

**A Two-Headed Ceramic Figurine and a Female Ceramic Figurine in the  
Ancient World**



Two-Headed Ceramic Figurine



Female Ceramic Figurine

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## **I. Preface**

The objects examined in this paper are a two-headed ceramic figurine and a female ceramic figurine. Without information on the circumstance and assemblage in which this object as found, I posit that the two-headed ceramic figurine originates from the Bronze Age (around 2200 – 1800 BCE) near modern Syria and that the female ceramic figurine originates from the Bronze Age (around 1850 – 1600 BCE) near Canaan. The lack of information on its excavation and composition, combined with a crack in its waist, shades doubt on the authenticity of the two-headed ceramic figurine; however, the morphology of the figurine is consistent with motifs of excavated assemblages from similar regions and time periods. The two-headed figurine is therefore assumed to be at least representative of the material culture of the late third millennium to early second millennium BCE near Syria. The two-headed ceramic figurine provides insight into north Levantine religion and cultural exchange. One-piece open molding ceramic techniques enter Syria and Canaan from the eastern Euphrates Valley around the posited time of the both figurines' creations, implicating interaction and cooperation amongst peoples in the Fertile Crescent. Using Mary Voigt's functional classification of figurines, based on Peter Ucko's prior classification, the two-headed ceramic figurine is best classified as a "Cult Figure" with a religious function and the female ceramic figurine is best classified as a "Vehicle of Magic" with a function that is difficult to isolate (Voigt 190-192). The imagery of the two-headed ceramic figurine's iconic elements and ornamentations, as well as its classification as a Cult Figure and assemblage evidence of similar figures, imply that the two-headed figurine may have had an apotropaic function. The female ceramic figurine may have been a precursor to the Judean Pillar Figurines. The two figurines highlight how Levantine material culture styles changed over time, with figurines in the style of the female ceramic figurine produced around one thousand years

after the date I have proposed it was made, whereas figurines in the style of the two-headed ceramic figurine were not produced after the mid-second millennium BCE.

## **II. Introduction**

The Bronze Age in the Near East spanned from 3200 – 1200 BCE, leading into the Iron Age, which is characterized by widespread usage of iron and metals (Eliav, *Glossary*). The Bronze Age Levantine region encompassed the eastern border of the Mediterranean Sea and contained a variety of peoples, including Canaanites, Akkadians, Eblaites, Israelites, Judeans, Babylonians and Hittites (Eliav 2016; Moore 27-34; Peyronel). These groups competed in a volatile political climate, either growing in power or being overtaken by rising empires. However, archaeological sources dating to the Bronze Age are scarce, with the Hebrew Bible and limited assemblages dominating the narratives of the region (Eliav 2016). These narratives display Levantine peoples as polytheistic and ritualistic. Although the peoples in the Levant maintained distinct identities, a high level of cultural exchange existed, seen when the same deity was represented in multiple religions like the Canaanites, Phoenecians and Mesopotamians did with Ashtaroht, Astarte, and Ishtar, respectively, or in the migration of ceramic techniques west along the Euphrates Valley and eventually to Canaan. Prior to the Iron Age, ceramic molding was a major component of Levantine material culture and was used to express functional and symbolic purposes (Eliav 2016).

## **III. The Two-Headed Ceramic Figurine**

### **A. Morphology**

The two-headed ceramic figurine, hereafter called the two-headed figurine, is an anthropomorphic figurine made of reddish-brown clay. Its dimensions are as follows: maximum width of 7.2 cm from shoulder to shoulder, minimum width of 2.8 cm at the intersection of the

