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Fifth Millennium Anthropomorphic Figurines in Southeastern and Central Anatolia: Comparative Museum Research

Ellen BELCHER

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FIFTH MILLENNIUM ANTHROPOMORPHIC FIGURINES IN SOUTHEASTERN AND CENTRAL ANATOLIA: COMPARATIVE MUSEUM RESEARCH

Ellen BELCHER*

The Halaf cultural horizon occurred during the fifth millennium B.C.¹ and extended throughout upper Mesopotamia, including southeastern Anatolia. Halaf material culture is well-known for its imaginative and beautifully made architecture, polychrome-painted pottery, geometric stamp seals and figurines. The regional character and variation of Halaf figurine assemblages however, is poorly understood, particularly in southeastern Anatolia. My research and study of these figurines reveals distinct southeastern Anatolian styles and technologies, some of which demonstrate direct connections to central Anatolia.

This article presents preliminary conclusions from a comparative analysis of contemporaneous anthropomorphic figurines belonging to the Halaf and Chalcolithic cultures conducted at museums and ongoing excavations in central and southeastern Turkey.

Geography of Halaf Figurines

Not all Halaf settlements are known to have made and used figurines, but they were quite common across the broad horizon of Halaf culture encompassing southeastern Turkey, northern Syria and northern Iraq (Map: 1). Figurines are known from Halaf settlements which cluster in the upper Euphrates, Khabur and Tigris river-valleys up to the Amanus Mountains, which are the western extent of fifth millennium Mesopotamia. Remarkably, figurines from Halaf settlements in northern Syria and Iraq illustrate regional styles only distantly-related to those of southeastern Anatolia although they originate from settlements geographically nearby.

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¹ Dates in this article are un-calibrated; the Halaf culture occurs in the sixth millennium, calibrated.
In this period, communication of anthropomorphic imagery mainly followed east-west trade routes perhaps following the Anatolian steppe. At least for the factors that influenced figurine production, north-south communication appears to have been less important. Indeed, very few Halaf settlements and no figurines have been found along the Syrian Euphrates. A lacuna in the geography of Halaf figurines in the extreme southeast of Anatolia probably reflects a historical lack of excavated sites rather than actual occurrence.

Geography of Fifth Millennium Central Anatolian Figurines
Figurines are distributed across several fifth millennium Chalcolithic settlements in Central Anatolia, including Canhasan, Çatalhöyük West, Köşk Höyük, Güvercinkayaşı, Kuruçay Höyük, Hacilar and Aphrodisias. The style and technology of these assemblages show a regional character that will not be discussed here; the purpose of my study is to identify an inter-regional relationship to Mesopotamia.

Eastern connections have been established for objects found alongside figurines at a few central Anatolian sites. For instance, Halaf style stamp seals were found at Köşk Höyük (Öztan, 2001). Also, painted pottery similar to that from late Halaf levels at Domuztepe has been found at Çatalhöyük West, Yumuktepe-Mersin and Canhasan. Central Anatolian figurines give evidence of an extended east-west exchange of ideas, ideology and imagery that may have traveled together with these stylistic techniques. Raw materials such as obsidian, probably also traveled on several east-west routes. Well traveled routes such as those over the Taurus Mountains and through the Cilician Gates are well documented in later periods.

Museum Research
In order to compare figurine assemblages from sites in Southeastern Anatolia, in the summers of 2000 and 2002, I studied Halaf figurines in the museums of Şanlıurfa and Diyarbakır, as well as at several ongoing excavations. In the summer of 2006, I traveled west to study two small groups of anthropomorphic figurines from the central Anatolian sites of Aphrodisias, in the Aphrodisias Museum, and

2 New Halaf excavations in the Mardin and Siirt regions may soon yield more examples. Recently a figurine fragment was found in the 2006 excavations Kerküşli Höyük, in the Mardin region; see Aslı Erim-Özdoğan, 2008.
Güercinkayasi, in the Aksaray Museum. The evidence suggests that Halaf artistic communication may well have extended across the Taurus Mountains, beyond the traditional borders of Mesopotamia. This research is beginning to show that some of the figurine styles from Halaf sites in southeastern Anatolia—especially those from the site of Domuztepe—may connect to figurines from central Anatolia.

Typology of Fifth Millennium Halaf and Anatolian Figurines

It is not generally understood that the best-known 'classic' Halaf figurine type is actually from a small chronological and geographic window of the Halaf horizon that does not include Anatolia. This type, representing a curvaceous seated female with arms supporting exaggerated breasts and hands clasped at the sternum occurs in abundance at late Halaf settlements in Northeastern Syria and Northwestern Iraq. Exaggerated features were often decorated with polychrome stripes while the hands, heads and feet were abbreviated. Most figurine types from that region are created of clay and can sit on a flat surface without support.

