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# REMARKS ON NUDE FEMALE FIGURINES HOLDING A SMALL GLOBULAR POT DURING THE PTOLEMAIC AND ROMAN PERIOD

*Khaled ISMAIL\**

## INTRODUCTION

Nude figurines holding a small globular pot in their hand form a distinct category of the terracotta female figurines produced in Egypt. This group of figurines will be discussed and illustrated via some few examples presented here:

- 1/ A nude female figurine squatting, legs wide apart and wearing boots on her feet. She wears a large bound wreath on the head linked with two lotus buds rising above the wreath, holding a globular pot in her left hand, while she points her right hand towards her genitals (**fig. 1**) (Provenance: Tell-Basta; Cairo, Grand Egyptian Museum, GEM 68271).<sup>1</sup>
- 2/ A nude female figurine squatting, legs wide apart. She wears a large bound wreath on the head. She holds a small globular pot in her left hand, and a sistrum in her right hand (**fig. 2**) (Provenance unknown; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, inv.52,5645).<sup>2</sup>
- 3/ A nude fat woman squatting, legs wide apart. She wears a large wreath on the head and holds a small globular pot in her right hand, while she inserts her left hand inside this pot (**fig. 3**) (Provenance: Alexandria; Alexandria, Graeco-Roman Museum, inv.7510).<sup>3</sup>
- 4/ A sitting nude woman holding a small vessel with straight handle in her left hand. She washes her genitals, while her left hand is on her thigh. (**fig. 4**) (Provenance: Ehnasya El-Medina; Brussels, Art and History Museum, inv. E.01222).<sup>4</sup>
- 5/ A nude headless woman with her legs widely apart. She holds a small vessel with a conical body, circular base and straight handle in her right hand. She has her left hand on her thigh. She seems to be sitting on a pierced circular base with vertical rim. (**fig. 5**) (Provenance: Fayoum; Alexandria, Graeco-Roman Museum, inv.31161).<sup>5</sup>

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1 Photo by the author.

2 Photo by the author.

3 BRECCIA 1934, pl. LIII, no.262.

4 PETRIE 1904, p. 2, pl. L, nos.108-109.

5 IBRAHIM 2021, p. 646, fig. 2 (A,B,C,D).

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*NeHeT* 8, 2024, p. 13-27.

6/ A headless nude woman sitting on a stone or night stool (?), she holds a vessel with straight handle in her right hand, while she points her left hand toward her genitals. There is a small oval pot with vertical rim beneath her in the middle of the base (fig. 6) (Provenance: Fayoum; Alexandria, Graeco-Roman Museum, inv.10019).<sup>6</sup>



Figure 1. A nude female figurine holding a small globular pot from Tell-Basta (Cairo, Grand Egyptian Museum, GEM 68271) [Photo K. Ismail]



Figure 2. A nude female figurine holding a small globular pot and sistrum (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, inv. 52,5645) [Photo K. Ismail]



Figure 3. A nude female figurine holding a globular pot (Alexandria, Graeco-Roman Museum inv. 7510) [After BRECCIA 1934, pl. LIII, 262]



Figure 4. A nude woman holding a vessel with straight handle in her left hand (Brussels, Art and History Museum, inv. E.01222) [After PETRIE 1904, pl. L, 108-109]

<sup>6</sup> IBRAHIM 2021, fig. 2.



**Figure 5.** A nude woman holding an *Askos*-pot and sitting on a pierced base (Alexandria, Graeco-Roman Museum, inv. 31161)  
[After IBRAHIM 2021, p. 660, fig. 2]



**Figure 6.** A nude woman sitting on a night stool (?), and holding an *Askos*-pot in her right hand (Alexandria, Graeco-Roman Museum, inv. 10019)  
[After IBRAHIM 2021, p. 659, fig. 1]

It is possible to divide this type of female figurines into two main groups according to their attributes. The first group presents squatted nude figurines holding a round or globular pot, while the second group is formed of the figurines which don't carry pots. Actually, this last group of figurines forms a large proportion of the terracotta productions in Graeco-Roman Egypt.

The type of nude figurines which don't carry pots represents squatted women, their legs open apart and wearing a large wreath crowned with two lotus buds. They either keep their two hands on their knees or point their vulva out with the right hand, while they keep their left leg lifted with the left hand.<sup>7</sup> In some rare examples, the woman appears in connection with other figures such as the representation in which she is carried by a satyr or Silenos.<sup>8</sup> She is also sometimes represented on the back of a wild boar.<sup>9</sup>

Based on museum catalogues and excavation reports, the ratio of representation of the women not holding pots is much more frequent than those which are holding pots in their hands. Most probably the lower number of the latter may refer to specific purposes and functions of these figurines in their context. In particular, most of them were excavated in settlements, an observation that can connect them with domestic contexts.