base to the body, width of 4.4 cm from neck to neck, height of 18.0 cm from base to base of neck, height of 21.0 from base to top of head and thickness of 1.3 cm at torso. The head is rounded without a defined neck. Facial features include a bird-like nose/mouth that appears to be attached on top of the face and without a line to indicate an opening, two large, circular eyes with defined irises in each eye for both heads, and pupils in the eyes of the left (from the perspective of the figurine) head. It also has either stylized ears or ornamentation on the sides of the head that the eyes lay on top of. The left head has no visible hair, the right head has a ponytail from its crown, and both have a small, decorated crown piece along the forehead. Both heads are attached and facing forward. The torso is flat and undecorated, with wide shoulders that curve into tapered hips. Two arms lay symmetrically on the chest, bending at the elbow with each hand on a non-gendered breast. Both arms are continuous with the surface of the chest, therefore incision is not likely the method used to shape the arms, but rather molding. Each hand has five fingers, which are delineated with a shallow incision. There are no legs, genitals or feet; instead the taper extends from the waist to the base. The two-headed figurine is ornamented with two incised strands, one that wraps from the left shoulder to above the right arm and the other that wraps around the front of the right head's neck to the space between the two heads, then follows the first strand to the right arm. Where the strands meet the back of the figurine, they are clearly overlaid on the figurine and are not smoothed into the torso. The figurine is well preserved, with a small hole near the right shoulder blade and a thin, transverse crack through the waist that is not seen from the front.

## **B. Techniques of Manufacture**

The two-headed figurine appears to have been pressed into a one-piece open mold face down, rather than being hand-made or wheel-made. The smooth (lacking indentations from

fingers), linear, and well-balanced form of the figurine contraindicate the figurine's body having been hand-made, and the lack of ridge lines and a radially symmetric axis contraindicate the figurine having been wheel-made. The previous attributes, combined with the arms being continuous to the chest rather than incised into place, indicate that the front of the figurine was molded, while the back of the figurine was smoothed by hand and the hair was added to the right head. After the body and heads were molded, the noses/mouths, eyes, ears or embellishments around the eyes, crowns, fingers, and strands were added. The construction of this figurine is detailed and clean, indicating that time was specifically spent to ensure it was visually appealing.

### **C. Analysis of Morphology and Techniques of Manufacture**

The morphology of the two-headed figurine matches motifs found in assemblages excavated from Ebla at Tell Mardikh, Tell Hadidi, and in the nearby sections of the Euphrates Valley, implying that the figurine originates from modern Syria. Luca Peyronel's presentation of anthropomorphic figurines from Ebla allows visual comparison between the assemblage at Ebla and the two-headed figurine (Peyronel 84-88, see pages 13-14 of this essay for Peyronel's figures that are referenced): Figure 4.1:3 has round eyes with an incised pupil, ornamentation behind the eyes flaring to the sides of the head, a large and thin nose, a lack of distinction between neck and face, and a necklace that is similarly incised, though not separately attached; Figure 4.1:5 has an arm on its breast with incised fingers, a tapered waist with wide shoulders, and a bracelet incised similar to the necklace of the two-headed figurine; Figure 4.1:6 has symmetric arms with incised fingers to its chest and an ornamental incised necklace; Figure 4.2:1 has equivalent similarities as Figure 4.1:3 in relation to the eyes, ornamentations, and nose. Further, Peyronel's description of figurine type g, "'Euphrates"-type anthropomorphic figurines with pronounced shoulders and freely modeled arms at the breast ... and applied single or

multiple strips on the neck,” matches the two-headed figurine (Peyronel 78). At Tell Hadidi, Dornemann’s Plate 10 further establishes motifs of flat bodies, beak-like noses, round and incised eyes, incised necklaces, shape of the base, and placement of hands to the chest (Dornemann, Plate 10). With such striking similarities in design motifs, the two-headed figurine may have been constructed in a similar region near Syria.

While the above morphological comparisons to Early Bronze Age (around 2500 – 2000 BCE) Syrian assemblages of hand-made figurines display a high degree of similarity, the one-piece open molding technique used on the two-headed figurine implies that it was constructed closer to 2200 – 1800 BCE. One-piece open molding was a technique that originated in the eastern Euphrates Valley and migrated west through cultural exchange, seen in molded Babylonian plaques dated between 1900 – 1700 BCE and reaching Syria between 1800 – 1700 BCE (Moorey Plate 6-7, 34). However, Syrian application of one-piece open molding techniques appears exclusively for nude female figurines (Moorey 34). This contrast between the above position that the two-headed figurine was created in Syria and that this figure is not a nude female figurine lessens the strength of the asserted regionalization. Yet, it is feasible that further east on the Euphrates, Babylonia, which did not partake in this exclusive molding practice, may have contributed to the molding of the two-headed figurine.

