



## **SIMILARITIES AMONG NORTH MESOPOTAMIAN (LATE HALAF), EGYPTIAN (NAQADA), AND NUBIAN (A-GROUP) FEMALE FIGURINES OF THE 6–4TH MILLENNIA BCE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Late Halaf female figurines of clay/pottery from northeastern Syria (Type LH.1A; 6th millennium BCE) have close parallels in Predynastic Egyptian figurines (4th millennium BCE) in the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology. The lack of provenance for the Egyptian statuettes—all of which were purchased—has long inhibited any comparison with their Mesopotamian counterparts. A further parallel from Lower Nubia with secure provenance (A-Group, 4th millennium BCE), which was published in 1972, speaks for the authenticity of some or all of the Egyptian pieces. However, the figurines' discovery in three different countries (Syria, Egypt and Sudan) and their origins in three different cultures (Mesopotamian Halaf, Egyptian Naqada, and Nubian A-Group) from different time periods (6th and 4th millennia BCE) seems to have precluded the collective consideration of these Late Halaf-style figurines, such that their impact as an ensemble has been overlooked. This communication presents a brief intercultural study of the figurine family as a whole.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Similarities between anthropomorphic or therianthropomorphic figurines from ancient Egypt and the ancient Near East naturally attract interest.<sup>1</sup> In most pairings, the Egyptian examples predate the Near Eastern ones, and the resemblance is superficial and/or confined to particular aspects of the figurine. For example, the bulbous beak-like faces of the well-known “bird-woman” figurines from el-Ma’ariya (e.g., Brooklyn Museum 07.447.505; 4th millennium BCE; FIG. 1a)<sup>2</sup> somewhat resemble the projecting bird-like faces of Syro-Hittite female figurines, formerly called “fertility figurines” and “pillar idols” (3rd–2nd millennia BCE; FIG. 1b).<sup>3</sup> The peg-like torsos of the el-Ma’ariya figurines (FIG. 1a) resemble the lower portions of royal temple foundation pegs from Mesopotamia (3rd millennium BCE; FIG. 1c), while the raised and inward-curving arms/wings of each

bird-woman seem to anticipate the similarly posed arms of the Mesopotamian king, who steadies on his head the basket of clay from which the first brick for the new temple will be made (FIG. 1c).<sup>4</sup> Of course, the el-Ma’ariya figurines never held any object above their heads; their pose—which is also common in two-dimensional Predynastic art—is probably an expression of power.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, the Naqada I bone figurine of a standing woman with enormous round eyes of lapis lazuli (British Museum EA32141, 4th millennium BCE; FIG. 1d)<sup>6</sup> seems to anticipate the equally wide-eyed votive statues recovered from temples in Eshnunna (Tel Asmar) and other city-states of Early Dynastic Sumer (3rd millennium BCE; FIG. 1e).<sup>7</sup> Intended to gaze adoringly at the cult statue of the relevant deity, the large eyes of the Mesopotamian statues could also be inlaid with lapis, and their hands—clasped



**FIGURE 1:** Limited and/or superficial resemblances between ancient Egyptian figurines of the 4th millennium BCE (panels a and d) and Near Eastern figurines of the 3rd–2nd millennia BCE (panels b, c, and e). **a:** “Bird-woman” figurine from el-Ma’ariya, Egypt; painted terracotta, 29.2 cm tall; Brooklyn Museum, Charles Edwin Wilbour Fund, 07.447.505 (Brooklyn Museum n.d.a; CC-BY). **b:** Syro-Hittite female figurine; terracotta, 12.4 cm tall; Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Dr. Florence Day, 51.117 (Brooklyn Museum n.d.b; CC-BY). **c:** Temple foundation peg of Ur-Namma, Sumer; copper alloy, 27.3 cm; Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. William H. Moore, 1947, 47.49 (Metropolitan Museum of Art n.d.a; CC0 1.0). **d:** Figurine of standing woman, Egypt; bone with lapis lazuli eyes, 11.4 cm tall; British Museum EA32141 (British Museum n.d.a; © Trustees of the British Museum). **(e)** Statues of worshippers from Eshnunna, now Tell Asmar; Iraq Museum, Baghdad; gypsum, typically 20–40 cm high (Amin 2019; CC BY-SA 4.0).

in prayer above the abdomen—seem to echo the pose of the Naqada figurine. However, the similarities dissipate when we consider that the Egyptian woman is naked and that her sexual characteristics are emphasised, whereas the Sumerian votives are mainly men and are all clothed. The comparison collapses completely when we see the British Museum’s curatorial note that “the lapis lazuli inlays in the eyes were probably added in modern times.”<sup>8</sup>

#### LATE HALAF FIGURINES AND SUBSEQUENT VISUAL COGNATES

In view of the unfruitful outcomes to the comparisons made above, it is of considerable interest to note a particular type of figurine for which the older examples come from the ancient Near East and for which the similarities extend across all aspects of the representation. Late Halaf figurines from Tell Halaf (FIG. 2), and from other sites close to it in northeastern Syria, date from the 6th millennium BCE and form a distinctive and well-represented subtype within the corpus of ancient Near Eastern statuettes (FIG. 3a),<sup>9</sup> classed in the literature as Type LH.1A.<sup>10</sup> Hand-modeled from clay, sometimes with baking,<sup>11</sup> they depict a corpulent woman seated upright or somewhat reclining; her legs extend parallel before her with knees bent, and her arms are curved under her breasts so as to cradle them.<sup>12</sup> The arms usually terminate without hands in the center of the chest,<sup>13</sup> where they may taper, tentacle-like, to a pointed, blunt or flattened end. Many such figurines

