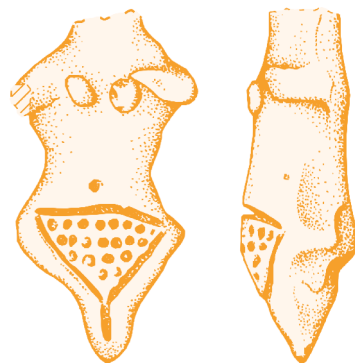


Tracing the provinces in clay figurine production in 3rd-millennium BCE Mesopotamia: integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches



Abstract: In recent decades, the corpus of clay figurines from 3rd-millennium BCE Mesopotamia has grown significantly, highlighting the need for a comprehensive, up-to-date synthesis that defines the most significant characteristics of this aspect of material culture at both regional and cross-regional levels. Adopting a combined qualitative and quantitative approach, this study goes beyond a review of existing figurine typologies to offer a diachronic analysis of the frequency of different figurine classes based on a large dataset covering 29 sites across the study area. As a result, three main provinces of clay figurine production have been identified, as well as several contact zones exhibiting mixed affinities. Each province represents a distinct tradition, evidenced by separate regional types as well as region-specific diachronic patterns in the frequency of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines, their main categories, and the proportional relationships among the different animals represented. These results pave the way for future in-depth comparative analyses of regional patterns in clay figurine production in relation to environmental, social, cultural, and economic differences among Mesopotamian subregions.

Keywords: clay figurines, anthropomorphic figurines, zoomorphic figurines, Mesopotamia, 3rd millennium BCE, typological analysis, quantitative analysis, regionalization

Maciej Makowski

Polish Academy of Sciences,
Institute of Mediterranean
and Oriental Cultures

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INTRODUCTION

Anthropomorphic and zoomorphic clay figurines were among the most common and prominent components of Mesopotamian material culture in the 3rd millennium BCE. However, due to their ambiguous nature and the difficulty of reconstructing their cultural and social roles and meanings, they make only a limited contribution to meta- and macroscale narratives of past regional cultures and societies. Despite advances in figurine analysis in recent decades, particularly through detailed, multidimensional studies of individual objects or groups within their immediate spatial, cultural, and social contexts, such studies remain limited in scope. Regional and cross-regional analyses are therefore essential to provide a solid foundation for these specialized

studies and to integrate them more effectively into large-scale reconstructions of the region's past material cultures. The present study offers a macroscale analysis integrating qualitative and quantitative research approaches, aiming to provide a comprehensive and detailed synthesis of this aspect of material culture. In addition to a typological summary, the study includes a diachronic analysis of the frequency of different figurine classes and categories within corpora from individual sites and regions. The specific aim of this paper is to enhance our understanding of regional trajectories in this aspect of material culture and to define the main provinces of figurine production in 3rd-millennium BCE Mesopotamia, their extent, and their principal characteristics.

STATE OF RESEARCH

To date, macroscale studies of clay figurines from 3rd-millennium BCE Mesopotamia have primarily focused on their typology, the variety of details they feature, and the style or technique used in their manufacture (e.g. Barrelet 1968; Badre 1980; Cholidis 1989; Pruss 1999; 2010; 2013; 2020; Moorey 2005; Sakal 2013; 2020; see also below). In the case of Central and South Mesopotamia, the most recent typological summaries and regional analyses of clay figurines are at least two decades old (Barrelet 1968; Wrede 2003; Moorey 2005). The most up-to-date syntheses of this aspect of material culture for North Mesopotamia were produced within the framework of the ARCANE project and published between 2011 and

2019 (Pruss 2011; 2015; Sakal 2015; 2018; Peyronel and Pruss 2018; Tonussi 2019). Importantly, in contrast to many earlier analyses, these studies gave equal attention to both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines. They have made significant contributions to the systematization of clay figurines, although they generally provide only a cursory overview of material from the first half of the millennium. Furthermore, syntheses of material from the latter half tend to prioritize the most characteristic types, which are typically more elaborate in form. However, these types are not necessarily equally well represented across all regions, while other types are either overlooked or only briefly mentioned.

As Ferhan Sakal (2018: 222) has observed, previous macroscale analyses often fail to adequately address the quantitative dimension and consequently offer limited information on the relative frequency of individual types or categories of figurines within the archaeological record.

With regard to the regionalization of clay figurine production, Sakal’s analysis (2013: 161–167; 2018) is particularly significant, even though it focuses exclusively on anthropomorphic figurines from the final four centuries of the 3rd millennium BCE. By mapping the spatial distribution of specific types, Sakal (2013: 161–167) identified “terracotta provinces”

and “contact zones,” the latter defined as areas where figurines resembling those from the core distribution area occur, albeit in much smaller quantities.

In contrast to the typological approach, quantitative analyses of clay figurines and studies examining the percentage frequencies of their individual categories have rarely been undertaken at regional or supra-regional levels (Badre 1980; Pruss and Sallaberger 2004; Sakal 2013: 145–161; Makowski 2024). Observations in this respect have been limited to selected regions, sites, or time frames, or to specific representational classes (e.g. zoomorphic figurines).

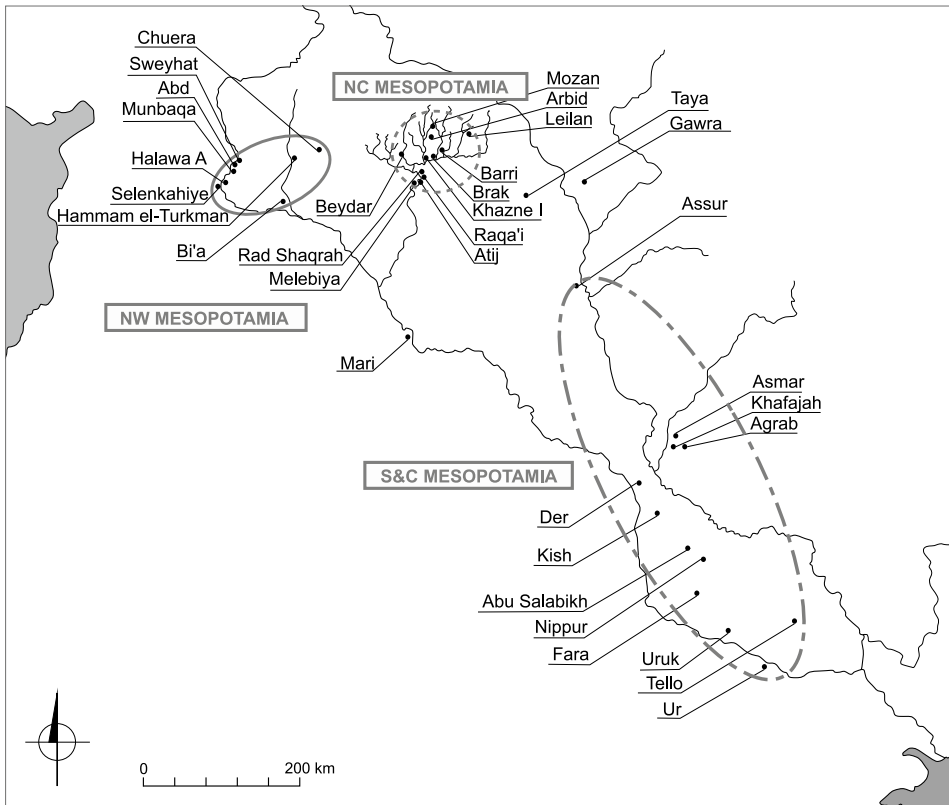


Fig. 1. Map of Mesopotamia with sites mentioned in the text and clay figurines provinces marked (Processing M. Makowski)

MATERIALS

The present study includes all categories and types of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines in the round from 3rd-millennium BCE Mesopotamia. The corpus comprises figurines from sites in modern-day Iraq and Syria, situated between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. However, mold-made terracotta plaques are not considered here, as these are attested only in small numbers in South Mesopotamia at this time (see, for example, Gasche and Pons 2014; Makowski 2024: 360, Fig. 12, Table 2). The distribution of large, well-published figurine corpora is uneven across Mesopotamia [Fig. 1]. In the north, they are concentrated in the Tabqa Dam Basin and the Lower Middle Euphrates. Notable collections from this area include those from Sweyhat (Holland, Goodway, and Roaf 2006), Abd (Pruss 2019; Sakal 2019), Munbaqa (Czichon 1998), Halawa A (Meyer and Pruss 1994; Pruss and Link 1994), Selenkahiye (Liebowitz 1988; van Loon 2001), and Bi'a (Rittig 2010a; 2010b; Strommenger 2010). Another cluster is located in the Central Jazirah region, specifically in the Khabur River basin. This includes collections from Arbid (Makowski 2016), Mozan (Wissing 2009; see also Hauser 2006; Mahmoud 2021), Khazne I (Lun'kova 2016; Munčaeu and Amirov 2016), Brak (McDonald 2001), Rad Shaqrah (Makowski 2020), Melebiya (Lebeau 1993), al-Raqai (Dunham 2015), and Atij (Fortin et al. 2023). In the vast area between these two concentrations, there are only individual corpora from Hammam el-Turkman in the Balikh River valley (Rossmeisl and Venema 1988)

and Chuera in West Jazirah (see especially Ciuchitu 2023; Haddad 2023). Data on figurine production from other regions of North Mesopotamia are limited to a few isolated collections. For Mari, located on the northwestern fringes of Central Mesopotamia, only selectively published material is available (see, for example, Parrot 1956: 200–207; Margueron 2004; Weygand 2007; 2020). Information is also very limited for the eastern part of North Mesopotamia, including incompletely published material from Taya in East Jazirah (Reade 1968; 1971; 1973) and from Gawra in the Tigridian region (Speiser 1935). The only exception is the substantial collection from Assur, located on the northeastern fringes of Central Mesopotamia (Klengel-Brandt 1978; Klengel-Brandt and Onasch 2020). This situation may change in the near future due to intensified research in Iraqi Kurdistan. To date, however, no corpora from excavations conducted in the region over the past decade have been systematically published. The most complete information on figurines from South and Central Mesopotamia derives from Agrab, Asmar, and Khafaja in the Diyala region (Frankfort, Lloyd, and Jacobsen 1940; *Diyala Archaeological Database*), Der (Gasche and Pons 2014), Kish (Zaina 2020; Bekken 2023), Abu Salabikh (McAdam 1993), Nippur (McCown, Haines, and Hansen 1967), Fara (Heinrich 1931; Martin 1988), Uruk (Wrede 2003), Ur (Woolley 1955), and Tello (de Genouillac 1934). It should be noted that ongoing excavations in South Mesopotamia could significantly expand the material

basis for future figurine studies; however, complete information on these new corpora is not yet available.

The chronology of the corpora from North Mesopotamia was established based on the results of the ARCANE project (see Quenet 2011; Finkbeiner 2015; Renette 2019). The applied periodization is based on regional systems for the Middle

Euphrates (Early Middle Euphrates/EME 1–5 periods), Jazirah (Early Jazirah/EJZ 1–5), and Tigris (Early Tigridian/ETG 1–9) regions (see, for example, Lebeau 2018: x) [Fig. 2]. For South Mesopotamia, however, the traditional system is used, based largely on historical periodization and its division into the Early Dynastic (ED I–III), Akkadian, and Ur III periods.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

BCE	Middle Euphrates	Jazirah	Tigridian	South & Central
3100	EME 1	EJZ 0	ETG 1	JN
3000			ETG 2	
2900	EME 2	EJZ1	ETG 3	ED I
2800			ETG 4	
2700	EME 3	EJZ 2	ETG 4	ED II
2600		Final		
2500	EME 4	EJZ 3 ^a	ETG 5	ED IIIa
2400			ETG 6	ED IIIb
2300	EME 5	EJZ 4	ETG 7	Akkadian
2200			ETG 8	
2100	EME 6	EJZ 5	ETG 9	Ur III
2000				

Fig. 2. Correlation of regional periodization systems for 3rd-millennium BCE Mesopotamia: EME – Early Middle Euphrates; EJZ – Early Jazirah; ETG – Early Tigridian; ED – Early Dynastic (Processing M. Makowski, based on Lebeau 2018: x)

The qualitative part of the study systematizes the corpus according to the morphological, technological, and stylistic features of the figurines. The figurines were divided into two main classes —anthropomorphic and zoomorphic— and subsequently into categories based on significant morphological differences. The latter part of the paper illustrates these classes and categories through regional types.

