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Bronze Hoard from Heracleion

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During the last ten years, the field of marine-archaeology in Egypt realized very distinguished progress owing to the various discoveries of the submerged sites: - east of Qaiet-Bay fort¹, eastern harbor of Alexandria² and in Abukir bay³. One of the most exciting of these discoveries was that of the ancient city of Heracleion (Thonis), which lies on 7 – 8 m. depth and 6 km. far from the coast line of Abukir bay. The recent underwater excavations which had been carried out in the site by *L'Institut Europeen d'Archeologie sous-marine* (IEASM) in collaboration with the *Department of Under- water Archaeology* (DUA-SCA), revealed various results: constructions including remains of the temple, the harbor, shipwrecks, anchors, royal statues, colossal,

★ It is a great honor for me to participate by this modest paper in the seminar of "Archeological activities in Alexandria and environs in ten years (1993-2003) " in the occasion of 110 years of the Archeological Society of Alexandria. My great thanks go to Prof. Dr. Moustafa El Abbadi, president of the Archeological Society. also I'm gratitude to Mr. Franck Goddio the director of the IEASM who gave me the opportunity of studying the bronze hoard from Heracleion, I wish acknowledge Prof. Dr. Jean Yoyotte honorary professor in College De France who provided me with many key insights. Thanks go also to Prof. Dr. Maha Farid head of the archeology department in Helwan University who helped and encouraged me.

- (1) Grimal, N., Travaux de l'IFAO 1995-96 :- Alexandria, BIFAO 96 (1996), p.569-570; Empereur, J.E. et Grimal, N., les fouilles sous – marines du phare d'Alexandrie, CRAIBL (1997), fasc.3, p.693 f.; Empereur, J.E., the underwater site near Qaiet bay fort, Egyptian Archeology 8, (1996) , pp.7-10; Corteggiani, J.P., les Aegyptiaca de la fouilles sous-marine de Qaiet bay, BSFE, n.14, (1998), p.25ff.
- (2) Goddio, F., The topography of the submerged royal quarters of the eastern harbor of Alexandria, in Alexandria The submerged royal quarter, London 1998, pp. 1-52., Bernard, A. et Goddio, F., L'Egypte engloutie, London 2002, pp.74 ff., Gallo, P., The Peninsula and the island of Canopus, a history of water and sand, in:- one hundred years in Egypt, paths of Italian archeology, Milan 2001, pp.138 ff.; Abdel Fattah, A., Serry, M. And Darwish, I., Underwater archeology in Egypt, in : Bibliotheca Alexandrina the archeology Museum, Cairo 2002, pp.99-114.
- (3) Yoyotte, J., Le second affichage du décret de l'an 2em de Nekhetnebef et la decouvert de Thonis – Heracleion, Egypt, Afrique & Orient, no.24, 2001, pp.24-32., idem, Guardian of the Nile: Thonis rediscovered, Minerva, vol.13, no.3, 2002, pp.32-34, fig.2.

hieroglyphic inscriptions, jewelries, gold coins and of course among these results was a spectacular hoard of bronze collections.

When we remember the rare information which are available to historians (depending only on the reports of classical writers) concerning the Canopic region in general and the city of Heracleion in particular⁴, it could be said that the discovered objects will delight all the historians and scholars whether Egyptologists or Hellenists⁵

As to the bronze hoard from Heracleion, it is composed of different collections of ancient metal ware which are characterized by their diversity. The hoard was discovered inside and around the temple of the city. Elsewhere⁶ I classified the hoard into two main groups: -

- 1 - Objects which were devoted to the daily life (utensils), including ladles, bowls, vessels, mirrors, coins and other objects.
- 2 - Objects which were devoted to religious beliefs and cultic ceremonies including statuettes of gods, sacred animals and various amulets.

To follow-through this bronze hoard, this paper deals with some selected objects from the hoard in order to trace some facts related to the aspects of human activities and beliefs in the city of Heracleion (Thonis).

Group of bowls: (Pl. I, fig. 1 a-c)

A varied group of bowls was come to light from the site of Heracleion. Most of them (Pl. I, fig. 1 a-b) are made from single sheet, the body is almost hemispherical, with line separating the neck from the body, and the neck is terminated by flaring rime. Another type of bowl (Pl. I, fig 1,c) presents different shape of cylindrical body with flat base without any decoration. The type of hemispherical body with short neck and

(4) Many of Aboukir monuments suffered heavily because of various religious conflicts of the past or the extensive plunder and modern human impacts, cf.: Morcos, S.A., early discoveries of submarine archeological sites in Alexandria, in underwater archeology and coastal management, Paris 2000, p.34

(5) Yoyotte, J., *Minerva*, 13, p.34.