Paul Perdrizet was the first scholar who presented this unique type, depicted on water flask. The nude woman is represented squatting, legs apart and raising her hands, holding in the right hand the sistrum, while she holds a small globular vase in the other hand.<sup>10</sup> There has been much discussion about these figurines, which are attested in several catalogues and publications since the twentieth century. There was general agreement among the first scholars that these

7 BAILEY 2008, p. 46, pl. 23, nos.3134-3137; NIFOSI 2019, pp. 101-102, fig. 3.20.

8 PERDRIZET 1921, p. 124, no.342, pl. LXXXIV (see also: no.347).

9 NIFOSI 2019, p. 99, fig. 3.17.

10 PERDRIZET 1921, p. 125, no.346, pl. LXXXV; LIMC III/1, p. 88, 8.

nude figurines represent apotropaic Baubo figurines.<sup>11</sup> W. Weber and P. Graindor have suggested that these figurines were used as prophylactic amulets.<sup>12</sup>

A similar nude figurine was excavated in the Graeco-Roman settlement of Tell Atrib by the Polish mission (1985-1986). The figurine represents a woman (or probably the goddess Isis?) sitting cross-legged on a woven basket, holding a *sistrum* in her right hand, while she holds a globular pot in her left hand. She carries on her head a floral crown connected from the top with the Hathoric “*basileion*” crown.<sup>13</sup> K. Mysliwicz posited that this type of figurines was associated with the Eleusinian mysteries in honor of Isis / Demeter and may have been offered as *ex-voto* for fertility or fortune in child delivery.<sup>14</sup> As for Françoise Dunand and Eva Bayer-Niemeier’s point of view, they assumed that the owners dedicated such figurines to Isis in order to get protection for pregnant mothers and their new born, and also to repel the evil spirits from the houses.<sup>15</sup>

Pascale Ballet agrees and suggests that such naked figurines holding pots are generally identified as Isis / Hathor or Isis / Demeter who is connected to popular cults in Egyptian villages.<sup>16</sup> Ballet assumes that the female figurine holding the globular pot is evoking the cult of Isis-Hathor at Dendera, and that these globular pots were dedicated as ritual vessels in her shrines during the cultic activities in the temple of Hathor.<sup>17</sup>

Scholars such as Jutta Fischer,<sup>18</sup> László Török,<sup>19</sup> and Donald Bailey adopted Mysliwicz’s point of view and describe these figures as fecundity demons. They interpret their symbolism as figurines to promise fertility and to bring good luck during the pregnancy.<sup>20</sup>

More recently, Nagwa Ibrahim published two extraordinary nude figurines from Fayoum currently kept in the Graeco-Roman Museum at Alexandria (figs. 5-6).<sup>21</sup> Both figurines miss their heads completely, and represent nude women purifying themselves. One of them is seated on a so-called pierced container and holds an askos-pot in her right hand, while she places her left hand on her vulva. The other figurine represents a unique type: a squatted nude woman, seated on small chair which is probably a birth chair or stool (?). She holds an askos-pot in one hand while she places the other hand on her vulva to purify herself. There is a small pot beneath the seated woman.

11 WEBER 1914, p. 148.

12 WEBER 1914, p. 165; GRAINDOR 1939, pp. 104-105.

13 MYSLIWICZ 1990, p. 287, fig. 1.

14 MYSLIWICZ 1990, p. 289.

15 DUNAND 1979, p. 102; BAYER-NIEMEIER 1988, p. 149.

16 BALLETT 2020, p. 143.

17 BALLETT 1994, p. 29.

18 FISCHER 1994, p. 339, pl. 88, no.839.

19 TÖRÖK 1995, p. 132.

20 BAILEY 2008, p. 51, pl. 23, nos.3131-3132.

21 IBRAHIM 2021, pp. 645-664, figs. 1-2.

## WHAT ARE THE POTS?

The distinctive feature of this category of figurines is the presence of a small pot that women carry in their hands, but these are still not interpreted accurately. It is indeed difficult to determine the function of those globular pots and their contents with any certainty.

