



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**A STUDY OF UNPUBLISHED ANTHROPOMORPHIC TERRACOTTA
FIGURINES FROM ANCIENT YEMEN**

DHEKRA ABDULJABBAR AL-SHARGABI.

FEM 2005 6



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2005



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By

DHEKRA ABDULJABBAR AL-SHARGABI

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science**

May 2005



DEDICATION

TO MY PARENTS WHO SACRIFICED A LOT AND MADE EVERY EFFORT TO
MAKE ME THE PERSON I AM TODAY

TO MY LOVELY SISTERS AND BROTHERS.

TO MY LOVELY HUSBAND ABDULWAHID

TO EVERYONE WHO GOES FAR TO SEEK EDUCATION, I DEDICATE THIS
RESEARCH.

Abstract of thesis presented to the senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science.

**A STUDY OF UNPUBLISHED ANTHROPOMORPHIC TERRACOTTA
FIGURINES FROM ANCIENT YEMEN**

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May 2005

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Yemen was called the Arabic Felix as it had a long history, which started in the third millennium BC and flourished throughout the kingdom of Saba, Ma'een, Qataban, and Hadhramout, Ousan and Hemyar. The Yemeni people were proficient in many aspects of life and had the capability to build a great civilization as they had many experiences, with different types of inventions, innovative arts and religious ideas at that time.

This study concentrates on one of the interesting aspects of the Yemen Civilization, i.e. an art that they were skilled in. The terracotta figurines were collected from three museums: The National Museum of Sana'a, The Military Museum in Sana'a, and the National Museum of Aden. These figurines were obtained either by donation or by purchase. There are one hundred eight including female and male terracotta figurines

This study involved fieldwork that was done as follows: description of the overall shape, the position of the body, the method of manufacture, the decoration and the colour. The Fabric colour was measured using Munsell Soil Colour Charts and the hardness was measured using Moh's scale. The aim was to create a database of the terracotta figurines for future references.

At present, Yemen is still lacking in ancient archaeological information concerning the art and religion. The terracotta figurines from museums showed some similarity with that from other sites in Yemen and Gulf countries that came from controlled excavations and have already been dated.

As a conclusion, a date was suggested in the first millennium BC-100AD period for the terracotta figurines in the Yemeni museums in Sana'a while the terracotta figurines from Aden museum were dated to the fourth millennium BC to the second millennium BC.

After extensive research and reading, we suggest that the significance of these terracotta figurines were clearly used for religious function i.e., it might have served either for worship of the mother Goddess or maybe an offering as a gift to the temples and their existence in ancient houses were to bring good luck and prevent bad luck. The male terracotta figurines were very rare but they might be used as God or King or horseman or temple priest. The heads figurines might be used as votive objects.

Abstrak yang dikemukakan kepada senat Unversiti Putra Malaysia bagi memenuhi
Keperluan Ijazah Master Sains

KAJIAN TERHADAP PATUNG TERRACOTTA DARI ZAMAN PURBA YEMEN TIDAK DITERBITKAN

Oleh

Dhekra AbdulJabbar al-Shargabi

Mai 2005

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Yemen pernah mendapat gelaran sebagai “Kebahagiaan Arab”,serta mempunyai sejarah yang panjang, bermula semenjak 3000 tahun Sebelum Masehi (3000 SM) dan berkembang maju sepanjang kerajaan Saba, Ma’een, Qataban, Hadhramout, Ousan dan Hemyar. Pada zaman dahulu, masyarakat Yemen mahir dalam berbagai aspek kehidupan serta memiliki kemampuan untuk membangunkan suatu tamadun yang tinggi, kerana mereka mempunyai banyak pengalaman dengan berbagai penemuan dan berbagai inovasi dalam bidang seni serta idea keagamaan pada masa itu. Kajian ini menumpukan pada salah satu aspek menarik daripada tamadun Yemen, iaitu kemahiran mereka dalam bidang seni. Patung-patung terracotta telah dikumpulkan daripada tiga muzium, iaitu Muzium Negara di Sana’a, Muzium Askar di Sana’a, dan Muzium Negara di Aden. Patung-patung tersebut diperoleh melalui pemberian serta pembelian. Dalam kajian ini terdapat 108 patung-patung terracotta, termasuk patung berbentuk lelaki mahupun perempuan. Kajian telah dilakukan sebagai berikut: deskripsi bentuk keseluruhan, posisi badan, cara pembuatan, hiasan dan warna. Warna patung telah diukur menggunakan carta-carta warna tanah Munsell, manakala kekerasan patung diukur menggunakan skala