ANTHROPOMORPHIC FIGURINES

For the purposes of this study, the anthropomorphic figurines are divided into four categories: pillar-shaped, standing, cylindrical/cone-shaped, and seated. A similar system, albeit limited to the first two categories, was employed by Sakal (2018: 225–227) in the most recent cross-regional typological synthesis of 3rd-millennium BCE Mesopotamian figurines. These two categories were characteristic of the latter half of the millennium, represented by relatively large figurines that were baked in pottery kilns and manufactured with great care.

Pillar-shaped figurines depict males, females, and individuals of unidentified sex. Their general morphology, as well

as the absence of any attempt to render genitalia or legs, suggests that they were intended to represent individuals wearing long robes. While the upper portions of these figurines are characterized by an abundance of detail, particularly in the depiction of the head (hairdos and headgear), face (eyes, nose, and, in the case of males, beards), and upper torso (necklaces and, in the case of females, breasts), the lower portions are almost invariably plain and devoid of decoration (Sakal 2018: 225–226).

The second category includes nude standing figurines with clearly shaped legs, often set on a small base that is flat at the bottom. These figurines are mostly female or of unknown sex, although male examples are also sporadically attested. They typically have elaborately decorated heads with detailed faces and hairstyles, as well as other features such as jewelry (mostly necklaces and hip belts) and primary gender characteristics (genitalia and breasts). A distinct subcategory comprises female figurines stylized in a violin shape. These figurines are predominantly flat or board-like in form, with notably broad hips, an exaggerated pubic triangle, and frequently disproportionately short legs (Sakal 2018: 227).

The third category comprises cylindrical and cone-shaped figurines, which are attested throughout the 3rd millennium BCE. These figurines are smaller than those in the first two categories and are mostly crude, unsmoothed, and unbaked or only lightly baked, with few marked details. Due to these characteristics, they are considered *ad hoc* productions (Sakal 2018: 225). However, some

figurines in this category, both male and female, exhibit abundant decoration or additional details, particularly on the head (e.g. headgear), face (e.g. eyes, noses, and beards), and torso (e.g. necklaces, chest bands, and, in the case of females, breasts; see below for references). Some figurines have holes pierced in the base for attachment to another object or in the torso for mounting attributes, which may have included model weapons. Similar to pillar-shaped figurines, these may represent individuals wearing long robes; however, some specimens depict male genitalia.

Seated figurines constitute the fourth and final category and are attested only in the latter half of the millennium (see below for references). Two main subcategories can be distinguished. The first includes figurines designed to be seated on a separately modeled object. These figurines are usually crude and either unbaked or only lightly baked. They have clearly shaped arms and legs that are lowered below seat level. They are predominantly unadorned with minimal modeling, and as a result their gender is undetermined in most cases, although some specimens feature male genitalia. The second subcategory comprises figurines integrated with a stool or featuring a projection along the back, enabling vertical placement. This category includes both male and female representations. These figurines are usually well-baked, modeled, and decorated in detail.

ZOOMORPHIC FIGURINES

As with most publications of material from individual sites, the classification systems of zoomorphic figurines at

supra-regional and regional levels have generally followed taxonomic distinctions between representations (Peyronel and Pruss 2018: 87). In the present study, however, the corpus is first divided into three fundamental morphological categories. The first category consists of solid figurines. The second comprises wheeled figurines adapted for mounting on axles with wheels and, in most cases, a string for pulling them (Peyronel and Pruss 2018: 92, type Z 13). This category includes both solid and hollow figurines or vessels in the shape of an entire animal, which may have openings in the torso walls and/or spouts in the head. The third category consists of hollow figurines that are not adapted for mounting on axles and wheels. These are predominantly flutes and rattles (Pruss 1999; Peyronel and Pruss 2018: 92, type Z 15), though not all hollow figurines with openings in their walls can be interpreted as such (see, for example, Makowski 2016: 109; 2020: 472–473).

The most commonly depicted animals are equids, sheep, goats, cattle, dogs, and birds. Other sporadically attested quadrupeds include pigs and undomesticated animals such as lions and hedgehogs.

The identification of these animals is facilitated by certain distinctive features. In equid representations, the characteristics include upright ears, a mane (sometimes perforated), a high neck, and long legs. Some have perforations in the head intended for a string to link the figurine to a model vehicle or another figurine. Among solid figurines, in addition to simple equid types (Peyronel and Pruss 2018: 90, type Z

06), previous studies have distinguished a type with a depicted harness (Peyronel and Pruss 2018: 90, type Z 07), as well as a muscular type with wide hind legs and often without a mane (Peyronel and Pruss 2018: 90–91, type Z 08). Composite figurines consisting of an anthropomorphic figure attached to the back of an equid (Peyronel and Pruss 2018: 91, type Z 09) are also attested in some regions. Sheep figurines most often have spiral horns on the sides of their heads, and their fleece is sometimes indicated by incisions or applied clay stripes. Aside from solid figurines, sheep are relatively often represented as wheeled figurines (Peyronel and Pruss 2018: 88–89, types Z 03 and Z 13). The presence of straight or curved horns projecting from the top of the head is a distinguishing feature of goat figurines. Additional characteristic details include a beard, a raised tail, and a triangular rump (Peyronel and Pruss 2018: 89, type Z 04). Cattle figurines have upward-pointing horns marked on the sides of the head, and some examples exhibit perforations in the head (Peyronel and Pruss 2018: 88, type Z 02). Dog figurines are characterized by short legs, a raised tail, and pointed, erect ears that sometimes have slightly drooping tips (Peyronel and Pruss 2018: 89, type Z 05). Finally, bird figurines are typically set on a cylindrical pedestal base. They have either extended or unmodeled wings, and feathers are frequently rendered through incision or other forms of decoration. Birds occur among both solid and hollow figurines (Peyronel and Pruss 2018: 92, types Z 14–15).

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

The quantitative part of the study is based on a dataset that systematically collects and classifies data from published figurine corpora (Makowski 2025). This dataset covers sites for which complete data —i.e. the total number of figurines found at a given site within defined contextual or chronological frameworks— are available. The data were gathered from the catalogs and inventories of the relevant publications. The dataset provides a solid basis for analyzing the percentage frequencies of the different figurine classes and categories, as defined in the qualitative section of this study. The

following quantitative comparisons are included:

- between the two main figurine classes (anthropomorphic and zoomorphic), based on over 6500 specimens from 29 sites;
- between the anthropomorphic figurine categories, based on over 1500 specimens from 24 sites;
- between the zoomorphic figurine categories, based on over 2700 specimens from 24 sites;
- between the different kinds of animals among zoomorphic figurines, based on over 3000 specimens from 25 sites.

SPATIAL AND CHRONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

The geographical and chronological distribution of specific figurine categories and types, together with patterns in the relative frequencies of different figurine classes and categories, are used to examine the phenomenon of regionalization. Consequently, concise definitions are provided for individual clay figurine provinces and their contact zones —areas where patterns characteristic of different traditions overlap— as defined by Sakal. The discussion of each province includes a brief presentation of regional types, which have usually been described in detail in previous studies, as well as a summary of regional patterns in the percentage frequencies of different figurine classes and categories. These patterns are illustrated in bar charts based on medians calculated for each province and century. The captions of each chart clearly define its quantita-

tive basis. Medians effectively represent idealized patterns and trajectories in this aspect of material culture, while remaining firmly grounded in quantitative data. They are preferred in this analysis due to their resistance to outliers, as they provide results largely unaffected by records of low reliability, whether due to small sample size or the manner and quality of publication (i.e. incomplete, cursory, or following markedly different methods of material interpretation and categorization). However, it should be noted that bar charts based on medians do not always accurately reflect the actual presence of individual figurine classes or categories within specific spatial and chronological frameworks. Classes and categories represented by very small quantities, or attested only in some records relating to a given region, may be entirely absent from these

charts, even though they are mentioned in the qualitative part of the study and/or included in the dataset on which the quantitative analysis is based.

When calculating medians, only corpora (records) containing at least ten specimens and covering no more than four centuries were included. If two or more corpora from a given site have at least partially overlapping dates, only the larger or more precisely dated one was taken into account. Otherwise, the results (i.e. the medians) could be disproportionately influenced by sites that yielded the greatest number of records, resulting in outcomes that would less accurately reflect the regional perspective — the main objective of the present analysis. Reliable quantitative data are unfortunately unavailable for some periods, preventing the establishment of percentage frequencies for them and re-

sulting in the absence of bars for certain centuries in the charts. This may concern all figurine classes and categories within a given temporal and spatial framework, or only some of them. For example, reliable quantitative data may be lacking for the calculation of percentage frequencies of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines, while data for anthropomorphic figurine categories alone may be sufficient for the same time and spatial frame. It should also be noted that the absence of bars for certain periods does not imply the absence of figurines from the same time span, but rather the impossibility of determining percentage frequencies. Finally, some periods are represented by only a single record or site. In such cases, the corresponding bars in the charts are rendered semi-transparent to distinguish them from chronological spans supported by more extensive data.

RESULTS

NORTHWEST MESOPOTAMIA

In terms of clay figurine production, the Middle Euphrates region, specifically the area extending from Bazi to Bi'a, together with the Balikh River basin, can be identified as a single province [Figs 3–7; see also Fig. 1]. With regard to anthropomorphic figurines from the latter part of the millennium, this province was already well defined in Sakal's study (2013: 163–165). In his analysis, the area further east, including Chuera in West Jazirah, was identified as a contact zone. The present analysis generally follows this definition of the province's extent and its contact zone, although, as Sakal noted, the area is not entirely homogeneous. Moreover,

due to the lack of data from the eastern part of the province —namely the Balikh River basin and West Jazirah— new discoveries from the region may necessitate a revision of its definition.

The production of clay figurines in this area during the first half of the 3rd millennium BCE is poorly documented. The current state of research suggests that anthropomorphic figurines were not produced during the EME 2 period (Sakal 2015: 267) [see Fig. 2]. The earliest specimens date to the EME 3 period, while the first well-defined type appears only in the mid-millennium (late EME 3/early EME 4). During the first half of the millennium, the zoomorphic corpus

was dominated by crude or simple solid figurines (Pruss 2015: 280, type MEFT Z 01–02) [Fig. 4:1], primarily of cattle (75% in the EME 2 period; see Makowski 2025: AZ spreadsheet) [Fig. 7:b], although single figurines of sheep, goats, and equids are also recorded (see Ciuchitu 2023: Nos TCH 08-K-007, 02-Z-098).

