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The Terra Cotta Anthropomorphic Figurines

Introduction: Origins of Anthropomorphic Representation

Anthropomorphic representation is known from very early in antiquity, either from archaeological evidence or from written sources represented by epigraphical documents mentioning potter-gods or ordinary potters. According to Mesopotamian tradition, the practice of fashioning terra cotta figurines goes back to the creation of the world. In one episode Enki asks his mother, the goddess Nammu, to form a creature of clay:

Mix the heart of clay that is over the abyss
You, do you bring the limbs into existence
Nimah (the earth-mother goddess) will work above thee,
(goddess of birth) will stand by thee at thy fashioning. (Kramer 1961: 70).

The biblical account of man's creation, represents the creator as a potter (*yosser*) modeling Adam out of clay (Badre 1980: 13). In the Ugaritic legend of Keret, the god El is described as making a clay shape: *Sha'taqat:* meaning the one who heals. It is *she* who will take care of and heal King Keret (Caquot *et al.* 1974: 566, CTA 16, V, 1. 26-30 notes h-i).

Workshops for Figurines

This study will be based on the anthropomorphic representation in Syria, mainly of the Bronze Age, but including some examples of the Iron Age. There is very little evidence for potter's workshops in Syria. Antoon Moortgat thinks he has identified one in Tall Khuwayra (Chuera) in the area of the Northern Temple, where he found a large pile of fine levigated clay that would only be used for delicate objects such as tablets and figurines. This, he suggests, was in connection with the nearby kiln and the *Wasserpülanlage* (a system for washing with abundant water). This complex has yielded a large number of terra cotta figurines and clay chariots which may justify his hypothesis that it actually was a workshop (Moortgat 1962: 17). In a second stage, figurines were baked in kilns. These have been found in many sites associated with figurines such as Tall 'Abd and Tall Ḥabūba Kabīra (Hensch 1973: 56-57, FIGS. 20-21). Potter's tools of clay, pebbles or flints have also often been found but rarely in their proper context. These were mainly used for scraping or smoothing the clay surface of the terra cotta figurines.

Clay and its Provenance

In the mythological texts, the gods are said to have taken the clay from a humid context, mainly from riversides (Barrelet 1968: 29). This is confirmed by the concentration of terra cotta figurines at sites located along rivers in Syria: the Orontes and the Euphrates, where it is interesting to note the uniform texture and colour of the clay in each area. The advantage of obtaining clay from river banks is that it saves the potter the levigation process which uses water in successive stages, a job that would automatically be done by the river. In a second stage, the clay is mixed with a temper which can vary from fine limestone to hematite or mica grits. These give elasticity to the clay during the firing stage and consequently reduce the risks of malformation or cracking.

TECHNIQUES OF FASHIONING FIGURINES

There are two major procedures for fashioning clay figurines: free-hand modeling and pressing in a mould.

A. Free-hand Modeling

This is the most primitive method used in manufacturing clay figurines: the technique depends on the preconceived concept of the potter before he fashions the figurine, whether he wants it standing, seated or riding an animal (Badre 1980: 18). There are various shapes executed using a free-hand modeling technique.

I. Figurines Represented in a Standing Position

This category forms the largest majority of anthropomorphic terra cotta figurines.

1. The Snow-Man Technique. The snow-man technique

is the most primitive and schematised rendering of the human form. The main features: the head, the arms and the legs are pinched from the original clay lump. Other details, such as the eyes, the ears, etc., may be indicated by incision, by application and sometimes emphasised by painting. This technique was originally used in the representation of female figurines and was found in the very early sites of Syria, at Muraybit (FIG. 1a) of the eighth millennium (Cauvin 1974: 48, FIGS. 3-4; 1978: 118; FIG. 25) and at Chagar Bazar (FIG. 1b) of the Chalcolithic period (Mallowan 1936: 19, PL. I; 3).

