Charming Lives: Human and Animal Figurines in the Late Epipaleolithic and Early Neolithic Periods in the Greater Levant and Eastern Anatolia

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Abstract Coincident with the processes that led to the development of agriculture and animal domestication, human and animal representations in clay, stone, and plaster were important constituents of the archaeological record across much of the eastern Mediterranean region. The bulk of the evidence comes from the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (PPNB) period, but there are also important findings from PPNA and the Late Epipaleolithic sites that suggest an increasingly growing concern for the livelihood of expanding human populations in local environments that were becoming more and more influenced by human activities. Nevertheless, significant differences appear in the relative frequencies of animal and human figurines from various parts of the region. For animals there are clear reflections of local faunas, although the iconography is not correlated with the importance of species in their contributions to local diets. As for human depictions, pregnant females indicate the importance of providing future generations, but not all females are portrayed in this condition. Furthermore, where sex can be determined, the proportion of males and females ranges over a considerable span. This study provides a synthesis of research and attempts to explain the variability of these circumstances.

Keywords Natufian · PPNA · PPNB · Levant · Anatolia · figurines · symbols

Introduction

With the onset of sedentism, one phenomenon that is strikingly evident in the archaeological record is a substantial increase in material culture. In addition to permanent housing, utilitarian objects grow in number and density, and, to a great extent, non-utilitarian items appear, including three-dimensional images of humans and animals that can be subsumed under the general rubric of "figurines". Although there are well-documented exceptions, the emergence of sedentism is generally associated with food production (Neolithic) and its immediate predecessor, intensive

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foraging (Late Epipaleolithic). It is the intent of this study to examine the figurine phenomenon in the current state of research in the Levant and eastern Anatolia.

The term "figurine" should be defined, since there might be different ideas on what they entail. For the purposes of this chapter, figurines are any three-dimensional object of any size that can be interpreted as representing either zoomorphic or anthropomorphic entities; in its broadest meaning, "figurine" also refers to the often enigmatic cylindrical to globular objects (sometimes referred to as "stalk figurines" or the like) that turned up in many Neolithic sites. Size is also not an issue in the use of "figurine", for larger three-dimensional images such as the engraved columns from Göbekli Tepe and Nevali Çori and the monumental statuary of animals and humans from these two sites and from Jericho and 'Ain Ghazal are also included. What will not be included are two-dimensional images such as the MPPNB paintings on house floors at Haloula (Molist 1998), or Tell 'Abr (Yartah 2004).

In general, the study focuses on the beginnings of sedentism in the Late Epipaleolithic and PPN period, but there will also be excursions into ceramic Neolithic settlements.

Some Evidence

The Late Epipaleolithic

The earliest figurines in the Near East come from the Late Epipaleolithic and represent both animals and humans in a variety of media (Fig. 1). At Early Natufian el-Wad a bone sickle haft was finished at one end with a carving of a "young deer" (Garrod and Bate 1937: Plate XIII-3; Garrod 1957: 218) or gazelle (Valla 1995: Plate 3) (although it was held by one author that the entire body of a gazelle is represented [Noy 1991: 567 and Fig. 6: 5]), and a small human head in calcite also came from the excavations (Garrod and Bate 1937: Plate XIII-4). A small calcite figure of two people embraced in a sensuous pose was found at Ain Sakhri in the desert (Garrod 1957: 219; but see Boyd and Cook 1993), and a broken (headless) ungulate was recovered from Umm ez-Zouteina, also in the desert (Garrod 1957: 218; cf. Cauvin 2000: Fig. 3: 4)

A small human head rendered in calcite also appeared at 'Ain Mallaha, as well as a headless human torso in limestone and two stylized heads engraved on pebbles (Perrot 1966: Fig 23 and Photo 11); evidently no animal figurines were found since they are not mentioned by either Perrot (1966) or Valla et al. (2001).

Nahal Oren yielded several items, including a carved bone with an animal head at one end and human face at the other; a small head of a dog carved in limestone (broken); a complete figurine consisting of a carved head reportedly resembling an owl; and a broken piece of limestone with a clear effort to make a figurine which is supposedly an animal (Noy 1991: 563–564 and Fig. 5).

Kebara Cave produced two fragments of carved bone that probably represent animals (not identifiable) in addition to two complete bone sickle hafts as well as
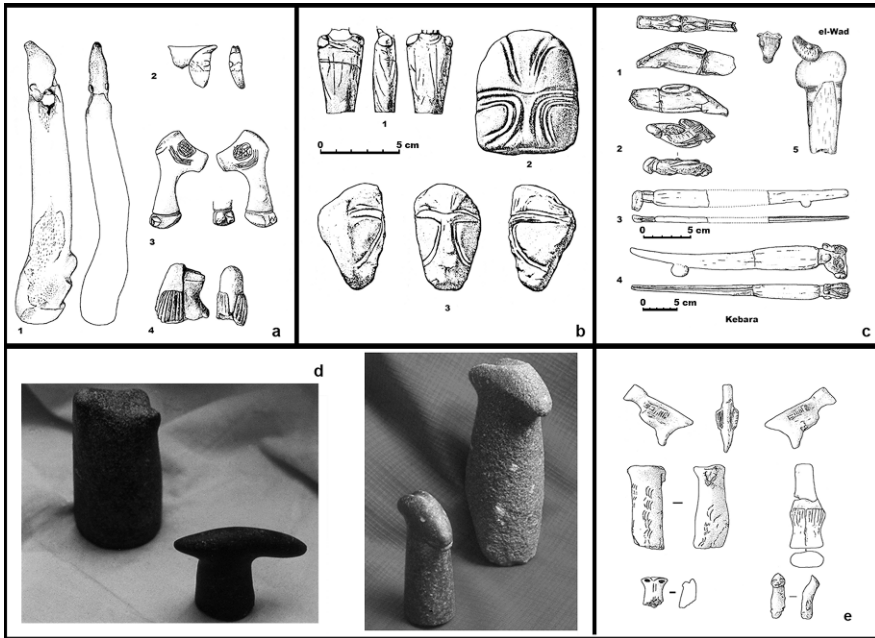
Fig. 1 Figurines from the Epipaleolithic of the Near East. **a**. Nahal Oren (after Noy 1990: Fig. 5); **b**. Ain Mallaha (after Perrot 1966: Fig. 23); **c**. Kebara and el-Wad (after Noy 1990: Fig. 6); **d**. Hallan Cemi (Rosenberg 1999: Figs. 14–15); **e**. Gilgal (after Noy 1989: Fig. 5)

several carved bone fragments representing animals that "are probably broken off from sickles" (Garrod 1957: 216) and represent "a deer and a horse" (Garrod 1957: 218). Of the complete sickle hafts, Garrod identified one animal head as a goat, while "the other [is] an unidentifiable creature which may just possibly be a wild ass, with ears laid back" (Garrod 1957: 216; cf. Noy 1991: Fig. 6: 1–4; Valla 1988: Fig. 2).

Hallan Çemi was occupied between 11,600 and 9,000 calBC (CANeW Project n.d.) and falls within the Late Epipaleolithic period and the subsequent PPNA chronological period. Excavations yielded a number of stone pestles sculpted at one end with stylized goat (gazelle?) heads, possible bovines, another mammal without horns (Rosenberg 1999: 28), and one carved bone appears to represent a snake (Rosenberg 1999: Fig. 11). Although not a figurine under the provisional definition, at least one stone bowl was incised with a non-horned mammal (a canid?) (Rosenberg 1999: Fig. 3). The subsistence economy relied on the hunting of a broad variety of wild species including sheep/goat, deer, canids, bears, small mammals, birds, reptiles, and fish; while there is no evidence of domesticated plants, Rosenberg asserts that pigs had been domesticated (Rosenberg 1999: 31).

Summary of the Late Epipaleolithic. As Cauvin noted earlier, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic representations in the Natufian were relatively rare, although his assertion that "Natufian art . . . was essentially zoomorphic" (Cauvin 2000: 25) might

not be warranted in view of the numbers for each category, which (not counting the shaped pestles from Hallan Çemi) rank nine animal figurines versus seven humans, with one figurine indeterminate as to what it represented; I have not been able to find a count for the material from Hallan Çemi.

It should be noted that the identification of these figurines to the kind of animal that is depicted is not unanimously accepted. The differences among Garrod, Valla, and Noy have already been mentioned, and Cauvin is skeptical of the identifications for Nahal Oren and 'Ain Mallaha (Are some of the "heads" actually human? Cauvin 2000: 25, endnote 10).

It is interesting that many of the animals decorate utilitarian tools that have nothing to do with hunting, although it is possible that some of the "loose" animal heads once adorned spear-throwers.

The PPNA Period

With the onset of agriculture, there are some possible shifts in emphasis in both the northern and southern parts of the Near East.

In the PPNA period, when wild animals still constituted the menu at Nemrik in Iraq, Kozlowski reported 29 "gods" in the form of long, thin limestone cylinders with terminations representing, in his estimation, vultures, eagles, bovids, a number of indeterminate bird images, several other indeterminate animals, and one female human "or other animal" (Fig. 2-a; cf. Kozlowski 2002: Table 6). In general, Kozlowski notes that in his opinion these images are similar in effect to cylindrical representations at Hallan Çemi (goat/gazelle), Abu Hureyra (cat), Jerf al-Ahmar (bird), Dja'ade, and Mureybet. Clay figurines at Nemrik were relatively rare (13 total, of which 5 are unidentifiable as to being either human or animal), but they included such animals as a domestic pig, a wild boar, a domestic sheep (how is domestication determined in these cases?), and an aurochs. Due to preservation problems at the site, 92% of the faunal remains could not be identified even to the genus level (Kozlowski 2002: Table 7). For Kozlowski, the figurines represent "individual deities connected to single houses" (Kozlowski 2002: 78) or "domestic deities."