In the latter half of the 3rd millennium BCE, figurine production underwent a gradual transformation, with well-baked

and meticulously crafted anthropomorphic and zoomorphic examples becoming increasingly predominant. A marked increase in the frequency of anthropomorphic figurines is observable at numerous sites [Fig. 6:a]. By the middle of the millennium, they accounted for 40–50% of the corpus, reaching up to 70% in the final three centuries (see especially Sweyhat, Halawa A, Selenkahiye, and Bi'a; Makowski 2025: AZ spreadsheet). Pillar-shaped

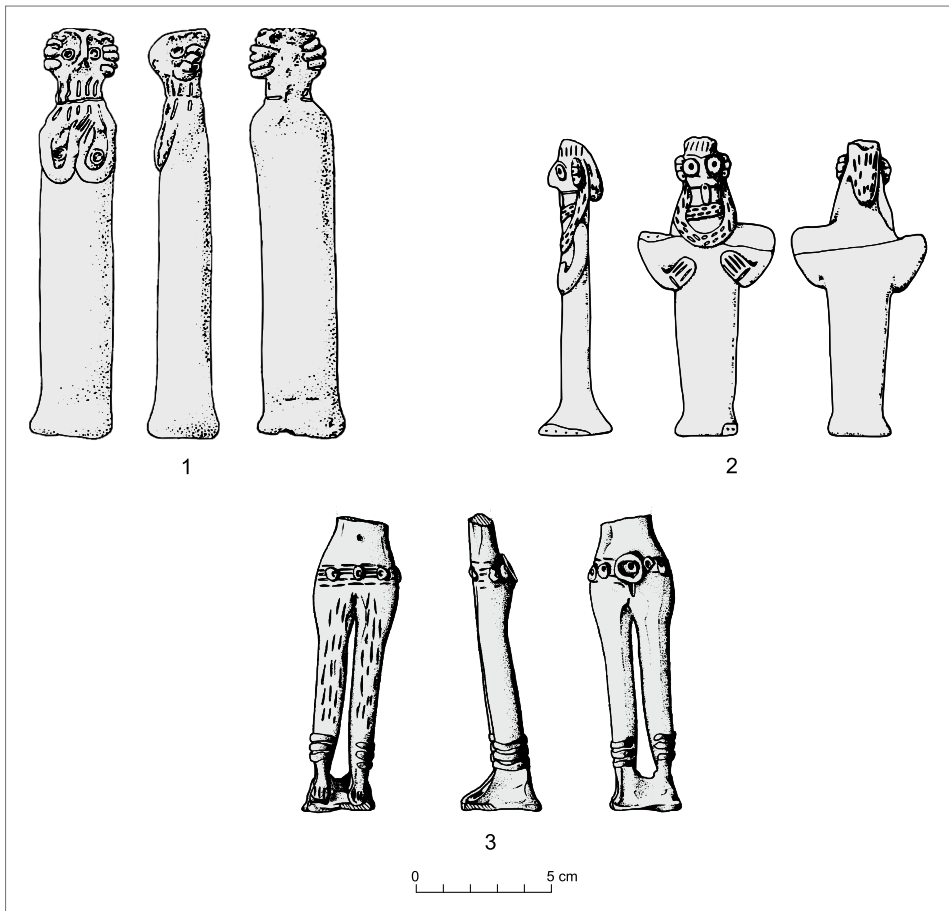


Fig. 3. Northwest Mesopotamia, main types of anthropomorphic figurines: 1 – pillar-shaped figurine of MEFT A 01 type; 2 – pillar-shaped figurine of MEFT A 02 type; 3 – standing figurine of MEFT A 03 type (Processing M. Makowski, based on Meyer and Pruss 1994: Fig. 11:109; van Loon 2001: Pl. 6:5b; Haddad 2023: Pl. A1:1)

figurines dominated, constituting at least 90% of anthropomorphic representations (see Makowski 2025: ACat spreadsheet) [Fig. 6:b]. Within this category, two distinct types are particularly noteworthy. The

first type emerged during the late EME 3/EJZ 2 or early EME 4/EJZ 3 period (type MEFT A 01/ME-F1; see Sakal 2013; 2015) [Fig. 3:1]. These figurines are characterized by incised decoration —particularly

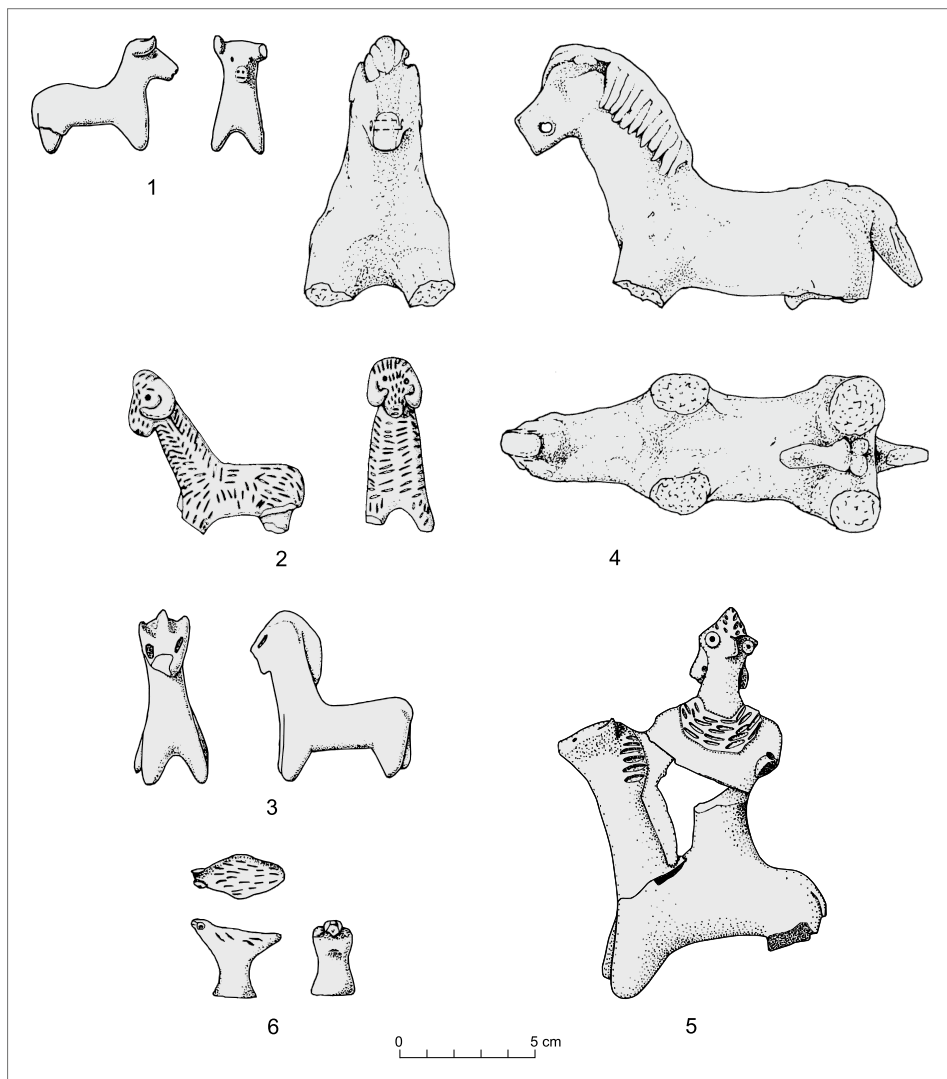


Fig. 4. Northwest Mesopotamia, main types of solid zoomorphic figurines: 1–3 – simple figurines of MEFT Z 02 type, including representations of cattle, sheep, and equid; 4 – equid figurine of MEFT Z 03 type; 5 – composite figurine of MEFT Z 04 type, with a male attached to the back of an equid; 6 – bird figurines of MEFT Z 06 type (Processing M. Makowski, based on Pruss and Link 1994: Figs 32:40, 35:79, 36:98, 44:297; van Loon 2001: Pl. 6:6d; Holland, Goodway, and Roaf 2006: Fig. 157:6)

necklaces— and by their distinctive arm position: the arms are bent at the elbows and held close to the center of the body. Notably, these figurines appear to depict only females. The main distribution area of this type corresponds to the Balikh River valley. The second type shows greater internal variation than the first (type MEFT A 02/ME-F2; see Sakal 2013; 2015) [Fig. 3:2]. These figurines feature prominent shoulders, a flat upper body, and applied decoration often supplemented by additional incisions. This method of decoration was used to depict headgear, hairstyles, facial features, and necklaces. Figurines of this type represent both males and females. They date to the EME 4–6/EJZ 4–5 and are primarily found at sites along the Middle Euphrates.

In EME 5, a new category of naturalistic standing female figurines was introduced [Fig. 3:3], though these are relatively rare, accounting for around 3–7% of the total [see Fig. 6:b]. Typically, these figurines wear necklaces, have a marked pubic region, and place their hands on their breasts (type MEFT A 03/ME-F3; Sakal 2013; 2015).

The two abovementioned types of pillar-shaped figurines [see Fig. 3:1–2] are also found further east (in West and Central Jazirah) and south (at Mari in Central Mesopotamia). At Chuera in West Jazirah, identified as a contact zone, the older type (MEFT A 01) clearly dominates [see Fig. 1]. In addition, the site has yielded figurine types that appear more closely related to those from Central Jazirah [see below, Fig. 8:1–8], including simple cylindrical and cone-shaped figurines, as well as schematic standing figurines with stub arms. The latter type is attested earlier (from EJZ 3b) and occurs more frequently (about 7–18%) than naturalistic standing figurines at this site, as is also the case in Central Jazirah (Makowski 2025: ACat spreadsheet).

Within the corpus of zoomorphic figurines from the second half of the millennium, cattle occupy the most prominent position, accounting for around 20–30% (see Makowski 2025: ZSpec spreadsheet) [see Fig. 7:b]. However, equid figurines also occur in relatively high frequencies, typically ranging from 15 to 30%. At certain sites, their frequency even exceeds

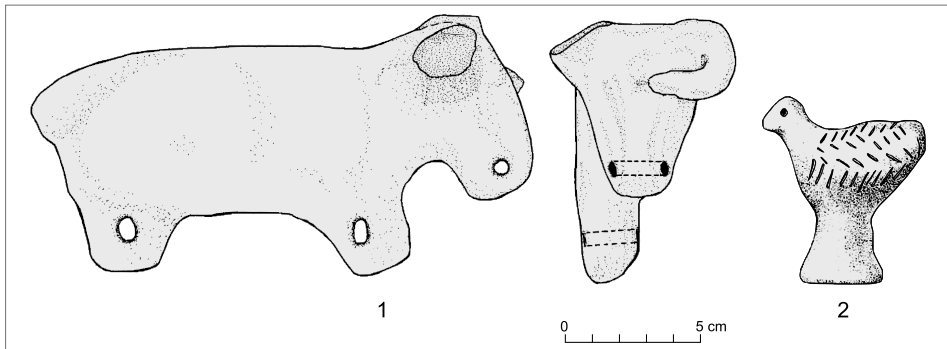


Fig. 5. Northwest Mesopotamia, wheeled sheep figurine of MEFT Z 05 type (1) and hollow bird figurine/flute of MEFT Z 07 type (2) (Processing M. Makowski, based on Holland, Goodway, and Roaf 2006: Pl. 175:4; Rittig 2010a: Pl. 86:10)

that of cattle. The high proportion of bird representations (about 5–15%) is also characteristic of the region, and their relative importance increased over time (see Sweyhat, Abd, Halawa A, Bi'a, and

Chuera). In addition to solid figurines, some wheeled (up to 2–3%) and hollow (up to 5–6%) examples are also recorded (see Makowski 2025: ZCat spreadsheet) [Fig. 7:a].

