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on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East

Volume 1

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Barbara Horejs, Christoph Schwall, Vera Müller,
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Transformation & Migration
Barbara Horejs and Christoph Schwall

Archaeology of Religion & Ritual
Edited by Vera Müller

Images in Context: Agency, Audiences & Perception
Edited by Marta Luciani

Islamic Archaeology
Edited by Markus Ritter and Mattia Guidetti

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Foreword to the 10th ICAANE Proceedings

The 10th anniversary of the International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East was held from 25th to 29th of April 2016 in Vienna, hosted and organized by the Institute for Oriental and European Archaeology (OREA) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. More than 800 participants from 38 different countries found their way to Vienna to celebrate the 10th anniversary of ICAANE with a wide range of 8 scientific sections, 28 workshops and round tables, a huge poster exhibition and a special section about 'Cultural Heritage under Threat'.

The topics in focus of this ICAANE covered traditional, as well as new fields, in relation to state-of-the-art approaches and methodologies. The general themes of transformation and migration, cultural landscapes, religion and rituals, environmental shifts, contextualized images, as well as economies and societies, are currently promising fields in archaeology and these proceedings give new insights into former Near Eastern societies. These general questions are obviously challenging topics in present times, too, a fact that is leading us archaeologists into a dialectic discourse of past and present social phenomena. This additional impact within our scientific community and beyond is underlining the ongoing fascination and power of Near Eastern archaeology. The first volume includes papers of the sections 'Transformation and Migration', 'Archaeology of Religion and Ritual','Images in Context' as well as 'Islamic Archaeology'. The second volume is dedicated to the sections 'Prehistoric and Historical Landscapes and Settlement Patterns', 'Economy and Society', and is completed by 'Excavation Reports and Summaries'. A number of presented posters are integrated in the theme relevant chapters too. I would like to express my sincere thanks to the editors of these sections, namely Teresa Bürge, Mattia Guidetti, Felix Höflmayer, Marta Luciani, Vera Müller, Markus Ritter, Roderick Salisbury and Christoph Schwall.

Altogether 28 workshops focussing on special research questions and themes demonstrated the ongoing dynamic and new inputs in Near Eastern archaeology. The engaged discussions of internationally high-ranked experts with young scholars was essential for the success and open atmosphere of the 10th ICAANE in Vienna. I would like to express my sincere thanks to the workshop organisers, who are also acting as editors for the separate workshop volumes, published as internationally peer-reviewed books in the OREA series of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, of which some are already in print, accepted or in preparation at the moment. The conference was delighted to have two keynotes given by Mehmet Özdoğan and Timothy Harrison; both pointed to the current political conflicts and related massive destruction of cultural heritage from different perspectives. In facing the current conflicts and continuing damage of cultural monuments in regions of the Near East, we are confronted with situations going far beyond the usual scientific challenges. Although we have to observe highly frustrating ongoing destructions and can hardly influence the general political situation, the archaeological

community is responsible for supporting, re-evaluating and advancing ongoing essential strategies in digital preservation of the cultural heritage and other current activities in that field.

Therefore, we decided to organize a Special Section within the 10th ICAANE about *Cultural Heritage under Threat*, where well-known experts and political authorities discussed the current challenges and future perspectives in a very fruitful and open atmosphere.

This special section was organized with the great support of Harald Stranzl, the Austrian Ambassador at UNESCO for the Austrian Ministry of Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs. The discussions and contributions were accomplished by signing the 'Vienna Statement' (s. below) by a total of 34 authorities for antiquities in Near Eastern countries, European institutions and stakeholders. My sincere thanks are expressed to Karin Bartl and her engagement in organizing this special section.

The 10th ICAANE aside its impact on international archaeology, can additionally be seen as a powerful boost for the archaeological endeavours in Austria and for our local scientific community, not at least visible in the fruitful cooperation of several archaeological institutions acting committedly in our Local Organising Committee: the Historical-Cultural Faculty and the Faculty of Philological and Cultural Studies (University of Vienna), the Egyptian and Near Eastern Collection of the Kunsthistorische Museum, the Austrian Archaeological Institute, members of the Austrian Academy of Sciences as well as the Institute for Oriental and European Archaeology. My sincere thanks go to Manfred Bietak, Vera Müller, Hermann Hunger, Bert Fragner, Regina Hölzl, Claudia Theune-Vogt, Michael Doneus, Markus Ritter, Christiana Köhler, Marta Luciani, Sabine Ladstätter, Karin Kopetzky and Angela Schwab for their engagement in the local committee and making this conference real. I extend sincere thanks for financial support to several Austrian and international institutions, which are The Austrian Federal Ministry of Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs, the University of Vienna, the City of Vienna, the Vienna Science and Technology Fund (WWTF), the Institute for Aegean Prehistory (INSTAP), the Austrian Orient Society/Hammer Purgstall Society and the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

The OREA institute took over the honourable duty hosting this conference with lots of effort and energy, all our institutes' members, students and scientists were involved in some parts and the OREA team together was making this conference running. Particular thanks and recognition also go to Angela Schwab, Ulrike Schuh and Christine de Vree. Finally, I thank the ICAANE Scientific Committee and the Harrassowitz Publishing House.