The female figurine was represented as a seated steatopygous "mother goddess", a form which was widely distributed in the ancient Near East and of which similar specimens were found in the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B level of 'Ayn Ghazāl in Jordan (ca. 7500-5000 BC) (FIG. 1c - Zayadine 1986: 40, no. 17). Male figurines were also commonly represented in the snow-man technique. They did not form a unified type as was the case with female figurines, but the technique used for their fashioning was the common denominator. The Tall Brāk figurine (FIG. 1d - Badre 1980, PL. XXX.1; XXXI.12-13) and that from Byblos (FIG. 1g - Dunand 1954: 1039, FIG. 1146) have their parallel in the male figurines of 'Ayn Ghazāl (FIG. 1e, f - Zayadine 1986: 40, nos. 15, 16).

2. Flat Figurine Technique. The potter in this case sets the clay lump on a flat surface, shapes the contour of the figurine using the pinching technique and stretches out the limbs. It is obvious that these figurines, because of their flat shape, were meant to be placed lying on, or standing against a flat surface.

The arms are represented in full, either brought forward or more commonly folded over the chest holding the breasts (FIG. 2a - Badre 1980: 394, PL. LXIII). They are also rendered in the shape of stretched horizontal stumps (FIG. 2b - Badre 1980: 393, PL. LXIII). The face has a bird-like aspect, where some details such as the nose, the ears and the beard are produced by the pinching technique. Other details of the face are completed either with incisions, with applications, or with a combination of both. Round pellets, either plain or with a central perforation, represent the eyes, the ears, the breasts, and the navel. The headdress is stretched out in a comb-like shape, perforated at the corners. These holes may have been used to suspend the figurine. In an almost symmetrical way, the pinched-out ears are also pierced through, possibly for earrings. Decorative elements are added in a secondary stage; these are applied narrow bands to represent necklaces, belt or diagonal crossed bands over the chest. They are usually plain bands incised mechanically in the rouletted technique using an indented wheel-like tool (FIG. 2c - Matthiae 1966: PL. 60.5), a simple stylus or a fork-like instrument. The low-

er part of the figurine has wide hips and the legs are brought together in a single piece, separated by a medial incision. The contour of the pubic triangle is indicated by an incised outline and filled in with several rows of hatchings produced in the rouletted or free-hand technique. In some cases (FIG. 2d-e - Fugmann 1958: FIGS. 74, 85) the body appears disproportionate as there is no distinction between the two parts of the body; the torso and the lower trunk are fused in a circular shape ending in a concave base. The arms are very rarely indicated on this type of figurine. When they are indicated, they appear as small bands applied over the chest.

Most of the above described features: the pubic triangle, the navel, the breasts, the folded arms holding the breasts, the bands across the chest and the typical comb-like headdress, are characteristics of female figurines. The male figurines are much less frequently represented than the female. They are produced in the same basic technique for the body and the facial features. The headdress is tilted backwards. Distinct details are the applied beard and the male organs. In some rare exceptions the navel, the breasts and the folded arms appear on male figurines. The arms are either brought toward the side to carry a jar over the shoulder (FIG. 2f - Badre 1980: 195, PL. X) or sometimes brought forward to hold an animal applied to the chest (FIG. 2g - Badre 1980: 195, PL. X). These different objects held by the figurines probably symbolize offerings, an attitude which seems to be particular to the male figurine.

In general, the above described figurines are particular to the Orontes valley (Badre 1980: 45-53) and belong to the second millennium BC, with a concentration towards the middle of this millennium.

3. Composite Technique of Flat Torso and Column-like Body. The fashioning of these figurines is executed in two stages: 1) the upper part where the flat torso is fashioned according to the above-described technique; and 2) the lower part, where the lower trunk is rendered in a schematized column-like shape with a circular, oval or rectangular section. In the last two cases the column-like body does not affect the general flat appearance of the figurine. A concave base is shaped at its extremity, to make the figurine stand up.