However, the transverse crack in the waist, the reddish tint present beneath this crack, and the rarity of recovering similar figurines from Early-Middle Bronze Age Syrian assemblages set the foundation for an argument that at least a portion of this artifact is recently forged (Moorey 35). Without an analysis of the figurine’s composition and information on where the figurine was recovered from, such questions are difficult to resolve. Similar figurines sold online further spread doubt of the figurine’s authenticity, specifically when considering that recovering

intact Early-Middle Bronze Age figurines with designs similar to the two-headed figurine from Syrian assemblages, especially recovering figurines with two heads, is a rare event (Moorey 35). For example, the Baidun Shop sells a “Syro-Hittite Double-Headed Figurine” in “Excellent Condition” that is dated to the Middle Bronze Age Syro-Hittite Empire and has two heads with facial features, arms, a necklace, and a body shape similar to the two-headed figurine (Syro-Hittite Double Headed Figurine). Without any information for why Baidun Shop concluded that the figurine was from this time and region, and the rarity of finding such an object fully intact, the question of authenticity for the Baidun Shop’s figurine parallels the question of the two-headed figurine’s authenticity.

Despite the above proposition that the two-headed figurine is not entirely from Bronze Age Syria, the two-headed figurine is consistent with the motifs present in the region; thus, the figurine is at least representative of the material culture in 2200 – 1800 BCE Syria. Due to this representation, the two-headed figurine is worth examining further to extract information on the culture that created it. Hereafter, the two-headed figurine’s authenticity is assumed to not detract from the strength of analyses about the culture that created it.

#### **D. Functional Classification**

Mary Voigt’s functional classification of figurines, based on Peter Ucko’s prior classification of figurines, provides four main classifications of figurines: Cult Figures, Vehicles of Magic, Initiation Figures, and Toys (Voigt). As the two-headed figurine is made of hardened clay, is thin and therefore fragile, has fully defined arms, and is intact, it is unlikely to have been a toy. The lack of any indication that the figurine was heavily used, disposed of, broken, or burned leads away from the two-headed figurine having been a vehicle of magic. Though the anthropomorphic, yet bird-like faces of the figurine may lead toward a classification as an

initiation figure, the two-headed figurine's attributes most closely align with a Cult Figure. The figurine is well formed, mostly symmetrical, ornamented with iconic elements including the ears/eye ornaments, necklaces, crowns, noses, and the second, asymmetric head, is able to stand on its own, and has a slight indication that it was handled due to a relatively more polished lower body, where it is easy to grip; Together, these attributes best classify the two-headed figurine as a Cult Figure.

### **E. Functional Analysis**

Through the imagery of the figurine's iconic elements and ornamentations, its classification as a Cult Figure, and assemblage evidence from Royal Palace G at Ebla imply that the two-headed figurine was an apotropaic influence used in public settings (Peyronel 78). In Peyronel's examination of Royal Palace G at Ebla, there was a widespread distribution of materials similar to the two-headed figurine, implying palatial use by elites in a public setting. Many of such elements were not intentionally buried, representing use on daily than ritualistic scale.

The two-headed figurine appears consistent with daily, rather than ritualistic, use. The figurine's base allows it to stand freely, thereby enabling it to be left in a stable position over an extended period of time. A long-term, stable standing position implies that the figurine is meant to watch over what is in its presence. With the difference in hair and pupils between the two heads, each head of the figurine may have a different role in observation. Further, the lack of a mouth may indicate that the figurine is not meant to be enlivened, instead maintaining a constant watch (Peyronel 82). With its hands to its chest, this is a motif that has been related to self-awareness as well as compassion and maternity (Moorey 31, Peyronel 78). Thus, as the two-

headed figurine has imagery and the physical structure to watch over a field, it may have an apotropaic function.

#### **IV. The Female Ceramic Figurine**

##### **A. Morphology**

The female ceramic figurine, hereafter called the female figurine, is an anthropomorphic pillar figurine made of grey-brown clay. Its dimensions are as follows: maximum width of 3.6 cm, height of 11.3 cm, and front-to-back thickness of 2.9 cm. The head is disproportionately large compared to the body, but otherwise does not have non-human traits. Facial features include eyes with a circular iris, a small, flat nose, a small mouth that is possibly smiling, no visible ears, and a line defining where the head meets the neck. The female figurine has shoulder length hair, with a middle-part and incisions that give the hair non-flat texture. The head is attached and facing forward. The torso is thick, with a rounded stomach and two large breasts. The right arm hangs straight, with the hand on the side of the thigh, flat against the side of the figurine. The left arm is similarly flat against the side of the figurine, but it bends at the hip and the hand cups the bottom of the left breast. The fingers on each hand are long, thin, and poorly defined. The legs are together, and are broken off at the knee. The back of the figurine is not molded or sculpted, instead being rounded and rough. There is what appears to be an impression of the heel of a hand on the right side of the female figurine's back, and impressions of four fingers on the left side of the female figurine's back. The female figurine does not appear to be wearing clothing, and is unornamented.