The archaeological sources confirm that the Greeks and Romans used a variety of vessels for cleansing in the domestic spheres in Egypt. Various bath-jugs were available in the Ptolemaic baths complex such as the ἀρύταινα and κατάχυτλν which were used for pouring the water over the bathers.<sup>22</sup> While the ἀρύταινα, latin *urna* or *urceus*, is well-known during the Roman times, they also used other vessels that they brought from their homes such as the globular pots with vertical rim and short neck. These various vases were used for several purposes and functions.<sup>23</sup>

The two examples of nude female figurines from the Fayoum are the best documented representative iconography of those female figurines holding the pots (figs. 5-6). If we compare both figurines, we can note two different types of pots. The first type which is carried by the woman in her right hand could be identified as an *askos*-pot (?) (fig. 5), while another type of pot is placed under the second figurine (fig. 6). The pots carried by the women in their hands (figs. 5-6) have one straight handle and a globular body with sometimes trilobed mouth or round rim, which is very similar to the vessel that is shown in the figurine from Ehnasya El-Medina (fig. 4). The other type of pots remains difficult to identify. It resembles the form of pots which were carried by squatted women on their upraised hands (figs. 1-3).

Nagwa Ibrahim tried to identify their functions. She succeeded to identify the function of the *askos*-pot, while she couldn't determine the purpose of the small globular pot under the woman in the second figurine. She proposed that women use such globular pots to wash themselves.<sup>24</sup> However, I suggest that we should be more cautious in interpreting the function of these small globular pots. It is possible indeed to suppose that there are two various types of vessels that were carried by the terracotta figurines.

Archaeological evidence attests that bronze *askoi* were used in the Roman imperial baths. They were probably used for washing and taking a shower inside public baths.<sup>25</sup> The Roman mosaic preserved in the *caldarium* room in the house of Menander in Pompei shows an ithyphallic black servant holding two round-bodied water jugs with rounded mouth in his hands.<sup>26</sup> Also, such jugs were depicted on the floor of the *caldarium* room of the House of Caesius Blandus in Pompei.<sup>27</sup> The best example is the representation of the *askos*-pot on the so-called "dog mosaic" from Alexandria. The *askos*-pot is represented as a rounded-bulging body with straight handle not exceeding the opened spout.<sup>28</sup>

R. Nenova-Merdjanova suggested that the *askoi*-pots may have been used in the houses and baths for pouring water during the bathing, as their shape is very suitable for this purpose.<sup>29</sup>

22 NIELSEN 1990, p. 143.

23 REDON & LECUYOT 2018, p. 209, figs. 5-6.

24 IBRAHIM 2021, p. 651.

25 BESCHI 1962, p. 81.

26 LING & RING 1979, p. 13, fig. 13.

27 CLARKE 1996, p. 185, fig. 78.

28 QUEYREL 2012, p. 328, figs. 2,4,5.

29 NENOVA-MERDJANOVA 1999, p. 134.

N. Franken assumed also that the servants used these pots to pour the water onto the bathers.<sup>30</sup> It is possible to suggest that the function of an *askos*-pot was to contain the bath water. Perhaps the bathers, particularly the women used them to wash themselves.

The interpretation of the globular small pots with flat base and vertical rim is much more difficult and critically problematic. They were wrongly described by Perdrizet as *situla* vessels.<sup>31</sup> This point of view was accepted by P. Ghalioungui and G. Wagner.<sup>32</sup> On the opposite, J. Vogt proposed they were an Egyptian ritual vessel and described them as ritual Egyptian *nw*-pots.<sup>33</sup>

Vogt's point of view seems to be acceptable, however the function of the pots is still debated. Their shape reminds the Egyptian ritual liquids vessels, which are mainly connected with the libation vessels for Nile water, milk and wine. The pots were depicted in the hands of those offering the sacrifices from the Old Kingdom to the Roman times.<sup>34</sup> These sacred liquids were frequently used in the ritual festivals of Isis and Osiris.<sup>35</sup> In additions, the demotic and Greek magical texts indicate that the content of the ritual *nw* vases consists of the sacred blood of Osiris.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, this pattern of globular pots also appeared in some hieroglyphic signs to indicate the purity and cleansing.<sup>37</sup>

The absence of archaeological context for the small globular pots probably represents a critical problem to interpret their function. Some of these small pots were found in Graeco-Roman houses and public baths around Egypt. A number of them come the Graeco-Roman bath of Sakha in Delta.<sup>38</sup> Corpuses of pots were excavated during the recent excavation in the ancient cities of Tell Atrib conducted by the Polish mission between 1985 and 1995,<sup>39</sup> and also in Buto within the Hellenistic and Roman domestic districts and industrial quarters.<sup>40</sup> A corpus of small vessels made of pottery, faience and bronze has been excavated at these sites. For instance, in Tell Atrib, most of the pottery globular pots were excavated close to the public baths complex of the city.<sup>41</sup> This may provide an indication of the function of those pots in the domestic sphere.

