



Summary :

The terracotta art flourished greatly in Asia Minor throughout the Hellenistic period. The production of Asia Minor workshops is characterized by a variety of thematic types and free-style modelling. The most significant centres were located in Myrina, Pergamon, Smyrna and Cnidus.

Date

3rd century BC – 1st century AD

Geographical Location

NW and SW Asia Minor

1. Introduction

The Hellenistic terracotta art is characterized by the predominance of uniform tendencies in the selection of themes and styles. This generalized homogeneity often impairs variety. The local peculiarities of different workshops, which were particularly evident in the Archaic and Classical periods, are now minimised. In the Hellenistic period, however, the Greek terracotta artists reached the height of their creativity. It would not be an exaggerated statement to make that certain Hellenistic figurines surpass the boundaries of their size and their 'humble' construction material, and reach the level of perfection that corresponds to great works of plastic art.

Initially, the terracotta artists of Asia Minor followed the general tendencies which also prevailed in mainland Greece. In the Late Hellenistic period, however, they came forward by creating original local styles, sharing a similar technique and selection of themes.

2. Time boundaries and general characteristics

The Hellenistic terracotta art of Asia Minor could be divided in two chronological stages.¹ The early stage covers the time-span between 330 and 200 BC. In these years the so called 'Tanagra style' is prevalent, which is characterized by a great homogeneity in style and choice of thematic types.² The most common thematic type of this style are the so called 'Tanagrians', namely the standing, dressed female figures, with multi-coloured decoration and an elaborate attribution of their clothes' foldings. These figures usually wear a **chiton** and an **himation**. The clothes are depicted as embracing the body tightly, creating folds which follow opposite directions, which attribute a vivid and decorative character to the figures, and offer the possibility for variations on the same theme.

Other characteristic thematic types in these years are the seated female figures, young girls, standing male figures, young boys whose additional wings could make them pass for god **Eros**, and plenty of variations of **Aphrodite**, standing or seated.

The Late Hellenistic period covers the 2nd and the 1st centuries BC, while in some workshops the production continued even later. The tendency for homogeneity had survived, yet at the same time new, innovative tendencies were crystallized. The 'Tanagrians' still remained a favourite theme, but the thematology of terracotta artists was enriched with various new types. Tendencies became more and more stilted, and the style generally became more decorative. The centre of attention was eventually shifted to the workshops of Asia Minor, which produced some of the best samples of terracotta art around the Greek world at that time. Indeed, in many cases their production continued until Imperial times.³ In this later period, copper works of art became more accessible than before, a fact that reduced the demand for clay figurines. Thus, this kind of art steadily fell into decline and its last, degenerated samples are dated to the 5th century AD.

One of the greatest problems in the research of Hellenistic terracotta art is that of dating, due to the conditions under which it has been discovered. The majority of the figurines from Eastern workshops were found mainly in excavations that took place in the 19th century at the great sanctuaries of Asia Minor's Greek towns. The research orientation of that period focused mainly on the monumental architecture and the great terracotta art. Inevitably, the humble clay figurines that emerged from the dark were second-rate. References by excavators to the terracotta art are usually succinct, if not non-existent, resulting to an often impossible connection of the figurines with dated objects or sets of findings. Therefore, dating attempts are usually based on stylistic observations.

3. Usage and construction techniques

The usage of Hellenistic figurines remains a mystery to current researchers. The place of recovery – whenever it is known – is not a valid criterion for making conclusions, since the same types are usually seen in different sets of findings. One should not ignore the fact that opinions, which have been often expressed in relation to the use of figurines, are based exclusively on modern conceptions and remain unproved to a great extent.

