Egyptological Hypotheses 2024, May, Article no. 11
https://www.egyptological-hypotheses.org

EGYPTOLOGICAL Hypotheses

Prehistoric female figurines

A parallel between Europe and Egypt

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1 Prehistoric female figurines and their possible meanings

This work is about the approximately 12–20 cm high, mostly female anthropomorphic figures made of clay, marble, bone, or ivory, which date from the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods and were found throughout Europe, the Middle East, and Egypt. For these figurines, the term "idol" (from the Greek word " *eídolon* " for "figure", "image") was coined.[2] They are presented in exhibition catalogues and illustrated books as "prehistoric art".[3] However, there is much to suggest that they were cult objects. Due to the lack of written records, we do not know the type and aims of the cult. Figurines with a distinctly feminine body shape[4] are associated by scholars with a fertility cult on a purely associative basis.[5] The considerations as to who these figures represent range from an

[2] Because of the conceptual overlap of the word “idol” with a revered role model, and because of the variety of possible meanings of these prehistoric figurines, a neutral term such as “statuette”, “figurine” or “anthropomorphic small sculpture” is often preferred in recent literature.

[3] F. Berg and H. Maurer, *Idole: Kunst und Kult im Waldviertel vor 7000 Jahren* [Horn 1998]; D. Craig Patch, *Dawn of Egyptian Art* (New York, 2011), passim. However, "art" in the sense of a purposeless, creative involvement with nature, the environment, or feelings is not generally conceded to prehistoric civilizations (Berg and Maurer, *Idole*, 11).

[4] Such figurines already existed in the Upper Paleolithic Period, e.g., the famous „Venus of Willendorf“ (Gravettian, around 25 kya). The body shape of an overweight woman is perhaps meant to symbolize the longed-for/requested abundance of food.

[5] Berg and Maurer, *Idole*, 61; C. Fiutak, *Anthropomorphe Plastiken der Lengyel-Kultur: Merkmalanalytische Untersuchung* (doctoral thesis, Saarbruecken, 2021), Vol. I, 145; E. Lenneis, C. Neugebauer-Maresch, and E. Ruttkay, *Jungsteinzeit im Osten Österreichs* (Vienna, [2]1999), 101; M. Siebert, *Vor Gott die Göttin: Zur Deutung der „Kykladenidole“*, https://homersheimat.de/res/pdf/zur-deutung-der-kykladenidole.pdf, p. 10 (last accessed on April 30, 2024). An opposing standpoint by Svend Hansen is quoted in K. Horst, “Farbe und Funktion der Kykladenidole”, in R. Gebhard and H. Schulze (eds), *Kykladen: Frühe Kunst der Ägäis* (Munich, 2015), 39–40.

ancestress,[6] matriarchal ruler,[7] goddess,[8] mediator between the divine and earthly spheres[9] to a representative for healing magic or social occasions[10]. The inconsistent environments in which these figurines were found, i.e. in settlement areas, near cult sites, or in graves, [11] do not provide any useful clues as to the purpose of the figurines. In Europe, however, the circumstances in which they were found indicate a ritual act followed by the deliberate destruction of the figurines and the burial of the fragments in pits in the settlement area or at special places.[12] Likewise, in prehistoric Egypt, such prehistoric figurines seem to have served a specific purpose for the living rather than as grave goods.[13]

2 Locations, cultural contexts, and the diversity of forms of prehistoric figurines

For the present work, the period under consideration is roughly 6000–2000 B.C. and the geographical areas are, with some exceptions, central, eastern, and southeastern Europe and Egypt.[14]

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6 Craig Patch, *Dawn*, 97; J. Marler, "The Body of Woman as Sacred Metaphor", in M. Panza and M. T. Ganzerla (eds), *Il Mito e il Culto della Grande Dea: Transiti, Metamorfosi, Permanenze* (Bologna, 2003), 3.

7 Siebert, *Kykladenidole*, 11–12.

8 Craig Patch, *Dawn*, 97; C. Fiutak, *Lengyel-Kultur,* I, 3; M. Gimbutas, *Göttinnen und Götter im Alten Europa: Mythen und Kultbilder 6500–3500 v. Chr.* (Uhlstaedt-Kirchhasel, 2010), 197 (German first edition of: M. Gimbutas, *The goddesses and gods of Old Europe: Myths, legends and cult images* [Berkely and London, 1982]); Lenneis, Neugebauer-Maresch, and Ruttkay, *Jungsteinzeit*, 101, 104; Marler, in Panza and Ganzerla (eds), *Grande Dea,* 9–24; J. Thimme, "Die religiöse Bedeutung der Kykladenidole", *Antike Kunst* 8 (1965), 82.

9 Siebert, *Kykladenidole*, 11; Horst, in Gebhard and Schulze (eds), *Kykladen*, 42.

10 Horst, in Gebhard and Schulze (eds), *Kykladen,* 38, 41; J. A MacGillivray, *Who Were the Early Cycladic Figures?* (2024), https://www.metmuseum.org/perspectives/articles/2024/01/cycladic-figures (last accessed on May 15, 2024); Craig Patch, *Dawn*, 135.

11 Craig Patch, *Dawn*, 101; Fiutak, *Lengyel-Kultur,* I, 152; Gimbutas, *Göttinnen*, 70–74; Siebert, *Kykladenidole*, 6.