It is possible to compare these small globular pots with those frequently appearing on the effigies of nude figurines represented on the magical uterine gems from Roman times in Egypt. These extraordinary depictions of nude women received the attention of such authors as Simone

30 FRANKEN 2018, p. 48.

31 PERDRIZET 1921, p. 125.

32 GHALIOUNGUI & WAGNER 1974, p. 192, pl. 62 (f).

33 VOGT 1924, p. 50.

34 DAUMAS 1970, p. 75.

35 WILD 1981, p. 126.

36 MORENZ 1959, p. 138.

37 BALCZ 1933, p. 7, figs. 48-50.

38 EL-KHACHAB 1978, p. 150, pl. 136.

39 MYŚLIWIEC 2000, pp. 9-10.

40 REDON & LECUYOT 2018, p. 209, fig. 5.

41 MYŚLIWIEC 1998, p. 125.

Michel,<sup>42</sup> Georges Nachtergaele,<sup>43</sup> and Veronique Dasen.<sup>44</sup> They associated the representation of nude figurines on the uterine gems with the Greek goddess Omphale, who is represented as a pregnant woman sitting and washing her genitals with a globular pot. They interpreted these small pots that were carried on Omphale's hand as medical vessels which were used to protect women during childbirth and the menstrual period. This hypothesis is followed by Campbell Bonner,<sup>45</sup> Veronique Dasen,<sup>46</sup> and recently by Ada Nifosi<sup>47</sup> based on the magical scenes and inscriptions engraved on these gems.

According to the Greek mythology, Omphale was a queen of Lydia. She forced Herakles and enslaved him for one year to expiate his crimes. She obliged him to exchange roles and clothes, therefore she wore the lion skin and carried his club. Henceforward, Omphale gained some healing skills and she was able to control the dangerous threats. She is responsible for supporting the women's health and giving them medical immunity against obstetric and gynecological deceases.<sup>48</sup>

Some uterine gems depict Omphale on one side as a squatting woman in frontal position with legs apart and holding a small globular pot in her right hand, while on the other side an ithyphallic donkey lies down with erected phallus. Next to it, there are some magical inscriptions (fig. 7).<sup>49</sup> In some other gems, the women's womb is represented as an inverted small globular



Figure 7. Red jasper uterine gem representing on one side a nude figurine holding a small globular pot (Hamburg, Skoluda collection) [After DASEN 2008, p. 267, fig. 2]

42 MICHEL 2001, pp. 79-80, no.83.

43 NACHTERGAEL 2003, p. 186.

44 DASEN 2008, pp. 267-268, fig. 2 (a,b).

45 BONNER 1950, pp. 62-64.

46 DASEN 2008, p. 269.

47 NIFOSI 2019, p. 105.

48 LIMC VII/1, s.v. "Omphale"

49 MICHEL 2001, pp. 220-245.

pot with bulging body, narrowing toward the top closed by the key. It shows under the genitals of the Omphale figure (fig. 8).<sup>50</sup>

The Greek myth indicates that Omphale took the place of Herakles who was protecting the women from the gynecological hazards. Heracles was fighting the lion, while Omphale defeated the donkey which embodies the action of malevolent entities threatening feminine health. The Egyptian texts describe the donkey as the god of evil, who causes the threatening of the pregnant women during their sleep. She is keeping his negative effects under her control. She also transformed his excessive power to positive protective function which is more evident on the uterine gems.<sup>51</sup>

This representation of Omphale on the gems recalls the ancient Egyptian story of Isis when she gave birth to her son Horus in the marshes of the Delta, while she was fighting Seth to defend herself and her newborn.<sup>52</sup> This popular and traditional idea was probably transferred from the myth to the effigies of bronze, faience, and terracotta figurines in Graeco-Roman Egypt. The magical representation of “Pesudo Baubo” or probably “Omphale” according to the magical inscriptions on the Roman gems can control the evil forces that threaten the mother and newborns. It seems from these evidences that there is a strong connection between the Egyptian and Greek conceptions concerning the ideas of the protection of motherhood and childbirth.



