CHAPTER 6: INTERPRETATION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Information relevant to an interpretation of the Egyptian figurines, as explored in the previous chapters, comes from a wide selection of sources. In keeping with Ucko's four-stage methodology, the interpretation presented here is not restricted to material evidence. Rather, besides a close examination of the figurines themselves and the context in which they were found, additional interpretive material has been drawn from ethnography, comparative religion, and the historical religion which developed during the Dynastic period. Some of the more specific issues affecting interpretation include: the wide diversity of styles among the Egyptian figurines; the mortuary provenance; the distribution of sex and its importance in the history of figurine interpretation; the accompanying artefacts; the absence of figurine use among the élite population; the high proportion of therianthropism; the tendency of small scale societies to embody only intermediate or minor deities and spirits; the various arm styles; the peculiar body position of some figurines; and the myths surrounding the mortuary culture of Dynastic Egypt. The following discussion examines each of these issues.

THE MEANING OF DIVERSITY

The first, most obvious observation is that the figurines as a whole group do not conform to any one specific style which can be identified as typically Egyptian. Examination of the figurines from other prehistoric cultures demonstrates that the Egyptian figurines are anomalous in their diversity. For example, the typical Mesopotamian Southern 'Ubaid figurine conforms to a recognisable style which is distributed over a defined area. In the north of Mesopotamia, the Halaf culture produced its own typical figurine. In the Indus Valley, the figurines conform to a recognisable style as do the ones from Crete, the Cyclades, and prehistoric Greece.[68]

The diversity of the Egyptian figurines suggests a number of points which affect interpretation: 1. The figurines might not have originated in the Nile Valley, but elsewhere. 2. The figurines came from a number of cultures rather than one single culture. 3. Different figurines were used for different purposes and therefore, no one interpretation can cover all figurines.

The heterogeneous nature of the earliest Nile agricultural communities may be the explanation for this diversity. Nile culture did not develop from a community formed from single groups of related peoples, sharing a common culture, livelihood, beliefs, and practices. Rather, the earliest Egyptian culture comprised a racially diverse mixture of migrants from various locations within northeastern Africa. They practised varying forms of horticulture, animal husbandry, and foraging, and each group must have had its own specific religious beliefs and practices.

Soon after settling in the Nile valley, however, these divergent groups moved towards a more uniform culture, sharing trade goods, technology, and agricultural practices. They also began to share some similar religious beliefs, particularly regarding the afterlife, for each community buried its dead with grave goods of a similar nature. Certain pottery styles, which were developed after settlement, became the standard grave goods, and the figurines, although diverse in style, tended to be confined to mortuary practice rather than domestic or community rituals performed in villages and homes.

Previous interpretations of the figurines have often not taken into account the cultural diversity of Predynastic Egypt, nor the specific funerary nature of the figurines. While the grave culture seems relatively uniform, the beliefs behind the imagery probably varied in the same way that the similar rituals of sacrifice and worship undertaken by twentieth century Nile dwellers, the Nuer, Dinka, and Atuot, focus on similar but clearly different deities and spiritual forces.

This chapter presents a discussion designed to recognise these cultural differences. Images common throughout the Predynastic, such as certain styles of female imagery, may indicate shared concepts but different spiritual specifics behind them.

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[68] See Ucko (1969) for a typology and analysis of figurines from Crete, Greece, and the Near East, as well as Egypt. For information on the Indus Valley figurines, see Banerji (1994).

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GRAVES

Many reasons for placing figurines into graves are attested in small-scale contemporary cultures. Ucko explored a number of practices which place a diversity of figurines with various meanings in graves (Ucko 1962: 420-6; 1968: 45-7). Children are buried with their dolls, shamans with their mediums, adults with their initiation figurines, men with concubine figurines, and twins with figurines which represent the other twin. Ucko's observations demonstrate that the similarity of findspot does not necessarily indicate similarity of meaning.

In the case of the Egyptian figurines, however, one observation suggests that the Egyptians designed their figurines specifically for mortuary use, thus perhaps narrowing the range of possible meanings. The nearly complete absence of figurines from settlement sites and rubbish tips suggests that the figurines were not used as dolls, initiation figures, ancestor figures, votary objects for domestic and village rituals, or for any other domestic purpose which could leave traces of figurine use behind. Broken, discarded, or forgotten figurines did not inhabit homes, streets, and rubbish tips as they did in other Near Eastern prehistoric sites. All Egyptian figurines, with very minimal exception, ended up in graves, as though they were specifically made for mortuary purposes and were not simply retired to the grave with the death of the owner. They may have been used in village funerary rituals prior to interment, but it seems their final goal was the grave. Hence, I do not think we are looking at the remains of dolls, ancestor figures, or initiation figurines, but at something more specific to death and possibly beliefs in the afterlife. Certainly the Dynastic mortuary cult which followed the Predynastic would support this conclusion, for many grave goods were made specifically to assist the deceased on the afterlife journey and were not personal objects enjoyed and used by the deceased during life. The development of tombs complete with storage chambers accommodated the increasing number of objects and provisions thought necessary or desirable in the afterlife (Spencer 1982: 45-73).