Prof. Dr. Barbara Horejs
Director of the Institute for Oriental and European Archaeology
Austrian Academy of Sciences

IMAGES IN CONTEXT: AGENCY, AUDIENCES & PERCEPTION

edited by M. Luciani

Refiguring the Body: From Terracotta Figurines to Plaques in Early Second Millennium Mesopotamia

Elisa Roßberger[1]

Abstract

The late third and early second millennium BCE saw the rise of the terracotta plaque production and the (temporary) end of figurines in southern Mesopotamia. This media-based transformation is usually considered a mere technological advance but we have to acknowledge that it coincides with new ways of visualizing the human form. I argue that profound differences in the perception and conceptualization of images lie at the heart of these changes. During this process depictions of male/female bodies moved from visual references to persons into generic representations of symbolic concepts.

Keywords: terracotta figurines, terracotta plaques, gender, body visualization, artistic genre change, Ur III, Isin-Larsa, Old Babylonian.

1. Introduction[2]

Thousands of images in clay have come down to us from late third and early second millennium Mesopotamia (Barrelet 1968; Legrain 1930; Opificius 1961; van Buren 1930; Wrede 2003). Many of them have been discussed for more than a century and a selected group of these images is frequently used to illustrate topics like 'daily life', 'popular religion' or 'sex and eroticism' in the Ancient Near East. Nevertheless, we still have difficulties in understanding their overall pictorial structure, their status as an artistic medium and the contextual realms they related to. Figurative clay objects have a long history in the ancient Near East and elsewhere. They can be produced on an *ad hoc* basis from a lump of clay and are found in all kinds of archaeological contexts, almost inevitably broken. While the simplicity and cheapness of figurine making would suggest great diversity and individual rendering, figurines of most periods follow circumscribed conventions, indicating widely accepted norms for their appropriate making and appearance, if not institutional production.

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1 Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, Institute for Near Eastern Archaeology.

2 This research was made possible through a post-doctoral fellowship from the Bayerische Gleichstellungsförderung (2015–2016) at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, and a travel grant from the Fritz-Thyssen-Foundation (2015), which allowed me to directly investigate terracotta plaques at the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago, the British Museum, and the Ashmolean Museum. I wish to thank M. Luciani for sending me an unpublished manuscript of her forthcoming article (Luciani in press), and K. Kaniuth for corrections and comments on an earlier version of this paper.

Research questions concerning terracottas usually tackle chronological, iconographical, functional or technological issues (e.g. Dales 1960; Opificius 1961; Barrelet 1968). Excavation reports and synthetic treatments group and discuss them in broadly defined motif groups (e.g. Klengel-Brandt and Cholidis 2006; Meyer and Pruß 1994; Wrede 2003; Pruß 2010), but leave little room for recognition of diversity and artistic change.[3] Visual culture studies informed research that seeks to understand pictorial variability within and between typological groupings in comparison to other artistic media and in relation to the artworks' function in specific cultural settings and social structures, remains rare. Furthermore, the range of haptic perceptions offered by the objects under investigation is often neglected.[4]

This paper discusses various trajectories for the transition from female and male *figurines* into terracotta *plaques* at late third and early second millennium BCE sites in southern Mesopotamia. I will argue that this is not only a technological or random stylistic change,[5] but part of a profound, culturally embedded re-conceptualization of figurative artworks in general and visualizations of the human body in particular.

To substantiate my point, I will use archaeological evidence from two large and reasonably well documented corpora of figurative terracotta objects excavated at Isin and in the Lower Diyala region (Tab. 1). The site of Tell Asmar (ancient Ešnunna) is particularly important since it allows us to follow up developments from Ur III to Isin-Larsa levels. The figurines and plaques from Iščali provide us with a large number of terracottas found in two well-stratified religious buildings from a circumscribed time-span lasting from the earlier 19th century to the mid-18th century BCE. Tell Agrab and Khafajeh yielded mostly figurines from Early Dynastic to Akkadian levels and relatively few terracotta plaques.[6] For Isin, most terracotta figurines and plaques come from Ur III to Old Babylonian contexts or can be dated to these periods on stylistic grounds.[7] While a fine-tuning of chronological placement from Ur III to Old Babylonian levels would be highly desirable and surely an asset for all future research, it is hard to achieve on the ground of the existing documentation. The situation is further complicated by the fact that well-fired terracotta figurines and plaques come more often than other objects from

3 For a similar critique see Langin-Hooper 2014: vii.

4 But see the study of A. Garcia Ventura and M. López-Bertran (2010) on Tell Asmar figurines venturing into this direction.

5 The transition from figurines to plaques is generally considered a technological 'evolution' following the necessities of increased demand (Spycket 1986: 80; Barrelet 1968: 86–95).

6 An unpublished Ph.D. thesis by Elise Auerbach (1994) brings together all plaques from the Diyala sites but leaves out the figurines.