The majority of the Hellenistic figurines in Asia Minor have been found in graves, thus they are regarded funeral gifts. The explanation for this is that they were offerings to chthonic deities or accompanied the deceased to Hades. In fact, a view has been recently expressed that the numerous figurines which were found in the cemeteries of Myrina were meant to be the substitutes of relatives of the deceased, which would accompany the latter to the afterlife. The preference for figurines of



winged Eros and Nike has been interpreted as an attempt on behalf of the living to symbolize the joy of life and to emphasize the contradiction between the terrestrial and subterrestrial worlds.⁴

Another way of tracing Hellenistic terracotta works of art is to look for them in the great sanctuaries of Asia Minor. Without a shadow of doubt, the figurines there were used as votive offerings. Perhaps they even functioned as substitutes for the believers who dedicated them to the gods.⁵

Finally, a large number of figurines were found in houses, like in [Priene](#) and [Ephesus](#).⁶ These were evidently of domestic use, namely they were decorative items – a financial substitute for those who were not in position to purchase works of large-scale terracotta art, or objects made of precious material. It is not unlikely that some of them were offerings in domestic sanctuaries. Theatre masks which decorated the houses of theatre fans or the seats of theatre companies of that time were an interesting category of votive offerings.⁷

It is generally worth mentioning that the Hellenistic figurines did not share the religious features that marked the Archaic and Classical terracotta art. On the contrary, their technique is often so naturalistic that has led to the widely acknowledged view that they simply represented mortals.⁸ Naturally, this interpretation cannot possibly be universal. There are frequent cases where the holy symbols that even some of the most naturalistic figurine samples bore, prove that the figurines represented deities.

The Hellenistic figurines' technique is particularly advanced. They were constructed with, primarily, clay moulds on both sides. The entire procedure was based on the usage of an archetype (meaning a pattern), from which the mould derived.⁹ The inner part of the figurines was concave, in order to avoid fractures during the baking procedure.¹⁰ The heads were concrete and were created by two different moulds.¹¹ The terracotta artists diligently processed the main frontal facet, while they often left the back side unprocessed.¹² Some peculiarly processed samples with a perfect shape on all sides were undoubtedly thus created, so as to be seen from all three dimensions. The Hellenistic figurines bore a colourful decoration, which is still preserved on the best extant samples.

4. Workshops of terracotta art in Asia Minor

4.1. Troy

The terracotta workshops in Asia Minor were numerous, and usually stood out due to the different varieties of clay that was used. Despite local differentiations, the production of clay items presents great homogeneity. Terracotta art from [Troy](#) comes mostly from the excavations of the Americans in the years 1932-8.¹³ The technique is somewhat 'provincial', compared to the one used by their neighbouring workshops. The production spreads chronologically from the 3rd century BC until the 1st century BC. Dressed female figures of the 'Tanagrian type' prevail, which were variations of the seated goddess [Cybele](#), as well as of seated naked female figures that were known as 'Eastern type Aphrodite'.¹⁴

4.2. Myrina

The relatively unimportant town of Myrina in [Aeolis](#) is the place where the largest number of Hellenistic terracottas has been recovered so far throughout Asia. These examples, approximately 2000, were found mainly in the excavations that the French School of Archaeology carried out in the town's cemetery around the 19th century.¹⁵ The large number of findings and their excellent state of preservation rendered the Myrina workshop into the most significant one in the Late Hellenistic period. This conclusion, however, is only partly real as it has been drawn due to the lack of finds by neighbouring workshops with a great tradition in terracotta art.¹⁶ The earliest samples of the workshop are traced around 250 BC and are linked to the artistic tradition that was developed in Athens and Tanagra during the Late Classical and Early Hellenistic years. In fact, it has been assumed that terracotta artists who had left the Greek mainland in a period of political instability, seeking a better life, settled in Myrina. Initially the 'Tanagrians' prevailed, but children, Erotes, masks and animals are also met. The best examples of the workshop belong to the period 200-150 BC. This peak period is perhaps associated with the arrival of terracotta artists from Alexandria or, most likely, with the influence of the [school of sculpture](#) from Pergamon.¹⁷ In those years and until approximately 30 BC, production had particularly increased and new, more spirited thematic types were adopted by mythological cycles, which are depicted having perfect, free-style shapes.

The thematic types of preference are female figures, representations of Aphrodite, Eros, Sirens, human-like figures with a vigorous naturalism that makes them resemble caricatures (grotesque), actors, mythological figures and copies of notorious works of terracotta art, like the [Cnidian Aphrodite](#) by [Praxiteles](#). A general, local technique was crystallized, which surpassed the boundaries of an average work of art. These new tendencies are located mainly in the creation of figurines of Nike and Eros,¹⁸ winged figures which reveal a strong plasticity and motion, as well as the use of perfect technique. The figurines were created from many different moulds, which were united before the stage of baking. One of the most popular examples of this style, two seated women chatting, is currently on display at the British Museum.