Other PPNA animal figurines from the northern Euphrates include a possible owl (with possible human attributes) in limestone from Mureybet (Pichon 1985) and five female human figurines (Fig. 4-a; one in stone and four in baked clay; Cauvin 2000: 44; Figs. 7 and 8); another small carved stone, broken at both ends, is attributed to being a figurine but there is little detail to indicate the sex (Cauvin 2000: Fig. 6:5). At Jerf el-Ahmar, small sculptures of human (and animal?) faces were recovered, but two impressive stelae representing some sort of bird (the beaks are missing, but they may be raptors) about 2 m tall adorn one building in the village (Stordeur et al. 2001: 40 and Fig. 11).

The tall Jerf el-Ahmar stelae foreshadow, perhaps, the monolithic art in Anatolia as the transition from the PPNA to the EPPNB took place. Göbekli Tepe has
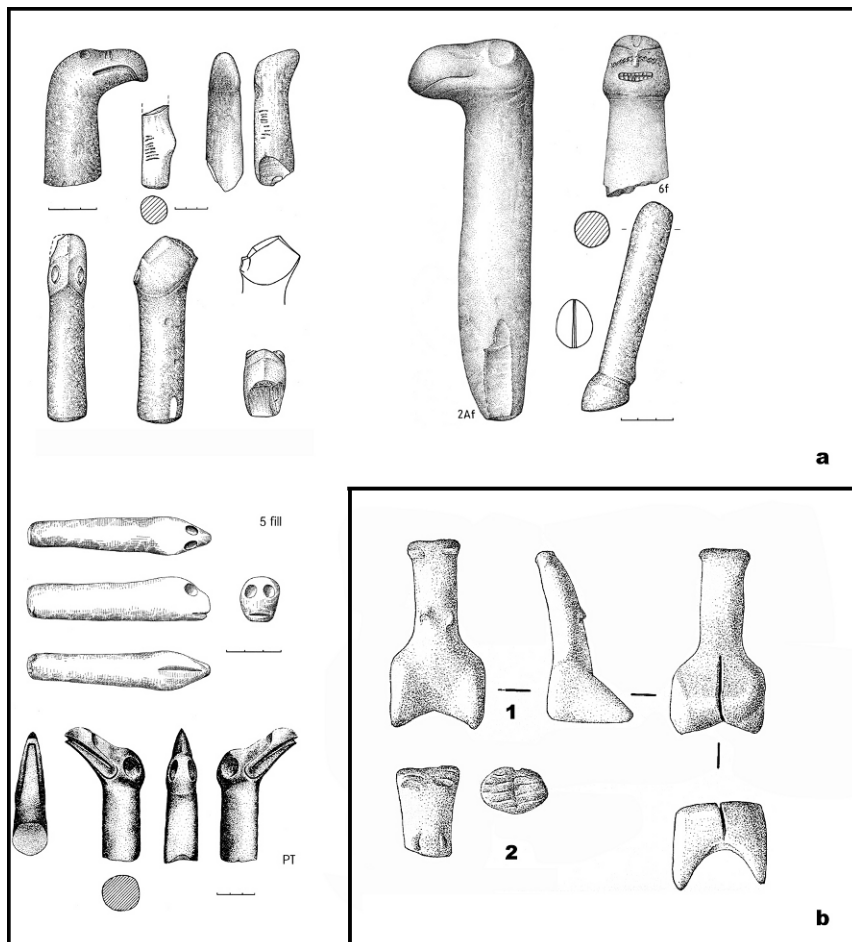
Fig. 2 Figurines from the PPNA in the Near East. **a**. Nemrik (after Kozlowski 2002: Plates 138–140); **b**. Netiv Hagdud (Bar-Yosef and Gopher 1997: Fig. 6–1.2)

provided a stunning array of animal motifs both as reliefs on massive columns and as free-standing sculptures (Fig. 4). The depicted animals on the T-headed limestone columns include aurochs, lions, cranes, crocodiles (?), fox, sheep, boar, wild ass, gazelle, bear (Schmidt 1995; 1998; Peters and Schmidt 2004), vultures, and scorpions (Anon 2006; Schmidt 2006). A headless male with an erect penis appeared on one column (Anon. 2006: 75), a free-standing ithyphallic male sculpture ca. 40 cm high also came from the site (Beile-Bohn et al. 1998: 72–73 and Abb. 34), and another human sculpture ca. 40 cm high was also found (Beile-Bohn et al. 1998: Abb. 31). In addition, there are three similar 1-m long phallus reliefs (complete with scrotum) in high relief in the nearby limestone quarry, which, as Schmidt points out, cannot be directly dated, but there is little other post-PPNA/EPPNB archaeological
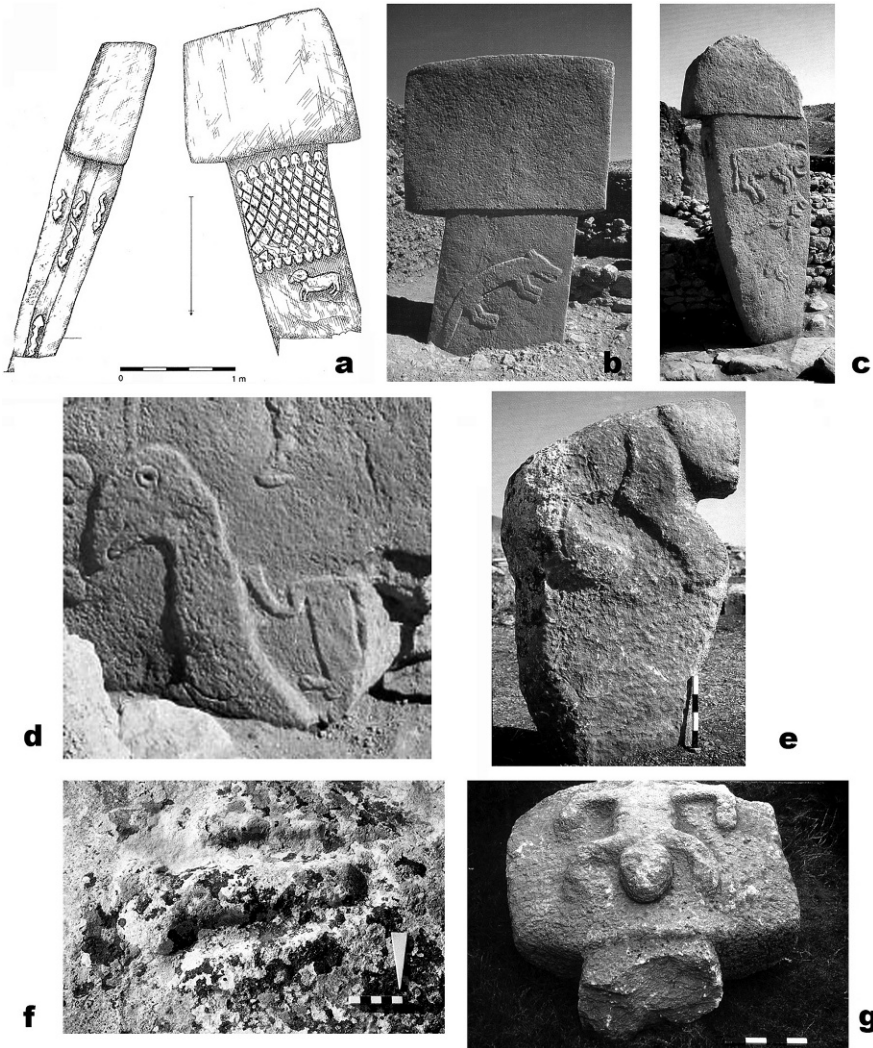
Fig. 3 Stone reliefs from Göbekli Tepe. **a**. "Snake Pillar"; **b**. fox; **c**. bull and birds; **d**. bird and headless male; **e**. lion; **f**. erect penis and scrotum; **g**. quadruped (d from Anon 2006; all others from Hauptmann 1999)

evidence in the area (Schmidt 1998: 29 and Abb. 7). Free-standing limestone sculptures also include a half-meter high lion (Beile-Bohn et al. 1998: Abb. 30), a poorly preserved bird ca. 30 cm tall, and the broken head of an unidentifiable carnivore (Beile-Bohn et al. Abb. 29).