7 First millennium terracottas from Isin include nine 'Persian rider figurines' (IB-3, -17, -628, -1027, -1406, -1265, -636, -372, -1974) and four plaques (IB-100, -130, -1001, -1034). For terracottas from Isin, see the contributions by B. Hrouda and A. Spycket in the preliminary excavations reports (Hrouda 1977; Spycket 1981, 1987, 1992a).

so-called 'secondary context' (fill, garbage deposits etc.), or surface collections. While these limitations should not restrain us from doing in-depth studies of what we have, they reduce our chances to arrive at clear-cut conclusions.

2. Visualizing the human body – representing individuals, types or symbols

Humans, and to a lesser degree animals, are the prime subjects of terracotta art; thus, the much discussed topics of the human body and its materialization in the visual arts come into focus.[8] It is generally assumed that habitual engagement with representations of the human form has strong repercussions on actual perception and knowledge of the body (e.g. Kohring 2014: 249). The idea is, that pictures of the body do not tell us what ancient people looked like, but take a stance on culture-specific ideals or their counterparts by shaping categories and defining what is appropriate and essential about the body within certain socio-cultural contexts. While they do not mimic reality, they translate habitual activities and body techniques related to specific situations into pictorial schemes and thus into just another layer of cultural semantics. Accordingly, we might investigate the role of corporeal iconography in the creation, dissemination and negotiation of social norms and ontological structures of past societies (cf. Kohring 2014: 249). We should be aware that not only changes in visual but also in haptic qualities of the objects under investigation might be essential for their meaning and function (Bailey 2014).

Such general reasoning sounds attractive for terracotta studies: First, because bodies figure so prominently, and second, because proximity between makers and consumers was close and therefore mutual repercussions were arguably more immediate than in other artistic media. However, a closer look reveals that we cannot speak of just *one* way of rendering the human body or of *one* trajectory of artistic development in late third and early second millennium terracotta production, but that we have to acknowledge the existence of different forms and combinations of schematization, stylization, and naturalism.[9] Moreover, iconographic and stylistic homogeneity within distinct motif groups varies greatly, with some groups being rather homogenous, others highly heterogeneous. This indicates that style, understood as a specific way of rendering, was less a matter of artistic ability but of necessity inherent in the figurative object's intended status and function. Stylistic homo-/heterogeneity mattered in two different ways: On the one hand to set visual themes apart, and on the other, to either highlight or balance differences within

8 See contributions in Borić and Robb 2008 for the current discourse on these topics.

9 For general thoughts on "… design features and social effects of schematic, stylized and naturalistic representations of bodies …" see Robb 2015: 174–176 with tab. 12.3.

a group. I argue that it is exactly these often overlooked differences that are indicative for the material images' place in cultural practice and social configuration.

3. The female body in clay: from figurines to plaques

In southern Mesopotamia terracotta production had almost ceased during Uruk and Early Dynastic times and restarted in significant numbers only in the Akkadian period (Pruß 2011–2013: 604, 606). The Ur III period saw an increase in figurines and this is also the time when terracotta *plaques* begin to appear (Barrelet 1968: 86–91).[10] In these early contexts, the ratio of figurines against plaques was still around 4:1 or higher (Tab. 1). Although the number of figurines slowly diminished, most Isin-Larsa contexts, like the Kitītum-Temple at Iščali, the houses below the Southern Building or the Snake Shrine at Tell Asmar, still produced considerable amounts of figurines – unfortunately many of them omitted from publication.[11]

As against common opinion, the ratio between female and male figurines is rather balanced at most sites and contexts (Tab. 1).[12] Hair-styles, body forms and attributes allow for clear-cut gender-attributions, the remaining lacunae derive from fragmentary states of preservation. While gender-specific differences are not pronounced in Akkadian figurines, they become the main focal point in Ur III and Isin-Larsa female figurines with their voluminous striated hair bundles, wide hips (often with hip belts), huge pubic triangles and hands holding the breasts (Fig. 1a–c). Clay pellets or bands were usually added for eyes and hair-do, and sometimes for necklaces, breasts and the belly button. Incisions further emphasize hair, neck-ornamentation and pubic hair. While some figurines have arms ending in stumps, similar to their predecessors in the Early Dynastic period, arms and hands are most often held in front of the body and close to the breasts. Occasionally, the backs are plastically modelled (e.g. Isin IB-1589; Spycket 1987: 51, Taf. 22), sometimes an incised line marks the spine but neither in an anatomically correct nor in an elaborate way.

Overall, the production of such a figurine must have been a multi-stage, sensual process pronouncing its most relevant features through additions and incisions. Douglass Bailey (2014) recently pointed out the strong 'cheirotic' aspects of pre-

10 The earliest examples of terracotta plaques come already from Akkadian levels at Tell al-Wilayah and from Late Akkadian/Ur III transitional levels at Khafajeh and Tell Asmar (Auerbach 1994: 74–76; Moorey 2001: 92).

11 All numbers derive from records in the Diyala Archaeological Database (DiyArDa) of the Oriental Institute, University of Chicago (<http://diyala2.uchicago.edu> last accessed: 20.09.2016). The field records available at this invaluable online resource include sketches for most objects, allowing for an at least approximate typological identification where no photographs exist.

