THE MIMESIS OF A WORLD
THE EARLY AND MIDDLE BRONZE CLAY FIGURINES FROM EBLA-TELL MARDIKH
Marco Ramazzotti

ABSTRACT
The paper will focus on the cognitive and spatial analysis of clay figurines dated to the Early and Middle Bronze Age that were recently discovered in Ebla-Tell Mardikh (Syria). The results outline a symbolic chaîne opératoire of these clay artifacts and underline their ideographic and composite character, which also can be paralleled in the Early Dynastic and Early Syrian miniature statue tradition. It will then be suggested that these products of the so-called ‘material culture’ were also a conscious human imitation of sacred and royal images of power. It has been observed that during the Early Syrian Period (2400–2000 B.C.) the spatial concentration of clay figurines in the Royal Palace G of Ebla does not seem accidental, a likelihood that could demonstrate a sort of affinity of this miniature clay world with that of the sacred kingship. However, I would argue that even though the spatial distribution of the clay figurines from the Old Syrian Period (2000–1600 B.C.) is indeed extensive, the strong concentration of figurine fragments that was found close to the Ishtar public cult area (Monument P3 and Temple P2) seems to indicate a radical transformation of the roles played by this clay world. Rather than being a mimesis of the physical and metaphysical sacred kingship, it is instead a reproduction of the whole society.

THE EARLY SYRIAN AND OLD SYRIAN CLAY FIGURINES AT EBLA

Within the Early and Old Syrian coroplastic corpus from Ebla there are a number of clay representations of the human and animal world that could be considered products of the first Mesopotamian state societies, well adapted to the contextual, economic condition of the so-called northern secondary urbanism (Figs. 1a–b). This specific, archetypical relationship between southern and northern Mesopotamia was strongly reinforced by the economic and political network of the Uruk Period. During the Late Uruk Period, at the end of the 4th millennium B.C., this network comprised an interchangeable continuum of materials, techniques, and images that included the Sumerian technique of modeling in clay, or molding the earth, a technique that pre-dated the mechanical reproduction of figurines by means of a mold. For this reason, many centuries later in the second half of the third millennium B.C., we still find at Ebla-Tell Mardikh in northern Syria a local translation of the Sumerian tradition of the miniature representation of the human and the appearance of a variety of shapes and styles contemporary with the Early Dynastic symbolic tradition. Typologically, we can distinguish these miniatures as Early Syrian from their distinctive iconographic character and their similarity to many other contemporary images from north...

Figs. 1a–b: TM83G311 Early Syrian Clay Turtle. (© La Sapienza University of Rome – Missione Archeologica Italiana in Siria)
Figs. 2a–c. TM83G361 Early Syrian Clay Figurine. Photo: © La Sapienza University of Rome, Missione Archeologica Italiana in Siria

Figs. 3a–b: TM06HH0934 and TM07G174 Early Syrian Clay Figurines. Photo: © La Sapienza University of Rome, Missione Archeologica Italiana in Siria