Moh's. Tujuannya adalah untuk menciptakan pangkalan data untuk patung-patung terracotta bagi rujukan di masa akan datang. Pada masa ini, Yemen masih lagi kekurangan informasi arkeologi zaman purba yang berkaitan dengan bidang seni dan agama. Patung-patung terracotta dari beberapa muzium telah menunjukkan beberapa persamaan dengan patung-patung terracotta dari tempat-tempat lain di Yemen dan Negari-Negeri Teluk yang didapat dari pengawalan beberapa penggalian dan telahpun ditetapkan tarikhnya. Sebagai kesimpulan, tarikh penetapan bagi patung-patung terracotta dari muzium-muzium Yaman di Sana'a dianggarkan diantara 1000 tahun Sebelum Masehi hingga 100 tahun selepas masehi (1000 SM - 100), sedangkan patung-patung terracotta dari muzium di Aden tarikhnya ditetapkan antara 4000 SM hingga 2000 SM. Setelah mengadakan kajian yang luas, kami mencadangkan bahawa kegunaan patung-patung terracotta ini adalah sebagai fungsi keagamaan, misalnya ianya dipersembahkan untuk penyembahan Mahadewi atau mungkin sebagai hadiah untuk kuil-kuil, dan wujudnya di rumah-rumah lama telah dianggap membawa tuah serta menolak bala.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

In the name of Allah, the compassionate, the merciful. Praise be to the Almighty Allah for his exceeding ease and comfort. Praise him for helping me to accomplish this work, and he who thanks Allah, the Great and the Almighty, thanks people.

Many thanks also go to the financial sponsorship provided by M.T.C.P.

My deep gratitude, sincere appreciation and due respect go to the chairman of my supervisory committee : Dr.Zaid bin Ahmad who has never hesitated to give me his advice and guidance that have helped accomplish this research .My sincere appreciation also goes to the committee members : Dr.Zahid bin Emby for his invaluable comments, suggestions and insightful criticism , and Prof.Dr.Ghassan Ta.Yaseen. who was my teacher for four years in Sana'a university during my degree and who provided me with a lot of references which were very important to complete this research and for his invaluable comments, suggestions , and insightful criticism and also for becoming like my second father in Malaysia. My deep gratitude goes to his all family members also.

Thanks also to the Department of Philosophy and civilization and the faculty of human Ecology particularly and the universiti of Putra Malaysia in general for providing a conducive environment in which to carry out this study.

I also wish to express my sincere greetings to the administration represented by Mr.Abdulaziz al-Jendari and the employees of the National museum in Sana'a. My gratitude and respect go also to the administration representing by lieutenant colonel Sharf Loqumaan and the employees of the Military museum in Sana'a. Also I wish to express my sincere greetings to the administration representing by Dr.Raja'a Ba-taweel and the employees of the National museum in Aden. My thanks also goes to Prof.Dr.Abdul Othman Gahlib, Dr.Amida Sholan and Dr.Abdul Hakeem, Dr. Ahmad Ba-taee'a. Many thanks to the National center for archives represented by Mr. Ali abu Al-Rajal. I also wish to express my sincere greetings to the administration of the Germany Archaeology institute in Sana'a for their kind help.

My deepest appreciation to my family in Yemen especially my father and my mother who dedicated a lot of their time to me especially during my field work to Aden museum ,accompanying me every where. My sisters and my brothers who assisted me during the collection of my data and who were encouraging all the time and were very patient when I was nervous.

All sincere respects to my lovely husband Abdulwahid in Canada who supported me always and raised my spirits in difficult times.