12 Berg and Maurer, *Idole*, 46–47, 51; Fiutak, *Lengyel-Kultur,* I, 9, 141–143; Lenneis, Neugebauer-Maresch, and Ruttkay, *Jungsteinzeit*, 99–101, 104; Siebert, *Kykladenidole,* 9, 11; H. Schulze, "Kykladenidole im Kontext der mediterranen Welt" in Gebhard and Schulze (eds), *Kykladen*, 16-17. The fracture points are characteristic (Fiutak, *Lengyel-Kultur,* I, 137–140).

13 Craig Patch, *Dawn*, 101.

14 A very abbreviated presentation is unavoidable for reasons of space. Anatolia is barely represented here, because many of their figurines ended up in the hands of private dealers and auctioneers who refused to grant the right to use their images.

2.1 Europe

The Lengyel culture in the 5th millennium B.C.[15] (European Middle and Late Neolithic) had a huge geographical spread, mainly from Central Europe (Moravia, western Austria, Slovakia) through Hungary to Croatia. It is a cultural complex defined primarily on the basis of painted pottery. Chronological and regional subgroups can be delineated.[16] Typical of the ceramic figurines of the early Lengyel culture are stylized heads, extra-long necks,[17] stump arms in the form of rounded truncated cones projecting horizontally to the side[18] and an overly feminine shape of the buttocks and thighs.[19] Hair, clothing and jewelry were represented by painting or carving.[20] In the central Balkan region, there is an overlap with the figurines of the Vinča culture (c. 5300–3500 B.C.).[21] Triangular or pentagonal clay masks with human features or masked figurines are also characteristic of the figurative art of the Vinča culture.

In mainland Greece, figurines with bird-like faces were produced from about 6000 B.C. into the Iron Age. It is believed that there was a cult of a bird goddess.[22]

On the Aegean islands, the beginning of the Cycladic culture around 3200 B.C. marks the end of the Early Neolithic in this region. The marble female figurines of the Early Cycladic Period (c. 3200–2000 B.C.)[23] are either extremely abstract and violin-shaped with a long

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15 P. Stadler et al., "Absolutchronologie der Mährisch-Ostösterreichischen Gruppe (MOG) der bemalten Keramik aufgrund von neuen ^{14}C-Datierungen", *Archäologie Österreichs* 17/2 (2006), 54 [Tab. 5]).

16 Fiutak, *Lengyel-Kultur*, I, 5, 29 (fig. 3). Related cultures extend into Eastern Europe and south to the Aegean (Gimbutas, *Göttinnen,* 19–33). The common origin of the Lengyel culture is assumed to be in the Balkans (Gimbutas, *Göttinnen*, 25–28; J. Lichardus and J. Vladár, "Zu Problemen der Ludanice-Gruppe in der Slowakei", in *Slovenská Arch.* 12/1 [1964], 70).

17 The Lithuanian-American archeologist Marija Gimbutas interpreted the long neck together with a round head as phallic symbolism; accordingly, such idols represent a union of male and female characteristics (Gimbutas, *Göttinnen*,153–154, 197).

18 In some figurines (e.g. Figs. 5, 7, 8 of this work), it seems that the protruding stump arms represent only the upper arm and elbow, and that there are (or once were) very thin forearms directed toward the breasts, as in the seated figurine in Fig. 18.

19 In later phases of the Lengyel culture, the horizontal posture of the arm stumps changes to a V-shaped upward posture or completely raised arms. For the legs, the trend changes from separate legs to closed legs with a drilled hole between the thighs (Lenneis, Neugebauer-Maresch, and Ruttkay, *Jungsteinzeit,* 101).

20 Lenneis, Neugebauer-Maresch, and Ruttkay, *Jungsteinzeit*, 101.

21 Fiutak, *Lengyel-Kultur*, I, 21; Gimbutas, *Göttinnen*, 22–24; G. Lazarovici, "Vinča-Lengyel and Transylvania", *Acta Mus. Napoc.* 37/1 (2000), 7-20; E. Ruttkay, "Das Idol mit Vogelgesicht vom Höpfenbühel bei Melk – Beiträge zur jüngeren Lengyel-Kultur in Ostösterreich", *SPFBU* 48/M4 (1999), 106–107 (available at https://digilib.phil.muni.cz /sites/default/files/pdf/113850.pdf).

22 Gimbutas, *Göttinnen*, 135–144; Marler, in Panza and Ganzerla (eds), *Grande Dea,* 10–13.

23 These include the Grotta-Pelos culture (mainly Naxos and Milos), the Kampus culture, the Keros-Syros culture (mainly Syros, Kea, Ios and Delos), the Kastri culture (Syros) and the Phylakopi culture (Milos). There was no significant preceding hunter-gatherer culture on these islands, as they are too small. Cf. Siebert, *Kykladenidole*, 7–8, 12–13.

neck and no head, or more realistic with stump arms sticking out to the side or thin arms folded over the abdomen ("folded arms figurines"), and a pronounced pubic triangle.[24] They can be up to 1.5 meters tall. Traces of paint indicate that faces and jewelry were originally painted on.[25] Similar figurines also exist from Cyprus, Crete, Anatolia and the Anatolian-Syrian border area.[26]

