

A FIGURINE FROM URKESH: A “DARLING” FROM TROY TO MESOPOTAMIA

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It was a pleasure to accept the Buccellatis' invitation to publish the upper half of a flat, lead figure of a woman found at Urkesh¹ and return to an old interest of mine.² I once surmised that such objects were used by merchants in the metals trade as “cash” when travelling from Mesopotamia to Anatolia.³

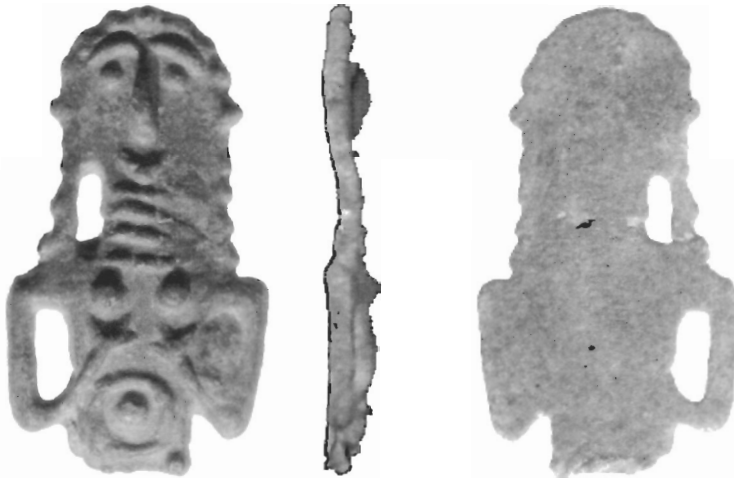


Fig. 1 Lead figurine from Urkesh (A9.86; height 7.0 cm).

The Urkesh piece is defectively cast, and the ridge above the eyeballs and the edge of the chin give the face a misleading, cheerful expression. From other examples we know that the ridge would probably have surrounded the eyes and that, above the remnant of a protruding chin, the mouth would have been straight. The long thin nose is still preserved. Curls over the forehead are represented by round knobs, as are the tresses falling on either side of the face. The woman is nude except for four ridges of a high collar necklace. The breasts, represented as small knobs, are placed very high on the chest and the fingers of the upraised hands are spread as if supporting them. A prominent knob, surrounded by a wide ridge, emphasizes the navel.

The Urkesh piece is very welcome as an excavated example of a familiar but rare type of lead figurine. The first example was found in third-millennium levels at Troy on the west coast of Turkey in the nineteenth century.⁴ Four moulds for casting such a figurine are also known.⁵ These are peculiar in having so many dies tightly crowded onto a single surface. They are for amulets,

¹ A9.86; ht 0.07 m.

² J. Canby, Early Bronze “trinket” moulds, *Iraq* 27 (1965), pp. 42–61 (hereafter Canby).

³ Not everyone agreed. See K. Emre, *Anatolian Lead Figures and their Stone Moulds* (Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınlarından Seri VI-14), Ankara, 1971 (hereafter Emre); Emre concluded that these and later moulds for lead figurines were made in Anatolia for an Anatolian market. R. Merhav generally followed her, but argued for a somewhat later date (An Anatolian trinket mould from the Lipchitz collection, *The Israel Museum Journal* 6 (1987), pp. 38–50). R. Wartke, in his discussion of the contemporary moulds from Assur in the Berlin Museum, also concluded that they were made for the local Anatolian market (Vorderasiatische Gussformen

aus den Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, *Forschungen und Berichte* 20/21 (1980), p. 257; hereafter Wartke).

⁴ A. Götze (in W. Dörpfeld, *Troja und Ilion*, Athens, 1902, pp. 363 ff.) describes it as that of a toothless woman (see also Canby, Pl. Xc; Emre, No. 32, 111, Pl. I:1). It was taken to Berlin by the excavator and disappeared for many years, along with the precious objects from “Priam’s Treasure”. It had been taken to Russia at the end of World War II. In 1996, it was displayed at the Pushkin Museum in Moscow, and republished in a catalogue raisonné: V. Tolstikov, M. Treister, *The Gold of Troy* (Pushkin Museum), Abrams, 1996, No. 258, pp. 194, 217.

