

Of Men and Equids Piecing the Clay Images from Tell Arbid Back Together

MACIEJ MAKOWSKI

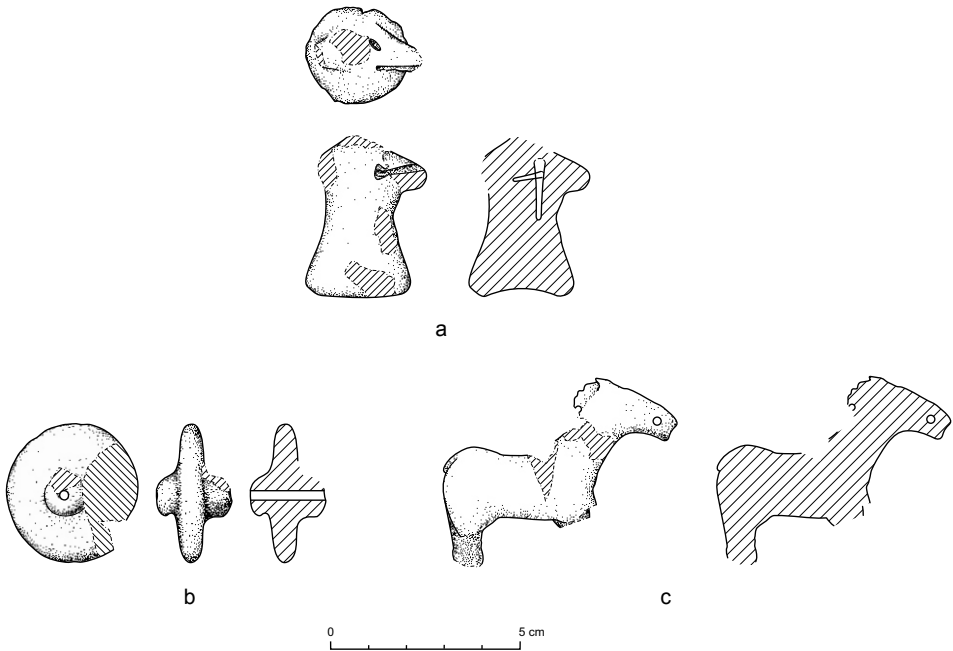
Abstract: This paper aims at analyzing relations between different types of clay figurines and models found at Tell Arbid, a site in northern Mesopotamia, in the Khabur region. Starting with a presentation of a set of third millennium BC clay objects – including an equid and an anthropomorphic figurines, as well as a wheel model – the author discusses those figurines which were deliberately shaped to fit, or to be combined with, other objects. Analyzing them against the backdrop of analogies from Mesopotamian iconographic sources allowed for defining some functional associations between the representations of males, wheeled vehicles and/or equids. The hypothetically reconstructed sets seem to reproduce scenes well-known from other media. Based on these observations, it is possible better to understand and to interconnect phenomena characteristic for the clay plastic art not just of the site but of the whole region: predominance of equids, prevalence of male over female images and popularity of model vehicles.

Keywords: terracotta anthropomorphic figurines, terracotta zoomorphic figurines, interpretation of the figurines, wheeled vehicles, popular iconography, Tell Arbid, Bronze Age Syria, North Mesopotamia

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The meaning and function of clay figurines, widespread at most sites of the Near East, is an issue drawing the attention of most scholars analyzing this class of small finds. However, studies devoted to this research problem generally do not yield unequivocal and conclusive results, especially when Bronze Age or earlier figurines are considered. Since written sources provide hardly any direct aid for reconstructing such images' function and meaning, the analysis of the figurines themselves and of their context – in a broad sense – is essential for these studies.

This holds true also for clay figurines from the Khabur River basin, in north Mesopotamia. The plastic art of the region from the third and first half of the second millennium BC is among the least recognized in Mesopotamia. Most are rather schematic representations



1. Set of clay objects found above floor level of a late ED III house, Tell Arbid: a. anthropomorphic figurine; b. wheel model; c. equid figurine; inv. nos: ARB'03 SD 35/65-20A (1–3) (a. Makowski 2014: Fig. 6; b-c. Digitizing M. Momot).

whose makers paid little attention to detail. A vast majority comes from secondary contexts: room fills, refuse pits, street deposits and disturbed or eroded layers.¹ This is also the case of figurines from Tell Arbid, studied by the author of article. The assemblage numbers *c.* 650 figurines. An overwhelming majority of them (*c.* 90%) represents different species of animals, the rest – human males and females. These objects are dated from the Ninevite 5/Early Jazirah I–II period (*c.* 2900–2500 BC), through the Early Dynastic III/Early Jazirah III (ED III, *c.* 2500–2350 BC), Akkadian/Early Jazirah IV (*c.* 2350–2200 BC), and Post-Akkadian/Early Jazirah V periods (*c.* 2200–2000 BC) to the Khabur ware period/Old Jazirah I–III (*c.* 2000–1500 BC). Hardly any of them were found in primary contexts in which they may have originally functioned or, at least, been intentionally deposited. However, these cases are not just rare but also involve unique representation dissimilar to the bulk of other figurines.²

