excellent quality – than would be possible in print, and the high resolution allows the viewer to zoom in and view each object in detail, far larger than life size.

The discussion preceding the catalog is relatively brief (25 pp.) and raises, inevitably, more questions than such a limited space can answer. Following a discussion of the history of the museum's collections in Chapter 2, Rabe addresses the molds' use in ancient bronze, terracotta, and faience production in Chapter 3. Publications of figurines from Greco-Roman Egypt are relatively numerous, but published molds are rarer¹ and such objects provide important data on the production process for bronze and terracotta objects. Rabe distinguishes between molds for terracotta or faience and molds for bronze based partly on the presence or absence of sprues (channels for the introduction of molten fluid), indicating the production of bronze objects via the lost-wax technique (p. 12-14). Her overview of the manufacturing processes for bronze, terracotta, and faience focuses largely on the act of casting. While this section is useful, the reader is left wishing for a fuller discussion of the artifacts' entire *chaîne opératoire*, from the acquisition of raw materials (for both the molds and the objects cast within them) to the distribution of the finished products.

In Chapter 4, Rabe addresses the date of the objects, which appear to range from early Ptolemaic through approximately the 2nd century CE. Because of the molds' lack of context, the dating is necessarily stylistic. While Rabe acknowledges the dangers of such stylistic dating (p. 16), it would have been helpful here, for the benefit of readers without extensive prior background in coroplastic studies, to go into more detail on those aspects of mold-based production that make stylistic dating particularly problematic. For example, since coroplasts could use finished figurines as prototypes for new molds, a mold might easily appear stylistically older than its actual date of production.² Additionally, the suggestion that ruler portraits should have been commissioned not long after the ruler's time in office (p. 16) does not appear to hold true in all cases. For example, several bronze and terracotta representations of the third-century Ptolemaic couple Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II appear to date to the second or first century BCE³ – to say nothing of the long-lasting popularity, throughout the Mediterranean world, of posthumous images of Alexander.⁴

Chapter 5 deals with the molds' origin, arguing for a Memphite provenience based on old records and parallels with other finds. Chapter 6 analyzes the different workshops involved in the molds' production, arguing for the existence of at least two separate workshops (p. 19). This chapter includes a useful discussion of the relative validity of various characteristics of molds as criteria for the identification of workshops. However, more attention might here have been paid to the possible trade in figurine molds and prototypes. The potential circulation of molds and prototypes from workshop to workshop greatly complicates any attempt to assign a mold to a single workshop, as the craftsman who cast that mold from a prototype might well be geographically and temporally separated from both the craftsman who made the original prototype, and any craftsmen who later used the mold to cast new figurines.⁵ Following this discussion of workshops, Chapter 7 addresses other technical features of the molds, while Chapter 8 addresses the figural molds' iconographic themes. Images of Isis and Harpocrates are predictably popular, as is often the case with figurines from Greco-Roman Egypt. Rabe discusses the prominent motifs in the corpus, but does not provide the number of molds associated with each type; a summary table, listing the major mold types and the number of exemplars, would have been useful here.

Following some brief concluding remarks in Chapter 9, the catalog proper consists of 5 sections: molds for figurines; molds for vessels, furniture, and other equipment; “Sonstiges” (containing only one object, a plaster impression of straw); ancient castings in plaster; and lost objects known from museum records. Within all categories, molds for bronze casting predominate. Rabe subdivides these categories according to iconographic type (for the figurine molds) or vessel or object type (for all other molds). She divides the figurines’ iconography into the following groups (whose numbers, as follows, come from the present reviewer’s count): Egyptian gods (47 in total, dominated by Isis and Harpocrates); Greek and Roman gods, heroes, and associated figures (8, of whom half belong to the Dionysiac thiasos); divine attributes (1, a *tnj*-crown); portraits (10); unidentifiable or generic figures in Egyptian dress (6); unidentifiable or generic figures in Greco-Roman dress or style (52, though one may question whether all of these are purely “Greco-Roman”; see below); limbs and body parts (108); animals (35); and other (5). The category of “Gerät” includes several object types: fulcra (2); vessel handles and attachments (19); feet for furniture (8); ornamental leaves (7); protomes (5); and miscellaneous (29).

As the list above suggests, the corpus’ iconography is rich and varied. Chapter 8 provides a very brief introduction to the imagery, but this chapter’s limited scope (just over 2 pages) precludes detailed analysis. The figural molds, in particular, deserve further iconographic study. Rabe’s division of the figural molds into Egyptian and Greco-Roman categories requires further nuancing as much research on figurines from Greco-Roman Egypt suggests that outwardly Hellenizing iconography may often translate quite traditional ideas. Figurines of Greek deities, such as Dionysus or Herakles, may represent not only their Hellenic prototypes, but also the Egyptian gods with whom they were equated, such as Osiris or Somtous.⁶ Indeed, the Ptolemaic promotion of Dionysus’ cult – derived ultimately from the ancient association of royal ancestors with Osiris – may help explain the popularity of Dionysiac imagery in Greco-Roman Egypt⁷ (see, for example, cat. nos. 50, 51, 54, and 55). In addition, a hunchbacked “grotesque” (cat. no. 85) appears under the heading of “Griechisch-römische Themen,” although in Egypt, such figurines of hunchbacked figures (usually dwarfs) frequently appear to depict indigenous deities or cult officiants.⁸ Given its possible Memphite origin, this particular mold’s iconography may recall the cult of Pataikos, an achondroplastic dwarf form of the Memphite creator deity Ptah.⁹ Similarly categorized under “Griechisch-römische Themen” is a probable Isis priestess (cat. no. 88); but despite the figure’s Hellenized attire, Isis’ long indigenous pedigree complicates any attempt to assign this mold neatly into either a purely indigenous or a purely Greco-Roman category.