Figure 7. Uterine gem representing on one side an inverted round pot closed by key beneath the figurine of Omphale (London, the British Museum, inv. G 1986,0501.32)  
[Photo © Trustees of the British Museum]

### THE FUNCTIONAL INTERPRETATION OF THE SMALL GLOBULAR POTS: THE MEANING AND CONCEPTION

According to the archaeological and literary sources, various vases were used by women for washing and cleansing in the houses and baths. The *urna*-pots were frequently mentioned in the Graeco-Roman papyri, used for pouring the water over the bather and for washing their hands. Most likely there were other types of pots used for the ritual bathing and purification. The

<sup>50</sup> NIFOSI 2019, p. 103.

<sup>51</sup> DASEN 2008, p. 270.

<sup>52</sup> NIFOSI 2019, p. 104.

bathers probably brought some instruments from their home, which weren't available in public baths for these ritual purifications inside the facility.<sup>53</sup>

The *askoi*-pots as well are attested in various archaeological evidence for pouring the water over the bathers. I suggest that it was probably used by the women for very private practices relevant to their ritual purification of menstruation at home since they would be suitable pots for this kind of purposes and activities.

According to the recent study of the globular small pots, they are described as containers for medicinal liquids. They are resembling those pots which are known from different sites in the Mediterranean world.<sup>54</sup> If we consider this possible hypothesis provided by archaeological evidence and the link between these pots and the purification, I propose that the pots could probably have been used for some ritual purification and treating during childbirth.

The Greek medical texts of the Ptolemaic and Roman periods recommend that women behave and purify themselves before accessing the temples during the menstruation period. For instance, Philo of Alexandria mentions that Jew women purified themselves with private ablutions after the sexual intercourse or during menstruation by using a small globular pot (*λουτροίς*).<sup>55</sup> Otherwise, demotic papyri from the Ptolemaic period attest those women performed a very private ritual purification at their home using pierced small vessels or containers made of pottery.<sup>56</sup> Geneviève Husson discussed and identified these vessels as small pierced pots water was suctioned.<sup>57</sup> These pottery vessels are also attested in Hippocratic treatises as a night stool or small pierced seat for those women who are suffering from the menstruation.<sup>58</sup>

Hippocrates recommends to use a pierced small round seat with inclined back when the parturient were somewhat weak, whereas he advised to use a *“very narrow night stool connected with the small pot for the adults when the menstrual bleeding were very strong to accomplish delivery of the childbirth”*.<sup>59</sup>

Either pierced pottery seats or the night stool described in Hippocratic treatises are attested in the terracotta figurines: the female figurine (fig. 5) representing a nude woman sitting on a round pierced seat, while she holds an *askos*-pot in her right hand to wash her genitals. There is another interesting figurine kept in the British Museum (GR.1992.8.11.1) and probably found in the Fayoum, which dates to the first or second century AD, and represents a draped female seated on a pierced pot with a wide mouth (fig. 9).<sup>60</sup> The figurine (fig. 6) is the best example to show the type of night stool linked with the globular pots. In this example, the woman washes her genitals, while the menstrual bleeding is suctioned into the small pot beneath her.

According to the Egyptian, and Greek-Roman medical texts, the menstruation is not only bleeding but also purification.<sup>61</sup> The Egyptian medical texts mention that the blood of menstruating

53 REDON & LECUYOT 2018, p. 206.

54 LAJTAR & POLUDNIKIEWICZ 2017, p. 334.

55 Philo Alex., *Leg III*, p. 163.

56 ZAUZICH 1968, vol. 1, pp. 17-19 (*Urkunde 11: P. Louvre 2424*).

57 HUSSON 1986, p. 91.

58 HANSON 1994, p. 163.

59 LIENAU 1973, p. 53.

60 VASSILIKA 1994, p. 181; ROWLANDSON *et al.* 2000, p. 288, fig. 33(b).

61 NIFOSI 2019, p. 164.



**Figure 9.** A draped female seated on pierced vase  
(London, British Museum, inv. GR.1992.8.11.1)  
[Photo © Trustees of the British Museum]

women was not useless. Sometimes the bleeding could interact with some medical productions to cure woman bodies, for instance as a cure for sagging breast.<sup>62</sup> Some other Egyptian medical texts suggest the Egyptians created a medicine to treat infertility and menstrual bleeding. This consisted of the male or donkey menses mingled with the menstrual blood, which was mainly used to facilitate the suction of bleeding outside women's bodies.<sup>63</sup> Hippocratic treatises describe the menstrual bleeding as a "purification" during the postpartum or childbirth.<sup>64</sup> They also claim that the blood flows into the womb during the pregnancy to nurture the child over the month, while the excess blood comes out after the womb had been opened by the childbirth.<sup>65</sup>

I could suggest that these pots express the symbolism of purification and treating of gynecological deceases. The pots probably contain protective potions that were recommended to the woman to anoint their genitals with after childbirth. Another possible function for these pots is to suction the blood caused by the mensuration during the hygienic ablution, a part of very private ritual purification in the houses.