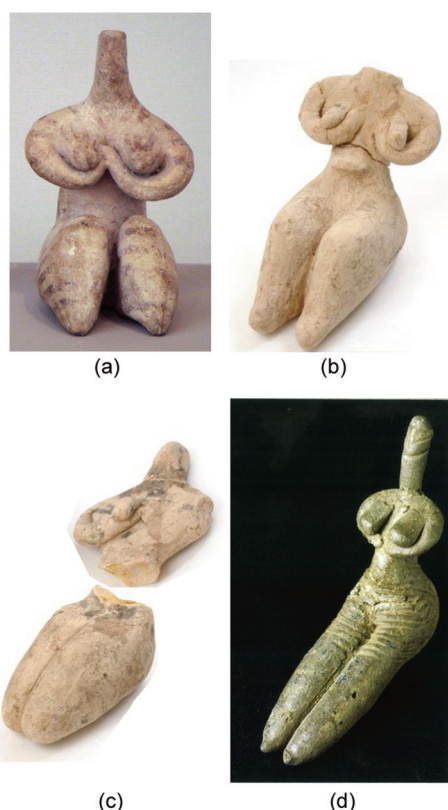
bear painted (usually striped) decoration. Surprisingly, Predynastic Egyptian figurines of very similar design feature in the collection of the Petrie Museum at University College London. These will be described in the next paragraph.

The Egyptian figurines that conform to the Late Halaf LH.1A style include UC 15153, 15160, 15162, 15814 (FIG. 3b), and 15813 (FIG. 3c); of these, the first three—which were bought by Petrie in Egypt—are assigned to the Naqada I period (4th millennium BCE), while the last two—acquired at auction from the Amherst collection in 1921—are simply classed as “Predynastic.”<sup>14</sup> In the absence of precise findspot information, these figurines are shown on the map as notionally originating in Naqada itself (FIG. 2). The fabric is clay, baked for all except possibly UC 15153.<sup>15</sup> The legs of UC 15162 and 15813 (FIG. 3c) are either truncated at the knees or else the figures are kneeling, whereas the legs of UC 15153 seem to be fully extended (without bending) in front of the torso; for all three, the indication of leg separation is reduced to a shallow groove or absent. For all of these variants, the visual effect remains very close to that of the figurines in FIGS. 3a–b. Like most Late Halaf LH.1A statuettes, all of the Egyptian figurines bear painted markings. The first three Petrie Museum statuettes bear traces of black paint on the head, throat, or waist (or on several of these); UC 15813 also has a black-painted loincloth and chest pattern (FIG. 3c), while UC 15814 (FIG. 3b) has black paint on her neck (hair) and breasts.

To this growing family we must make one last and crucial addition, namely a Lower Nubian A-Group figurine (4th millennium BCE) from Grave 16B in Cemetery 277 at Halfa Degheim (near Wadi Halfa), Sudan.<sup>16</sup> The fabric is a brownish-gray clay with sand particle inclusions.<sup>17</sup> It is not stated whether the figure has been baked, although a single use of the term “pottery” suggests that it has.<sup>18</sup> This item (excavation cat. 277/16B B:3, now Sudan National Museum cat. SNM 13729) conforms closely to the Late Halaf LH.1A template, especially in the way that the handleless arms cradle the ample breasts (FIG. 3d).<sup>19</sup> Naturally, there are also some differences. The seated woman’s legs are in this case extended fully before her, rather than being drawn up at the knees, and (unlike the extended legs of UC 15160 and 15153, which are partly or wholly fused) the legs of the Nubian woman are modeled as almost separate limbs, albeit with the same abstraction at the termini (i.e., no feet are shown). The modeled/incised ripples



FIGURE 2: Map showing the main type-sites and/or findspots (red) mentioned in the text.



**FIGURE 3:** Female figurines that seem to conform to the Late Halaf LH.1A template. **a:** Halaf figurine, 6th millennium BCE, Mesopotamia/northern Syria; hand modeled and painted terracotta, 8.2 cm tall; Louvre AO 21095 (ALFGRN 2019; CC BY-SA 2.0). **b:** Predynastic figurine of seated female, 4th millennium BCE, Egypt; baked clay with traces of black paint, 9.9 cm tall; Petrie Museum UC 15814 (Petrie Museum n.d.; © The Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, UCL, CC BY-NC-SA 3.0). **c:** Predynastic figurine of seated female (broken), 4th millennium BCE, Egypt; baked clay with traces of black paint, 12.2 cm tall, 18.0 cm long; Petrie Museum UC 15813 (Petrie Museum n.d.; © The Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, UCL, CC BY-NC-SA 3.0). **d:** A-Group female figurine, 4th millennium BCE, Grave 16B, Cemetery 277, Halfa Degheim, Lower Nubia/northern Sudan; clay, 11.7 cm long; Sudan National Museum SNM 13729; image by Roco Ricci.

from the lower abdomen to above the knees are another innovation and seem to depict “a garment, perhaps a type of loin-cloth.”<sup>20</sup> These seem to replace the painted markings on the other figurines; both the Halaf and Nubian examples involve regular stripes, albeit with different implementation and coverage.

