Prehistoric female figurines – a parallel between Europe and Egypt

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List of 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
BC	Before Christian Era
BM	The British Museum, London
Brooklyn Mus.	Brooklyn Museum, New York
Curr. Biol.	Current Biology
ed., eds	Editor, editors

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)

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 come from neolithic and chalcolithic times 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.[1] They are presented in exhibition catalogs and illustrated books as "prehistoric art".[2] 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 markedly feminine body shape[3] are associated by researchers with a fertility cult on a purely associative basis.[4] The considerations about the person behind the figurines range from an ancestress,[5] matriarchal ruler,[6] goddess,[7] mediator between the divine and earthly spheres[8] to a representative for healing magic or social occasions[9]. The inconsistent environments in

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1 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.

2 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 usually not even conceded to prehistoric civilizations (Berg and Maurer, *Idole*, 11).

3 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.

4 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, ²1999), 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.

5 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.

6 Siebert, *Kykladenidole*, 11–12.

7 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.

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

9 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.

which these figurines were found, i.e. in settlement areas, near cult sites or in graves, [10] do not provide any useful clues as to the purpose of the figurines. However, in Europe, the circumstances in which they were found indicate a ritual act followed by the deliberate destruction of the figurines and burial of the fragments in pits in the settlement area or at special locations.[11] Likewise, in prehistoric Egypt, such prehistoric figurines appear to have served a specific purpose for the living rather than as grave goods.[12]

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

For the present work, the period under consideration is roughly 6000–2000 BC and the geographic areas are central, eastern, and southeastern Europe and Egypt, with some exceptions.[13]

2.1 Europe

The Lengyel culture in the 5th millennium BC[14] (European Middle and Late Neolithic) had a huge geographic spread, ranging mainly from Central Europe (Moravia, western Austria, Slovakia) through Hungary to Croatia. It is a cultural complex defined primarily on the basis of ceramics (painted pottery). Chronological and regional subgroups can be delineated.[15] Typical of the ceramic figurines of the early Lengyel culture are stylized

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

[11] 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).

[12] Craig Patch, *Dawn*, 101.

[13] 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.

[14] 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]).

[15] 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).

heads, extra-long necks,[16] stump arms in the form of rounded truncated cones projecting horizontally to the side[17] and an overly feminine shape of the buttocks and thighs.[18] Hair, clothing and jewelry were represented by painting or carving.[19] In the Middle Balkan area there is overlap with the figurines of the Vinča culture (ca. 5300–3500 BC).[20] Triangular or pentagonal masks with human features made of clay or masked figurines are also characteristic for the figurative art of the Vinča culture.

In mainland Greece, figurines with bird-like faces were produced from about 6000 BC into the Iron Age. It is believed that there was a cult of a bird goddess.[21]

On the Aegean islands, the beginning of the Cycladic culture around 3200 BC marks the end of the Early Neolithic in this region. The marble female figurines of the Early Cycladic Period (ca. 3200–2000 BC)[22] are either extremely abstract and violin-shaped with a long neck and no head, or more realistic with stump arms sticking out to the side or thin arms folded over the stomach area ("folded arms figurines"), and a pronounced pubic triangle.[23] They can be up to 1.5 m tall. Traces of paint show that faces and jewelry were originally painted on.[24] Similar figurines also exist from Cyprus, Crete, Anatolia and the Anatolian-Syrian border area.[25]

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16 The Lithuanian-American archaeologist 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).

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

18 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 to closed legs with a drilled hole between the thighs (Lenneis, Neugebauer-Maresch, and Ruttkay, *Jungsteinzeit,* 101).

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

20 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).

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

22 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.

23 MacGillivray, 2024.

24 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.