12 At Uruk 11 female and 13 male figurines can be attributed to the Ur III to Old Babylonian period (Wrede 2003: 257, 303).

historic figurines, their potential appeal to the human sense of touch and not necessarily vision. Drawing on insights from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jacques Derrida and others, he argues that touch, – the making, grasping and holding such a small-scale object, – creates an 'immediacy of relationship' exceeding other forms of experience and, at points, transcending the limit between body and world (Bailey 2014: 32–33). Tactile knowledge makes for a more proximal understanding of the world; a person assessing the properties of an object manually (e.g. blind people) will first seek to apprehend the different properties of an object and then combine them into a whole (Bailey 2014: 34). Turning to our late third/early second millennium Mesopotamian female figurines, the lower parts of their bodies with closely converging legs and miniature or non-existent feet attract envelopment by the hand; added and incised features at specific areas on the upper parts of the body invite exploration of details with the fingers. This way of holding and handling may explain best their usual point of breakage at the waistline.

While the overall features of female figurines are rendered similarly over a wide geographic area and time-frame, their details are rarely identical, indicating that there was an unequivocal understanding of necessary features but no need to adhere precisely to a specific prototype or ideal. Even though we cannot reconstruct their exact place in ritual practice, we are probably right in following Nicholas Postgate's understanding of such figurines as the 'effigy of a human', the effigy of a specific anthropomorphic entity/individual, termed *ṣalmu* in Akkadian (Postgate 1994: 179–180).

Turning to the newly introduced medium of terracotta *plaques*, we observe two different strands of transformation for the 'nude female'. The first one adheres closely to the figurine tradition with an emphasis on the curvy body outline with extremely narrow feet, voluptuous hair-do and ornamentation, enlarged pubic triangles and occasionally applications for eyes and belly-buttons (Fig. 2a–c). The hands are either holding the breasts or are folded below. In some cases, the negative moulds for the plaques were pressed from positives with applied pellets, bands and incisions making them true derivates of the figurines. While there is no doubt about their unifying elements, stylistic variation in details remains as large as with the figurines.

However, another strand in the nude female terracotta plaque production appears already in the early plaque phase (i.e. Late Akkadian/Ur III contexts), and becomes more and more dominant in the second half of the 19th century BCE (Fig. 3a–c). Its youthful, 'barbie-doll'-like appearance with slim hips, minimally indicated primary sexual organs (without nipples or pubic hair), little ornamentation (simple rings around the neck) and a uniform mid-length hairstyle/hair tied up backwards (without curls or claps) set against a wide empty background follows a fixed prototype for the female body. The whole group is rather homogeneous, leaving little room for additions or modifications. We observe only slight stylistic variations in otherwise identical replications of a visual ideal for the naturally proportioned female physiognomy without any exaggerating features. The closely aligned feet are usually set on a small platform – stressing the stationary, objecti-

fied quality of the depicted.[13] The ovoid shape and convex back characterizing the female nude-plaques make the whole object well suited to be held in a hand. Tactile investigation of the depicted figure grasps the body as a whole, without much differentiation of specific properties or marked details – making these objects obviously more appealing to sight than to touch.

4. Men holding curved staffs as figurines and plaques

Male figurines are characterized by large beards and brimmed or pointed hats, often decorated with small pellets (Fig. 4a–c). Their hands and fingers are prominently visible, sometimes enlarged. They *hold* things: either an animal/kid (a), or: one or two curved staffs (b). The lower body is frequently missing, but if preserved, consists of a roughly cylindrical, substantive base maybe indicating a long dress, but essentially indecisive and similar to the shape of Akkadian figurines of both sexes. As with the female figurines, male figurines are modelled similarly all across Mesopotamia; nevertheless, each figurine is unique and interesting to touch, due to its multi-stage manufacture with added pellets, bands and incisions.

How did these figurines transform into plaques? There are surprisingly few direct translations of this popular motif, especially in the Diyala region where the figurines were frequent. The limited number of plaques depicting men holding kids ('animal/offering bearers') come mainly from sites further to the south like Isin, Tello and Ur (Auerbach 1994: 211–213; Opificius 1961: 149–154); they are stylistically far removed from the figurines and form part of the official iconography depicting the ruler/worshipper in front of a deity, well known from contemporary cylinder seals.

I suggest that typical pictorial features of the male figurines holding curved staffs continued in a more direct manner in form of the popular motif of the so-called 'bull-eared' or 'shrouded god' (Moorey 2001: 94, 116; Opificius 1961: 90–100) with pairs of axes, maces or lion-headed scimitars (Fig. 5a–c). Communalities are the large, rounded eyes, the awkwardly attached beards, the angular forms of the shoulders and the hands with distinct fingers held in front of the body. While the horned cap and large bull-ears characterize the plaques alone, we also find knobs or circular impressions resembling the pellet or impressed decoration on many of the figurines' hats (e.g. Fig. 5a, b), making it clear that they were still close to the compound nature of the figurine tradition.