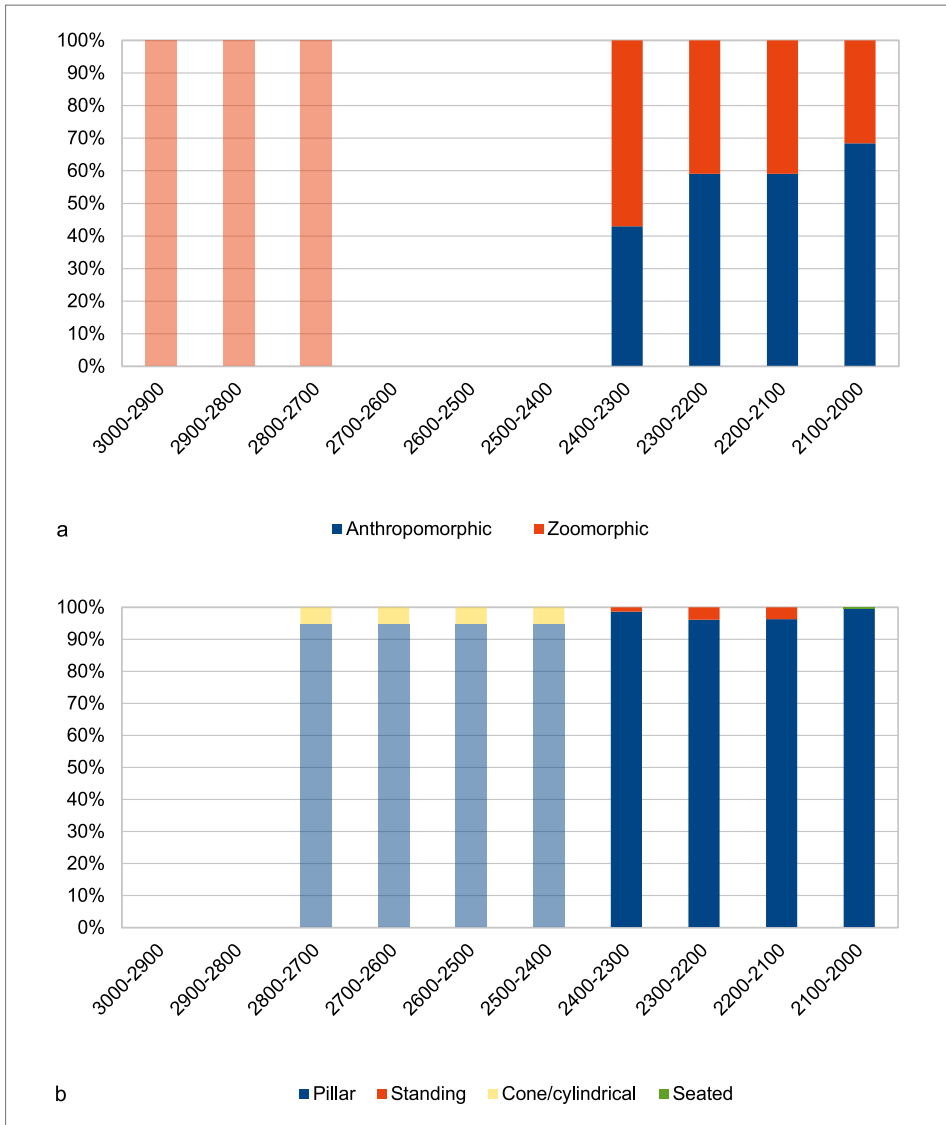


Fig. 6. Northwest Mesopotamia, diachronic changes in the percentage frequencies of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines (a), based on 1526 specimens from 7 sites; anthropomorphic figurine categories (b), based on 434 specimens from 7 sites; semi-transparent bars are based on a single record/site only (Processing M. Makowski)

The EME 3 period saw the introduction of new types of solid, well-baked quadruped figurines (Pruss 2015: type MEFT Z 02) [Fig. 4:2–3]. The EME 4/5 period witnessed the emergence of further

types, including elaborate equid figurines adorned with harnesses and featuring perforations in the head, genitalia, and/or mane (Pruss 2015: type MEFT Z 03), as well as composite figurines with a male

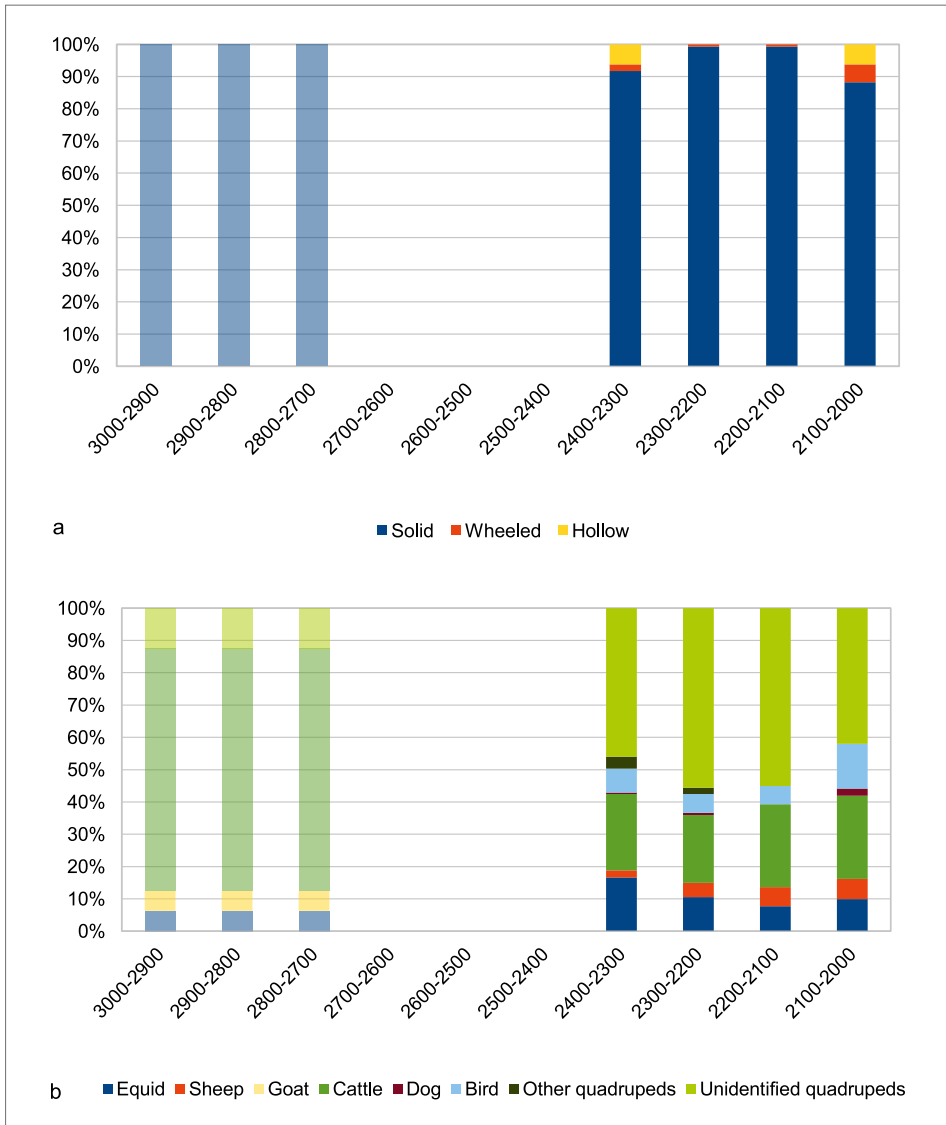


Fig. 7. Northwest Mesopotamia, diachronic changes in the percentage frequencies of zoomorphic figurine categories (a), based on 757 specimens from 7 sites; particular kinds of animals among zoomorphic figurines (b), based on 820 specimens from 7 sites; semi-transparent bars are based on a single record/site only (Processing M. Makowski)

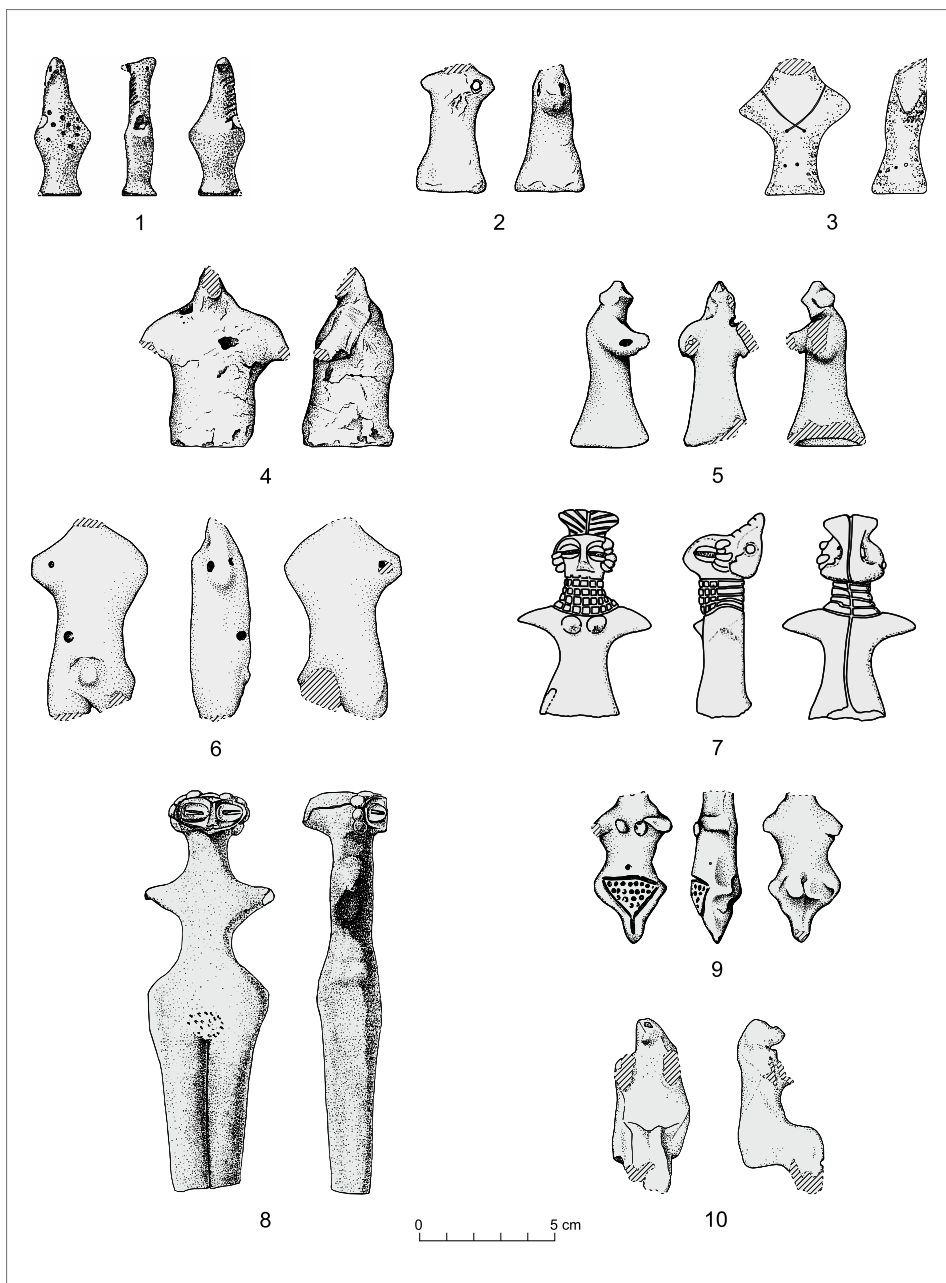


Fig. 8. North-Central Mesopotamia, main types of anthropomorphic figurines: 1–5 – cylindrical/cone-shaped figurines of JZFT A 03 type; 6 – standing figurines of JZFT A 01 type; 7 – standing figurine of JZFT A 08 type; 8 – standing figurine of JZFT A 04 type; 9 – stylized standing female figurine; 10 – seated figurine (Processing M. Makowski, based on McDonald 2001: Fig. 486:5; Debryne, Jans, and van der Stede 2003: Pl. XI:32374-M-1; Munčaeu and Amirov 2016: Pl. 4:743; Makowski 2016: Pls I:A 004, A 016, II:A 023, A 025, A 031, III:A 049; 2020: Fig. 4:3)

figure attached to the back of an equid (Pruss 2015: type MEFT Z 04) [Fig. 4:4–5]. The same period also saw the first appearance of solid bird figurines (Pruss 2015: type MEFT Z 06) [Fig. 4:6]. Among hollow figurines, bird representations were especially common, mostly in the form of flutes with a single hole under the tail and some rattles (Pruss 2015: type MEFT Z 07) [Fig. 5:2]. These may have been produced as early as the EME 3 period but only became popular toward the end of the millennium. The category of wheeled figurines (depicting sheep, cattle, equids, and even birds) is mainly attested from the EME 5–6 period (Pruss 2015: type MEFT Z 05) [Fig. 5:1].

At Chuera, a contact zone, slightly distinct patterns were documented, including a relatively very high percentage frequency of bird figurines (13–21%) and hollow figurines (approximately 8–9%), with some sheep and cattle representations in the latter category (Makowski 2025: ZSpec and ZCat spreadsheets).

NORTH-CENTRAL MESOPOTAMIA

The current study identifies the Khabur region as a distinct province of clay figurine production [Figs 8–12]. The westernmost fringes of the region, particularly the area around Beydar, have been suggested as a contact zone, as has the Middle Khabur region on the southern periphery [see Fig. 1]. However, the eastern extent of this province remains unclear due to the lack of large, well-documented collections of figurines from the area between the Khabur region and Assur (see also above). Only two sites (Taya and Gawra) in this vast area have data on figurine production, but these are too

limited to allow definitive conclusions to be drawn.