There is no monumental art in the southern Levant during the PPNA, but small figurines occur in several sites. Highly stylized female figurines dominate the southern Levant, including a clay one from Netiv Hagdud (and the head of another
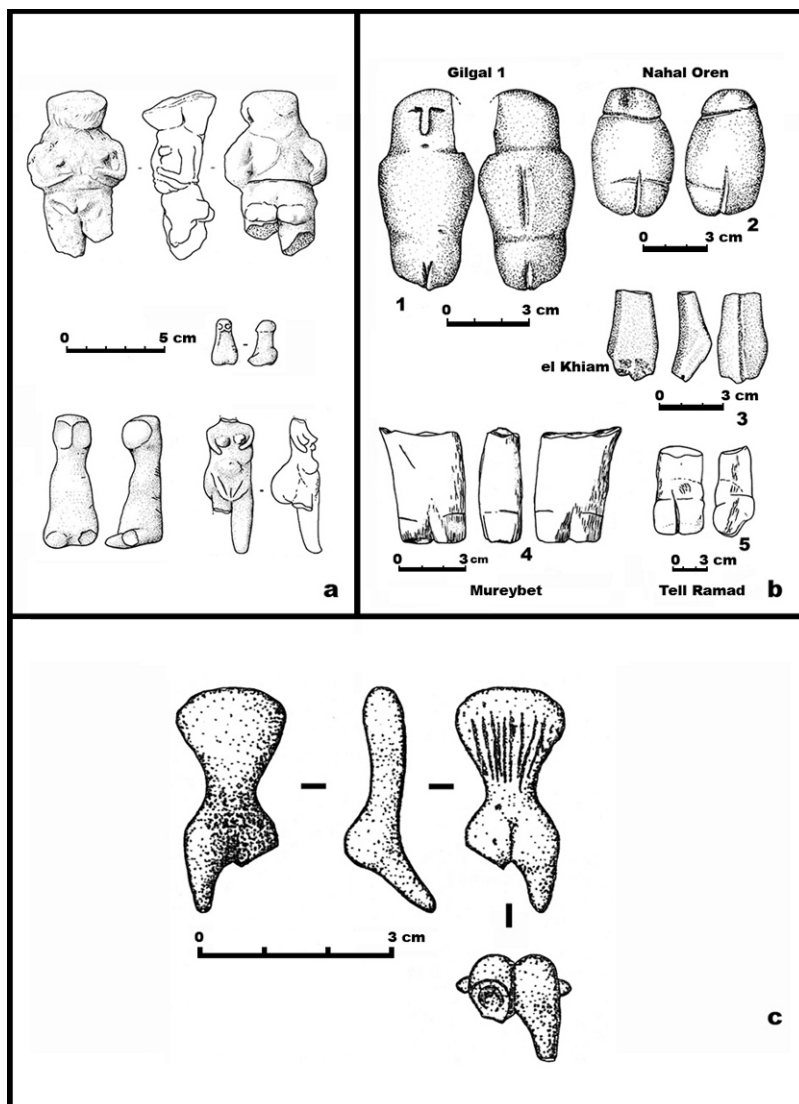
Fig. 4 Figurines from the PPNA of the Near East. **a**. Mureybet (after Cauvin 2000: Figs. 7 and 8); **b**. Gilgal, Nahal Oren, el-Khiam, Mureybet, and Tell Ramad (Bar-Yosef 1980: Fig. 4); **c**. Dhra' (Kuijt and Finlayson 2001: Fig. 2)

figurine) (Fig. 2-b; Bar-Yosef and Gopher 1997: 177–178 and Figs. 6.1.1 and 6.1.2), and stone statuettes from Salibiya IX (Bar-Yosef 1980: 195 and Fig. 3); Gilgal (Noy n.d.: 13, 15–16; Noy originally assigned this surface find to the Natufian, but it has been dated to the PPNA by others (e.g., Cauvin 2000: Fig. 6:4)); Nahal Oren (Stekelis and Noy 1963: 9 and Plate 2: F-H); El Khiam (Echegaray 1966: Plates 6–7,

and Dhra' (Kuijt and Finlayson 2001: 14 and Fig. 2) (Fig. 3-b and 3-c). Figurines of both stone and clay were excavated from Gilgal, including four "pillared" (or stalk-like) figurines claimed to be humans of indeterminate sex, as well as a rare (for the southern Levant) bird figurine made of limestone (Noy 1989: 13, 17 and Fig. 5).

Summary of the PPNA Period. Overall, there is a perceptible change in figurine production compared to the Late Epipaleolithic. Animals tend to play an important role in the iconography of the north, while except for the bird from Gilgal, they do not appear at all in the southern Levant. Monumentality is introduced at Jerf al-Ahmar, which is taken to even greater lengths at the late PPNA/EPPNB ritual center at Göbekli Tepe in the form of reliefs on columns and free-standing sculptures. Where figurines are complete enough to determine sex, females are clearly present, but there are also complete human figurines whose sex is simply indeterminate, and some of the determinations by archaeologists are questionable (discussed more fully below).

The PPNB Period

Despite major changes in lithic technology and subsistence economy, the PPNB period demonstrates some continuity with the PPNA period in its figurine component, although there are also some changes that indicate an evolution of these three-dimensional images. Animal figurines are found at virtually all PPNB sites in the Levant, and human figurines are also relatively frequent. It is not possible to discuss them all due to the large number of sites reporting anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines, but some of the more intriguing examples will be mentioned.

Early/Middle PPNB Nevali Çori appears to be directly involved with the iconography of Göbekli Tepe, which is not very distant. One of the T-shaped pillars (Fig. 5a) of the cult building (which underwent at least two renovations) has arms and hands in relief on the sides and front edge of the pillar (the head is missing), and this detail mirrors a pillar fragment from Göbekli Tepe (compare Beile-Bohn et al. 1998 Abb. 28: 3 and Hauptmann 1993: Abb. 16). Large free-standing sculpture continued its importance at Nevalı Çori, with both humans and animals, but what is new here is the combination of both on the same piece and often as humans with attributes of animals, such as "hybrid" bird/humans (Fig. 5-d) and a snake climbing up the back of a human head (cf. Hauptmann 1999: Figs. 10–15); there is also a 1-m "totem pole" of at least two female busts with "hairnets" placed atop each other (Fig. 5-c), surmounted by a bird whose head is missing. Morsch's analysis of the clay figurines from Nevalı Çori (Fig. 6) revealed 169 seated females (2 "with child" and 8 pregnant), 179 standing male figurines; about 29 zoomorphic pieces, and 39 abstract items that might be either animal or human, all totaling 416 figures (Morsch 2002: 147–148 and Plates 1–4). Other sites with similar T-shaped pillars have been located in SE Anatolia as well, although they have not been investigated in any detail (e.g., Çelik 2000a, 2000b; 2006).
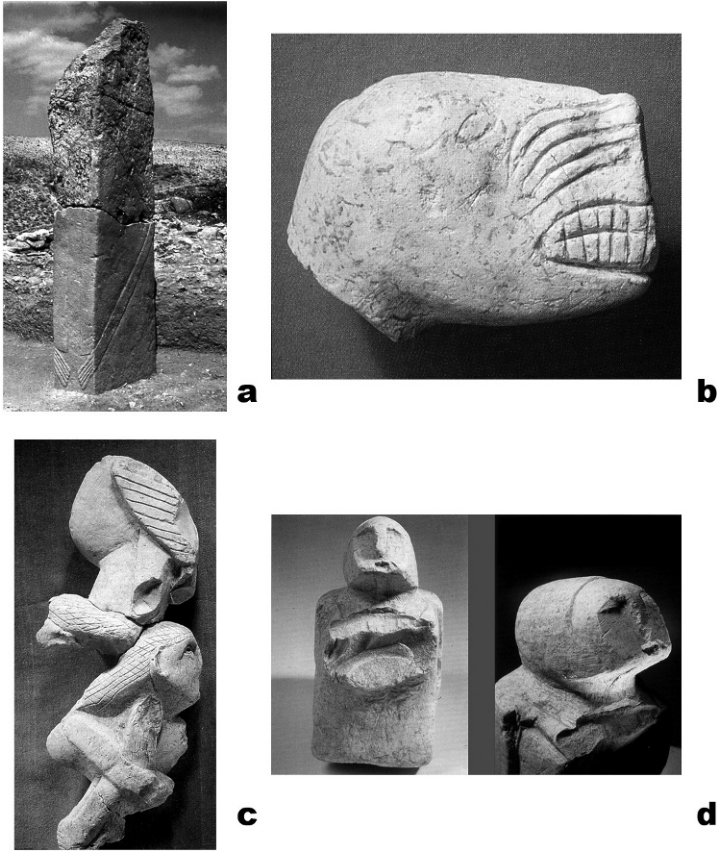
Fig. 5 a. Stone pillar with incised human arms and hands; **b**. lion; **c**. human-bird "totem pole"; **d**. bird-human sculpture (Hauptmann 1999)

Four clay human figurines were found together in a depression of a house floor at Cafer Höyük: three were female and one was male (Cauvin et al. 1999: 94 and Figs. 26–28). In addition, a composite clay figurine of a bird (with wings added to the body before firing) came from the upper levels of the site (Cauvin et al. 1999: 98 and Fig. 33).