Incised lines also provide a minimalist physiognomy on the head-stump of the Nubian figure; the elongated oblique slits used to depict the eyes are reminiscent of those on Ubaid figurines from Mesopotamia and on figurines from Naqada I/II tombs at Abydos.<sup>21</sup>

The findspot, Halfa Degheim, lies ca. 450 km south of Naqada. The Nubian A-Group was contemporary with the Naqada civilization in Upper Egypt, and material culture remains in northern Sudan “show that people at these sites participated in exchange networks connecting them to the emerging civilization of Egypt.”<sup>22</sup> Given their physical similarities, presence in adjacent cultures connected by known trade relationships, and coincident temporal window, one may reasonably connect this Nubian figurine with its Egyptian parallels in the Petrie Museum. In contrast, Tell Halaf lies ca. 1,400 km northeast of Naqada by the most direct route (Fig. 2),<sup>23</sup> and the profound geographic, cultural, and temporal divide between the corresponding civilizations is much more difficult to bridge.

#### MUTUAL SUPPORT AND COLLECTIVE VALUE

Were it not for the existence of Nubian figurine SNM 13729 (FIG. 3d), which was obtained in the course of an authorized excavation, one would be inclined to doubt the authenticity of the key Egyptian figurines, all of which were purchased from dealers. Peter Ucko, writing before the Nubian figurine was first published,<sup>24</sup> seems to have been very skeptical of the Halaf-like figurines in the Petrie Museum. He was clearly aware of their similarity to North Mesopotamian statuettes from two millennia earlier, but he confined himself to two oblique comments that focused on the lack of provenance for the Predynastic examples. The first, in a section on arm positions, reads, “On figurines from Halaf and Hacilar the arms are just as commonly shown placed on the chest. In Egypt no single excavated figure is shown with the latter arm position.”<sup>25</sup> The second comment, in a section on breasts, reads, “As has already been noted in connection with the positions of the arms on predynastic figurines, Franz’ and Massoulaud’s description of arms supporting the breasts must be based solely on bought figures.”<sup>26</sup>

Another problem is that the figurines’ origins in three different civilizations predispose any detailed assessments to be done separately rather than collectively, which means that their impact as an ensemble is overlooked. For example, Peter Ucko

considered only Egyptian figurines and in any case conducted his survey before Nubian figurine SNM 13729 was first published (an issue already noted above). In her 2018 survey,<sup>27</sup> Ryna Ordynat considered only Egyptian figurines and further confined herself to those with provenance, thereby excluding all members of the present group. The two Nubian figurines recovered from Grave 16B at Halfa Degheim—one of them being SNM 13729—received no inter-cultural comparison from Torgny Säv-Söderbergh,<sup>28</sup> but they prompted Hans-Åke Nordström to mention laconically that “Figures of this and similar types [...] have been described by Ucko (1968) and are also mentioned by Helck (1971, 20).”<sup>29</sup> Helck—at the citation just given—presents only the Halaf figurines.<sup>30</sup> In the chapter of *The Oxford Handbook of Prehistoric Figurines* titled “Prehistoric Figurines in Sudan,” an image of figurine SNM 13729 (FIG. 3d) is presented; again, the authors confine themselves to remarking generically of Nubian clay anthropomorphs that “The stylistic features of the figurines show similarity with Egyptian and Near Eastern Neolithic sites.”<sup>31</sup> Discussions of Halaf figurines do not mention the Egyptian or Nubian examples.<sup>32</sup>

A promising exception to the usual separatism was afforded by Stan Hendrickx in his 2002 paper “Bovines in Egyptian Predynastic and Early Dynastic Iconography,” whose Appendix G lists “Female statuettes with arms curved underneath the breasts.”<sup>33</sup> This list of ten items includes Nubian figurine SNM 13729 alongside the Petrie Museum cognates. However, it does not include any Halaf figurines. The list also contains items that do not conform to the LH.1A template that is the focus of the present paper (FIG. 3a–d). For example, the only Egyptian figurine in the list with provenance—Ashmolean 1895.125—is in such poor condition that the breast-cradling pose may be imagined rather than real. Ucko’s drawing of it includes ambiguous dotting that could indicate a faint scar where a missing right arm may once have tracked under the right breast.<sup>34</sup> In contrast, Payne’s Ashmolean catalog entry for the same figure says “made without arms;”<sup>35</sup> the drawings in her catalogue show stump arms and make no suggestion of breast-cradling.<sup>36</sup> In addition to these issues, this female anthropomorph is standing upright on feet with incised toes, rather than seated (reclining or upright) with minimal lower limb detail. Another non-conforming example is Metropolitan Museum of Art 07.228.71, an un-

provenanced figurine with stump arms overlaid with thin tubes that disappear under the tiny breasts,<sup>37</sup> which (despite its reclining pose and solidity) might better be compared with a Halaf standing figurine-vessel from Yarim Tepe II in Iraq.<sup>38</sup> A particularly unhelpful inclusion is UC 15156,<sup>39</sup> the upper part of a (probably standing) bird-headed figurine without breasts whose surviving (left) arm is positioned well away from the body, pointing downward parallel to the torso. Two other constraints of this list are that it occurs as an addendum to a paper focused on bovine rather than human iconography, where it is but one of thirteen (often long) lists, and—most importantly—that none of the items are presented visually, either by drawing or photography.

In a footnote to a paper published ten years later,<sup>40</sup> Hendrickx and Eyckerman belatedly extended the Appendix G list by one item: Metropolitan Museum 07.228.53, a late Naqada II/early Naqada III pottery figurine (4th millennium BCE),<sup>41</sup> which does indeed present the canonical breast-cradling by handleless arms (FIG. 4). However, this figurine departs from the template of those in FIGS. 3a–d by possessing a globular lower body, as well as a naturalistic head with (a) tubular locks of hair, (b) incised eyebrows, almond-shaped eyes and mouth, and (c) drilled nostrils in a lightly modeled nose (FIG. 4). The figurine—like its sister pieces in the Petrie Museum—lacks provenance, having been purchased in Egypt in 1907. The authors suggest that the type of figurine exemplified by Hendrickx’s Appendix G may have its origins in Badarian sculpture (5th millennium BCE), citing as likely precedents an ivory and pottery figurine from el-Badari (British Museum EA59648 and EA59679, respectively).<sup>42</sup> However, both of these are standing figures of relatively slim females who do not cradle their breasts (FIG. 5a–b).<sup>43</sup> The similarity to Late Halaf figurines of the 6th millennium BCE (FIG. 3a) is much stronger, if less easy to explain. The Metropolitan Museum 07.228.53 figurine, with its assigned date around the Naqada II/III boundary, seems to be an evolution or relaxation of the Halaf-like template to which the Petrie Museum exemplars—with their assigned date of Naqada I—adhere.