2.2 Egypt

In Egypt, neolithic anthropomorphic figurines are generally rare finds (many may have been destroyed by the periodic inundations).[27] The extant figurines can be divided into realistic variants with facial details, arms and separated legs, and abstracted variants with undetailed bird-like faces, shortened or missing arms, and fused legs. An outstanding female ivory figurine associated with the Badarian culture (c. 4400–3800 B.C., named after el-Badari in Middle Egypt) has a slim shape and is surprisingly naturalistic.[28] Another important site is the wider area of Naqādah, which gave its name to the Naqada culture (c. 4500–2800 B.C., several phases). The clay and ivory figurines coming from there have a narrow waist and wide hips in both, the realistic and abstracted variants. Legs fused into the shape of an inverted rounded cone are interpreted to have been inserted into a hole in a base or stuck into the ground ("peg figurine"). Such figurines are sometimes reinforced internally by a stick ("stick figurine").[29] Pubic hair or clothing, jewelry, patterns, or tattoos were painted or carved into the surface, and there is evidence that bald heads originally had painted or pasted hair.[30] Another special type of figurines are the small, flat "tag figurines" made of bone, ivory, or greywacke.[31] At el-Ma'mariya (north of Hierakonpolis), terracotta figurines with bird-like faces (or wearing a bird mask?) and raised arms – perhaps a gesture of prayer, cheering, or dance – were unearthed.[32] In the cemetery of Hierakonpolis (*Nekhen*, the capital of a predynastic realm in Upper Egypt), excavators found pentagonal ceramic masks with human features

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24 MacGillivray, 2024.

25 Siebert, *Kykladenidole,* 4–10; B. Steinmann, "Vielfalt der Kykladenidole", in Gebhard and Schulze (eds), *Kykladen,* 21–22; Horst, in Gebhard and Schulze (eds), *Kykladen*, 33–37.

26 Schulze, in Gebhard and Schulze (eds), *Kykladen,* 16–17; see Fig. 10 (Brooklyn Mus. 51.117).

27 Craig Patch, *Dawn*, 100–101, 135.

28 It even has dimples in the lumbar area. Craig Patch, *Dawn*, 98, 99 (Cat. 83).

29 Craig Patch, *Dawn*, 103, 116–118 (Cat. 96, 98).

30 Craig Patch, *Dawn*, 97–104. See Fig. 18 of this work.

31 Craig Patch, *Dawn*, 132, 134 (Cat. 112, 113, 114).

32 Craig Patch, *Dawn*, 112–113. Such "bird women" also decorate the rim of a bowl from Abydos, where they hold hands (ibid., 114–115 and fig. 54). Craig Patch disagrees with the view that the downward curved structure projecting from the face is a beak (ibid., 113). However, the extant painted eyes of the analogous "bird men" (MFA 04.1802, Brooklyn Mus. 35.1269) are reminiscent of the eye stripes of many birds (see also the painted eyes of Fig. 18).

(Chalcolithic, c. 3600 B.C.). The masks fit nicely over a human face and have cutouts for eyes and mouth, which means that they were actually worn.[33]

3 Iconographic comparison

Comparing the following examples, it is amazing that peoples living in widely separated areas put forward very similar ideas in the creation of female figurines, even if their dating is sometimes more than 2,000 years apart (in certain regions the tradition of making such figurines continued into the Iron Age).[34]

[33] Craig Patch, *Dawn*, 90–92, fig. 23.

[34] Please refer to note 14.

Examples of figurines with stump arms:

Fig. 1: Egypt: Female figurine from Mostagedda, Badarian culture, clay, height 9 cm, 4400–3800 B.C., BM EA62211

Fig. 2: Eastern Romania: Female figurine from Cernavoda, Hamangia culture, clay, height 15.7 cm, c. 5000 B.C., NAM Bucharest

Fig. 3: Northern Greece: Female figurine from Nea Nikomedeia, clay, height 17.5 cm, c. 6200 B.C., storage location not specified

Fig. 4: Lower Austria: Fragment of a female figurine from Untermixnitz, Lengyel I (MEG I), clay, height 12.8 cm, c. 4500 B.C., Museum Horn

Fig. 5: Lower Austria: „Venus from Falkenstein–Schanzboden", Lengyel I (MEG I), clay, red, yellow, and black pigment, drilled hole between the knees, height 13.8 cm, c. 4500 B.C., MAMUZ, Asparn/Zaya

Fig. 6: Lower Austria: "Venus from Langenzersdorf", Lengyel I (MEG I), polished clay, height 18 cm, c. 4500 B.C., private ownership

Fig. 7: Serbia: Female figurine from Supska-Stublina, Vinča culture, clay, red and white paint, height 15.1 cm, c. 5000–4500 B.C., private ownership

Fig. 8: Turkey: Female figurine from Anatolia, clay, height 18.5 cm, 3rd millennium B.C., private ownership

Fig. 9: Greece (Cyclades); Female figurine from Antiparos, Louros type, Grotta-Pelos culture, marble, height 12.3 cm, 2800–2700 B.C., BM 1884,1213.12

Fig. 10: Syria: Female figurine with bird-like features, left arm broken off, findspot not specified, Syro-Hittite culture, clay, height 12.4 cm, 2000–1600 B.C., Brooklyn Mus. 51.117

Examples of figurines with a flat triangular torso:

Fig. 11: Egypt: Fragment of a female figurine from Qaw el-Kebir, Naqada II, clay, height not specified, 3900–3650 B.C., PMEA UC9601

Fig. 12: Egypt: Female figurine from el-Ma'mariya, early Naqada II, clay, white pigment, height 22.2 cm, 3650–3300 B.C., Brooklyn Mus. 07.447.501

Fig. 13: Lower Austria: Fragment of a female figurine from Pottenbrunn, Lengyel I (MEG Ia), clay, traces of red and yellow pigment, c. 4500 BC, MAMUZ, Asparn/Zaya

