

## SIDON'S "GUARDIAN SPIRITS"

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1 Room 6 of the Early Bronze Age building where the miniature figurine S/5624/2637 and the bowl S/5625/2367 were found.

Two figurines discovered in Sidon in the 2009 and 2010 seasons of excavations were found in Early and Middle Bronze Age contexts. Although the manufacturing techniques for both figurines carved respectively in gypsum and limestone was different, what links them together is that neither have any clear gender characteristics<sup>1</sup>. Neither figurine bears any iconographic indicators pointing to its fertility, sexuality or dominating military role<sup>2</sup>.

### The Early Bronze Age



A miniature gypsum figurine S/5624/2367, (fig. 2) which is 5 cm high and 0.4 to 0.7 cm wide was found together with a small gypsum bowl S/5625 (3.2 x 2.1 cm)<sup>3</sup> (fig. 3) with a broken handle in room 6 of an Early Bronze Age building consisting of at least 10 rooms. Different activities took place in this building so that it is not always possible to clearly delineate between what was profane or sacred within this particular period. It is an economic and social unit with communal storage and we therefore named it a "public" building. The figurine was found in an Early Bronze Age IIB context<sup>4</sup> next to a large pit (1.22 m x 85 x 34 cm) where extensive burning had taken place (fig. 1) and which was

2-3 Miniature figurine S/5624/2367 and a small bowl S/5625/2367.

located directly underneath a hearth found on the upper level of the room. A plaster floor was found around the pit as well as an area (1.62 x 72 cm) in the north of the room packed with small stones, cobbles, (10 x 7 x 3 cm), pottery sherds and a single deer bone (fig. 1). The figurine and the bowl were found next to the large pit in very compact soil. The head of the figurine had broken off but it is difficult to ascertain whether this damage was the result of an accident or if it was deliberate and ritual<sup>5</sup>. The miniature was treated like any household rubbish once it had served its purpose<sup>6</sup>. If we consider this miniature to be a scale model of a statue and not a toy<sup>7</sup> there is a possibility that as such it was a rejected cultic object deliberately broken<sup>8</sup> but this hypothesis is virtually impossible to resolve categorically<sup>9</sup>. The miniature bowl nearby indicates the possibility that offerings were received or that at least the idea of offering was intended<sup>10</sup>.