As this corpus includes molds for both bronze and terracotta figurines, it provides fertile ground for future comparative analysis. What motifs appear primarily on bronzes rather than terracottas, and vice versa? How might such trends reflect differential patterns of distribution and consumption, related to the social classes of consumers and the intended use-contexts (for example, temple, domestic, etc.) of the finished products? While the absence of any discussion of such topics is a missed opportunity in the present book, the publication provides a valuable resource that other scholars might use to address these and other questions.

The molds’ proposed Memphite provenance raises another question not addressed in this book, but potentially productive for further research: to what degree does the objects’ iconography reflect local, site-specific patterns of belief and ritual, and to what degree does that iconography reflect broader national trends? The traditional Memphite triad of Ptah, Sekhmet, and Nefertem appears only sparsely represented (for example, cat. nos. 40, 43, and see observations above on cat. no. 85), but further study might help elucidate more site-specific elements of the molds’ iconography.¹⁰

Finally, the two molds for bronze statuettes of a four-headed Hathor (cat. nos. 26 and 27) are unusual and potentially important. The present reviewer would like to note that like the four-sided Hathor-headed columns at Dendara, these statuettes clearly allude to the theology of Hathor as a universal deity: “Hathor Quadrifrons” whose four faces correspond to the four quarters of the world.¹¹

As a catalog of a previously unpublished primary source material, this work is eminently successful. The corpus is lovingly and comprehensively documented. The study’s analytical and interpretive aspects are less thoroughly developed, as is frequently the case with catalog-style presentations. In the concluding chapter, however, Rabe expresses a hope that future research will help elucidate “weitergehende kulturhistorische Fragen” concerning these artifacts’ social and economic context (p. 25). Such a result would indeed be valuable. As intermediary steps in the manufacturing process for bronze, terracotta, and faience objects, these molds deserve study as part of the larger *chaîne opératoire* for such objects’ production, distribution, and consumption. Equally desirable is a detailed iconographic analysis investigating these artifacts’ imagery as evidence for the negotiation of cultural and religious identity in the diverse, cosmopolitan city of Memphis, with its “bunt zusammengesetzte Bevölkerung” (p. 25). While the volume does not aim to provide definitive statements on these topics, Rabe’s careful recording and high-quality images of the artifacts will provide fertile ground for scholars wishing to explore such issues further.

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¹See, for example, C.C. Edgar, *Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire. Greek Moulds*, Cairo, 1903.

²See, for example, A. Muller, *Les terres cuites votives du Thesmophorion. Études thasiennes* 17, Athens, 1996, 60-61; G.S. Merker, *The Sanctuary of Demeter and Kore: Terracotta Figurines of the Classical, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods. Corinth* 18, Princeton, 2000, 14; H. Szymanska, *Terres cuites d'Athribis*, Turnhout, 2005, pp. 65 and 78; D. Kassab Tezgör, *Tanagréennes d'Alexandrie*, Cairo, 2007, 16-17.

³F. Queyrel, "Portraits de souverains lagides à Pompéi et à Délos," *BCH* 108, 1984, 295; C.E. Barrett, *Egyptianizing Figurines from Delos: A Study in Hellenistic Religion*. CSCT 36, Leiden, 2011, 12 and 190-198.

⁴For example, A. Stewart, *Faces of Power: Alexander's Image and Hellenistic Politics*, Los Angeles, 1993.

⁵See, for example, Barrett, *Egyptianizing Figurines from Delos*, 359-362.

⁶Dionysus and Osiris: Barrett, *Egyptianizing Figurines from Delos*, 382-383. Somtous and Herakles: J. Quaegebeur, "Somtous l'Enfant sur le lotus," in *Mélanges Jacques Jean Clère*, Lille, 1991, 113-122.

⁷Barrett, *Egyptianizing Figurines from Delos*, 382-383.

⁸Compare the non-hunchbacked, but equally "grotesque," cat. no. 72, which Rabe correctly identifies as a "Kultdiener".

⁹V. Dasen, *Dwarfs in Ancient Egypt and Greece*, Oxford, 1993, 40-41, 84-98; Barrett, *Egyptianizing Figurines from Delos*, 279-284.

¹⁰On figurine iconography alluding to specific local cults, see P. Ballet, "Terres cuites isiaques de l'Égypte hellénistique et romaine. État de la recherche et des publications," in L. Bricault, ed. *De Memphis à Rome*, Leiden, 2000, 100-102.

¹¹P. Derchain, *Hathor Quadrifrons*, Istanbul, 1972; cf. H. Willems et al., *The Temple of Shanhûr*. OLA 124, Leuven, 2003, 104-105.