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

2.2 Egypt

In Egypt, neolithic anthropomorphic figurines are generally rare finds (many of them might have been destroyed by the periodic inundations).[26] The extant figurines can be divided into realistic variants with facial details, arms and separated legs, and abstracted variants with undetailed bird-like faces, abbreviated or missing arms and fused legs. One outstanding female ivory figurine associated with the Badarian culture (ca. 4400–3800 BC, named after el-Badari in Middle Egypt) has a slim shape and is surprisingly naturalistic.[27] Another important site is the wider area of Naqādah, which gave its name to the Naqada culture (approx. 4500–2800 BC, several phases). The clay and ivory figurines coming from there have a narrow waist and wide hips in both, the realistic and abbreviated variants. Legs fused to the shape of an inverted rounded cone are interpreted to have been inserted into a hole in a base or into the ground ("peg figurine"); such figurines are sometimes reinforced internally by a stick ("stick figurine").[28] 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.[29] Another special type of figurines are the small, flat "tag figurines" made of bone, ivory or greywacke.[30] Terracotta figurines with bird-like faces (or wearing a bird mask?) and raised arms – perhaps a gesture of prayer, cheering, or dancing – were unearthed in el-Ma'mariya (north of Hierakonpolis).[31] In the cemetery at Hierakonpolis (Nekhen, the capital of a predynastic realm in Upper Egypt), excavators found pentagonal ceramic masks with human features (Chalcolithic, approx. 3600 BC). The masks fit nicely over a human face and have cutouts for eyes and mouth, which means that they were actually worn.[32]

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[26] Craig Patch, *Dawn*, 100–101, 135.

[27] It even has lumbar dimples. Craig Patch, *Dawn*, 98, 99 (Cat. 83).

[28] Craig Patch, *Dawn*, 103, 116–118 (Cat. 96, 98).

[29] Craig Patch, *Dawn*, 97–104.

[30] Craig Patch, *Dawn*, 132, 134 (Cat. 112, 113, 114).

[31] Craig Patch, *Dawn*, 112–113. Such "bird women" also decorate the edge of a bowl from Abydos, where they hold hands (ibid., 114–115 and Fig. 54). Craig Patch disagrees with the view that the downwardly bent 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).

[32] Craig Patch, *Dawn*, 90–92, Fig. 23.

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).[33]

[33] Please refer to note 13.

Examples of figurines with stump arms:

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

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

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

Fig. 4: Lower Austria: Fragment of a female figurine from Untermixnitz, Lengyel I (MEG I), clay, height 12.8 cm, approx. 4500 BC, 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, approx. 4500 BC, MAMUZ, Asparn/Zaya

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

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

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

Fig. 9: Greece (Cyclades); Female figurine from Antiparos, Louros type, Grotta-Pelos culture, marble, height 12.3 cm, 2800–2700 BC, 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 BC, 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 BC, PMEA UC9601

Fig. 12: Egypt: Female figurine from el-Ma'mariya, early Naqada II, clay, white pigment, height 22.2 cm, 3650–3300 BC, 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, approx. 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, approx. 4500 BC, 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 BC, Ashmolean Mus. AN1895.123b

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

Fig. 17: Syria: Seated female figurine, unknown findspot, Halaf culture, clay, paint, height 8.2 cm, 6000–5100 BC, 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 BC, MMA 07.228.71

Fig. 19: Lower Austria: Fragment of a seated female figurine from Wetzleinsdorf, Lengyel I (MEG 1b), clay, length 12 cm, approx. 4500 BC, NHM Vienna

Fig. 20: Lower Austria: Fragment of a seated female figurine from Wetzleinsdorf, Lengyel I (MEG 1b), clay, length 8.2 cm, approx. 4500 BC, NHM Vienna

Examples of hunched figurines:

Fig. 21: Egypt: Heavily stylized female figurine from el-Badari, Badarian culture, unbaked clay, height not specified, 4400-3800 BC, PMEA UC9080

Fig. 22: Egypt: Heavily stylized female figurine from Mostagedda, Badarian culture, unbaked clay, pigment, 4400–3800 BC, BM (inventory number not specified)

Fig. 23: Egypt: Female figurine, unknown findspot, Naqada II–III, clay, pigment, height 14 cm, 3500–3100 BC, Brooklyn Mus. 1996.146.1

Fig. 24: 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. 25: Egypt: Figurine from Naqada, Naqada II, hippo ivory, height not specified, 3800–3450 BC, Ashmolean Mus. AN1895.129