Researchers, based on stylistic analyses, succeeded in distinguishing different workshops, but also the anonymous terracotta artists who worked over the years in Myrina. In some cases, monograms and signatures have survived.¹⁹ These are attributed mostly to terracotta workshop owners, rather than terracotta artists. In fact, one of them, Menophilos, was wealthy enough and belonged to a higher social rank.²⁰

In later terracotta works, the first signs of decline are evident, a fact that was perhaps due to mass production. The technique remained perfect, but the figurines were steadily losing their freshness, while their strong decorative style often reached a level of **mannerism**. Production continued until the beginning of the 2nd century AD, when the catastrophic earthquake of 106 put an end to the workshop's artistic activity.

4.3. Cyme

The terracotta art of [Cyme](#) presents great stylistic similarities in thematic types and the use of clay with that from Myrina. These common tendencies are due to the vicinity of the two cities. Despite this, the shaping is somewhat more coarse in relation to the one produced by Myrina, while the use of a lustrous paint in the decoration is rather peculiar, and is also encountered in Smyrna.

4.4. Smyrna

[Smyrna](#) was one of the original terracotta centres of Asia Minor. The town was refounded by [Lysimachus](#), a general of [Alexander the Great](#), around 288 BC, within a small distance from its old location.²¹ Smyrna reached its peak in the Imperial years.²² In fact, the continuous habitation until more recently made the conduct of systematic excavations impossible. Most figurines from Smyrna that are on display in the greatest museums of Europe and the United States – mostly fragments of heads – have been unearthed in illegal excavations, mostly from the town's residential zones.²³

The figurines of Smyrna are dated to between the 1st century BC and 106 AD, when the great earthquake that took place in the area forced the inhabitants to abandon the town for a long time. They are easily recognized by the colour of their clay, which varies from brown to red. The clay is fine and homogeneous, and contains scrapings of gold and silver.²⁴ Some samples still preserve their colours. It is worth mentioning that the ventilation openings are tiny or absent overall. In general, the formation is very careful and the back side of the figurines is rarely left unprocessed, while very few signatures of terracotta artists survive.²⁵

As far as themes go, many popular types of the great terracotta art of the Classical or the Hellenistic period prevail, like those of [Heracles](#), various deities and athletes.²⁶ Another favourite theme was dressed female figures in the 'Tanagrian' type.²⁷ Handmade miniatures are also encountered, while the so called grotesque figures with exaggerated anatomical deformities are a special category. These puzzling figurines probably represented real people, who suffered from deforming diseases.²⁸

The terracotta style of Smyrna presents great similarities with that of Myrina. It is likely that the same terracotta artists worked in both towns, and perhaps used similar moulds. A relevant relation most likely existed in Pergamon and Cyme. On the other hand, certain thematic types of the Smyrna workshop – the black figures and grotesque figures – allude to the terracotta art of Alexandria, thus ensuring close commercial and artistic relations with that town. The figurines from Smyrna were highly appreciated in the ancient world. They were exported to Myrina, Priene, Pergamon, Troy, [Tarsus](#), [Delos](#), Athens, Cyprus and towns of the Black Sea.

4.5. Pergamon

The Hellenistic Pergamon, the biggest town of [Mysia](#) and seat of the [Attalid](#) dynasty, was the most significant artistic centre of Asia Minor in those years, mainly as far as [architecture](#) and sculpture are concerned. The Attalids were supporters of all art genres, among which ceramics and terracotta art. The German excavations from 1878 onwards revealed figurines which were found mostly in [sanctuaries](#) and [houses](#). They are mainly young boys, and variations of Aphrodite and the Eroses. These figurines present a great stylistic affinity with the terracotta art of neighbouring Myrina. The close relationship between the two workshops has been paralleled with the one between Athens and Tanagra in the Greek mainland. Pergamon was probably the pioneer centre where the new artistic tendencies were produced. This prosperity is undoubtedly due to the simultaneous prosperity of the great terracotta art in the town, which created the prototypes for terracotta artists.