Syrian urban centers (Figs. 2a–b). During the Early Dynastic and the Early Syrian periods in Mesopotamia and in Syria the quantity and variability of clay figurines increased, while the hybridism recognized during the Halaf and Ubaid period almost disappeared in favor of the more naturalistic representations of the Uruk/Jemdet Nasr period. The exponential growth in the manufacture of clay figurines, the reduction of hybrid images, and the appearance of naturalistic representations are variables of complex phenomena probably related to the political and economic characteristics of secondary urbanization, a different replica of the Mesopotamian urban revolution (Figs. 3a–b). Subsequently, the technique of agglutinated, composite, molded elements that appears on a wide variety of Early Syrian artifacts was replaced by closer imitations of the real and/or metaphysical world during the Old Babylonian and Syrian periods. At this time the highly diversified Early Syrian figurines were produced in uniform series (Figs. 4a–b) that were not related to only the female, male, or animal classes, but also to some specific breakages, or fractures. However, in the same period the figurines were highly structured, with the hand-modeled examples related to the divided spheres of hybrids, humans, and animals that were based on a shared model with standard proportions and dimensions (Fig. 5a–b). This transformation began suddenly, probably with the collapse of Early Syrian centralized political power at the beginning of the Akkadian period, when the aggressive expansion of the Sargonic royal household, at the expense of many local institutions, is attested. In this period —after the “Fall”— we have some rare and unusual painted clay figurines that cannot be automatically assigned to the previous tradition. In any case, from the
beginning of the Old Syrian period onward, human, animal, and divine figures proliferated. But within the *habitus*, or social values, of this mass production the tendency to formalize more ancient schemes of representation coexisted with the tendency to maintain archaic, ideographic codes in order to make subject matter recognizable (Figs. 6a–b; Fig. 7). These ideographic codes, the use of clay details on the image, and the place of the image as a socially recognizable aspect of the institutional, political, and religious roles of the represented subjects were probably inspired by popular imitation and translation of some contemporary Old Syrian works, such as the Face of Ishtar, which were impressive images of the most archaic Eblaite kingship and religious power. Examples of this can be seen in clay imitations of the most archaic sacred images (Table II:A, TM83G400), such as the miniature statue in hematite, white marble, and red jasper discovered in the Royal Palace G (Table II:A, TM94P666), and reproduced—probably as a queen—in another important, but fragmentary, Early Syrian votive plaque representing a banquet scene. There are also clay reproductions of the most popular Old Syrian sacred images (Table II:B, TM88R035), such as the nude Ishtar representation in the fragmentary basalt basin from Temple P2 (TM08P2–916), or the clay imitations of archetypical symbols of kingship in the basalt monumental sculptures (TM64B35), such as the lions’ heads well attested at Ebla during the Old Syrian period (TM95P260 / TM91P251). Additionally, there are the clay mimesis of ideological actions of kingship in the wooden and ivory inlays (Table II:C, TM93P340), such as the iconography of the king carrying an animal offering (Table II:C, TM92P596). Moreover, during the Late Old Syrian period we witness the multiplication of figurines that are not properly imitations and/or representations, but rather follow an autonomous composite path: theriomorphic vases, ceremonial chariots, and incense burners. These clay objects show that the clay as “matter of creation” for humans and animals and “matter of tactile mimesis” of humankind be-
Table 1-A. Spatial distribution of 100 clay figurines from Ebla dated to EB and MB period; B. Spatial distribution of 100 clay figurines main breakages (heads; chests; legs; pubes; complete); C. Spatial distribution of the 50 clay figurines Early Syrian breakages; D. Spatial distribution of the 50 clay figurines Old Syrian breakages. © La Sapienza University of Rome ARCHEOSEMA Digital Archive.
Table 1: B Spatial distribution of 100 clay figurines main breakages (heads; chests; legs; pubes; complete). © La Sapienza University of Rome ARCHEOSEMA Digital Archive.
Table 1:C. Spatial distribution of the 50 clay figurines Early Syrian breakages. © La Sapienza University of Rome ARCHEOSEMA Digital Archive.
Table 1:D  Spatial distribution of the 50 clay figurines, Old Syrian breakages. © La Sapienza University of Rome ARCHEOSEMA Digital Archive.
A. Clay Mimesis of archaic religious images (TM83G400 and TM94P666). (© La Sapienza University of Rome, Missione Archeologica Italiana in Siria)

B) Clay Mimesis of the most popular sacred images (TM88R035 and TM08P2-916). (© La Sapienza University of Rome, Missione Archeologica Italiana in Siria)

C) Clay Mimesis of the kingship symbols (TM64B35 and TM95P260) and actions (TM93P340 and TM92P256). (© La Sapienza University of Rome, Missione Archeologica Italiana in Siria)

Table II

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came a professional medium to display a “potential automation” of the real world. Therefore, we could hypothesize that the role of these infinite reproductions was that of collective copies created for some function during important rites, or to remain as memory signs, games, and/or allusions in daily life.

The Chemical and Physical Analysis of the Ebla Clay Figurines

Preliminary spectroscopic analysis realized in collaboration with CiSTEC at La Sapienza University of Rome by Professor Maria Laura Santarelli gave us the opportunity to analyze the technical aspects of the Early Syrian and Old clay figurine breakages and their topographic localizations, but the present analysis reveals a new side to the political assessment of the city, where the figurines became “clay images of people.” Our preliminary report on these Ebla figurines, which were richly embellished, has focused on the Sumerian concepts of clay as “creation matter” and as “molding technology.”

The Chaine Opératoire of the Early Syrian and Old Syrian Coroplast Production

In the Sumerian tradition of the poem Enki and Ninmakh, Nammu, the mother of every god, pulls out the clay from the Apsû (The Primeval Ocean) in order to put it in the matrix of the first man. This matrix, which was created by Enki Nu.dim.mud, the artificer, will be used to make man a replicable “Automata” assigned to serve the gods, to obtain food for them, and to placate their wrath. In this myth, the animation of the Automata through the life-giving breath of Ninmakh seems to create a solution for Enki’s laziness. This laziness is apparently incompatible with his well-known official status as Enki “the wise,” but perhaps here it is evident that in myth-genesis every contradiction should be resolved. Wisdom and guile are universal values of the intellect, but they are also able to invent human slavery. Later, in the Curse of Akkad, one of the most potent invectives against those whose commit sacrilege to injure the Ekur of Nippur (the House Temple of En-lil founded at the beginning of creation) is: “May your clay return to its Apsû; may it be clay cursed by Enki!” Afterwards, in the Atramhasis, the Akkadian poem dated to the Hammurabi period, the birth-giver belet-ilil is given instructions by Ea to mix the flesh and blood of a god with clay to produce mankind; and so the clay itself will be kneaded with the flesh and the blood of a sacrificed god, as if to emphasize a sort of “sacrifice for life.” Finally, the element of the Apsû—clay is eliminated altogether in the Enuma Elish, when mankind will be created with only the blood of Kingu’s corpse, the sacrificed rebel god. In this epic it seems that the clay matter of creation has been transfigured into an amalgam of the vital essence of humanity, adopting a function and a role that is easily understandable if analyzed from the point of view of original sin as the foundation of human life and as the separation between god and humans. In this Babylonian world clay always appears as the material and the ideal of every creation process. It is—in other words—a unique coexistence of values, ethics, and technologies that comprise allusive and metaphorical images, historical and meta-historical subjects. Clay is indeed a plastic material. However, both in the Sumerian and Akkadian texts, clay is not linguistically distinguished from mud. Modeling clay was used for the first Neolithic molded skull: the skull was removed from the face of the dead and was replaced by a plaster mask that reproduced the lines and attributes of the face, modifying and embellishing some details (Jericho, Palestine). The sun-dried clay statues of Ain Ghazal in Jordan are exceptional coroplastic discoveries, which are already statuary, a coroplastic object that does not have miniature proportions, but nevertheless was discovered in contexts where there were miniature, handmade human and animal figurines. The clay mask that transfigures the face of the dead and the clay reproductions of the family are archetypes, which, with plastic manipulation, gave the dead features from life, therefore the passage between the two—the mask and the copy—were two of the most important nodes in the later consecration rites of divine statues. In any case, the link between these theoretical, literary, and aesthetic notions can be identified in the Samarra figurines from Niniveh and Choga Mami, in the so-called Neolithic pillar figurines from Tell Bouqras, in the Yarim Tepe II anthropomorphic vessels, and later on in the snake-headed figurines of southern Mesopotamia dated to the end of the Ubaid period from Uruk, Uqair, Ur, and Eridu. This is a homogeneous group of 20 hybrid figurines discovered out of their original contexts, apart from the Ur and Eridu copies, which were found in burials. The long heads, the almond-shaped eyes, the large shoulders, and the long legs are formal indices of the transformation of natural, human proportions: these elements make the body a model for a metamorphic change that, in this case, has been associated with a primeval aspect of Ningizzida, the snake lord of the
earth and the netherworld. The metamorphosis of these subjects depends on controlled manipulation of some details that could have had ideographic values (the faces, the eyes, the shoulders, the legs and the arms). This kind of alteration will be preserved through millennia as a technique to make the metamorphic clay figurines a sort of prosthesis of ostensible reality. The well-known, ideological link between Mesopotamia and northern Syria has recently been detailed on a cognitive level. But this link also is well documented by some imported clay figurines of the Early Bronze Age probably coming from the central Euphrates region and by the extraordinary iconographic analogy between the Ubaid Mesopotamian clay figurines with almond-shaped eyes and two Eblaitic figurines respectively from the Royal Palace G (TM93P589) and from the Area P (TM92P290).

Theoretical Approaches to the Visual and Tactile Meaning of the Ebla Clay Figurines
The miniature, or the idea of reproducing every subject of the imagination on a miniature scale, seems to be an ahistorical characteristic of perception, which in the Near Eastern visual cultures becomes a tactile experience. In this specific sense the Ebla clay figurines represent an extraordinary corpus, since they can be studied as a contextual urban system of artefacts closely related both chronologically and culturally to the Mesopotamian psychical and technological milieu. In the ancient myths of the Near East, clay is the matter, the matrix, and, at the same time, the body of the shape, as we say, the figure and substance of nature. Clay provides the possibility of replicating the one in the many, the copy and its twins, the unique and the diverse. Nevertheless, when we pass from this metaphor that lives in mythopoeic thought and organizes the daily life of ancient people to consider the physical properties of the clay, our attention is captured by its plastic essence, and we see the infinite forms that every lump of earth can take. It is as if the earth clod gave the hands also the capability of creation, modeling, and replication. Starting from the Samarran, Halaf, and Ubaid periods, the additional elements that were molded, painted, impressed, and incised into the clay surfaces are the essence of the figure. These function as ideograms adapted to a model that seems standardized. These applications, impressions, and incisions are so typical of the Sumerian image perception and cognition that observing one single part both of the miniature composite statues and clay figurines of the Uruk period, it is possible to reconstruct the semantic unity of the subjects (pars pro toto): the wheel of a ceremonial wagon, the instrument of a musician, the representative standard, the sex of the man and the woman, the human or deity’s headgear, and so on. The impact of the agricultural revolution on the times and modes of the mass production of the clay figurines should not be forgotten or neglected. However, the “symbolic revolution” behind these images seems to be extended to such a large geographical area that it is inappropriate to suggest an historical and cultural epicenter for human clay reproduction as an aesthetic aptitude, the aptitude to organize shapes by integrating and aggregating elements as intelligible signs. At the same time, the high variability of attributes and subjects represented renders questionable the hypothesis that most of the ancient clay figurines were related to the first administrative processes or dedicated to the mother goddess, to the fecundity of nature, and inspired by the family nucleus, intended as a microcosm of the whole society. If this were the case, why the high frequency of clay figurines in pre-urban, archeological contexts and in the semi-nomadic, nomadic, and other scattered modern ethnographic groups? Why also the clay imitation of games, furnishings, hybrids, omens, and, more generally, many objects that frequently fall outside the control of our classification categories? In these reproductions an inner geometry is continuously translated, but into different shapes; the clothes are diversified but not exclusive; the roles are alluded to but not the hierarchy; the sexual attributes are almost always emphasized, but not the sexuality. Moreover, the use of agglutination and incision of signs on standard clay models was the most useful, technical, and cognitive way to record action and desire on more profound, consolidated images of authority and institutions and to transfer these consolidated images to a living communication system. Starting from the clay replica of the human world, the silent or non-verbal miniature replica of physical and metaphysical beings, it also will be possible to distinguish a figurative world from a non-figurative world, to reduce the world to a manual scale, and to make the hands’ action on the clay an extension of human effectiveness on the present, on the past, and on the future, avoiding any written “dramatic” distinction between peoples and authority. In fact, in the ancient Near East we can identify historically what we call image in our western culture many centuries later, probably reaching back to the Old Akkadian period when the word salmu translated
from the Sumerian term ALAM denotes indifferently the representations of gods, kings, and human beings, as well as demons. Since we considered the concept of "clay as matter creation" a human cognitive code for the reproduction and imitation of the human world, our proposal has been to verify how and where reproduction as creation began the mimesis of the physical and metaphysical worlds, first in Mesopotamia and later in Syria. In fact, between creation and mimesis is located the space of a rapid aesthetic transformation of these cultures and their communication systems.

Notes
1 The ARCHEOSIMA project (Geographic Information Systems and Artificial Adaptive Systems for the analysis of Complex Phenomena) of La Sapienza University of Rome, Department of Antiquities (Ramazzotti 2012c, pp. 6–10, Ramazzotti, forthcoming c). This interdisciplinary workshop provided me with the opportunity to present a preliminary synthesis on Early Syrian (Early Bronze) and Old Syrian (Middle Bronze) clay figurines from Ebla-Tell Mardikh (Northern Syria), bringing together different ideas, concepts and materials that I began to collect after the interdisciplinary congress Argilla. Storie di Terra Cruda organized by me and by Giovanni Greco in Rome (25–26 May 2007. Ramazzotti – Greco 2011). For these reasons, I would like to thank Paolo Matthiae, Director of the Ebla Archaeological Mission for giving me the precious opportunity of studying these mostly undated objects coming from the Ebla archaeological excavations; Armando Montanari, geographer of La Sapienza University of Rome, for his continuous support; Maria Laura Santarelli, engineer of La Sapienza University of Rome and coordinator of CISTEC (Laboratory of La Sapienza for materials and buildings technologies) for the chemical-physical analysis of the Ebla mud and clay world and Luca Deravignone and Irene Viaggia, members of ‘Archeosema Archaeological Group’ for the geographical formalization and the spatial analysis on the Ebla Coroplastic Corpus (ECC) and of course, Stephanie Langin-Hooper for inviting me to participate at this stimulating scientific and interdisciplinary workshop.

2 In terms of absolute chronology, according to the so-called conventional Middle Chronology, the conquest of the first Ebla at the end of Early Bronze IV and the high Early Syrian period took place around 2300 B.C., while at the end of Early Bronze IVB and the late Early Syrian period, the destruction of the second Ebla should date from the years around 2000 B.C. The destruction of the third Ebla resulted in a catastrophic end of the urban life of the settlement in the final years of Middle Bronze II at the end of the classic Old Syrian period (Matthiae 1995, pp. 13–135). This probably took place immediately before the fall of Babylon in 1595 B.C., which meant the end of the Old Babylonian period in Southern Mesopotamia (Matthiae 2009, pp. 165–205, p. 165, footnote 3).


4 See Ramazzotti 2011c, pp. 16–19. The problem of the identification of imported images could partially be solved with the chemical-physical analysis of the figurine’s clay to determine its provenience, in any case the local imitation of foreign figurative models was also part of Ebla’s aesthetic culture, deeply related to the lexical and conceptual translation of Sumerian and Early Dynastic written and visual documents. Ramazzotti 2010b, pp. 309–326; Ramazzotti 2013, pp. 161–216.

5 Therefore, the plastic mold of “matter creation” began to copy the observed reality that the producer, free from the constraints and suggestions of customers, imagined in the clay. From our contemporary point of view, so deeply immersed in virtual communication, in the landscape of what is potential in nature, and in a world still oriented by the mass media, this miniature world, a tactile link between reality and imagination, appears far away and pervaded by abstractions and incongruities. However its ideographic character, its metamorphic physical structure and its “genetic” hybridism reveals a tactile (and to us anachronistic) continuity between the similar and diverse, life and death, present and past. Ramazzotti 2011d, pp. 9–20; Ramazzotti 2012b, pp. 346–375; Ramazzotti 2013, pp. 48–69.

6 We can suppose for this production not only faster, and almost industrial, firing methods that reduced the quality of the products, but also the influence of a specific role probably related to some pervasive religious cults, such as the Ishtar cult was at Ebla and Hadad at Aleppo. See Matthiae 2003b, pp. 381–402.


8 For the hybrid clay figurines dated to the Halaf and Ubaid period see Breniquet 2001, pp. 45–55.


11 For the relative chronology of the Old Syrian Period based on historical, cultural and material cultural data see Nigro 2002b, pp. 297–328; Matthiae 2006c, pp. 39–51; Marchetti 2007, pp. 247–253; Matthiae 2007, pp. 6–33; Pinnock 2007, pp. 457–472.


13 Moreover during the Old Syrian period the human figurines are fashioned on standard schemes underlining their measures, proportions and sometimes social roles. Matthiae 1965, pp. 81–103; Baffi 1979, pp. 9–18; Marchetti 2000a, pp. 839–867; Marchetti 2000b, pp. 17–132; Marchetti 2001; Marchetti 2007, pp. 247–283.

14 Ramazzotti 2009b, pp. 54–65; Ramazzotti 2011b, pp. 341–375.


16 Some figurines dated to the Early Bronze IVB period were discovered in Area T (Matthiae 1993) and in the so-called Phase I of the Archaic Palace (Matthiae 2006a); recently some painted animals and human clay figurines were found in the Area HH where the ‘Temple of the Rock’ is located (Matthiae 2006b, pp. 447–493; Ramazzotti 2009, pp. 12–15). For some chronological aspects related to the EBIVB–MB transition at Ebla see Dolce 2008, pp. 171–194; Matthiae 2008, pp. 5–32.

17 Like the so-called “undressed goddess”, the “nude goddess with hands on her breasts” or the “doves of the goddess” closely related to the popular, rather than official, Old Babylonian and Old Syrian religious tradition. Pinnock 2000, pp. 127–134.


19 The case of the Early Dynastic, Early Syrian and then Old Babylonian, Old Syrian, and Middle Elamite wagons is typical; they are mobile, multi-sensory miniatures with tactile, visual, and sometimes olfactory functions. Each mechanism is activated by humans and is built as a harmonic integration of single parts (wheels, hubs, bodies, ropes). The parts are decorated with specific attributes (incised, applied, and integrated), which exhibit the complexity of a unitary project, or of a copy or simulation. A project that was probably planned in order to emulate, to memorize, or to reproduce ceremonial processions, on a different scale and in a different space–time dimension, like the ceremony attested in the L. 2769 Archive at Ebla, where the couple of divine, formally-dressed statues of Kura and Barama were certainly borne on a chariot drawn by oxen during the royal ritual. Matthiae 2007, pp. 270–311.

20 Like the 2nd millennium Ishtar rite of Mari, where the hierarchical positions of the precious statues of deities were probably fixed in order to be seen. Following an Early Dynastic tradition from the Early Syrian period, many cult objects were transported inside chapels (DAGx) according to Biga (Biga 2006, pp. 19–39), or sacred niches, such as the Ishkara image that we recently supposed was originally located in the painted niche of Building FF2 (Ramazzotti and Di Ludovico 2011, pp. 66–80; 2012, pp. 287–302); otherwise, in the contemporary Mesopotamian tradition these images of gods were set “upon” a seat in a temple so their surfaces could reflect (more than absorb) the light to render the physical emanation of the Sumerian (ME-LAM'u) and Akkadian (melammu) as a sort of “aura” according to Winter 1994, pp. 123–132.

21 Ramazzotti 2011c, pp. 16–19.

22 For a detailed analysis of this turtle discovered at Ebla see Marchetti 2009, pp. 275–296.

23 The interpretation of the ancient Near East clay figurines is strictly related to the very different “anthropomorphic” methods used for their classification see Van Buren 1931; Ucko 1962, pp. 38–54; Ellis 1967, pp. 51–61; Klengel and


27 Many inductions of cult images and “many rituals of constitution and installation” were attested in Mesopotamia from the end of the third Millennium, and a special verb meaning ‘to give birth’ (sum. tud, akk. waldatu) is used for the creation of statues, rather than the verb ‘to make’ (DIM.), see Walker and Dick 1999, pp. 55–122; Winter 2000a, pp. 129–162.


31 We can consider the documented existence of some institutional rituals as official occasions also to realize clay reproductions. Examples are the monkey sacrifice at Mari and the equids sacrifice at Umm al-Ma’arra. On the particular importance of equids in Syria during the Early Bronze Age Period see Biga 2007, pp. 125–151; for the supposed equids ritual dated to the Early Bronze Age period see Schwartz 2006, pp. 603–641; Schwartz 2007, pp. 39–68.

32 Common everywhere as ‘Volksgesitter’ media of an inner communication inspired and supplied by the people’s “common sense,” sometimes intimate without explicit ideological constraints of the authorities, other times the quite instinctive reproduction of the real world as mysterious requests or questions for the venerated deities. For the archaeological context and the interpretation of the unbaked clay figurines discovered in the Favissa P. 9301 of Temple HH2 related to the Middle Bronze Age see Lisella 2010, pp. 821–836.