The male body itself seems irrelevant in these representations; instead, the focus lies on what they hold or are equipped with. There are barely any indications of anatomical modelling or musculature; the lower body is never visible and in the case of the bull-eared gods encaged into a casket-like tube, that sometimes ends in a narrow

13 For a particularly clear representation of the plinth see Moorey 2001: 112, no. 114. 'Nude females' depicted on cylinder seals also regularly stand on a plinth (Blocher 1987: 100–104).

socket or naked feet standing on a narrow pedestal – similar to the one of the nude females mentioned earlier. This might be a way of rendering the depicted immobile, marking it as the depiction of an object not an animate being.

But there are two other trajectories of plaque development for the 'man with curved staff(s)' figurines. The first is the so-called 'hunter' – a bearded man with a bent weapon over one shoulder carrying prey (dead birds?) (Fig. 6a, b; Auerbach 1994: 82–83; cat. 135–138). The 'hunter' is among the earliest plaque motifs from Tell Asmar (Ur III contexts, Fig. 6a). Modified Isin-Larsa versions with a bow replacing the curved weapon come from Iščali (Fig. 6b) and Khafajeh, as well as from Ur (Diqdiqqeh; BM 116817, BM 1168821, Penn 32-40-28, Penn 31-43-447), Tello (Barrelet 1968: no. 252), and Fara (Heinrich 1931: F. 2267, pl. 76c).

A second group of plaques depicting 'men with curved staffs' are the so-called 'dancing combatants' (Fig. 7a–b). These are two men, usually wearing distinctive 'feathered' cylindrical headdresses,[14] combined with short kilts and a (threefold) belt, facing each other with their bent weapons. A frontal version of the motif is already known from mid-third millennium Mari in the form of a small double-statuette from the Ištar temple (h. 23 cm; Louvre AO 17568),[15] and reoccurs several centuries later on terracotta plaques from Ur and Tell Asmar (Fig. 7a; see also i.a. Ur/Diqdiqqeh: BM 127477, Penn 33-35-14).[16] Examples of the more common, and only slightly later,[17] profile version were discovered at several early second millennium sites including Tell Asmar, Iščali, Tell Harmal, Isin, Assur and Susa (Fig. 7b; Opificius 1961: 156–159; Auerbach 1994: 113–114; cf. Moorey 2001: 104); sometimes the two men flank a pole-like lama-goddess(-statue) set up on a small plinth (e.g. Opificius 1961: Nr. 392 and 393 from Khafajeh and Tell Harmal).

Unlike the 'bull-eared gods', the 'hunter' and 'dancing combatants'-plaques (at least in their profile version) display bodies *in motion*. The pictorial emphasis lies on naturalistic representations of well-formed physical and facial features, with delicately rendered hands and hairdos; special attention is paid to anatomical perfection and bodily smoothness, as well as to tendons and muscles. While we might refer to contemporary stone relief sculpture as prototypes, we still have to explain this discrete artistic development within the terracotta genre. Thematically, the 'dancing combatants' form part of a larger group of terracottas depicting musicians and danc-

14 Annubanini's first captive in the Sar-i Pol rock relief (II) wears a similar headdress (Börker-Klähn 1982: 139, Nr. 31).

15 M. Williamson interpreted their curved staffs as harps (Williamson 1969).

16 At Susa, several plaques depict a nude, bearded men holding one or two curved staffs in frontal or profile view (Spycket 1992b: 81–83, cat. 418–429). Similar plaques are known from Fara (Heinrich 1931: Taf. 75f) and Uruk (Wrede 2003: Nr. 1184–1189).

17 For instance, plaque As. 31:608 comes from an early Isin-Larsa level at the Palace of the Rulers at Tell Asmar (Ur-NinMAR.KI, ca. mid 20th century BCE), Is. 34:41 from the Kitītum-temple at Iščali, late Isin-Larsa levels III–IV, 19th to mid-18th centuries BCE (see <http://diyala2.uchicago.edu> last access 16.05.2017).

ers probably performing at festive occasions. The 'hunter' (in his profile version), continues into the famous 'figure with a mace' (Porada) or 'Gottkönig als Krieger' (Moortgat), identified by Frans Wiggermann (1987: 26–27) as the protective spirit *šēdu*. The rendering of this figure is typologically so closely constrained that the whole group appears extremely homogenous, similar to depictions of the supernatural heroes *kusarikku* and *laḫmu*.

5. Conclusions

Terracotta plaque production of the late third and early second millennium is not as uniform as it is often assumed, especially when considering the varying treatments of the body:

1) Handmade figurines of *nude women* developed from visually overloaded and ornamented forms with exaggerated but nevertheless abbreviated physical features into similar plaques, on the one hand, and into much finer modelled, naturally proportioned and extremely homogenous representations, on the other ('barbie-doll style'). The latter no longer highlight specific body components/additions but the overall form of the smooth figure set against a blank background. They are more interesting to look at than to make or to touch.

2) Handmade figurines of *men* do not show much body details but concentrate on headdress, beards and curved staff(s) held in front of the body – a visual focus that continues with the plaque motif of the 'bull-eared gods'. So-called 'hunter'- and 'dancing combatants'-plaques equally perpetuate the visual topos of the man with the curved staff but transfer it into motion with increasing emphasis on the semi-nude, muscular body. It finds its ultimate form in the 'figure with the mace'-motif, whose pictorial rendering is extremely closely constrained.