While a few features of Anatolian Halaf figurines resemble those from Syria and Iraq, most possess distinctly Anatolian features, some of which are similar to contemporaneous figurines from central Anatolia. Anatolian types from both southeastern and central Anatolia are noticeably less curvaceous. Many are quite flat, almost two dimensional figurines rendered in both clay and stone, and several are represented in standing poses. Many Anatolian figurines cannot be displayed on flat surfaces without support. There is much variation and special attention made to modeled details on figurine heads, of which only a few examples survive. This contrasts with minimal delineation or decoration of the torso, breasts and arms. Decoration is usually limited to incision, light washes and punctation, and perhaps inlay. These differences in figurine styles contrast with a somewhat homogeneous material culture of pottery, seals and architecture throughout the Halaf horizon. A special focus of this project are the figurines from Domuztepe, which were made and used at the western edge of Mesopotamia, and show little connection to Halaf styles, although they were found amongst a recognizable Halaf material culture.

3 Research was supported in 2000 by a C. V. Starr dissertation grant, Columbia University, in 2002 by the Center for the Ancient Mediterranean, Columbia University and in 2006 by the Research Foundation/ City University of New York. I thank the General Directorate of Cultural Heritage and Museums and in particular Levent E. Vardar for granting me permission to conduct this research.

4 Examples include Von Oppenheim 1943, taf. CV: 1-18; Mallowan 1938: fig. 5: 1-9; 11 amongst many others.
HALAF FIGURINES FROM SOUTHEASTERN ANATOLIA

Çavi Tarlası Figurines, Şanlıurfa Museum§ (Drawing: 1)

At the site of Çavi Tarlası, on the upper Euphrates, the late Halaf figurines found show distinctly Anatolian variations on Halaf themes. With the exception of one limestone figurine6, all of the figurines from this site are molded in clay. The distinctive features of these figurines demonstrate an Anatolian figurine style loosely resembling other Halaf types. Arms are abbreviated to short stubs and are attached to a very flat upper torso with small appliqué breasts. Most striking are figurines that feature a hole that takes the place of a head and neck (1a-b), which allowed for the insertion of interchangeable heads that could have been made of different materials. Detached figurine heads were not found at this site; perhaps they were made of perishable materials?

Seated examples (1d-e) feature legs that extend well below the base of the figurine. This type of figurine would need support when displayed, such as a small stool, or perhaps it was designed to sit on the edge of a shelf. Incised lines and sometimes a red wash comprise the only decoration; in some examples a navel is represented by punctuation.

Girikihaciyan Figurines, Diyarbakır Museum’ (Drawing: 2)

Figurines from late Halaf levels at Girikihaciyan are also distinct Anatolian types of clay figurines. One standing figure (2a) is very flat with incised decoration; holes show where appliqué breasts had once been attached. Another standing figurine (2b) is columnar with small appliqué breasts. A few leg fragments, (2e) when attached to the torso, may have also extended below the base, meaning these figurines also would require support for display purposes. No figurine heads found at this site, although breaks at the necks of these figurines show that they were once attached.

§ Thank you to Alwo Von Wickede for his permission to study the Çavi Tarlası figurines and to Eyüp Bucak for facilitating my study of them at the Şanlıurfa Museum.

6 ÇT84-2, on exhibit in the Şanlıurfa Museum; see Von Wickede and Herbordt 1988: abb. 5: 1.

7 Thank you to Patty Jo Watson for granting me permission to study the Girikihaciyan figurines and to the staff of the Diyarbakır Museum for facilitating my study there.
Three clay figurines were found at the early Halaf site of Fistsikli Hoyuk. One figurine is a flat, standing type with arm stubs (3a), similar to later examples from Çav Tarsa. Holes for attachment of appliqué breasts remain and incisions decorate the waist and navel. Another example similar to this one was also found in the same level. A less carefully made figurine (Fig. 3b) may represent a standing male. Attachment scars suggest that an appliqué phallus was represented, but is now broken off.

Early Halaf figurines found in the Arnuq B settlement at Tell Kurdu are all made of clay and are portrayed in Anatolian styles. One fragment (4b) is a standing flat type with arm stubs. This example is also incised and punctated to represent the female pudenda. Another columnar shaped fragment is decorated with fingernail marks (4d). A third example may represent a skirted kneeling female (4c). A head fragment (4a) is unique in that it is the only figurine example of this time with modeled ears. A complete figurine (4e) shows no detail or decoration on its pointed head.

