Naukratis: Greeks in Egypt

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http://www.britishmuseum.org/naukratis

Archaic mixed style faience vessels

Virginia Webb
Distinctive faience aryballoi in the form of hedgehogs and other animals with Egyptian connections, as well as aryballoi spherical in shape, make up a large group of faience objects widely distributed in the Mediterranean world in the 6th century BC (Webb 1978, 108–35, in particular hedgehog aryballoi 132–4, spherical aryballoi 108–14; Webb 1987, 72–4). It is most likely that they were carried with other Greek products, and they have been found in burials and sanctuary deposits in Greek colonies and trading posts throughout the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, from Ampurias in Spain to Olbia in the north of the Black Sea, as well as in foreign settlements on the coast of the Levant, Cyprus and in Egypt (Webb 1978, 8, fig. 5). As attractive containers for the ubiquitous oil used in Greek gymnasia, private baths, banquets and especially funerary ritual, they correspond to the Corinthian aryballoi in size and design, closely reproducing the wide lip and concave mouth of these ceramic vessels to aid the application of the oil (Webb 1978, 108–9).

Although they are often given the label ‘from Naukratis’, not many aryballoi have actually been found there. Amongst the actual finds from the early excavations at Naukratis in the British Museum there is only one example of a hedgehog aryballos (Fig. 1; EA 68829; Webb 1978, 133, no. 905, pl. 21) – a very widespread and common type. It is fragmentary and without a precise find-place, and is not mentioned by Petrie, but it clearly came from his excavations, as is indicated by its date of registration (1886) in the British Museum. To this we can add two vase fragments amongst the material assigned by the Egypt Exploration Society (EES) in 1885 to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (RES.86.135 and RES.86.136) which belong to spherical aryballoi of the same phase (Figs 2 and 3).

Moreover, the account by Edgar of the condition of the site in 1903 gives a vivid snapshot of debris surviving on the surface including ‘rubbish heaps near the scarab factory’. Amongst other faience material, he ‘also noticed one or two fragmentary specimens of hedgehog-vasés’ (Hogarth 1905, 134). Unfortunately Edgar did not attempt to retrieve the material or record exactly where he had observed it. Other types of material that he noticed include faience figurines and numerous fragments of New Year flasks (see the chapter on New Year’s flasks). This amount of debris remaining strongly suggests that the aryballoi formed part of the workshop activity on the site.

Hedgehog aryballoi

Three other hedgehog aryballoi have been given (possible) Naukratis provenances: National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh, A.1965.266; Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, R.E.I.N. 1591 (Fig. 4; see Mogensen 1930, 70 no. A 539, pl. 68; Webb 1978,133 no. 906, pl. 21); and Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 41.162.94 (CVA USA 8, Fogg Museum and Gallatin Collection 82 no. 7, pl. 33.7; Webb 1978, 133 no. 1

1 Unless otherwise indicated, all images in this chapter are © Trustees of the British Museum.
2 However, it is to be noted that one hedgehog aryballos found in an Egyptian tomb was equipped with a kohl stick: Egyptian Museum, Cairo, CG 3839, illustrated in Bénédite 1911, 55.
916), without, however, any firm supporting evidence. Other examples are well distributed in Egypt, from Tell el-Yehudiyeh (from Petrie’s excavations: CVA Brussels 3, pl. 107; Webb 1978, 133 no. 912), and as far south as Thebes (Webb 1978, 133 nos 907–11) while another three have a non-specific Egyptian provenance (Webb 1978, 133 nos 913–15). This makes nine altogether (not including the figured aryballoi in other forms found in Egypt). The sub-species of hedgehog that is represented in these vessels, with its large ears, is found in Egypt and not in Greece (southern Europe), where hedgehogs with small ears of the European and roumanicus strain are common. It corresponds to *Hemiechinus auritus* (Herter 1965) and its (modern) geographical spread is across dry steppe from Northern Egypt eastwards across most of mid-Asian semi-desert and steppe.

The origin of the hedgehog faience aryballoi as Egyptianizing versions of the East Greek terracotta hedgehog aryballoi was initially suggested by Webb (Webb 1987). However, it seems as likely that the East Greek hedgehog aryballoi (Higgins 1959, 26–7 nos 1641–3, pls 16–17; Ducat 1966, pl. 18.2–3) may be a response to the faience depictions, as they are not very numerous or well conceived and they are dated to the middle of the 6th century BC or soon after (Higgins 1959, 26–7), which is the same date range as the faience hedgehogs. Moreover, the hedgehog has a range of important meanings in Egyptian religious thought (Buchholz 1965; Droste zu Hülshoff 1980; Osborn and Osbornova 1998, 19–23) and occurs throughout Egyptian art and minor arts in amuletic and vessel form with powerful implications of fertility and rebirth (Busz and Gercke 1999, 310, no. 87).

