



Ancient Greek Terracotta Sculpture

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Introduction

The phrase “terracotta sculpture” refers to all figurative representations in fired clay produced in Greece and in the Greek world during the first millennium BCE, (from the Geometric period to the end of the Hellenistic period), whatever their size (figurine, statuette, or statue), whatever their manufacturing technique (modeling, molding, mixed), whatever their material form (in-the-round, relief, etc.), whatever their representation (anthropomorphic, zoomorphic [real or imaginary], diverse objects), and whatever the limits of their representation: full figure (figurines, statuettes, groups), truncated or abbreviated representations, including protomai, masks, busts, half figures, and anatomical representations, among others. All these objects, with the possible exception of large statues, were the products of artisans who were referred to in ancient texts as “coroplasts,” or modelers of images in clay. Because of this, the term “coroplasty,” or “coroplathy,” has been used to refer to this craft, but also increasingly to all of its products, large and small, while research on this material falls under the rubric of coroplastic studies. Greek terracottas were known to antiquarians from the mid-17th century onward from archaeological explorations in both sanctuary and funerary sites, especially in southern Italy and Sicily. Yet serious scholarly interest in these important representatives of Greek sculpture developed only in the last quarter of the 19th century, when terracotta figurines of the Hellenistic period were unearthed from the cemeteries of Tanagra in Boeotia in the 1870s and Myrina in Asia Minor in the 1880s. These immediately entered the antiquities markets, where their cosmopolitan, secular imagery had a great appeal for collectors and fueled scholarly interest and debate. At the same time, sanctuary deposits containing terracottas also began to be explored, but scholarly attention privileged funerary terracottas because of their better state of preservation. For most of the 20th century, the study of figurative terracottas basically was an art-historical exercise based in iconography and style that remained in the shadow of monumental sculpture. It is only in the last four decades or so that coroplastic studies has developed into an autonomous field of research, with approaches specific to the discipline that consider modalities of production, as well as the religious, social, political, and economic roles that terracottas played in ancient Greek life by means of broad sociological and anthropological approaches. Consequently, this bibliography mainly comprises publications of the last forty years, although old titles that are still essential for research are also included.

Coroplastic Studies: General Overviews, Historiography, Reference Works

Coroplastic studies as a research discipline with its own dedicated terminology and methodologies is relatively new. For this reason, general works on figurative terracottas are few, in comparison to those dealing with other forms of Greek sculpture.

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