⁵ 1. From Akhisar (Louvre; Emre, No. 41, p. 113). 2. From Abu Habba (British Museum; W. Budge, *A Guide to*

jewellery and stamp seals,⁶ as well as the figurines, and each object has its own pour hole for casting it separately.

None of the moulds came from an excavation. One came “from” Akhisar, about 100 km northeast of Izmir, and one from Izmir itself. These, plus the Troy figurine, suggested the figurine type was western Anatolian in spite of the awkward fact that the ancient city of Sippar (Abu Habba), on the Euphrates below Baghdad, was the source given for the same type of mould in the British Museum.⁸

Fortunately, recent excavations have produced contexts for both the type of figurine and the mould. In the 1990s a figurine was found in Tell Brak, south of Urkesh, on the headwaters of the Khabur, c. 1400 km from Troy.⁹ In 1999, a multi-die mould for a similar figurine was found at Titiş in eastern Turkey c. 1036 km from Troy. It was face down on the floor of a late Early Bronze III building, reconfirming the date for the type as the last quarter of the third millennium BC,¹⁰ and lending credence to the provenance of the Sippar mould.¹¹ We now know that the figurines, and probably also the moulds, can occur in widely different cultures from western Anatolia to northern Mesopotamia at that date. The distinctly regional character of some trinkets did imply that the clientele for the lead items lived in widely dispersed regions.¹²

It was not the objects that travelled, however; lead had too little value and would have been heavy to carry. It must have been the moulds, designed to make individual trinkets and figurines, that were carried by people going to these far-apart places. A person with such a mould, wherever he happened to be on his journey, could produce a locally popular item almost instantly. All he needed was an open fire and a pinch of lead, perhaps even some lead the villagers kept for mending pots. A figurine, seal or trinket could then be traded for food, water, shelter, labour, or whatever small thing he needed. The locations of the sites where the figurines have been found, Urkesh, Brak and Troy, make it likely that the travellers were involved in trade between metal-rich Anatolia and metal-poor Mesopotamia.¹³

The far-flung occurrence of the Urkesh figurine type leaves the question of its native popularity

the Babylonian and Assyrian Antiquities (2nd ed.), London, 1908, p. 117, No. 1071; Emre, No. 35, p. 111, Pl. II:1). 3. From Izmir (present location unknown, see n. 7; Emre, No. 37, p. 112, Pl. I:3; Canby, Pl. IXa-c). 4. In the Bible Lands Museum, Jerusalem (Emre, No. 38, p. 112, Pl. I:2). The Akhisar and Abu Habba moulds have both been known since the beginning of the twentieth century. The cross-hatching, the little face on the pendant spirals and other aspects of the Venice and British Museum moulds are strange (Emre, Pl. II:4–5).

⁶See G. Umurtak, Some observations on a lead stamp seal from the Bademağacı excavations, *Anatolica* 28 (2002), pp. 159–61.

⁷For the Izmir mould see Canby, Pl. IXa-c. The owner of the Izmir piece was not a collector but the wife of an American soldier stationed in Turkey, who bought it as a paperweight. The sum, as I remember it, was five American dollars, a small amount even then. This suggests to me that the seller purchased it locally, and it could, therefore, have been a west Anatolian find. Unfortunately, the last I heard of the piece was in the early sixties when the woman, at my urging, sent it to the Metropolitan Museum to be looked at, but she refused to sell it for the price they offered her.

⁸Budge *op. cit.* (n. 5). H. P. Schäfer, Zur Datierung einer Gussform aus Troia, *Archäologischer Anzeiger* 1971, pp. 419–22, illustrates a mould from Troy for earrings like those on the Sippar mould. The body of the unusual long-horned goat on the Sippar mould is segmented like the animals on some of the standards in the Alaca Höyük royal tombs, see K. Bittel, *Die Hethiter — Die Kunst Anatoliens vom Ende des 3. bis Anfang des 1. Jahrtausends vor Christus*, Munich, 1976, pp. 36, 40. The animal may have had only central Anatolian popularity. On the problem of the Sippar provenance, see Emre, pp. 121 ff., Wartke, pp. 243, 257.