(6) In the collective publications of the IEASM :- Abdel Raouf, A., Bronze hoard from Heracleion, (forthcoming) where I tried to classify the objects according to the purpose of use and within categories roughly according to type.

flaring rime could be called as an eastern Mediterranean (originally Achaemenid)⁷ shape, apparently derived from silver examples⁸.

The most interesting bowls are two examples, one of them (Pl. II, fig. 2) cast, fairing thick, hemispherical body, decorated with lotus leaves, neck little high comparing to Pl. I, figs. 1 a-b, with flaring rime. The base is decorated with rosette of 14 leaves inside circle. Similar types were found in Toukh El-karamous and Mendes⁹. According to parallel type represented in the tomb of Petosiris at Tuna El-Gebel¹⁰, this collection of bowls could be dated to the 5-2nd century B.C.

Group of Vessels: (Pl. II, fig. 3 & Pl. III, fig. 4)

Many bronze vessels were came to light, the first vessels (Pl. II, fig. 3)

D: 41.5 cm.

H: 17.8 cm.

Circular vessel with hemispherical body and rectangular handles emerge vertically with rime. The rime has a narrow open.

The second vessel (Pl. III, fig. 4)

H: 31 cm.

D: 26.8 cm

Situla, The handle is slightly tapered, curving out at junction with rime to end in tow slight knobs. These tow examples in addition to others

(7) As for the Persian influences on ancient Egyptian art, Robert Bianchi comments :(*The gifted Egyptian artists could not only replicate Persian costume, accessories, and gestures in their traditional media, but could also adapt certain Egyptian motifs in novel ways to cater to foreign taste. The ugentaria from Leontopolis are a case in point since they combine into one a beloved oriental motif of a roaring lion whose body was inlaid with the Egyptian love of visual puns. in addition, numerous finds of typically Achaemenid objects, particularly silver vessels, have been found in Egypt; these have sparked continued controversy as to their origin of manufacture*), cf: Bianchi, R.S., *Perser in Agypten*, LA, IV, cols.946-947.; For more details concerning this influence, cf.: Cooney, J.D., *Persian influence in late Egyptian art*, JARCE, IV, 1965, pp.39 ff.

(8) Hayes, J.W., *Greek, Roman and related Metal ware in the Royal Ontario Museum*, Toronto 1984, pp. 50-53, figs.71-75.

(9) Pefrommer, M., *Roots and contacts: aspects of Alexandrian craftsmanship, in Alexandria and Alexandrianism*, California 1996, p.175; idem., *Studien zu Alexandrinischen und Grossgriechische-Torentik fruhhellenistischer Zeit*, AF 1987, Taf.62.

(10) Lefebvre, G., *Le Tom beau de Petosiris*, Le Caire 1923, III, pl.VII.

vessels show a various types of vessels with different shapes and various techniques of manufacture. For example, the handle of each vessel is attached to the body in different technique whether by cast or by rivets.

Group of Ladles:

Many ladles were discovered in Heracleion in different sizes. The most common type is the long handle with hook in bird-head or animal-head form rising vertically from a small circular bowl. The style of bowl is circular and deep or semi-ovoid and shallow. Two of these ladles are distinguished by their restoration, one of them (Pl. III, fig. 5) was broken and reattached with rough restoration at junction of handle and bowl. This restoration reflects that the ancient Egyptian was interested in extending the permanence of each object as long as possible¹¹.

Coins: (Pl. IV, fig. 6)

Many hundreds of bronze coins were come to light from the site of Heracleion. Most of them are either corroded or covered with thick layer of oxidation, but fortunately some of them are in good condition of preservation. After restoration we found that the majority of coins collections refer back to the reign of Ptolemaios 1st (Soter) and Ptolemaios 2nd (Philadelphos)¹².

Mirror: (Pl. IV, fig. 7)

L: 24 cm.

D: 17 cm.

Thickness: 0, 6 cm.

Circular bronze mirror, the disc and handle are casted of one part, covered with layer of greenish patina and remains of maritime concretions. Handle is flat, it is highly probable that handle was covered with ivory or wood which is missed now. the mirror¹³ was an important toilet accessory and many museums possesses a large numbers of

(11) similar types :- Seif El-Din, M., Bronze hoard from Sais (Sa El-Hagar) BSAA 46, 2000, p.2 28, pl.V, no.3, 4.; Von Bissing, W., *Metallgefasse*, C.G., 1901, no. 4561, 3565; Hayes, J.W., *op.cit.*, pp.40 ff., figs.49-63.

(12) I shall let the study of coins collections to the specialists of numismatics, who can deal with it much better than me.

(13) Muller, Ch., *Spiegel*, LA, V (1984), col.1148.

mirrors, all are made of reflecting plaques of metal attached to handle of various shapes and materials¹⁴.

