

Terracotta zoomorphic askos (vessel) with antlers: Accession Number 74.51.795



Figure 1: Terracotta zoomorphic askos (The Cesnola Collection, 1874-76)

The object is a zoomorphic askos made out of terracotta and can be found in the Met Museum with the accession number of 74.51.795¹. This object was chosen because it is still in very good shape, with the decoration and form being very clear to see. It is also an object which gives a good insight into the pottery styles of the Middle Cypriot period, which in turn gives an indication further into the actual lives of the people of the time and what may have influenced them². The process of making such an object would have been time consuming, which therefore will further give insight into what the people would have valued or needed³.

The object stands at 14.6 cm tall and originates from the period Middle Cypriot III, which dates it back to approximately 1725–1600 B.C.⁴. It looks quite sturdy in design, with a large body, thick antlers and a small face. The present-day colours are now faded, but the red paint used for the decoration can still be seen,

alongside the pale main body colour contrasting against the lines. There are two protruding pieces on the back of the object, the smaller of which appears to be a tail. The larger of which looks like it could be some sort of handle- both are seamlessly combined with the rest of the object, with the decoration prevailing on both. In addition, from this angle two small holes can be seen pierced into the face of the creature, alongside what looks to be an opening on its mouth. The legs are short, which brings the whole object closer to the ground and on object's back, a lug can be found. This is likely due to the fact that during the Middle Cypriot Period, potters seemed to be fond of the idea of string-hole lugs and many such examples can be found on a variety of pieces⁵. The object is thought to represent a species of deer which was native to the area due to the antlers and the fact that wild deer bones were found at sites⁶. The object, which is said to be from the Idalion region, is a good example of white painted ware⁷. The expected geometric patterns of such a design style are seen decorating the figure in criss-cross and checked style in red paint⁸. This helps give an estimation to a potential time period because red paint would have been more commonly seen in earlier works whilst in later periods, black would have been more prominent⁹. Being so well decorated ties in with the idea that the majority of the items in the Cesnola Collection were found in tombs¹⁰. This is because good artistry would have been expected for an item which would have been used in a tomb¹¹.

Due to the potter's wheel not being introduced, ceramics were all handmade, and were as a result, very representative of a person's skill¹². As with all art types, there were phases of style and in the Middle Cypriot Period the style of White Painted Ware started to emerge, alongside new figures and shapes which started to be introduced and incorporated within the pieces¹³. This therefore, gives an

¹ The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000-2020

² The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000-2020

³ Karageorghis, 2000, p.78

⁴ The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000-2020

⁵ Karageorghis, 2000, p.33

⁶ The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000-2020

⁷ The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000-2020

⁸ Karageorghis, 2000, p.33

⁹ Karageorghis, 2000, p.33

¹⁰ Picon, Mertens, Milleker, Lightfoot, Hemingway, 2007, p.223

¹¹ Karageorghis, 2000, p.17

¹² Karageorghis, 2000, p.27

¹³ Karageorghis, 2000, p.33

insight into their creative style of the time and also demonstrates further the idea that during the period where white painted wares were being created, zoomorphic askoi started to gain more prominence¹⁴. To create white painted wares, such as the object in question, hand-made vessels were created with clay (red or brown), before being covered by a pale slip¹⁵. White Painted ware still retained many similarities with the process of an earlier style- Red Polished Ware, though the difference in the final appearance still demonstrates a shift in the creative process¹⁶. One of the reasons for the shifting changes in style were the influences from the Levant and the Aegean, as many artists of the time were inspired by the pottery being imported from such areas¹⁷. These works were used as a way to impress others, an ideology which had been around since the Early Cypriot period, which demonstrates a desire within the artists of the time to be recognised as great at what they do¹⁸. It shows that this object would have been one which would have been respected- not just because it was used to honour the dead, but because it would have taken time which would have required a great deal of skill to execute- though the medium of terracotta would have been one which was common to see¹⁹.

This piece now belongs to the Cesnola collection²⁰. This collection is one of, if not the, most important collections in the western hemisphere due to its wide variety of Cypriot art²¹. The collection also provides a good insight into how Cypriot art was influenced by Greek, Near Eastern, and Egyptian art²². This is because their wide variety of objects within the collection give an almost comprehensive view of how art of the time progressed and evolved²³. Of such art, most of which were objects which were “primarily dedications in graves”²⁴. This demonstrates that a level of respect was given to these types of objects, as they held enough significance to be placed within a grave. Though, due to it being placed in a grave, the objects themselves would not give a perfect insight into the everyday lives of the people of the time because these would be created for honouring people in their death, not for everyday use²⁵. In all, it is an interesting object because the good craftsmanship indicates that it was a valued object, and it’s nature as a zoomorphic vessel created with White Painted Ware further gives insight into how art styles changed with art techniques²⁶.

¹⁴ Karageorghis, 2000, p.33

¹⁵ Trustees of the British Museum, 2019

¹⁶ Karageorghis, 2000, p.33

¹⁷ Karageorghis, 2000, p.27

¹⁸ Karageorghis, 2000, p.27

¹⁹ Karageorghis, 2000, p.19

²⁰ The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000-2020

²¹ Department of Greek and Roman Art, 2004

²² Department of Greek and Roman Art, 2004

²³ Department of Greek and Roman Art, 2004

²⁴ Picon, Mertens, Milleker, Lightfoot, Hemingway, 2007, p.223

²⁵ Karageorghis, 2000, p.17

²⁶ Karageorghis, 2000, p.33

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