Fig. 14: Hungary: Fragments of female figurines from Szombathely-Oladi plató, Lengyel I, clay, traces of red pigment, heights 4.2/6.7 cm, c. 4500 B.C., Savaria Múzeum, Szombathely

Examples of seated figurines:

Fig. 15: Egypt: Seated female figurine from el-Ballas, Naqada IB, unbaked clay, length 17 cm, 3800–3450 B.C., Ashmolean Mus. AN1895.123b

Fig. 16: Syria: Seated female figurine, findspot not specified, Neolithic Period, talc, height 4 cm, c. late 8th millennium B.C., MMA 1985.356.32

Fig. 17: Syria: Seated female figurine, unknown findspot, Halaf culture, clay, paint, height 8.2 cm, 6000–5100 B.C., Louvre AO 21095

Fig. 18: Egypt: Seated female figurine from Naqada, late Naqada II, limestone, organic material, paint, malachite, drilled hole between the thighs (arrow), height 19.8 cm, 3450–3300 B.C., MMA 07.228.71

Fig. 19: Egypt: Seated female figurine, unknown findspot, Naqada II, clay, organic material, paint, malachite, drilled hole between the thighs, height 17 cm, 3700–3300 B.C., Museo Egizio, Suppl. 1146

Fig. 20: Lower Austria: Fragment of a seated female figurine from Wetzleinsdorf, Lengyel I (MEG 1b), clay, length 12 cm, c. 4500 B.C., NHM Vienna

Fig. 21: Lower Austria: Fragment of a seated female figurine from Wetzleinsdorf, Lengyel I (MEG 1b), clay, length 8.2 cm, c. 4500 B.C., NHM Vienna

Examples of hunched figurines:

Fig. 22: Egypt: Highly stylized female figurine from el-Badari, Badarian culture, unbaked clay, height not specified, 4400-3800 B.C., PMEA UC9080

Fig. 23: Egypt: Highly stylized female figurine from Mostagedda, Badarian culture, unbaked clay, pigment, 4400–3800 B.C., BM (inventory number not specified)

Fig. 24: Egypt: Female figurine, unknown findspot, Naqada II–III, clay, pigment, height 14 cm, 3500–3100 B.C., Brooklyn Mus. 1996.146.1

Fig. 25: Moldova: Female figurine, unknown findspot, Cucuteni A culture, clay, height not specified, late 5th millennium, NAM Bucharest 5730

Examples of “peg” figurines with hole or line patterns:

Fig. 26: Egypt: Figurine from Naqada, Naqada II, hippo ivory, height not specified, 3800–3450 B.C., Ashmolean Mus. AN1895.129

Fig. 27: Moldova: Flat female figurine from Vykhvatintsi, Cucuteni B culture, clay, height 15 cm, early 4th millennium B.C., NMH Moldova

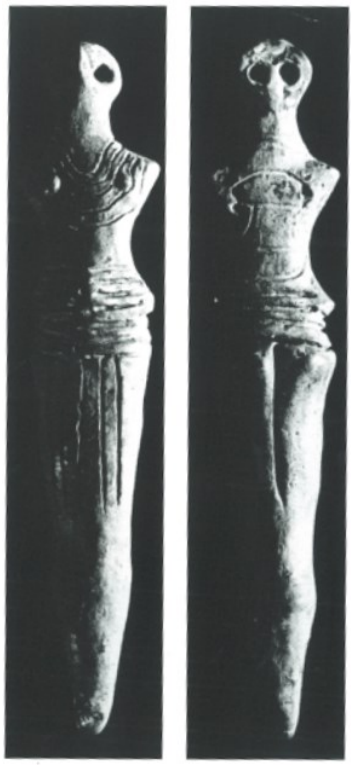

Fig. 28: Western Ukraine: Female figurine from Sipintsi (front and back view), Cucuteni B culture, clay, height 11 cm, early 4th millennium B.C., NHM Vienna

Fig. 29: Western Ukraine: Female figurine from Bilcze-Zlote, late Cucuteni B culture, clay, height 12 cm, early 4th millennium B.C., Archaeological Museum of Kraków

Examples of bird-headed figurines:

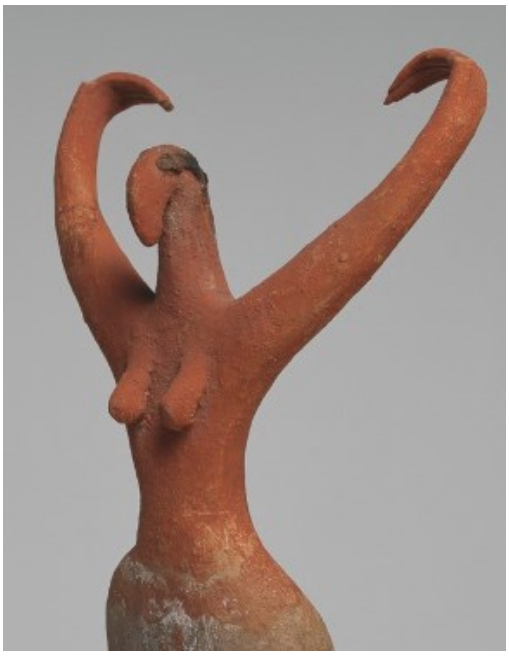

Fig. 30: Egypt: So-called “bird woman“ from el-Ma’marya, Naqada II, clay, painted, height 29.2 cm, 3600–3400 B.C., Brooklyn Mus. 07.447.505