The presence of anthropomorphic figurines in the region is documented from the second quarter of the 3rd millennium onward (EJZ 2 period; see especially Khazne I, Raqai and Barri, as well as Arbid and Atij), and possibly from the first quarter (EJZ 1 period; see Khazne I). Until the middle of the millennium, their percentage ranged from 8% to 20% at most sites and may have gradually increased over time (Makowski 2025: AZ spreadsheet) [Fig. 11:a]. They are typically poorly baked or unbaked and have a cylindrical or conical shape with stub arms (see Pruss 2011: type JZFT A 03) [see Fig. 8:1–2]. Alongside crudely made specimens with barely marked heads (see also stalk-like examples without limbs: Makowski 2020: 468–469), there is a more detailed type characterized by simple incised or impressed decoration. Figurines of the latter type are distinguished by the presence of facial features, necklaces, and/or discoidal headdresses (Valentini 2008: Fig. 5; Dunham 2015: No. Raq 90 H-007; Munčaev and Amirov 2016: 309–319, Group 1; Fortin et al. 2023: 392, No. Tc 50). Around the middle of the 3rd millennium BCE (late EJZ 2), a category of standing figurines emerged: poorly baked or unbaked male representations with stub arms, separate legs, and only the genitalia depicted (Pruss 2011: type JZFT A 01; Makowski 2016: 23, type Anthr/F/1b) [Fig. 8:6].

Zoomorphic figurines from the first half of the millennium tend to be small, crude, and poorly baked. Documented examples include sheep, goats, and cattle, as well as some equid and dog representations (Pruss 2011: types JZFT Z 01–02)



Fig. 9. North-Central Mesopotamia, main types of solid zoomorphic figurines: 1 – quadruped figurine of JZFT Z 01 type; 2–5 – figurines of JZFT Z 02 type, including representations of goat, equid, dog, and cattle; 6 – equid figurines of JZFT Z 03 type; 7 – equid figurine of JZFT Z 04 type; 8 – equid figurine of JZFT Z 05 type; 9 – bird figurine; 10 – cattle figurine of JZFT Z 02 type (Processing M. Makowski, based on McDonald 2001: Fig. 489:66; Matthews 2003: Fig. 6.69:14; Makowski 2016: Pls IV:Z 004, V:Z 028, VII:Z 085, IX:Z 112, XII:Z 274, XX:Z 413, Z 419, XXI: Z 428)

[Fig. 9:1, 3]. These animals appear to be represented in relatively even percentages across the corpora (Makowski 2025: ZSpec spreadsheet) [Fig. 12:b].

A continuation of earlier patterns is evident at the beginning of the second half of the millennium (EJZ 3 period). However, a significant decline in the percentage of anthropomorphic figurines, to below 10%, occurred no later than around 2350 BCE (EJZ 4), possibly even earlier (EJZ 3b). Their relative frequency remained low until the end of the millennium (Makowski 2025: AZ spreadsheet) [see Fig. 11:a]. At sites located in contact zones (Beydar, Melebiya, and Rad Shaqrah), a significantly higher proportion of anthropomorphic figurines was recorded. In view of the uncertain eastern limits of the province, the very low proportion of anthropomorphic figurines at Gawra in the Tigridian region is notable (Speiser 1935: 63–66), as it is similar to that observed in the Upper Khabur region.

In typological terms, there is no significant change between the first and second halves of the millennium. Earlier patterns continue, although a large proportion of the figurines is now hard-baked. Crude cylindrical/cone-shaped figurines remain a major component of the corpora, usually constituting at least 80% of anthropomorphic representations (Makowski 2025: ACat spreadsheet) [Fig. 11:b], with a new type introduced in the EJZ 3 period. This new type is characterized by a flat, oval-sectioned body and is occasionally adorned with incisions or marked breasts (cf. Makowski 2020: 467 and n. 43–44) [Fig. 8:3]. Another variant of cylindrical/cone-shaped figurines emerged during the EJZ 3b period. These may still have stub arms, though they more often display arms formed in a more naturalistic manner. Notable characteristics include piercings, head-dresses (mostly conical), beards, and, in the case of later examples, incised long

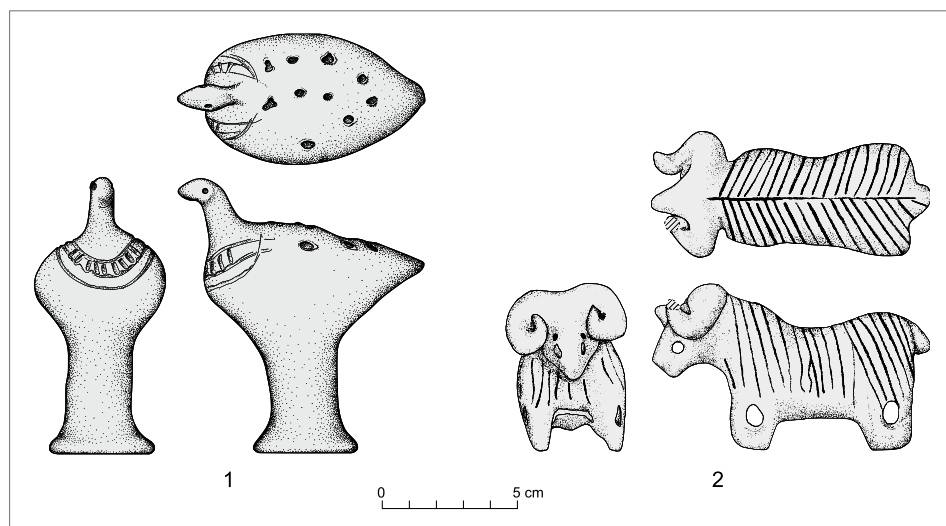


Fig. 10. North-Central Mesopotamia, hollow bird figurine/rattle (1) and wheeled sheep figurine of JZFT Z 06 type (2) (Processing M. Makowski, based on Makowski 2016: Pls XV:Z 339, XX:Z 432)

robes. The figurines predominantly depict males and may represent military or high-status individuals (see Makowski 2016: type Anthr/F/3b2-3) [Fig. 8:4-5].

The tradition of producing standing figurines, mostly female, continued throughout the second half of the millennium. They seem to have become particu-

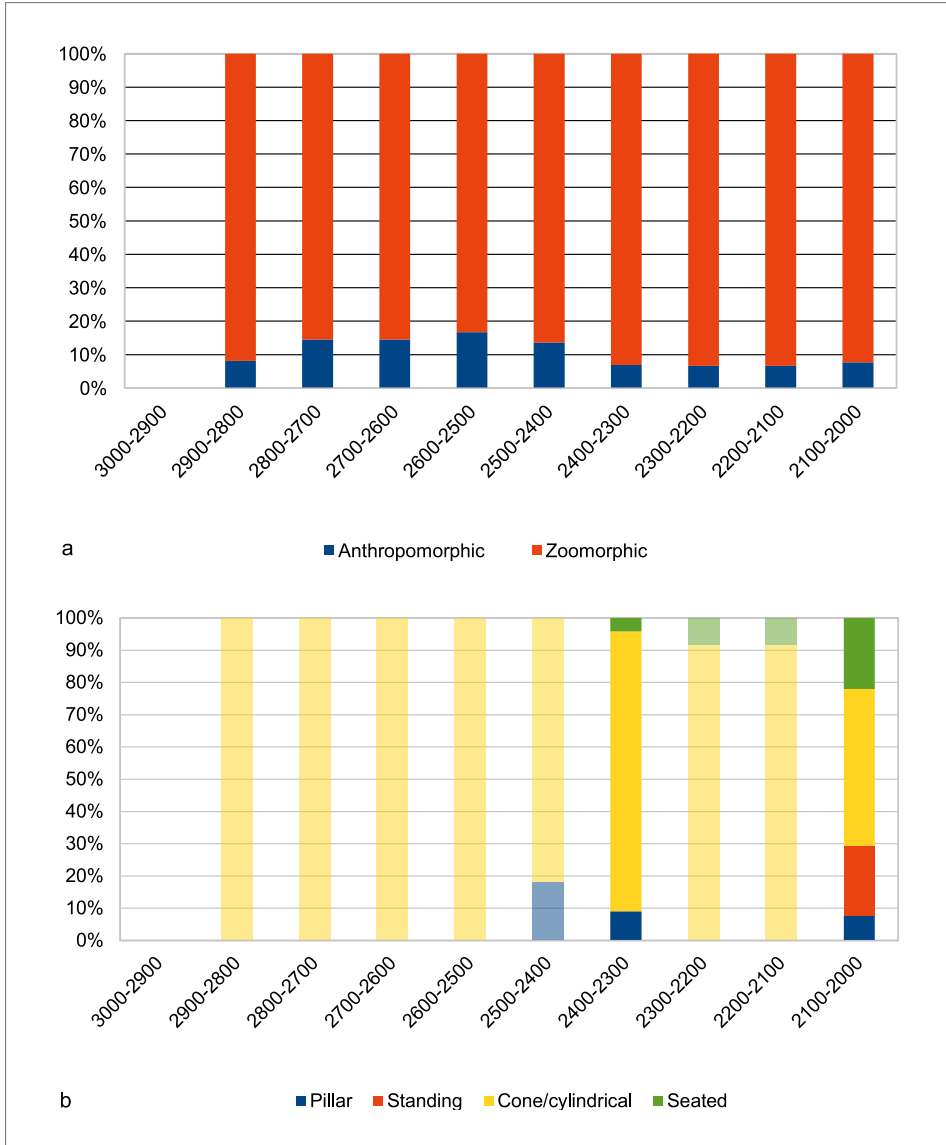


Fig. 11. North-Central Mesopotamia, diachronic changes in the percentage frequencies of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines (a), based on 1918 specimens from 11 sites; anthropomorphic figurine categories (b), based on 120 specimens from 4 sites; semi-transparent bars are based on a single record/site only (Processing M. Makowski)

larly common in the final century (EJZ 5; see Makowski 2025: ACat spreadsheet) [see *Fig. 11:b*]. Some are naturalistically shaped, but most are schematic with stub arms. These figurines exhibit a distinctive style of facial representation characterized by coffee-bean-shaped eyes (Pruss 2011: 241, types JZFT A 04, 05 and 08; 2020; Makowski 2016: 23–24, type Anthr/F/1c; 2020: 463–464) [*Fig. 8:7–8*]. A small number of figurines fall into the subcategory of stylized female representations, characterized by wide hips, an exaggerated pubic region, and disproportionately short, barely defined legs (see Makowski 2016: type Anthr/F/2; 2020: 465–466) [*Fig. 8:9*]. By contrast, the few standing male figurines are more naturalistically shaped, with clearly separated legs that give the impression of a rider in a straddled seated position (see Makowski 2016: type Anthr/F/4a; Mahmoud 2021: No. A10q680.2).

Seated figurines appear to be relatively common in the Upper Khabur region during the EJZ 4–5 periods (Makowski 2025: ACat spreadsheet) [see *Fig. 11:b*]. They represent both subcategories, with male figurines outnumbering female ones [*Fig. 8:10*]. Some of these figurines display genitalia and naturalistic arms, and in a few cases they also have long incised robes (see Makowski 2016: 29–30, type Anthr/F4a–b).

Pillar-shaped figurines are very rare in the region compared to the Middle Euphrates, Balikh River valley, and West Jazirah regions (see Makowski 2025: AZ spreadsheet) [see *Fig. 11:b*]. Several of these figurines correspond to types known from South and Central Mesopotamia (see, for example, Makowski 2016: 28–29,

No. A 040). Other pillar-shaped figurines resemble types found in Northwest Mesopotamia (MEFT A 01 at Beydar, MEFT A 02 at Mozan; see e.g. Sakal 2013: 148–149).

In light of the province's uncertain eastern borders, it is important to highlight the striking similarities between Taya (Reade 1971: Pl. XXV:c, f) and the Upper Khabur region in regard to stylized standing female figurines and seated figurines from second half of the millennium.