The last Halaf figurine assemblage from southeastern Anatolia I present here is from the site of Domuztepe, an early and late Halaf settlement at the western edge of Mesopotamia. The prolific community of artists at Domuztepe produced a diverse and quite skilled assemblage of artifacts, including pottery, figurines, pendants and seals, many in Halaf styles, but others—especially the figurines—having stylistic and material connections with central Anatolia.

The figurines found at Domuztepe differ dramatically from other Halaf examples both in style and technology. Apart from a figurine-vessel, so far no
clay anthropomorphic figurines have been found. A stone head fragment, perhaps of a male (5b) was found in early Halaf levels. Facial hair and a headdress are represented by incision, and it may have been painted with a light red wash, of which only scant traces remain. The deep eyes probably once held inlay, but I have not yet had a chance to analyze the material remaining in these holes. A suggestively-shaped pebble (5c) was decorated with incision to create a phallic symbol that might also be interpreted as a seated figure.

A remarkable and unique anthropomorphic-vessel of a standing female was found in late Halaf levels (5a). Although the paint is nearly gone, faint traces of an eye (reconstructed in the drawing) can be detected on the neck of the vessel. The breasts and thin arms are appliquéd, and the hands are represented with splayed fingers. Diagonally hatched painted bands encircle the hips, knees and ankles, perhaps representing beaded ornaments. Beads have been found at every area of excavation at Domuztepe, perhaps fallen from similar body ornaments. The left foot is slightly upturned and gives the impression that the figure is walking. Indeed, even in its fractured state, this vessel stands without support on its feet. Wear on the soles of the feet and sides show that this vessel was displayed standing and was often held. Perhaps it was used to hold and pour liquids.

No close parallels to this extraordinary vessel have yet been found. In fact only a few anthropomorphic vessels are known from contemporaneous sites, including lone examples from Yarım Tepe II, Arpachiyah, Köşk Höyük, Canhasan and Çatalhöyük West, as well as further afield in western Anatolia and the Balkans. Each example is unique and rendered in different sizes, poses and styles, although all may have been made with clay-slab technology similar to Domuztepe. It seems that only the concept, as well as perhaps the meaning and use of anthropomorphic vessels was communicated between these sites, while style and overall imagery was the invention of local artisans.

A type of figurine not found at any other Halaf sites, but common at Domuztepe, are several examples of flat, pendant-figurines (5a-d). String-wear at the piercings proves that these were suspended from these holes, possibly to be worn as jewelry, hung on a wall, or sewn to clothing. Some are pierced at the pubic area, meaning they may have hung upside down. Two more complete figurines suggest that the heads may also have been pierced (5a, d). These figurine-pendants are of locally available stones which are ground, polished and incised. The only parallels to this type are found at sites west of Domuztepe in central Anatolia.
Other objects, such as beads, pendants, seals, mirrors and stone bowls show are the products of the prolific stone workshops of Domuztepe, and are made of local and imported materials, such as obsidian. Analysis of the obsidian and other non-local stones is ongoing, but we expect results to conclude that at least some must be from Cappadocian sources, further supporting central Anatolian connections.

CENTRAL ANATOLIAN CHALCOLITIC FIGURINES

Aphrodisias Figurines, Aphrodisias Museum (Drawing: 7)

The site of Aphrodisias brings to mind the amazingly well preserved classical settlement, which has been under excavation for more than a century. In the 1960s, soundings were excavated into three mounds on the site, in order to investigate the prehistoric roots of Aphrodisias (Joukowsky 1986). Three figurines date to the earliest Chalcolithic levels of soundings on the 'Pekmez' mound. Other figurines from 'prehistoric' soundings date to Bronze Age levels which are too late for consideration in this project.

Examples from this level are a type called ‘Killia figurines' which are named for a figurine purchased near Troy said to have come from Killia. This type is a western Anatolian figurine tradition found at several Chalcolithic sites which perhaps continues into the early Bronze Age. Recently a middle Chalcolithic figurine workshop was found at Kulaksızlar, where 'Killia' and other figurines were produced (Takoğlu 2005). The close similarities of the 'Killia' figurines to the pendant-figurines at Domuztepe show that this type also traveled over the Taurus Mountains into Mesopotamia. Since all known examples are of local stone, the imagery may have traveled on another, perhaps ephemeral material, such as felt, leather or textiles. 'Killia' type figurine-pendants have also been found at Canhasan, mid-way between Aphrodisias and Mesopotamia.