That the influence is Egyptian is confirmed by other types of faience aryballoi made in the same style and in closely related workshops. Examples are the aryballoi in the form of a tilapia fish (Webb 1978, 134–35, nos 941–9), which copy a popular motif in Egyptian minor arts (Dambach and Wallert 1966). Others in the form of a grasshopper (Webb 1978, 135, nos 950–53) mimic parallel cosmetic vases in ivory and other materials from the New Kingdom and earlier (Keimer 1932, 138, pl. 8.1a and b, with 132, fig. 3; Smith 1965, 214, pl. 153a; Cooney 1975; Barnett 1982, fig. 7, pl. 6a). There is also another group of similar aryballoi in the form of conjoined heads of two of the traditional enemies of Egypt – a black African or Nubian backed by a Syrian (Webb 1978, 130).

Therefore the faience hedgehog aryballoi are likely to have been manufactured in Egypt, in an area under East Greek influence (Webb 1978, 132–4). The technique of manufacture is to form the body of the aryballos round a tightly wound plug of grass or reed stalks (clearly visible in the British Museum hedgehog, Fig. 5) and to add the concave mouth and handle as a separately modelled element. The technique of using grass packing is seen in other faience vessels made in Egypt, for instance, an ape vase (Webb 1978, 144, no. C2, pl. 2) and a Bes vase fragment

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3 The Ny Carlsberg example is described as ‘Naukratie’ in the MacGregor Sale Catalogue 1922 (108, no. 829), which is a generic description, and not a proof of origin.

4 One miniature version comes from the excavations at Naukratis (British Museum, 1886.0401.1470, see Higgins 1959, 27 no. 1642, pl. 17), where it is assigned an origin in Rhodes, and another example (British Museum, 1926.0318.2, see Higgins 1959, 27 no. 1643, pl. 17) affixes a duck head above the hedgehog’s neck, in the same way as certain faience hedgehogs have an additional head (see Fig. 4 above).
from Naukratis (British Museum, EA 68856). This technique accounts for the fact that the body wall varies greatly in thickness. Modelling is by hand, and there is no evidence of the use of moulds, although the products of the workshop are very consistent in their size and proportions. Modelling of the animal concentrates on the facial features: pointed nose, curved mouth, round eye and large petal-shaped ears, with an incised margin, which are pushed downwards by the coat. Above the face is an upstanding crest of prickles which runs right across from ear to ear, and behind this the diamond shaped incisions are arranged in two zones: one above the crest and one running right round the back. Two small out-turned legs sit on the front edge of the base, with crooked legs shown at the back, where the base is curved round to reflect the back of the animal. In their original state, these vessels would have been coloured in a deep turquoise green (derived from the use of copper salts), with spots of dark colour on the coat, and on the ridge of the crest and the vase mouth. Sometimes yellow glaze was used for additional highlighting. Unfortunately, the conditions of burial have not been kind, and almost all have lost their top coat of glaze. Our British Museum Naukratis example has faint traces of green glaze remaining.

Other figure-shaped aryballoi

Other types of figured aryballoi that claim Naukratis as a find-place include a complete vase in the form of a siren, another in the form of conjoined horses, and a fine head of a black African. None of these have convincing documentation. The siren vase (British Museum, EA 32593; Fig. 6) is most similar to a piece in Paris, unfortunately without a secure find-place (Paris, Louvre, AM 6764; see Webb 1978, 132 no. 893). It does not come from Petrie’s, Gardner’s or Hogarth’s excavations (as far as we know), but was purchased by the Reverend Chauncey Murch in Egypt (he also donated to the Metropolitan Museum in New York) and sold to the British Museum in 1900, with the provenance of Naukratis. This could be solely a dealer’s provenance. But the vase could have been found at the site before, during or after excavations, for example in the heaps of rubbish which Edgar describes as still present in 1903 (Edgar 1905, 134). The double horse vase in Edinburgh (National Museum of Scotland, A.1965.267) is of a type close to others which are part of this industry, but again there is no documentation to confirm Naukratis as its find-place, and its state of preservation is suspiciously good. Lastly, Boston has a fine head of a black African (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 03.835; Webb 1978, 128 no. 860, pl. 19) which came from a private collection and which Fairbanks (1928, 176 no. 504) claims is from Naukratis, equally, it seems, without supporting documentation.