The prevalence of equid figurines among zoomorphic representations is characteristic of this province in the second half of the millennium [see *Fig. 12:b*]. During the EJZ 3 period, equid figurines constituted at least 30% of the total (see Makowski 2025: ZSpec spreadsheet), a percentage that increased further during the subsequent EJZ 4–5 period. At most sites, sheep occupy second place, followed by goats in third, while cattle and birds are present in very limited quantities (about 2–3% at most sites). However, deviations from this pattern have been observed in contact zones. Notably, the EJZ 3–4 Beydar corpus (Makowski 2025: record ID ZSpec_09_01) exhibits a remarkably even distribution of species, with a lower equid percentage (about 16%) and relatively high bird and cattle percentages (about 10% and 17%, respectively). This distribution is analogous to that observed in Northwest Mesopotamia. Wheeled and hollow figurines are relatively rare in the Khabur region, usually constituting no more than 1–2% of the corpus each (Makowski 2025: ZCat spreadsheet) [*Fig. 12:a*].

New types that emerged in the lat-

ter half of the millennium include well-baked, solid figurines of sheep and equids. Plain equid representations occasionally exhibit perforations in the

head or mane (Pruss 2011: type JZFT Z 03) [Fig. 9:6]. From the EJZ 3b onward, two distinct types of equid figurine are documented: those with detailed deco-



Fig. 12. North-Central Mesopotamia, diachronic changes in the percentage frequencies of zomorphic figurine categories (a) based on 1389 specimens from 8 sites; particular kinds of animals among zoomorphic figurines (b) based on 1279 specimens from 9 sites; semi-transparent bars are based on a single record/site only (Processing M. Makowski)

rations reflecting harnessing, and the muscular type (Pruss 2011: types JZFT Z 04–05) [Fig. 9:7–8]. Both types frequently display marked male genitalia, which are often strapped. Wheeled figurines are attested from the EJZ 4 onward, although they may have been present as early as the EJZ 3 (Pruss 2011: type JZFT Z 06; Makowski 2016: 72–74; 2020: 471–472). Notably, wheeled figurines appear to exclusively depict sheep [Fig. 10:2]. The category of hollow representations is exemplified by a limited number of specimens, including bird-shaped rattles from the EJZ 5 period [Fig. 10:1]. Other hollow figurines (possibly flutes) have openings at the back and in the anal area. These represent birds (EJZ 4/5?), pigs (EJZ 3), and potentially other animals (Makowski 2016: 93; 2020: 472–474).

MARI IN THE NORTHWESTERN PART OF CENTRAL MESOPOTAMIA

Figurines from Mari [see Fig. 1], a site in northwest Central Mesopotamia, appear to deviate from the patterns and trajectories observed in the aforementioned provinces. However, it should be noted that it is not possible to establish the percentage frequencies of the different figurine classes and categories at this site.

Anthropomorphic figurines, including simple cylindrical or cone-shaped examples with stub arms, appear to have been produced at Mari as early as the first quarter of the 3rd millennium BCE (Margueron 2004: Fig. 78:1–2; Weygand 2020: 204, Fig. 4:g). Among the zoomorphic figurines of the same period are crude, small representations of quadrupeds, as well as early examples of equid representations. Some equid figurines are more

elaborate, with harnesses and perforations in the head and neck (Margueron 2004: Fig. 78:3–7).

In the latter half of the millennium, cylindrical and conical anthropomorphic figurines continued to be produced (Margueron 2004: Fig. 413:1). During the final centuries of the millennium (the Shakkannakku/Ville III period, 2250–1810 BCE), standing figurines, mostly female but also male, were introduced (Badre 1980: 69–70, 85–87, types MAI 1, MAV 1; Margueron 2004: Fig. 413/6–8, 11–12; Sakal 2018: 227; Weygand 2020: 199). Female figurines bear a strong resemblance to contemporary naturalistic examples from the Middle Euphrates region, though they differ in details such as arm position. Some male figurines exhibit a high degree of similarity to their female counterparts, while others have clearly separated legs reminiscent of those from the Khabur region (Margueron 2004: Fig. 413:5). Pillar-shaped figurines appear to be uncommon, although some correspond to types known from Northwest Mesopotamia (types ME-F1–2; see Sakal 2013: 148–149).

In the field of zoomorphic representations, equid figurines featuring perforations in the head and mane are documented alongside wheeled sheep figurines (Margueron 2004: Figs 290:1–5, 413:4).

SOUTH AND CENTRAL MESOPOTAMIA

South and Central Mesopotamia constitute a distinct province, with Assur in the northeast identified in this analysis as a contact zone [Figs 13–16; see also Fig. 1]. Anthropomorphic figurines are well attested in the region as early as the

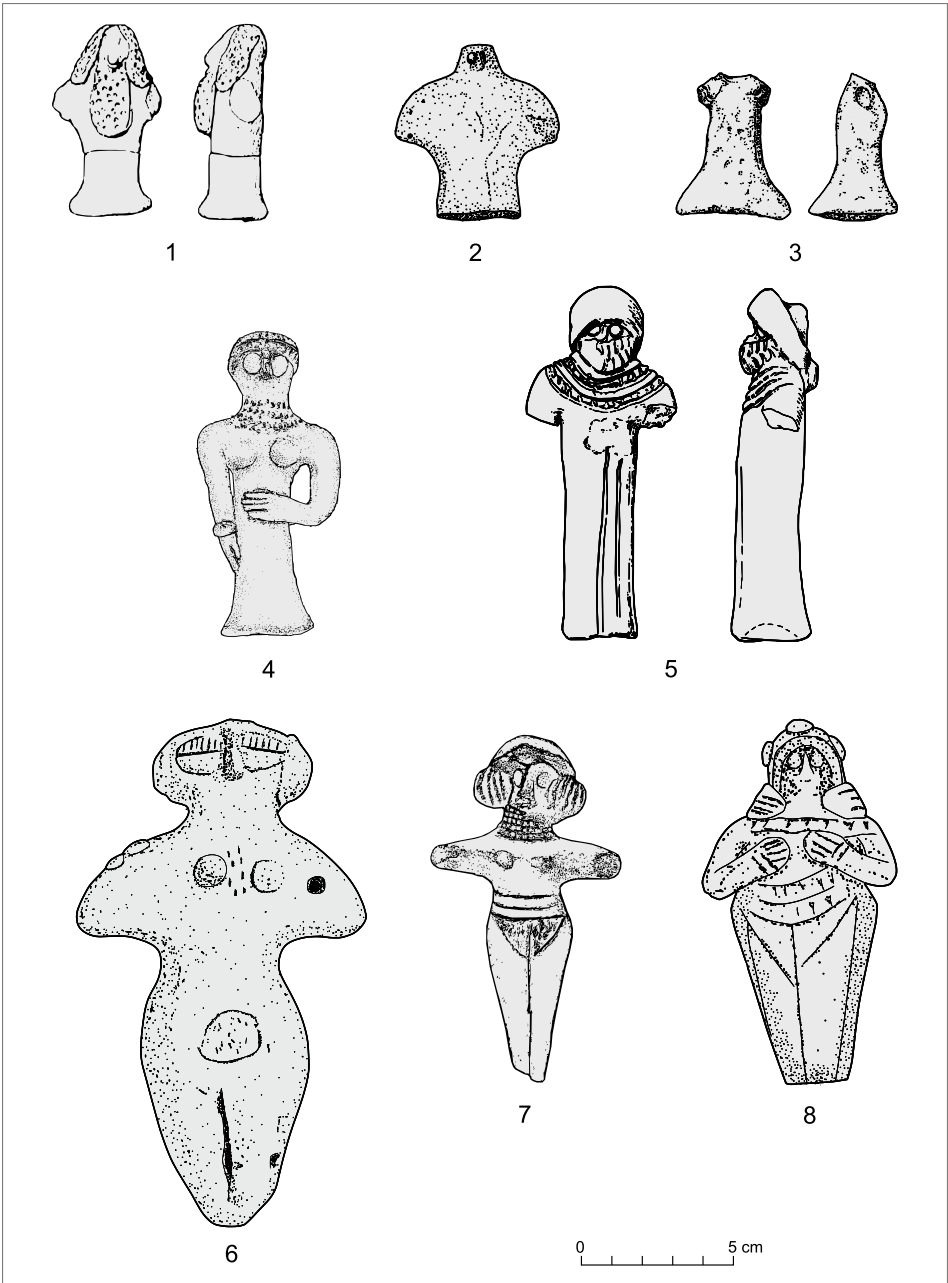


Fig. 13. South and Central Mesopotamia, main types of anthropomorphic figurines: 1-3 – cylindrical/cone-shaped figurines; 4 – female pillar-shaped figurine of the Akkadian type; 5 – male pillar-shaped figurine; 6 – early stylized standing figurine; 7 – naturalistic standing figurine; 8 – late stylized standing figurine (Processing M. Makowski, based on Frankfort 1936: Fig. 57:A; Frankfort, Lloyd, and Jacobsen 1940: Figs 108:c, 109:c; Woolley 1955: Pl. 21:U.18416; McCown, Haines, and Hansen 1967: Pl. 122:10; McAdam 1993: Fig. 3:5, No. 282; McMahon 2006: Pl. 163:13)

first quarter of the 3rd millennium BCE, when they make up around 26–31% of the collections from individual sites (Makowski 2025: AZ spreadsheet) [Fig. 15:a]. Two categories are recorded: cylindrical/cone-shaped figurines and the less frequent standing female figurines. At least some of the latter are baked and characterized by large heads with perforations and coffee-bean-shaped eyes. They also have stub arms, a marked pubic area, and breasts, but usually no jewelry (Moorey

2003: 173*; 2005: 53, 57–58; *Diyala Archaeological Database*: Nos As. 34:105, As. 34:114, Kh. V 167, Kh. V 171a, Kh. V 193, Kh. V 257, Kh. V 297, Kh. V 358, Kh. VI 61, Ag 36:449) [Fig. 13:6]. Dated to the ED I period, they do not appear to have continued into the following centuries. Among the small cylindrical or cone-shaped figurines with stub arms from the ED I–II period are specimens with very superficially modeled heads and, in some cases, perforated arms. There

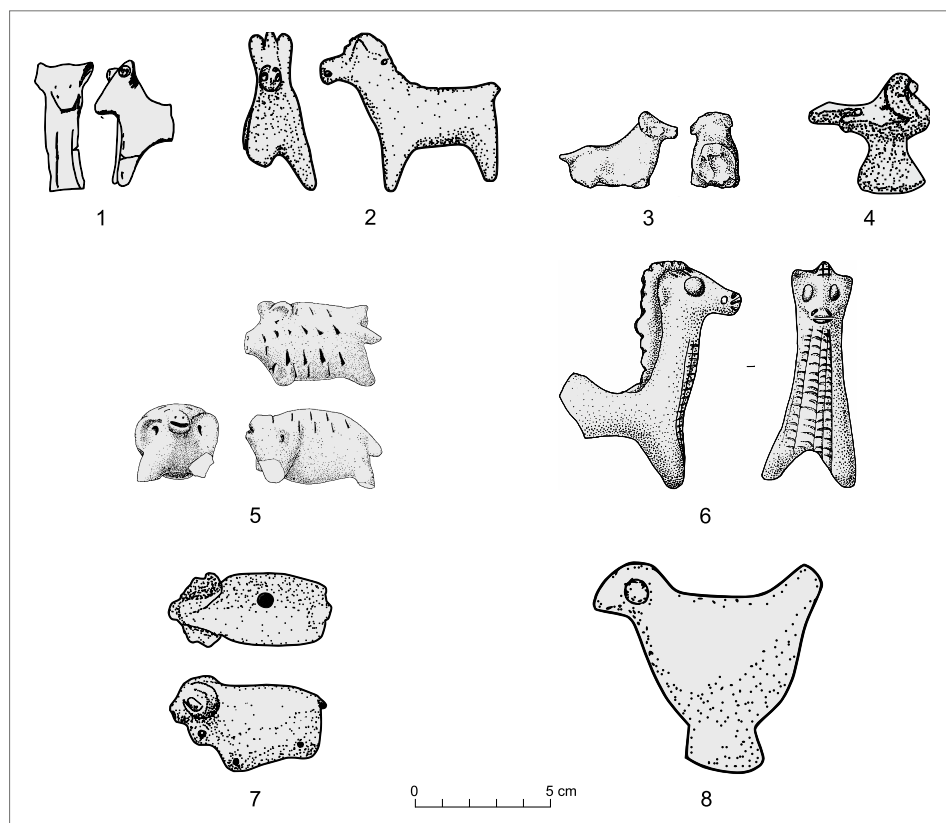


Fig. 14. South and Central Mesopotamia, main categories and types of zoomorphic figurines: 1–5 – solid figurines of cattle, equid, sheep, bird, and pig; 6 – solid equid figurine with harness; 7 – hollow wheeled sheep figurine; 8 – hollow bird figurine/flute/rattle (Processing M. Makowski, based on Delougaz 1952: Pl. 94:i; McCown, Haines, and Hansen 1967: Pl. 142:2; Martin 1988: 195, No. 43; McAdam 1993: Fig. 3:9, No. 309, 3:12, No. 338; Pruss 1999: Fig. 8:P14; Cellerino 2009: Pl. 5:25; Zaina 2020: Pl. XCIV:14)

are also more elaborate examples with clearly marked beards and hairstyles, suggesting male representations. Some have a vertical perforation in the base

(Moorey 2003: 173*-176*; 2005: 58-59; Wrede 2003: 227-228, No. 853; Otto et al. 2024: 99, Fig. 24; Diyala Archaeological Database: No. As. 34:113) [Fig. 13:1-2].