##### **B. Techniques of Manufacture**

The female figurine appears to have been pressed into a one-piece mold face down, rather than being hand-made or wheel-made. The continuity from the hair to the head and body, from

the arms to the body, and from each leg to the other leg and pelvis indicate that the hair, arms and legs were defined by pushing surrounding clay toward the back of the figurine, rather than these sections being added to an already formed body. Further, the divide between the molded front and unmolded back indicates that the figurine was pressed into a one-piece mold face down without the back being sculpted. The incisions in the hair indicate that the figurine was meant to have a specific hairstyle, but otherwise the morphology displays minimal attempts of constructing details.

### **C. Analysis of Morphology and Techniques of Manufacture**

The morphology of the female figurine is similar to pillar figurines from the Akkadian Empire and the Kingdom of Judea, and the motif of *en face* nude females without a horned headdress that the female figurine follows implies that it originates from Canaan between around 1850 – 1600 BCE. The pillar form, of which the female figurine follows, was developed in the third Millennium BCE in the Akkadian Empire (Moorey 27). With the earliest one-piece open molded reliefs from the Akkadian Empire being dated to the end of the third millennium, the female pillar figurine likely follows this period and is near the location of the Akkadian Empire. The lower bound of the female figurine's age can further be lowered, as the motif of the *en face* nude female without a horned headdress dominated assemblages from the early second millennium BCE Canaan (Moorey 31). The female figurine fits this motif perfectly; therefore it is reasonable that the female figurine may have been from early second millennium Canaan. An upper bound on the female figurine's age can be set to around 1600 BCE because of the use of a one-piece open mold technique, which entered Canaan around 1800-1600 BCE and was further refined after this (Moorey 34). Thus, due to the motif of the *en face* nude female without a

horned headdress dominating early second millennium BCE Canaanite assemblages and the use of a one-piece open mold, the female figurine likely originates from 1850 – 1600 BCE Canaan.

#### **D. Functional Classification**

Again using Voigt's classification system, the female figurine is best classified as a vehicle of magic (Voigt). Though the female figurine was anthropomorphic, it was not iconic, not burned or soaked and not made sturdily, indicated by how thin it is. This leads it away from a classification as an initiation figure or toy. The female figurine is made of clay, is meant to be seen from the front, has no iconic elements, has no insignia or symbol, and is broken, thereby implying that it is not a cult figure, but instead a vehicle of magic. This conclusion is furthered from the figurine having been broken at the knee, which appears to be a specific act done to it based on the clean break at the knee and lack of other breaks.

#### **E. Functional Analysis**

Having been broken at the knees, the female figurine is reminiscent of Judean Pillar Figurines (Moorey 4). The Judean Pillar Figurines are figurines found that originated from the Kingdom of Judah, around 800 BCE (Meyers 119). The Judean Pillar Figurines were wheel-made, could stand on their own, and had large breasts that were often held by their arms. The cupping of the breasts, specifically, was a trait uncommon to assemblages in other parts of the world. Further, Judean Pillar Figurines were found broken nearly 95% of the time. Due to the similar cupping of the breasts and being broken at the knees, I propose that the female figurine is a precursor to the Judean Pillar Fragments (Meyers 120). The female figurine follows similar motifs of a low-quality design, emphasized breasts and being broken, which lends strength to this proposition.

Beyond proposing that the female figurine is a precursor to Judean Pillar Figurines, it is difficult to conceive of the specific function the female figurine was used for. That it was broken at the knees and is best classified as a vehicle of magic implies that the female figurine was broken intentionally, for some magical effect. Meyers discusses various interpretations of Judean Pillar Figurines; however, much of her argument is that the pervasive analyses that large breasts directly imply that the figurine is a fertility goddess or erotic are unfounded (Meyer 120-126). Instead, Meyers posits that figurines in this style may simply be women. Without information on other items it was found with, it is hard to contextualize how the female figurine was used. Thus, the function of the female figurine is inconclusive.