33 Two MSAE (Materialei e Studi di Archeologia Ebla) volumes related to about 4,500 fragments of Old Syrian Period clay figurines discovered at Ebla from 1981 to 2001 (a corpus that follows Marchetti’s publication on the clay figurines discovered at Ebla between 1964 and 1980) is in preparation by the author (Ramazzotti, forthcoming b).

34 The Apsû is usually intended as the “Primeval Ocean” (Green 1978, pp. 127–167; Sjöberg 1994, pp. 202; Horowitz 1998, pp. 335) sustaining the Earthly and Kingship order (Ramazzotti 2009b, pp. 54–59), although the etymology of the word is still uncertain (Lambert 1997, pp. 75–77)

35 The clay of the Apsû is plastic since the primeval ocean waters give the earth plasticity and therefore different images and shapes can be molded. In this specific character of the Apsû we should understand the epithet Na₄dim₄mu₄ (image fashioner, god of shaping) and this attribute gave Enki the protection of artisans and craftsmen. See Jacobsen 1971, pp. 111; Cavigliaux and Krebernik 1998–2001, pp. 607.

36 We cannot exclude a particular version of the myth centered on the spontaneous birth of man from the Earth; in a second moment Enlil “broke through the cast of the earth with his newly created pickaxe so that the first man developed below could ‘sprout forth’.” Kramer 1974, p. 5.


38 The first attempt by Enki to create mankind produces a visibly defective humanity of imperfect creatures; but the God will assign them a specific destiny (ME) and these ME will be existential archetypes of the human being. See

33Cooper 1983.
35Maul 2000, pp. 23–34.
38Statues were also the object of recent renewal rites, such as the annual replacement of the silver mask that covered the statue of Kura at Ebla during the Early Syrian period. See, pp. Archi 2005, pp. 81–100; Archi 2010, pp. 3–17.
41“The driving emotion in the making of these images was fear of bodily harm and an effort to find protection through the representation of the relevant superhuman figure.” Porada 1995a, p. 10.
42On the figurative and cognitive relationship between the Mesopotamian Ubaid snake-headed human figurine and Old Syrian clay figurines from Ebla see Ramazzotti 2011, pp. 345–376.
43On the ideological relationship between the kingships of Ur and Ebla see Ramazzotti 2012b, pp. 346–375.
44For the logic of perception see Damerow 1996; Damerow 1998, pp. 247–269.
49The historical reconstruction of the so-called “thought of the people” from the ancient Near Eastern archaeological documents is, of course, both a political and technical problem. I am convinced that the clay figurines will constitute an important set of data on which to build a “common sense” interpretation of propaganda and reduce historical reconstruction exclusively linked to the rhetoric of the ancient kingships. Here the use of “people” as an ambitious and complex heuristic category is acknowledged by Samuel Noah Kramer’s (Kramer 1964) and Peter Roger Stuart Moorey’s (Moorey 2003) pioneer works that philologically and archaeologically explored the natural limits of the textual, material, and aesthetic data.
50In this ancient repetition of manual creation and in its organization, some art historians have seen “La Vie des formes.” On the other hand, cultures have always been considered more material the more they are tied to the Earth, and the more they are able to touch and model the earth. Material, in any case, is an ambiguous word, difficult to understand outside its human historiography. Ramazzotti 2010a, pp. 50–87.
52For the specific character of this ‘aesthetic aptitude’ in the southeastern European Neolithic see Bailey 2005.
59 In particular see Schmandt-Besserat 1992, 1996.

60 In particular see Gimbutas 1982, 1989, 1991. For a different model and quite opposite views see Ucko 1968, where the cultic role of the mother-goddess has been strongly criticized.


62 On this specific cognitive character of the ancient Mesopotamian figurative system see Ramazzotti 2010b, pp. 309–326, Ramazzotti, forthcoming a.


64 This will be the only definition both for the statues and for the stelae (sum. NA-RÚ-A; akk. from Sumerian loan: nart). For the stelae concept in the Ebla documents see Archi 1998, pp. 5–24.

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