Although clay female figurines began to show up in the PPNA layers at Çayönü, they do not become numerous until layers dated to the MPPNB; animal figurines are absent in the earlier layers, but they predominate in the MPPNB (Fig. 7-a and 7-b), with sheep/goat the most numerous; Özdoğan notes that the rarity of pig figurines is curious since the animals figured so heavily in the diet (A. Özdoğan 1999: 59). For the figurine samples collected up to and including the 1987 season, Broman Morales cites 11 sheep/goats, 1 steer, 3 possible dogs, 5 pigs, and 22 unclassifiable animal figurines. For human figurines, there are no identifiable males, but females can be detected among 14 highly stylized seated images, 20 "lady stalks", and 7 broken
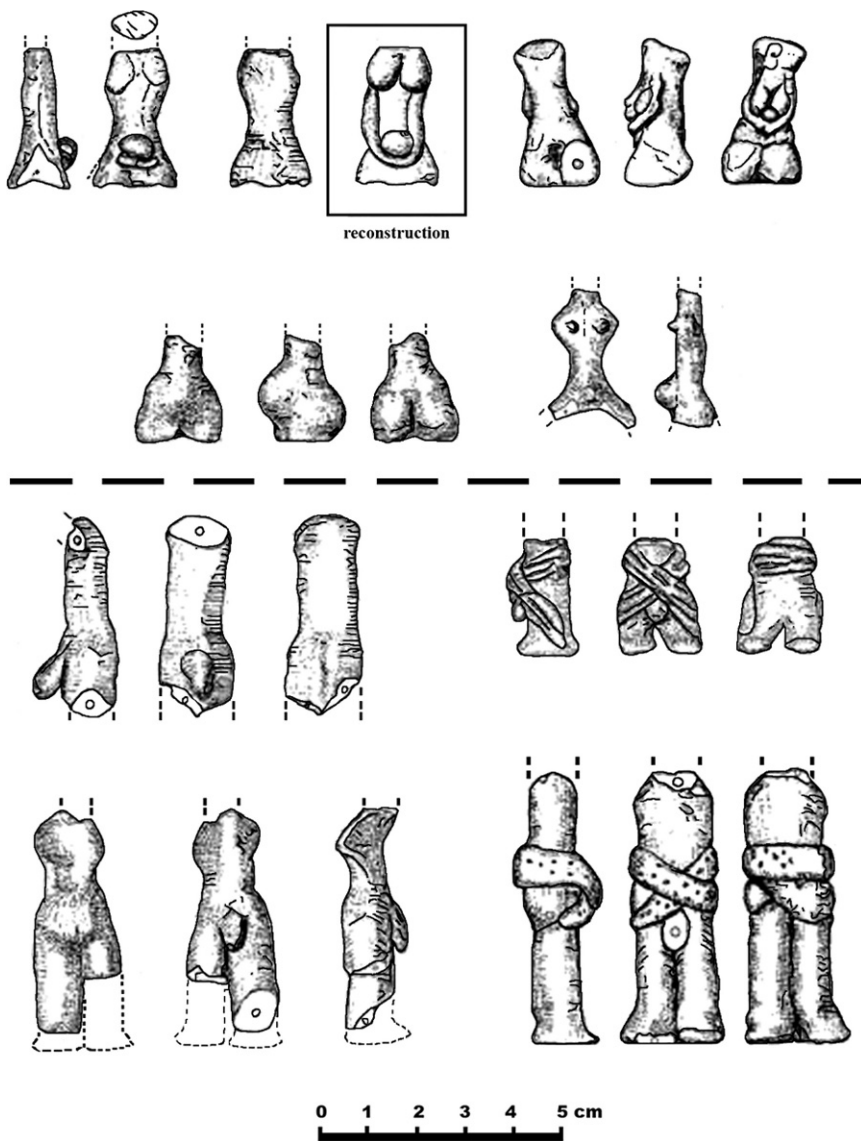
Fig. 6 Clay figurines from Nevali Çori (after Morsch 2002: Plates 1 and 3)

"composite" figurines; other clay "stalks" were not classified as anthropomorphic (Broman Morales 57–64 and Plates 19–25).

In post-PPNB occupation at Çayönü, there is no direct mention if figurines were found in the last phase (Large Room Building, PPNC) (cf. A. Özdoğan 1999: 59), but elsewhere in Anatolia M. Özdoğan reports numerous small limestone human figurines from Mezraa-Tleilat during a period that is described as transitional from
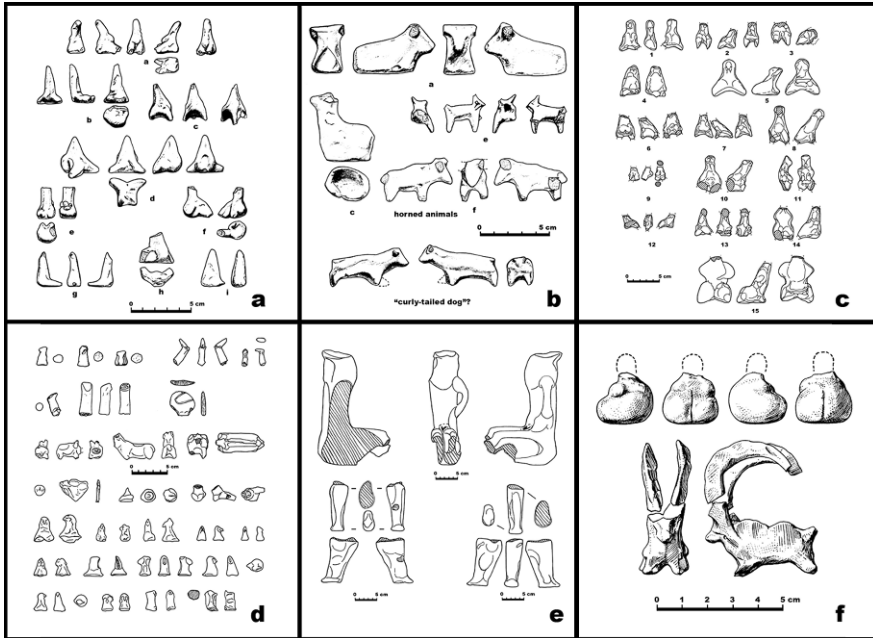
Fig. 7 a. "Stalk ladies" from Çayönü (Broman Morales 1990: Fig. 22); **b**. animal figurines from Çayönü (after Broman Morales 1990: Plates 19 and 21); **c**. human figurines from Tell Aswad (de Contenson 1995: Fig. 127); **d**. human and animal figurines from Tell Ramad (de Contenson 2000: Fig. 100); **e**. plaster supports to display modeled skulls at Tell Ramad (de Contenson 2000: Fig. 104); **f**. a human female and an ibex from Beidha (Kirkbride 1966: Fig. 4)

the Pre-Pottery to the Pottery Neolithic correlated with the PPNC (M. Özdoğan 2003: 514–515). The pieces consist of 29 seated figures, 2 standing humans, and 94 phalluses; no sex could be determined for the seated or standing figures (M. Özdoğan 2003: 515–517).

Farther south near Damascus, de Contenson reported numerous figurines, both human and animal, from Tell Aswad (Fig. 7-c), but most in a very fragmentary condition, so that horns, for example, constituted a large proportion of the total; among the identifiable animals, cattle seem to be present (de Contenson 1995: 181–182 and Fig. 125). Quite a number of the figurines assigned to the anthropomorphic category are cylindrical "stalk" examples, and there are many fragments such as heads and legs; de Contenson notes that for the human pieces, sitting figurines are "clearly" female (de Contenson 1995: 183). The same general situation pertains to de Contenson's excavations at nearby Tell Ramad (Fig. 7-d), with many seated figurines and "stalk" or cylindrical pieces identified as human forms (de Contenson 2000: 179–189 and Figs. 100–103). Novel additions to the figurine inventory at Tell Ramad included headless statuettes (Fig. 7-e) of a pink clayey soil that served as bases for plastered skulls (de Contenson 2000: 217 and Fig. 104).

A later excavation at Tell Aswad also recovered some clay human figurines, including a male similar to the one from Cafer Höyük and another of indeterminate

sex very like the beaded-eye figurines from Munhata (Stordeur 2003: 12 and Fig. 6: 1–2). Among the zoomorphic specimens recovered in the later excavations, many of the animals could be identified, with cattle the most frequent, followed closely by goats; sheep and pig were rare, and there was possibly a dog (Stordeur 2003: 13 and Fig. 6: 3–4).

Figurines from Jericho are surprisingly rare: there were 3 "human types" from PPNA layers and 14 from PPNB contexts (Holland 1982: 551–553 and Figs. 223–224), all of them in very fragmentary conditions. Animal figurines are likewise scarce, with only six reported from the PPNB period (Holland 1982: 553–554 and Figs. 224–225). Beidha also produced few figurines from the first five seasons, including a small "mother-goddess" (Fig. 7-f), an ibex, and a couple of probable cattle horns (Kirkbride 1966: 26 and Fig. 4); there have been no reports of figurines from the subsequent excavation seasons at Beidha.

Excavations at Munhata produced 19 (35%) anthropomorphic and 36 (65%) zoomorphic figurines from the MPPNB layers which, for the southern Levant, is a high proportion of human examples. Of the former category, nine females and one male "could be identified with certainty" (Garfinkel 1995: 54; Figs. 13–14 and Plates 2–4). Among the animals, there were at least four cattle, several sheep or goats, one pig, and a number of "maned animals" (Garfinkel 1995: 22 and Figs. 15–18). In the Yarmoukian layers, the percentages for human vs. animal figurines is exactly reversed (total n = 62 pieces).

'Ain Ghazal is especially rich in figurines. About 150 animal figurines made in clay, many of them fired, derive principally from MPPNB contexts (although there are also examples from the LPPNB, PPNC, and a few from the Yarmoukian Pottery Neolithic). By far, cattle dominate the animal inventory (McAdam 1997; Schmandt-Besserat 1997), accounting for 50% or more of the identifiable inventory. Other animals include sheep/goat, equids, pigs, possible reptiles (Schmandt-Besserat 1997: Fig. 5), dog (Rollefson 1983: Plate III: 7), and perhaps fox and cat. Among a sample of bovids that was recovered between 1982 and 1985, McAdam could distinguish between bulls, cows, and calves (McAdam 1997).

