



CRE 2020/2021 – University of the Aegean, 9-16 May 2021

Water Jar-Stand from the Coptic Museum

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Heritage Background

When you walk through Egypt's streets and find these pottery jars set up on the street corners, on metal or wooden stands or on racks located on the pavement under trees, you might ask yourself: what is the function of these jars? Why are they here? And who is responsible for them?

All these questions are important – not only because water jars provide water to quench the thirst of passerby - but also because the style of the stands on which they are placed are considered as part of history, culture and also as part of human heritage.



The photos represent the modern Water jar- Stands which used in houses and streets in the late 18th till the 21st Century AD.

Exhibitions

- The idea of the exhibition and the display took place in the British Museum 2013 as a participant in the International training programme "ITP".
- An exhibition with only one object from the storage of the British Museum.
- The exhibition entitled "**Quenching the thirst across ears**".
- The theme is recording and focusing on the continuous tangible and intangible heritage in the Egyptian community to connect the people with Museum objects which they know very well in daily life habits.



©The British Museum, International training programme 2013 the participants individual exhibitions.

Historical Timeline

❖ New Kingdom



fig. 1



fig.2

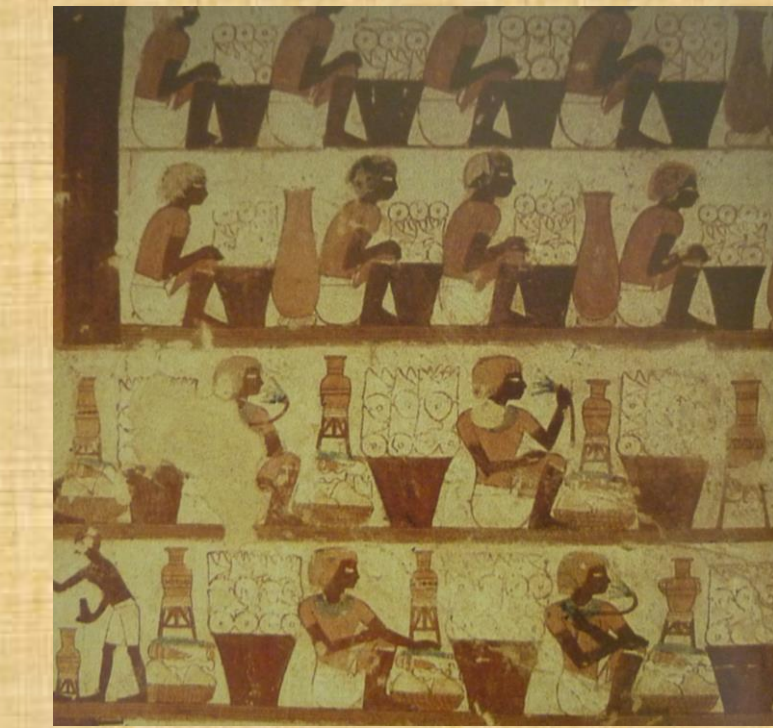


fig. 3

Fig.1 Various household objects, New Kingdom, c.1300BC; from Thebes.

Fig.2 Water Jar-stand, 18th Dynasty © British Museum, Cat. No. 2470.

Fig.3 This scene is from the private tomb of 'Userhat' TT 56 the scribe who counts breads in Upper and Lower Egypt, New Kingdom, Thebes, Upper Egypt.

In Pharaonic Egypt the house plan always provided for a special place, usually paved with a stone slab, along the side wall of the vestibule or main hall, where large water-jugs would be set on wooden stands or ring stands.

❖ Late Roman and Coptic period



fig. 1



fig.2

Fig. 1 © Coptic Museum Inv. No. 3497, 5th – 6th A.D.

Fig.2 © British Museum EA 1788, Wadi Sarga, Upper Egypt, 7th – 8th A.D.

The water-jar stands are permanent structures made of red bricks bonded with waterproof mortar composed of lime and pounded brick, and having an elaborate system of drainage as well as a protection from dust and insects. The water jar stands in these periods are decorated with lion heads, undulating vines with rigid grapes and leaves surging from the baskets, as well as letters A and Ω as a symbolic idea of Christian resurrection. Other stands have, instead of the lion head, a round human face with a protruding tongue.

References:

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Coptic Museum object

- **Water jar stand**
- 5th - 9th AD.
- Saqqara, The monastery of Apa Jeremias.
- © Coptic Museum, Inv. No. 7077

Description: Limestone stand for two water jars and four small holes, two on each side, for cups leaving in the middle a space having the shape of a cross. In the front, the Coptic inscriptions start with a cross † and end with another cross † as dedication for the deceased.

- **Inscription:** Left→ †My brother Mina the Steward, Amen †



- Right → †the teacher(master) Zacharias his brother, [Jesus] save us†

❖ How are Jug stand used ?

A very good display from Louvre Museum. Water jar stand © Louvre Museum, Inv. No. E 12131 From Baouit (Assuit-Middle Egypt), 7th Century A.D.



❖ Islamic period

© British Museum Marble jar stand, Inv. No. 1988,1107.1 Fatimid dynasty, 12th A.D



© Islamic Art Museum, Cairo. Marble jar stand with marble vase Ottoman period in Egypt.

In this period water jar stands are usually made of marble but we can also find marble jar stands dated to the late Coptic period. We can differentiate between each of them from the decoration; as the Islamic artist used plant motifs, especially tree branches overlapping and interlocking (arabesque), as well as the Arabic inscriptions, which came bearing religious verses, and information about the foundation.

They served as water containers for ablution beside their main function as drinking container for humans, animals as well as birds, they were set up outside the mosques as an ongoing charity and it is known as '*mai sabil*' which is literally translated as 'free water for passing people. This concept conveys public access to free water and is a long established tradition in the Arab and Muslim world.