In the two workshops common thematic types and common signatures of terracotta artists are encountered.²⁹ Despite this, the attempt of a detailed stylistic comparison is particularly difficult since, as opposed to Myrina, the figurines of Pergamon have not survived in a good condition, due to their domestic use.

4.6. Ephesus

In Ephesus the archaeological excavations were carried out in the [temple of Artemis](#), between 1863 and 1874, and brought to light numerous figurines.³⁰ Their publications are insufficient and many of them are difficult to date. The samples of the workshop that can be safely dated to the Hellenistic period are scarce. Despite



this, it is certain that the town was one of the greatest production centres in Asia Minor at that time. The reddish clay that was produced was very peculiar and it usually contained mica and other mixtures of materials. The prevailing figures are those of standing women – variations of Aphrodite – and mainly fragments of male and female heads. Stylistically, they bear resemblance to the terracotta manner of the adjacent Smyrna. A figurine representing the devotional statue of [Artemis Ephesian](#) is quite remarkable.³¹ A local peculiarity was bodies with openings, where jointed limbs would suspend.

4.7. Priene

The Hellenistic terracotta art of Priene is of great interest. The new town was moved to its current location around 350 BC. The few figurines that were traced in the town come mainly from the sanctuaries of [Athena Polias](#), [Demeter](#) and [Kore](#), as well as the town's residential zones.³² The production extended chronologically between the 3rd and the 1st centuries BC. The clay from Priene is fine, with mixtures from other materials, and a soapy texture. Its colour varies between orange and brown. The large number of extant signatures is remarkable. Dressed female figures prevail, and the extant samples are of excellent quality. They resemble the best samples of the Myrina workshop, but they are distinguished by the type of clay that they are created from, and by certain local thematic types. The great size, which reaches 50 cm., indicates that some figurines, cheap substitutes of great terracotta pieces, were used as votive offerings in sanctuaries, or as decorative objects in houses. The naturalistic figures representing daily scenes are a local peculiarity – for instance a group of figurines which probably depict Vavo, which were votive offerings in the shrine of Demetra and Kore.

4.8. Caria

In the region of [Caria](#) the workshops of [Cnidus](#), [Halicarnassus](#) and Theangela were located. Their production presents similarities with the modern terracotta art of the Dodecanese islands.

4.8.1. Cnidus

Cnidus was refounded in 340 BC. A series of figurines which are dated in those years certifies the existence of a local workshop of terracotta art. Many of them – together with lamps, vessels and glass objects – were buried in trenches, where they had been placed in order to be protected by possible raids.³³ These were the offerings in the shrine of Demetra and Kore, which Charles Newton brought to light in 1858. The majority belongs to a particular thematic type, that of 'water-carrier with a veil', which was adopted around 340-300 BC and was directly linked to the cult of Demetra. Their ritual usage inflicted a quite strict shaping, emphasising their frontal sides. These features make them seem as if they belonged to an early production period.³⁴

The second common thematic type in Cnidus involves dressed female figures in the 'Tanagrian' type. In fact, the strong plasticity that some pieces present led to the view that the terracotta art of Cnidus – as well as that of Halicarnassus – was influenced to a greater degree by contemporary [sculpture](#), compared to other Eastern workshops.³⁵ This counterinfluence is owed to the particular development which the great plastic art met in the two aforementioned towns during the Hellenistic period. The Cnidian clay is usually distinguishable, light-coloured, with hues which vary from rose to light brown, while its stiffness certifies its baking in high temperature. A second variety of clay is also often encountered, in an orange hue and with a higher percentage of mixed materials. This clay was local and it is clearly distinguished from the one of nearby Halicarnassus.

4.8.2. Halicarnassus

Halicarnassus has a considerable production rate of figurines to boast about, mainly found in the excavations that were carried out in the [Mausoleum](#) by Charles Newton, between 1856 and 1858. The excavator's interest in the monument itself and the sculpture led to the unknown conditions under which the figurines were found, a fact that hindered the process of their dating. Undoubtedly, the figurines were dated to later than the Mausoleum, which must have been completed around the middle of the 4th century BC. If the view that these figurines were votive offerings is valid, then the performance of a ritual in honour of [Mausolus](#), worshipped as a god or hero in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, is justified. Intact figurines in Halicarnassus are scarce. Most of them are fragments, usually heads or hands that hold offers, a fact that renders their dating difficult. The 'Tanagrian' type was a frequent thematic type. There are also numerous samples which echo influences of the great sculpture.