Of particular note among the 'Ain Ghazal aurochs category, 24 cattle figurines were found in a single cache, along with a lump of off-site clay from which they were made, discarded in a trash deposit in a courtyard (Fig. 8a); the singular cluster, together with a block of raw material, indicates that they were all produced at the same time and used in a single ceremonial episode (Schmandt-Besserat 1997: 52–53). The cache also tended to exhibit more burning (in the form of "blackening") on the rumps of the animals, suggesting that they may have been arrayed in an arc around the edge of a hearth with the hind parts toward the fire and the heads pointed outward (Schmandt-Besserat, pers. comm.).

It is interesting to note that among the cattle figurines at 'Ain Ghazal, several bore evidence of surface treatments that indicated haltering and perhaps slashing (Fig. 8-b; McAdam 1997: 134; Schmandt-Besserat 1997: Fig. 9). Two cattle were found buried side-by-side in a pit that cut through a house plastered floor (although it is not clear if this part of the house had been abandoned at the time) (Fig. 9a and 9b); both had been pierced in the ribs from the side and through the front of the
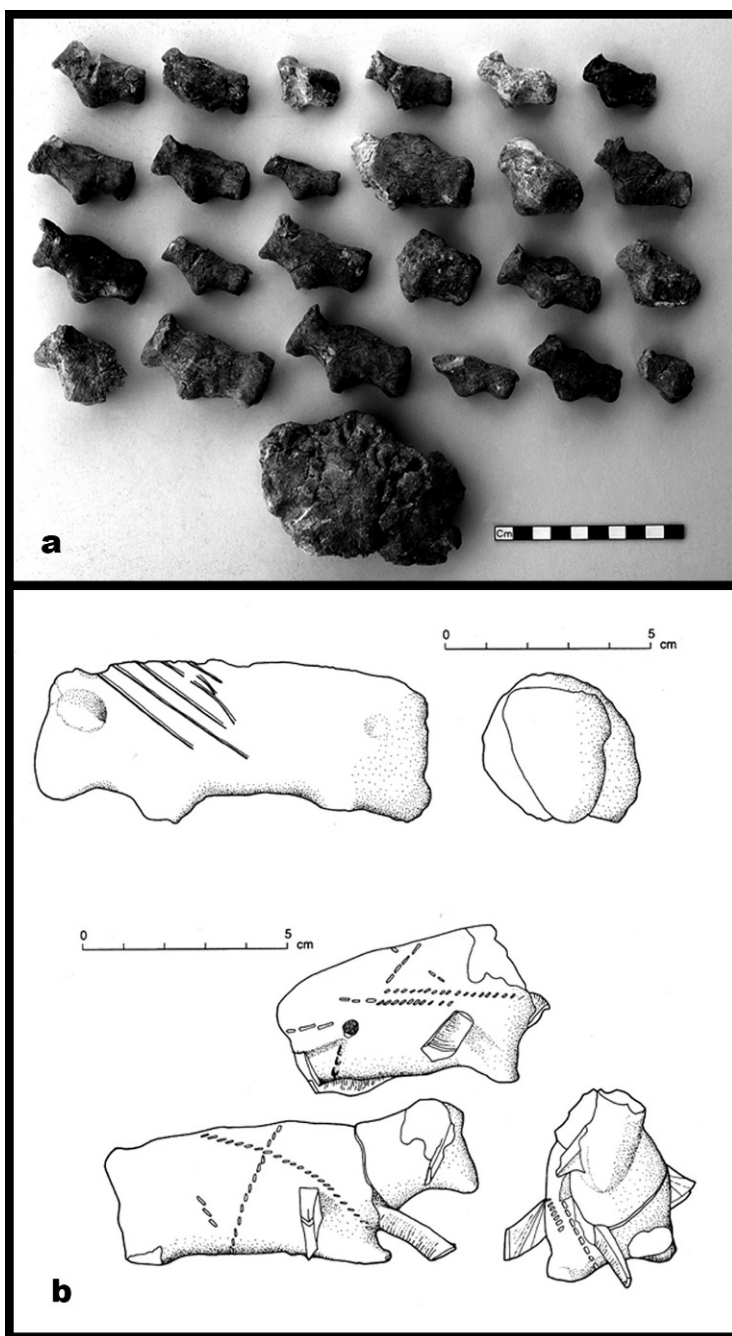
Fig. 8 a. Cache of cattle figurines from 'Ain Ghazal (photo: C. Blair); **b**. surface markings on several cattle figurines from 'Ain Ghazal (after McAdam 1997: Figs. 13–14)

Fig. 9 a. "Killed cattle" in situ; **b**. "killed" cattle (photos by C. Blair)

chest with flint bladelets, and for the steer whose head remained intact, one eye was stabbed with another bladelet (Schmandt-Besserat 1997: Fig. 10).

A total of 43 anthropomorphic figurines has been catalogued for the PPNB period (Schmandt-Besserat n.d.), although many of these are fragments. In the same 1982–1985 sample mentioned earlier, McAdam noted that construction varied from pinching pieces of clay into shape to assembling "spare parts" to create the three-dimensional images (McAdam 1997). Female figurines were often easily identified, although sometimes there was some difficulty in making the decision (Fig. 10). An example might be cited where several specimens that were clearly female bore rocker-stamped, cord-impressed decorations (McAdam 1997 Fig. 2) so it is not impossible that several lumps of clay called "male genitalia" (McAdam 123 and Fig. 6) may in fact have been highly stylized females; additionally, a rocker-stamped, cord-impressed "object" may have been a pregnant abdomen "spare part" of a female figurine (McAdam 1997: Fig. 7). Many figurines could not be assigned a sex due to the nature of preservation.
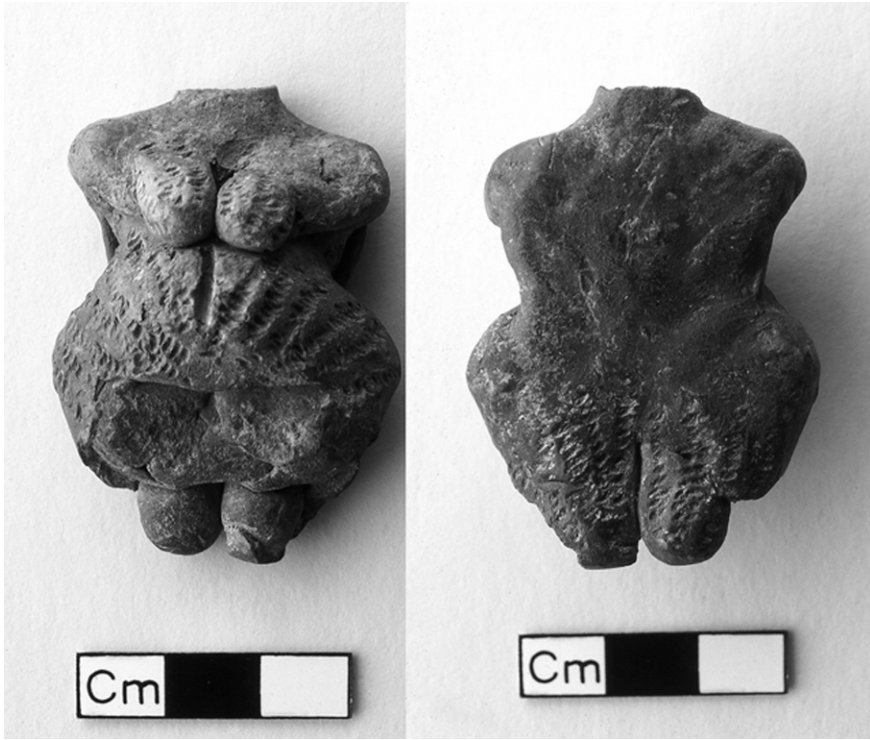
Fig. 10 Clay figurine of a pregnant female from 'Ain Ghazal (photo: C. Blair)

More imposing human MPPNB images from 'Ain Ghazal include the large plaster human statues (ca. 90–100 cm high) and busts (30–40 cm) that were excavated in two separate caches in the 1983 and 1985 seasons (Fig. 11; Rollefson 1983; 1986). Several females have been identified on the basis of the presence of breasts, but there are other relatively complete pieces that have no direct evidence of sex. The earlier cache consists of 13 full-standing statues and a like number of busts, while the later cache (badly damaged by bulldozer activity) includes five complete statues and busts (the latter are two-headed) and fragments of at least one more figure. Sex determination for the latter cache is especially difficult since it appears that the statuary was intended to be covered with robes between the neck and knees (cf. Grissom 2000: 43). There are strong parallels in facial cosmetic treatment between the statuary and plastered skulls at 'Ain Ghazal, especially for the earlier cache, and it is likely that the statuary and plastered skulls are parts of the same iconographic canon. Statues similar in appearance and construction were also recovered (in very poor condition) from Garstang's excavations at Jericho (Garstang 1935), and fragments of molded plaster that were interpreted to be plaster statue fragments also were found at Nahal Hemar (Bar-Yosef and Alon 1988).

In the southern Levant, at least, there may have been a major decrease in figurine production in the LPPNB, at least for animal figurines (particularly at "megasites").