The great variety of the figurines produced in this technique depends mainly on the various styles of the headdress. These appear in the following types:
a) The headdress with long braids to the front and rectangular bun to the rear (FIG. 3a). The braids are made as applied bands decorated with incised herring-bone design. Two similar bands represent the necklaces. A row of pellets with vertical incisions is placed over the forehead, and the eyes are represented by pierced pellets. A similar type of figurine (FIG. 3b) shows a simpler decora-
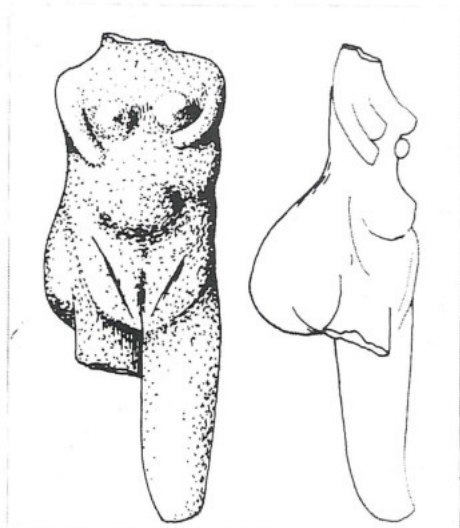
1. (a) Muraybit; (b) Chagar Bazar; (c, e, f) 'Ayn Ghazāl; (d) Tall Brāk; (g) Byblos.
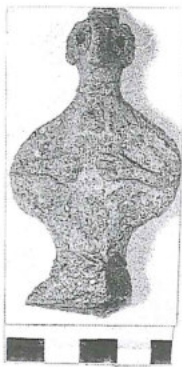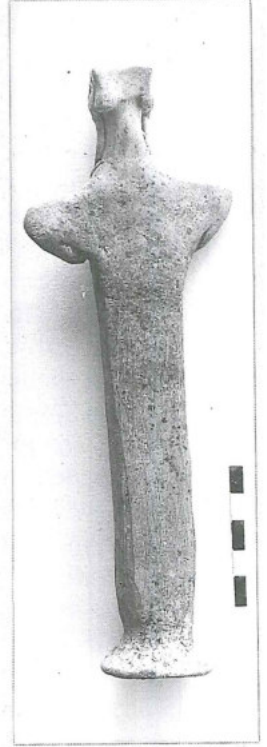
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2. (a) Unknown provenance - AUB Museum; (b) unknown provenance - Aleppo Museum; (c) Tall Mardīkh; (d, e) Ḥamā; (f, g) Salamiyyah.

3. (a-d) Unknown provenance - private collection.

tion for the necklaces and the hairstyle, which consists of one or two rows of deep nail incisions. The eyes are applied pellets with a reed incision around a central perforation.

b) A headdress with long braids to the front and a pony-tail to the rear (FIG. 3c). The braids are applied bands decorated with incisions. Four applied bands decorated alternately with vertical and horizontal hatchings represent the necklaces. These are continued in the back by a counter-weight indicated by three parallel incised lines in a V-shape. The forehead band is decorated with a horizontal band incised with herring-bone design. The eyes are applied pellets with a reed incision around a central perforation. Similar pellets are applied, one on the central forehead and a row of three over the pony-tail. Oblong folded pellets are applied over the pinched ears. Applied perforated pellets represent the breasts. The arms are brought forward holding unusual offerings: a saucer in the right and a pigeon in the left.

c) A headdress with short braids to the front and enlarged pony-tail to the rear (FIG. 3d). This type is similar to (b) above except for shorter braids. The necklaces are partly applied in two bands, and partly incised: one consists of vertical strokes between two horizontal lines, the other is a large herring bone design across the front shoulders. Bracelets are indicated on each wrist: two applied small bands, with fingernail incisions.

d) A flat elongated headdress (FIG. 4d-e - Badre 1980: 297, PL. XXXIV). The ears are pinched out with three or more oblong pellets folded over them. Simple pierced holes represent the eyes. The necklace and the bracelets are also indicated by a row of vertical incisions. The arms are brought forward. In some cases, this type of figurine is carrying a child in a highly stylized form. It consists of an elongated lump of clay for the body which has been squeezed in to indicate the neck and bring out the head.

