

The Life, Use and Value of a Neolithic figurine from Halaf



Halaf figurine. Excavated at Chagar Bazar, Syria, and dated to 6000-5000BC.

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Side view of the figurine.

First, some context...



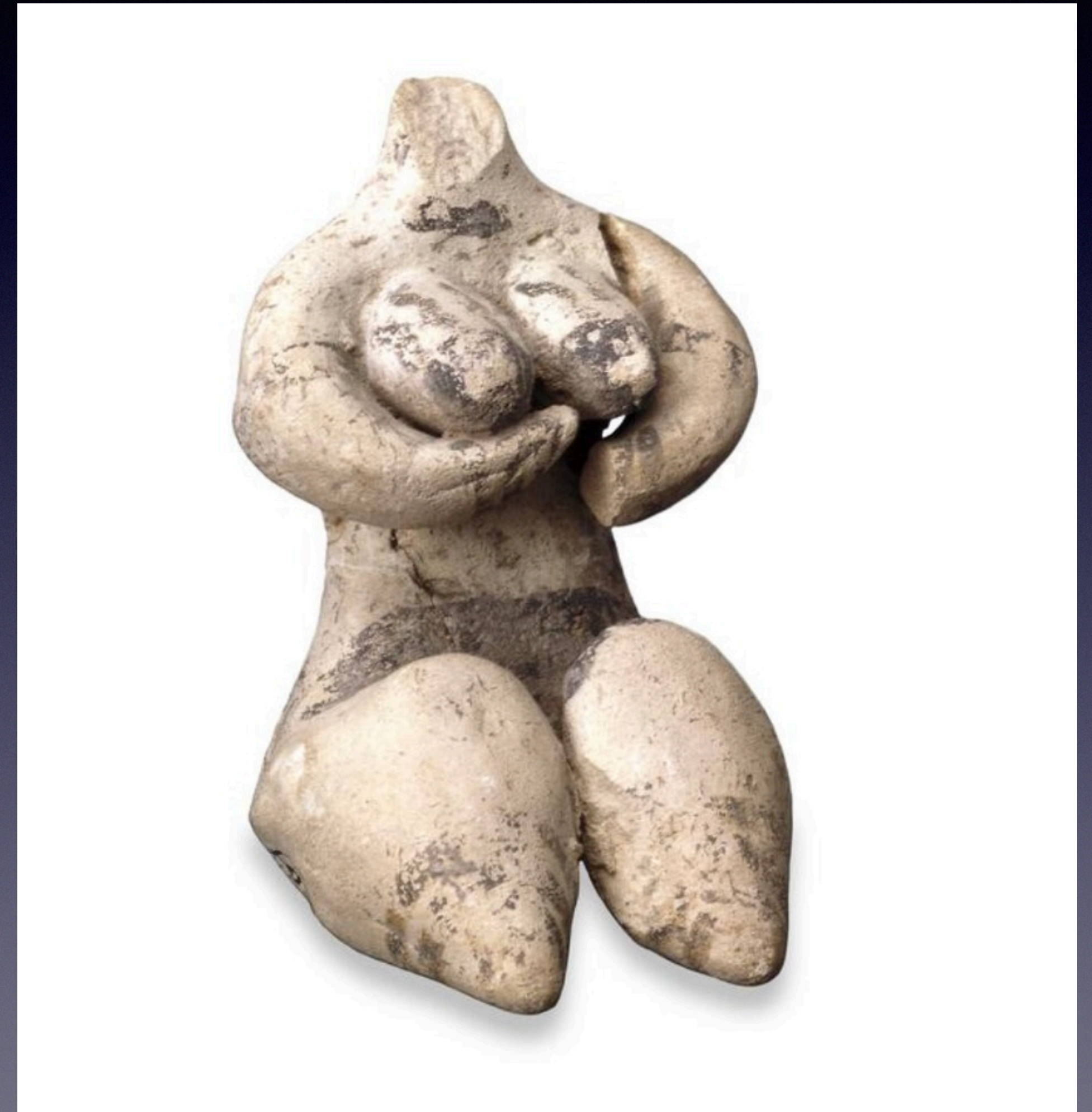
- Neolithic clay figurine.
- Dated 6000-5000BC.
- From Chagar Bazar, Syria.
- Seated lady, holding her hands underneath her breasts. Very round limbs, with no attention paid to anatomically accurate hands/feet. Her head and one hand is missing.
- Halaf refers to the culture that spread over northern Iraq, Syria and southern Turkey.

Map showing the spread of Halaf culture. Tell Halaf and Chagar Bazar have been circled.