#### VISUAL PUNS

Stan Hendrickx and Merel Eyckerman have proposed that the curved arms that cradle the breasts of Egyptian figurines such as those in FIGS. 3b–c mimic the shape of down-turned bull horns,<sup>44</sup> much



**FIGURE 4:** Figurine of a Seated Woman, 4th millennium BCE, Egypt; pottery (Nile clay), 11.5 cm tall; Metropolitan Museum of Art 07.228.53 (Metropolitan Museum n.d.c; CC0 1.0).



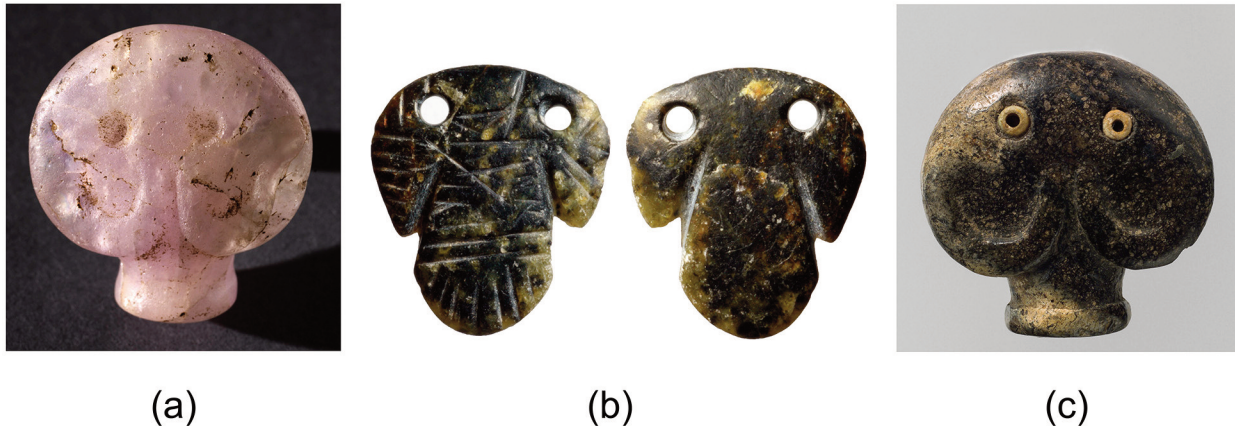
**FIGURE 5:** Badarian female figurines, 5th millennium BCE, el-Badari, Egypt. **a:** Complete standing figurine; hippopotamus ivory, 14.0 cm tall; British Museum EA59648 (British Museum n.d.b; © Trustees of the British Museum). **b:** Incomplete standing figurine; terracotta, head and legs lost, 9.3 cm tall; British Museum EA59679 (British Museum n.d.c; © Trustees of the British Museum).

as the raised arms of the el-Ma'mariya "bird-woman" figurines (FIG. 1a) mimic the more usual upturned configuration of bovine horns.<sup>45</sup> In support of the of down-turned horns hypothesis they cite the similar paradigm found on a serpentine vase, as well as instances of the popular "bull's head amulet," an ambiguous mushroom-like item that can be interpreted either as a stylized torso with inward curving arms and prominent nipples or as a bull's head with down-turned horns and forward-staring eyes (FIGS. 6a, c).<sup>46</sup>

One might therefore wonder if similar preoccupations can be found among Late Halaf material remains. This culture certainly shared the

Predynastic Egyptian fascination with bull horns; as Çiğdem Atakuman writes of North Mesopotamian stamp seals and pendants, "Bucrania are considered among the most significant imagery of the later Neolithic."<sup>47</sup> Stuart Campbell, analyzing the symbolism of North Mesopotamian painted iconography, observes that "some motifs may carry specific meanings. The most obvious is the well known bucrania [...] Although the bulls' horns are often highly schematic, they still appear on a very wide range of Halaf pottery in a form recognisable to us, almost always embedded in otherwise geometric decoration."<sup>48</sup>

Potential visual puns have been identified in the



**FIGURE 6:** Ambiguous human body/animal head amulets. **a:** Predynastic bull's head amulet, 4th millennium BCE, Egypt; amethyst, 3.4 cm tall; Cleveland Museum of Art 1998.26 (Cleveland Museum of Art n.d.). **b:** Late Halaf figurine pendant, 6th millennium BCE, Domuztepe, southeast Turkey; serpentinite, 2.4 cm tall; excav. no. dt6560 (2009 season), now in Maraş Museum (© Stuart Campbell, Domuztepe Project). **c:** Predynastic bull's head amulet, 4th millennium BCE, Egypt; serpentinite, 3.5 cm tall; Metropolitan Museum of Art 59.101.1 (Metropolitan Museum of Art n.d.d).