e) A highly elongated headdress ending in a turreted crown, with an enlarged applied pony-tail to the rear (FIG. 4a). The ears are treated in the same way as in the preceding example (d). Three applied bands with a double row of incised hatchings represent the necklaces. Two similar bands are applied on the forehead and the base of the turreted crown. The stump arms are brought forward and pierced through as if to hold something.

f) A conical pointed headdress (FIG. 4b). This is usually decorated with incised motifs: lines, strokes or small dots and is rarely represented without decoration. The ears are pinched downward, either covered by an oblong pellet, or sometimes simply pierced through. The eyes are often represented as perforated pellets and sometimes have the shape of coffee bean pellets.

On the illustrated example (FIG. 4f) the eyebrows appear as an applied band decorated with incised herring bone design. On this same figurine the necklaces appear as a combination of applied and incised bands. The latter continue in the back. A long pony-tail is decorated with incisions applied to the back. The arms are stumps brought forward holding a lamb in the left and against the shoulder. This ram is a unique example rendered in one pinching technique applied transversely, on each shoulder.

The very large majority of these figurines is represented nude, but some exceptions are partly or fully dressed. An example from Tall Khuwayra (Chuera) (FIG. 4c - Moortgat 1960: 44, FIG. 42a) shows the body entirely covered with reed incisions giving the effect of a dress. The pelleted breasts are, however, applied on top of the dress. The priority of their role is more important realistic representation. Another example from Tall Tayināt (Badre 1980: 21, PL. XXI.3) shows elements of a garment painted in red and black. Paint and bitumen are occasionally used to emphasize certain features. Only a few figurines are entirely covered with red slip. Other specimens of dressed figurines are known; they belong to the second category of moulded plaques (cf. *infra*).

From the regional study of human figurines it appears that the above described composite technique applies mainly to the region of the Euphrates valley and is dated to the period between the beginning of the third millennium and the beginning of the second millennium BC (Badre 1980: 71-85).

II. Figurines Represented in a Kneeling Position

Very few figurines are represented in a kneeling position. In order to make this posture possible, the legs are brought forward together in one piece (FIG. 5a-b - Ingholt 1940: 60, FIG. 1; Badre 1980, PL. LXVI.71), and as a counterbalance, a clay peg is devised and stretched backwards from the original form of the figurine. In the few known cases, the kneeling position seems to be characteristic of male figurines, as their beards make clear. They are often carrying a container, an animal or a weapon applied against the chest, probably as offerings or ex-votos. In some cases the hands are brought to the knees, as in a praying position. The whole attitude of the figurine is that of a worshipper.

From the above described standing and kneeling figurines carrying offerings and from further research on this specific type (Ingholt 1940: 62), we conclude that worshipping and presenting ex-votos were male functions while female figurines are represented occasionally carrying a child and have their sexual attributes emphasized, symbolizing fertility and reproduction.