Fig. 26: Moldova: Flat female figurine from Vykhvatintsi, Cucuteni B culture, clay, height 15 cm, early 4th millennium BC, NMH Moldova

Fig. 27: Western Ukraine: Female figurine from Sipintsi (front and back view), Cucuteni B culture, clay, height 11 cm, early 4th millennium BC, NHM Vienna

Fig. 28: Western Ukraine: Female figurine from Bilcze-Zlote, late Cucuteni B culture, clay, height 12 cm, early 4th millennium BC, Archaeological Museum of Kraków

Examples of bird-headed figurines:

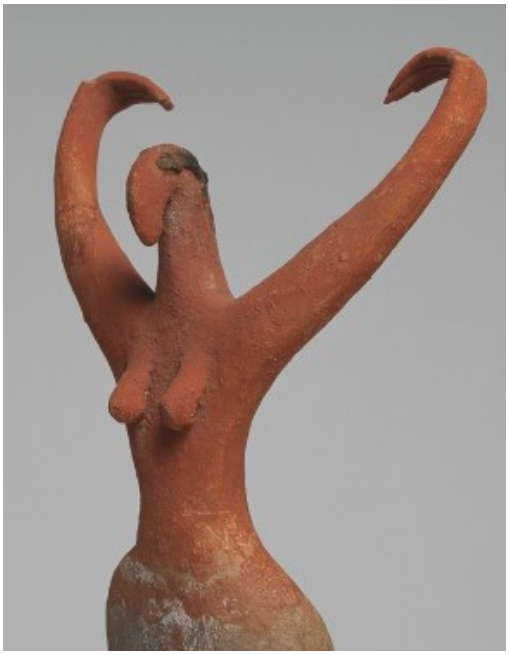

Fig. 29: Egypt: So-called "bird woman" from el-Ma'marya, Naqada II, clay, painted, height 29.2 cm, 3600–3400 BC, Brooklyn Mus. 07.447.505

Fig. 30: Greece: Fragment of a bird-headed female figurine from Megali Vrisi (Thessaly), Sesklo culture, clay, approx. 6000 BC, Museum of Volos

Fig. 31: Greece: Bird-headed figurine from Achilleion near Farsala, clay, traces of white paint, 6.1 cm, approx. 6000 BC, private ownership

Fig. 32: Greece: Bird-headed figurine, unknown findspot, Boeotian Period, clay, 15 cm, 6th century (!) BC, KHM Vienna V2813

Examples of figurines with similarly folded arms:

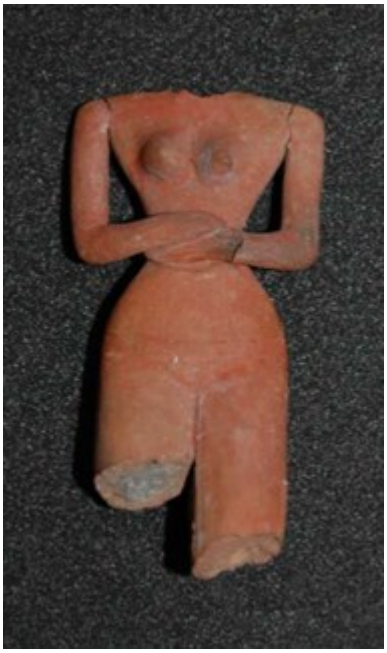

Fig. 33: Egypt: Female torso from el-Badari, Badarian culture, clay, height 9.3 cm, 4500–4000 BC, BM EA59679

Fig. 34: Egypt: Female figurine from Hierakonpolis, Naqada III (note the slim hips), lapis-lazuli, height not specified, 3300–3000 BC, Ashmolean Mus. AN1896-1908.E.1075

Fig. 35: Greece (Cyclades): Female figurine from Amorgos, Plastiras type, Grotta-Pelos culture, marble, height 19.8 cm, 3000–2800 BC, BM 1890,0921.5

Fig. 36: Greece (Cyclades): Female figurine from Paros, Spedos type, Keros-Syros culture, marble, height 14.9 cm, 2700–2500 BC, BM 1884,1213.11

