

A Ptolemaic Unguentarium from the Museum of El- salam School



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Introduction

The Museum of El-Salam School at Assiut governorate includes among it finds a fusiform pottery jar carrying number 368/126. The jar is missing rim which is worn-out. The shape's dimensions are: the height is 9.3cm, the base diameter 1.2cm and the maximum body diameter 2.2cm. The fusiform pottery shape made from marl clay fabric and shaped by wheel. The exterior surface is self-slipped, and the interior surface is untreated. The exterior surface has zones of colors; light red (2.5 YR 6/8) and pale yellow (2.5 Y 8/3) (Figure 1).

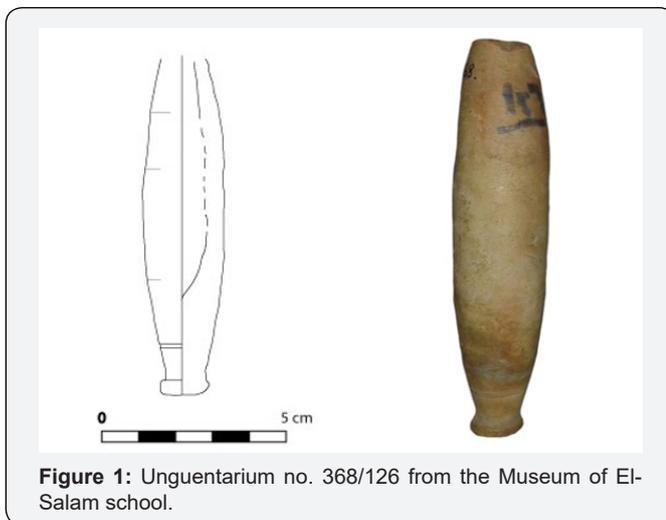


Figure 1: Unguentarium no. 368/126 from the Museum of El-Salam school.

Discussion

The fusiform pottery shape belongs to the Unguentarium type of pottery which indicates to a small tall jar made of pottery or glass. The shape found in numerous Hellenistic and Roman cemeteries as well as settlements [1]. The first appearance of the Unguentarium dates back to the late 4th c. BC and the beginning of the 3rd c. BC in Cyprus, later the shape spread and become common all around the Mediterranean [2]. The Unguentarium produced in two shapes; the fusiform and the bulbous or piriform forms. The fusiform shape found in many of the Hellenistic sites with tall cylindrical neck, oval body and a ring tall solid base [3].

Its appearance was in Cyprus in the late 4th and the beginning of the 3rd c. BC [4]. The fusiform Unguentarium was in used for a long time, where it was observed over time the trend to minimize the capacity of the shape by making them thinner, lower and a tall solid shank [2].

The bulbous or piriform Unguentarium has a tall neck and rounded body without shank [2]. Its appearance is not precisely known despite it was common in the late 1st c. AD. Most of what discovered from this shape found in cemeteries dates back to the second half of the 1st c. AD [5]. The shape used for a limited time about one hundred year which was in used parallel to the foci form shape and didn't replace it. During the 2nd and 3rd c. AD the shape of the bulbous Unguentarium developed to be similar to the bell shape [1]. In the Greek Agora the Unguentarium categorized as aromatic oil jar used in washing and personal cleanliness. The majority of what found there intended for the daily life uses [6]. The Unguentarium classified as one of the perfume vessels. The carefully made shape and the dense fabric used for that type indicate that the content was used in small amounts, likely perfumed oil [6].

Dating of the Unguentarium of the Museum of El-Salam School

The fusiform unguentaria are found on Hellenistic sites around the Mediterranean in both domestic and funerary contexts [6]. The unguentaria from FKTE site represent the local copy of the imported shapes. At Alexandria, unguentaria were produced in Nile clay fabric [7]. The unguentaria of the Saqqara Anubieion were produced in a small number of marl clay and in a large quantity of Nile clay, and, dated back to the period from 150BC to 50AD [8]. At El-Tod the shape appeared during the period 222-51 BC [9]. At North Karnak, they were produced during the Ptolemaic period [10]. At the Priest's Quarter similar shapes were found which could be dated to the late Ptolemaic period. The SCA excavations in front of Karnak temples recovered large amount of such fusiform unguentaria from the settlement which dated back

to the late Ptolemaic period and may use by the area or the baths' goers [11-15].

Conclusion

A fusiform pottery jar carrying number 368/126 from El-Salam Museum School classified as one of the Unguentaria types which appeared for the first time during the late 4th c. BC and the beginning of the 3rd c. BC. The shape adopted to be used in Egypt during the Ptolemaic Period may be as a perfume container.

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