4.8.3. Theangela

At last, but not least, a special reference should be made to the terracotta art of Theangela, close to Halicarnassus, which remained unknown until recently. It appears that in the years of Alexander the Great certain local tendencies which distinguished the production of Theangela from the other Carian terracotta workshops were crystallized. The male flask-carrier figurines were mostly dominant, as well as female figures which were depicted in multiple variations. These figurines had probably a devotional usage, and were associated with the cult of Demeter and Kore.



1. The dating of Hellenistic terracotta art is very often problematic. Most figurines come from illegal excavations. Even the ones that have been dug up in formal excavation sites are usually placed in graves, where ceramic finds are absent, thus making their dating difficult. Moreover, any similarities with pieces of the great terracotta art cannot be used for dating. For an extensive discussion on the issue of dating of Hellenistic terracotta art, see Higgins, R.A., *Greek Terracottas* (London 1967), pp. 95-6.
2. A theory has been outlined that the stylistic pattern should be sought in the works of great terracotta art. A relief grave stele which was found in Athens and is dated to around 320 BC presents a great stylistic similarity with the earthen Tanagrians.
3. In Egypt the making of high quality works of art continued also in this later period.
4. See Mrogenda, M., *Die Terrakottafiguren von Myrina* (Frankfurt 1996), p. 107 onwards.
5. The connection between donators and figurines were only symbolic, as the figurine was not a model of the person who dedicated it. Most of the times, the gender and age of the donators remain unknown.
6. See Wiegand – T., Schrader, H., *Priene. Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen und Untersuchungen in den Jahren 1895-1898* (Berlin 1904), pp. 330-66; Lang-Auinger, C., "Masken aus Ton und Masken in der Wandmalerei-eine Gegenüberstellung", *ÖJh* 67 (1998), pp. 117-31.
7. This is how theatrical masks in House 1 of Ephesus are interpreted, as well as in the house next to the theatre of Priene. The theatrical masks that were funeral gifts are considered symbols of love of the deceased for theatre, or they are related to the cult of Dionysus.
8. The most naturalistic figurines provide relevantly valid information on the dressing and hair styles of that period. Despite this, it is better to seek their patterns in works of the great terracotta art, instead of modern life.
9. Such archetypes were handmade from clay or wax, or even clay, bronze or wood figurines. In order to create the mould, strips of wet clay were fixed one on top of the other on the front side of the archetype, until they formed a thick layer. They were then left to dry out. When the clay became almost as hard as leather can be, it was carefully detached from its archetype with the help of a special tool, and was then baked. After the baking procedure, the mould was ready to be used. On the concave part of its front side equally thick stripes of clay were placed, while its back side was closed with a particular stripe of clay that was left unprocessed. The two parts were connected with thin clay. After that, the clay was left in order for its humidity to evaporate, and the figurine was then ready for careful removal.
10. For the same reason openings were left on the back side. From the second century BC onwards plaster moulds were used in Athens, in Egypt and elsewhere. The use of this technique in Asia Minor was limited. See, for example, Burn, L. – Higgins, R.A., *Catalogue of Greek Terracottas in the British Museum III* (London 2001), cat. no. 2271, 2494.
11. Figurines whose heads were created from three moulds have been traced in Smyrna.
12. The techniques used by the Greek terracotta artists have been a point of discussion for many researchers. For a thorough report see Burn, L. – Higgins, R.A., *Catalogue of Greek Terracottas in the British Museum III* (London 2001), pp. 18-20, n. 12.
13. Earlier on, a number of figurines had been traced by Frank Calvert in mid-19th century, and by Heinrich Schliemann in the years 1870-94.
14. This type of Aphrodite was particularly frequent in the eastern terracotta art workshops of the Hellenistic period.
15. The best samples are shared today among the Louvre Museum, the Instabul Archaeology Museum, the French School at Athens, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the British Museum, the Pergamon Museum and the Smyrna Museum. It is noteworthy that in the end of the 19th century about 5000 graves were excavated in Myrina.
16. For example, some figurines from Pergamon share stylistic similarities with the ones from Myrina, but the cemetery of Pergamon, which could



supply us with exceptional samples, has not yet been excavated.