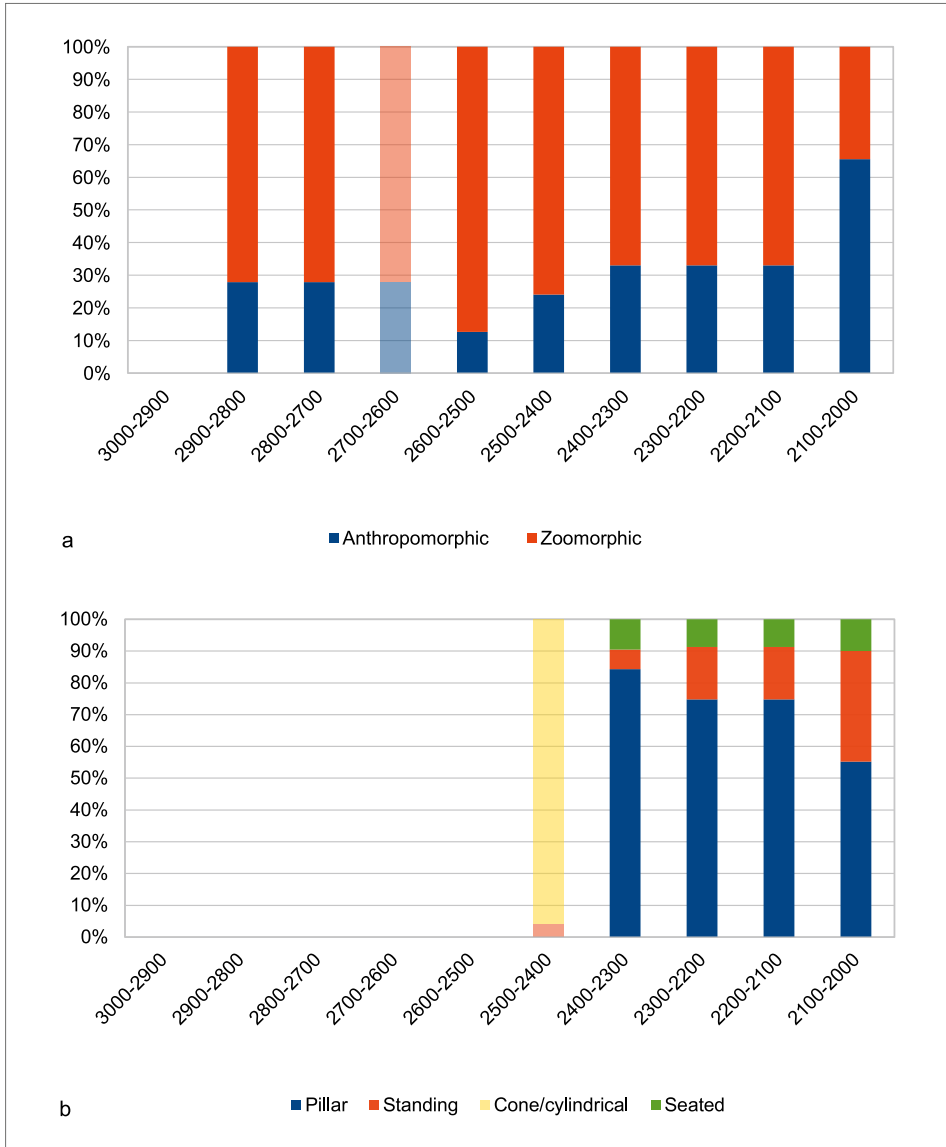


Fig. 15. South and Central Mesopotamia, diachronic changes in the percentage frequencies of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines (a), based on 1477 specimens from 10 sites; anthropomorphic figurine categories (b), based on 539 specimens from 5 sites; semi-transparent bars are based on a single record/site only (Processing M. Makowski)

Zoomorphic figurines from the first half of the millennium include small, crude, poorly baked specimens, as well as larger, hard-baked but still simple examples. Fused legs are a distinctive feature of quadruped figurines from this early period (see, for example, McAdam 1993: 89; Wrede 2003: 228; Moorey 2005: 60–61; *Diyala Archaeological Database*: Nos Ag. 35:509, Ag. 35:510) [Fig. 14:1]. Represented animals include sheep, goats, cattle, birds, and possibly dogs. The earliest depictions of equids, some with perforations in the head and mane, also date from this period (Zaina 2020: Pl. XCIV:15; *Diyala Archaeological Database*: No. Ag. 35:510) [Fig. 14:2]. It is difficult to reconstruct the percentage frequencies of different animals for the first half of the millennium, but it appears that sheep were among the most abundant (McAdam 1993: 89; Makowski 2025: ZSpec spreadsheet) [Fig. 16:b].

The frequency of anthropomorphic figurines remained stable during the middle and second half of the millennium BCE, and at most sites they are as frequent, or only slightly more frequent, than in earlier centuries (27–40%; see Makowski 2025: AZ spreadsheet) [see Fig. 15:a]. However, during the final century of the millennium, specifically the Ur III period, there was a marked and sudden increase in their frequency, reaching around 70%.

The continuity between the first and the second halves of the millennium is also evident from a typological perspective in the case of anthropomorphic figurines. Until the end of the ED III period, simple cylindrical or cone-shaped figurines [Fig. 13:3] predominated (95% at Abu Salabikh; see Makowski 2025: record

ID ACat_26_02) [Fig. 15:b]. Some of these figurines exhibit perforations or incised robes (see McAdam 1993).

Around 2350 BCE, a radical shift occurred with the introduction of substantial numbers of pillar-shaped figurines (93% at Asmar; Makowski 2025: record ID ACat_21_03) [see Fig. 15:b]. The Akkadian pillar-shaped figurines feature applied decoration (used for rendering coiffure, eyes, and necklaces) and frequently display characteristic arm gestures, with one arm extending down along the body and the other bent, placed at the waist, on the chest, or across the torso (Barrelet 1968: 70; Wrede 2003: 258; Moorey 2005: 71, 90–91) [Fig. 13:4].

The second turning point was the large-scale reintroduction of standing figurines in the last century of the millennium (the Ur III period). At least at some sites, these figurines are the most frequently attested category (about 65% at Nippur; Makowski 2025: record ID ACat_26_02) [see Fig. 15:b]. The figurines of this period are characterized by arms held outstretched or resting on the body, under or on the breasts (McCown, Haines, and Hansen 1967: Pls 122:4–13, 123:1–5; Barrelet 1968: 73–74; Moorey 2005: 73–74; Gasche and Pons 2014: Pl. 3; *Diyala Archaeological Database*: Nos As. 31:330, As. 31:357). While some specimens have a fairly natural appearance [Fig. 13:7], most belong to a subcategory of stylized representations. These are richly ornamented and have very wide hips, an exaggerated pubic triangle, and a generally flattened body [Fig. 13:8]. The final century also saw the emergence of a new type of male pillar-shaped figurines with a beard and various types of

headdress (McCown, Haines, and Hansen 1967: Pls 128:10–11, 13–15, 129:1–5; Barrelet 1968: 72–73; Moorey 2005: 74, 100; *Diyala Archaeological Database*: No. As. 31:350)

[Fig. 13:5]. Some raise one arm, carry an animal or other offerings, or wear a sash or incised garment that leaves one shoulder bare. Apart from their size and hard

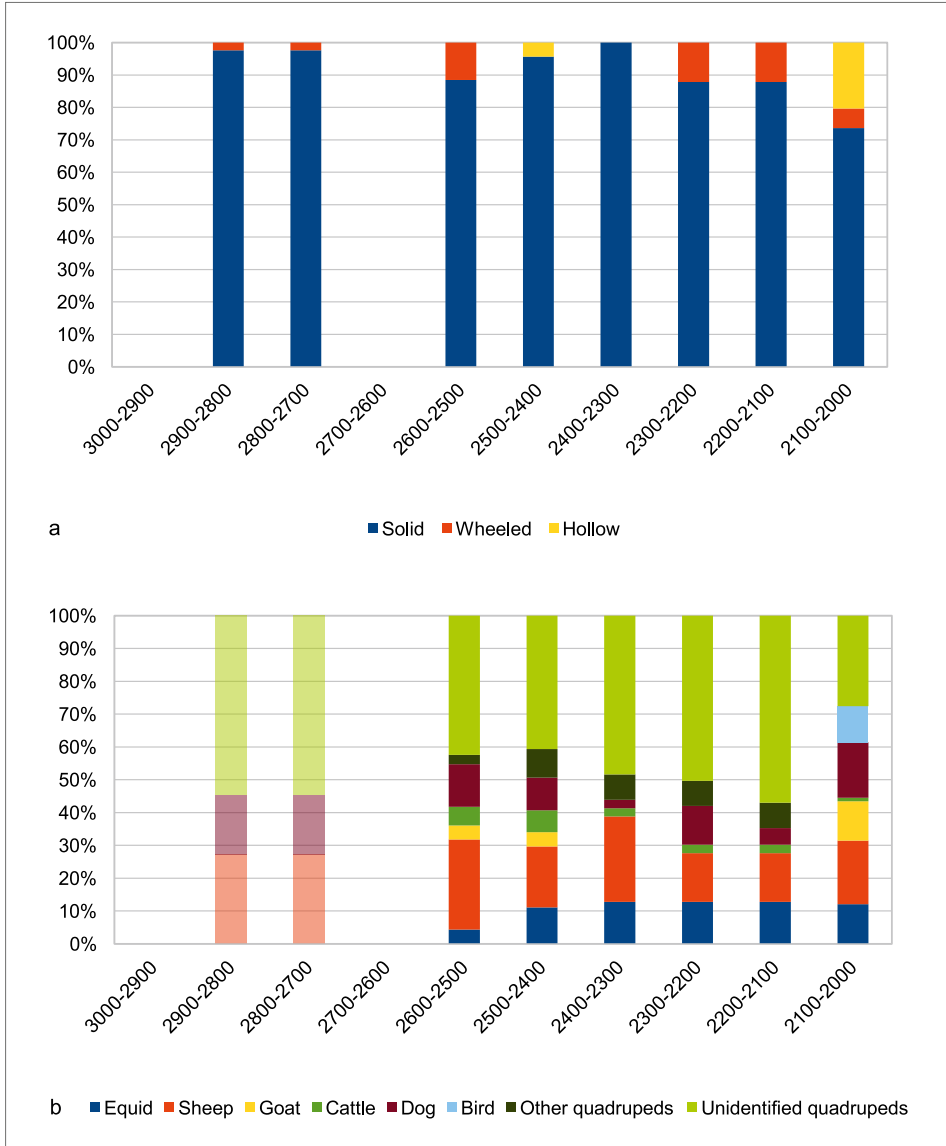


Fig. 16. South and Central Mesopotamia, diachronic changes in the percentage frequencies of zoomorphic figurine categories (a), based on 268 specimens from 6 sites; particular kinds of animals among zoomorphic figurines (b), based on 291 specimens from 5 sites; semi-transparent bars are based on a single record/site only (Processing M. Makowski)

firing, these figurines seem more closely related to the cylindrical/conical-shaped figurines from the ED I–III period [see *Fig. 13:1–3*] than to the Akkadian pillar-shaped female figurines [see *Fig. 13:4*].