Halaf artistic repertoire; for example, some three-dimensional depictions of bull horns may have phallic connotations.<sup>49</sup> There is also a class of small “angel” pendants that afford phallic and/or human-profile interpretations.<sup>50</sup> One of these, a Late Halaf stone artifact from Domuztepe (FIG. 6b),<sup>51</sup> has some similarity with the Egyptian curved arms/bull head amulets (FIGS. 6a, c). It is described by Ellen Belcher as a “Figurine pendant of a figure with bent arms represented by notched appendages. [...] Pierced with two large holes at shoulders, which could represent either breasts or eyes.”<sup>52</sup> Breast/eye ambiguity, of course, is one feature of the Egyptian “bull’s-head amulet.” Arm/horn equivalence, however, is probably absent from the Domuztepe pendant; rather, the outline of the pendant may double as a phallic form. In Mesopotamia, breast/eye equivalence may have had long-lived consequences for figurine semiotics: Wolfgang Helck has proposed that the Halaf arms-cradling-breasts motif morphed into the large eyes of the Ubaid-era “eye idols,” which are best known from Tell Brak (4th millennium BCE).<sup>53</sup> Thus, although body-part switches and visual puns do feature in the North Mesopotamian

female figurine repertoire, there seems to be no Late Halaf counterpart to the twin visual double entendre that has been extrapolated from (or projected onto) the Egyptian female figurines, namely the identification of their nipples with animal eyes and their inward-curving arms with down-turned horns.

#### FROM HALAF TO HALFA?

Not so long ago, the family resemblance exemplified by FIGS. 3a–d would have been explained in terms of diffusion of a particular manifestation of the Palaeolithic/Neolithic “Great Goddess,” a construct championed by Marija Gimbutas.<sup>54</sup> Today, as Richard Lesure observed recently, “The [Great Goddess] construct has been repeatedly and thoroughly discredited.”<sup>55</sup> Lesure goes on to provide a rigorous framework that enables comparative studies within the prehistoric figurine corpus to be conducted objectively. The outcome of preliminary tests of this methodology “hint at a grand history of figurine-making that differs in form from the Goddess thesis.”<sup>56</sup> He continues: “The larger point here is that application of the framework site by site across the Near East yields patterns at large scales.

There is a basis for grand history. Indeed, there is a need for grand history.”<sup>57</sup>

While we must be mindful of “analysts’ tendency to privilege similarity over difference,”<sup>58</sup> the similarities between the Late Halaf LH.1A, Predynastic Egyptian and Nubian A-Group figurines (FIGS. 3a–d) hint at such a large-scale pattern. As already mentioned, there is little difficulty in reconciling the Nubian figurine with her Egyptian contemporaries, since there is good evidence of contact between the A-Group and Naqada cultures. The main problem lies in understanding how a 6th-millennium template from North Mesopotamia could resurface, almost unaltered, in 4th-millennium Egypt and Sudan. Either there is a “genetic relationship” in which the African figurines are descendants of the Near Eastern antecedents or else the same template was invented independently on two continents at times separated by over a millennium.

Given the considerable time and distance separating the Mesopotamian from the Egyptian and Nubian figurines, the default hypothesis would have to be independent invention. The somewhat universal nature of the figurines’ pose might be adduced as circumstantial evidence in favor of this option; for example, some Early Neolithic female figurines from Crete cup their breasts,<sup>59</sup> and many Cucuteni-Tripolye figurines from Eastern Europe exhibit a semi-reclining posture.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, some Late Halaf LH.1A figurines are dated as recently as the late 5th millennium BCE,<sup>61</sup> so there is a real possibility that the template was communicated from northern Syria to Lower Egypt via trade connections, whether overland (through the Levant) or maritime (along the Mediterranean coast),<sup>62</sup> and then percolated south to Upper Egypt and Lower Nubia. Commonalities between the Halafian culture and the Wadi Rabah culture—that of the southern Levant in the Early Chalcolithic—have long been recognized.<sup>63</sup> In addition, “composite female” figurines recovered from Wadi Rabah sites have close iconographic parallels in Ashur and Mari, while Halafian ram’s-head amulets of Domuztepe type have been found in the southern Levant.<sup>64</sup> Together with other similarities, these common features indicate that Mesopotamia and the entire Levant constituted a shared “interaction sphere,” with bidirectional exchanges of material culture, in the 6–5th millennia BCE.<sup>65</sup> Since the Wadi Rabah culture

seems to have provided considerable cultural input to Egypt in the 6th millennium BCE,<sup>66</sup> one can envisage a conduit by which the LH.1A template might have travelled from Tell Halaf to Egypt.

Interactions between Egypt and the regions to its north persisted in the 4th millennium BCE. In the Late Chalcolithic period, southern Levantine influence was extensive at Maadi and Buto in the Nile Delta (Buto Ia, contemporary with Naqada I–IIAB) and occasionally extended to Upper Egyptian sites as well.<sup>67</sup> Sea trade between Egypt and northern Syria may date from as early as Naqada IIA.<sup>68</sup> Of course, if the LH.1A-like Naqada/A-Group figurines are younger than currently estimated and post-date Naqada IIB, then the template’s arrival could coincide with a period of high-volume importation from the southern Levant.<sup>69</sup> The Naqada IICD period involved Mesopotamian imports and saw the opportunistic assimilation of Uruk motifs into Egyptian culture.<sup>70</sup>