⁹J. Oates, Tell Brak in the fourth and third millennia: From Uruk to Ur III. In S. Eichler, M. Wäfler, D.

Warburton, *Tall al-Hamidiya 2. Recent Excavations in the Upper Khabur Region*, Freiburg/Schweiz and Göttingen, 1990, p. 146, Pl. 15:1 — Ur III or Isin-Larsa are considered the latest possible date; also J. and D. Oates, *Nagar in the Third Millennium. Excavations at Tell Brak 2*, Cambridge, 2001, p. 246. The same area also contained a mould with a die face for casting various trinkets, see below n. 12.

¹⁰H. Pitman in G. Algaze *et al.*, Research at Titiş Höyük in southwestern Turkey — 1999 season, *Anatolica* 23 (1997), pp. 66–9, 84, Figs. 19–20.

¹¹A mould from Assur even has a lion-headed eagle (Imdugud) that is associated with Girsu (Tello) in southern Mesopotamia (Wartke, No. 4, p. 228, Fig. 6, see p. 248)!

¹²The trinket dies for Schnabelkannen on the new moulds are distinctly regional. The objects with antennae on the Izmir and Lipschitz mould (Emre, Pl. I:1–2) are probably some kind of insect, like the flies on a mould from Nuzi (R. F. S. Starr, *Nuzi — Report of the Excavations at Yorgan Tepe*, Cambridge, Mass., 1939, I, pp. 24–5, II, Pl. 56g), and join the riverside creatures: frogs and turtles, as well as fish, popular on Mesopotamian moulds at Brak (Oates, *Brak 2*, see above n. 9), Nineveh (D. Opitz, *Altorientalische Gussformen, AfO Beiheft 1*, Berlin, 1933, Pl. VI:3), and Assur (Wartke, p. 227, Fig. 4, p. 234, No. 1). The striding lion facing the viewer certainly belongs in that area, see the Assur, Nineveh, Brak and Nuzi moulds just cited, plus one from Selenkahiye (M. van Loon, The preliminary results of 1974–1975 excavations at Selenkahiye near Meskene, *AASOR* 44 (1979), Fig. 13; M. van Loon (ed.), *Selenkahiye: Final Report on the University of Chicago and University of Amsterdam Excavations in the Tabqa Reservoir, Northern Syria, 1967–1975*, Istanbul, 2001, Pl. 9.13 c-d.

¹³M. Buccellati, Trade in metals in the third millennium: Northeastern Syria and eastern Anatolia. In P. Matthiae *et al.* (eds), *Resurrecting the Past — A Joint Tribute to Adnan Bouuni*, Leiden, 1990, pp. 117–30.

open. It certainly was not at home at Troy or in central Anatolia, and while similarities of individual details may be found elsewhere and in other media, no exact parallel has yet been found. The best, it seems to me, is still at Mari.¹⁴ The home of the figurine type could be somewhere outside Anatolia, perhaps in northern Syria or Iraq where moulds were common and lead figures continued to be produced.¹⁵ The figurine from Troy may have lost its Anatolian homeland, but it now assumes greater importance as proof that caravans from far east in Syria travelled as far west as the Aegean coast of Turkey.

The Anatolian character of the Urkesh figurine type was also assumed because of links to the numerous early second-millennium lead figurines and moulds from the Assyrian colonies in Anatolia that have been considered of local manufacture.¹⁶ This attribution may also be questioned. The figurines have indeed been found at Anatolian sites, but they were found only in the houses of Assyrian merchants, and not in later periods. Moreover, most look foreign when compared to the full-bodied, sculptural quality of contemporary Anatolian arts.¹⁷ A plump and curvaceous lead figurine from Karahöyük¹⁸ and a mould allegedly from Kültepe¹⁹ illustrate the kind of lead figurines the local artists produced.²⁰

Like the "Anatolian Style" cylinder seals used by earlier merchants,²¹ the flat lead pieces with linear details resemble contemporary sculpture on the basins at Ebla in North Syria.²² The flat lead figures are also not exclusively found in Anatolia. They have turned up in widely different areas: at Judeideh in the Amuq,²³ at Ebla in western Syria,²⁴ and to the east at Chagar Bazar,²⁵ just south of Urkesh, and at Tell al Rimah c. 150 km still further southeast in Iraq.²⁶ The moulds to make flat lead figurines with linear details are again, I think, objects belonging to the travelling merchants of this period.