Fig. 11 Plaster statues and busts from 'Ain Ghazal. **a**. From the 1983 cache (photo: P. Dorrell and S. Laidlaw); **b**. from the 1985 cache, including three two-headed statues (photo: J. Tsantes)

At 'Ain Ghazal, two seasons of excavations (1983–1984) over ca. 200 m^2 of MPPNB deposits produced 40 human figurines (or identifiable fragments thereof), 61 animal figurines, and 93 clay figurine fragments that could not be assigned to either anthropomorphic or zoomorphic status, for a total of 194 figurines. Excavations in LPPNB layers over at least three times that area produced only 2 human figurines, 14 animals, and 3 unidentifiables, a total of 19; this represents less than 10% of the MPPNB total even though population had more than doubled in the LPPNB and the investigated area was more than tripled. In the ensuing PPNC, across a somewhat larger areal extent, there were 8 human, 9 animals, and 11 unknowns for a total of 28 figurines, despite the fact that population was probably only one-third or less of the LPPNB residents.

This general pattern might be generally characteristic of most LPPNB and later sites. Unfortunately there are few detailed reports, but the impression is that at LPPNB Basta, for example, figurines were not a prominent part of the material culture (Nissen et al. 1991: 29, where it is stated that "…several fired clay objects were found. Among them was an animal figurine"; cf. Hermansen 1997; 2004), and there is little indication of figurines from LPPNB Ba'ja (e.g., Gebel and Hermansen 2003; but see Gebel, Hermansen and Kinzel 2006: 15 for the mention of one anthropomorphic figurine), although these preliminary reports have tended to concentrate on architecture and lithic production. Excavations at LPPNB 'Ayn Jammam in 1995 (Waheeb 1996) produced a total of one animal figurine and five "stalk" figurines from several hundred square meters that reached several meters depth (Rollefson 2005a: 22). An exception to this pattern appears to be the case at the LPPNB megasite of es-Sifiya, in west-central Jordan, where Mahasneh reports that 215 zoomorphic and 23 anthropomorphic (similar to "stalks") figurine were recovered from a single 5 × 5m unit, which Mahasneh interprets as a figurine production area (Mahasneh and Bienert 2000: 3 and Figs. 8–10). Could this be taken to represent some kind of specialization in the ritual area?

In the Pottery Neolithic period figurines are also relatively rare. At 'Ain Ghazal, the Yarmoukian Pottery Neolithic layers, which were sampled over more than 2000 m^2, or about ten times the area of the MPPNB sample, produced eight human figurines, nine animals, and three unidentified fragments. At Munhata, while the PPNB figurine counts were modest at 55 pieces (19 humans and 36 animals), all of the Pottery Neolithic layers combined yielded 45 clay figurines (21 human, 24 zoomorphic) (Garfinkel 1995: 15, 27, 47). The extensive excavations at Sha'ar Hagolan since 1989 (1800 m^2, Garfinkel et al. 2002: 189) have recovered abundant human and pebble figurines (Fig. 12), although no complete count is available, and 15 animal figurines have also been found; the ratio of anthropomorphs to zoomorphs is said to be about 2 to 1 (Garfinkel 2004: 195), suggesting that there are around 30 human figures. Anthropomorphic figurines at Sha'ar Hagolan are heavily dominated by the cowrie-eyed, cone-headed seated female that, to some, invokes the "terrible mother" (Cauvin 1972: 86) image, recalling in some ways the enthroned "goddess" from Çatal Höyük that also dates to the Pottery Neolithic (Mellaart 1967 183 and Fig. 52).

Summary of the PPNB and Post-PPNB Periods. With the onset of the PPNB, animal figurines become ubiquitous in the Near East, although human figurines – both
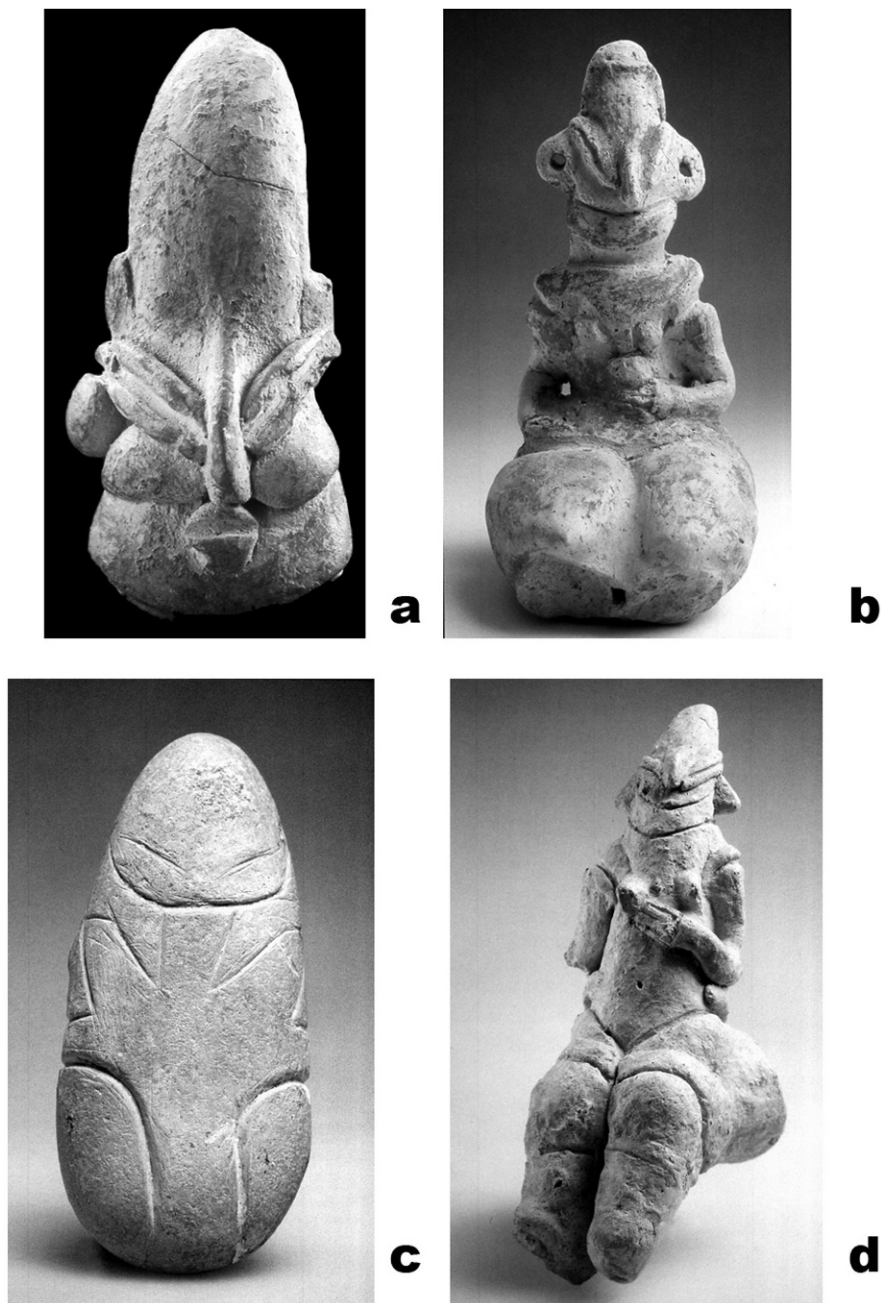
Fig. 12 a, b, and d. Yarmoukian clay female figurines from Sha'ar Hagolan; c. Yarmoukian incised pebble from Sha'ar Hagolan (all photos from Garfinkel 1999)

male and female – are also important, occasionally far outnumbering zoomorphs. Among the animal figurines, cattle are usually most numerous, although in places sheep/goats and birds are almost as frequent.

The monumental images so striking at Göbekli Tepe are maintained in several places in SE Anatolia, and monumental statuary (albeit on a reduced scale) appears in the central Levant at Jericho, 'Ain Ghazal, and Nahal Hemar, an area where the plastered skull cult was characteristic of the ritual arena.

In general, figurine use seems to crescendo in the MPPNB, perhaps signaling a peak in social tensions associated with population growth. The statuary is possibly associated with an emphasis on social identity based on corporate kinship groups. By the Late PPNB figurine production in general seems to have waned, and females seem to dominate the anthropomorphic set. In the ceramic Neolithic, females are clearly the most abundant, but numerous pebble figurines are unclear in terms of their connotations of sexual identity. Nevertheless, the absolute numbers of figurines remains relatively low.

What Is with All These Figurines?

The meaning of figurines remains one of the most difficult and controversial aspects of understanding the material culture of the Neolithic people who made them. The problems lie in several areas, any one of which, if treated dismissively, could invalidate any chance of a clear understanding of the intent of the objects.

How Does One Approach the Problem?

Richard Lesure identified four schools of philosophical approaches to the study of figurines: (1) the iconographic approach investigates just what figurines were intended to represent; (2) the functional approach looks at how figurines were used and whether they were sacred or profane; (3) the social analytical perspective sees figurines as representations of social tension and political struggle; and (4) the symbolic school sees figurines as entailing far more than what they physically depict and investigates the more abstract elements about the subject matter (Lesure 2002: 589–594). Certainly, researchers are not necessarily confined to one approach or the other, but failing to understand the contributions that the alternative avenues of study can provide will likely result in limited perceptions at best, and wrong understanding at worst.

Location, Location, Location

One of the aspects of primary importance is the contextual associations of figurines, both spatial and temporal. Without this basic requirement, Marcus' three components of ritual – (a) content, (b) locus of performance, and (c) performers – cannot

be addressed: what happened, where, and by whom (Marcus 1996: 287). Of course, knowing all three aspects does not guarantee a correct interpretation, but without them an incorrect interpretation is virtually assured.