Additional discoveries of figurines conforming to the LH.1A template in the Levant or in Lower or Middle Egypt would greatly strengthen the case for lineal descent of the Egyptian/Nubian forms from the Mesopotamian paradigm, especially if these finds were to date to the 5th millennium BCE. Two fragments of baked clay figurines that are suggestive of the LH.1A template were found near Damascus at Tell Aswad,<sup>71</sup> “the most northerly known manifestation of the southern Levantine PPNB *koine*.”<sup>72</sup> This site adapted cultural imports from the Middle Euphrates to local needs, making it a suitable staging post, but the apparent Pre-Pottery Neolithic B date for the fragments renders them much too early to serve as possible examples of Halaf-to-Halfa transmission.<sup>73</sup> In Lower Egypt, the major (known) settlement sites of the 5th millennium BCE are Merimde Beni Salama and el-Omari, both in the south of the Delta. Merimde pottery and lithics exhibit many Levantine features.<sup>74</sup> Numerous fragments of clay bovid figurines have been recovered from Merimde,<sup>75</sup> but only one anthropomorphic fragment (too broken to assist us).<sup>76</sup> Female human figurines of pottery and ivory have been recovered from graves of the contemporaneous Badarian culture in Middle Egypt (FIGS. 5a–b),<sup>77</sup> but (as intimated earlier) the best known of these differ greatly from the LH.1A template. However, finds of figurines similar to them in Late Chalcolithic contexts at Beersheva suggest ongoing communication with the southern Levant.<sup>78</sup> A few Badarian figurines do seem

to belong to the same genre as the Egyptian/Nubian LH.1A-like specimens, sharing the angled (semi-reclining) posture of FIGS. 3b–d. One such figurine from Grave 5769 at el-Badari (Petrie Museum UC 9080),<sup>79</sup> made of gray unbaked clay, has a fused lower body mass resembling that of FIG. 3c, but the breasts have broken off and it only has stumps for arms.<sup>80</sup> Another, a flatter pottery figurine from Grave 494 at Mostagedda, has retained its breasts and again has stump arms.<sup>81</sup> Peter Ucko claimed that the UC 9080 figurine was “unique in its semi-reclining posture,” which he considered “an anomaly.”<sup>82</sup> He did, however, note that the pose was shared by “several bought Egyptian figures”<sup>83</sup>—no doubt the LH.1A-like group in the Petrie Museum—as well as some of the Nubian figurines known at that time.<sup>84</sup>

In his broad inter-cultural comparison, Ucko also noted that “Several figures of Halaf date are painted with anklets and these are unparalleled (except by several bought Egyptian figures such as Nos. 183 and 204),”<sup>85</sup> which correspond to Petrie Museum UC 15161 (one of the LH.1A-like group) and Metropolitan Museum 07.228.71 (a divergent specimen discussed above). This feature may constitute another clue that Egypt’s Predynastic female figurine corpus was subject to genuine Halafian influence. My working hypothesis favors the concept of southward diffusion of the Halaf LH.1A template over that of its independent reinvention in Egypt/Nubia. However, in the absence of further discoveries, the relationship between the Late Halaf and the similar-looking Naqada/A-Group figurines—while suggestive—will have to remain uncertain.

#### FUNCTION AND SIGNIFICANCE

Whether they represent a lineal pedigree or the independent products of convergent evolution, there is no need for the LH.1A-style figurines to have held the same meaning in the three cultures from which they have been recovered. The north Mesopotamian figurines, which were typically recovered from general habitation levels of settlements,<sup>86</sup> seem to have been more prevalent in their society than Upper Egyptian or Lower Nubian ones were in theirs.<sup>87</sup> The Mesopotamian examples, which scholarship traditionally associates with fertility and childbirth,<sup>88</sup> were well handled in life, with damage sometimes necessitating running repairs, and they seem ultimately to have been discarded in settlement refuse.<sup>89</sup>

In contrast, the Nubian figurine (along with another one of somewhat different design) was recovered from a grave. The grave contained an adult woman and a child; similarly, the accompanying figurines represent a mature woman (large figurine, 11.7 cm long; SNM 13729, Fig. 3d) and a young girl (small figurine, 8.6 cm long; excavation cat. 277/16B B:1–2) with a short, slender body and small breasts.<sup>90</sup> The stump arms of the latter have central holes that may have originally supported arms made of wood or other perishable material. Torgny Säve-Söderbergh has proposed that the two figurines depict the two individuals in the tomb, with the Halaf-style large one representing the adult woman, and has suggested that the role of the figurines vis-à-vis the deceased is “to secure their eternal vitality.”<sup>91</sup> This idea is supported by finds in Cemetery 102 in Lower Nubia, where a pottery figurine depicting a young woman was recovered from the grave of a girl.<sup>92</sup>

The archaeological contexts of the Egyptian figurines are unknown. Most figurines from Naqada I–IIB have been recovered from Upper Egyptian tombs,<sup>93</sup> and the appearance of these specimens on the antiquities market may be further circumstantial evidence in favour of a tomb location. All were broken. This may have been accidental; the figurines may primarily have been used in life, or the damage may have occurred after deposition or during excavation. However, if the breakage was deliberate, then a ritual role—perhaps as funerary offerings—would be favoured.<sup>94</sup> Pragmatism suggests that the significance of the Egyptian figurines is more likely to align with the closer and contemporaneous Nubian practice than with the more distant and much earlier Mesopotamian usage. We might note that the potentially related Badarian figurine UC 9080, which was made with small breasts but with wide hips bearing an incised pubic triangle,<sup>95</sup> was wrapped in cloth in a pot within a child or young person’s grave.<sup>96</sup> The figurine from Mostagedda Grave 494, which has small breasts and no accentuation of pelvic features, was in the grave of a (seemingly) young female and “was evidently broken before, or at, the burial.”<sup>97</sup>