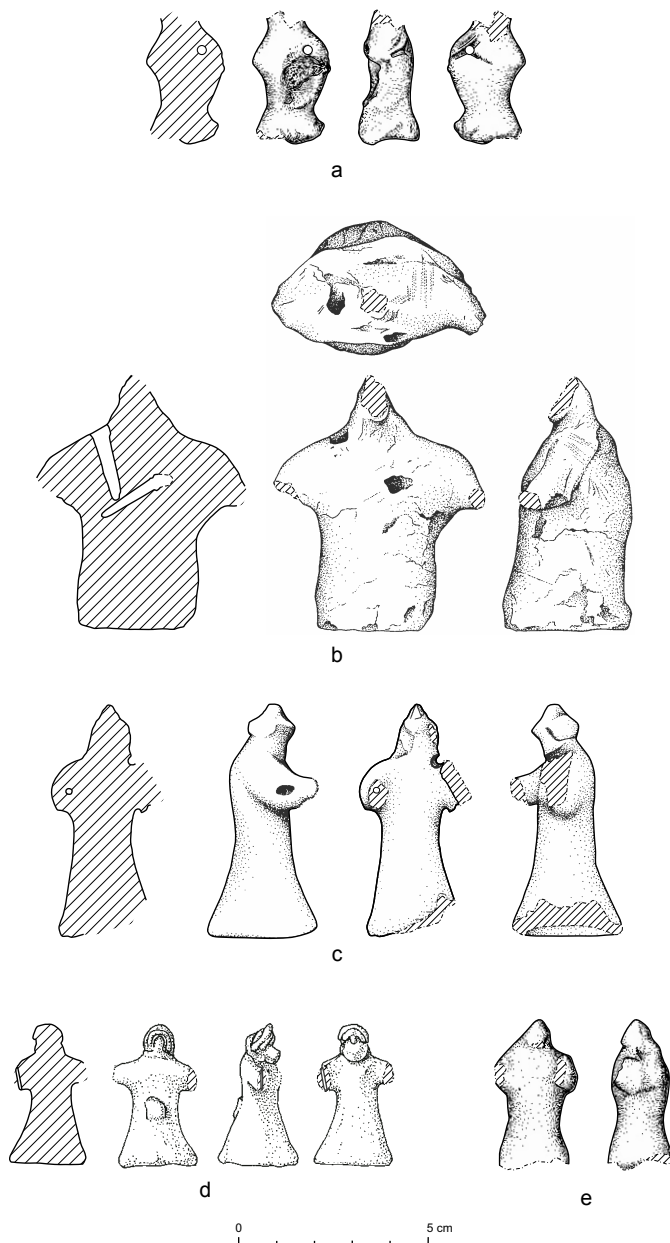
Exceptional in the Tell Arbid assemblage is a set of objects made of unbaked clay (**Fig. 1**) found just above the floor of a late ED III house, unearthed on the eastern slope of the tell.³ The set includes an anthropomorphic figurine,⁴ an equid figurine⁴ and a wheel

¹ Pruß 2011: 239.

² Makowski 2013: 618, 621, Fig. 3; Bieliński 2000: 281, Figs 5–6; see also: Pruß 2012a.

³ Bieliński 2004: 341, Fig. 6/locus 5, square 35/65.

⁴ Makowski 2014: Fig. 6.



2. Conical/cylindrical anthropomorphic figurines from Tell Arbid, dated to the Ninevite 5 (a), late ED III (b) and Post-Akkadian (c-d) periods or of uncertain date (second half of third millennium BC); inv. nos: a. Stray find ARB D; b. ARB'98 SD 36/65-8; c. ARB'03 SD 36/64-102A; d. ARB'08 P 37/60-98; e. ARB'02 D 29/41-16 (b-c. Makowski 2007: Fig. 3; a, d-e. Drawing and digitizing: M. Momot, M. Puzkarski and M. Świążkowska).



3. Conical/cylindrical anthropomorphic figurines from Tell Arbid, dated to the Post-Akkadian period; inv. nos: a. ARB'08 P 37/60-98; b. ARB'09 P 37/60-149-1 (Phot. M. Szablowski).

model. The find context seems to reflect the place where the set had functioned. However, the set is not complete and each of its elements is damaged. The presence of the wheel strongly suggests that a model of a wheeled vehicle could have belonged to the set.⁵ Several unidentified clay objects found with the described set could, in fact, have been fragments of such a model.

Individual objects forming the set represent categories of small finds very popular at Tell Arbid – both figurines belong to the most numerous types among zoomorphic⁶ and anthropomorphic⁷ representations, respectively. Therefore, the analysis of this set could potentially contribute significant data with regard to the function and meaning of clay figurines from the site.

SET OF CLAY IMAGES – WARRIOR, EQUID AND WHEEL

The anthropomorphic figurine from the abovementioned set represents a type which can be dated anywhere from the Ninevite 5 period through the Post-Akkadian period (**Figs 2–3**).⁸ Such figurines are distinguished by a conical or cylindrical body with few or no details marked. Several feature male gender traits (beard, genitalia), but none is identifiable as a female. In short, this type of figurines seems to represent men.

Although the images are rather schematic, there are certain details which allow for further interpretation of the depicted figures. The most helpful hint is provided by the cone-shaped headdresses recorded on some of the figurines. The conical, or triangular pyramid-shaped head of others seems to indicate the same detail of attire (**Figs 2b-c, e; 3b**).

⁵ On models of vehicles from Tell Arbid, see: Raccidi 2012.

⁶ Makowski 2014: 258. Equid figurines constitute c. 44% of all zoomorphic figurines from Tell Arbid.

⁷ Makowski 2007: 475–477, Fig. 3.

⁸ Makowski 2007: 475–477, Fig. 3.



4. Detail from the ‘Stele of the Vultures’ from Tello, dated to the ED III period (based on: Seidl 2006–2008: Fig. 3b, not to scale).

Most probably, in both instances the figurine makers attempted to record a cone-shaped helmet, well attested in third millennium BC Mesopotamia iconography (**Fig. 4**).⁹ Therefore, it can be assumed that figurines of this type depict warriors. The interpretation is corroborated by other features of the clay images: perforations of arms and slots in the body. They facilitated equipping the figurine with an attribute, most likely a model weapon of some sort, made separately from an organic material.¹⁰ In the case of the anthropomorphic figurine from the discussed set and of another one, found in the same building,¹¹ there are two slots: one piercing the body from the front and going into an arm, and the other, vertical, in a shoulder (**Figs 1a, 2b**). The orientation and arrangement of these slots indicate that the figurine was originally equipped with two attributes: one held slantwise in front of the body and the other resting vertically against its shoulder. Contemporary, or slightly later, iconographic sources suggest that the figurines may depict infantrymen wielding an ax and a spear or standard (**Fig. 4**).¹² Similarly equipped soldiers are often portrayed in direct association with wheeled vehicles pulled by equids. The analyzed set of objects from Tell Arbid was probably an image in the round presenting this type of scene (**Fig. 5a**), characteristic for Mesopotamian iconography of the ED III period.¹³ Some of the elements of the set could have been physically attached to each other. For example,