Statue fragment :

Bronze Helmet (Pl. V, fig. 8)

H.: 81, 7 cm.

L.: 34, 5 cm.

Th.: 5, 2 cm.

Many statues or statuettes representing Egyptian deities were discovered such as Osiris, Isis, Anubis, Khonsu, Harpokrat and Bastet. But among the discovered objects is a part of gigantic statue of Greek style. It is an unusual bronze object neatly symbolizes the inter independence of ancient Greece and ancient Egypt in terms of their cultures and beliefs systems. The object in question is a crest typically of a Greek helmet which, to judge by size, was intended for the head of a statue some 4, 5 m. tall. It is composed of 4 locks of hair which are twisted on each other. It would be reasonable to suppose that this gigantic figure was a representation of the Roman Minerva, the Greek Athena, the Egyptian Neith "lady of the sea", standing at the gateway to her domain, in (Thonis of Sais)¹⁵

As for the similarities of objectives and functions of guiding and salvage, Neit was identified during the late Pharaonic and Ptolemaic periods with the Greek goddess Athena¹⁶. Of course this identification was not the unique case in Heracleion, the Greeks used to identify their gods with the Egyptian Parallels gods: - Amun was identified with Zeus, Mut was identified with Hera and Khonsu as Heracles¹⁷. In Heracleion, the temple was called Heracleion owing to the cult of Heracles (Khonsu), the same case in Thebes, the temple of Khonsu which is situated in south – west of Karnak temple was called in the Greek Ostraca as the Heracleion also¹⁸.

(14) Grenier, J.-c., *Les bronzes du Museo Gregoriano Egizio*, Vaticano 2002, p.195, 18732, 18737, pl. LIII, no. 396, 397; Corteggiani, J.P., *the Egypt of the pharaohs at the Cairo museum*, London 1987, p.130, no.82.

(15) Yoyotte, J., *op.cit.*, p.34, fig.6.

(16) Schlichting, R., *Neith*, LA, IV (1982), col. 392.

(17) Yoyotte, J. et Chuvin, P., *Le Zeus Casios de Peluse a Tivoli*, BIFAO, 88, (1988), p.175.

(18) Quaegebeur, J., *Les appellations Grecques des temples de Karnak*, OLP 6/7, 1975/1976, pp.468- 469.

When we consider the long process of development of Egyptian metallic industries through the old, middle, new kingdom and late period, it could be said that the bronze hoard of Heracleion represents a very advanced aspect of Egyptian metal ware during the 5-2nd centuries B.C. Although that the above presented objects represent a few selected items from the Hoard of Heracleion, it could be concluded with some facts:

Firstly, the intensive numbers and the diversity of the bronze objects which were found in Heracleion prove that it is highly probable that there was an important industrial center of metallic objects in or nearby Heracleion.

Secondly, the collections of vessels shows very advanced techniques of manufacture, especially concerning the shape of body and the handle attachment whether by rivets or cast. Meanwhile the restored ladles roughly or accurately reflect the same fact. In addition, the bronze vases or bowls which have floral decorations confirm that the workshop of Heacleion was an advanced center in lower Egypt in addition to those of upper Egypt such as that of Tuna El-Gebel, and the craftsmen in the workshop of Heracleion were aware of the common artistic traditions in ancient near east.

Thirdly, the different collections were found scattered inside and around the temple strict, the fact which proves that the temple was one of the main axes of daily life and human activities in Heracleion in addition to the harbor of the settlement, in other words the temple was the religious center and the harbor was the commercial part of the city. At last but not least the mixture of the Egyptian and Greek motifs confirms what was reported by the classical writers that different aspects of religious beliefs and human races were existed in Heracleion.¹⁹

(19) In the 5th century B.C., Herodotus talked about the temple of Heracles where Paris and Helen had taken refuge, (Herodotus, II, 113), while the same temple of Heracleion was mentioned by the decree of Canopus 238 B.C., which report that " every year, on the 29th day of the month of Choiak, the sacred boat of Osiris was moved from the temple of Amon Gereb in Ra-henet to the temple of Osiris in Canopus " (URK, II, 144, 1-3). The same temple of AmonGerb in Ra Henet was translated in the Greek version of this decree as the Heracleion (As to the name of Henet cf.: Yoyotte, J. Notes de toponymie égyptienne, MDAIK, 16, 1958, p.429.)



Fig.1, a-b
Hemispherical bowls



Fig.1, c
Cylindrical cup



Fig. 2
Decorated bowl



Fig.3
Bronze vessel with vertical Handle



Fig.4
Bronze Situla



Fig.5
Restored Ladle



Fig.6
Group of coins from Heraclion



Fig.7
Bronze Mirror



Fig. 8
Bronze helmet of the goddess Athena (Neith)