III. Figurines Represented as Riders

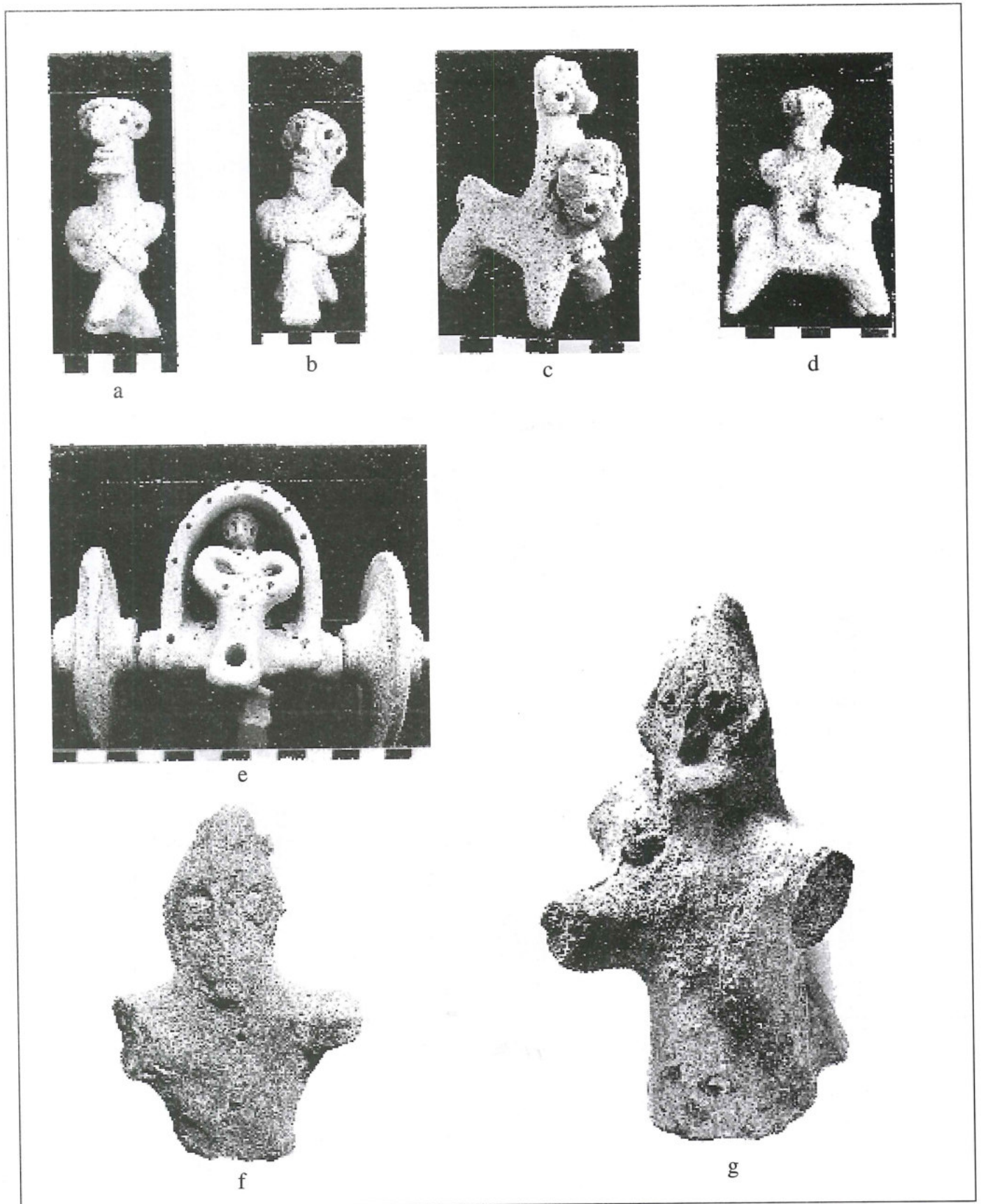Zoomorphic figurines are almost as numerous as human figurines, but very few human figurines riding animals
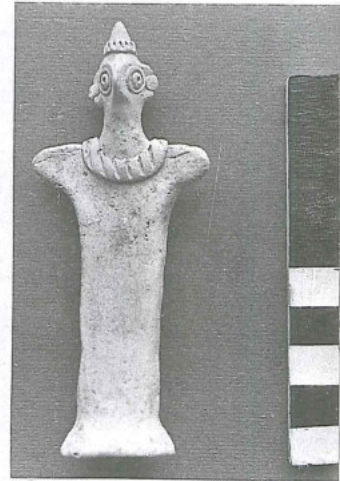
4. (a, b, d, f) Unknown provenance - private collection; (c, e) Tall Khuwayra (Chuera).