17. The town fell under the control of Pergamon in 262 BC.

18. Eros is the most popular thematic type in Myrina. Until 200 BC it was depicted young, while later depictions range from early childhood to adolescence. For the presentation of some characteristic variations on this topic, see Higgins, R.A., *Greek Terracottas* (London 1967), table 55.

19. These are inscribed on the archetype, on the mould or on the figurine itself. When the signature is a full one, it is usually met in the genitive case, while abbreviations and monograms are also met.

20. See Besques, S., "Une Aphrodite au collier de Myrina, signe par Menophilos", *AK 26* (1983), pp. 22-30.

21. The old town was ruined in 627 BC and was not refounded in the same location.

22. Many ancient writers make mention of the town's grandeur and beauty. Strabo cites it as the most significant town of Ionia. See Strabo 14.646.

23. The fact that these figurines were found in houses and not in graves, like in Myrina, justifies their bad state of preservation. Surprisingly, there is a great analogy of extant heads, compared to extant bodies which are in the possession of museums or other collectors. A likely explanation is that illegal excavators found the majority of figurines in fragmentary forms, and they preferred collecting the head parts, while they often ravaged the bodies, assuming that they would not profit from them.

24. The clay very often has a grayish nucleus.

25. A signature of a terracotta artist under the name of 'Masimus' has survived on a figurine from Smyrna, which is currently in the British Museum. The name must be another version of 'Maximus'.

26. The researchers acknowledge distinct influences of the great plastic art on figurines which represent deities. Apart from the particularly popular model of Heracles, the models of Zeus, Hermes, Dionysus, Apollo, Ares, Satyrs and Artemis Ephesian are met.

27. The integral samples of this type are few. It is considered that some of them represent Aphrodite. Moulds were found in the town, which prove the preference for the 'Tanagrian' type.

28. These figures are often depicted dancing or acting. They most likely represented beggars who roamed the streets displaying their physical defects, in order to make a living. They have been also regarded as votaries who took part in religious ceremonies, or simply as comedians.

29. The distinction of clays between the two workshops is not always easy. Thus, some figurines that were found in Myrina were maybe created in Pergamon.

30. See Wood, J.T., *Discoveries at Ephesus* (London 1877), where the references to terracotta art are few.

31. See Higgins, R.A., *Greek Terracottas* (London 1967), tab. 58E.

32. The dating of the figurines from the temple of Athena is doubtful. The temple started being built around the middle of the 4th century BC, while the great shrine remained unfinished until the end of the 3rd century BC. The devotional statue of Athena was dedicated in the first half of the second century BC.

33. According to another view, these trenches were replaced by the sanctuary's treasury, which had been ruined by an earthquake.



34. For a discussion concerning their use in ceremonial practices see Burn, L., "Sculpture in terracotta from Cnidus and Halicarnassus", in Jenkis, I. – Waywell, G.B. (ed.), *Sculptors and Sculpture of Caria and the Dodecanese* (London 1997), p. 87.

35. Burn, L., "Sculpture in terracotta from Cnidus and Halicarnassus", in Jenkis, I. – Waywell, G.B. (ed.), *Sculptors and Sculpture of Caria and the Dodecanese* (London 1997), pp. 84-90.






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1998, 117-131

Glossary :

 chiton, the
Item of clothing consisting of a square woollen textile seamed on both sides.
 himation, the
Rectangular woolen (mainly) cloth that was worn over the <i>chiton</i> (cloak). It could be wrapped around the shoulders and the body in different ways and was fastened with a belt or with brooches.
 mannerism
The term denotes a reaction to the classical ideals of aesthetics, as well as sophistication and an unnatural rendering of the forms. The figures display small heads, elongated limbs and pretentious poses.
 mica
Clay inclusions usually derived from eroded minerals and stones (mostly marble and schist).
 Tanagra style
A mold-cast type of terracotta figurines of the Hellenistic period. Primarily found in the cemeteries of Tanagra, they became popular in other areas as well, such as Athens.