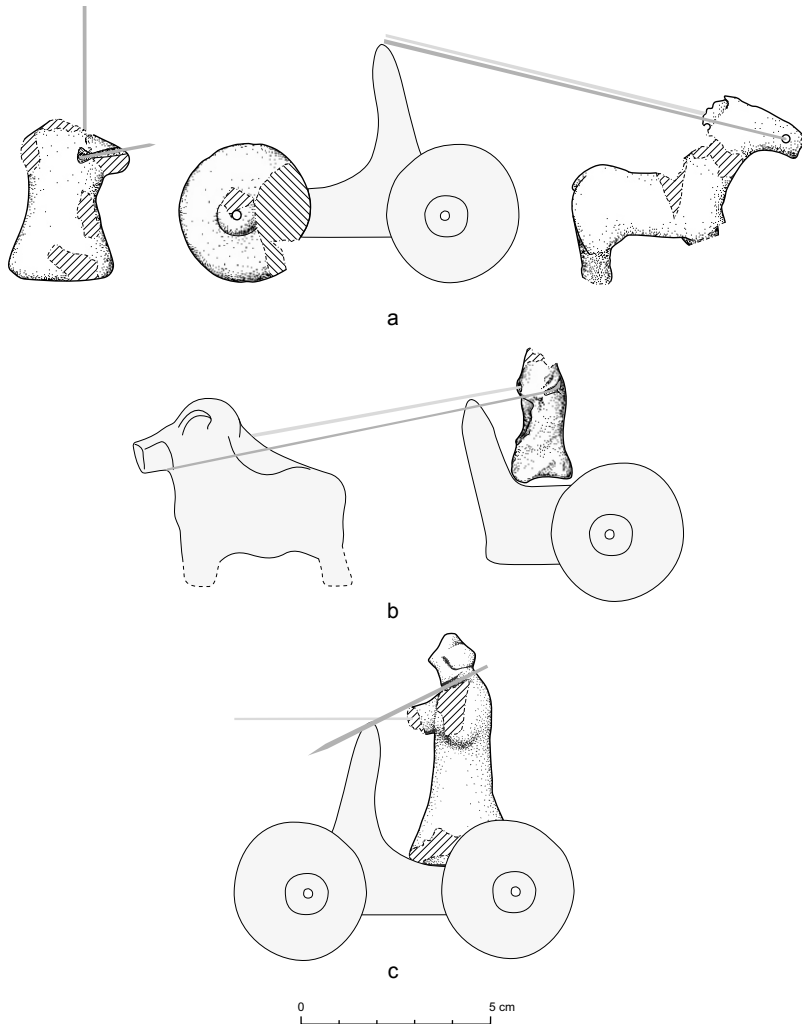
⁹ Margueron 2004: Figs 278, 279e, 280, 282/1, 4–8, 414; Börker-Klähn 1982: Pls 17d, 21c, 22b, 26a, d, f-k; Seidl 2006–2008: Figs 3b, 4; Littauer, Crowel 1979: Fig. 3.

¹⁰ Wissing 2009: 30, no. 14; McDonald 2001: 270; Oates 2001a: 285.

¹¹ Makowski 2007: Fig. 3, second from top.

¹² Börker-Klähn 1982: Pls 17d, 26a, d-f, j-k; Seidl 2006–2008: Figs 3b, 4. Interpretation of figurines from Tell Arbid against the backdrop of analogies from south Mesopotamian iconographic sources is fully justified, as clay images of this type are known from both regions; see *infra*, p. 136.

¹³ Börker-Klähn 1982: Pl. 17d; Seidl 2006–2008: Fig. 3b; Strommenger 1963: Pl. 72.



5. Sets from Tell Arbid depicting wheeled vehicle drawn by equids and accompanied by warrior or driver, hypothetical reconstructions: a. dated to the ED III period; b. dated to the Ninevite 5 period; c. dated to the Post-Akkadian period (a. based on: Fig. 1 and Raccidi 2012: Fig. 4; b. based on: Fig. 2a, Raccidi 2012: Fig. 1, top and ARB'04 SD 33/65-9 – unpublished; c. based on: Fig. 2c and Raccidi 2012: Fig. 4).

a perforation in the head of the equid figurine (**Fig. 2c**) was meant for a thread connecting the animal and a presumed vehicle model or its occupant.¹⁴

The functional association of vehicle models and equid figurines is quite obvious, yet actual sets have hardly ever been found. Therefore, it is difficult to determine how many specimens were originally associated with a counterpart from the other category (see *infra*).

¹⁴ Pruß 2011: 243; Makowski 2014: 264.

Of equal importance is the question of whether anthropomorphic figurines were a standard element of such sets. Unfortunately, most of them were found in secondary contexts, so findspot analysis does not help in resolving the issue. Therefore, the present author will make an attempt at answering this question through examination of figurines which were deliberately shaped to fit, or to be combined with, other objects.

CLAY IMAGES OF WARRIORS, DRIVERS AND NOBLEMAN

CONICAL/CYLINDRICAL FIGURINES

Anthropomorphic figurines of the same type as the specimen from the discussed set, have been attested since the Ninevite 5 period. Two of these early specimens, made of poorly (probably accidentally) fired dark-gray clay, have horizontally perforated stub arms (**Fig. 2a**). On one of them, impressions visible around the opening of the perforation indicate the use of a thread. The arrangement of the thread impressions suggest that thread's both ends were pulled several times in the same direction the figurine was facing. The presence of the thread impressions and the association between figurines of this type and models of wheeled vehicles (presumed for the ED III period) suggest that this could have been an image of a driver. The thread passing through the perforation could have imitated a rope for controlling the draught equids. Using an equid figurine and vehicle model of similar size and date¹⁵ allows for a hypothetical reconstruction of the set to which the discussed figurine could have belonged (**Fig. 5b**). Moreover, a cavity visible on the front side of the figurine's body can be an accidental impression of a vehicle's front shield. It could have been made by pulling the equid figurine connected by a thread to the driver figurine, which had not been fixed to the vehicle model. The other similar figurine,¹⁶ with a deep slot in its base, could have been firmly attached inside a vehicle with a peg.

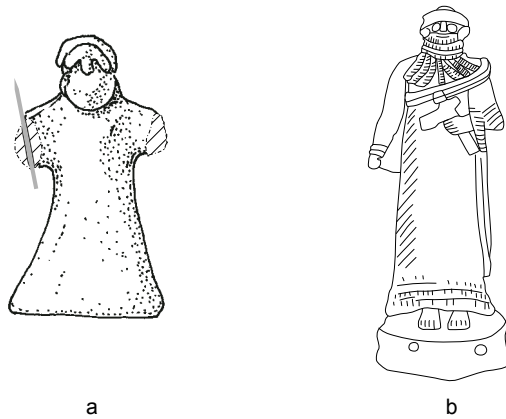
It seems that at least one Post-Akkadian figurine of this type¹⁷ also portrayed a driver (**Fig. 2c**). It is a warrior figurine, as attested by the pointed helmet marked on its head. Its outstretched right forearm and its left shoulder are horizontally pierced. The right forearm could have pierced to allow for the passing of a thread, as the diameter of the perforation is much smaller than that of slots for attributes. The second perforation, being wider, was rather meant for an attribute. The left arm gesture – bent at the elbow, with the hand pointing to the left shoulder – clearly indicates that the warrior was holding the attribute in his raised hand. Among Mesopotamian third millennium BC warriors' representations, this pose is characteristic for javelin throwers (**Fig. 4**),¹⁸ although – unlike in the case of this figurine – they usually are vehicle passengers, not drivers (**Fig. 5c**).

¹⁵ Raccidi 2012: 606, Fig. 2, type 1.

¹⁶ Makowski 2007: 476–477, Fig. 3, top.

¹⁷ Makowski 2007: 475, Fig. 3, third from top.

¹⁸ Littauer, Crouwel 1979: Fig. 3; Börker-Klähn 1982: Pl. 17d; Seidl 2006–2008: Fig. 3b; see also: Oates 2001a: Fig. 313/2.



6. Male figurines equipped with a weapon: a. from Tell Arbid, dated to Post-Akkadian period, hypothetical reconstruction; b. from Tello, turn of second and third millennium BC (based on: Fig. 2d and Barrelet 1968: Fig. 48; not to scale).

Two other Post-Akkadian figurines had vertically pierced arms. One seems to depict a warrior, as attested by its conical helmet, so it could have been equipped with some sort of weapon. The second differs in headdress (**Figs 2d, 3a**),¹⁹ which looks like a round brimmed cap characteristic for the iconography of males in southern Mesopotamia.²⁰ Although this element of clothing is not typical for warrior images, sometimes it is worn by armed figures (**Fig. 6b**).²¹ Therefore, also the second figurine could have carried a weapon (**Fig. 6a**). Nevertheless, this figurine, along with another one, clad in a long robe,²² show that in the Post-Akkadian period males were defined not only by military symbols and association with wheeled vehicles, but also by elements of elite garments.²³

STANDING FIGURINES

Some standing male figurines were also deliberately shaped to fit, or to be combined with, other objects. One of them, dated to the Ninevite 5 period, had a horizontally perforated stub arm.²⁴ One arm of another figurine, Post-Akkadian in date (**Fig. 7a**), is vertically pierced. Both feature male genitalia. Possibly, the Ninevite 5 specimen should be inter-

¹⁹ Koliński 2011: 313, Fig. 10.

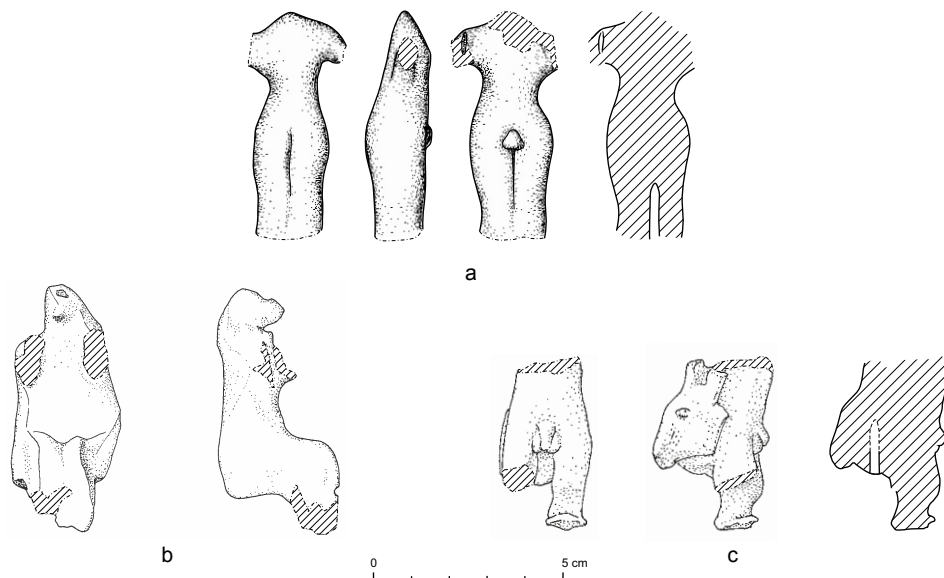
²⁰ In southern Mesopotamia, it is attested since late third millennium BC, among others on clay figurines: Pruß 2012b: 606; *ANE Terr.*: 74; Barrelet 1968: Pls IV/33, 35–37, VI/65–68; Wrede 2003: 304–306, Fig. 90e–g, i, Pl. 41/1092, 1094–1095.

²¹ Pruß 2012b: 606; Barrelet 1968: 78–79, Fig. 48; Börker-Klähn 1982: Pl. 26k.

²² Makowski 2007: 475, Fig. 3, bottom.

²³ The brimmed cap should be interpreted as an element of elite attire, as it is worn by south Mesopotamian rulers (see, e.g.: Pruß 2012b: 606). The cap and long robe occur together on south Mesopotamian terracotta figurines of analogous form to the conical/cylindrical figurines from Tell Arbid: *ANE Terr.*: 74; Wrede 2003: 305, Fig. 90/e–f, Pl. 41/1100; Barrelet 1968: Figs 40, 48.

²⁴ Makowski 2007: 473, Fig. 1, top.



7. Standing and sitting figurines from Tell Arbid dated to the Post-Akkadian period; inv. nos: a. ARB'02 D 29/41-2; b. ARB'01 SR 37/60-66; c. ARB'09 P 37/60-149 (Drawing and digitizing: M. Momot, M. PuszkarSKI, M. Wagner).

preted as a driver, just like the contemporary conical figurines with horizontally pierced stub arms (**Figs 2a, 5b**). The Post-Akkadian standing figurine, besides the arm perforation, had a deep slot in the base, for mounting purposes (**Fig. 7a**). Most probably, the figurine was fixed in a vehicle model. Some vehicle models feature vertical slots in seats²⁵ and rear footboards,²⁶ designed for the fixing of a seated driver and an accompanying standing person, respectively. The discussed figurine could easily fulfill the role of such a standing passenger. Moreover, in third millennium BC iconographic sources from Mesopotamia, the passengers are mainly warriors equipped with javelins or axes (**Fig. 8b**).²⁷ Therefore, the arm perforation of the figurine from Tell Arbid could have been meant for attaching a weapon (**Fig. 8a**).

SEATED FIGURINES

Most of the seated figurines from Tell Arbid have also originally been mounted on some other objects, as attested by the position of the legs, bent at the knee, as if sitting²⁸ and, in

²⁵ Raccidi 2012: 606–607, Figs 2/Arb'05 SD 35/65-16-1, 3/Arb'07 D 31/41-28-16, 5/Arb'99 SS 36/55-IX; Oates 2001a: 281, Figs 299, 300 – third from left; Wissing 2009: 194, 206, Pls 41/610, 42/613. On the drawing of the model cited above (Arb' 07 D 31/41-28-16), the slot has not been marked; compare, however: Raccidi 2009–2010: nos 11, 20, 30, Pls XXIII, XXVIIA, XXXIB.

²⁶ Oates 2001a: 281, Fig. 299.

²⁷ Oates 2001b: Fig. 9.1; Jans, Bretschneider 2011: 79–81, Wagon 9, 11–12; Littauer, Crouwel 1979: Fig. 3.

²⁸ See, however: Makowski 2013: 620–621, Fig. 2, right.



8. Wheeled vehicles with seated driver and standing warrior: a. hypothetical reconstruction of Post-Akkadian set from Tell Arbid; b. detail from the 'standard' of Ur dated to the ED III period (a. based on: Fig. 7a-b and Raccidi 2012: Fig. 5, left; b. based on: Littauer, Crouwel 1979: Fig. 3, not to scale).

one case, a vertical slot in the base (**Fig. 7b-c**). Some of them could have been seated on a sort of stool.²⁹ Others must have been specially made for fixing in vehicle models,³⁰ as at least vehicles with slots in seats (see *supra*) were combined with a seated driver (**Fig. 8a**).

Figurines of this type feature few details. Two of them have male traits (genitalia) marked, none is marked as female. It seems that also the remaining ones should be interpreted

²⁹ McDonald 2001: 270, Fig. 486/1.

³⁰ Two seated figurines from Tell Brak were interpreted in this way: McDonald 2001: 270, Fig. 486/11; Oates 2001a: 285, Fig. 307.

as males.³¹ They are dated to the Post-Akkadian or late Akkadian period, but similar representations must have been produced already since late ED III period.³²

CLAY IMAGES OF RIDERS AND MOUNTS

ASTRIDE SEATED FIGURINES

The second type of seated figurines from Tell Arbid differs by the legs, which are astride so these representations were adjusted to be mounted on a rounded object. With regard to this feature, they resemble rider figurines attested in southern Mesopotamia,³³ but hardly encountered in the Khabur region.³⁴ Two such representations from Tell Arbid are characterized by naturalistic modeling (**Fig. 9a**). On one, male genitalia are marked.³⁵ The figurines come from contexts dated to the late ED III or Akkadian period and the Post-Akkadian period. The pose of these two figurines – with legs astride, but stretched slightly forward – makes them similar to early, two-dimensional images of riders from southern Mesopotamia (**Fig. 9b-c**), dated to the second half of the third millennium BC, from the late ED III or early Akkadian period onwards.³⁶ These riders are always males, often either naked or lightly clad, riding astride and bareback.

MOUNT FIGURINE

An exceptional, but badly damaged, zoomorphic figurine (**Fig. 10a**) proves that at Tell Arbid, at the turn of the third millennium BC, clay effigies combining the images of rider and mount were also made.³⁷ The specimen was found in Khabur ware-period layers, but possibly should be dated to the Post-Akkadian period. Although the rider has been broken off, its imprint is visible on the loins of the animal. The rider's position must have been similar to that shown on contemporary terracotta plaques from southern Mesopotamia (**Fig. 10c**).³⁸ These plaques depict riders seated well back at the croup, often with their knees sharply drawn up. In several cases the mounted animal wears a wide girth. It was meant for the rider to hold onto in case of necessity or for wedging his knees

³¹ Most seated figurines from other sites in the region also represent males: McDonald 2001: 270; Oates 2001a: 285, Fig. 307; Mallowan 1947: 183, Pls XXXVIII/5, LIV/5; compare, however: McDonald 2001: 270, Fig. 486/11.

³² Vehicle models with slots in seats intended for mounting of sitting figurines, dated to late ED III and Akkadian periods, seems to corroborate this hypothesis: Raccidi 2012: 607–608, Figs 2 (Arb'05 SD 35/65-16-1), 3 (Arb'07 D 31/41-28-16); 2009–2010: nos 11, 20, Pls XXIII/A, XXVII/A (see also *supra*, comments in n. 25); Wissing 2009: 206, Pl. 42/613; Oates 2001a: 281, Fig. 300.

³³ Wrede 2003: 304, Fig. 90a-d; Frankfort, Lloyd, Jacobsen 1940: 208, Fig. 113b-c.

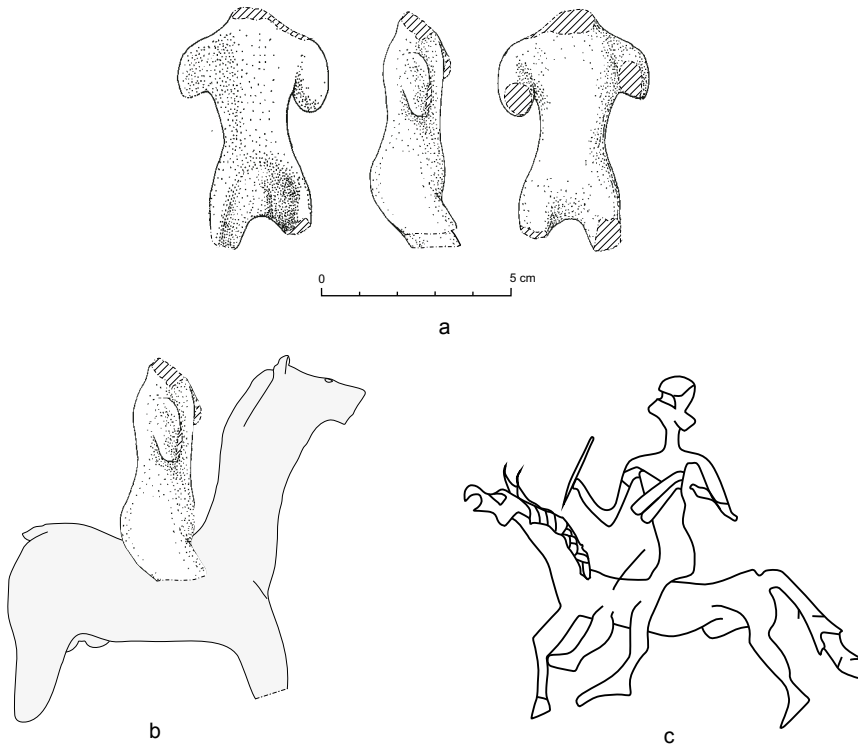
³⁴ Mallowan 1937: 128, Fig. 9/15; *ANE Terr.*: 177, no. 275.

³⁵ Makowski 2007: 474, Fig. 1, bottom.

³⁶ Littauer, Crouwel 1979: 35; Moorey 1970: 45, no. 1; Weszeli 2006–2008: 304; see also *infra*.

³⁷ For figurines combining the images of rider and mount see, for example: Magen 2001; Margueron 2004: Fig. 413/3.

³⁸ Moorey 1970.



9. Rider images from Mesopotamia, dated to the late third millennium BC: a. anthropomorphic figurine from Tell Arbid, dated to the Post-Akkadian period, inv. no. ARB'09 P 37/61-140-1; b. rider figurine mounted on equid figurine, hypothetical reconstruction; c. detail of seal impression, dated to the Ur III period (a. Drawing: M. Święzkowska, digitizing: M. Puszkarski; b. based on: Makowski 2014: Fig. 1; c. based on: Owen 1991: Fig. 1, not to scale).

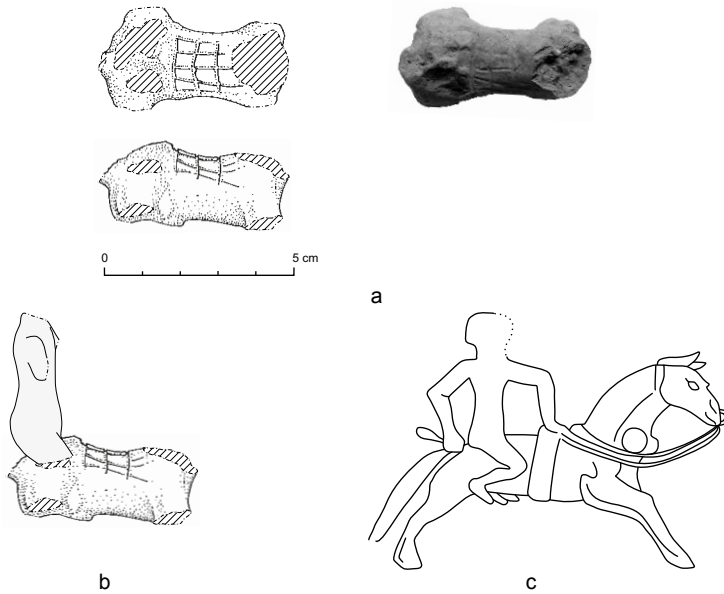
under it.³⁹ The decorative pattern on the back of the figurine from Tell Arbid seems to represent the same element of equipment.⁴⁰ On the sides of the torso, where it should continue, the legs of the presumed rider could have been originally positioned (**Fig. 10b**).

The figurine's state of preservation makes the interpretation presented above fairly disputable. If, however, the rider image was stuck on the back of the animal figurine – which seems very probable – and the decorative pattern records an element of real equipment worn by the mount, the analysis of other iconographic sources leaves no doubt that it must have been this kind of girth.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the figurine's fragmen-

³⁹ Littauer, Crouwel 1979: 67.

⁴⁰ For figurines with a similar decoration, see: Hauser 2007: 115, 382–383, Bos 300, Equus 10; Wissing 2009: 119, Pl. 21/221. The dorsal stripe (see: Makowski 2014: 266, 271) marked on the last figurine suggest that it could represent an equid. The extent of the decorative field on all these figurines is different than in the case of those with marked trappers or saddlebags (Makowski 2014: 268–269, 273).

⁴¹ Decorative pattern marked on the figurine could also represent a pack saddle (see, for example: Bar-Oz *et al.* 2013: 3–4). However, this interpretation does not explain, or even account for, the object which was originally stuck onto the loins of the figurine and must therefore be rejected.



10. Mounts images from Mesopotamia, turn of third and second millennium BC: a. zoomorphic figurine of Post-Akkadian or Khabur ware period date, inv. no. ARB'10 P 35/60-96; b. rider figurine on mount figurine, hypothetical reconstruction; c. detail from terracotta plaque, dated to the beginning of second millennium BC (a. Drawing, digitizing and Phot. M. Puzzkarski; b. based on: Fig. 9a, not to scale; c. based on: Weszeli 2006–2008: Fig. 1, not to scale).

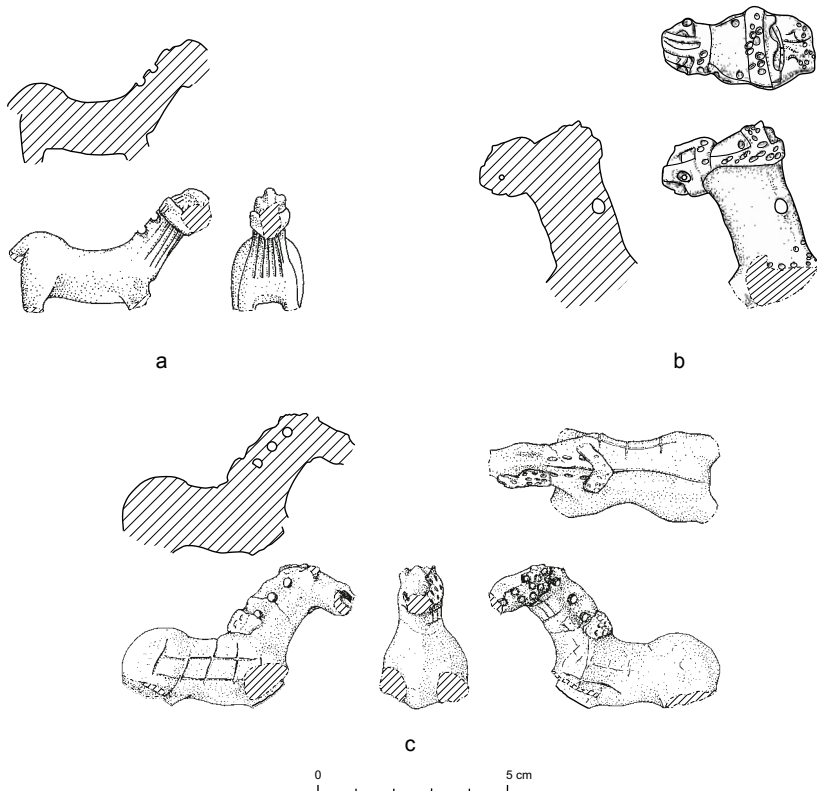
tation does not allow to ascertain whether it represents an equid or some other kind of ridden animal.⁴²

PIECING THE CLAY IMAGES BACK TOGETHER

Interpretation of a single clay figurine – in isolation from other elements of material culture – hardly ever gives reliable results, for a single symbol could be understood in multiple ways. The find context of figurines from Tell Arbid and from other sites in the region hampers attempts at their association with other categories of small finds. However, examination of their formal features implicates that some of the figurines were once part of sets consisting of different clay images. At Tell Arbid, such features occur on some male figurines. Most of these representations, deliberately shaped to fit or to be combined with other objects, were originally functionally associated with models of wheeled vehicles and/or equid figurines. On the other hand, such formal features are quite common among equid figurines.⁴³ Notably, perforation of the head (**Figs 1c, 11b**) – a detail indicating that the equid figurine was most probably combined by thread with a model of a wheeled vehicle – is attested

⁴² Littauer, Crouwel 1979: 66; Hill *et al.* 1990: 98, Pl. 35k-l.

⁴³ Numerous equid figurines feature perforations or slots in the neck (**Figs 1c, 11a-c**) and rump. They were meant for fastening on tassels imitating the mane and tail of the animals (Makowski 2014: 261).



11. Equid figurines from Tell Arbid with marked elements of their equipment: neck strap with fringe (a), headstall (b-c), trapper, yoke/neck straps holding a yoke on and decorative nape strap (c) (Makowski 2014: Figs 4, 7, 14).

in about one-third of specimens with head preserved. Therefore, it could be tentatively suggested that even one-third among the *c.* 250 equid figurines from Tell Arbid could have been suited for combining with vehicle models. This estimated number is higher than the number of model vehicles known from the site,⁴⁴ so probably at least some of the clay vehicles were originally pulled by more than one equid figurine.

Analysis of other details marked on the equid figurines corroborates this assumption (**Fig. 11**). These are, among others, elements of equipment characteristic for draught equids: yoke or neck straps, holding a yoke on, and trappers.⁴⁵ Moreover, a vast majority of equid figurines with a neck strap with fringe and/or headstall seem to represent draught equids as well.⁴⁶ It is hard to estimate how often such details were originally marked on figurines.

⁴⁴ In material from sectors investigated by the University of Warsaw team, in seasons 1996–2009, 40 models of wheeled vehicles were recorded (Raccidi 2012). Further specimens were found in 2010 and during three seasons of work conducted by the Adam Mickiewicz University team.

⁴⁵ Makowski 2014: 268–269.

⁴⁶ Makowski 2014: 262–263, 265.

However, for example at Tell Arbid, headstalls and/or head perforations are attested on half of the specimens with preserved heads. This estimate suggests that even every other equid figurine among the *c.* 250 specimens from the site could have been combined with a model wheeled vehicle. Some of these sets, but not more than half of them, included also clay images of warriors and/or drivers (**Figs 5, 8a**). Therefore it cannot be precluded that the anthropomorphic figurines were only additional elements that did not change the basic meaning of the sets.

Summing up, it seems that even 20% of the whole assemblage of *c.* 650 figurines from Tell Arbid, both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic, might have been elements of sets depicting wheeled vehicles drawn by equids and accompanied by warriors and drivers. The tradition of creating such sets was shaped in the Ninevite 5 period and lasted throughout the second half of the third millennium BC and possibly into the first half of the second millennium BC, although to a reduced degree.

The motif of rider and mount is remarkably less popular among the terracottas from Tell Arbid (**Figs 9–10**). Only several figurines could be interpreted as representations of mount or rider. They are attested since the ED III or Akkadian period, i.e. much earlier than in other iconographic records.

THE MOTIF OF WHEELED VEHICLES DRAWN BY EQUIDS AND ACCOMPANIED BY MALES

Popularity of vehicle models and the predominance of equid representation among zoomorphic figurines are visible not just in the terracotta assemblage from Tell Arbid, but also in those from some of the neighboring sites, such as Tell Mozan and Tell Brak.⁴⁷ Moreover, among the relatively few anthropomorphic figurines from these sites,⁴⁸ there are specimens comparable to the warrior and driver representations from Tell Arbid.⁴⁹ Therefore, the interpretation of clay images of wheeled vehicles drawn by equids and accompanied by males needs to be considered in a broad context of regional culture.

During the second half of the third millennium BC, terracottas are not the only kind of evidence pointing to the importance of wheeled vehicles and equids in the Khabur region. For example, textual sources of a late ED III date indicate that Nagar, identified with the site of Tell Brak, specialized in breeding of hybrids,⁵⁰ most probably a donkey and onager cross, particularly valuable and favored for pulling wheeled vehicles in whole Mesopotamia.