5. (a, e) Ḥamā; (b, d) unknown provenance - AUB Museum; (c) Tall Mardīkh; (f) Tall Judayda; (g) Dayr ʿAllā.

have been discovered to date. These animals are quadrupeds of an indefinite species: a bull or a donkey. The human figurine is represented either astride (FIG. 5c - Matthiae 1974: 29) or sitting with both legs on one side of the animal (FIG. 5d - Badre 1980: 406, PL. LXVII.80). The riders are usually male with pointed or tilted headdresses. The animal and the riding figurines are fashioned separately then fused together in a secondary stage, sometimes skipping the lower part of the rider's legs.

The arms are either bent forward to hold onto the head or the horns of the animal, or represented as stretched-out horizontal stumps. The concept of these riders is common to all periods. The only distinctive chronological feature may be in the specific type of the human figurine itself. There are, however, some cases where there is no distinctive difference between the periods — for example, if we compare the Bronze Age rider from Tall Judayda (FIG. 5f - Badre 1980: 254, PL. XX.2) with the rider of the Persian period from Dayr 'Allā (FIG. 5g - Zayadine 1986: 124, no. 158). They have the same posture, similar pointed headdress and pelleted eyes. Figurines similar to the riders are shown driving a chariot (FIG. 5e - Badre 1980: 406, PL. LXVII.81) and are represented standing or seated in the chariot.

B. Moulding or Relief Technique

Small terra cotta plaques with a frontal relief figure, usually of a woman and very rarely of a man, have been found in most parts of the Near East, where they are known to archaeologists by the conventional names of their technique: the "Astarte plaque" or the "tongue reliefs". This technique implies an economic development because through such a procedure it is possible to achieve mass production of the same type of figurine. It also implies progress in technology, since moulded reliefs require a more complex procedure.

The earliest examples are from Mesopotamia and date from the third millennium BC. The Palestinian and Syro-Phoenician specimens were introduced at a later date; no plaques have been found so far in any Chalcolithic or Early Bronze Age deposits. Even in the Middle Bronze period they begin to appear in very small number, and it is not until about the 15th century that they really become abundant.

A relief or a plaque implies the creation of a mould and therefore a model or a prototype. The prototype is shaped by hand in a first stage and then baked. In a second stage the mould is produced by pressing the prototype into a lump of clay. The result is a negative of the original model. This mould is then baked. In a third stage a lump of clay is impressed in the mould and the relief comes out in the image of the original prototype. A more direct and faster way is to carve the mould itself in neg-

ative, but this implies greater and more proficient skills. The final result is usually adjusted by retouching the edges before the final baking: the "margins" were either finely cut (détouré) or simply left as they were. From the technique of treating the back side of the figurine with a final hand smoothing, it can be concluded that the majority of the plaques were impressed in univalve moulds. Such moulds have been discovered in excavations at Mari, Mumbaqāt and Maskanat Aymār (Meskeneh-Emar) (Badre 1980: 101).

Taking into consideration the economic reasons for such a moulded production, one can expect to find series of identical reliefs and a large number of moulds, but neither is the case. There are indeed a large number of the same identical type of relief, but the difference in the size of these reliefs within and throughout the sites may indicate the production of one mould per relief! Among the basic types are:

1. The Relief of a Nude Standing Figure with Bent Arms Holding Breasts with Both Hands
a. The basic example of this common type comes from Alalakh (Woolley 1938: 247, PL. LVI.7) and Aymār (FIG. 6a-b - Badre 1980: 302, PL. XXXVI.9), showing a naturalistic body with pubic triangle indicated. The jewelry represented in relief includes three bracelets for each wrist and a necklace with a central pendant. The features of the face are distinct with almond-shape eyes and triple earrings showing in profile. There is a horizontal band on the forehead. This type is found throughout many Syrian sites: Tall 'Aṭshāna, Çatal Hüyük, Maskanat Aymār and Kamīd al-Lawz (Badre 1980: 65).
b. The standing figure with thick hair moulded in a roll of even vertical locks slanting down to the shoulders. This type of figurine is usually applied to the facade of a miniature shrine, which, in turn, is normally part of a larger clay structure. Such miniature shrines found *in situ* at Maskanat Aymār (Margueron 1976: 206, FIGS. 6-7) and Kamīd al-Lawz around an altar belonging to the Late Bronze sanctuary, as well as one of unknown provenance in the American University of Beirut Museum (Seeden 1979: 7-19), leave no doubt as to their function in connection with a temple building. These figurines come in twin pairs identical in shape, size and details. They are certainly made in the same mould. Some features, such as the eyes and eyebrows are outlined with black paint. These terra cotta models of a shrine are similar to one which has an entrance guarded by two naked women playing tambourines found in the Jordan Archaeological Museum (FIG. 6c - Zayadine 1991: 39).
c. The standing figure with short vertical locks. It is similar to the above mentioned types (a and b) but with more simplified, schematized facial features. We should note for this type the similarity between the Late Bronze fig-
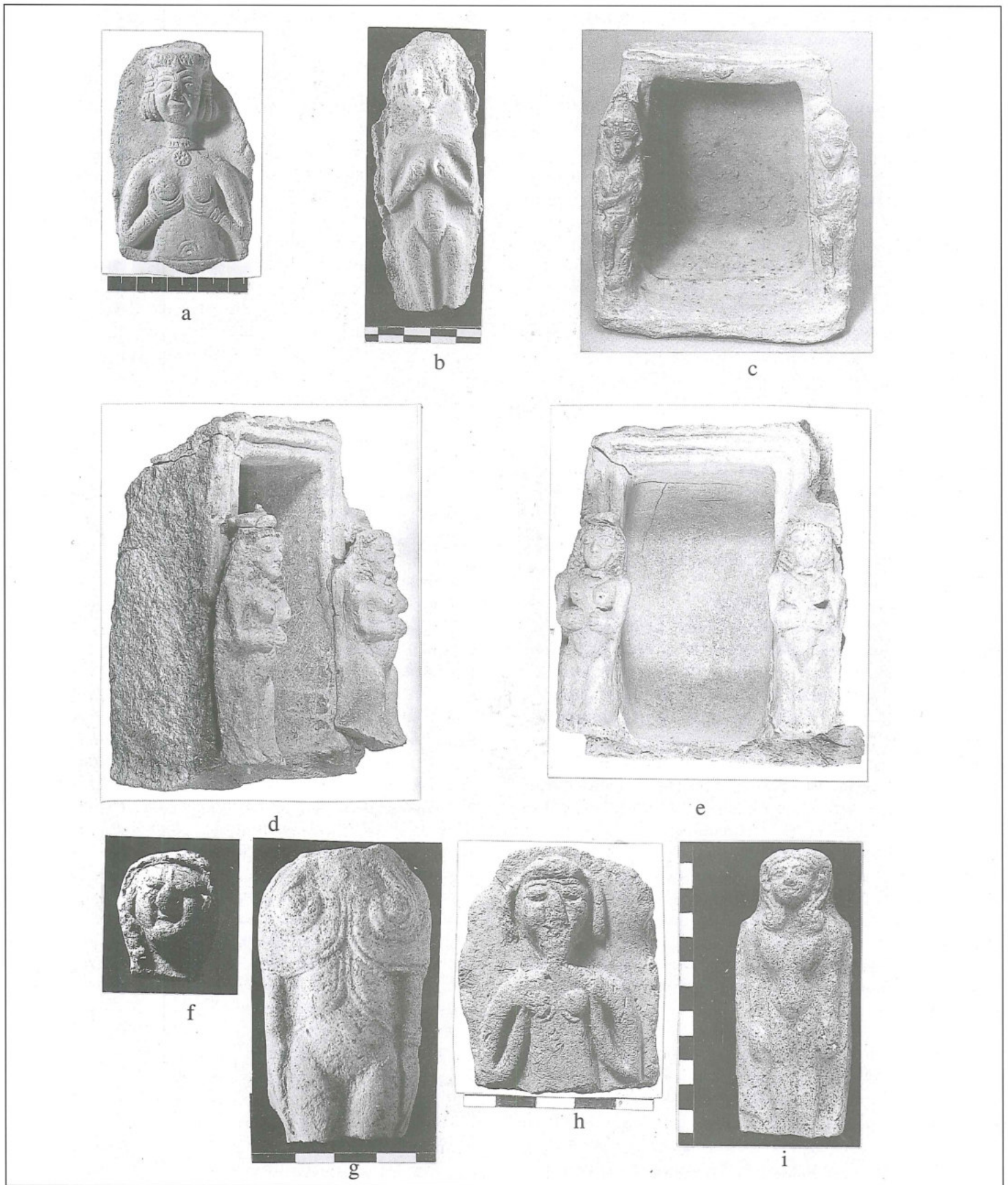
6. (a) Alalakh; (b, g) Maskanat Aymār (Meskeneh-Emar); (c) unknown provenance - Jordan Archaeological Museum; (d, e) unknown provenance - AUB Museum; (f) Dayr 'Allā; (h) Kamīd al-Lawz; (i) Ugarit.