The Life of the figurine

- Life is from the conception of the idea to the figurines destruction/deposition.
- Its 'use' as an object is most of its life.
- Specifics are difficult to determine?
- Social?

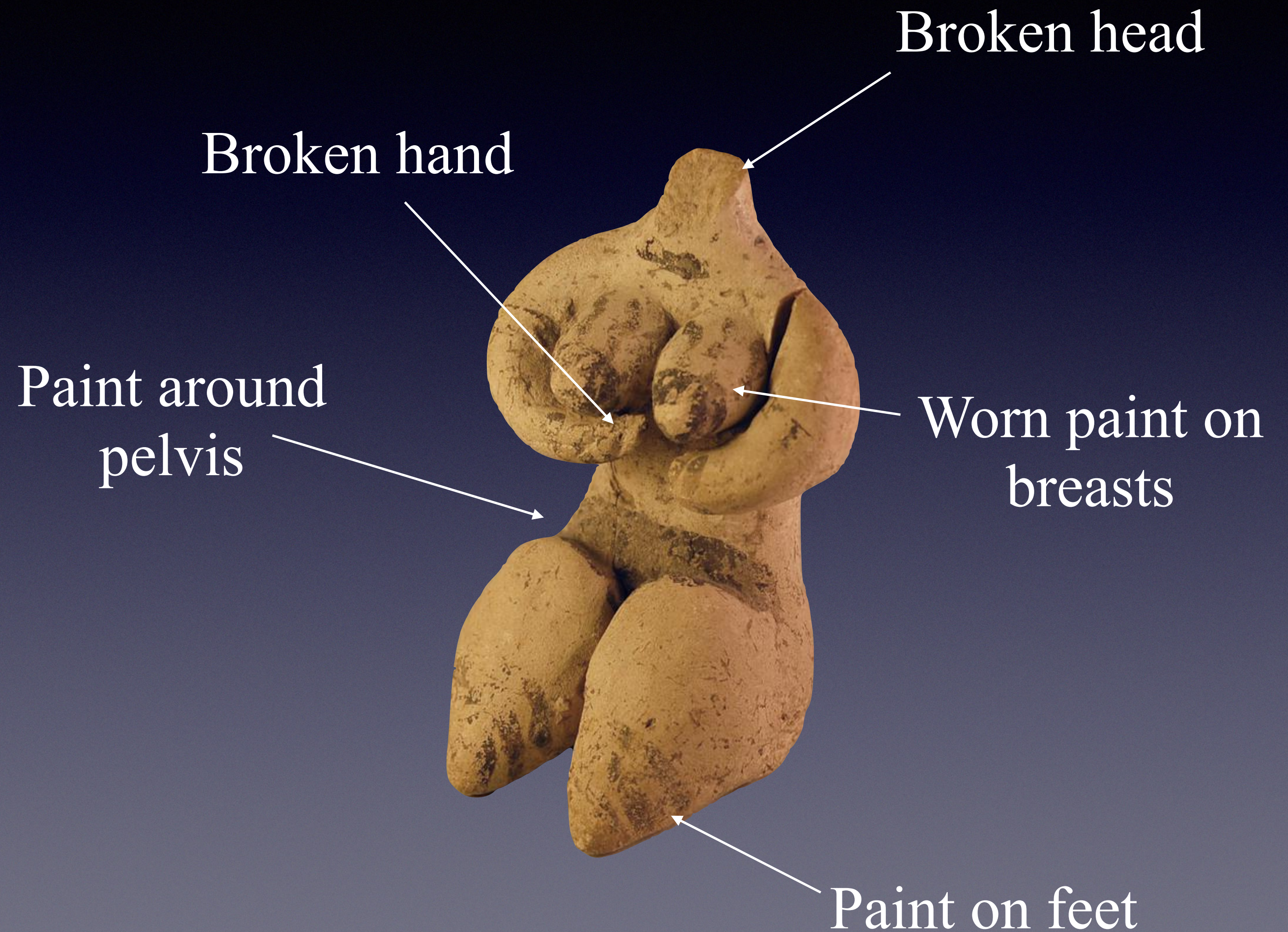
Idea thought of > Figurine made
> Figurine 'used' > Figurine
broken and/or discarded



Halaf figurine.

The Use of the figurine

- Religious or secular? Mallowan's 'Mother Goddess' or just a woman?
- How did Neolithic communities look at the body?
- Agency?
- Handled? Breaks and worn paint.



The Value of the figurine

“[Figurine agency is] detached from any original intention. Figurines do. Figurines act. Figurines affect. Figurines afford.”
Bailey (2012, 245-246).

- Value to whom? How can we determine this?
- Value in looking at Neolithic communities.
- Value = usefulness? Or something more?