⁴⁷ McDonald 2001: 271–272; Oates 2001a: 280, 287; Wissing 2009: 37–38, 193.

⁴⁸ On Tell Arbid, anthropomorphic figurines are attested four times more rarely than equid figurines. A similar ratio between these two categories of clay images has been observed on Tell Mozan (Wissing 2009: 13, 37–38) and Tell Brak, if the so-called gaming pieces be taken into the calculation (McDonald 2001: 271–272, Tab. 26; Oates 2001a: 287).

⁴⁹ McDonald 2001: 270; Fig. 486/11; Oates 2001a: 285, Fig. 307; Mallowan 1947: 183, Pls XXXVIII/5, LIV/5; Wissing 2009: Pls 4/14–15, 17–18; 5/23–24; 6/31–32, 36.

⁵⁰ Oates 2001a: 286.

The vehicle of the ruler of Nagar was, most probably, drawn by this kind of equids,⁵¹ and they were also imported by rulers from outside of Mesopotamia.⁵² What is more, equids are quite popular in elite iconography – glyptics of late ED III and Akkadian periods – so they seem to have had prestigious connotations.⁵³

The same pictorial evidence testifies to the importance of wheeled vehicles in the elite culture of the region.⁵⁴ They are attested in military contexts, in scenes resembling the iconography of southern Mesopotamia (**Figs 4, 8b**), in hunt scenes and even in cultic contexts. According to texts, the upkeep and repair of vehicles, as well as feeding, care and grooming of draught animals, was one of the duties of central authority.⁵⁵ This could be one of the reasons behind depicting wheeled vehicles on seals belonging to high officials.⁵⁶

The iconographic and written sources suggest that in the Khabur region in the second half of the third millennium BC, or at least in late ED III and Akkadian periods, equids and wheeled vehicles were important symbols of male elites. At the same time, the same motifs were common among the terracottas from the region. Could identical motifs in elite and popular culture have conveyed equivalent meaning?⁵⁷ The discussed clay images – often unbaked, small-sized, schematic and imprecisely shaped – seem to be a rather inappropriate medium to demonstrate prestige or high status. On the other hand, there is a growing body of evidence for crude clay images' usage in public or official contexts, and their spatial association with administrative devices. On several sites in southern Mesopotamia assemblages comprising models of wheeled vehicles, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figurines, as well as sealings with seal impressions were found in the context of monumental buildings.⁵⁸ Of special interest is a late ED III assemblage from Abu Salabikh. It included male figurines, comparable to the conical/cylindrical figurines from Tell Arbid, vehicle models and zoomorphic figurines, among which equid figurines, some with perforated heads, were most numerous.⁵⁹ Throughout the third millennium BC, the phenomenon is attested in the Khabur region as well.⁶⁰ These examples prove that terracottas could have functioned in close association with objects in other media – such as glyptic – representing elite culture, and therefore they were in use among members of society familiar with high status symbols.

⁵¹ Sallaberger 1998: 173.

⁵² Oates 2001a: 279–280, 286, 292–293.

⁵³ Pruß, Sallaberger 2003–2004: 304.

⁵⁴ Raccidi 2013; Oates 2001a: 289–292; Jans, Bretschneider 1998.

⁵⁵ Sallaberger 1998: 175.

⁵⁶ Jans, Bretschneider 1998: 155, no. Bey. 1.

⁵⁷ Although there is no consensus as to the meaning and function of north Mesopotamian terracottas, most scholars agree that they were not toys (see, e.g.: Pruß 2012b: 603; Cholidis 1989) or at least there is hardly any evidence for such an interpretation.

⁵⁸ Green 1993: 2, 18–21; McAdam 1993; *ANE Terr.*: 54–55.

⁵⁹ McAdam 1993: 85–88, 93–95, Figs 3.4/275; 3.6/283, 287; 3.10/318–319, 323; 3.16–18.

⁶⁰ By assemblages from the royal building AK in Tell Mozan, dated to the late third millennium BC (Hauser 2007: xvii–xx), administrative-public complex from Tell Leilan, dated to ED III and Akkadian periods (McCarthy 2012) and from Ninevite 5 context from Tell Brak (Matthews 2003: 102–104). See also assemblage from palace G in Ebla (Peyronel 2008).

Although, on Tell Arbid, clay figurines and vehicle models come mostly from dwelling districts, they seem to convey symbols related to the elite culture. However, while clay images of equids pulling wheeled vehicles, as well as the accompanying warriors and drivers, were produced since the Ninevite 5 until the turn of the third millennium BC at the least, in elite iconography of the Khabur region such themes are testified mainly in late ED III and Akkadian periods.

THE MOTIF OF RIDER AND MOUNT

Rider and mount is a recurrent motif among Mesopotamian terracottas from the second half of the third and first half of the second millennium BC (*see supra*), sometimes attested also in other media.⁶¹ However, its relatively low importance in the iconography of the region is quite obvious. Paucity of Mesopotamian sources relating to riding hinders the interpretation of this theme.⁶² In general, riding was a male prerogative but there is no reliable evidence for its association with military context. Equids were ridden by scouts, messengers and nobleman, among others.

There are no firm indications as to the identity of the individuals depicted by rider figurines from Tell Arbid. Nonetheless, identification of mount and rider figurines in the assemblage from Tell Arbid is additional testimony (apart from that cited above) of a functional association between figurines of males and those of equids.

*

Phenomena distinctive for third millennium BC figurines from Tell Arbid – the prevalence of male over female images,⁶³ the predominance of equid representations and popularity of vehicle models – are doubtlessly closely associated. On the one hand, these clay images reflect a specificity of the Khabur region: the importance of wheeled vehicles, specialization in breeding of equids, innovations related to their exploitation and equipment⁶⁴ and significance of military motifs in the symbolic definition of males. On the other hand, they prove that the society of the site was familiar with the system of symbols characteristic for the culture of Mesopotamian urban centers.

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⁶¹ Oates 2001b: 119–120, Figs 9.3–5.

⁶² Weszeli 2006–2008: 304, 306; Littauer, Crouwel 1979: 46.

⁶³ Makowski 2007: 481.

⁶⁴ Makowski 2014: 262, 277.

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