urine of Kamīd al-Lawz (FIG. 6h - Badre 1980: 236, PL. VII.4) with the much earlier (c. 3000 BC) terra cotta head from Dayr ʿAllā (FIG. 6f - Zayadine 1986: 61-62, no. 71).

2. *The Relief of a Nude Standing Figure with Arms Extended to the Sides*

The basic example of this type is represented by the standing figure with "Hathoric" hairstyle found mainly on the coastal sites, i.e. Ugarit (FIG. 6i).

Like modelled figurines, most moulded figurines are represented in the nude. Some exceptions appear, mainly on the figurines of Maskanat Aymār (FIG. 6g - Badre 1980: 306, PL. XXXVIII.28) where they are shown dressed in a double cape, the lower one to the waist surmounted by a shorter one to the level of the elbows. In spite of the double thickness of the clothing, the breasts are showing again as if to stress the importance of the fertility symbol for which they stand.

Conclusions

The study of the technique of manufacturing terra cotta figurines leads to some major conclusions which may be summarized as follows:

1. *Identification of the Nature of the Figurines*

a. Male figurines are distinguished by their apparent organs or beard. In the absence of these, the shape of the head — pointed, flat or slanting backwards — can be indicative. The head with the turreted crown is also characteristic of male figurines. The riders and kneeling figurines, as well as those carrying ex-votos (vessel, arm or animal), have been recognized as males.

b. Female figurines are distinguished by their breasts (with some exceptions), their navel and their pubic triangle. The position of their arms bent forward, usually holding the breasts is another characteristic of female figurines. While the headdress is a basic element, which types the female figure, the headdress also serves to identify the geographical distribution of the figurines. Thus, the comb-like headdress is typical of the Orontes valley, while elaborate combined hairstyles (cf. *supra*) are characteristics of the Euphrates region and Hathoric hairstyles are basically found on the moulded figurine of the coastal region.

2. *Geographical/Typological Distribution of the Figurines*

In addition to the above mentioned distribution of headdress styles in the three main regions of Syria, there are other elements that are characteristic of each one of them. Thus, the flat circular body (cf. *supra*) and the crossed bands over the chest are typical of the Orontes valley. However the pillar-shaped body, the coffee-bean

pellets for the eyes, as well as the reed-incised and perforated pellets, which represent other various features, are found exclusively in the Euphrates region.

It is important to note that there are some rare exceptions to these conclusions, i.e. the pillar body does appear in rare cases in the Orontes region, but in earlier chronological contexts than the ones usually known in that region. Indeed the known Euphrates figurines belong mainly to the third and second millennia, while the Orontes figurines are more abundant in the middle of the second millennium. Recognition of these exceptions leaves the door open for revision of the above conclusions should future excavations in the Orontes, Euphrates and the coastal regions bring to light equal quantities of figurines, with an equal distribution for each period.

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