## **V. Conclusion**

The continuation of the style of the female figurine in the Levant, compared to the discontinuation of the style of the two-headed figurine, highlights how different cultures in Bronze Age Levant exchanged information and set foundations for later cultures. I posited that the two-headed figurine from Syria predates the female figurine. This not only is consistent with the spread of one-piece open molding technology, but also displays a direct influence on the cultures one-piece open molding reached. Interestingly, the two-headed figurine would have predated the motif of nude female figurines that enveloped the Levant. This indicates that the style of the two-headed figurine was discarded once the style of the female figurine was adopted. Further, as the two-headed figurine is best classified as a cult figure, this indicates that the religious function of the figurine was replaced by a new theology. Thus, while the two-headed figurine's motifs disappeared, the female figurine's motifs spreading throughout the wider region indicate a shift from a smaller theology to a more widespread theology. This is consistent with the volatility of Bronze Age Levant, as cultures often fought with each other for power while

also interacting with each other and sharing culture (Eliav 2016). Further, that the female figurine is so similar to Judean Pillar Figurines may highlight that the production of the female figurine was by cultures that would come to dominate Canaan in the years after it was molded. Thus, through the analysis of the two-headed figurine and the female figurine, each figurine was given a realistic time period and region that it could originate from, a functional classification, and a functional analysis. Through this, each figurine highlights the exchange of information across Bronze Age Levant and the developing theologies within the region.