The production of seated figurines of both males and females is also documented in South and Central Mesopotamia (see, for example, McCown, Haines, and Hansen 1967: 87, 89, Pls 124:6–9, 128:1–9; *Diyala Archaeological Database*: No. As. 32:1093), with most dating to the Ur III period, though some specimens date to the Akkadian period. Most have a projection down the back or are seated on a stool. Among the male figurines, some are shown astride or have clearly indicated genitals.

The production of zoomorphic figurines during the mid- and late 3rd millennium BCE is much less well documented. Wheeled and hollow figurines are relatively frequent, and at least at some sites, each of these categories accounts for more than 10% (see Makowski 2025: ZCat spreadsheet) [*Fig. 16:a*]. Sheep still appear to be among the most frequently represented animals (about 38% at Asmar; Makowski 2025: record ID Zspec_21_03), although equids begin to increase in importance no later than the ED IIIb period (see Makowski 2025: ZSpec spreadsheet) [see *Fig. 16:b*], and at certain sites they were even more common than sheep. The region is also characterized by a relatively high frequency (5–11% at most sites) of other quadrupeds (mostly pigs) in the latter half of the millennium, and by the growing significance of birds, especially in the final century (at least 10%; Makowski 2025: records ID Zspec_20_01, Zspec_28_02; see also McCown, Haines, and Hansen 1967: 93; Makowski 2024: 362, n. 47).

Among the solid zoomorphic figurines, alongside plain, poorly or hard-baked representations of sheep [*Fig. 14:3*], goats, cattle, equids, and dogs, new categories and types emerged in the mid-3rd millennium BCE (Barrelet 1968: 54–78; McAdam 1993; Wrede 2003: 343–352). One such category comprises wheeled sheep figurines. The earliest examples, dating to the ED IIIa period, take the form of squat vessels with an opening at the back and a spout in the shape of an animal's head. Other variants of this category were introduced somewhat later [*Fig. 14:7*]. Equid representations with depicted harnesses are known from the ED III and later periods (Zaina 2020: Pl. CV:5; *Diyala Archaeological Database*: Nos As. 32:305; As. 32:1107) [*Fig. 14:6*]. Bird and pig figurines could be hollow (mostly rattles and flutes; see Pruss 1999) or solid [*Fig. 14:4–5, 8*]. Pig representations are frequently characterized by incised decoration and have been found from the ED III period onward.

Assur [see *Fig. 1*] exhibits a production pattern comparable to that of sites in South and Central Mesopotamia. However, most of the figurines come from the final century of the millennium (ETG 9), with only a few that may be slightly older (ETG 6–8/2350–2100 BCE). The close relationship with South Mesopotamia is evident in the relatively high frequency of anthropomorphic figurines (about 61%) and in the proportions of sheep (about 23%) and birds (about 10%) among zoomorphic examples (Makowski 2025: record ID AZ_20_01 and Zspec_20_01). The near balance between pillar-shaped and

standing figurines within the anthropomorphic group (Makowski 2025: record ID Acat_20_01), the prominence of the stylized female subcategory among the latter, and the presence of some seated figurines with a lower part shaped like a stool are all features common to Assur (groups 1–6 according to Klengel-Brandt 1978 and Klengel-Brandt and Onasch 2020; Tonussi 2019: type TGFT A 01–10) and to South and Central Mesopotamia at that time. However,

the corpus from Assur is distinctive in several respects: pillar-shaped figurines are dominated by female representations, whereas standing ones include some males. Moreover, the style of decoration (frequent use of combed ornamentation) and the technique of execution (bell-shaped lower bodies in pillar-shaped figurines) are also very specific to this site, as is the relatively high frequency of curved attributes among male representations.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Previous observations on the regionalization of clay figurine production in Mesopotamia during the 3rd millennium BCE have focused on the stylistic aspects of execution (see Peyronel and Pruss 2018: 87), morphological details such as the shape of the head, torso, and arms, and iconographic elements such as hairstyle, headgear, jewelry, arm gestures, and attributes. They have also examined production technologies, including firing and clay tempering. Prior to the present study, the prevailing perspective regarded regional types as the primary source of variation among individual traditions and as indicators of the geographical extent of these provinces. At the same time, considerable emphasis was placed on identifying similarities between types originating from different provinces, while variations in the timing of introduction, frequency, or absence of certain representational categories in specific areas received less attention. The present study offers a notably different perspective on this issue. Employing both quantitative and

qualitative approaches, it focuses not only on regional types but primarily on comparing corpora from individual sites and on the differences in the relative frequencies of particular figurine classes and categories within these corpora. This methodological framework facilitates a more nuanced understanding of regional specificity as well as cross-regional patterns and trajectories in clay figurine production during the 3rd millennium BCE in Mesopotamia.

As previously noted (see, for example, Peyronel and Pruss 2018: 87; Sakal 2018: 225), simple, crude, unbaked or poorly baked figurines—usually undecorated—predominated in all regions until around 2400–2300 BCE. However, recent advances in the publication of figurine assemblages have provided a more refined understanding of this early stage of production. It has become evident that these simple figurines have too often been treated as a single, uniform group, without sufficient recognition of regional variation. It is now possible to identify distinct regional types from the

first half of the millennium, although these are less standardized than those from later periods. For example, this can be observed among the anthropomorphic cylindrical/conical figurines from the Khabur region and from South and Central Mesopotamia. Furthermore, previous syntheses have suggested that anthropomorphic representations were produced more frequently only in the latter half of the millennium (see, for example, Pruss 2013: 603–606). Nevertheless, the relative frequency of anthropomorphic representations compared to zoomorphic ones does not appear significantly lower among crude, poorly baked figurines from the first half of the millennium, except possibly in Northwest Mesopotamia.

From around the middle of the 3rd millennium BCE, crude, poorly baked figurines were largely replaced by hard-baked examples fired in pottery kilns. Distinct and standardized regional types can easily be recognized among these larger and more detailed figurines. One of the earliest manifestations of this process is evidenced by the emergence of female pillar-shaped figurines in region-specific forms in Northwest Mesopotamia (the early EME 4 period) and in South and Central Mesopotamia (the Akkadian period), around 2400–2300 BCE. Other cross-regional developments that took place throughout Mesopotamia at this time include the introduction of more elaborate equid figurines, some with marked harnesses, as well as wheeled figurines. Equids remained a significant component of figurine corpora throughout the latter half of the millennium and consistently repre-

sented one of the two most frequently documented animal species in site collections from all regions.

The subsequent supra-regional transformation occurred around the end of the 3rd millennium BCE, though not simultaneously across all regions. It is characterized by the introduction or re-introduction of standing anthropomorphic figurines, predominantly female. In the Middle Euphrates region, and possibly at Mari and Assur, standing figurines date as early as around 2300 BCE. In South and Central Mesopotamia, however, they are documented only from around 2100 BCE. The introduction of standing figurines in these two provinces appears to correlate with the increasing relative frequency of anthropomorphic figurines (up to around 60–70%). Another shared characteristic of these regions is the relatively high percentage of bird representations in the final century of the millennium.

Despite these cross-regional patterns and tendencies, individual regions followed distinct trajectories that extended well beyond differences in area-specific types. North-Central Mesopotamia, specifically the Khabur River basin, exhibits the most distinctive trajectory, especially in the second half of the millennium. During the first half of the millennium, the production of figurines in this region appears to have developed in a manner analogous to that observed in South and Central Mesopotamia. This is evident in the attested figurine categories (e.g. the prevalence of conical or cylindrical anthropomorphic figurines) and their relative frequencies. However, a significant shift in regional trajectories occurred

around 2400 BCE. In contrast to other regions, no standardized indigenous type of pillar-shaped anthropomorphic figurine developed at this point. Instead, cylindrical and conical figurines continued to form a significant part of the corpus, as in previous centuries. From at least the middle of the millennium onward, these were accompanied by schematic standing figurines and a small number of pillar-shaped representations of types whose main area of distribution lay in other regions. Furthermore, from around the same period, there was a marked decline in the percentage frequency of anthropomorphic figurines, contrasting with patterns in other parts of Mesopotamia. Another distinctive regional characteristic of the latter half of the millennium in North-Central Mesopotamia is the high relative frequency of equid figurines (about 35–60%), which often display significantly greater detail than those from other regions. While these patterns are thoroughly documented only in the Khabur region, a broadly comparable developmental trajectory may have extended across a wider area of North-Central and Northeast Mesopotamia, potentially reaching as far as the Tigridian region, particularly around Gawra. Despite this distinct development trajectory in clay figurine production, individual types and categories from the Khabur River basin generally align with those found in other parts of Mesopotamia, particularly in the south.

One of the most distinctive features of the Middle Euphrates and West Jazirah is the near-total absence of anthropomorphic figurines until around 2400 BCE, according to currently available

data. This is particularly striking when compared with South and Central Mesopotamia, as well as the Khabur region, where a significant portion of the figurine corpus was anthropomorphic by the second or even the first quarter of the millennium. A substantial percentage of cattle figurines appears to have been a distinctive feature of the region from the beginning of the millennium. Despite their percentage declining in the latter half of the millennium, cattle figurines remained dominant until the end of the period. The low frequency of sheep figurines, the broad variety of animals depicted as wheeled figurines, and the relatively high proportion of hollow bird figurines were also region-specific characteristics of that time. However, the latter half of the millennium was above all defined by the prevalence of pillar-shaped figurines, which accounted for over 90% of anthropomorphic figurines. This is particularly evident in the Middle Euphrates region.

Evidence from South and Central Mesopotamia suggests that the local tradition underwent very gradual changes over time. This is exemplified by the longevity of cylindrical- and conical-shaped anthropomorphic figurines, which remained relatively unchanged from the beginning of the millennium until around 2350 BCE. Notably, even the pillar-shaped male figurines from the final century of the millennium could be considered late, more elaborate successors to this category. The region's distinctive features also include the stability of the proportional frequencies of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines throughout much of the 3rd

millennium BCE, as well as the high importance of sheep representations, particularly in the first half of the millennium. The attestation of standing female figurines in the first quarter of the millennium, the prominence of wheeled sheep figurines, and the relatively high percentage of pig (including hollow examples) in the second half of the millennium are also specific to the region. A significant change occurred in the last century of the millennium, marked by a substantial increase in the relative frequency of anthropomorphic figurines, especially female standing figurines and, in particular, stylized ones.

Contact zones have been identified on the outskirts of individual provinces or where two provinces meet. These zones either exhibit a significant deviation from the core area of the given province or display a mixture of patterns characteristic of the adjoining provinces. The transitional or peripheral position of a figurine corpus from a given site can be reflected in typological terms (see Assur and Chuera, for example) or in the relative frequencies of different categories of representation (see Beydar, and probably Melebiya and Rad Shaqrah, for example). Mari, located on

the northwestern outskirts of Central Mesopotamia, also appears to exhibit a blend of diverse traditions. However, since some of the contact zones correspond to areas represented by only one isolated site, it cannot be ruled out that these identifications will need to be revised as research progresses and new figurine corpora from the region are published.

The synthesis of clay figurine production in 3rd-millennium BCE Mesopotamia remains incomplete, with significant gaps in the available evidence, particularly concerning the Tigridian region and the early phase of the millennium. Additionally, records pertaining to specific categories of figurines, such as zoomorphic examples from South and Central Mesopotamia, are largely absent. Despite these limitations, research drawing on the current results of analyses of cross-regional patterns and distinct regional trajectories in clay figurine production—set against the backdrop of environmental, social, religious, cultural, and economic processes, as well as regional differences within Mesopotamia—has the potential to significantly enhance our understanding of this component of material culture.

Dr. Maciej Makowski

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5898-256X>

Polish Academy of Sciences

Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures

mmakowski@iksio.pan.pl

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