¹⁴ A. Parrot, *Le temple d'Ishtar — Mission Archéologique de Mari I*, Paris, 1956, p. 299, Pl. LXVIII, M 50; L. Badre, *Figurines anthropomorphiques en terre cuite à l'âge du bronze en Syrie*, Paris, 1980, pp. 70–1, 269, Pls. XXVI:12–14, XXVII:15–19, dated to the Early Dynastic to Akkadian periods. See now the ivory figurine from Brak in an Akkadian level, Oates, *Brak 2* (see above n. 9), p. 295, Fig. 315.

¹⁵ See n. 12 and Wartke for some of these moulds.

¹⁶ Emre, pp. 139–50, Pls. V:2 to XI:3; also Bittel, *op. cit.* (n. 8), pp. 95 ff., Figs. 83–4, 87, 90. Moulds for lead figurines from the later colonies in level Ib at Kültepe and at Alişar are smaller and usually have dies for only a god plus a female who sometimes holds a baby and, between the adults, sometimes an antelope or child, and a winged god. A figurine from Acemhöyük is thought to be a transitional piece see Emre, Pl. III-3 *ibid.*, Fig 2; also Bittel, *op. cit.* (n. 8), p. 99, Fig. 89, with an identical pair in the Louvre said to be from Kültepe. The flat lead god from Karahöyük (where there could well have been Assyrian colonies) seems to be related to the group of stick figures accompanied by animals that Emre classifies as dating to the earlier Colony Age (see Emre, pp. 133–7, Pl. II; S. Alp, *Karum-zeitliche Gussform und Siegel aus Karahöyük*, *Istanbul Mitteilungen* 43 (1993), pp. 185–93, Pl. 19:1.

¹⁷ For some good examples, see K. Bittel (*op. cit.* n. 8), pp. 69–91, 97 with figures.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 101, Fig. 91; S. Alp, *Iştar auf dem Karahöyük*, *Mélanges Mansel* (Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınlarından Serie VII-60), Ankara, 1974, pp. 703–7.

¹⁹ Emre, No. 51, Pl. XI:4a-b. Some of the curvaceous, flat lead figures from Kültepe *kārum* level II and Alişar (Emre, Pls. V:1 and X:1), may have been made under local influences.

²⁰ Earlier Anatolian lead idols are known. One, that copied an alabaster disc idol type characteristic of the late Early Bronze levels on the city mound at Kültepe, was found in northeastern Turkey near Zile (E. Uzunoglu, *Ein Bleidol mit schiefenformigen Körper*, *Istanbul Mitteilungen* 43 (1993), pp. 179–83, Pl. 18; *id.*, *Women in Anatolia* (Exhibition Catalogue, Topkapi Saray Museum), Istanbul, 1993–4, A 110, p. 90.

²¹ N. Özgüç, *The Anatolian Group of Cylinder Seal Impressions from Kültepe* (Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınlarından Serie V-22), Ankara, 1965. Bittel, *op. cit.* (n. 8), p. 92, Figs. 73–4.

²² P. Matthiae, *Ebla — An Empire Rediscovered*, New York, 1981, Pls. between pp. 192–3; W. Orthmann, *Der Alte Orient* (Propyläen Kunstgeschichte 14), Berlin, 1975, Figs. 412–14a.

²³ Emre, No. 31, p. 109, Pl. VI:2.

²⁴ P. Matthiae, F. Pinnock and G. S. Matthiae, *Ebla alle origini della civiltà urbana*, Milan, 1995, p. 394, No. 241, "Bronzo Medio II, ca. 1750–1799".

²⁵ M. E. L. Mallowan, *The excavations at Tall Chagar Bazar, and an archaeological survey of the Khabur Region, Iraq 4* (1937), p. 152, Pl. XVII, found in temple-palace area BD, stratification uncertain.

²⁶ T. A. Carter, personal communication.