How can we explain these differences and developments? It should be clear by now, that I view style not as mere coincidence or matter of taste but as crucial factor for converting a culturally important subject into meaningful imagery. Changes in artistic 'Zeitgeist' (or period style) or claims for 'stylistic maturation' are not ends in themselves but result from changing social and cultural practices, norms and ideas that embed the artworks. Moreover, using arguments of technical inaptitude vs. artistic mastery distracts us from the observation of formal and stylistic differences that characterize a whole motif group and not just individual examples. Due to the universal availability of clay and the relative technological simplicity of production, terracottas are a particularly dynamic field of artistic production, reacting faster to changes in socio-cultural configurations. That is an important point if we want to argue that it is ultimately the consumers' not the producers' side that matters when explaining pictorial change.

I suggest, that differences in *referentiality* lie at the heart of the perceived changes: Male and female *figurines* referenced individuals (cf. Postgate 1994: 179–180), represented in stereotyped form but with additional features and none of them exactly alike,

making their production and handling a truly unique experience. We might understand them as material correlates of specific situations/practices that were part of essential social or supernatural encounters. Thus, they are conceptually related but miniaturized and economized forms of the so-called 'Beterstatuetten' (stone votive statuary).

On the contrary, typical and highly standardized *plaque* (and later on seal) motives like the 'nude female' or the 'figure with the mace' were generic representations of concepts established or at least universally promoted all over southern Mesopotamia by the end of the 3rd millennium BCE.[18] We might deduce further that the increasingly symbolic character of the perfect and beautiful female/male body caused the cultural need for exact replications and made them the main objective of Mesopotamian image production. [19] The end of the hand-made figurines and the beginning of the plaque era is more than a technological advance. It reflects profound conceptual changes in image consumption that caused the short-lived and unparalleled variety of the Isin-Larsa terracotta production.

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18 This argument needs elaboration and substantiation. A comprehensive study on changing patterns of artistic use and rendering of the human form in third and early second millennium Mesopotamia is currently underway (Roßberger in preparation; see also Roßberger in press). This study will focus particularly on terracotta objects but will take other artistic media as well as textual sources into account.

19 We may refer again to Postgate (1994: 183), who concludes that "… the standardization of the apotropaic figurines is a clear reflection of the concern for ritual correctness which is itself expressed in the care with which the exorcist's instructions are written down, lest an error be made. The good match is there because it was an end in itself."

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Site and selected archaeological contexts	Period	Anthrop. figurines (female/ male/untermined gender)	Terracotta plaques
Tell Asmar		174 (79/57/38)	74
Abu temple	*ED I–III*	6 (1/2/3)	0
Houses, stratum V	*Early Akkadian*	5 (3/0/2)	3
Houses, stratum IV	*Late Akkadian*	14 (7/5/2)	4
Houses, strata III–II	*Ur III*	5 (3/1/1)	3
Houses below Southern Building	*Early Isin-Larsa*	13 (3/10/0)	2
Southern Building	*Early Isin-Larsa*	4 (4/0/0)	1
Northern Palace, Earlier and Main Level	*Akkadian*	4 (3/0/1)	0
Northern Palace, Ur III and Isin Larsa	*Ur III to Isin-Larsa*	2 (2/0/0)	5
Palace of the Rulers, Ur III	*Ur III*	8 (6/1/1)	5
Palace of the Rulers, Isin Larsa levels	*Early Isin-Larsa*	19 (13/5/1)	3
Palace of the Rulers, unstrat./top layer	*Isin-Larsa*	40 (17/16/7)	8
Trench A	*Early Isin-Larsa*	4 (2/2/0)	8
Snake Shrine	*Early Isin-Larsa*	2 (0/2/0)	4
Iščali		77 (28/45/4)	214
Kititum temple	*Isin-Larsa*	30 (11/19/0)	71
'Gate temple'	*Isin-Larsa*	6 (2/3/1)	21
Tell Agrab		13 (6/6/1)	17
Šara Temple/Mound A, unstratified	*Isin-Larsa*	5 (1/3/1)	9
Khafajeh		27 (13/2/12)	32
Houses	*ED IIIa to early Akk.*	11 (4/1/6)	0
Akkadian Foundations	*Akkadian*	1 (1/0/0)	1
Mound C	*Isin-Larsa/Old Bab.*	2 (0/1/1)	8
Mound D	*Isin-Larsa/Old Bab.*	1 (0/0/1)	22
Isin		55 (29/16/10)	144
Gula temple	*Isin-Larsa/Old Bab.*	6 (1/1/4)	30
Gula North	*Isin-Larsa/Old Bab.*	1 (1/0/0)	17
Area 'Südost I'	*Isin-Larsa/Old Bab.*	5 (3/2/0)	15
Area 'Süd I'	*Ur III*	27 (17/5/5)	12