These two Aphrodisias examples are cut, ground and polished from locally available stone into an overall flat shape with features rendered in low relief on

12 Unfinished objects of imported materials are abundant at Domuztepe, such as a group of unfinished obsidian beads; see Campbell, 2007: 18.
13 I thank R. R. Smith for permission to study these figurines and the Aphrodisias museum staff for facilitating my study there.
the front. An upper torso fragment (7a) represents a figure with bent elbows and hands the on upper chest indicated by notching on the side and low relief. A second figurine (7b) is in the same pose, but without as much detail. The heads of both these figurines have broken off. A third figurine(7c) from the same level, may give clues to what the heads may have looked like; this figurine is roughly carved from a schist pebble.

Güvercinkayası Figurines, Aksaray Museum15 (Drawing: 8; Figs: 1, 2)

Güvercinkayası is a middle Chalcolithic site situated in Central Anatolia, 29 km northeast of Aksaray. The site is on a well protected rock outcrop, overlooking a wide river plain and was continually occupied for 400 years (Gülçur and Pirat, 2005). All examples of figurines from this site excavated thus far were hand molded from clay although some animal figurines have stone inlay.

Two similar seated figurines (8c-d) sit without support on their bases leaning backwards so that the heads, which have now broken off would have been gazing upwards. Both of these have arms that are reduced to arm stubs, perhaps suggesting bent arms (given the evidence from Aphrodisias). The lack of adult body-features suggests that this type may represent a young person, perhaps a bundled baby. This type of figurine has parallels in central Anatolia; however, other than the arm stubs and flat base, it has no clear connection to Halaf Mesopotamia.

A seated figurine, (8b) found on the floor of a burnt structure is the earliest figurine found at Güvercinkayası and has parallels to examples in Mesopotamia. The wide thighs are molded together with a round bottom and a flat base on which it sits without support. The sharply bent legs are tucked up close to the lower torso with incised flat shins. A hole at the break in the torso reveals that this example may also have had interchangeable heads possibly of different materials, such as those from Çavuş Tarlası. The pulled up legs and rounded lower torso is very similar to late Halaf figurines from Tepe Gawra16 and Arpachiyah17, in northern Iraq, as well as several examples from nearby Kışk Hoyûk18.

15 I thank Sevil Gülçur for permission to study the figurines from Güvercinkayası. Thank you also to Yücel Kiper and the helpful staff of the Aksaray museum for facilitating my research.
16 See for example Tobler 1950, plate LXXXI: c-d, amongst others.
17 See for example Mallowan and Crukshank Rose 1935: figs. 47:2 and 3.
Two heads from later levels at Güvercinkayaşı are quite different from each other. One (Fig. 1) wears a high headdress, decorated by incision and has deep eyes ringed by appliqué which also may have held inlay. The second example (Fig. 2) has similar appliqué eyes; here the upper head and/or headdress has now broken off. The wide faces are similar to that of Domuztepe (5b), which also features a headdress and deep, possibly inlayed eyes. High headaddresses seem to have been in style across Mesopotamia and Anatolia in this period—and they can still be found as part of traditional dress in parts of Turkey today. It seems that in the fifth millennium Anatolia figurine heads could have a wide degree of variation, unlike Halaf figurine heads from sites in Syria and Iraq, which were much more standardized.

Conclusion

This study of contemporaneous fifth millennium central and southeastern Anatolian figurines reveals that there was more communication between the workshops of these two regions than previously supposed. Mesopotamian artisans at this time appear to have balanced local, regional and cultural styles with those from much further away in central Anatolia when making choices in figurine production. The result is a varied and imaginative corpus of figurines that crosses the traditional borders of Mesopotamia for influences that develop into uniquely Anatolian figurine types and styles. While more figurines remain to be studied, an east-west artistic exchange has tentatively been identified through this research.

Acknowledgments

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Map 1: Fifth Millennium Anatolian sites with figurines mentioned in article

Drawing 1: Examples of figurines from Çavi Tarlası

Drawing 2: Examples of figurines from Girikhaciyan
Drawing 3: Examples of figurines from Fistikli Höyük

Drawing 4: Examples of figurines from Tell Kurdu

Drawing 5: Examples of figurines from Domuztepe
Drawing 6: Examples of figurine-pendants from Domuztepe

Drawing 7: Examples figurines from Aphrodisias

Drawing 8: Examples of Figurines from Gövercinkayasi
Fig. 1: Figurine head fragments from Güvercinkayaşı

Fig. 1: Figurine head fragments from Güvercinkayaşı