In his survey of the current state of post-Goddess figurine studies, Richard Lesure concludes: “Among Neolithic figurines of the ancient Near East (and beyond) there is systematic patterning at a very large scale—at the scale, indeed, at which the Goddess construct was formulated. [...] She will only fade

away for good when we devise an alternative grand history that accounts for large-scale coherences. That task is far beyond the capacities of any single scholar.”<sup>98</sup> He then calls for “research at that scale, open to lively comparison, in which multiple investigators can incrementally contribute to the creation of a new synthesis.”<sup>99</sup> It is hoped that this small inter-cultural study may contribute something to that great endeavor.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> For general discussions of Mesopotamian influences on Predynastic Egyptian art and material culture, see, e.g., Mark 1997, Joffe 2000, and Ataç 2015.
- <sup>2</sup> Brooklyn Museum n.d.a.
- <sup>3</sup> E.g., Brooklyn Museum n.d.b; Science Source Images n.d.a, b.
- <sup>4</sup> E.g., Metropolitan Museum of Art n.d.a; Harvard Art Museum n.d.
- <sup>5</sup> Hendrickx and Eyckerman 2012; Ordynat 2015.
- <sup>6</sup> British Museum n.d.a.
- <sup>7</sup> E.g., Bahrani 2017, 62–63, 71, and 75; Caubet and Pouyssegur 1998, 56–59; Sutori n.d.
- <sup>8</sup> British Museum n.d. a.
- <sup>9</sup> Louvre n.d.
- <sup>10</sup> Belcher 2014, 114 table 3.6; e.g., Bahrani 2017, 33 fig. 1.25; Walters Art Museum n.d.; Becker et al. 2010, fig. 2 (upper).
- <sup>11</sup> Belcher 2014, 15 and 23.
- <sup>12</sup> Belcher 2014, 114 and 556–570.
- <sup>13</sup> Belcher 2014, 114.
- <sup>14</sup> Petrie Museum n.d.
- <sup>15</sup> Note that the Petrie Museum website currently (as of 9 September 2019) incorrectly classifies the fabric of the last two figurines (UC15813 and 15814) as limestone. Ucko 1968, 147–148, lists them as “baked buff clay,” and Hendrickx 2002, 310 (Appendix G, nos. 8 and 9) as “baked clay.” The Petrie Museum website classifies the sister pieces UC15153, 15160, and 15162 as clay. Similarly, Hendrickx 2002, 310 (Appendix G, nos. 6 and 7) specifies “baked clay” for UC15160 and 15162, and clay for UC15153. Ucko 1968, 146 (no. 187) lists “baked clay” for UC15162, while Ucko

- 1968, 139 (no. 171), lists “buff-slipped clay” for UC15153.
- <sup>16</sup> Nordström 1972, 27, 127, 195 and pls. 56:3 and 197; Haaland and Haaland 2017, 89.
- <sup>17</sup> Nordström 1972, 127 and pl. 197.
- <sup>18</sup> Nordström 1972, 27.
- <sup>19</sup> Nordström 1972, 127.
- <sup>20</sup> Nordström 1972, 127.
- <sup>21</sup> E.g., Roaf 1990, 56 (fig.); Kaminski 2012; Hartung 2011, 469.
- <sup>22</sup> Haaland and Haaland 2017, 89 (quotation); Williams (2011).
- <sup>23</sup> As the crow flies, which includes traversing the Red Sea at Hurghada to Sharm el-Sheikh.
- <sup>24</sup> Ucko’s survey was published in 1968 but with a preface dated to 1964, whereas the preliminary mention of the Nubian figurine appeared in 1968 in part 2 of a biennial volume of the journal of the Sudan Antiquities Service, *Kush* (Säve-Söderbergh 1967–1968).
- <sup>25</sup> Ucko 1968, 396.
- <sup>26</sup> Ucko 1968, 197.
- <sup>27</sup> Ordynat 2018.
- <sup>28</sup> Säve-Söderbergh 1967–1968, 228 and pl. 43.
- <sup>29</sup> Nordström 1972, 127.
- <sup>30</sup> Helck 1971, 20–21; nor do any Egyptian or Nubian figurines of Late Halaf type feature among the drawings of his Type 1 figurines (Bild 1–128, pp. 29–47).
- <sup>31</sup> Haaland and Haaland 2017, 89 and fig. 5.3.
- <sup>32</sup> E.g., Belcher 2014; Campbell and Daems 2017, 580–581.
- <sup>33</sup> Hendrickx 2002, 309–310.
- <sup>34</sup> Ucko 1968, 28 (no. 38, fig. 29).
- <sup>35</sup> Payne 1993, 19 (no. 39).
- <sup>36</sup> Payne 1993, fig. 10 (no. 39).
- <sup>37</sup> Metropolitan Museum of Art n.d.b.
- <sup>38</sup> Campbell 2010, 149–150; Belcher 2014, 214 fig. 4.41.
- <sup>39</sup> Petrie Museum n.d.
- <sup>40</sup> Hendrickx and Eyckerman 2012, 39 fn. 32.
- <sup>41</sup> Metropolitan Museum of Art n.d.c.
- <sup>42</sup> Both EA numbers are incorrectly reported in Hendrickx and Eyckerman 2012, 39 fn. 32, but the objects can be identified by other citations provided by the authors. The online catalog entries are British Museum n.d.b and n.d.c.
- <sup>43</sup> Brunton and Caton-Thompson 1928, 28–29 and pl. 24:1–2.
- <sup>44</sup> Hendrickx and Eyckerman 2012, 39–40.
- <sup>45</sup> Hendrickx and Eyckerman 2012, 35–36.
- <sup>46</sup> Hendrickx and Eyckerman 2012, 39–40; Hendrickx 2002, 285–287; e.g., Museum of Fine Arts, Boston n.d.
- <sup>47</sup> Atakuman 2013, 256 and 257 fig. 20.
- <sup>48</sup> Campbell 2010, 151.
- <sup>49</sup> Atakuman 2013, 256; compare his figs. 13c and 20b.
- <sup>50</sup> Atakuman 2013, 257.
- <sup>51</sup> Belcher 2014, 439 (DT-4).
- <sup>52</sup> Belcher 2014, 439 (DT-4).
- <sup>53</sup> Helck 1971, 21; Roaf 1990, 67 (fig.).
- <sup>54</sup> Ucko 1968, 409–414; Gimbutas 1991, 1992 and 1999. Gimbutas’ focus was on European figurines and iconography.
- <sup>55</sup> Lesure 2017, 37.
- <sup>56</sup> Lesure 2017, 57.
- <sup>57</sup> Lesure 2017, 57.
- <sup>58</sup> Lesure 2017, 54.
- <sup>59</sup> Sixth millennium BCE. Ucko 1968, 265 (no. 34) and 216 (fig. 104); see also 485 (no. 60, pl. 50) and pl. 55.B.
- <sup>60</sup> Fifth millennium BCE. Ucko 1968, 397 and 405; Lazarovici 2005.
- <sup>61</sup> Brooklyn Museum 2009.
- <sup>62</sup> Mark 1997, esp. 22–30 and 122–126; Gómez Bach et al. 2016.
- <sup>63</sup> Milevski et al. 2016, 136–138.
- <sup>64</sup> Milevski et al. 2016, 138–146.
- <sup>65</sup> Milevski et al. 2016, 146–147.
- <sup>66</sup> Streit et al. 2017.
- <sup>67</sup> Braun 2011, 107–110.
- <sup>68</sup> Mark 1997, 122–123.
- <sup>69</sup> Braun 2011, 108–119; Streit et al. 424 (fig. 12); Wilkinson 1999, 128.
- <sup>70</sup> Mark 1997, 27; Joffe 2000, 115–116.