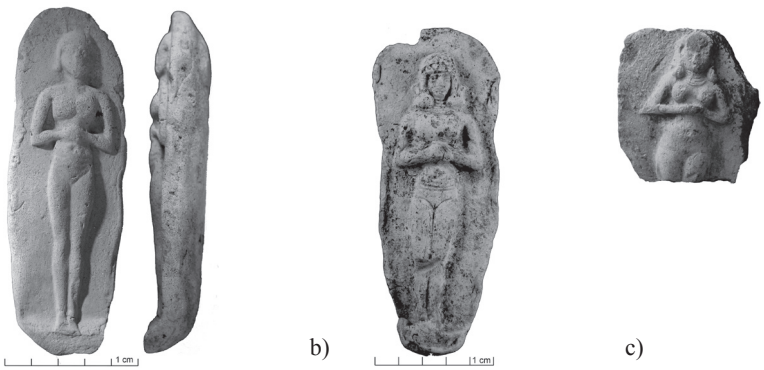
Table 1 Numbers of anthropomorphic figurines (classified by gender into male/female/undetermined) vs. plaques discovered in selected contexts in the Lower Diyala region and at Isin. All numbers based on Diyala Archaeological Database, Oriental Institute, Chicago (corrected by author) and LMU Isin Archive (courtesy of Kai Kaniuth)

a) b) c)

Fig. 1 Terracotta female figurines from: a – Isin (Ur III; IB-0285; © Isin Archive LMU Munich); b –Tell Asmar (Ur III; h. 11.3cm; As. 33:598, Frankfort/Lloyd/Jacobsen 1940: fig. 109c); c – As: 31.612 (late Akkadian; Diyala Archaeological Database) (b and c: courtesy of the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago)

a) b) c)

Fig. 2 Terracotta plaques with individually rendered, figurine-like depictions of the nude female from Tell Asmar: a – As. 31.672b (Ur III or early Isin-Larsa; h. 13cm; Diyala Archaeological Database); b – Kh. IV.34 (late Akkadian; h. 11cm; Diyala Archaeological Database); c – As. 31:213 (early Isin-Larsa; H. 8.5cm; Frankfort *et al.* 1940: fig. 125b (All courtesy of the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago)



a) b) c)

Fig. 3 Terracotta plaques with homogenously rendered depictions of nude females from: a – Tell Asmar (early Isin Larsa; As. 35:32; photos: author); b – Iščali (late Isin-Larsa; Ish. 35:62; photo: author); c – Isin (IB-1251; © Isin Archive LMU Munich) (a and b courtesy of the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago)

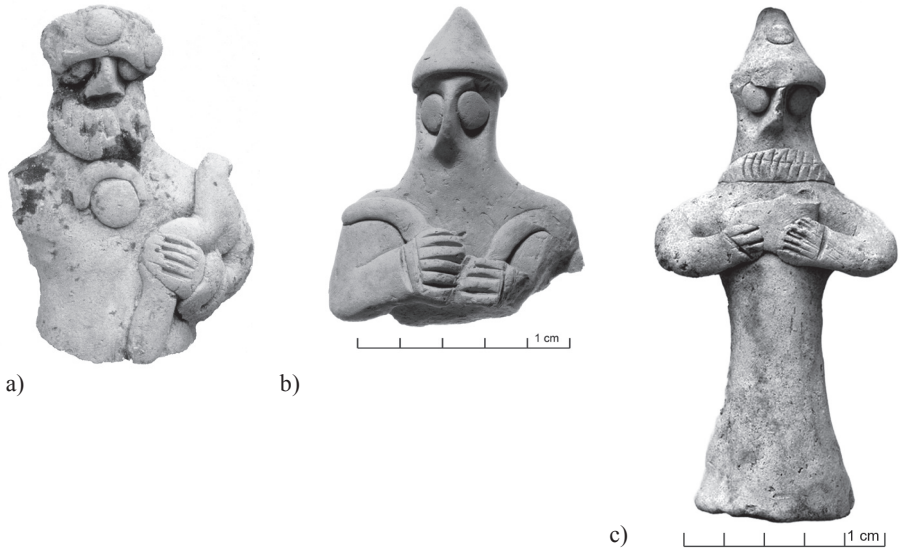


Fig. 4 Terracotta male figurines holding curved staff(s) or a kid from: a – Isin (IB-1914; © Isin Archive LMU Munich); b – Iščali (early Isin Larsa?; Ish. 35:213; photo: author); c – Tell Asmar (early Isin-Larsa; As. 30:57a; Frankfort *et al.* 1940: fig. 116a) (b and c: courtesy of the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago)