Examples of masks and masked figurines:

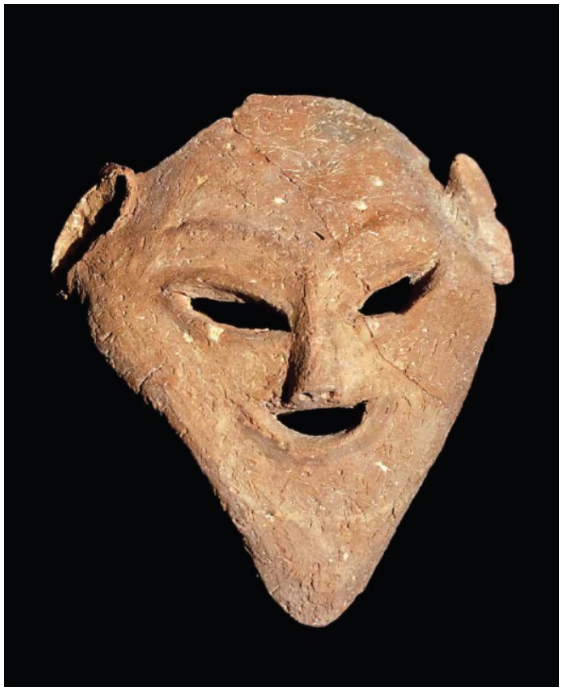

Fig. 37: Egypt: Mask from Hierakonpolis, Naqada II, clay, paint, ca. 3600 BC, Cairo JE 99152

Fig. 38: Egypt: So-called “tag figurine”, unknown findspot, Naqada II, ivory, height 6.5 cm, 3650–3450 BC, MMA 54.28.2

Fig. 39: Kosovo: Mask from Predionica, Vinča culture, polished clay, height 10 cm, 4500–4000 BC, Museum of Priština 157

Fig. 40: Serbia: Head of a masked figure from Vinča, Vinča culture, dark-red clay, height 9.6 cm, 5000–4500 BC, University of Beograd 4956

(Photo credits are presented at the end of the document.)

4 Considerations

Simple explanations come into question for the iconographic similarities, e.g. random similarities according to the requirements of human anatomy; the (presumed) cultic use of the figurines which the form follows; or the craftsmanship possibilities that existed at that time in conjunction with the breaking properties of the materials used.[34] Nevertheless, considerations regarding a connection with migration, cultural transfer and long-distance trade are warranted.[35]

The origin of a sedentary farming lifestyle is believed to have been in the Fertile Crescent.[36] After reaching Anatolia and in the 8th millennium BC, it spread into the Balkans and to further parts of Europe. At all times, humans migrated mainly along river valleys and coasts, since there, locomotion is least arduous. Accordingly, the migration movement of the early European farmers divided into three major axes, as archeologic and paleogenetic data confirm. Certain groups migrated around 6500 BC along the Struma and Vardar rivers to the north, 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 set out to move west along the coasts of the Mediterranean. Archeological, paleogenetic, and climatologic evidence confirm these processes.[37] Long-distance trade was established on an axis between Northern Europe

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[34] Cf. Craig Patch, *Dawn*, 103–104. Indeed, the "pear shape" and 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 body could also be a concession to resistance to breaking. However, M. Siebert assumed that folded arms were a matriarchal symbol of power (Siebert, *Kykladenidole*, 12).

[35] Cf. Berg and Maurer, *Idole*, 20–21.

[36] 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.

[37] 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.

and Mesopotamia.[38] Given the rapid expansion of the farming lifestyle in Europe during the 7th and 6th millennia BC, it is intuitive to imagine a fourth axis of spread 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.[39] 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? Taking into account the significantly lower sea level of the Red Sea during that time compared to today,[40] and the grassy habitat crossed by lateral branches of the Nile where are now desert and wadis,[41] there could have then been migration routes to Egypt that have now long been submerged under seawater and sand.[42] Mere cultural diffusion is also possible.[43] In any case, there is no evidence of a phase of agricultural "pilot attempts" like the Pre-Pottery Neolithic in in the Levantine

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[38] 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*, 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.