- <sup>71</sup> One fragment (Ad. 71.173) is the upper torso of a woman whose breasts rest on her folded arms (Contenson 1995, 183, 190 [fig. 128:1] and pl. 15.6). Another fragment (Ad. 71.270, 6 x 5 cm) comes from a semi-reclining female with what seem to have been conical legs, although the excavators speak of the right leg being extended and the left one folded (Contenson 1995, 183 and 189 [fig. 127:15]). The latter fragment has one surviving appliqué arm, which curves inward and tapers to a point below the (now missing) breast.
- <sup>72</sup> Edwards 2016, 63.
- <sup>73</sup> These Level II fragments appear to date to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B, i.e., 9–8th millennia BCE (Contenson 1995, 183; Edwards 2016, 63 and 69). If both the dating and my tentative assignation as LH.1A-like are correct, this could suggest that the Late Halaf template is much older than hitherto recognized and had a more southerly origin—one closer to Egypt. More conservatively, it could merely point to the LH.1A template as being an archetype that enjoyed frequent reinvention.
- <sup>74</sup> Eiwanger 1984.
- <sup>75</sup> Hendrickx 2002, 275–276.
- <sup>76</sup> Eiwanger 1984, 114 (cat. I.1172) for human fragment (Level I, *Urschicht*); drawn in Taf. 63:I.1172.
- <sup>77</sup> Brunton and Caton-Thompson 1928, 28–29 and pl. 24:1–2.
- <sup>78</sup> Ucko 1968, 404 (table 13.1); Braun 2011, 107, including fig. 12.4.
- <sup>79</sup> Petrie Museum n.d.; Ucko 1968, 71 (no. 3).
- <sup>80</sup> Brunton and Caton-Thompson 1928, 28–29 and pl. 24:3; Ucko 1968, 71 (no. 3).
- <sup>81</sup> Brunton 1937, 36; also pl. 24:31 and pl. 25:3–5.
- <sup>82</sup> Ucko 1968, 397 and 433.
- <sup>83</sup> Ucko 1968, 397.
- <sup>84</sup> Ucko 1968, 405 and 434. Indeed, Ucko (1968, 405) writes that “It is interesting to note that were only excavated Egyptian figures considered, the numerical evidence suggests that this semi-reclining posture moved from Nubia to Egypt.”
- <sup>85</sup> Ucko 1968, 400.
- <sup>86</sup> Ucko 1968, 365.
- <sup>87</sup> Belcher 2014, 17; Stevenson 2017, 77; Nordström 1972, 127.
- <sup>88</sup> Van de Mierop 2016, 16 (fig. 1.3 legend). Ucko 1968, 440, favors the idea that they were children’s toys.
- <sup>89</sup> Belcher 2014, 18–19, 308, and 345–348.
- <sup>90</sup> Säve-Söderbergh 1967–68, 228 and pl. 43; Nordström 1972, 27, 127, pl. 56:2,3 and pl. 197.
- <sup>91</sup> Säve-Söderbergh 1967–68, 228; Säve-Söderbergh 1979, 27.
- <sup>92</sup> Nordström 1972, 27.
- <sup>93</sup> Stevenson 2017, 66.
- <sup>94</sup> Hartung 2011, 470; Stevenson 2017, 70.
- <sup>95</sup> Brunton and Caton-Thompson 1928, 28–29 and pl. 24:3.
- <sup>96</sup> Ucko 1968, 71 (no. 3) and 433.
- <sup>97</sup> Brunton 1937, 36.
- <sup>98</sup> Lesure 2017, 57.
- <sup>99</sup> Lesure 2017, 57.