In this regard, it should be noted that few available reports so far include a consideration of context, and catalogues of inventory numbers, whether described according to species and sex or not, are simply that: catalogues of things. When it can be seen that small clay anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines are never found in ritual buildings at Çayönü (A. Özdoğan 1999: 59), for instance, there is a strong indication that however they may have been used, it was not in the context of public ceremonies. Nor have the figurines occurred as a common element in burials anywhere in the Near East, nor even in the Balkans (Bailey 2005: 11). It is also notable that when contextual information is provided, the clay figurines are almost always found in trash deposits, which suggests that the two "killed" cattle figurines buried in a subfloor burial pit at 'Ain Ghazal were something "more" than the odd cow, sheep/goat, or dog found among burned bones, flint debitage, and other detritus. But even here, a description of the trash association can be vital to insights of the disposable figurines: the 24 cattle discarded together in a midden demonstrate that the "herd" may have operated in a unit, and the implications of this clutch of animals probably are different than a single animal in the rubbish. As a final example, it has been suggested that the context of the disposal of the stone bust at Nevalı Çori indicates it is a deity since it was placed inside a cult building (Voigt 1991: 39); although there have been no cult buildings identified at MPPNB 'Ain Ghazal, would the careful burial of the "dead" statues at 'Ain Ghazal indicate that they, too, were deities?

Since the final resting place for so many of the figurines was in the trash (at Gritille, for example, all but one of the "nearly 50 clay figurines" were found in ash deposits (Voigt 2000: 265)) it seems that they were all one-offs: made for a specific purpose and then discarded once the objective had been satisfied; the importance was in the creation of the figurines, not in their maintenance (cf. Hamilton 1996: 283).

In the Eye of the Beholder

It is likely that the reader has read a report on figurines in a publication only to turn to the illustrations and raise an eyebrow while silently asking, "That's a pig?" Depending on the state of completeness, it is often possible to distinguish between figurines intended to represent animals and those that were supposed to be people, but there are also many times when the stylized renditions are too vague to be certain of species or sex. Hamilton is adamant in her view that analysts usually (always?) bring a lot of historical baggage with them, a "political context" they developed over their education and experience in their research, especially when it concerns the identification and interpretation of human figurines (Hamilton 1996: 282).

When criteria are explicitly stated for sorting figurines into this category or that category, the reader is able to make a judgment of the reliability of the criteria – and
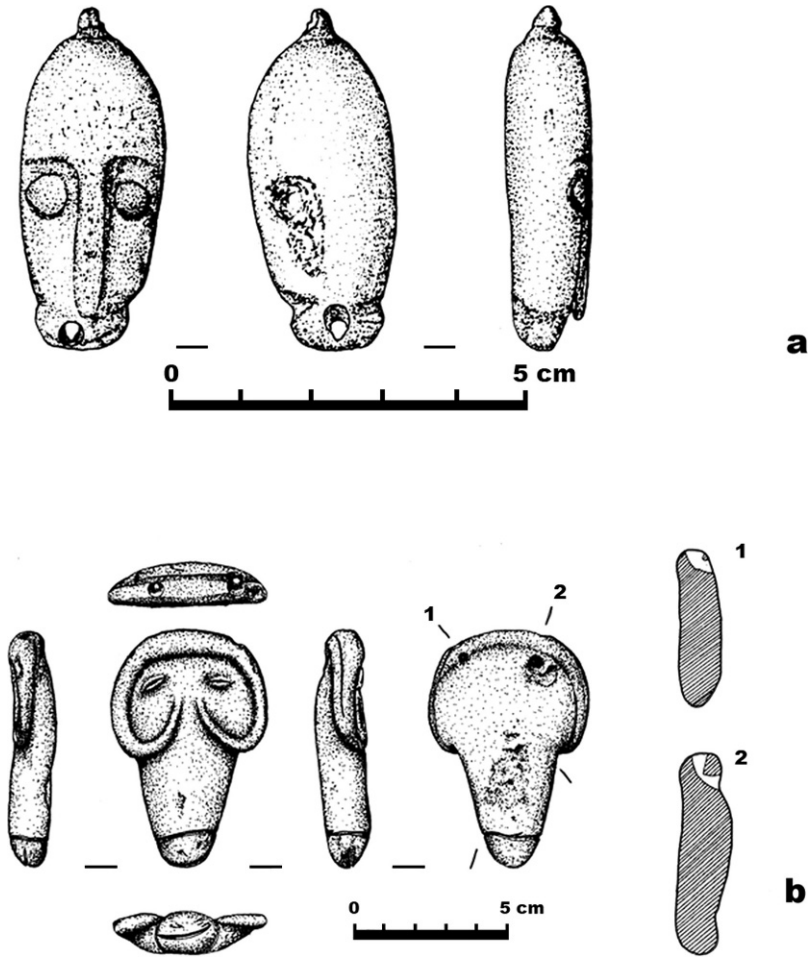
Fig. 13 a. Greenstone pendant from Basta in the shape of a head, or stylized penis and scrotum; **b**. stone pendant from Basta in the form of a ram's head or penis and scrotum (both after Hermansen 2004: Figs. 1 and 2)

therefore the reliability of the classification. Often no such criteria are expressed, or they are so vague as to be suspect. This problem is especially acute when it comes to the so-called stalk figurines, which in some reports might be assigned to one sex (or species) but in another publication to the other sex (or type), a pounding of square pegs into round pigeon holes in many cases. Bailey notes that figurines "are inclined to deceive" (1996: 292), usually by emphasizing some characteristics at the expense of others. The categories of animal vs. human may not be mutually exclusive in all cases, nor the distinctions between adult and child nor between male and female (Bailey 2005: 15). In other words, whatever the role of the figurine, it might simply involve an invocation of "something", not necessarily "that thing".

Bailey's "deception" by the figurine makers can involve intentional ambivalence or ambiguity concocted by the figurine maker. Two examples of this come from the LPPNB megasite of Basta in southern Jordan (Fig. 13). One green marble pendant ca. 5 cm long is roughly semi-cylindrical in shape and has, at first glance, a rather cartoonish (of "Kilroy was here" style) depiction of a human face, but on closer inspection the nose and eyes might depict a penis and testicles (Hermansen 1997: Plate 4: B). Another pendant of similar size made of limestone could be interpreted in three ways: (1) as a ram's head, with horns curving down from the top of the head to surround two "coffee bean" eyes, with a small horizontal slit along the bottom to represent the mouth (Hermansen 2004: 102 and Fig. 15: 2). (2) Alternatively, the curving features might represent arms rather than horns, and the "eyes" could also be seen as breasts of a female human, with the incision at the bottom setting off the pubic area from the rest of the body; note that in this view the figurine would be headless by design and execution). (3) Finally Hermansen also remarks that when this figurine is turned upside down, the figurine becomes a phallus and scrotum.

Gender Bias?

The myth that human figurines in Neolithic contexts in the Near East are over-whelmingly female has long held sway over the general public and many archae-ologists alike. In part not only does this go back to Hamilton's "political/historical baggage", but also there have been concerted efforts to focus on the female images as representative of deities, no matter how they were used and discarded.

In Anatolia, at least, the situation is one where males and females are essentially equal in terms of representation in the PPNB period, and only later did an emphasis on females and pregnancy become apparent (Voigt 2000: 290). Male figurines also occur in the central and southern Levant, but in some cases the lack of effort to represent male genitalia explicitly may be a reflection of technological problems (for example, in the fashioning of the plaster statues at 'Ain Ghazal).

One focus of controversy has been the identification of the "Mother Goddess", a concept that was championed by Mellaart and exaggerated by Gimbutas (e.g., Gimbutas 1991). While there are still adherents to this notion throughout the archaeological community, there are also vocal opponents, perhaps most force-fully expressed first by Ucko (cf. Ucko 1996) and by a troupe of researchers since then (Tringham and Conkey 1998; Bailey 2005: 12; Haaland and Haaland 1996: 298).

Pregnant females are numerous everywhere, but especially in the southern Levant during the MPPNB period, when environmental and sociopolitical conditions ap-pear to have intensified (e.g., Rollefson 1997). Pregnant females have usually been referred to as "fertility figurines", implying that women may have relied on them to become pregnant. Another viewpoint is that the gestation period, and especially the birth event itself, represent the most dangerous times in a woman's life, and that

the pregnant females could have been fashioned to protect the mother through this crucial period (Rollefson 2000: 167–168; cf. Hershkovitz and Gopher, this volume, and Rolston in Rollefson et al. 1985: 106). In addition, if women were having more children over their lifetimes, the dangers would have been more frequent. (Of course, both purposes for fertility and protection were possibly in effect.) The latter interpretation would fit well with the assertions by the Haalands (1996: 297) and Bailey that "[the meaning of female figurines] emerges in the crises of the life cycle" (Bailey 1996: 16).

Familiarity Breeds Contempt

The proportional representation of certain animal species, if one can be confident in such an undertaking, often demonstrates that the figurines and diet are not necessarily correlated. Özdoğan decried the absence of pig figurines during the Round and Grill building subphases at Çayönü during the times that pigs figured so prominently in the settlement's food resources. Similarly, at 'Ain Ghazal, goats accounted approximately 50% of the animal bones during the MPPNB period, yet only one and perhaps two animals could be assigned to this category; cattle figurines, which were so predominant, were still morphologically wild (although the domestication process may have been well underway), accounting for only 8% of the animal bones (although this would have meant a sizeable contribution to the menu) (Köhler-Rollefson et al. 1993: Table 1). This might imply that some figurines were not especially imbued with any "power", such as goats and the dog at 'Ain Ghazal and pigs at Çayönü, and that such figurines may have been made as toys for (and even by) children (see also Voigt 1983: 187).