And the deepest appreciation to my friend Thahira from India who assisted me in proper usage of language during all my work in this study and we went through a lot together.

Also I wish to express my sincere greetings to my friends in Yemen. And many thank to all my Yemeni friends in Malaysia who help me to complete this work.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

N.M	National museum of Sana'a
M.M	Military museum of Sana'a
A.M	National museum of Aden

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Yemen has a great prehistoric and historic heritage and is known in the Middle Eastern countries as the country of trade. This study will cover one hundred eight of unpublished terracotta figurines of Yemen from ancient times and during the rise of the Yemeni Kingdom(C.1000 B.C) until the rise of Islam in the six Century in the Christian era which is considered to be a witness of the main features of Yemen civilization. This type of study had not been done before except for two studies of which one was by Rathjens (1955) and another one by Yaseen, et al (1996).

This study will be reflecting the arts and religious beliefs of ancient Yemen, and it is basically a field work, which will focus on terracotta figurines in three museums in Yemen namely The National Museum of Sana'a¹, The Military Museum in Sana'a,² and The National Museum of Aden.³

All terracotta figurines on display and some of undisplay were analyzed .Most of these figurines are without registration and documentation as to where they were found. The exact date when the figurines were made is unknown and only an estimated time period can be established.

Some of them arrived to these particular museums through purchase, or donations by people. Most of them did not come from organized excavations .Most of these figurines

¹ It is situated in the heart of the capital Sana'a in the Tahrir square

² It is situated in the heart of the capital Sana'a in the Tahrir square south of national museum

³ It is located in Crater in Serh province ,an old Sultan's palace

date back to the ancient Yemeni kingdoms but the exact period of time when it was made is not known.

This study consists of six chapters. The initial four chapters are to provide the necessary background data for this study; firstly the introduction chapter will focus on research problems and the initial concepts as well as the Introduction, Objectives, Limitations and Methodology. Chapter two of this study will be the Literature review.

Chapter three consists of the geographical and historical background of Yemen. The name & location of Yemen will be considered. The geographical factors and influence of these factors on the rise of the Yemeni civilization is also discussed. The historical background of ancient Yemen will be discussed in brief from pre-historic period until the rise of Islam.

Chapter four consists of the Yemeni terracotta figurines background. It will focus on the background of the terracotta figurines in brief, which existed in Europe during the upper Paleolithic and during the Neolithic times in the near East and with special references to Arabia (Gulf States). The focus however, will be on the Yemeni terracotta figurines. This chapter is also going to concentrate on figurines in different shape and status, where it sometimes takes on human forms whether female or male. The terracotta figurines from the ancient sites in Yemen which had been based on an actual field work (excavation) in some places such as Ma'rib and Sabrlahj or other sites which had fixed dates of excavations will also be discussed.

Chapter five consists of the discussion of the Terracotta figurines from Museums of Yemen. The aims of this chapter are to discuss and concentrate on terracotta figurines from museums in Yemen (field work by the researcher) and will focus on the anthropomorphic figurines whether female or male as well as a general description of these figurines.

The relationship between the terracotta figurines from the museums in Yemen and neighboring countries shows that the figurines had some influence from neighboring areas or originally came from outside as a result of contacts whether by trade or movement of people for any reasons. This chapter also investigates whether the Yemeni terracotta figurines carried out in this study had features or any kinds of similarities with other figurines from neighboring countries.

Chapter six consists of the conclusion and recommendations .This chapter will have conclusion of all chapters, including the artistic style of the terracotta figurines and the significance of the female, male and heads terracotta figurines. The date is approximated for these terracotta figurines and there is a focus on the significance and usage of these terracotta figurines in the Near East, neighboring countries and essentially Yemen whether they were used as religious objects or others.

The study will end with the recommendations, bibliography and appendixes. The appendix contains the catalog that will cover female figurines, the male figurines and heads figurines which will include pictures, measurement and the type of manufacturing. The catalog contains some tables and diagrams of classification of figurines.

It is hoped that this study will shed some light on the important part of plastic art and religious beliefs which existed in the ancient Yemen civilization.