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AN UNPROVENANCED HUMAN FIGURINE IN THE COLLECTION OF CLASSICAL ANTIQUITIES OF THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS (PART 1)

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Cuvinte cheie: figurină egipteană feminină atipică, Regatul Nou, Dinastia a XVIII-a, cca. 1550-1292 a.Chr., origine siriană sau cananeană

Key words: atypical Egyptian female figurine, New Kingdom, Eighteenth Dynasty, ca. 1550-1292 BC, Syrian or Canaanite origin

Introduction

In March 1990, Edit Szávay¹, the widow of the well-known Hungarian diplomat, art collector and journalist István Rudnyánszky, presented a female figurine of unknown provenance to be permanently deposited in the Collection of Classical Antiquities of the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest (Hungary) with the expectation that the museum's specialists would be able to determine the figurine's provenance, one-time cultural context and date (inv. no. A.644, **Fig. 1.2, Figs 3-5**).

Árpád Miklós Nagy, the then director of the Collection of Classical Antiquities, commissioned Eszter Bánffy, an archaeologist who at the time worked in the Institute of Archaeology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, to undertake this archaeological investigation; the results of her research were published in a small English-language monograph in 2001.

In her search for analogies to the figurine, Bánffy drew a sweeping picture that virtually encompassed the entire Old World, from the early Indus Valley civilisation through the Near East to Egypt within a time-frame from the late third to the early second millennium BC (which thus practically included any human figurine made by any human civilisation flourishing in South-East Europe, Asia Minor, Central Asia and North Africa)².

Despite her rigorous search for parallels across a vast territory and a broad time-span, Bánffy was unable to find truly good analogies to the object

¹ [https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Szávay Edit](https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sz%C3%A1vay_Edit) (last accessed February 19, 2024).

² Bánffy 2001, p. 33-34, 35-64.

she designated as the *Budapest idol* or *Budapest figurine*³. Although its modelling differed to some extent, the single small statuette bearing the closest resemblance to the Budapest figurine was a piece in the Brooklyn Museum of Art that similarly had no known provenance (accession no. 72.133, **Fig. 1.1, Fig. 7**)⁴. This figurine was believed to originate from Syria and was dated to 2200-2000 BC⁵.

Basing her arguments on the likeness with the Brooklyn figurine, Bánffy made a case for the Syro-Palestinian coast, a region known for receiving and absorbing cultural impulses from Egypt, as being the most probable place of production of the Budapest figurine and proposed a date between 2400/2200-2000 BC for it. Discussing its religious context, she contended that the figurine was most likely a simpler, domestic/regional variant of the *Magna Mater* goddess reflecting local religious beliefs and noted that some of the figurine's attributes resembled those of *Hathor* (*Astarte/Astaroth/Asherah/Anat*), a goddess popular throughout the Near East. The figurine was in all likelihood vested with protective powers as part of a domestic shrine (resembling the *teraphim*, the household gods of the Bible)⁶.

Addressing the issue of whether the figurine was an imitation/copy of one of the period's popular goddesses or a modern forgery, Bánffy could not present conclusive evidence for either. Her main argument was that the figurine appeared to be genuine, not least owing to its careful modelling with attention to tiny details, and that even if it was a modern forgery, it would definitely have its artistic merit⁷.

Shortly after Bánffy's book was published, János György Szilágyi, the former director of the Collection of Classical Antiquities, still active at the time, came across an even closer analogy than the Brooklyn figurine in an auction catalogue (**Fig. 1.3**). The modelling of this figurine was almost identical to the Budapest exemplar, but regrettably had no known provenance either. The appraiser searched for similar pieces in an entirely different cultural milieu⁸ and thus proposed a wholly different date and possible origin for the figurine⁹.

³ Since then, the term *idol*, widely used at the time in Hungary, has been supplanted by the term *figurine* in Hungarian prehistoric studies.

⁴ Bánffy 2001, p. 36, Fig. 10.

⁵ Bánffy 2001, p. 20, 34. It must here be noted that other information was later published on the museum's website (<https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/98871>): „Ancient Near Eastern Female Figurine, late 3rd millennium B.C.E. Terracotta, 14×9×2 cm. Brooklyn Museum, Gift of Helena Simkhovitch in memory of her father, Vladimir G. Simkhovitch, 72.133. Place Made: [Mesopotamia \(modern day Iraq, Turkey, & Syria\)](#)” (last accessed August 30, 2023).

⁶ Bánffy 2001, p. 75-83.

⁷ Bánffy 2001, p. 84-87.

⁸ Christie's, New York, Antiquities, Wednesday 5 December 2001 and Thursday 6 December 2001, p. 111, Lot 368: „For a similar example see p. 208 in Baines and Malek, *Atlas of Ancient*

This discovery led Mariann Dági, the current director of the Collection of Classical Antiquities of the Museum of Fine Arts, to re-open the case of the figurine and I was tasked with recommencing its study in 2023.

Known as the Goldman figurine after its former owner, this piece is indeed the best parallel to the Budapest figurine: the two are virtually identical, with only minor, negligible differences.

It must again be emphasised that the Goldman figurine similarly lacks a provenance and an archaeological context. In contrast to the Brooklyn figurine, its probable provenance is specified as Egypt and not Mesopotamia, but this was no more than the opinion of the appraiser, who may have been an expert, but not one necessarily specialising in the human figurines of the Near East/Egypt. The analogy cited to this figurine for tentatively establishing its probable data and origin can hardly be regarded as the best formal parallel (**Fig. 2**)¹⁰. The proposed date is likewise overly general and was in all likelihood based on a generalised conclusion – it can best be treated as a *terminus ante quem* since the most widely accepted scholarly opinion regarding the human figurines of Egypt is that although they are attested in all periods of Egyptian history¹¹, their number increased from the Second Intermediate Period onward (1650-1550 BC)¹². As a matter of fact, even this chronological boundary cannot be taken for certain¹³.

Research framework and research objectives

Given that previous studies were unable to provide a cogent answer regarding the figurine's origins and genuineness, the research objectives have not changed. The basic questions have remained the same: when and where was the female figurine made, what was its intended function, and whether it could possibly be a modern forgery.

Similarly to Bánffy, I undertook this task following the conventional archaeological procedure. I first examined the figurine with the naked eye, then with a hand magnifier (10×) and finally under a microscope (7.5× magnification)

Egypt" (https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-3831643?ldp_breadcrumb=back, last accessed August 30, 2023). For the description of this figurine, see below.

⁹ „An Egyptian terracotta fertility figure, Second Intermediate Period, Dynasty XV-XVII, 1640-1532 BC [...] 17.2 cm high. Property from the Estate of Mathilda Goldman (1906-)” (https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-3831643?ldp_breadcrumb=back, last accessed August 30, 2023). Sold on December 6, 2001, for USD 9400 (the purchaser is not known; when making enquiries in 2023, the auction house replied that it was not at liberty to reveal the purchaser's name).

¹⁰ Baines, Malek 1980, p. 208: lower illustration, first figurine on the left; **Fig. 2** here.

¹¹ Teeter 2010, p. 5.

¹² Cf., e.g., Pinch 1993; Waraksa 2007, p. 97-98.

¹³ Teeter 2010, p. 6; Török 1993, p. 51, 53.

for providing a detailed and accurate description, followed by the conclusions drawn thereof. Since Eszter Bánffy followed the same procedure, I will here compare her observations with my own. When faced with various issues that still need to be resolved, I have proposed the appropriate analytical procedure that would be suitable for providing a conclusive answer to questions that cannot be resolved through a macroscopic examination. However, these analyses can only be undertaken if the figurine's ownership is settled and the current owner agrees to the invasive and non-invasive examinations. The planned analyses and their results will be presented in the later, second part of this study.

This procedure is methodologically sound and useful in several respects. Firstly, I was curious to find out how much can be learnt without the use of various analytical instruments and how observations made with the naked eye and human brainpower compare with the more unbiased and scientifically more grounded information gained from various analyses. I also find it very instructive how machine intelligence integrated with human analytical investigations has fundamentally changed archaeological scholarship.

Next, I discuss the two closest parallels – the Brooklyn figurine and the Goldman figurine – with similar attention to detail. In their case, the description is based on the published information and photos made available on their respective websites because I did not have the opportunity to personally examine either figurine. I then review the similarities to and divergences from the Budapest figurine, and the insights that can be drawn from this comparison.

Description of the figurine (Museum of Fine Arts, Collection of Classical Antiquities, inv. no. A.644)

Bánffy distinguished seven main typological traits, which she discussed separately¹⁴, and I shall also follow the same sequence: her descriptions and observations are cited in italics, followed by my remarks. Given that an Egyptian origin was proposed for the Goldman figurine, the closest comparative piece to the Budapest figurine, I shall also principally look to recent research on this period in Egypt, not least because major advances have been made in this field during the past decades, mainly through the work of Joanne Backhouse¹⁵,

¹⁴ 1) Standing posture, flat body, dimensions; 2) fabric, painting; 3) separately modelled legs, different feet; 4) angular head, vertical applied nose and round applied eyes; 5) head ornament, applied hair braids, necklace and bracelets; 6) arms position; 7) breasts, navel, depiction of the pubic area, nudity (Bánffy 2001, p. 13-32).

¹⁵ Backhouse noted that the figurines were accessible to all. Furthermore, she suggests that because these figures were made in various mediums „to express the same motifs”. „The female form, was a central belief system of the community”. Given that many of the figures she studied are not specifically mentioned in magico-medical religious texts, Backhouse contended that they were used by women for women's needs and that the spells and rituals would have been

Stephanie Joan Harris¹⁶, Victoria Irene Jensen¹⁷, Geraldine Pinch¹⁸, Amanda Jane Shaffery¹⁹, Emily Teeter²⁰, Angela M. J. Tooley²¹ and Elisabeth A.

transmitted orally amongst women. In her view, based on her study of the New Kingdom figurines from Deir el-Medina, female figurines were used „by women in their own personal religious/magical/medical practise” (Backhouse 2013, p. 37). She also made a remarkable observation about the archaeological context: „The multifunctional purpose of the figurines is supported by evidence from Deir el-Medina, where we find figurines in the home, tombs and in the vicinity of chapels. An interesting group has been found in a niche cut into a wall of a house at Amarna, consisting of a standalone figurine, model bed and small scale stela. It is possible the figurines at Deir el-Medina were displayed in a similar way, as niches were cut into many of the walls opposite the ‘lit clos’, which Bruyère maintained was the focus of ancestor cult. The figurines may have served as a link between the past generations, the present and the future generations” (Backhouse 2013, p. 38).

¹⁶ Harris 2018, iii: „Ancient Egyptian distinctive headdresses made from precious or semi-precious materials date to prehistoric times, indicating a growing sense of individuality and hierarchy. Women’s headdresses were indicators of rulership, divinity, social status, cultic affiliation and wealth. Visual evidence indicates that female identity was emphasised by external and outward appearance and headdresses in the form of diadems followed recognised stylistic dictates throughout the Dynastic Period. The floral and faunal motifs used in the embellishment were believed to have protective amuletic and magical powers. Although a considerable amount of investigation has been undertaken into the use of materials and techniques used in the manufacture of diadems, the incorporation of symbolism and iconography of these gendered artefacts as a means of interpreting visual messages and self-expression has largely been unexplored.”

¹⁷ Jensen (2019, p. 11-12, 274-283, 349-351, 399-400) notes that figures found in domestic contexts were most likely used in birthing rituals, while broken pieces recovered from trash dumps may have functioned as mediums of apotropaic magic, and the ceramic figurines deposited in tombs may have been intended to protect the deceased.

¹⁸ Ceramic female figurines interpreted as representations of fertility: Pinch 1993, Types 2 and 3. In her view, the figurines can be assigned to the sphere of reproduction, rather than simply sexuality, given the presence of children on many pieces. She suggested that their deposition in funerary contexts was to ensure the fertility of the deceased in the afterlife and assist their rebirth. Figurines could be offered to or placed in the vicinity of ‘higher powers’ such as the spirits of the dead or deities associated with fertility.

¹⁹ Shaffery 2021, p. 6: „Concerning ceramic figures, I suggest that when found in domestic contexts they are truly representations of fertility and may have functioned as amulets to aid in pregnancy and breastfeeding; when found in tomb contexts, it is plausible that they may have also functioned as magical midwives to the deceased”.

²⁰ Teeter 2010, p. 24-27: „Female figurines from the dynastic period at Medinet Habu fall into three major stylistic groups. ... The female figurines are clearly related to fertility.” Teeter’s work is comprehensive and serves as an excellent example of how female figurines can be classified.

²¹ Tooley 2020: „Truncated figurines, otherwise known as fertility figurines, lack legs below the knees. This significant feature is not the only characteristic which distinguishes this type of figurine from other types in the established typology. In an alternative method of analysis, braided hairstyles are considered, revealing diachronic and iconographic developments which indicate a shift in emphasis in the way these objects may have functioned”.

Waraksa²². This should by no means be taken as a stance in favour of the Budapest figurine's Egyptian origin – it simply means that the first precise analytical parameters and the archaeological contexts suitable for meaningful comparisons were published in their works. It must also be noted that despite the many studies focusing on human figurines, a typology for all Egyptian human figurine types is still lacking²³, as is an archaeometric examination of any single Egyptian human figurine using the full range of currently available analytical methods. Regrettably, the Budapest figurine does not appear among the types described in any of the studies published by the above authors and thus the new research findings and approaches in Egyptian figurine studies cannot be wholly adapted to our exemplar.

Before turning to the detailed discussion, an important point should be highlighted regarding the published images of the Budapest figurine. In her book, Bánffy published a colour photo of the frontal view as well as of the right side view and the back view, alongside six black-and-white photos of various details of the bodily regions, all without scale²⁴.

When I first held the figurine in my hand, I noticed that entirely different colours were accentuated in natural (warm) and artificial (cold) light, and I therefore made a series of photos showing the figurine in both lights to reproduce and convey this impression. In addition to this surprising discovery, examining the figurine under the two different lights was also very helpful in identifying the traces of red and black pigment surviving on the female body – even if in extremely worn condition in some spots – because red shows up better in artificial light, while black could be more clearly made out in natural light (**Fig. 3**). I prepared an explanatory and interpretative drawing on which I highlighted the technological and decorative traits that had originally characterised the figurine, some of which have survived (bichrome painting, traces of smoothing, modern treatment: **Fig. 4**). I prepared a series of photos with scale showing all views made in natural (warm) light (**Fig. 5**).

²² Waraksa 2007 (with a focus on New Kingdom and Late Period ceramic exemplars from the Mut Precinct in modern Luxor). She suggested that the female figurines from this site were mass-produced for magico-medical purposes: „*The clay figurines as being akin to excretion figurines that absorbed illness or evil and were thereafter broken to neutralize the evil.*” (Waraksa 2007, p. 104-106; for a critical discussion of Waraksa's interpretation, cf. Backhouse 2013).

²³ Angela Tooley is currently working on constructing a typological scheme for human figurines (mentioned by Shaffery 2021, p. 52, 154).

²⁴ For full-size photos, cf. Bánffy 2001, p. 8, Figs 1, and p. 10, Figs 2-3; additional photos of various details are as follows: head and shoulder region, front view: Bánffy 2001, p. 13, Fig. 4; only the head, front view: Bánffy 2001, p. 20, Fig. 6; back view: Bánffy 2001, p. 22, Fig. 7; torso and chest region: Bánffy 2001, p. 25, Fig. 8; abdomen: Bánffy 2001, p. 28, Fig. 9; feet: Bánffy 2001, p. 19, Fig. 5.

In the later, second part of this study, I plan to publish additional photos, specifically a series made under infrared and ultraviolet light as well as X-ray photos, which will no doubt offer additional insights that will improve our understanding of the figurine.

Fabric

*Yellowish clay mixed with marl*²⁵

The figurine was made from light yellowish-brown clay²⁶. This is not identical with the so-called Nile silt clay that has a reddish hue and is fine-grained with mica, which has been identified as the fabric of the Brooklyn figurine, and neither is it the grey marl clay mentioned as the fabric of Egyptian human figurines in several studies²⁷. This could be an indication that the figurine had not been made along the Nile, in the core area of the Egyptian kingdom.

No tempering agents are visible to the naked eye (making the expression *mixed with marl* somewhat inaccurate) since the figurine's surface is extremely worn and because there are no fresh breaks that would provide a view of the fabric's structure. It is possible that it was untempered because the clay was suitable for modelling in its natural state and there was no need to add artificial tempering agents (marl is a natural component of clay).

Examined under a microscope, tiny mica grains (≈ 1 mm), tiny gravel-like conglomerates (\approx marl, 2-3 mm), and slightly larger red-coloured lumps (≈ 3 mm) could be made out. However, these do not necessarily represent intentionally added tempering agents; they can equally well be natural inclusions in the clay.

Ceramic petrography sheds light on fabric composition and tempering; however, the ceramic material has to be sampled for the preparation of thin sections and therefore this invasive analysis can only be undertaken at a later date.

²⁵ Bánffy 2001, p. 9, 17.

²⁶ The original light brown surface, worn away in some spots to a yellowish colour, can be seen on the left arm and the right leg.

²⁷ Waraksa 2007, p. 48-51. The currently used classification system for Egyptian pottery was first outlined in 1980 (Nordström in Helck, Otto 1975-1992, VI: 633-634) and then published in greater detail in 1993 (Nordström, Bourriau 1993, p. 168-182). The so-called Vienna system can also be employed for the pottery preceding and succeeding the New Kingdom (Aston 1996). The creators of the Vienna system note that marl (greyish) clay is harder than Nile (red silt) clay (Nordström, Bourriau 1993, p. 165). This durability would be useful when a female figurine was used for magico-medicinal purposes and magic spells were recited over it. The figurine had to remain intact during this phase of the healing ritual for it to be effective and to alleviate or repel ailments (Waraksa 2007, p. 77).

Modelling

Aside from a few remarks, Bánffy did not discuss the modelling of the figurine. The figurine had been made in one of two possible ways: the first, that it had been modelled by hand from a single slab of clay and the additional elements (painting, applied ornamentation, limbs) were added separately after the basic form had been created. This possibility seems to be borne out by the figurine's compactness and its weight (so-called stand-alone statuette).

*"The body of the female figurine is flat, its average thickness does not exceed 1.6–1.7 cm. Aside from the carefully modelled hair braids falling down the back, the backside is not modelled"*²⁸.

While the back side was quite clearly not modelled²⁹, it can be seen, on closer inspection, that the back side is not completely flat (and thus not quite the same as the so-called plaque figurines)³⁰, but has a raised edge on the right and the left side and that the back side itself is slightly dished, with a difference of between 2–4 mm from the edge, as if the figurine had been made with its back side down in a rimmed mould or – insofar as this is not a technical, but a functional trait – as if the figurine had been laid onto another object or set into some substance for support (such as an altar, a ritual vessel serving as an altar, or perhaps a votive bed³¹, a votive plaque, or a small stand). The form and modelling of the back side possibly imply that it provided the additional stability that was needed for support if set upright: balancing on its asymmetrical feet, the figurine was not self-supporting (free-standing vs. not free-standing statuette)³².

²⁸ Bánffy 2001, p. 9.

²⁹ Twice-moulded figurines made in one-part moulds dating from the Late Bronze Age are known from the southern Levant (northern Palestine). Cf. Kletter *et alii* 2010.

³⁰ Backhouse 2013, Fig. 2:2.

³¹ It is possible that the figurine represents a women-on-bed type female figurine in view of the back side with raised rim. In this case, the bed/altar/platform would be a separate piece. Nevertheless, this seems unlikely because this figurine type is usually found together with the bed (e.g. Backhouse 2013, p. 31–32), although votive beds/altars/steles have also come to light in themselves (cf. Teeter 2010, p. 157–195). At Edfu, a plaque figurine was found in a tomb which contained a model bed and it is therefore possible that the two were associated. This tomb has been dated to the Middle Kingdom, suggesting that the association between figurines and beds may be more ancient than earlier assumed. Some stand-alone figurines were accompanied by model beds at Deir el-Medina. Similar evidence was found at Sawama and Amarna. However, at both Deir el-Medina and Amarna, the number of figurines greatly exceeds the number of beds, indicating that not all figurines were accompanied by a bed. The evidence would suggest that figurines of diverse forms were made and used concurrently at Deir el-Medina. Due to the lack of contextual information, it is impossible to ascertain which figurines were accompanied by a bed (Backhouse 2013, p. 33–34). The votive bed would represent a secure chronological anchor because it was popular for a very brief time, appearing in the Twenty-Second Dynasty and disappearing after the Twenty-Third Dynasty (Teeter 2010, p. 196).

³² Butterworth 2016, p. 67–68.

The back side can also reflect another manufacturing technique, namely that the figurine, or at least its head and torso, had been cast in a half-mould or an open one-part mould³³. This possibility would be underpinned by the rim around the back side, perhaps formed when the clay was pressed into the mould. However, it must also be noted that I am unaware of any moulds of this type since the pieces known to me from publications are all full body exemplars³⁴.

Irrespective of whether the figurine had been cast in a mould or modelled by hand, its decoration, the jewellery and various bodily parts, such as the headdress and the hair, the eyes, the nose, the breasts, the hands, the necklace and the double bracelets, were separately modelled and applied (post-moulding decoration), similarly to the impressed ornamentation of the clothing and body parts (mouth, nose, navel, headdress and hair, necklace, apron, toes), and the painting.

The two arms were added separately to the body, as shown by the crack at the armpit on the left arm, probably formed when it was fitted to the torso (**Fig. 4.3, Fig. 5.2**), as were the two legs, as can be seen both on the front and the back side. Viewed under a microscope at 7.5× magnification, the crack on the left arm appears to be more of a sharp jab, with no intention of smoothing over the join (the inner side is cracked along its length and could at some future point in time become detached from the body). Judging from the sharpness of the tool, it may have been made with a modern implement. A straight black line is visible on the back side of the left leg (as if drawn with a pencil), which could be the line of the join or a modern marking. A smoothed horizontal band can be made out on the front side of the right leg, in line with the one on the left, but lacking the pencilled-like line.

One argument in favour of the figurine having been made in a mould is that it has both a close comparative piece, the Brooklyn figurine, and a virtually identical parallel, the Goldman figurine, suggesting the one-time use of a standard mould and the existence of a specific type, possibly reflecting standardisation and the production of figurines in workshops³⁵. Yet, it must also be borne in mind that no two figurines are wholly alike among the Egyptian human figurines published in various studies.

One of the most unmistakable signs of a mould-made piece is if the figurine is hollow. If viewed under a magnifier, tiny voids can be made out above the left corner on the back side, on the left sole and on the apron on the

³³ Insofar as this assumption is correct, it would be an important chronological pointer since the use of moulds became widespread from/during the reign of *Thutmose III* in the New Kingdom (Waraksa 2007, p. 52-55; Teeter 2010, p. 23, note 39).

³⁴ E.g. British Museum, museum number EA54364: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA54364 (last accessed February 14, 2024).

³⁵ Waraksa 2007, p. 85-90.

front side. However, these could be the traces of surface treatment or of shrinkage during drying or firing, or of surface absorption. Alternately, they can indicate that the front and the back side had been made separately. Only additional analyses can establish whether the figurine is hollow. If made from two separate parts, an X-ray image would reveal the line where the two parts had been fitted together, whether the join had been smoothed over by hand, and whether it had been dried or fired.

It is impossible to determine with the naked eye whether the figurine had been fired or merely sun-dried³⁶. In my view, it had perhaps been fired at a low temperature to stabilise the black and red painting; however, this can only be determined by the X-ray diffractometer analysis of a sample taken from the figurine that would also shed light on the firing temperature and the inorganic composition of the clay.

Dimensions

*"Length: 16.4 cm"*³⁷

The other measurements are as follows: L. 164 mm, W. of cross-section 11-28 mm, diam. of shoulder 85 mm, distance between elbows 95 mm, diam. of hips 66 mm, weight 215 g.

The average dimensions of Egyptian human figurines found in domestic or mortuary contexts³⁸ range from 5-6 cm to 30-40 cm³⁹, and in this respect, the Budapest figurine falls into the average range and was portable by hand.

Traces of wear and surface treatment

*"Small patches of a thin, greyish-brown slip survived on the abdomen and legs"; "slightly polished slip"*⁴⁰.

In my view, there is no coating of any kind on the figurine, neither a wash, nor a thinner and finer slip⁴¹. Viewed under a microscope, it can be clearly

³⁶ Unfired figurines are also attested, e.g. from Amarna: Waraksa 2007, p. 94.

³⁷ Bánffy 2001, p. 17.

³⁸ *"Fertility figurines have been found in three contexts: houses, burials, and temples"* (Pinch 1993, p. 225). This assertion later came under heavy criticism, alongside proposals for a broader range of functions. A distinction must be drawn between whether a figurine was recovered from a primary or a secondary context, whether it was intact or fragmented (accidentally or intentionally broken), and it must also be borne in mind that Pinch's main categories do not provide a firm framework since dwellings can also be found in temple precincts, while burials can lie within the confines of both a city and a temple precinct (Waraksa 2007, p. 17-18).

³⁹ Waraksa 2007, p. 26-27, 164.

⁴⁰ Bánffy 2001, p. 9, 17.

seen that the shinier patches on the abdomen, the legs, the right arm and the back side designated as polishing and remnants of a slip by Bánffy are actually the remains of a modern treatment: a layer of stabilising adhesive substance of unknown composition was applied to the figurine at some point (see below).

The figurine's surface was originally merely smoothed and any shinier patches – which are currently not visible on its surface – could only have been formed secondarily during its use and handling; the figurine was not polished originally. The inner, undamaged sides of the legs under the vulva have a matte surface that is porous since the leather-dry clay was not smoothed, while long, wider lines resembling plank imprints were made by a smoothing implement; the upper part of the right leg has thin diagonal lines left by a somewhat narrower implement. Vertical lines over a larger surface on the back and on the front side on the abdomen in line with the navel, and horizontal lines on the left breast are likewise marks left by smoothing.

*"One side of the figurine is more worn: not only has the slip disappeared, the yellow clay surface also shows signs of wear, similarly to the top of the head, [...] It would seem that the figurine had lain this side upward, more exposed to the fluctuations in temperature and humidity"*⁴².

More precisely: the figurine's left frontal part is extremely worn, as is the head and the top of the head's back side, possibly because the figurine had been positioned obliquely, or had been laid and embedded on its right side, which was more protected or perhaps even covered. It seemed likely that the legs had lain somewhat lower down, while the frontal upper part was more exposed⁴³. A zoned wear pattern could have been caused not only by the burial, but also by the figurine's position during its use (for example, it could have been placed on an altar with one part covered and the other part exposed, or with the more intact portion wrapped in some textile or other organic material)⁴⁴.

However, both of the above assumptions had to be rejected after the examination of the figurine under a microscope, which revealed that the currently more lustrous parts such as the right arm and some patches on the left leg – which appear to be better preserved and which in Bánffy's view were coated with a slip and polished – in fact preserve the remnants of some modern treatment (an amateur attempt at conservation with the application of some sort

⁴¹ Wash is a combination of water and pigment, while slip is a combination of clay, pigment and water. Slip is sometimes defined as a coating applied before firing, while wash as a decorative coating applied after firing (Waraksa 2007, p. 61).

⁴² Bánffy 2001, p. 9.

⁴³ Interestingly, the photos suggest that traces of use-wear (or some modern treatment) can be noted in the same areas on the Brooklyn and Goldman figurines; cf. **Fig. 1**.

⁴⁴ Cf. Waraksa 2007, Fig. 8.

of adhesive substance, which can hopefully be identified by a compositional analysis).

Painting

”The remains of black painting can be made out on the top of the head, between the hair braids [...] near the left ear”⁴⁵.

As a matter of fact, the black painting had covered almost the entire body⁴⁶:

- the hair worn in locks/braids (or the wig) were all painted, as was each element of the cap-like headdress indicated with incisions;
- at the same time, black painting is also visible in the plain areas between the hair locks on the head’s better preserved right side corresponding to the neck and/or the temple and the face;
- it would appear that there is black painting on the inner side of the necklace and around the mouth;
- this is continued on the shoulder (red and black stripes on the right shoulder and two stripes on the more worn left shoulder forming a V motif towards the neck), as well as on the chest, including the breasts and the arms, in the form of diagonal stripes (*i.e.* red not covering the entire body);
- the inner and outer line of the more intact right arm indicates that it had been covered with paint and that the double bracelets were also painted; remnants of black painting survive on the back side of the left arm;
- the more poorly preserved, larger left breast and the much better preserved right breast were both painted black; the upper part of the right breast is painted with three separate dots (perhaps implying that the modelling/painting of the breasts was originally asymmetrical)⁴⁷;
- the black painting continues on the abdomen and the pelvis (streaking down from the bracelets on the wrists) and the legs, but not on the soles (of which only the edges were painted), and painting covers the figurine’s entire back side and the two sides, in vertical stripes;
- the black painting in the lower zone on the back side of the more intact right foot appears to be made up of five diagonal stripes, suggesting that it formed a pattern.

The FTIR and IR spectroscopy of samples from the black pigment will shed light on the composition of the paint and its binder. What seems certain is that

⁴⁵ Bánffy 2001, p. 9, 18.

⁴⁶ Black, or *khemet*, as indicated by onyx and obsidian in stones, denoted fertility as depicted by Osiris and Min’s black faces (Harris 2018, p. 64).

⁴⁷ The similarly asymmetrical modelling of the breasts has been noted on figurines from various other sites, too. Cf. Waraksa 2007, p. 59.

the black painting was decorative in nature and formed patterns, typically stripes on the body, or was used to accentuate certain bodily parts or jewellery items.

*"The two pupils were accentuated by brownish-red painting and traces of a similar painting can be noted on the hands"*⁴⁸,

*"The eyes of the figurine are rather peculiar: two small applied discs highlighted with painting"*⁴⁹.

The red painting in the latter areas and the red line framing the mouth are both closer to a reddish-brown, pastose hue and not a bright red resembling the hourglass-shaped patch on the arm, and it also differs from the pastose red painting of the braids. It seems to me that the eyes had been painted red, while the pupils were highlighted with black, explaining the differences in colour.

Additional traces of red painting can be made out on the arms, although it remains uncertain whether these represent intentional painting or whether similarly to the two tiny blobs on the back side of the left upper arm they are a natural ferrous inclusion in the clay.

The hourglass-like red patch on the front side of the right elbow is of a brighter hue than the other red paint remnants. It is accentuated with a black frame, explaining why it stands out more. It is possible that it symbolised some sort of body marking, perhaps tattooing⁵⁰.

Additional traces of red painting can be found on the lower third of the back side of the right arm, the lower part of the hair locks, the area between the right wrist and the necklace, the right corner of the apron (while the interior of the apron retains black painting if viewed under a microscope) and the right thigh.

The contours of both breasts were outlined with a smoothing implement. Remnants of red painting can be noted on the breasts under a microscope.

I found that the remains of red painting are more visible in artificial light.

In sum, red painting was applied not only on the fleshy areas of the body – the standard practice in the case of Egyptian figurines that were typically covered with a wash over the entire body – but, for example, also on the coiffure/wig. Thus, its role was not merely to accentuate the figurine's vitality, but quite certainly also had a decorative/clothing role⁵¹.

⁴⁸ Bánffy 2001, p. 9, 18.

⁴⁹ Bánffy 2001, p. 9.

⁵⁰ Cf. Austin, Arnette 2022. Cross-shaped tattoos have been identified on the upper arm of female figurines and mummies, which can most likely be associated with *Isis* or *Nephthys*. Cf. Shaffery 2021, p. 34, Fig. 21.

⁵¹ For the symbolic significance of the colour red, cf. Waraksa 2007, p. 119-131; for the symbolic significance of black, cf. Waraksa 2007, p. 131-132. She notes that the colour red also had negative connotations, not solely positive ones (*"the colour of life"*).

It would appear that two different red pigments were employed, which had possibly also been applied using different techniques and had a diverse composition. The pastose brownish-red paint was in all likelihood ochre, an earth pigment applied as a wash, while the bright red painting presumably represented a different pigment type (perhaps minium) or painting technique.

Looking at the use of red and black (bichrome)⁵² painting, it is apparent that the two overlapped in some areas, for example on the eyes, the mouth, the arms, the breasts and the apron. It is impossible to determine with the naked eye which of the two was the underpaint and which was the overpaint, or whether the red painting was a wash that had originally covered the entire body and which had then been painted over with black stripes. When examined under the microscope, it appeared that red was the base, but it did not cover the entire body and neither was it a wash, while the black painting was applied subsequently.

Preparing a series of UV, infra and X-ray photos will enable a drawn reconstruction of the figurine's original red and black painted decoration, which has almost wholly worn off by now.

The head

*"The head is essentially a rectangle joining the body without a neck"*⁵³.

Similarly to Bánffy, I did not find any really close parallels. I am unaware of a similar human figurine with a comparably flat rectangular head adjoining the body without any transition (*i.e.* lacking a neck). There are very few full-length human figurines that compare well with the Budapest exemplar in that they have a flat, rectangular head modelled in one with the body without articulation (*i.e.* devoid of a neck)⁵⁴: this modelling can be mostly found on the truncated/legless Egyptian female figurines⁵⁵.

*"The nostrils of the long nose are also indicated, while a deeply incised simple straight line marks the mouth"*⁵⁶.

⁵² It must again be highlighted that the figurine bears the remnants of red and black, *i.e.* bichrome painting, and not polychrome painting as erroneously stated in the auction catalogue entry for the Goldman figurine (*cf.* the description of the figurine below). This is an important point because polychrome painting involves the use of at least three colours (which on Egyptian figurines take the form of green, blue, white or yellow painting). Moreover, polychrome painting has a dating value since it became more popular in the Eighteenth–Twentieth Dynasties, which saw the appearance of polychrome vessels (Waraksa 2007, p. 65–75).

⁵³ Bánffy 2001, p. 9, 21.

⁵⁴ Teeter 2010, Figurine 53.

⁵⁵ Petrie Collection, Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology, *e.g.* accession no. LDUCE-UC59321: <https://collections.ucl.ac.uk/Details/petrie/29333>, accession no. LDUCE-UC34508b: <https://collections.ucl.ac.uk/Details/petrie/49039> (last accessed August 30, 2023).

⁵⁶ Bánffy 2001, p. 9.

As a matter of fact, the mouth was strongly accentuated: it was framed first with red and then with black painting. There is a slightly diagonal slash in the middle of the linear incision, possibly representing the throat, into which some substance could have been stuffed (if, for example, the figurine had been symbolically fed food or drink), or possibly the intention was to symbolise that it *spoke*. The deep end of the slash cannot be seen even under a microscope and it cannot therefore be excluded that some substance had actually been stuffed into it (this can only be determined with sampling).

Similarly to the eyes, the nose was also modelled separately and in one with the slightly protuberant middle part of the headdress across the top of the head. Traces of red painting survive on the nose and a larger, somewhat protuberant red blob can be seen by the headdress. The two nostrils are indicated with two slightly diagonal incisions.

*"The head is framed with two braids or free-hanging hair, with nine similar braids or locks on the backside. A series of impressed dots, perhaps symbolising braiding or unruly curls, runs down these locks"*⁵⁷.

Instead of two pairs of locks or tresses, the face is actually framed by three on either side: these could be artificial (not natural) strands of hair, perhaps also indicated by the immensely unnatural and rectangular, rigid, wig-like modelling of the headdress⁵⁸.

*"A slight protuberance resembling a headband can be noted at the junction of the brow and the hair, while the nose continues in a similar protuberance on the crown of the head [...] [which] might be interpreted as a hair ornament"*⁵⁹.

*"Densely incised lines cover the crown of the head [...] perhaps [...] indicating the continuation of the braids"*⁶⁰.

This seems unlikely: it appears to be part of the *wig* or *headdress*, and imitated a different type of material than the wig/artificial hair or the hair locks, explaining their different ornamentation.

The *hair ornament* assumed by Bánffy is a natural and organic part of the three locks falling down on either side of the face, covering the top of the head and comprising several other elements:

No. 1) the hoop or headband indicated with short vertical incisions along the forehead and the temples⁶¹, perhaps symbolising a headband, a

⁵⁷ Bánffy 2001, p. 9, 22.

⁵⁸ Harris 2018, Chapter 2, esp. 41, 49-60: *"An attempt has been made during the course of this study to assign different typologies to the diadem-type of headdress that appears to have been particularly favoured by wealthy and elite women, but which was also worn by men and other members of society on special occasions in the form of beaded headbands with the addition of botanical elements."*

⁵⁹ Bánffy 2001, p. 9.

⁶⁰ Bánffy 2001, p. 9.

⁶¹ Harris 2018, Chapters 7-8.

fillet or a circlet diadem, could have been made of various materials, such as leather, metal, textile, leaves/flowers or the like (*cf.*, *e.g.*, **Figs 9, 11.1**);

- No. 2) the cap/shawl/veil covering the top of the head⁶², marked with more dense grooving and separated from the hoop-like element (No. 1, **Fig. 11.2**.) and No. 4 element with a deeply incised line, that was painted red (which can be better seen in the side and top views);
- No. 3) a thicker, protuberant element running from the root of the nose along the midline of the head⁶³, decorated with smaller and shallower punctuations than the braids, and possibly retaining red paint in the punctuations; this central element, not made of hair, continues in the middle/central hair lock on the back side of the head separating the four locks flowing down the left and right side on the head's back side;
- No. 4) the hair locks on the top of the head, differing in their modelling from the thicker hair locks with punctuations in front and on the back side, accentuated with lighter incised lines, bearing similar, but lighter incisions than element No. 5 and painted black: a thicker lock in the middle and six lighter locks on either side on the top of the head, terminating under the top of the head and then continuing in another arrangement down the back, with three locks on either side of the central one;
- No. 5) the original or extension or false hair locks painted black from the top of the head to the tip of locks, with red painting added from the shoulders downward, and decorated with relatively large incisions⁶⁴; the locks reach down to the breasts on the front side, to the elbows on the side, and to shoulder blades on the back side (**Fig. 11.3-4**).

⁶² Harris 2018, Chapter 11.

⁶³ A similar central element of gold is attached to a circlet decorated with two gazelle heads and floral ornaments from the New Kingdom tomb of three wives of *Thutmose III*. Each bore the title of *King's Wife* and judging from their names, *Meruwa/Menwit*, *Maruta/Merti* and *Manhata/Menhet*, they appear to have been either Canaanite or Syrian in origin. The syllabic writing of their names indicates that they were foreigners, possibly daughters of Syrian kings (*ca.* 1479-1425 BC, Metropolitan Museum, **Figs 11-12**). It remains unknown whether they were related, perhaps sisters, sent to join King *Thutmose III*'s harem as diplomatic marriages. The cause of their death has not been confirmed and it has been speculated that it could have been due to some kind of infectious disease or possibly even a harem plot. *Merhet* may have been named for *Merhyt*, a minor goddess associated with the Nile and with water, but little is known of her actual roles. The origin and meaning of the other two names is unknown. Both surviving diadems show distinct signs of wear and repair. It has been speculated that the headdress was foreign in origin, arriving to Egypt as part of a dowry (Harris 2018, Chapter 11, *esp.* 204-205, Fig. 10.8; *cf.* also Lilyquist 2003).

⁶⁴ For a similar coiffure with daisy-like gold rosettes adorning the hair locks where the large incisions are on the Budapest figure, *cf.* Harris 2018, p. 245, Fig. 12.3b.

This was my detailed list of the formal broadly described hair ornament by Bánffy, which she elsewhere designated as the wig/coiffure of *Hathor/Astarte* or some other goddess⁶⁵. The portion of the canonical *Hathor* wig falling to the shoulders typically ends in two curled locks over the shoulder and it is therefore unlikely that the figurine's coiffure/headdress can be associated with *Hathor*⁶⁶. A deeply incised line separates the tips of the hair locks from the breasts on the Budapest figurine, a detail found on depictions of the goddess *Mut*⁶⁷.

One of the common coiffures in ancient Egypt was the tripartite hairstyle (left side – middle back side – right side, with a pair of three locks on the back and three locks in the middle) either created from natural hair or worn as artificial hair with a braid resembling a ponytail on the top of the head, that was widespread among the young women of both the elite and the commoners, as well as the servants who were no longer children, but were not yet married⁶⁸. In this sense, the figurine's hairstyle offers potential information on a certain life stage, age and social status (**Fig. 10**)⁶⁹. Even more importantly, this hairstyle appears increasingly frequently in the tomb-chapels built under the early Eighteenth Dynasty⁷⁰, and thus has a dating value⁷¹.

The elaborate headdress made up of five different elements – both natural and artificial – described in the above, and particularly elements 2 and 4–5, the cap and the rosettes adorning the braids, can best be likened to the headdresses found in the tomb of three foreign wives of *Thutmose III* (1479–

⁶⁵ Bánffy 2001, p. 23.

⁶⁶ Cf., e.g., Pinch 1993, Fig. 1.1, Fig. 6.4, 5, Pl. 28A. This coiffure is known as the *Hathoric Bouffant Style* (Tassie 2009, p. 442–443) or *Hathor wig* (Tooley 2020, p. 246, 12, Scroll style).

⁶⁷ For example, on the statue of *Mut*, the Mother Goddess of Thebes, made during the reign of *Horemheb*, Eighteenth Dynasty, 1323–1295 BC, Luxor: <https://www.gettyimages.ie/detail/news-photo/statue-of-mut-the-theban-mother-goddess-ascribed-to-the-news-photo/152200709> (last accessed February 14, 2024).

⁶⁸ Similar hair-variants: Tooley 2020, p. 245–246, 257–259, 266–273: Styles 5–6–7; Robins 2010, p. 64: "*Daughters of the elite may also be depicted with an alternative tripartite style, in which thick tresses or ringlets frame the face, while a thin bunch of hair at the back, like a ponytail, leaves the rear part of the head more exposed.*" Cf. also Robins 2010, p. 61, Fig. 3, and **Fig. 10** here.

⁶⁹ Insofar as any importance can be attached to the coiffure, it cannot be excluded that the figurine was made for initiation as part of a rite of passage and symbolised the transition from girlhood to womanhood in the initiation rite of the customer (for rites of passage in general, cf. van Gennep 2007).

⁷⁰ Robins 2010, p. 64.

⁷¹ The tripartite hairstyle is one of the most archaic and most oft-occurring Egyptian coiffures, which on the testimony of various depictions was worn from the Predynastic to the Ptolemaic period; it was the hairstyle of both men and women, and of both mortals and deities: cf. Tassie 2009, p. 428–434. Depictions of the tripartite elbow-length hair appear often in the tomb paintings of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties (**Fig. 10**): Tassie 2009, p. 432.

1425 BC)⁷². Regrettably, the use of clay and brown, black and red painting combined with the decorative grooves, punctuations and incisions reveal little about the original materials used in life. This headdress appears to represent a simpler type among Egyptian headdresses; however, if made from costlier materials, it would have been valuable even in this form and its wearer would have been a member of the elite. The headdress itself can be regarded as a personal adornment.

*"Discs ornamented with incised lines can be seen on either side of the head in place of the ears. If the incisions covering the head are interpreted as marking the beginning of the braids [...] the way of how these discs covering the ears were worn is not shown"*⁷³.

Indeed, there is nothing on the head to indicate ears: unlike on the forehead, where the hoop-like headdress (element 1) is straight, it is slightly curved across the temples on both the left and the right side. It is possible that the slight curve was meant to follow the shape of the ears in order to accommodate it to the contour of the head as well as to facilitate its attachment by adjusting it to the natural form. The headdress itself then covered the ears.

Other body parts

*"The flat, almost two-dimensional body is rather obese, but unmistakably female [...] wide waist, broadening hips"*⁷⁴.

This description raises the issue of what body standard is used as a yardstick: our current twentieth-century ideal of European white women? This description has a somewhat body shaming ring to it and, more importantly, it is highly inaccurate, even compared to the ancient anthropological types. The female figure is neither obese, nor disproportionate in a biological sense (unlike some Palaeolithic and Neolithic figurines, it does not depict a *steatopygous* woman with prominent buttocks owing to accumulations of fat in that body region)⁷⁵. The figurine is a realistic portrayal of a female type that is still common in the Near East (which can also be found among other ethnic groups, too, not only in the Near East): a woman with a short, stocky and somewhat robust body, darker skin, large, open, dark eyes, thick hair and hairless or depilated body.

⁷² Harris 2018, p. 204, 215-218, **Fig. 11.1-2-3**. The three women have been identified as *Menhet*, *Menwi* and *Merti* and each bore the title of *King's Wife*. The syllabic writing of their names indicates that they were foreigners, possibly daughters of Syrian kings.

⁷³ Bánffy 2001, p. 9.

⁷⁴ Bánffy 2001, p. 11.

⁷⁵ *Steatopygous* female figurines are attested among Egyptian female figurines, too, see, e.g., Butterworth 2016, p. 12-13, 28, 40, Figs. 4.10-11, Appendix 1: A-1, 6, 8, 13, C-1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 16, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, 33, F-1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 25, 26, 27, 28.

Although the figurine can be regarded as an average female archetype, it is not typical among the Egyptian female figurines whose majority tend to represent the idealised slender type⁷⁶. Nevertheless, the more robust variant is also attested continuously in figural art. One intriguing issue is why the Budapest figurine represents a realistic rather than an idealised image of the female body and the reason for the distinction between the two⁷⁷. The style of the mass-produced mould-made figurines echoed the style of the contemporaneous statues, reliefs and figural vessels expressing the period's artistic taste and catered to the needs of a wider market. In contrast, hand-made pieces tend to better express the individual beliefs or taste of the artisan/client than the elite community products⁷⁸.

The Budapest figurine represents a remarkable blend of the types distinguished among Egyptian female figurines: it is not slender, but more robust (although not exceedingly so) and the breasts were kept small.

*"The pubic hair, highlighted with five rows of oblique hatching, is set within two arcs under the strongly impressed navel"*⁷⁹.

It seems obvious to me that the semicircular area does not depict the pubic triangle, but rather imitates a piece of clothing, most likely a simple apron that covered the pubic area in front.

Another argument in favour of some type of clothing is that the incised lines separating the five rows of diagonal incisions are visible in artificial light. The diagonal incisions are perpendicular to each other, with one pair of rows forming a herringbone pattern, even if some rows are slightly offset, making the pattern somewhat irregular. The descriptions of the Brooklyn and Goldman figurines similarly interpret this part as an apron (designated as a loincloth, sporran or triangle-shaped garment in other publications)⁸⁰. Curiously enough, it only covers the front side of the body, but not the back (which is attested on other figurines in the case of this piece of clothing)⁸¹.

A similar ornamentation is found among other types of Egyptian female figurines such as paddle dolls⁸² and faience figurines⁸³. Shaffery posits that

⁷⁶ Teeter 2010, p. 196.

⁷⁷ At Medinet Habu, for example, the changes in the Egyptian perception of the female body can be traced from the idealised slender female figures of the New Kingdom and the Late Period to the exact opposite tendency reflected by figurines modelled with more prominent breasts and a more pronounced pubic area to the chubby orant figurines reflecting the impact of Hellenism and the almost abstract figurines reflecting Byzantine influence. Cf. Teeter 2010, p. 196.

⁷⁸ Teeter 2010, p. 197.

⁷⁹ Bánffy 2001, p. 11, 30-32.

⁸⁰ E.g. Butterworth 2016, p. 70-71.

⁸¹ This is typically to be found among Nubian figurines, Cf. Butterworth 2016, p. 74-76.

⁸² E.g. Shaffery 2021, Fig. 1.

⁸³ E.g. Shaffery 2021, Fig. 2.

paddle dolls and faience figurines were representations of dancers, specifically of the women and the trainees from the *khener* (troupes of professional dancers), that served as magical midwives. It is possible that the *khener* members served as magical practitioners who were responsible for the apotropaic protection of the mother and child during pregnancy and childbirth⁸⁴.

Insofar as the hatched motif does not denote a piece of clothing, other options can be considered. The ornamentation of diagonal grooving combined with black and red painting covering the pubic region/pubic mound under the red and black chequered skirt on the paddle dolls believed to portray *khener* dancers has been interpreted as tattooing or, even more likely, as scarification⁸⁵. Body ornamentation is generally associated with a rite of passage as a form of a personal social identification mark and it has been linked to a tradition arriving with immigrants from Nubia⁸⁶. However, it must also be borne in mind that incisions probably denoting scarification are attested in other bodily regions, too, sometimes in a wholly different form (most often as lozenge or cross motifs)⁸⁷.

The figurines are usually naked save for the piece of clothing covering the pubic area, adorned with nothing but their jewellery and elaborate coiffure (*clothed in jewellery*, as noted by Shaffery and Backhouse). This is an important trait⁸⁸ since it would suggest that the depicted individual is naked not because she is poor and cannot afford clothes, but for some other reason, particularly since her family provisioned her with pieces of what were probably valuable jewellery items (*cf.* the problem of nude *versus* nakedness)⁸⁹.

The navel was impressed with D-shaped plant stem and framed with black painting. Viewed under a microscope, the navel is void and the interior is porous.

*"In contrast, the breasts are rather small compared to the body and they are in part covered by the hair braids"*⁹⁰.

⁸⁴ Shaffery 2021, p. 5.

⁸⁵ Shaffery 2021, Figs 1-3, 18, 20, 51, note 29, Chapter 6, p. 204, 228-234; Butterworth 2016, p. 153.

⁸⁶ Butterworth 2016; Shaffery 2021, p. 194.

⁸⁷ Shaffery 2021, p. 28, Fig. 14.

⁸⁸ Shaffery 2021, p. 50-51: *"Backhouse's discussion of iconography is perhaps her most pertinent point as relates to this dissertation. Not only does she explain the different aspects of the figures in her corpus, such as their hair and wigs, but she also notes that though the figures are technically nude, they are adorned. According to Backhouse, the inclusion of jewelry and headdresses indicates that these figures were adorned for sex, and that these added elements are intended to 'heighten their physical attraction'".*

⁸⁹ Shaffery 2021, p. 87-88: *"The different purposes for being unclothed, as well as the difference between nude vs. naked raises a few questions: is nakedness/nudity related to the erotic? How does this affect our interpretation of images of women? Are female figurines actually naked or nude?"*

⁹⁰ Bánffy 2001, p. 11.

*"The cylindrical legs [...] are separately modelled and short relative to the overall body proportions. The flat soles enabled the figurine to be set on its feet, even though it could not stand upright unsupported. On one of the feet, the toes are marked with incisions, the other foot is broken"*⁹¹.

In my view, the chest area is proportionate to the body and both feet appear to be intact. The toes are marked with incisions on both feet. While both soles are slightly dished, the two feet and the soles are not symmetrical, having been modelled slightly differently:

- the right foot is narrower by 2-5 mm and has a raised edge similar to the figurine's back side and is slightly shorter than the left foot;
- the left foot is sturdier, the sole is more *elephant*-like, the heel is slightly damaged (this is the single spot with a fracture on the entire figurine).

The left leg is longer by some 5-6 mm, the main reason that the figurine is unable to stand on its feet: if set upright, the left sole is askew and does not stand flat on the ground.

In the side view, the narrower right foot appears to be slightly in front of the left foot and the sole sits more firmly on the ground (as if imitating the one step forward posture of Egyptian art or perhaps merely serving for support).

Viewed as part of the entire figurine, the legs appear to be somewhat disharmonious. After looking at the figurine from all possible angles, I realised what was wrong when viewing it laid flat on its back from the bottom: the posture and modelling of the left foot is neutral (pointing neither left, nor right), while the right foot is actually a left foot that was fitted to a right leg. It would appear that the figurine's feet had been accidentally or intentionally mixed up: it has a left foot in place of a right foot, while the left foot has no sidedness and its modelling and workmanship are strikingly different, being neither a left, nor a right foot.

There is no way of telling whether this was intentional or accidental when the figurine was modelled, or whether the figurine was made according to the customer's wishes or was simply a mistake by the figurine's maker.

The confusion of left and right is a body scheme disorder, occurring quite frequently in childhood, which can be treated with special therapies and movement coordination, and can be eventually outgrown. In adulthood, it is a sign of mental lateralisation, of movement disorder, that cannot be corrected with therapy.

If intentional, it is conceivable that this bodily trait can be related to the customer's ailment and its magico-healing treatment. The clumsy modelling was

⁹¹ Bánffy 2001, p. 11, 19-20.

perhaps meant to depict a congenital disorder that was frequent in ancient Egypt or one acquired later in life such as clubfoot⁹².

One curious detail is that the legs of both the Brooklyn and the Goldman figurine are similarly asymmetrical, suggesting that this trait was intentional and that it had some meaning that also affected the figurine's function⁹³.

*"The posture and arm position [...] is especially interesting. The arms are bent and rest on the abdomen above the navel. The left hand, shown with the palm turned upward, lightly supports the wrist of the right hand that is slightly raised, but does not touch the breast"*⁹⁴.

Another trait must also be highlighted regarding the hands: the thumb and the remaining four fingers of each upward-turned hand form two distinct groups (resembling mittens), with each group pointing in the same direction and held tightly together. The right hand is nestled in the left hand, as if cradling a delicate object such as a baby or a small child, which is missing from the figurine (which had perhaps been made from some perishable material and was lost with the passing of time). The fingers of the right hand extend to the left breast.

⁹² A discrepancy between the length of the right and the left foot can be absolute or functional. Absolute (or genuine) lengthening can be congenital (e.g. a longer thigh bone in one leg is a frequent malformation) or it can be caused by a problem with one of the femurs where it connects to the hip socket, but it can also result from some trauma (usually a fracture) to the lower limb or the joint space narrowing of the lower limbs. Functional (or seeming) leg length discrepancy can be caused by the pelvic tilt accompanying scoliosis, quite often by sacroiliac joint dysfunction or the up- or downward, or in- or outward shift of the pelvic bone. In fact, it is difficult to determine even with modern diagnostic imaging whether one of the limbs merely appears to be shorter or whether the other is in fact longer. One case in point is the CT scan of *Tutankhamun's* mummy which could neither prove, nor disprove earlier suppositions of the pharaoh's foot ailments. Cf. Rühli, Ikram 2013. We know of two other documented Egyptian cases where foot deformity was proven to have occurred. The X-rays of *Siptah's* feet (son of Seti II) revealed that one was deformed. In the past this condition has been described as a club foot, but the X-rays suggest poliomyelitis as an alternative diagnosis (Harris, Weeks, 1973, p. 45, 159). A depiction on the stele of a priest named *Ruma* shows a similar foot deformity (Germer 1991, p. 145-146).

⁹³ Anthropomorphic depictions such as figurines, masks and statues generally cater to the needs of the given community and reflect their perceptions, whether in the portrayal of typical or atypical traits, or in the realism or schematism of the depictions – in other words, they mirror the community's symbolic idiom and its anthropological self-image (cf. Horváth 2010, p. 122-123, note 35). For example, the masks of the *Lenni Lenape* (*Delaware*) tribe show unmistakable signs of trachoma, the typical eye disease of that population, cleft palate is often shown on the warrior bottles of the *Chimú* period in Peru, the asymmetrical *Iroquois* masks reflect hemifacial microsomia, while African masks and figurines frequently depict the elephantiasis and umbilical hernia typical for that region. Cf. Wells 1967, p. 16-17.

⁹⁴ Bánffy 2001, p. 11, 26.

The parallels to the distinctive arm and hand position of the Budapest figurine cited by Bánffy are geographically distant analogies and have the hands in a rather differing position⁹⁵.

Some Egyptian female figurines have their hands raised in their lap and some exemplars hold an object, perhaps a baby, represented by an amorphous gob of clay (although the hands are shown in a different position), others still have the fingers raised to the breast, imitating a nursing gesture⁹⁶. The Budapest figurine was perhaps meant to portray this hand position, but its maker erred, copying a gesture inaccurately, possibly because he or she was unaware of its symbolic meaning and significance. It is equally feasible that in this case, the figurine's maker was simply clumsy and less skilled than the master artisans working for the elite in the palace and temple precincts.

Given these finer details, I have only found a single exact analogy to the hands position, a red figurine in the collection of the British Museum, whose hands are in the exact same position. The slender, naked terracotta figurine is dated to the Middle Predynastic period between 4400-3900 BC. Although the head and the legs broke off and are missing, the legs were clearly separated and a piece of clothing resembling underwear was marked with red painting in her lap (**Fig. 6**)⁹⁷. Several female figurines made of ivory and terracotta of the Chalcolithic Badarian culture have been brought to light from burials in Middle Egypt. The figurine covered with a red wash was recovered from Grave 5227 of the el-Badari site⁹⁸.

⁹⁵ Bánffy 2001, p. 42, notes 120-122.

⁹⁶ Teeter 2010, p. 59, Fig. 53: child; p. 60, Fig. 55: vessel; p. 62, Fig. 57: the arms are broken, but the hands under the breast are modelled similarly, if more simply (Teeter mistook them for the breasts); p. 106, Fig. 129: hands on the abdomen, with the fingers of the right hand cupping the left breast; p. 43, Fig. 29, Fig. 30, p. 44, Fig. 31, p. 45, Fig. 33, p. 46, Fig. 36, p. 47, Fig. 37-38; similar posture, holding an infant to the breast: p. 44, Fig. 32.

⁹⁷ "Museum number: EA59679. Description: Terracotta female figure; head and legs lost. Cultures/periods: Badarian. Production date: 4500–4000 BC. Excavated/Findspot: el-Badari, Africa, Egypt, Asyut (Governorate). Dimensions: Height: 9.30 cm, Weight: 62 grammes, Thickness: 4.50 cm, Width: 5 cm. Published: T. Phillips [ed.], *Afrika*, Berlin 1996, 54 [I.3]. = *Africa*, London 1995, 54 [I.3]. Donated by: British School of Archaeology, Egypt. Acquisition date: 1929. Department: Egypt and Sudan: BM/Big number: EA59679, Registration number: 1929, 1106.61." https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA59679 (last accessed: January 30, 2024), cf. also Brunton, Caton-Thomson 1928, p. 28-29, T. XXIV–XXV/5227; Graham 2020, Fig. 5b, 28, 31.

⁹⁸ Brunton, Caton-Thomson 1928, p. 28-29, T. XXIV–XXV/5227; Butterworth 2016, p. 174-176. Cf. also Graham 2020, p. 28-29, Fig. 5b. The latter study explores the similarities between the figurines of northern Mesopotamia (late Halaf) and Predynastic Egypt (Naqada and Nubia A group), and the interactions between the two regions.

Jewellery

*"The necklace around the neck is modelled similarly to the hair braids [...]. The wrists are adorned with a pair of rather heavy plain bracelets (semi-circular in section). [...] we may assume that they were modelled on bone or shell (perhaps Spondylus) ornaments"*⁹⁹.

In my view, the heavy double bracelets on the wrists could equally well represent metal bangles of silver, tin or lead, which were also accentuated with black painting¹⁰⁰.

If any consistency can be assumed on the part of the figurine's maker, the double braid resembling a necklace under the throat depicts a similar material as the hair braids in view of the ornamentation (rosettes or beads?)¹⁰¹. This peculiar resemblance can perhaps be taken as an indication that the necklace itself was made of hair/artificial hair and was possibly part of the headdress: a pair of braids was draped under the chin, which in addition to being a decorative element, also served for better securing the headdress (**Fig. 8**)¹⁰².

It must here be highlighted that although the female figurine is naked except for a piece of clothing (?) worn over the pubic area, her jewellery as well as her coiffure and headdress were in all likelihood markers of her rank, status and age that signalled her social position based on her sex, her marital status and social status, in addition to expressing her family's wealth.

⁹⁹ Bánffy 2001, p. 11, 23.

¹⁰⁰ A female figurine from Gebel Zeit in the collection of the Egyptian Museum in Cairo has copper earrings and bracelets (Pinch 1993, p. 203). Similar pieces known from the tomb of Qurna (Lilyquist 2003, Figs 174-175-176).

¹⁰¹ Similar necklaces known from the tomb at Qurna, see Lilyquist 2003, Figs 185-186.

¹⁰² A similar wig or headdress with a cord under the chin (and a similar ornamentation of punctuations and red painting as on the Budapest figurine) can be seen on an Egyptian female figurine in the Garstang Museum, University of Liverpool („E6895, New Kingdom ca. 16th century BC, Garstang's excavation at Abydos 1906-1909"): <https://www.liverpool.ac.uk/media/livacuk/victoriagalleryandmuseum/garstangmuseum/blogimages/Bird-head.Figurine.jpg>, <https://garstangmuseum.wordpress.com/2018/08/29/object-in-focus-a-female-figurine-from-ancient-egypt/> (last accessed: February 14, 2024).

Additional remarks, independent of Bánffy's observations

- There is a barely visible vertical incision in the lap, which perhaps marks the vulva. A similar, although more pronounced incision can be seen on the Goldman figurine.
- There is nothing to suggest that the figurine had been outfitted/embellished with organic (*e.g.* textile, hair *etc.*) or inorganic (*e.g.* metal, shell, faience *etc.*) adornments, even though a combination with other materials was believed to enhance a figurine's magical powers¹⁰³.
- The figurine is intact, there is no breakage, either intentional or accidental¹⁰⁴. It is possible that it had not been used (it was in storage and waiting for its customer or the person performing the rite), or if it had been used, it was not for magical or healing purposes because in that case it would have had to be broken during the ritual¹⁰⁵. The Brooklyn and the Goldman figurines are similarly intact.

Comparative finds

Given that the Budapest figurine is unprovenanced and has neither a known site, nor an archaeological context, the single springboard for an archaeological interpretation is to invoke insights afforded by comparative finds. In her detailed search for similar pieces, Bánffy cited exemplars from the Egyptian Nile Delta through Syria and northern Mesopotamia to the Caspian littoral, most of them from Lebanon and Syro-Palestine, the Levantine region where Egyptian influence was particularly strong¹⁰⁶. In fact, in most cases, these were no more than similarities between a particular detail or distant analogies that, save for the Brooklyn figurine, were of little help in determining provenance and date.

Omitting this exercise, I shall only discuss those figurines in detail that share several identical or strongly similar traits with the Budapest figurine, specifically the Brooklyn figurine, the Goldman figurine and an Egyptian figurine in the Petrie Collection for a closer identification.

¹⁰³ Cf. Pinch 1993, Pl. 46D; Waraksa 2007, p. 56.

¹⁰⁴ Several studies have been devoted to the fragmentation of the figurines and whether they broke accidentally or were broken on purpose, alongside experiments in fragmentation. For a comprehensive discussion, cf. Waraksa 2007, p. 75-85.

¹⁰⁵ Waraksa 2007, p. 82.

¹⁰⁶ Bánffy 2001, p. 34-35.

Matching pieces

1. Brooklyn Museum of Art, accession number 72.133¹⁰⁷.

*"Syria, 2200-2000 BC"*¹⁰⁸, *"traces of painting"*¹⁰⁹.

The description given here is based on the photos published on the website of the Brooklyn Museum of Art (front and back views in black-and-white and colour, **Fig. 1.1** and **Fig. 7**).

My observations and comparison with the Budapest figurine:

- the figurine has no mouth, implying that she did not speak, nor was she fed food or beverages, and that the mouth played no role in the ritual it was used in, explaining why it was not marked;
- there are two hair locks framing the face on either side (this can be slightly misleading because in the case of the Budapest figurine, it was only apparent from the side view that there are actually three and not two locks on each side, but no side views are available of the Brooklyn figurine), and eight locks on the back side, indicated with eight deep and coarse incisions;
- a diagonal element can be seen across the top of the head if viewed from the back, which could be dirt adhering to the figurine or a cap/veil/shawl-like head cover, as on the Budapest figurine;
- the right arm is damaged;
- the head, the face and the breasts are unpainted;
- three vertical marks perhaps left by a smoothing implement are visible on the back side of the left arm, while the imprints of stemmed plants can be seen on the body;
- the hair locks, the eyes, the nose, the necklace, the breasts and the lower arms were modelled and applied separately;
- there are no bracelets, the wrists are unadorned;
- the hands position is identical to that of the Budapest figurine: the right hand is placed on top of the left one and the thumb is separate from the other four fingers held tightly together;
- the apron and the arms have a greenish hue, but is unclear whether this represents painting or corrosion from copper/bronze, or simply that the photo published on the internet is not true to colour;
- the apron is similarly depicted with five rows of incisions, but in a more rudimentary style;

¹⁰⁷ Bánffy 2001, p. 36, Fig. 10.

¹⁰⁸ Bánffy 2001, p. 20, 34.

¹⁰⁹ Bánffy 2001, p. 18, note 25.

- the hair locks and the necklace lack punctuations and neither are they painted;
- some elements of the headdress such as the protuberant middle part and the cap/veil/shawl-like head cover resemble the Budapest figurine, but lack the painting and the punctuations/incised pattern;
- although the legs are shown separately, they are nevertheless modelled in one and the separation of the legs is indicated with a deep, coarsely incised line on the front side, while the legs are undifferentiated on the back side;
- on the front side, the two legs are not symmetrical, similarly to the Budapest figurine: the right leg is shorter and thicker;
- the figurine was made of reddish clay;
- the head and the left upper body are worn in the same zone as the Budapest figurine.

In sum, the Brooklyn figurine is reddish in colour, it is stockier, smaller and wider than the Budapest figurine, has a more rudimentary modelling and differs regarding certain details, but is nevertheless a fairly close parallel.

2. Egyptian terracotta fertility figure, Second Intermediate Period, Fifteenth-Seventeenth Dynasties, 1640-1532 BC.

Description: *"The standing figure depicted nude but for a kilt decorated with four rows of deeply incised lines, her arms folded over her abdomen, her navel indicated, with two pairs of bracelets on her wrists, her long hair articulated with incised circles then bound with a fillet, polychromy preserved throughout, 6¾ in. (17.2 cm) high"* (**Fig. 1. 3**)¹¹⁰.

My observations and comparison with the Budapest figurine:

- traces of painting can also be noted on this figurine, although it appears to be a monochrome pastose reddish-brown colour, with black painting visible solely in the region of the navel on the published photo (although the description itself claims polychrome painting over the entire body);
- there is a deeper section in the middle of the incised mouth (possibly a throat opening)¹¹¹, similarly as on the Budapest figurine;
- it has two incised nostrils and a modelled nose, similarly to the Budapest figurine;

¹¹⁰ Christie's, New York, Antiquities, Wednesday 5 December 2001 and Thursday 6 December 2001, p. 111, Lot 368 (https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-3831643?ldp_breadcrumb=back, last accessed August 30, 2023).

¹¹¹ It could be a significant element of *The Opening of the Mouth Ceremony*, a funerary ritual of birth and rebirth and the springboard for the theory that *khener* dancers were magical midwives in the afterlife, Cf. Shaffery 2021, p. 5-6, 105-110, 118, 130, 209, 238, 244-245, Fig. 1, 254; Harris 2018, p. 58.

- the hair, the circlet diadem and the cap-like headgear on the top of the head is painted black, similarly as on the Budapest figurine;
- the necklace has punctuations, similarly to the Budapest figurine, but comprises a single strand;
- two braids decorated with punctuations and painting fall down to the shoulder on either side of the face in the front view, as on the Budapest figurine (however, this could be somewhat misleading since in the case of the Budapest figurine, only the side view reveals that there are in fact three braids on each side; regrettably, a side view of this figurine is not available);
- the pupils are indicated with painting, as on the Budapest figurine;
- the elaborate headdress is made up of the same elements as on the Budapest figurine;
- the upper body appears to be painted with stripes, similarly to the Budapest figurine: the double bracelets on the wrists are painted, although only with pastose reddish-brown paint;
- the area of the navel appears to be more pronounced with black, rather than brownish-red painting;
- the hand's position is similar, with the right hand held above the left one, on which all five fingers are shown separately, not merely the thumb with the other four fingers held tightly together, as on the Budapest and Brooklyn figurines;
- the apron is indicated with four rows of incisions and is painted with pastose reddish-brown paint;
- a deep vertical incision under the apron in the figurine's lap can be interpreted as the sexual organ, an element that also appears on the Budapest figurine, although it is less pronounced;
- the breasts are painted, as are the legs, with pastose reddish-brown paint;
- the two legs are separated, they have different lengths and are asymmetrical, the toes are marked, similarly as on the Budapest figurine.

In sum, the Goldman figurine is the currently known closest parallel to the Budapest figurine, an almost exact counterpart with negligible differences. The female body is somewhat slenderer and does not convey the same stout, chunky impression as the Budapest figurine. This figurine is similarly unprovenanced and lacks an archaeological context; unlike the Brooklyn figurine, Egypt was proposed as its possible place of origin.

3. Petrie Museum, Middle and New Kingdom, H. 15–20 cm, London, University College (**Fig. 2**)¹¹².

My observations and comparison with the Budapest figurine:

- this piece is a much more rudimentary parallel or perhaps a prototype of the Budapest figurine;
- the head is much more coarsely modelled, pinched into a longish and narrower shape rather than a wide, flat, rectangular form;
- the nose is a large, elongated, separately applied beak-like feature with two impressed nostrils;
- the top of the head is perhaps covered, indicated with smaller impressions;
- instead of hair locks, this figurine has a veil or shawl falling to the shoulders, marked with small impressions;
- the mouth is rendered with a thin incised line (without a throat);
- the two arms are broken at the elbows and it therefore remains unknown whether the figurine was portrayed wearing bracelets, as does the depiction and position of the hands;
- the two breasts, symbolised by two separately modelled and applied gobs of clay, are more closely set and it appears as if there was something, perhaps an infant, between them;
- the navel is a deep cavity impressed with a plant stem;
- it remains uncertain whether the triangle filled with stippling in the waist area marked an apron or the pubic area;
- the vulva is indicated with a long vertical incision;
- the figurine's legs are broken and missing a portion under the thighs and knees; the legs are separated in front, similarly to the Brooklyn figurine, but were probably undifferentiated on the back side (it is not apparent from the front view and there is no back view);
- overall, the body of this figurine is rather disproportionate: a coarsely modelled head, narrow shoulders, far too elongated upper body and large, wide hips.

In sum, this figurine is more rudimentary and crudely modelled, more robust in terms of its bodily proportions to the extent that it appears truly disproportionate or intentionally exaggerated. It is decorated with stippling instead of punctuations. I would not consider it to be a good parallel to the Budapest figurine.

It seems likely that a similar workshop tradition and/or clientele can be assumed for the three female figurines (Brooklyn, Budapest, Goldman). It is

¹¹² Baines, Málek 1980, p. 208 (lowermost illustration, first figurine on the left), *cf.* also **Fig. 2** here.

striking that the three figurines are similar not only regarding their physical form and appearance, but also in terms of their smaller details, such as the costume, the jewellery, the coiffure, the body painting, the separation of the legs and their modelling to indicate deformity, all canonically repeated traits. Even the use-wear traces appear to be similar judging from the available photos (**Fig. 1**).

Each of these elements has closer or more distant analogies among Egyptian female figurines, but none appear together on a single exemplar aside from these three pieces. Taken together, the overall appearance of these three figurines distinguishes them from the standard, widely known types familiar from the publications.

Discussion

The detailed descriptions set side-by-side present the observations made by two researchers independently of each other with a time gap of some twenty years. Although archaeological scholarship has been enriched by a new range of analytical tools and techniques since the turn of the millennium, and there has also been a perceptible shift in approaches and perspectives, the established method of describing archaeological artefacts not requiring the use of analytical instruments has not changed. The major differences between the two opinions, often downright contradicting each other, are astonishing, particularly the deficiencies, inaccuracies and several mistakes in Bánffy's description.

I did not wish to move beyond this point in the first part of the study. Nevertheless, a preliminary comment on the figurine's potential origin and genuineness seems in order before the publication of the second part covering the various archaeometric analyses that will no doubt provide a conclusive answer to many of these questions.

Regrettably, the conclusions that can be drawn from the detailed examination of the elements are often at variance with each other. Although some modern treatment can be noted on the figurine's surface, this does not necessarily imply that it is a forgery. This issue will be resolved after the thermoluminescence analysis.

The use of a mould provides a sort of *terminus ante quem* date for the figurine since this technology was used from the New Kingdom onward, although it yet remains to be proven that the figurine was indeed mould-made.

In my view, an Egyptian origin is most strongly supported by the figurine's most distinctive identifying trait, namely the headdress and/or coiffure/wig because comparably elaborate coiffures/wigs can only be seen on Egyptian figurines, statues and depictions (*cf.* **Figs 8-11**). Obviously, this does

not exclude the possibility that the figurine had come to light outside Egypt, in a region under Egyptian influence or with strong trade relations to that land¹¹³.

Given the lack of clear-cut iconographic traits that could be linked to any of the well-known Egyptian deities and their attributes, it would be a futile and senseless exercise to identify the figurine with a particular goddess or even to claim that it represents a goddess¹¹⁴. Regarding its one-time function, several studies have addressed in detail the potential role of figurines, often differing substantially from earlier proposals as to how they had been used¹¹⁵. In view of its leg deformity and its coiffure suggesting an unmarried girl/young woman, the Budapest figurine can most likely be seen as a piece made with a magico-medical purpose¹¹⁶.

Insofar as the figurine is not a forgery, its date suggested by the typological traits – among which the stout, robust form, the depiction of the apron, the bracelets and the hands position are the most decisive – can reach back to the Pre-Dynastic or even the Chalcolithic period; yet, as astutely noted by László Török, the virtual parallels can span the period up to the late Hellenistic period. Nevertheless, a number of finer details, such as the coiffure and the bichrome painting, would speak for a date during the first dynasty of the New Kingdom (Eighteenth Dynasty, *ca.* 1550-1292 BC, or, more precisely, the age of the tomb of three foreign wives of *Thutmose III*, *ca.* 1479-1425 BC).

Whatever the original contexts of the Budapest, the Goldman and the Brooklyn figurines were, these have been wholly lost to archaeological scholarship. Although the one-time contexts can no longer be accessed, they can perhaps be reconstructed to some extent. The contexts were perhaps known to the sellers who put the figurines on the antiquities market – and it is to be hoped that the future will bring some form of collaboration between the two parties – scholars and amateur finders – leading to the discovery of similar finds either from the same sites or from new ones under controlled and well-documented

¹¹³ Juan Carlos Moreno García suggested that paddle dolls and, by extension, female figurines were representations of a myriad group of foreigners, from Libyans to Nubians: García 2017, p. 173-194. In the case of the Budapest figurine, the analogies rather point to Syria/Canaan.

¹¹⁴ Backhouse 2013, p. 37; Teeter 2010, p. 20: "*Oddly, baked clay figurines of gods are rare: only eight are known from the field photographs.*" The figurines portraying deities such as *Bes*, *Aries* and *Harpocrates* can be clearly identified from their attributes and their appearance.

¹¹⁵ Figurines have been variously interpreted as toys, dolls, wife figures, concubines (for the dead) or *Beischläferin* and fertility figurines (for a comprehensive discussion, *cf.* Pinch 1993, p. 211-225; Waraksa 2007, p. 12-24).

¹¹⁶ It must in all fairness be noted that unlike the grave goods from *Tutankhamun*'s tomb, in whose case a part of the footwear bearing traces of wear had been demonstrably manipulated to adapt them to the pharaoh's foot deformity (*cf.* Veildmeijer 2010, Chapter 3.3), the finds from the Qurna tomb, as well as the ones believed to originate from the tomb, did not indicate foot disorders of any kind (Veildmeijer 2010, p. 144; Lilyquist 2003, Figs 114-119).

circumstances. Another welcome development would be for finders to share their knowledge on the find circumstances of previously found pieces with the period's specialists.

No matter the wealth of new information provided by the archaeometric analyses to be published in the study's second part, either confirming or challenging the observations made here, the one-time archaeological context that is essential to any interpretation has been irrevocably lost and thus a reconstruction of the figurine's complete biography cannot be expected either from an archaeological or an archaeometric analysis.

Given that no more than three similar figurines – possibly made in the same workshop and with the same purpose, perhaps even on the same site¹¹⁷ – are known at present, future discoveries of comparable pieces brought to light from well-documented archaeological contexts in the course of excavations and a more thorough archaeometric analyses will no doubt contribute to a more informed interpretation.

O FIGURINĂ ANTROPOMORFĂ DE ORIGINE NECUNOSCUȚĂ ÎN COLECȚIA DE ANTICHITĂȚI CLASICE A MUZEULUI DE ARTE FRUMOASE (PARTEA I)

REZUMAT

În urmă cu aproximativ 35 de ani, un cunoscut colecționar de artă maghiar a înmănat o figurină feminină cu origine necunoscută Colecției de antichități clasice a Muzeului de Arte Frumoase din Budapesta. S-a dovedit imposibil de a stabili precis autenticitatea sau originea figurinei, de atunci. Prezentul studiu pledează pentru un posibil context egiptean pe baza examinării detaliate la microscop a figurinei și a unei analogii, propunând alte funcții potențiale și o datare diferită decât cea inițială propusă de Eszter Bánffy în studiul acesteia despre figurină, publicat în 2001.

¹¹⁷ In this case, the first association that springs to mind is the tomb of three foreign wives of *Thutmose III* as a feasible place of origin. The treasure was discovered by villagers from Qurna in 1916 after summer rains had dislodged rocks to reveal a tomb located in a gorge close to the Valley of the Kings. The tomb contained not only the remains of three princesses, but also a considerable quantity of jewellery and other funerary objects, such as mirrors, vases and canopic jars (the canopic jars of the three wives in one picture: Lilyquist 2003, Fig. 267, **Fig. 12**). Sometime later the artefacts were gradually offered up for sale in Luxor and began to appear on the international antiquities market (Harris 2018, p. 215; Lilyquist 2003; <https://thebanmappingproject.com/tombs/wadi-d-l-menhet-menwi-merti>). In this case, the figurines were in all likelihood symbols of fertility and rebirth, three figurines from the childhood/adolescence of the three foreign wives.

ABSTRACT

Some 35 years ago, a well-known Hungarian art collector presented a female figurine of dubious provenance to the Collection of Classical Antiquities of the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest. It has proven impossible to conclusively determine either the genuineness, or the origin of the figurine since then. The present study makes a case for a possibly Egyptian context based on the figurine's detailed macroscopic examination and another comparable find, proposing other potential functions and a different date than initially suggested by Eszter Bánffy in her study on the figurine, published in 2001.

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Fig. 1. Colour photo of female figurines of unknown provenance, possibly made in the same workshop or workshop tradition. 1. Brooklyn Museum of Art, accession no. 72.133, <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/98871> (downloaded: September 23, 2023); 2. Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, inv. no. A.644; 3. Goldman figurine (Christie's, New York, Antiquities, Wednesday 5 December 2001 and Thursday 6 December 2001, 111, Lot 368). Illustration by T. Horváth

Fig. 2. Egyptian female figurine, Petrie Collection, University College, London, After Baines-Malek, *Atlas of Ancient Egypt*, 1980, 208. Illustration by T. Horváth

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Fig. 7. Black-and-white photos of the female figurine, Brooklyn Museum of Art, accession no. 72.133, <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/98871> (downloaded September 23, 2023). 1. Front view. 2. back view. Illustration by T. Horváth

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Fig. 9. Limestone bust of a female figure wearing a headdress wig from Egypt. 1. Front view. 2. Side view. British Museum, BM no. EA2383, Eighteenth Dynasty, New Kingdom, H. 13.5 cm (https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA2383, downloaded September 23, 2023). Illustration by T. Horváth

Fig. 10. The tomb owner *Rehkmira* and his wife *Merit* are offered sistra and menit-necklaces by their daughters. TT 100. After Robins 2010, Fig. 3. The smaller sisters portrayed with an alternative version of the tripartite hairstyle are accentuated with red. Illustration by T. Horváth

Fig. 11. Tomb of three foreign wives of *Thutmose III*, ca. 1479–1425 BC. 1. Diadem with two gazelle heads, Eighteenth Dynasty, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/553269> (downloaded May 14, 2024). 2. Great cap headdress of a lesser foreign wife of *Thutmose III*, <http://solarey.net/elaborate-ancient-egyptian-wig-hair-ornaments> (downloaded May 14, 2024). 3. Reconstruction of the incomplete gold headdress from the tomb of the foreign wives of *Thutmose III* <https://egyptianhistorypodcast.com/2017/03/17/episode-73-the-three-princesses> (downloaded May 14, 2024). 4. Reconstructed headdress incorporating a looped wire headdress and rosette wig ornaments, after Winlock 1948 and Harris 2018, Fig. 12.3b. Illustration by T. Horváth

Fig. 12. The Canopic jars of three foreign wives of *Thutmose III* (<https://www.metmuseum.org/met-publications/the-tomb-of-three-foreign-wives-of-tuthmosis-iii>), downloaded July 09, 2024. Illustration by T. Horváth.

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Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

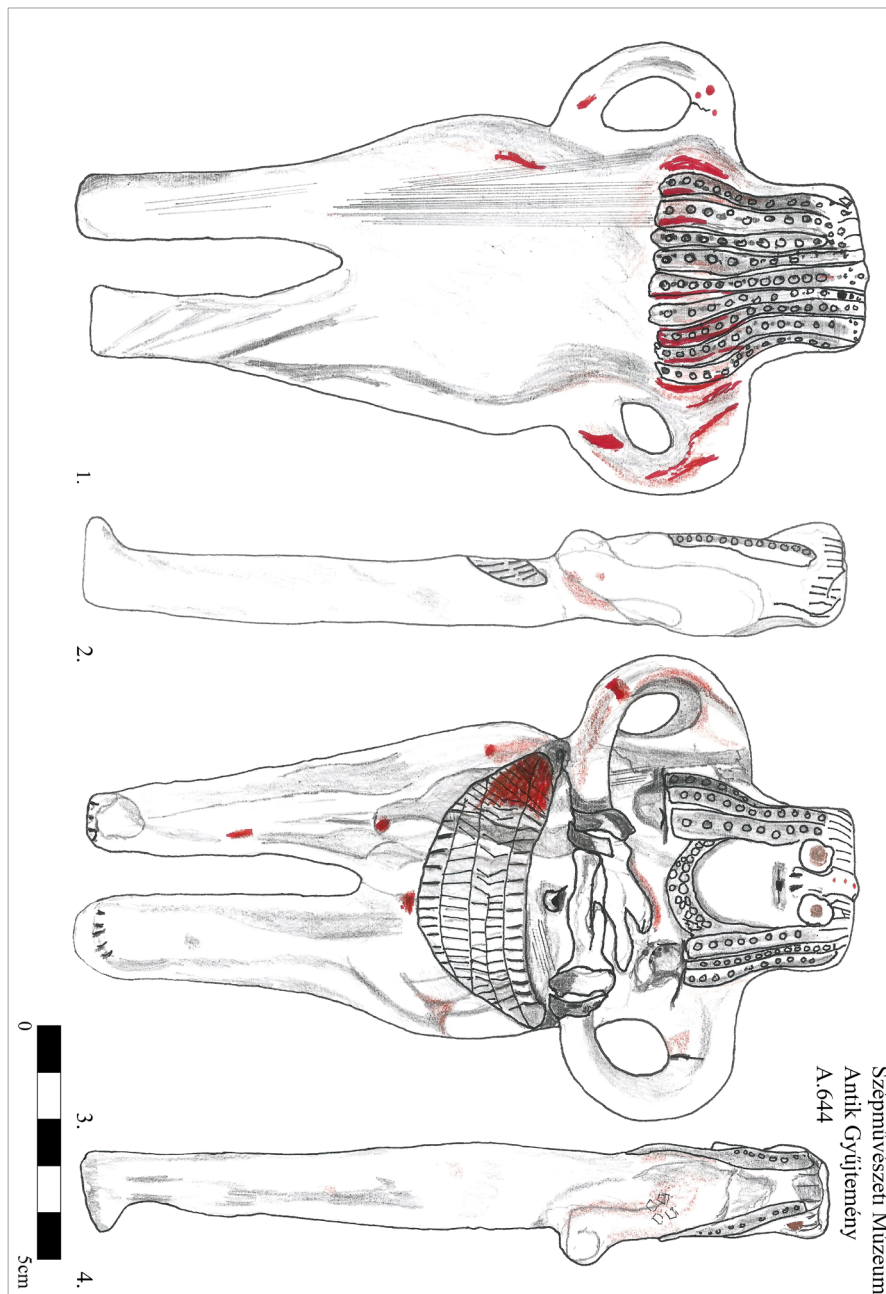


Fig. 4



Fig. 5

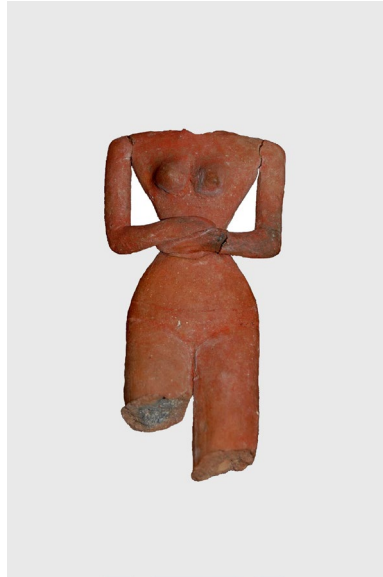


Fig. 6



1.



2.

Fig. 7



Fig 8



Fig. 9



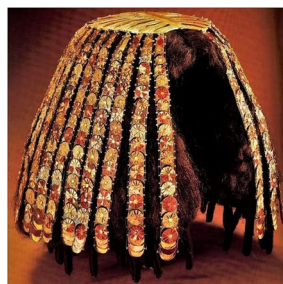
Fig. 10



1.



2.



3.



4.

Fig. 11



Fig. 12