Size *Does* Matter, Probably, At Times

For the most part figurines of clay are relatively small, often in the 4–10 cm range for maximum dimension. At other times, relatively huge images are created, as was the case of reliefs and free-standing sculptures at Göbekli Tepe, Nevalı Çori, Jericho, and 'Ain Ghazal. It would seem likely that those people called on or allowed to view the large objects were expected to be impressed with them, and that this "awesomeness" had a very different dimension of meaning than, for example, small clay figurines. Even within the "monumental" statuary at 'Ain Ghazal, there is a clear separation of two sizes: the small busts and the standing statues (with legs and feet) that tower over the former. The stark contrasts, especially in the 1983 cache, certainly imply a distinction in what each group represents, and it has been suggested that this dichotomy might reflect mythical ancestral lines of both clan and lineage (or some similar divisions) connections of the inhabitants of the settlement (Rollefson 2005b: 7).

Who Is Involved?

Many of the ritual activities that took place immediately preceding and during the Neolithic were probably relatively democratic in the sense that some of the activities that involved "external" forces may have directly involved each person. Could some figurines have been made by the commoner in the village, or could figurines become "powerful" only through the intervention of shamans or, possibly associated with the cult rituals, full-time priests? Once a figurine was made, was it possible for an individual to keep it for some period (until its effectiveness was successful, perhaps) before discarding it? Every human figurine (except one) from 'Ain Ghazal (including a PPNC stone specimen) had been broken, and the pattern suggests intentional fracture, presumably (?) to release the "power" that inhabited the piece, and states of fragmentation are similar throughout the Near East (e.g., Voigt 1983: 187). (The exception at 'Ain Ghazal appears to be a small vignette that may have represented a personal commentary; cf. Rollefson 1986: 47.)

The personal or domestic use of figurines is supported to a great extent by the wear patterns on many of them (Voigt 1983), and their high numbers in many sites also supports this idea. Bailey notes that the small three-dimensional objects can be held and carried, which invokes a sense of intimacy when there is direct personal contact of the participant, a "physical interaction," with the spiritual world (Bailey 2005: 20).

Why Make Figurines?

The answer to this question may seem obvious, but there is more to it than simply saying "because the people felt that the figurines could help them." But why were the people in trouble to begin with? This question actually lies at the heart of the entire conference: the consequences of the Neolithic transition.

We cannot be certain that mobile Near Eastern Paleolithic hunter-gatherer groups did not make figurines; Upper Paleolithic groups in Europe clearly did manufacture small, portable figurines and images of both humans (usually females) and animals, and created wall carvings and veritable art galleries. To some extent, this visual expression of ritually oriented activity may have been associated with a semi-sedentary and even sedentary situation, as at Dolni Vestonice. In the Levant, cave walls appear to have been inappropriate for parietal art, and it is highly possible that archaeological visibility is playing its inevitable hand should the figurines have been made of organic materials (viz. the wooden figurines from Nahal Hemar; Bar-Yosef and Alon 1988).

But there are also clear examples of changes in social settings that began to emerge with the Natufian/Late Epipaleolithic period and flourished in the Neolithic. Sedentism and population growth are not necessarily consistent with the quality of life, even if food production could eventually establish a stable food supply. Day-to-day, face-to-face confrontations with growing numbers of people must have

had some socio-psychological impact throughout the eastern Mediterranean, and the simple solution of leaving the crowded scene, which was so easily available among hunter-gatherers, was much more difficult with the investments individuals made in house construction and the direct connection with a particular piece of ground for food production, as well as for burials (of at least some members of the family) and what these aspects mean for social identity. Even with stable food supplies, life in the growing villages produced such drawbacks as trash accumulation and sewage disposal, both of which could become vectors for disease. The increasing reliance on, and intimate physical association with, domesticated animals was also a threat to health, as the cases of tuberculosis at PPNC 'Ain Ghazal attest (Najjar et al. 1996). With the evident evacuation of the West Bank and the Jordan Valley at the end of the MPPNB, competition became especially intense for farmland, and the packing of populations into older highland Jordan settlements, as well as the founding of densely populated new settlements in previously under-populated areas in the southern Jordanian plateau, created circumstances where "strangers" inhabited one's home town (cf. Kohler, this volume, where kinship became subordinated to civic solidarity).

The permanent architecture of farming settlements, whether of small PPNA hamlets or LPPNB megasites, portrays a superficial picture of stability and perhaps contentment. But life (and discomfort and disease and death) inside the settlements may have been much less satisfactory, and appeals to the spirit world to assuage – if not to correct outright – the situation could have been a principal focus of everyday life. Figurines, like modern placebos, may have been at least partially successful in a psychosomatic way, for their creation and use continued for millennia.

The NDT in the Perspective of Ritual Activity

Practices of religion and superstition (usually not easily separated) often reflect attempts to accommodate social needs with perceived threats in the natural and social environments. The situation at 'Ain Ghazal might be instructive in how ritual activity was a response to strains that Neolithic society suffered, and how actions were taken to ameliorate those pressures. In terms of small, "personal", or "domestic" images, in the earliest occupational phase at 'Ain Ghazal (MPPNB) nearly 200 clay figurines were recovered, representing 40 humans and 155 animals.[1] In the succeeding LPPNB only 3 human figurines were recovered, as well as 15 animal figurines. PPNC contexts supplied 8 human and 20 animal figurines, and the Pottery Neolithic Yarmoukian deposits provided 8 human figurines and 12 animal representations.

These absolute counts by themselves are suggestive, but they become even more meaningful when consideration is paid to the amount of area/volume sampled for

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[1] Although some of the figurines could be identified as females, many were obscure in terms of sex, a situation common in most archaeological situations in the Near East. Figures for other sites will not discriminate between males and females.

these periods. The MPPNB period at 'Ain Ghazal was investigated over ca. 250 m^2 (and something like 300 m^3, although this has not been verified at this stage); for the LPPNB, almost 1, 200 m^2 have been sampled (and roughly 600 m^3), whereas PPNC layers were examined over more than 1, 500 m^2, and the Yarmoukian period over some 1, 200 m^2. However, these numbers conflate area and population density, which are definitely variable over the occupation of the site; cubic meters for both the PPNC and Yarmoukian periods are roughly equivalent to the areas sampled.

The comparisons of the numbers of figurines with the sampled areas/volumes are related to the population of the 'Ain Ghazal settlement, although the correlation is certainly not one-to-one. Although MPPNB 'Ain Ghazal began as a relatively large village (2 hectares? cf. Rollefson and Köhler-Rollefson 1989), it grew to about 5–6 hectares by 9,500 calBP, with perhaps 800–1,000 inhabitants by the end of the period. The sudden growth of the settlement at the beginning of the LPPNB (doubling in size and population in a few generations) resulted in populations that reached between 2,000 and 3,000 or more by 8,900 calBP, when population pressures on the environment resulted ultimately in a major depopulation of the town (and the region; cf. Rollefson 1997). The PPNC population had fallen to perhaps only several hundred residents, and during the final phase of permanent settlement at 'Ain Ghazal, Yarmoukian residents perhaps ranged between 100 and 200 people. For 'Ain Ghazal, then, figurine production and use were clearly most intensive during the MPPNB, after which these small images lost much of their significance in general domestic importance. A parallel to this reduction of physical ritual paraphernalia is seen by the sudden disappearance of the MPPNB plastered skull cult in the southern Levant and the disappearance of plaster statuary in the central Levant.

It is not easy to compare the changes at 'Ain Ghazal with what happened elsewhere in the Near East. First, many excavated sites did not entail as long as a Neolithic sequence, with many containing only one or two main subphases of the Neolithic. Second, for some deeply stratified sites, figurines are described but no mention is made of the strata from which they appeared; a case in point is Çayönü, although Özdoğan mentions that most of the figurines come from the "Second Stage" at the site (A. Özdoğan 1999: 59). Third, in many cases the numbers of figurines may be provided (but not always), but it is not simple to interpret these numbers without knowing the relative volumes of excavated sediments, nor with little indication of the numbers of people inhabiting settlements during particular Neolithic periods. Nevertheless, it seems that figurine manufacture reached a peak during the MPPNB, and that there was a major drop-off in production in the LPPNB and later times.[2]

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[2] There is one principal exception to this pattern. Contenson's excavations at Tell Ramad produced a total of 9 figurines (1 human and 8 animals) in layer 1 (dated to the MPPNB), while 474 figurines (270 humans and 204 animals) derived from layer II, ascribed to the LPPNB. Notably, Tell Ramad also has the only plastered skulls from the LPPNB (layer II).

Concluding Remarks

The issues surrounding figurine production remain obscure to a great degree, and much of what has been discussed above reflects at least some degree of consensus among prehistorians working in the Near East, but this should not be taken to mean that we "know" what those small (and large) pieces of clay and stone represent. One anecdote from the recent past serves as a cautionary tale. In 1990–1991 while on sabbatical in India, we revisited a village where Dr. Ilse Köhler-Rollefson was involved in a project that involved veterinary care of camels owned by local inhabitants. Within a few minutes of arrival, six or seven children came into the house where we were speaking with some of the camel owners and presented Köhler-Rollefson with six or seven sun-dried clay figurines of camels that these children had made, well formed and complete with string reins. These precious gifts are curated now, and third millennium AD archaeologists may have a field day explaining the cache they excavated from a central German farmstead, where the bones of camels are certainly unrepresented in the middens.

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