Fig. 31: Greece: Fragment of a bird-headed female figurine from Megali Vrisi (Thessaly), Sesklo culture, clay, c. 6000 B.C., Museum of Volos

Fig. 32: Greece: Bird-headed figurine from Achilleion near Farsala, clay, traces of white paint, 6.1 cm, c. 6000 B.C., private ownership

Fig. 33: Greece: Bird-headed figurine, unknown findspot, Boeotian Period, clay, 15 cm, 6th century (!) B.C., KHM Vienna V2813

Examples of figures with arms folded in a similar way:

Fig. 34: Egypt: Female torso from el-Badari, Badarian culture, clay, height 9.3 cm, 4500–4000 B.C., BM EA59679

Fig. 35: Egypt: Female figurine from Hierakonpolis, Naqada III (note the slim hips), lapis-lazuli, height not specified, 3300–3000 B.C., Ashmolean Mus. AN1896-1908.E.1075

Fig. 36: Greece (Cyclades): Female figurine from Amorgos, Plastiras type, Grotta-Pelos culture, marble, height 19.8 cm, 3000–2800 B.C., BM 1890,0921.5

Fig. 37: Greece (Cyclades): Female figurine from Paros, Spedos type, Keros-Syros culture, marble, height 14.9 cm, 2700–2500 B.C., BM 1884,1213.11

Examples of masks and masked figurines:

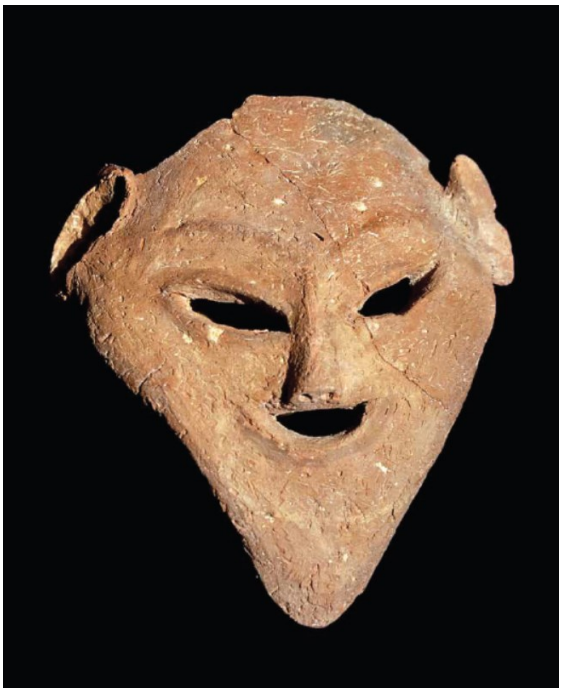

Fig. 38: Egypt: Mask from Hierakonpolis, Naqada II, clay, paint, c. 3600 B.C., Cairo JE 99152

Fig. 39: Egypt: So-called “tag figurine”, unknown findspot, Naqada II, ivory, height 6.5 cm, 3650–3450 B.C., MMA 54.28.2

Fig. 40: Kosovo: Mask from Predionica, Vinča culture, polished clay, height 10 cm, 4500–4000 B.C., Museum of Priština 157

Fig. 41: Serbia: Head of a masked figure from Vinča, Vinča culture, dark-red clay, height 9.6 cm, 5000–4500 B.C., University of Beograd 4956

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4 Considerations

Simple explanations for the iconographic similarities are possible, e.g., random similarities due to the requirements of human anatomy; the (presumed) cultic use of the figurines, which the form follows; or the craftsmanship possibilities available at this time in conjunction with the fragile nature of the materials used.[35] Nevertheless, considerations regarding a connection with migration, cultural transfer and long-distance trade are warranted.[36]

The origin of a sedentary farming lifestyle is believed to have been in the Fertile Crescent.[37] After reaching Anatolia and in the 8th millennium B.C., it spread into the Balkans and to further parts of Europe. Throughout history, humans migrated mainly along river valleys and coastlines, where locomotion is least arduous. Accordingly, the migratory movement of the early European farmers followed three major axes, as confirmed by archeological and paleogenetic data confirm. Certain groups migrated north along the Struma and Vardar rivers around 6500 B.C., where they separated again to either move further north along tributaries of the Danube or the Black Sea (Tisza, Pruth, Dniester), or to follow the Danube upstream to the northwest. Other groups moved westwards along the coasts of the Mediterranean. Archeological, paleogenetic, and climatologic evidence confirm these processes.[38] Long-distance trade was established on an axis between northern Europe and Mesopotamia.[39] Given the rapid expansion of the

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35 Cf. Craig Patch, *Dawn*, 103–104. Indeed, the "pear shape" and the horizontally protruding stump arms are ideal for holding the figurine securely in one hand. The stump arms or the arms folded in front of the abdomen, could also be a concession to resistance to breakage. M. Siebert assumed that the folded arms were a matriarchal symbol of power (Siebert, *Kykladenidole*, 12).

36 Cf. Berg and Maurer, *Idole*, 20–21.

37 S. Grigoriev, "Cultural genesis and ethnic processes in Central and Eastern Europe in the 3rd millennium BC: Yamnaya, Corded Ware, Fatyanovo and Abashevo Cultures", *JAHA* 9 (2022), 76; K. Kaser, *The Balkans and the Near East: Introduction to a shared history* (Studies on South East Europe 12, Vienna and Muenster, 2010), 1,11–12.