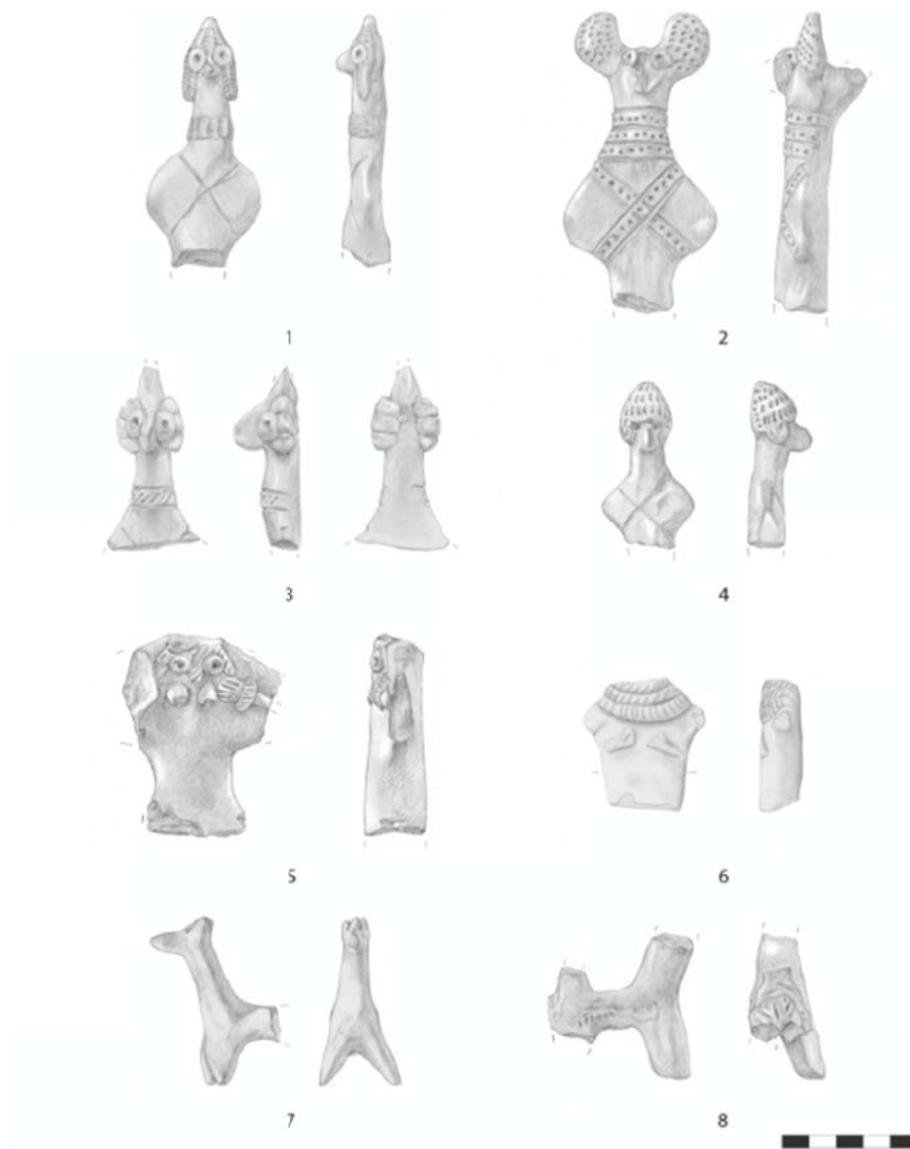


Figure 4.1. Main types of anthropomorphic and animal figurines from Ebla. 1. TM.77.G.150; 2. TM.78.Q.202; 3. TM.76.G.489; 4. TM.03.FF.420; 5. TM.76.G.326; 6. TM.94.P.208; 7. TM.76.G.801; 8. TM.76.G.578.

Figure 4.1, figurine types found at Ebla. Figurines 3, 5, and 6 (Figure 4.1:3, 4.1:5, and 4.1:6, respectively) have characteristics similar to the two-headed figurine (Peyronel 84).

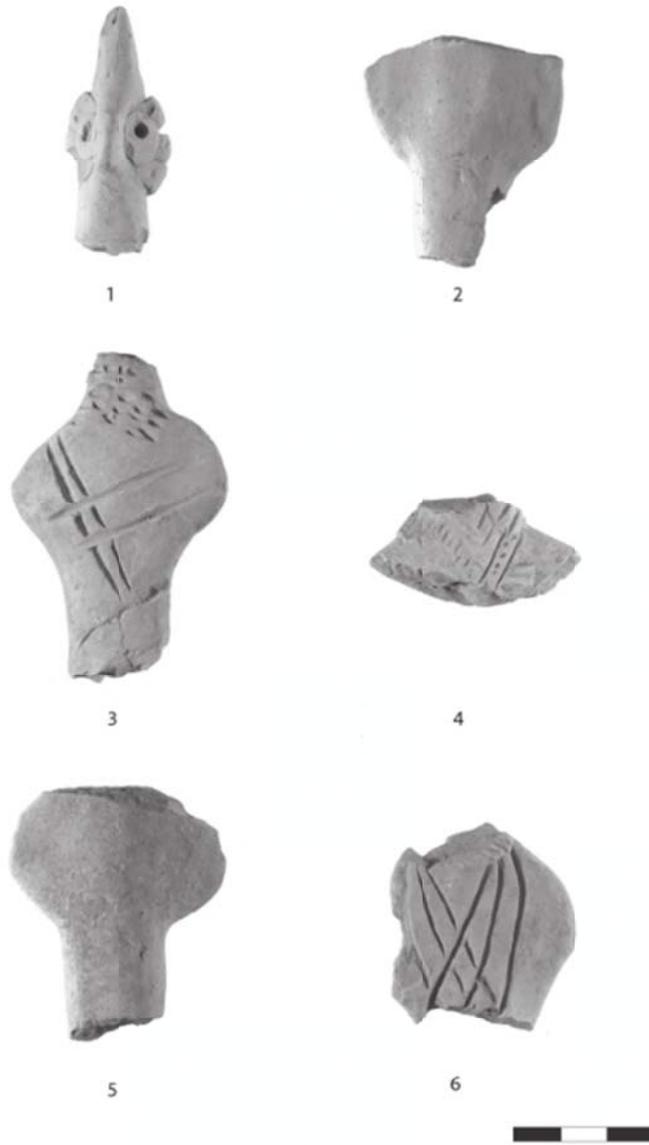


Figure 4.2. Clay figurines from the destruction level over L.2877 (Monumental Stairway). 1. TM.76.G.352; 2. TM.76.G.357; 3. TM.76.G.359; 4. TM.76.G.362; 5. TM.76.G.390; 6. TM.76.G.549.

Figure 4.2, figurine fragments found at Ebla. Figurine fragment 2 (Figure 4.2:1) has similar eyes, ornamentations and nose structure to the two-headed figurine (Peyronel 85).

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