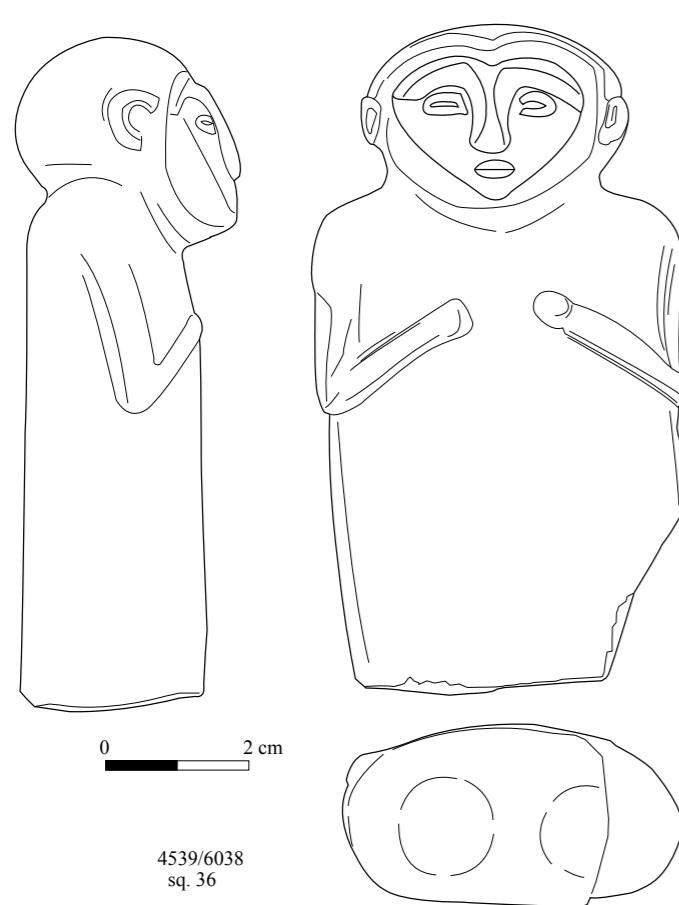


The figurine (fig. 2) appears to be wearing a simple ankle-length garment with details of the long dress only revealed at the back by a series of more or less horizontal lines designed to convey the pleated or flounced effect of the garment. The base of the statuette has a deep horizontal groove which separates the body from the base but no feet are shown<sup>11</sup>. Iconographic details were not of great importance here and the details of the face are crudely indicated by a thick nose, a horizontal stroke for the mouth and small pellet eyes. No neck is shown. Hair is indicated by incised lines and more lines are shown on the neck and body. Ears are absent. No clear indication of gender is seen and the figurine has no evident sign of divinity but its arms are shown as short stumps in front of the body<sup>12</sup> suggesting a respectful pose. This statuette is quite unique differing from the crude human figurines found in southern Mesopotamia in the Early Dynastic Period<sup>13</sup>. It differs also from seated divinities with a flounced or pleated garment holding a bowl<sup>14</sup>. A recent study by Katharina Teinz of Tübingen University sheds new light on the bowl-holding statues with evidence related to ancestor images in the second millennium BC.

4 Limestone figurine  
S/4539/6038.

### The Middle Bronze age

Limestone figurine S/4539/6038 (fig. 4) was found in a Middle Bronze Age IIB firm light grey silty layer with frequent chalk plaster lumps forming a thick solid plaster floor. The relationship of this floor with other contexts remains unclear as it continued into the section. However, the floor was truncated by numerous burials and the figurine was found south of burial 66 and west of a small group of arranged stones. This



consisted of three flat naturally rounded stones with some rougher nodules which may be the remains of a post pad (70 x 60 x 10 cm) with the flat stones providing support for a base and buttressed by the nodules. Further to the east an L-shaped arrangement of small nodules was found measuring 70 cm long, 70 cm wide and 25 cm high. It had a squared flat stone in the corner on which a jar was placed containing 8 *astragali* aligned inside around the base. *Astragali* bones were used in the ancient Near East for gaming but also seem to have had a ritual function<sup>15</sup>. The purpose and form of this small L-shaped arrangement cannot easily be explained but it is almost certainly a ritual structure<sup>16</sup>. Nearby a hand-held incense burner was also found.

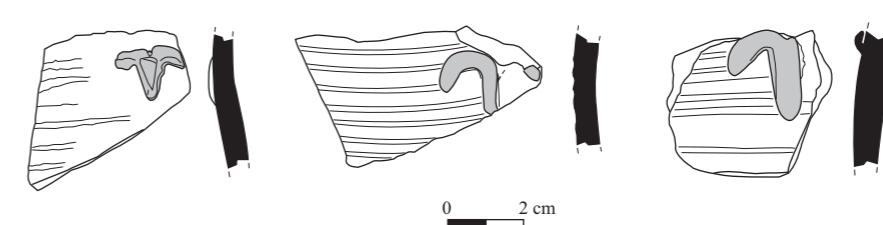
This figurine (fig. 4) measuring 9.4 cm high, 5.3 cm wide and 2.6 cm thick has wide rounded shoulders with a triangular shaped head, a pointed chin, deeply cut eyes, thick semicircular eyebrows and a sharply modelled nose shaped from a single lump. The mouth is well-defined. The stylized technique in which eyebrows and nose are cut recalls the full-frontal ram's head face (fig. 5 and 6) applied on pots

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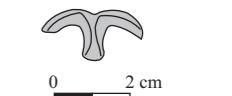
5-6 Full - frontal ram's head face from the third millennium BC. Nose and eyebrows of Middle Bronze Age figurine S/4539.

found in Sidon's third Millennium BC levels<sup>17</sup>. It remains uncertain if the technique of modelling in one piece was used because of its stylistic simplicity or whether any implication to recall the image of a ram was intended<sup>18</sup> (fig. 4). The most remarkable portrayals of a god in ibex form are on objects found in 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium contexts with the head depicted with exaggerated horns stressing the animal's power and maturity<sup>19</sup>. Ears are indicated and prominent. The stick-like arms bent across the chest imply a static attitude of worship. The body is

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Early Bronze Age ram's head



Nose and eyebrows  
of the Middle Bronze Age  
figurine S/4539

5



6

rectangular. On the side of the base are two circles in relief showing that the figurine was initially standing on two legs projecting under the body. Red paint was found on the front and back of the body as well as on the shoulders.