38 Literature overview on the Neolithic expansion: L. Betti et al., „Climate shaped how Neolithic farmers and European hunter-gatherers interacted after a major slowdown from 6,100 BCE to 4,500 BCE", in *Nat. Hum. Behav*. 4 (2020), 1004–1010, fig. 1; J. Fort, „Demic and cultural diffusion propagated the Neolithic transition across different regions of Europe", *J. R. Soc. Interface* 12 (2015), 20150166; R. Krauß et al., „The rapid spread of early farming from the Aegean into the Balkans via the Sub-Mediterranean-Aegean Vegetation Zone", *Quat. Int.* 496, 24–39; I. Mathieson, „The Genomic History of Southeastern Europe", in *Nature* 555 (2018), 197–198, 202; I. Olalde et al., „A Common Genetic Origin for Early Farmers from Mediterranean Cardial and Central European LBK Cultures", in *Mol. Biol. Evol.* 32 (2015), 3132–3142; A. Omrak et al., „Genomic Evidence Establishes Anatolia as the Source of the European Neolithic Gene Pool", in *Curr. Biol.* 26 (2016), 270–275.

39 Berg and Maurer, *Idole*, 21; O. Höckmann, "Frühbronzezeitliche Kulturbeziehungen im Mittelmeergebiet unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Kykladen", in H. G. Buchholz (ed.), *Ägäische Bronzezeit* (Darmstadt, 1987), 66; Krauß et al., *Quat. Int.* 496, 25, 33 (fig. 4); Lenneis, Neugebauer-Maresch, and Ruttkay, *Jungsteinzeit* , 21–74; Gimbutas, *Göttinnen*, 12; Schulze, in Gebhard and Schulze (eds), *Kykladen*, 16; M. L. Séfériadès, *Spondylus and Long-Distance Trade in Prehistoric Europe*,

farming lifestyle in Europe during the 7th and 6th millennia B.C., it is intuitive to imagine a fourth axis of expansion through the western wing of the Fertile Crescent into Egypt. Indeed, this idea was taken for granted until the 1980s, but is nowadays rejected because of a possible racist/colonialist background.[40] But how likely is the alternative theory that grain cultivation in Egypt was an autochthonous invention if centers of well-developed agriculture were, so to speak, in the eastern neighborhood? Considering that the sea level of the Red Sea was then significantly lower than it is today,[41] and that the grassy habitat was crossed by lateral branches of the Nile, where are now desert and wadis,[42] there could have then been migration routes to Egypt that have long since been submerged by seawater and sand.[43] Mere cultural diffusion is also possible.[44] In any case, there is no evidence in Egypt for a phase of agricultural "pilot attempts" like the Pre-Pottery Neolithic in the Levantine and upper Mesopotamian regions.[45] Moreover, the crops and livestock bred in Egypt's earliest farming economies were genetically derived from West Asia.[46]

Together with the knowledge of grain cultivation, certain neolithic beliefs and aesthetic

https://isaw.nyu.edu/exhibitions/oldeurope/pdf/spondylus.pdf (last accessed on May 14, 2024); J. Yellin, T. E. Levy, and Y. M. Rowan, "New Evidence on Prehistoric Trade Routes: The Obsidian Evidence from Gilat, Israel", in *J. Field Arch.* 23 (1996), 361–368.

40 Some of the earlier proponents of this idea (Petrie, Junker, Scharff, Kaiser, and others) were admittedly influenced by the biblical story of the descent of all peoples from Noah's sons in the Caucasus. Cf. E. C Köhler, "Of culture wars and the clash of civilizations in prehistoric Egypt – An epistemological analysis", *AeUL* 30 (2020), 115–117; U. Matić, "Decolonizing historiography and archaeology of ancient Egypt and Nubia, Part 1: Scientific Racism", *JEgH* 11 (2018), 19–44.

41 G. N. Bailey et al., „Coastlines, Submerged Landscapes, and Human Evolution: The Red Sea Basin and the Farasan Islands", *JICA* 2 (2007), 127–160; I. M. Ghandour et al., „Mid-Late Holocene Paleoenvironmental and Sea Level Reconstruction on the Al Lith Red Sea Coast, Saudi Arabia", *Front. Mar. Sci.* 8 (2021), 677010.

42 N. Brooks, "Cultural Responses to Aridity in the Middle Holocene and Increased Social Complexity", *Quat. Int.* 151 (2006), 35–37; R. Kuper and S. Kroeplin, "Climate-Controlled Holocene Occupation in the Sahara: Motor of Africa's Evolution", *Science* 313 (2006), 805–807; K. Nicoll, "Recent Environmental Change and Prehistoric Human Activity in Egypt and Northern Sudan", *Quat. Sci. Rev.* 23 (2004), 565–575.

43 R. Krauß et al. described a similar situation in the Upper Thracian Plain and along the North Aegean coast (Krauß et al., *Quat. Int.* 496, 27–28, 30–31). Genetic data from prehistoric Egyptians does not exist.

44 Cultural diffusion is exchange of ideas and technologies, as opposed to demic diffusion (through immigration). Cf. Fort, *J. R. Soc. Interface* 12, 20150166 (p. 1); M. M. A. MacDonald, „The pattern of Neolithization in Dakhleh Oasis in the Eastern Sahara", *Quat. Int.* 410 (2016), 181–197.