Spherical aryballoi

The other type of faience aryballos which was found at Naukratis, and again not referred to by the excavators, is the spherical aryballos (Webb 1978, 108–21, pl. 17). Like the hedgehog aryballoi, these borrow their form
from ceramic prototypes, but in this case purely Greek – Corinthian and East Greek, without any influence from Egyptian forms (Webb 1978, 108). The finest and most carefully made of the faience spherical aryballoi recall the fruit-like form of a parallel East Greek series in clay (Webb 1987, 72 n. 5.) The body of the vase is modelled in several interlocking series of raised diamonds, the shoulder incised in a typical ‘tongue’ pattern, and the base modelled as a rosette or star, all features of the clay fruit vessels which have been schematically rendered. Two fragments of spherical aryballoi were donated to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (RES. 86.135 and RES.86.136) by the EES in 1885, thus guaranteeing that they were excavated in the first season at Naukratis by Petrie (Petrie 1886a). Both have carefully marked out diamond patterns on the body (Webb 1978, 109–10, nos 703–29). Though fragmentary, enough survives of RES. 86.135 to show the regularly arranged radiating tongues on the shoulder, which are well modelled with deep divisions between them, and divided from the interlocking lozenges on the body by two ridges separated by a groove. These shoulder tongues are equal in size and quality of modelling to the lozenges on the body, unlike the simplified, flat tongues often seen on aryballoi of this phase. This piece must belong to the Early Fine Group 1,a (Webb 1978, 109–10) of such aryballoi and can be compared with examples from Camirus on Rhodes (Fig. 7; British Museum, 1860,0201.56, Webb 1978, 109–10 no. 707, pl. 17; cf. also ibid. 109 no. 705). The second fragment now in Boston (RES.86.136) is a smaller section of the body of an identical example with only the interlocking lozenges surviving. There is a possibility that it comes from the same aryballoi as RES.86.135.

**Dating and production**

The two spherical aryballos fragments represent example(s) of the Early Fine phase of faience aryballoi and are earlier than the hedgehog aryballoi. Grave groups suggest a dating in Late Corinthian 1, 575–550 BC. For the crudest and very common type a date in the third quarter of the 6th century, c. 550–525 BC, is most likely. Hedgehog aryballoi, which in their technique of modelling the diamond shapes on the coat are intermediate between the fine and the crudest spherical aryballoi (Webb 1978, 133–4 nos 900–40), are extremely common. Dated contexts give a dating around 550 BC. From the West Necropolis on Samos comes a fine example that was found together with an aryballos in the form of a tilapia fish in tomb 41, dated to c. 550 BC (Boehlau 1898, 44, 160, pl. 13.2–3; Gercke and Löwe 1996, 56, colour pls 7 and 8) and a recently excavated rich grave in northern Greece, dated to approximately 540–530 BC, contained three identical hedgehog aryballoi as well as another aryballos in the shape of a head of Acheloos (Chrysostomou and Chrysostomou 2012, 383–4, nos 20 [Acheloos head], 21 and 22 [hedgehogs]).

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5 For instance Samos, West Necropolis, tomb 44, dated to the second quarter of the 6th century BC (Boehlau 1898, 45 no. 11, p. 160, pl. 13.5; Gercke and Löwe 1996, 57–61 no. 44,11, colour pl. 10), which also contained a suggestively Egyptianizing aryballos with the same mouth form but in the shape of a seated Bes clutching an ibex: Gercke and Löwe 1996, 57–61 no. 44,9, colour pl. 9).
Both hedgehog and spherical aryballoi belong to a lively industry which produced a variety of types of aryballos, some modelled on Egyptian prototypes (tilapia fish, grasshoppers, hedgehogs, monkeys/apes, heads of black Africans and Syrians), while others take their model from Greek types of perfume vase (helmeted head, Acheloos head, Herakles head in lionskin, siren, cock-horse/hippalektryon, etc.) although the faience versions often betray their ignorance of the meaning of the original model. We are looking at an industry that stands at a cultural crossroads where both Egyptian, Greek and East Greek influences are absorbed and reused.

Although we have a disappointingly small number of specimens of this industry from Naukratis, the hedgehog aryballoi fragments noted by Edgar amongst the ‘scarab factory’ debris do suggest that they were made here, and this may be further corroborated by the fact that the scientific analysis of a number of faience objects from Naukratis has revealed as their nearest parallel a hedgehog aryballos (Kaczmarczyk and Hedges 1983, 271–4, Appendix C-51-52). However, more recent analysis (still unpublished) carried out on a significant sample of faience objects found at Naukratis, including the British Museum hedgehog aryballos (EA 68829), shows that the latter is of a different chemical composition from the other likely products of the factory.\textsuperscript{6}

It seems likely that while the hedgehog aryballoi have their origin in Egypt, the spherical aryballoi may originate in East Greece. Whether the industry was actually centred at Naukratis, had a number of manufacturing centres in Lower Egypt (finds of 6th-century BC Greek faience vessels from the so-called Palace of Merenptah at Mit Rahineh/Memphis suggest this possibility)\textsuperscript{7} or shared manufacturing know-how with centres on Rhodes (possibly Camirus or Ialysus), it is not possible to say in the present state of research. But wherever they originated, both types of aryballos bear witness to the strong links between Greek and Egyptian cultures and craft techniques during this period. Neither form could have existed without this synthesis.

\textsuperscript{6} A project of analysis using PIXE has been carried out in a collaboration between scholars and scientists at the British Museum and C2RMF based at the Louvre in Paris. The scientific investigation of faience from Naukratis is led by A. Meek, in association with A. Masson, A. Villing and V. Webb (British Museum). The PIXE analyses were conducted by A. Bouquillon and other scientists at the C2RMF, in association with G. Pierrat-Bonnefois (Louvre).

\textsuperscript{7} Palace of Merenptah unpublished finds from excavations by the Eckley B. Cox Expedition of the University of Pennsylvania Museum, Philadelphia.