### THE CONCEPTION OF THE REPRESENTATION OF NUDE FIGURINES HOLDING GLOBULAR POTS IN THEIR HANDS IN THE GRAECO-EGYPTIAN COROPALASTY

The representation of nude female figurines holding pots reflects significant cultural exchanges in the popular religion of Graeco-Roman Egypt. In particular, the iconography of the nude woman squatting, legs wide apart, and wearing a large bound wreath on the head linked with two lotus buds rising above the wreath, holding a globular pot in her left hand, while she points her right hand towards her genitals or in another type, holding a small globular pot in her left hand and a sistrum in her right hand. This Graeco-Egyptian representation is associated with the attributes of the Greek and Egyptian fertility deities.

The Egyptian traditional representations of carrying pots in the hands are recalling ritual purposes in the Egyptian temples in honor of the Egyptian fertility deities. This Egyptian tradition is also shown on the Roman protective uterine gems and terracotta figurines; however, this representation

<sup>62</sup> NUNN 2002, p. 197.

<sup>63</sup> WESTENDORF 1999, p. 424.

<sup>64</sup> KING 1998, p. 76.

<sup>65</sup> FRANDBSEN 2007, p. 86.

was treated in a new Greek style as “Omphale”. This main element became the nude female holding a pot who was named Baubo / Omphale and assimilated with the Egyptian Isis during the Roman period. This new Greek ideology was introduced in Egypt during the Hellenistic and Roman periods and showed a fundamental development in creating a new type of nude figurines which were used in multiple purposes such as protection and ritual purification practices.

The conception of the Egyptian pots is the libation vessels for Nile water, milk and wine which were frequently used in popular festivals. However, the purpose of the pots was probably modified during the Graeco-Roman period. According to the archaeological evidence, such small globular pots with vertical rim and wide mouth have been used to contain ointments, perfumes, and other medical liquids.<sup>66</sup> Most likely the nude figurines with attributes of Isis / Omphale holding globular pots were used in processions and cultic ceremonies. They were probably presented as *ex-voto* figurines in honor of the protective deities.

The two unusual nude figurines of the Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria are slightly different from those fertility figurines in terms of the conceptions and context. The widespread representation of the nude women sitting on the so-called “toilet chair” and washing her genitals using an *askoi*-pot and the globular small pot shows a clear concern for this particular style of figurines in the context of domestic cults. This type of figurines perhaps refers to a ritual private act in the Graeco-Roman domestic sphere. The demotic and Greek texts of the Graeco-Roman times confirm that there was a small room downstairs that was used for ritual purification activities.<sup>67</sup> The figurines may provide an indication of what women did in this room. They purify themselves by sitting on the chamber pierced pots, washing their bodies during the menstruation, while the blood and the waste water are suctioned to the pots. Most likely, the women deposit such figures in their house to ask the protective deities for protection from gynecological diseases and purification during the menstrual period.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, the female figurines show two different types of vessels: the *askos*-pot and the globular pot. The purpose of the *askos* vase was to pour the water of the bath in order to wash the body. The unique terracotta figurines from the Fayoum indicate that women used an *askos*-pot to wash their genitals during the menstruation after childbirth.

It is clear, according to archaeological evidence from Tell Atrib and Hippocratic treatises, that the globular small pots are multifunctional. They are described as medicine pots, which are used for several medical functions and purposes. I posited that they are used for collecting and suction the strong bleeding during the menstruation and childbirth. The associated function to the ritual purification, washing the bodies, and the private hygienic practicing in public baths and houses is also possible for those globular pots.

The mass production of these terracotta figurines found in domestic contexts shows a clear concern for popular cultic practices in Roman Egypt. Most likely these female figurines have various contexts and conceptions. Such votive female figures were probably used as protective figurines of the motherhood and newborn in various domestic contexts. Another possible meaning of those figurines is to secure the private ritual purification activities after the childbirth in the houses.

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<sup>66</sup> REDON & LECUYOT 2018, p. 208.

<sup>67</sup> NIFOSI 2019, p. 231.

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