45 I am not talking about small livestock breeding here. This has been proven in the Red Sea Mountains (Sodmein Cave, Tree Shelter site) as early as 6200 B.C. (P. M. Vermeersch et al., „Early and Middle Holocene Human Occupation of the Egyptian Eastern Desert: Sodmein Cave", *Afr. Archaeol. Rev.* 32 [2015], 1–39).

46 M. Brass, „Early North African cattle domestication and its ecological setting: a reassessment", *JWP* 31 (2017), 81–115; S. Hendrickx and D. Huyge, „Neolithic and predynastic Egypt", in C. Renfrew and P. Bahn (eds), *The Cambridge world prehistory, I: Africa, South and Southeast Asia and the Pacific* (Cambridge, 2014), 241–242.

ideas, which found expression in a cult with butt-accentuated feminine figurines may have spread both north and south.[47] However, during the 4th and 3th millennia (the Eneolithic), this part of the common cultural heritage was superseded. Pastoralists from the Eurasian steppe migrated in several waves to large parts of Europe, where they largely intermingled with the civilizations of "Old Europe".[48] In Egypt, a cultural transformation may have occurred through waves of immigration from the Western (Libyan) Desert as a result of increasing aridification,[49] and from Nubia.[50] Thus, both, Egypt and Europe became cultural "melting pots" of local substrates and impulses from incoming groups, from which advanced cultures began to develop independently. The cult of the ample, wide-hipped women had mostly served its time.

47 Cf. Krauß et al., *Quat. Int.* 496, 28 (fig. 2).

48 "Old Europe" is a term used by M. Gimbutas to describe the period before the mass immigration from the steppes. These migratory processes, which have been proven by archeological, linguistic, and genetic research, were very complex. Cf. Grigoriev, *JAHA* 9, 45–84; I. Lazaridis, "The Genetic Origin of the Indo-Europeans", *bioRxiv* 2024, 2024.04.17.589597 [Preprint]; Grigoriev, *JAHA* 9, 71–73.

49 Brooks, *Quat. Int.* 151, 37; U. Hartung, "Some remarks on a rock drawing from Gebel Tjauti", in K. Kroeper, M. Chłodnicki, and M. Kobusiewicz (eds), *Archaeology of Early Northeastern Africa: In Memory of Lech Krzyżaniak* (SAA 9; Poznań, 2006), 680–682; S. Hendickx, "Predynastic Period, Egypt", in R. S. Bagnall et al. (eds), *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History* (London, 2013), 5514–5515; Kuper and Kroeplin, *Science* 313, 806 (fig. 3); Nicoll, *Quat. Sci. Rev.* 23, 572–573, 575.

50 J. L. Groth Akmenkalns, *Cultural Continuity and Change in the Wake of Ancient Nubian-Egyptian Interactions* (PhD thesis, Santa Barbara, 2018), 13–16, 36–37, 48.

Abbreviations

Acta Mus. Napoc.: Acta Musei Napocensis: Prehistory, Ancient History, Archaeology (online); AeUL: Ägypten und Levante: Zeitschrift für ägyptische Archäologie und deren Nachbargebiete (Vienna); Afr. Archaeol. Rev.: African Archaeological Review; Ashmolean Mus.: Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, Oxford; B.C.: before Christian era; BM: The British Museum, London; Brooklyn Mus.: Brooklyn Museum, New York; Curr. Biol.: Current Biology; ed./eds: editor(s); Front. Mar. Sci.: Frontiers in Marine Science; J. Field Arch.: Journal of Field Archaeology; J. R. Soc. Interface: Journal of The Royal Society Interface; JAHA: Journal of Ancient History and Archeology; JE: Journal d'Entrée (du Musée du Caire); JEgH: Journal of Egyptian History; JICA: The Journal of Island and Coastal Archaeology; JWP: Journal of World Prehistory; KHM Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien (Museum of Art History, Vienna); kya: kiloyears ago; Louvre: Musée du Louvre, Paris; MAMUZ: Mistelbach–Asparn Museumszentrum (Museum of Prehistory in Asparn/Zaya, Lower Austria); MEG: Moravian-East Austrian Group of Painted Ware; MFA: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; MMA: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Mol. Biol. Evol. Molecular Biology and Evolution; NAM Bucharest: National Archeological Museum of Bucharest; Nat. Hum. Behav.: Nature Human Behavior; NHM Vienna: Naturhistorisches Museum Wien (Museum of Natural History, Vienna); NMH Moldova: The National Museum of History in Chişinău, Moldova; PMEA: The Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archeology, University College London; Quat. Int.: Quaternary International; Quat. Sci. Rev.: Quaternary Science Reviews; Slovenská Arch.: Slovenská Archeológia (journal); SPFBU: Sborník Praci Philozofické Faculties Brněnské Univerzity; M, Řada archaeological (Publications of the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Brno; M, archaeological series).

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Fig. 1: The British Museum, London, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA62211 (last accessed on May 9, 2024).

Fig. 2: Photo from M. Gimbutas, *Göttinnen und Götter im Alten Europa: Mythen und Kultbilder 6500–3500 BC* (Uhlstaedt-Kirchhasel, 2010), p. 152 (fig. 140).

Fig. 3: Photo from M. Gimbutas, *Göttinnen und Götter im Alten Europa: Mythen und Kultbilder 6500–3500 BC* (Uhlstaedt-Kirchhasel, 2010), p. 152 (fig. 138).

Fig. 4: Private photo taken at the Museum Horn, Austria.

Fig. 5: Wolfgang Sauber, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:MAMUZ_-_Idol_Falkenstein.jpg (last accessed on May 22, 2024).

Fig. 6: Günther Schökler, https://www.geschichtewiki.wien.gv.at/index.php?title=Datei:Venuslangenzersdorf.jpg (last accessed on May 1, 2024).

Fig. 7: Christoph Bacher, https://www.cb-gallery.com/produkt/vinca-figur-2/ (last accessed on May 22, 2024).

Fig. 8: Gorny & Mosch GmbH, Munich, https://auktionen.gmcoinart.de/Auktion/KatalogArchiv?intAuktionsId=798&los=1600314 (last accessed on May 1, 2024).

Fig. 9: The British Museum, London, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1884-1213-12 (last accessed on May 1, 2024).

Fig. 10: Brooklyn Museum, New York, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/65157 (last accessed on May 17, 2024).

Fig. 11: Photo from D. Craig Patch, *Dawn of Egyptian Art* (New York, 2011), p. 102 (Cat.83).

Fig. 12: Brooklyn Museum, New York, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/123076 (last accessed on May 1, 2024).

Fig. 13: Private photo taken at the MAMUZ, Asparn/Zaya, Austria.

Fig. 14: Photo from C. Fiutak, *Anthropomorphe Plastiken der Lengyel-Kultur: Merkmalanalytische Untersuchung* (Doctoral thesis, Saarbruecken, 2021), Vol. II, Pl. 88 (1610).

Fig. 15: Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archeology, Oxford, https://www.ashmolean.org/collections-online#/item/ash-object-487805 (last accessed on May 7, 2024).

Fig. 16: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/547202 (last accessed on May 14, 2024).

Fig. 17: Musée du Louvre, Paris, https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53355/cl010119537 (last accessed on May 17, 2024).

Fig. 18: Photo from D. Craig Patch, *Dawn of Egyptian Art* (New York, 2011), p. 123 (Cat.102).

Fig. 19: Museo Egizio, Turin, https://collezioni.museoegizio.it/en-GB/material/S_1146 (last accessed on May 12, 2024).

Fig. 20: Private photo taken at the Museum of Natural History, Vienna.

Fig. 21: Private photo taken at the Museum of Natural History, Vienna.

Fig. 22: The Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, University College London, https://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums-static/digitalegypt/badari/tomb5769/finds.html (last accessed on May 9, 2024).

Fig. 23: Photo from G. Brunton, *Mostagedda and the Tasian Culture: British Museum Expedition to Middle Egypt, First and Second Years* (1928, 1929), London (1937), Plate XXVI (no. 494).

Fig. 24: Brooklyn Museum, New York, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/4269 (last accessed on May 9, 2024).

Fig. 25: Photo from M. Gimbutas, *Göttinnen und Götter im Alten Europa: Mythen und Kultbilder 6500–3500 BC* (Uhlstaedt-Kirchhasel, 2010), p. 140 (fig. 129).

Fig. 26: Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, Oxford, https://www.ashmolean.org/collections-online#/item/ash-object-487747 (last accessed on May 7, 2024).

Fig. 27: The National Museum of History of Moldova, https://www.nationalmuseum.md/en/timetape/4000_dc_sfarsitul_mileniului_v/aeneolithic_age (last accessed on May 15, 2024).

Fig. 28: Photo from M. Gimbutas, *Göttinnen und Götter im Alten Europa: Mythen und Kultbilder 6500–3500 BC* (Uhlstaedt-Kirchhasel, 2010), p. 44 (figs 13, 14).

Fig. 29: Photo from M. Gimbutas, *Göttinnen und Götter im Alten Europa: Mythen und Kultbilder 6500–3500 BC* (Uhlstaedt-Kirchhasel, 2010), p. 44 (fig. 15).

Fig. 30: Brooklyn Museum, New York, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/4225 (photo section) (last accessed on May 7, 2024).

Fig. 31: Photo from M. Gimbutas, *Göttinnen und Götter im Alten Europa: Mythen und Kultbilder 6500–3500 BC* (Uhlstaedt-Kirchhasel, 2010), p. 118 (fig. 84).

Fig. 32: Photo from M. Gimbutas, *Göttinnen und Götter im Alten Europa: Mythen und Kultbilder 6500–3500*

BC (Uhlstaedt-Kirchhasel, 2010), p. 8 (fig. I).

Fig. 33: Museum of Art History, Vienna, Austria, https://www.khm.at/en/objectdb/detail/63276/ (last accessed on May 1, 2024).

Fig. 34: The British Museum, London, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA59679 (last accessed on May 17, 2024).

Fig. 35: Photo from D. Craig Patch, *Dawn of Egyptian Art* (New York, 2011), p. 190.

Fig. 36: The British Museum, London, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1890-0921-5 (last accessed on May 17, 2024).

Fig. 37: The British Museum, London, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1884-1213-11 (last accessed on May 17, 2024).

Fig. 38: Photo from D. Craig Patch, *Dawn of Egyptian Art* (New York, 2011) p. 92 (fig. 23).

Fig. 39: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/547233 (last accessed on May 9, 2024).

Fig. 40: Photo from M. Gimbutas, *Göttinnen und Götter im Alten Europa: Mythen und Kultbilder 6500–3500 BC* (Uhlstaedt-Kirchhasel, 2010), p. 63 (fig. 38).

Fig. 41: Photo from M. Gimbutas, *Göttinnen und Götter im Alten Europa: Mythen und Kultbilder 6500–3500 BC* (Uhlstaedt-Kirchhasel, 2010), 58 (fig. 27).