As there are no clear indications that these figures represent deities the reality that they portray belongs to the sphere of ritual and ceremony superseding gender identity. Both figurines represent two images emanating from Sidonian society in the third and second millennium BC probably illustrating "guardian spirits" equally at home "at temple doors, in city gates, in house door niches, in ancestor shrines and in palace shrines"<sup>20</sup>.

## NOTES

1 G. Gordon May, 1935, pl. XXIII, M 2690, gender lacking, p. 33.

2 O. Keel & Ch. Uehlinger, 1992, p. 96, in the Late Bronze Age warrior and political deities take over the role that was held during the Middle Bronze Age IIB... at a time when great importance was attached to obtaining vegetation.

3 P. Beck, 2000, p. 312, on the schematic statue from Hazor found adjacent to an offering bowl. Such crude statues are not unique to the Hazor temple but are found in many shrines and temples in northern Mesopotamia throughout the Levant. See p. 345 on the Hazor seated figures holding cups.

4 C. Doumet-Serhal, 2006, the equivalent of level 4, p. 45.

5 P. R. S. Moorey, 2003, At Ain Ghazal, figurines were never found with their heads attached... It may be a deliberate attempt to kill their potency.

6 P. R. S. Moorey, 2003, p. 2.

7 P. Ucko, 1958, p. 421-422; P. R. S. Moorey, 2003, p. 8, on toys representing some kind of narrative and relating to adult images.

8 D. Wengrow, 2003, p. 146.

9 P. R. S. Moorey, 2003, p. 10.

10 P. Beck, 1990, p. 91-95, commenting on the schematic statues from the Stelae Temple at Hazor; "It is not clear whether this is to be a portrayal of a god or of a deified ancestor. The cup in the right hand of the figure is also ambiguous, since cups are found in the hand of both gods and humans".

11 T. Howard Carter, 1970, p. 38, "there is no doubt some signifi-

cance which we do not understand, in the fact that legs and feet are largely ignored, even on seated forms".

12 O. Keel & Ch. Uehlinger, 1992, p. 35 and p. 36, 26 b: "On a row of stelae from Gezer the female deity is depicted with stump arms"; O. Keel & Ch. Uehlinger, 1992, p. 37, p. 38, fig. 28 a-b; "here the stumps are different in that they are not placed as on the Sidon figurine, horizontally in front of the body. The position of arms placed horizontally in front of the body is common in Middle Bronze Age II A-B".

13 E. Mc. Adam, 1993, p. 88-89; A. Green, 1993, p. 115, from those found in Abu Salabikh for example.

14 Katharina Teinz, "Imagery of ancestors? The bowl holding seated stone effigy and where they were erected", paper presented at the International symposium "Grave Inventories and their (Inter) regional Context. An Interdisciplinary Approach." November 25<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup>, 2010, Tübingen (26.11.2010).

15 G. H. Gilmour, 1997, p. 173.

16 C. Doumet-Serhal, 2009, fig. 39, 40 and 40 a, p. 38.

17 C. Doumet-Serhal, 2006, p. 53.

18 C. Elliott, 1977, p. 7, the portrayal of a god in ibex form in Nahal Mishmar. On the ibex horns or the applied horned animal heads in Palestine in the Chalcolithic Ghassulian culture in Palestine and western Transjordan, see, C. Elliott, 1977, p. 6-7.

19 *Ibid.*, and for the importance of the ram in the third Millennium in Sidon, see C. Doumet-Serhal, 2006, p. 270-275.

20 T. Howard Carter, 1970, p. 40.

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