Viewing the figurine in the modern world



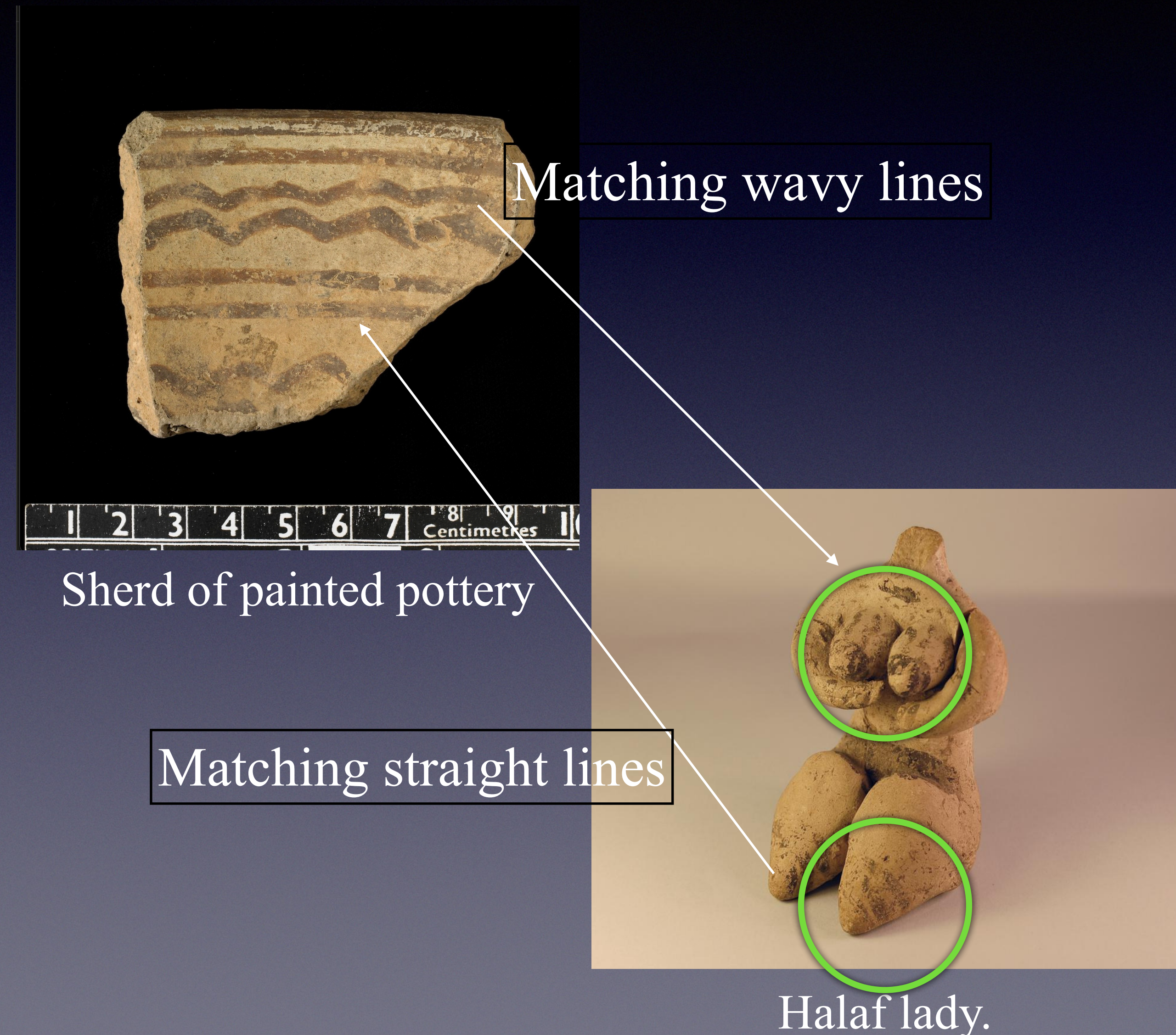
View of figurine from the back. The museum number has been written on its back.

- In the British Museum.
- Currently not on display - cannot be viewed by members of the public.
- Kept behind glass. The use of the figurine as something tactile is rendered useless.
- Viewing or seeing?

“Even when objects in museum and gallery contexts are viewed up close ... engagement is deliberately distanced in other ways, as by placing objects behind glass.” Sonik (2022, 533).

A few final points ...

- Figurines have agency that act upon us
- These figurines are *for* the communities who made them, not depictions *of*; we should not see them as reflections of reality - Bailey (2012, 245).
- Painted decoration similar to that found on local pottery - local decorative style
- Understanding the body as a major concept
- 'Mother Goddess' view can be reductive



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