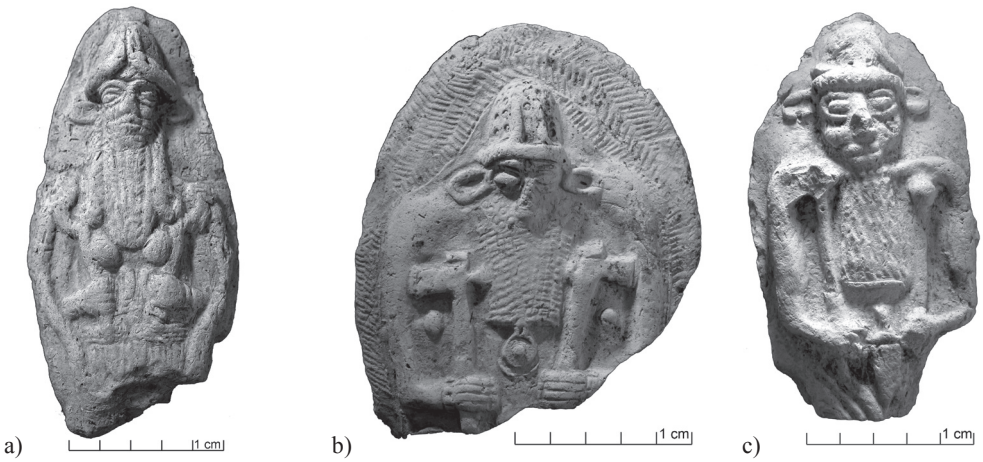


Fig. 5 Plaques depicting 'bull-eared gods' holding weapons from Iščali all from Isin-Larsa contexts: a – Ish. 34:208; b – Ish. 34:5; c – Ish. 34:100 (all photos by the author and courtesy of the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago)

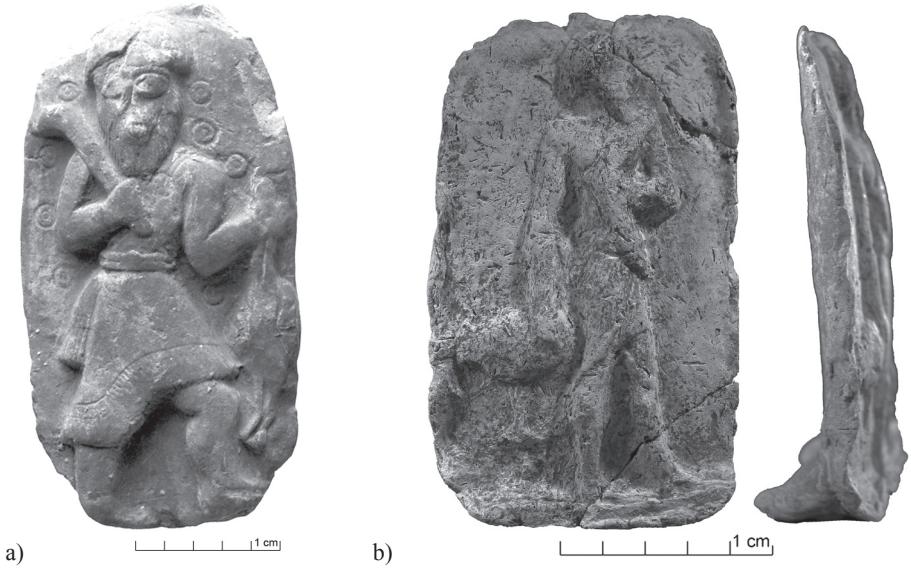


Fig. 6 Plaques depicting a 'hunter' from: a – Tell Asmar (Ur III; As. 32:525; Diyala Archaological Database); b – probably from Iščali (purchased 1930; OIM A 9336; photo: author) (both courtesy of the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago)

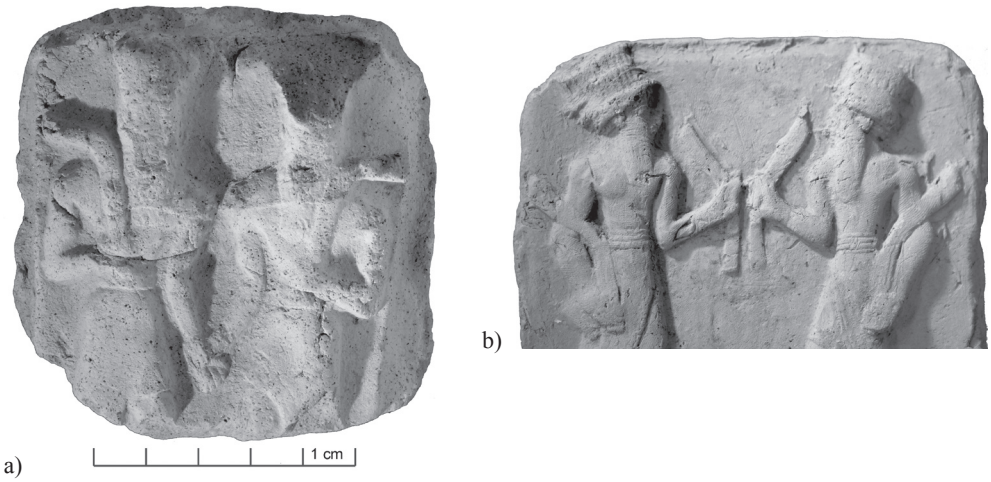


Fig. 7 Plaques depicting 'dancing combatants' with curved staffs: a – in frontal view from Tell Asmar (As. 34:78; photo: author); b – in profile view probably from Iščali (purchased 1930; OIM A 9346; photo: author) (both courtesy of the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago)