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## SOCIAL NETWORKS AND CROSS-CULTURAL INTERACTION: A NEW INTERPRETATION OF THE FEMALE TERRACOTTA FIGURINES OF HELLENISTIC BABYLON

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*Summary.* In the study of the Hellenistic period in Babylon, cross-cultural interactions between Greeks and native Babylonians have been primarily interpreted using colonialist theories of Hellenisation, domination, and cultural isolation. This paper finds, however, that such theories cannot adequately explain the types of cross-cultural combinations seen in the archaeological record of female Hellenistic Babylonian terracotta figurines. The forms and functions of these terracotta figurines were substantially altered and combined throughout the Hellenistic period, resulting in Greek-Babylonian multicultural figurines as well as figurines that exhibited new features used exclusively in Hellenistic Babylonia. In order to facilitate a greater understanding of the full complexity of these Greek-Babylonian interactions, a new interpretation of cross-cultural interaction in Hellenistic Babylon is developed in this paper. This Social Networks model provides an alternative framework for approaching both how a hybrid material culture of terracotta figurines was developed and how Hellenistic Babylon became a multicultural society.

### INTRODUCTION AND ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVE

The establishment of the Seleucid Empire in Babylonia marked a drastic shift in the political and cultural situation of Babylon, along with many other Babylonian cities, which became home to substantial Greek and Babylonian populations. While the habitation of both cultural groups in close proximity is not disputed, the levels and types of interaction that took place between these two groups continue to be debated. This is largely because many of the details of these cross-cultural interactions remain poorly understood.

Early theories interpreted the evidence of Hellenistic Babylonian cross-cultural interaction with considerable bias toward colonialist ideas of Greek dominance and 'Hellenisation', which was understood to be the introduction and spread of Greek culture to the detriment of native (with the implication of 'inferior') cultures. Such interpretations gave rise to models of Hellenistic society based on the uni-directional Greek exercise of cultural and political dominance over the native Babylonians. Two of the older theories based on this paradigm of cross-cultural interaction could be named as the 'Domination and Resistance' interpretation, as

espoused by Rostovtzeff (1941, 499–504) to postulate Greek cultural and military oppression of the Near Eastern peoples, and the ‘Observation and Adoption’ interpretation, as used to postulate the assimilation of Greek culture by willing Near Eastern peoples, by Tarn (1951) and Roux (1964, 417). While these theories differed in their conceptualization of the Hellenisation process, they were both very much focused on the idea of inherent Greek cultural dominance.

Alternatively, an approach that has found favour in more recent scholarship proposes an interpretive framework based on non-interaction (or impermeability) between culture groups. Most notably utilized by Preaux (1947, 550–2, 554–6; in Shipley 2000, 323), an early proponent of the theory, and later by Green (1990), this concept of non-interaction postulates that Greek and Near Eastern cultures were entirely separate, each remaining free of the other’s influence through a process of a ‘general rejection’ of each culture by the other (Green 1990, 316, 317). Such theories have presented new social models based on the idea of Seleucid Greeks and Babylonians as equally vital, but entirely separate, populations and cultures.

There is, however, much data in the archaeological record of Hellenistic Babylon that none of these interpretive frameworks of cross-cultural interaction can fully explain. Sherwin-White and Kuhrt have been most influential in pointing out the deficiencies in earlier, simplistic approaches to modelling cultural interaction in the Hellenistic East, and in calling for newer, more nuanced analyses of those processes (1987, as editors; 1993). In so doing, they and others have stressed the importance of ‘avoid(ing) the reductionist tendencies inherent in the traditional overarching definitions of “Hellenism” and “Hellenisation” ’ (Petrie 2002, 86). While this call has been a particularly important one, it has not been, as yet, universally heeded, nor have many alternative models of social interaction, which do allow for regional variation (as opposed to universal ‘Hellenising’ processes) and cross-cultural interaction without complete acculturation, been developed. Those models that have been developed have dealt primarily with large scale, centre-periphery relationships between Greek and Babylonian populations, with the day-to-day interactions of these groups in a single community or city left relatively unexplored (Alcock 1993; Invernizzi 1993).

It was in this absence of a compelling interpretive framework that I began my research on the female terracotta figurines, one of the largest single categories of personal objects in Hellenistic Babylon. In his study of Seleucid ceramics, Cameron Petrie highlighted the importance of Hellenistic terracotta figurines when he called for a more detailed analysis of ‘the cultural significance’ of the Hellenistic Uruk figurines, which he briefly commented upon by stating that they ‘indicate that we are dealing with complex cultural interaction’ (Petrie, 2002, 90). It is such a study, albeit of the figurines of Hellenistic Babylon, which I am presenting in this paper.

I argue that both the Greek and Babylonian traditional, pre-Hellenistic forms and functions of these female terracotta figurines were altered throughout the Hellenistic period to respond to the introduction and exchange of different styles and traditions of material culture between the two groups. Such exchanges clearly refute notions of non-interaction, yet at the same time they reveal greater multi-directionality than the Greek–Babylonian interactions propounded by the dominance-based models of Hellenisation. Based on this data, in this article I propose a new model of cross-cultural interaction in Hellenistic Babylon that I refer to as the Social Networks model.

The Hellenistic Babylonian social interactions posited by this new interpretive framework are characterized by cross-cultural interaction over time through the medium of

non-culture-based social alliances, such as gender, status, and age groups. This model, which allows for cross-cultural contact and idea exchange, takes the evidence of cross-cultural combination in the context, technique, form, and style of the female terracotta figurines more fully into account. In demonstrating how this model can be applied to the Hellenistic Babylonian terracotta figurine data, I argue that the Social Networks model can aid in our understanding not only of the existence of cross-cultural interactions, but also of how and why these interactions took place in the society of Hellenistic Babylon.

#### OVERVIEW OF HELLENISTIC FEMALE TERRACOTTA FIGURINES

Female terracotta figurines – the largest category of terracotta figurine types in Hellenistic Babylon – were widespread in Hellenistic Babylonian society and of cultural and religious importance to both Greeks and Babylonians (Greek: Bell 1990, 65; Babylonian: Black and Green 1992, 148). In spite of their cultural and religious importance, figurines were relatively easy to make and cheap to obtain, which ensured their accessibility to the entire population (Karvonen-Kannas 1995, 28). Figurines were also not so valuable as to be continually used and handed down through generations; rather, they were made, used, and replaced regularly (Burn and Higgins 2001). These elements were common to the figurine traditions of both Greece and Babylonia.

However, the specifics of Greek and Babylonian figurine design, manufacture, and use differed substantially. The pre-Hellenistic Neo-Babylonian personal religious practice is thought to have centred around an individual's personal god or goddess, who was usually 'not named and is referred to by the worshipper as "my god" or "my goddess"', or a 'benevolent *sedu* (male) or *lamassu* (female), anthropomorphic beings who accompanied people' and protected them from harm (Black and Green 1992, 148). When the original contexts of the Neo-Babylonian and late Babylonian figurines are preserved, they indicate an almost exclusively domestic use of these figurines. The forms of the female figurines (the most common type of figurine in pre-Hellenistic Babylonia) were modelled in four major types: frontal, nude standing woman with hands supporting or below the breasts, wearing necklace, bracelets, and anklets; frontal, nude standing woman holding a child at her breast; seated clothed woman with child (rare); and frontal, nude standing woman with arms at her sides (Koldewey 1914, 277–84). The single mould was exclusively used to manufacture these figurines.

Greek terracotta figurines were closely connected with temple- and shrine-based religious practices, as well as graves (Bell 1990, 65; Ammerman 1990, 42). The forms of these figurines were diverse, although Hellenistic Greek figurine production was dominated by the Tanagra type figurine: images of standing (often moving or dancing) young women and girls (Burn and Higgins 2001, 20). These Tanagra figurines have been recovered from temple, funerary, and domestic contexts. Greek figurines of mortal women were usually clothed (at least the lower body); however some goddess figurines were frequently shown naked. These figurines were made exclusively in the Greek-invented double mould.

Because of the related nature of Greek and Babylonian figurines as objects of personal religious devotion, but their differences in context of use, technique of manufacture, and visual features, I argue that these figurines are in the relatively unique position of being able to reflect to us the ideas, interactions, and preferences of the Hellenistic individuals and society who made and used them. Thus, rather than being constrained to an analysis of a particular political or social class group (as is often the case in analyses of Hellenistic Babylonian inscriptions or

monumental architecture), we are enabled by these objects to access and obtain information about a large number of the individuals in Hellenistic Babylonian society. Additionally, the Hellenistic Babylonian use of figurine features that can, individually, be traced back to either Greek or Babylonian figurine traditions allows us insight into the cultural origins (single or multiple) of each Hellenistic figurine.

#### METHODS

I began the study of the female figurines of Hellenistic Babylon with the aid of the catalogue and accompanying analysis by Kerttu Karvonen-Kannas (1995). Of the 183 female figurines listed and described in this catalogue, I studied 42 examples, along with approximately 20 figurine fragments (mostly detached heads). The figurines I studied represent the entirety of the British Museum's collection of female figurines from Hellenistic Babylon. The rest of the female figurines in Karvonen-Kannas's catalogue were inaccessible to me due to their locations either in the Baghdad Museum or the under-renovation sections of the Louvre Museum (although the Louvre curators did graciously allow me access to their files, which I used for comparison purposes and for which I am most grateful). These figurines are all of Babylonian provenance, with many examples (but not all) having specific contextual information from the excavation reports by Koldewey (1914).

At the outset of my research, I utilized the figurine typological categories outlined by Karvonen-Kannas in her catalogue. While her minor typological categories classify figurines by their physical attributes, such as naked vs. clothed or standing vs. reclining, her broad typological categories are cultural. Indeed, while Karvonen-Kannas analyses her material in terms of techniques and motifs, her main discussion classifies each figurine in the cultural categories of 'Traditional Mesopotamian types', 'Persian types', 'Western types', 'New variations', and 'Primitive types' (1995, 31–7). In creating these cultural categories, Karvonen-Kannas follows the earlier examples of Barrelet (1968, 130) and Van Buren (1930, XLIII) in utilizing the criteria of modern visual impressions concerning the aesthetics and artistic quality of each figurine (with those figurines that are considered well-made and more attractive to modern tastes falling in the Greek category).

I initially followed Karvonen-Kannas's assumptions about the applicability of these categories to the material. However, in the course of my research, in which I carefully examined each figurine's context, technique, and visual motifs, it became evident that the lines which divided these figurines into cultural categories were frequently derived not from any natural grouping of motifs or techniques within the figurines themselves, but from modern aesthetic perceptions of what a culturally Greek or Babylonian figurine would look like in the Hellenistic period.

Thus, in my analyses, I chose to disregard any traditional cultural assignments based on aesthetic parameters and ignore questions such as: does a figurine 'look' Greek? Or does it relate to a style that looks Greek? In so doing, I am not discounting the possible importance of aesthetics in Hellenistic Babylonian culture, nor am I disparaging studies of aesthetics. Rather, I want to test the possibility that figurines might not be quite so 'Greek' or 'Babylonian' if one looks at them with the goal of quantifying multiple discrete elements of each culture's figurine tradition present in the artefact, rather than choosing a single cultural assignment based on the stylistic impression. Thus, I am suggesting that in focusing on

aesthetics alone to categorize terracotta figurines as either ‘Babylonian’ or ‘Greek’, we might be missing valuable information about cross-cultural interaction in non-aesthetic (or not obviously aesthetic) figurine features.

In my analysis, I quantified several figurine features and considered each with equal weight. These features are: context, technique (double or single moulded), clothed vs. not clothed, elaboration of anatomical detail, head ornamentation, jewellery, presence or absence of arms (and, to a lesser degree, arm position), and body positioning. I compared each of the figurines, with all of their features, to all the other figurines in my corpus of 42 female terracottas and 20 fragments. From those comparisons, I derived a system of dividing the figurines into four categories (labelled Types 1–4) based on their body orientation and clothing, following Karvonen-Kannas’s minor typologies; however, this is not meant to indicate that I gave less consideration to the other figurine features. Inclusion in one of the categories required a minimum of four features shared across the group.

In analysing each of these figurines and quantifying their features, I remained aware of the fact that some of those features originated exclusively in either the Greek or Babylonian figurine tradition prior to the Hellenistic period. Thus, in presenting the figurines in their respective typologies, I have chosen to comment on the cultural origins (both certain or likely) of particular figurine features. This was done as a way to illustrate the degree of either ‘Greekness’ or ‘Babylonianess’ or both in the terracotta figurines, but not to determine a sole cultural origin of a figurine based on an individual feature.

#### A NEW TYPOLOGY FOR THE FEMALE TERRACOTTA FIGURINES OF HELLENISTIC BABYLON

##### *Type 1 figurines*

Type 1 (Figurines 1, 2, 3: Figs. 1–3) figurines are nude, standing women with arms intact. I researched 15 figurines of this type. In form, these figurines resemble the traditional Babylonian type of the naked, standing woman, seen from a frontal view. Their hands are shown in three positions: supporting their breasts; with only one hand supporting one breast; and with the arms at the sides. Their anatomical features are clearly emphasized, as seen in Figurine 1, where the outline of the pubic triangle is clearly inscribed. Figurines 1 and 3 wear a crown common to Babylonian figurines from earlier periods. These figurines were made in both Greek double moulds (for example, Figurine 1) and single moulds (see Figurines 2 and 3).

The braided hairstyles of Figurines 1 and 3, which sometimes include a high level of detail on the back of the head, along with other elaborate hairstyles seen in this type, are similar to Greek figurine hairstyles. All the figurines of this type, regardless of the moulding technology used in their manufacture, are very thick-walled, vertically stable, and durable. In the case of the figurines made in double moulds, the walls of these figurines were so thick that they touched internally in several places – a condition which would have caused some figurines to break during firing. This indicates that these figurines were deliberately designed to be durable, suggesting a function in which these figurines would need to endure repeated handling. The vertical stability, however, also indicates that these figurines were meant to stand alone, possibly in a domestic shrine. Where contextual information is available, these figurines are associated with domestic contexts.



Figure 1

Type 1 female figurine, front and back views. Double moulded. Height: 38 cm.

Museum location and number: British Museum, BM 80-6-17-1713=92215.

Left photograph adapted from Karvonen-Kannas 1995. Right photograph by author, courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

### *Type 2 figurines*

Type 2 (Figurines 4, 5: Figs. 4 and 5) figurines are naked, standing women with arms finished-off. These finished-off arms were not broken off after manufacture, but rather fashioned during manufacture into short arm stumps. I researched nine figurines of this type. Figurines of this type also bear similarity to the traditional Babylonian style, with exaggerated anatomical proportions. However, in figurines of this type the exaggeration emphasizes both the presence of the navel and the contrast between the narrow waist and wide hips, neither of which was a feature common to traditional Babylonian figurines.

It is likely that the figurines of this type all had separately moulded arms that were originally attached by means of unfired clay or string; indeed a few figurines show evidence of this practice. The placement of the arm stumps directly off the sides of the body, and not angled to the front, makes it difficult to conceive how such attached arms could have been twisted in such a way as to support the breasts. Rather, it is more likely that these arms were placed in a forward position, in a posture of offering sacrifices to a god. This posture suggests that these figurines represented not a deity, but rather a mortal person offering to the gods in a manner consistent with Greek terracotta figurine usage.

The hairstyles of these figurines are highly varied, although always lacking a crown or any other type of head covering. The elaborately braided hairstyle of Figurine 4 is similar to the



Figure 2

Type 1 female figurine, front and side views. Single moulded. Height: 9 cm.

Museum location and number: British Museum, BM 81-4-28-948.

Left photograph adapted from Karvonen-Kannas 1995. Right photograph by author, courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

style displayed on some Greek figurines. Figurine 5 wears a hairstyle of neither Greek nor Babylonian style (this figurine will be discussed in more detail later in this article). The figurines of this type were always made in a double mould and, in contrast with the double-moulded figurines of Type 1, were made with thin, delicate walls. This suggests that this figurine type was used for display purposes, possibly in a domestic shrine as this figurine type is also associated with domestic contexts.

### *Type 3 figurines*

Type 3 (Figurines 6, 7, 8: Figs. 6–8) figurines are draped, standing women. I researched nine figurines of this type. In contrast with the figurines of Types 1 and 2, these figurines have a predominantly Greek style. These are heavily draped women, standing in a frontal, but more relaxed, contraposto pose. They wear a low headdress or hairstyle, with their heads usually covered by their cloth drapery. Figurine 7 wears a wreath on her head in a traditional Greek style. However, the frequent position of one hand held over the chest or one breast, such as in Figurines 6 and 8, suggests a traditional Babylonian terracotta pose. Both double and single mould technologies were used to create these figurines. As in Type 1, these figurines were intentionally manufactured to be very durable and vertically stable. These characteristics could indicate a



Figure 3

Type 1 female figurine, front and side views. Single moulded. Height: 13 cm.  
Museum location and number: British Museum, BM 80-6-17-1937=91849.  
Photographs by author, courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

ritual or other function that required that they be regularly handled. These figurines were again associated with a primarily domestic context.

#### *Type 4 figurines*

Type 4 (Figurines 9, 10: Figs. 9 and 10) figurines are reclining women. I researched nine figurines of this type. The most distinctive common feature of these figurines is their pose, which always depicts the figure reclining on its left side and, in many cases, supported by an attached terracotta couch (as in Figurine 9). The cultural origin of this pose is Greek; however Greek figurines depicted in this style were traditionally male, and usually represented the god Dionysus (Higgins 1967, 91; Roberta Menegazzi, personal communication). In the Hellenistic Babylonian figurines, the subject is exclusively female. This gender shift might have resulted from the development of a new (and, thus, likely not exclusively Greek) meaning or function for the pose.

Although united in pose, these figurines vary substantially in their clothing, including both nude and fully clothed examples, as well as clothing in both Greek and Babylonian styles. Several examples, such as Figurine 10, wear a conical, Near Eastern headdress, while Figurine 9 (like Figurine 4) wears a Greek hairstyle. These figurines were always made in double moulds, with very thick and durable walls. When interpreted in light of the primarily





Figure 4

Type 2 female figurine, front and back views. Double moulded. Height: 23 cm.  
Museum location and number: British Museum, BM 81-7-1-3368=121212.  
Photographs by author, courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

funerary context in which this figurine type has been found, these figurines appear to have been either intended to be handled during the funeral ceremony or meant to last for a long period of time within the grave.

#### CROSS-CULTURAL INTERACTION IN HELLENISTIC BABYLONIAN FIGURINES

Surveying the results of the typological analysis, it can be noted that on the basis of form, style, and motifs, none of these figurines could be clearly assigned to either a Greek or Babylonian cultural category. While admittedly these typological categories are my divisions, and so do not necessarily correspond to any ancient categories (which may or may not have been used to differentiate figurines during the time of their creation and use), I have not found any logical means of differentiating these figurines such that they are divided into types featuring exclusively Greek or exclusively Babylonian forms and styles. Indeed, as we have seen, it is difficult in most of the examples presented (such as Figurines 1–6, as well as 8 and 10) even to propose an exclusively Greek or Babylonian heritage for a single figurine. It therefore must be emphasized that these terracotta figurines are neither wholly Greek nor Babylonian, but are quite distinctly the products of both terracotta figurine traditions.

In addition to recognizing that none of the figurines can be classified as exclusively Greek or Babylonian, it is also most important to observe that each type of figurine represents



Figure 5

Type 2 female figurine, front view. Double moulded. Height: 27 cm.  
Museum location and number: British Museum, BM 1901-7-13-1900=94344.  
Photograph adapted from Karvonen-Kannas 1995.

a *different* combination of features from those found in the other types. For instance, some figurines of Type 1 (such as Figurine 1) were created in a primarily Babylonian pose, with the addition of Greek facial features, hair, and the use of the double mould technology. A typical figurine of Type 3 (such as Figurine 6), however, represents a very different combination of features, namely the Greek style and manner of dress combined with aspects of a Babylonian pose and the use of single mould technology. This difference in the ways in which figurine features were combined indicates that these figurines are not the result of one incident of cross-cultural material exchange, but rather the product of processes of cross-cultural interaction.

In addition to the formal combinations described in each figurine type above, a few trends in the contextual and technological evidence provide additional insight into the complex nature of Greek–Babylonian cross-cultural interactions. The excavation reports of Babylon, although not specific enough to aid in a determination of precise usages of individual Hellenistic Babylonian figurines, do provide some evidence of where the figurines were used (Koldewey 1914). Most Hellenistic Babylonian terracottas were found in the domestic structures of the Merkes district (see Fig. 11), along with some funerary contexts. These contextual data indicate that Greeks in Babylon no longer dedicated figurines in temples; however they used more figurines in domestic contexts. The native Babylonians apparently retained their traditional domestic usages of figurines, although this context was supplemented by an increased funerary use of figurines. Thus, neither the Greeks nor the Babylonians of Hellenistic Babylon exclusively retained the traditional contexts of their pre-Hellenistic figurine practice.



Figure 6

Type 3 female figurine, front and side views. Single moulded. Height: 14 cm.  
Museum location and number: British Museum, BM 81-11-3-1876.  
Photographs by author, courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Two aspects of the technological evidence of these figurines also indicate substantial interaction between the Greeks and Babylonians of Hellenistic Babylon. In figurine types where both double and single moulds were used, there are several examples where the fronts of these figurines look the same or similar. Thus the single-moulded figurines could have been modelled from the front half of a double mould or vice versa. This suggests that there was no sharp division between when a double or single mould would have been used. Indeed, the figurines of Types 1 and 3 were produced in either double or single moulds (with no preference given to the corresponding Greek or Babylonian visual features present or absent). However, divisions in the technology could be understood as existing along the lines of practical and functional concerns. For instance, the figurines of Type 1 were created in either a single-moulded or thick-walled double-moulded style (which could indicate a need for durability), while the figurines of Type 2 were created in a thin-walled double-moulded style (indicating a display function). Such divisions indicate that the functions and practicality of the figurine types were of greater concern in the selection of the technology used in their manufacture than the cultural origins of the technology or style.

A second important conclusion can be reached from this evidence, namely, that figurine technologies were interchanged. This process would have required a certain level of cross-cultural interaction between the Greek craftsmen, who used double moulds, and the Babylonian craftsmen, who used single moulds. While the moulds themselves would have been relatively simple to exchange, the methods by which single and double moulds are used to create figurines



Figure 7

Type 3 female figurine, front view. Double moulded. Height: 10.5 cm.  
Museum location and number: British Museum, BM 76-11-17-2401=118760.  
Photograph adapted from Karvonen-Kannas 1995.

differ substantially (Higgins 1967). Furthermore, as seen from the comparison of figurine technologies above, these craftsmen not only utilized each other's technologies, but also adapted them to the manufacturing requirements of a variety of cross-cultural figurine types. Such adaptations were frequently complicated – the conversion of a single-moulded Babylonian figurine type into a double-moulded figurine would require the Babylonian craftsman to conceptualize what the back of a figurine should look like, whereas the conversion of a double-moulded Greek figurine type into a single-moulded figurine would require the Greek craftsman to learn how to use a single mould to indicate the complete head and facial details of a figurine (which would be lacking with the use of just the front half of a double mould set). The exchange and learning of these skills would have required an additional investment of time spent in cross-cultural interaction between figurine craftsmen. This evidence again indicates that these terracotta figurines were the result of a sustained process of cross-cultural interaction in Hellenistic Babylon.

#### CASE STUDY: THE INTERPRETATION OF A SINGLE FIGURINE

In order to better understand how all these different processes of cross-cultural interaction mentioned above might have taken place on the level of the individual figurine, individual craftsman, and individual owner/user, it is useful to situate widespread social interaction in the concrete framework of the cross-cultural features of one figurine. As such an



Figure 8

Type 3 female figurine, front and side views. Single moulded. Height: 16 cm.

Museum location and number: British Museum, BM 80-6-17-1702.

Left photograph adapted from Karvonen-Kannas 1995. Right photograph by author, courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

exercise, here I present an analysis of the cross-cultural characteristics of Figurine 5. Figurine 5 is particularly well preserved, with all of its visual features still clearly apparent, and so the interplay of cross-cultural combinations in its features can be easily accessed and analysed.

Figurine 5, a Type 2 figurine, appears to represent a typically Babylonian female figurine. She is naked and stands in an entirely frontal position. These features, when considered with her inscribed pubic triangle and proportional, but prominent, breasts, indicate one element of Babylonian cultural influence. As with the other Type 2 figurines, however, the function of this figurine likely conforms to a Greek cultural tradition of representing a mortal woman dedicating an offering to the gods. Indeed, she bears the characteristic finished-off arms, complete with holes by which separately moulded bent arms for holding offerings could be attached. Additionally, this figurine was created in a double mould. This figurine therefore represents a cross-cultural combination of features.

I can conceive of three possible explanations for the development of this particular figurine, all of which required the medium of a cross-cultural social group through which the figurine features were exchanged. The first explanation is that a Babylonian individual, to whom the sexual features of a naked female were the most important aspect of a terracotta figurine, was influenced by contact with Greek individuals and their material culture to adopt some Greek figurine features. It is possible that he or she chose to adopt these Greek figurine features because the double moulding and the extended arms were, in his or her opinion, better suited to perform



Figure 9  
Type 4 reclining female figurine, front view. Double moulded. Height: 10.5 cm.  
Museum location and number: British Museum, BM 76-11-17-2399=91784.  
Photograph adapted from Karvonen-Kannas 1995.

a figurine function (such as presenting offerings to a household deity) than the Babylonian type previously used. Thus, the Babylonian individual was enabled through these cross-cultural combinations of figurine stylistic features to retain the elements of his or her personal religious practice and cultural figurine traditions, such as the emphasis on female sexuality, which he or she found most important. Simultaneously, he or she was able, through personal interactions with Greek people, to learn about Greek figurine meanings, relate these meanings and functions to his or her own traditions, and then adopt aspects of Greek figurine styles which he or she found pleasing, interesting, or beneficial.

The second explanation for the cross-cultural combinations of features found in Figurine 5 is that it was made and used by a Greek individual. This Greek individual, to whom the function and meaning of this type of figurine was most important, was influenced by Babylonians with whom he or she interacted to adopt Babylonian visual features. It is possible that this Greek individual wished to replicate the Babylonian style in order to worship a Babylonian deity (or the Babylonian aspect of a Greek deity), express his or her new affiliation with Babylon, relate more closely with the Babylonians in his or her social group, or simply utilize an aesthetic he or she found visually pleasing (note: it is here, in the consideration of human agency in creating these figurines, that I believe a study of aesthetics would be most useful in interpreting the terracotta figurine data). Thus this Greek individual was enabled by personal contacts with Babylonians to adopt stylistic features of Babylonian figurines while leaving the function of the figurine, which he or she found most important, intact.

Each of these first two explanations is equally likely, and indeed, both processes could have occurred in the creation of the many similar figurines of this type. However, two additional



Figure 10  
Type 4 reclining female figurine, front view. Double moulded. Height: 10 cm.  
Museum location and number: British Museum, BM 68-6-2-8.  
Photograph adapted from Karvonen-Kannas 1995.

features of this particular figurine shed light upon specifics of this process of cross-cultural interaction. The first of these is the exaggeration of certain anatomical characteristics, namely the navel and the contrast between the wide hips and the very narrow waist. These particular types of anatomical exaggerations are not common to either pre-Hellenistic Greek or Babylonian figurines. The second feature, a three-knobbed triangular headdress, is also lacking a pre-Hellenistic precedent – indeed, this style is known only in Hellenistic figurines from Babylon and Seleucia (Karvonen-Kannas 1995, 124). Both of these characteristics of Figurine 5 represent local inventions. Thus, regardless of the Greek or Babylonian cultural heritage of the individual who made and used this figurine, he or she was clearly participating in more than just a personal choice of functional and aesthetic preferences – this individual was also engaged in the process of creating a new, multicultural tradition and material culture.

The use of not only a cross-cultural combination of features, but also of unique Hellenistic Babylonian features in Figurine 5 suggests to me a third possible process that might have created this figurine: an already established Hellenistic Babylonian hybrid cultural tradition. Indeed the features, such as nakedness, sexual characteristics, and finished-off arms, which we label ‘Greek’ or ‘Babylonian’ might have been subsumed within the new, multicultural Hellenistic tradition and combined with new stylistic inventions by the time that Figurine 5 was created (the precise manufacture and usage dates of all of these figurines are unknown). Thus the cross-cultural features of Figurine 5 (as well as those of other figurines) might not be providing evidence of a contemporary cross-cultural interaction; rather, it could

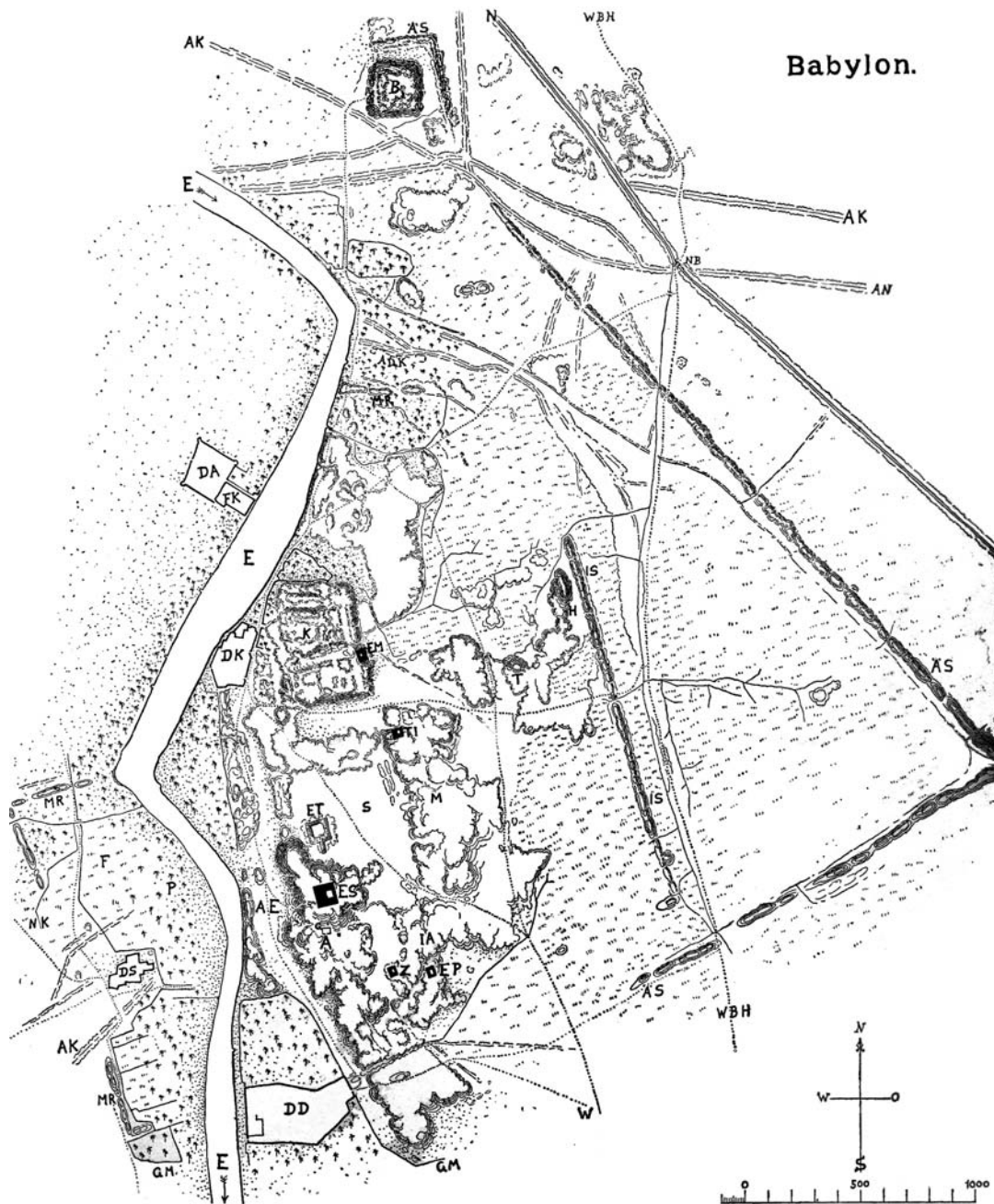


Figure 11

Site plan of the city of Babylon. AS: Outer city wall; E: Euphrates River; ES: Esagila, the temple of Marduk; ET: Etemenanki, the ziggurat of Marduk; IS: Inner city wall; M: Merkes residential district; T: Greek Theatre. Adapted from Koldewey 1914.



be dually demonstrating the existence of prior Greek–Babylonian interactions (such as in the first two possible scenarios described) as well as the new cultural traditions of the contemporary multicultural society.

In such a scenario, the features used in the creation of Figurine 5 might have been chosen more for their functions and practical characteristics – such as the meaning of the motifs or the stability and durability of the technology – than for the historical and cultural origin of these traits. While it is precisely this historical and cultural origin of traits that *we* look for and use to categorize the figurine as Greek or Babylonian, our perceptions are no indication that these traits still bore cultural associations (or at least not the *same* cultural associations) in Hellenistic Babylonia. We can therefore use these combinations of traits to better understand the process of cross-cultural interaction, but only with the understanding that the presence of Greek, Babylonian, and/or hybrid features in a figurine may have eventually become only a side effect, and not the intended result, of the creation of figurines such as Figurine 5.

#### A NEW INTERPRETATION OF CROSS-CULTURAL INTERACTION IN HELLENISTIC BABYLON: SOCIAL NETWORKS MODEL

Up to this point, I have discussed the cross-cultural combinations of traits present in the terracotta figurines of Hellenistic Babylon and argued that a sustained process of cross-cultural interaction is the most likely explanation for the occurrence of these features. Traditional theories of Hellenistic cross-cultural interaction – all of which focus on the concepts of Hellenisation, domination, and/or cultural impermeability – fail to account adequately for this degree of multi-directional, diachronic cross-cultural interaction, which would have required the active participation of members of both Greek and Babylonian cultural groups over an extended period of time.

However, in discarding these theories, we are left with a complete absence of a valid interpretation that applies specifically to Hellenistic Babylon (or to the Hellenistic Near East in general). In an attempt to fill that void, I have used the evidence of cross-cultural exchange in the terracotta figurine record to develop a new framework – the Social Networks model – for understanding social interaction in Hellenistic Babylon. This model was developed primarily following the post-colonial anthropological theories of social mediators and cultural hybridity (Gosden 2001), but with an application tailored specifically for the Hellenistic Babylonian terracotta figurine evidence.

In the Social Networks model, I posit a social environment of mutual interaction between the Greek and indigenous Babylonian communities through time (Fig. 12). A first step in that interaction was the inclusion of people of both cultural backgrounds into a single society. As mentioned previously, this took place when several large population groups of varying Greek and Macedonian cultural backgrounds migrated to Babylonian cities.

The second phase in this model postulates a period of necessary interaction between Greeks and Babylonians, who interacted with each other out of necessity to trade in the market place, settle disputes, organize government, etc. During this step, some cultural barriers of language and social interaction would break down in order to facilitate this communication. Some members of each culture also become cultural mediators – people who learn the traditions and customs of the other culture, so as to facilitate interactions between the groups. This phase of interaction can be seen in such evidence as the bearing of both Greek and Akkadian names by Hellenistic Babylonian individuals (Rempel and Yoffee 1999, 393).