[39] Some of the former supporters of this idea (Petrie, Junker, Scharff, Kaiser, and others) were admittedly influenced by the Bible 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.

[40] 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.

[41] 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.

[42] 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 do not exist.

[43] Cultural diffusion means sharing 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.

and upper Mesopotamian regions.[44] Moreover, the crops and livestock bred in Egypt's earliest farming economies came genetically from West Asia.[45]

Together with the knowledge of grain cultivation, certain neolithic beliefs and aesthetic ideas which found expression in a cult with butt-accentuated feminine figurines may have spread both, north and south.[46] However, over the course of the 4th and 3th millennia (the Eneolithic), this part of the common cultural heritage was superseded. Pastoralists from the Eurasian steppe immigrated in several waves to large parts of Europe, largely intermingling with the civilizations of "Old Europe".[47] In Egypt, a cultural transformation may have occurred through waves of immigration from the Western (Libyan) Desert as a result of increasing aridification,[48] and from Nubia.[49] 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.

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[44] 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 BC (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).

[45] 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.

[46] Cf. Krauß et al., *Quat. Int.* 496, 28 (Fig. 2).

[47] "Old Europe" is a term used by M. Gimbutas to describe the period before immigration from the steppes. These migratory processes are proven through archeological, linguistic, and genetic research, and were actually 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.

[48] 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.

[49] 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.

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

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

Fig. 21: 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. 22: 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. 23: Brooklyn Museum, New York, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/4269 (last accessed on May 9, 2024).

Fig. 24: Photo from M. Gimbutas, *Göttinnen und Götter im Alten Europa: Mythen und Kultbilder 6500–3500 BC* (Uhlstaedt-Kirchhasel, 2010), p. 140 (Fig. 129).

Fig. 25: Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, Oxford, https://www.ashmolean.org/collections-online#/item/ash-object-487747 (last accessed on May 7, 2024).

Fig. 26: 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. 27: 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. 28: Photo from M. Gimbutas, *Göttinnen und Götter im Alten Europa: Mythen und Kultbilder 6500–3500 BC* (Uhlstaedt-Kirchhasel, 2010), p. 44 (Fig. 15).

Fig. 29: Brooklyn Museum, New York, https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/4225 (photo section) (last accessed on May 7, 2024).

Fig. 30: Photo from M. Gimbutas, *Göttinnen und Götter im Alten Europa: Mythen und Kultbilder 6500–3500 BC* (Uhlstaedt-Kirchhasel, 2010), p. 118 (Fig. 84).

Fig. 31: Photo from M. Gimbutas, *Göttinnen und Götter im Alten Europa: Mythen und Kultbilder 6500–3500 BC* (Uhlstaedt-Kirchhasel, 2010), p. 8 (Fig. I).

Fig. 32: Art-Historical Museum, Vienna, Austria, https://www.khm.at/en/objectdb/detail/63276/ (last accessed on May 1, 2024).

Fig. 33: The British Museum, London, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA59679 (last accessed on May 17, 2024).

Fig. 34: Photo from D. Craig Patch, *Dawn of Egyptian Art* (New York, 2011), p. 190.

Fig. 35: The British Museum, London, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1890-0921-5

(last accessed on May 17, 2024).

Fig. 36: The British Museum, London, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1884-1213-11 (last accessed on May 17, 2024).

Fig 37: Photo from D. Craig Patch, *Dawn of Egyptian Art* (New York, 2011) p. 92 (Fig. 23).

Fig. 38: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/547233 (last accessed on May 9, 2024).

Fig. 39: Photo from M. Gimbutas, *Göttinnen und Götter im Alten Europa: Mythen und Kultbilder 6500–3500 BC* (Uhlstaedt-Kirchhasel, 2010), p. 63 (Fig. 38).

Fig. 40: Photo from M. Gimbutas, *Göttinnen und Götter im Alten Europa: Mythen und Kultbilder 6500–3500 BC* (Uhlstaedt-Kirchhasel, 2010), p. 58 (Fig. 27).