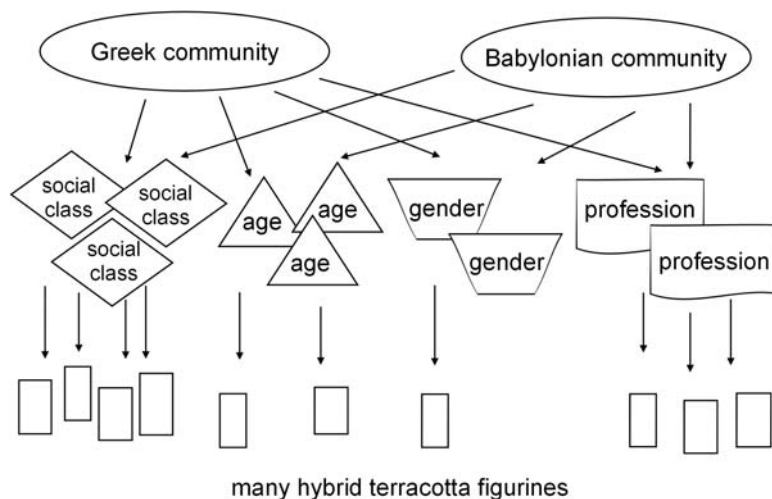


Figure 12

Model of Social Networks in Hellenistic Babylon. Large ovals at top represent the early division of society into two groups, Greek and Babylonian, based on ethnicity. Below these are the later divisions of society into many types of social groups, represented by different shapes (i.e. different criteria for admission in a social group, different boundaries between groups, and different people involved in each group). The arrows between the earlier ethnic groups and the later social groups indicate that members of each ethnicity are included in all social groups. The arrows from the social groups to the boxes at bottom (which represent the many hybrid terracotta figurines that form the archaeological evidence dealt with in this paper) indicate that the ethnic diversity present in the social groups was responsible for the hybrid features of the figurines, but that the interactions that took place within the different social groups were responsible for the actual creation and use of the figurines.

As the barriers between the two cultural groups are broken down or mediated, people could more easily communicate with members of the other group. This led to the third, non-necessary interaction phase, characterized by broader social interactions between individuals of the Greek and indigenous Babylonian cultural groups. As a result of these broadening social interactions, the nature of social relationships changed. These social relationships were no longer exclusively dictated by membership in a particular cultural group; rather, social networks begin to reform along lines traditional to both Greek and Babylonian societies, such as social class, age, gender, and profession, as well as along new axes peculiar to new social situations developing out of the intermingling. Thus, the boundary lines of social interaction would have been redefined along lines other than 'Greek' and 'Babylonian'.

This diversity in social groups, all of which might have claimed both Greeks and Babylonians as members, could begin to account for the variety of combinations of cultural features seen in the archaeological record. These hybrid forms were created independently by many small subgroups of society, each of which could develop their own hybrid form to suit their own purposes. Thus, the distinctive cultural traits of Greek and Babylonian material culture would have ceased to be important in the definition of people's identities. Instead, cultural traits were actively recombined to form new material culture, which better served to express and establish new social identities based on gender, age, social class, etc., that existed across cultural boundaries. Through the use of these combinations, individuals would also have begun to develop new figurine forms that, although based on the pre-Hellenistic traditions of Greece and

Babylonia, were not identical to previous cultural forms. This active use of material culture to express new social identities explains the pervasiveness of cross-cultural combinations in the terracotta figurines, as previous cultural boundaries were no longer emphasized, and new social ones were being demarcated. The variation in the terracotta figurine combinations can therefore be explained through this model as the result of several different but simultaneous attempts on the part of different social groups to create a new, hybrid material culture distinctive to their network over a period of time.

In this way, ideas about the appearance, meanings, and function of figurines circulated within social groups. Indeed, the adoption of cultural practices acceptable to all would have been crucial to the conduct of the interactions of daily life in the 'mixed cultural environment' that existed in Hellenistic Babylon (Sherwin-White 1987, 7). Just as the social groups themselves contained both Greek and Babylonian individuals, these ideas would have necessarily contained elements of both Greek and Babylonian ethno-historical figurine traditions. However the cultural origins of those traits (which we have classified as 'Greek' or 'Babylonian') might have ceased to be of importance or even relevance. Such an explanation can account for the manner in which these cultural traits are distributed and combined throughout the terracotta figurine types, but without regard for strictly or exclusively maintaining their associations and forms of earlier Greek and Babylonian figurines. Thus, it is this model that I believe presents a theory of social interactions in Hellenistic Babylonia that is most consistent with – as, indeed, it is derived from – the terracotta figurine data.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Based on these data and arguments, I conclude that the Social Networks model should be applied as a theoretical framework through which to interpret Hellenistic Babylonian society. In so concluding, it must be stated that I developed this model exclusively to explain those social interactions in Babylon that resulted in the creation of terracotta figurines. Thus I cannot argue that this model of Social Networks can completely explain all types of interaction in the societies of the Seleucid Empire. Indeed, I would like to suggest that the Social Networks model *not* be used to interpret social interaction across the Seleucid Empire, as the interactions within each community likely followed unique and specific paths. To suggest otherwise would be simply renewing the problem of the old broad-scale Hellenisation theories and substituting a new framework – without fully considering the call of Kuhrt and Sherwin-White to adopt a more nuanced, localized, situation-specific approach to the Hellenistic world.

I would, however, like to suggest that this Social Networks model should be more broadly applied to the archaeological evidence from Hellenistic Babylon. Through such an application, particularly to other types of terracotta figurines and the domestic archaeological evidence, the accuracy of this model can be more fully ascertained. Additionally, in applying this model, it is also important to consider that it is unlikely that every social group of Hellenistic Babylon used, and so was represented by, the female terracotta figurine tradition. Indeed, it is possible that several social groups existed who did not make or use terracotta figurines. Thus, in applying this Social Networks model to other types of domestic material culture, a more complete range of cross-cultural interactions and the development of all types of hybrid cultural forms can be accessed. If these other categories of evidence show similar types of cross-cultural interaction through a combination of forms and functions, as well as the

invention of new hybrid forms similar to those used in the terracotta figurine tradition, I suggest that the Social Networks model can and should be used to better understand social interaction in Hellenistic Babylon.

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