THE MOTHER GODDESS

Earlier interpretations, especially by Baumgartel (1970b: 492-4) and Hornblower (1929), relied on an observation that the majority of the figurines are female. This led them to conclude that the Predynastic Egyptians worshipped a female fertility goddess, in keeping with the prevailing theory of the time that the earliest civilisations were matriarchal and worshipped a goddess rather than a supreme male deity. These ideological theories stemmed from evolutionary theories propounded by Bachofen and Engels. These theories, rather than the material evidence, largely informed figurine interpretation, overemphasising the female component at the expense of other classes of figurines, such as male, sexless, and animal examples.

Elise Baumgartel held that the figurines belonged to fertility beliefs similar to those indicated by letters to the dead written during the Dynastic period (Baumgartel 1950-1: 59-60). A Middle Kingdom female figurine holds a child and the inscription on the figurine pleads for the birth of a child to the deceased's daughter (ibid 59). Baumgartel, I believe, has let her fertility goddess theory, rather than an assessment of the figurines as a whole, inform her analysis. In the first place, many of the figurines are male, and in the second place, only three Predynastic female figurines hold children (Appendix 1) and thus are comparable to the Middle Kingdom figurine.

The mother and child motif is a natural subject for figurative artists. No culturally specific meaning can be attached to such depiction. These 3 figurines could be early representations of Isis, the only major Dynastic goddess to be depicted holding a child, but without further symbolic associations with an Isis-like deity, this conclusion remains too speculative to be credible. One seems to have a protruding stomach, perhaps indicating pregnancy. It can equally be argued, along Ucko's lines, that the figurines holding children are designed to educate young women in the responsibilities of motherhood, although why such figurines would end up in graves with no trace in the village environment needs explanation.

Baumgartel also offered the opinion that some of the female figurines are related to the female illustrations on D-ware. While she acknowledged that the figurines with raised arms could represent the "Mother Goddess", she more strongly stated that the figurines are votive offerings to this goddess (Baumgartel 1960: 69-70; 1970b: 492). As ex-votos, she maintained, they have some relationship to the principal gods of the period, and would be placed in the grave in order to solicit help or some beneficial influence for the deceased (ibid 1960: 69-70), through dedication to the Mother Goddess (ibid 71).

The "ugly little fact that killed the beautiful theory", as Petrie might have said[69], became obvious once "scientific" archaeological methodology acknowledged the large group of figurines which dethroned the goddess from her supreme position. Female figurines had to take their place in a wider group which included these other forms. The male figurines seemed particularly to threaten the supreme Mother Goddess theory, although now it seems odd that they should, since the polytheistic nature of ancient religion was never secret, with its supreme and subordinate deities.

The Egyptian figurines still come under the spell of the Mother Goddess, with current Egyptologists such as Rosalie David (1982) and Fekri Hassan (1992) coming to similar conclusions regarding the prominence of goddess worship in the Predynastic. J. Gwyn Griffiths, in his interpretation of the anthropomorphic imagery on D-ware (Griffiths 1996: 11-43) (Fig. 2.7), placed the large female figure within the context of the other figures on the pots, both male and female, as did Baumgartel (1970b: 493). Griffiths concluded that the main female figure is an early form of the goddess, Hathor, the original mother of Horus (Griffiths 1996: 15), and that she forms the mother in a proto-typical Egyptian triad. Contrary, however, to earlier theories, Griffiths (and Hassan 1998: 111) challenged any notions of the matriarchal nature of prehistoric Egyptian culture:

> ...early Egyptian society shows little sign of having
> evolved from a matriarchy. It is strongly patriarchal. (Griffiths 1996: 15)

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[69] Said by Petrie with regard to the facts which undermined the "mystical" measurements of the pyramids favoured by early Egyptologists (Time-Life 1987: 301).

He preferred to see the female figure with raised arms as a goddess, but the mother of the sky god as ruler rather than as a supreme deity in herself (ibid 16).

Griffiths' focus is on the imagery and symbolism of the painted designs. He recognised in the standards the insignia of Horus and Min and the cow horns of Hathor (ibid 15). He did not mention the possible funerary implications of the boat, nor did he consider the fact that, with the exception of a few sherds, all of the D-ware pots come from graves or were strewn about the surface of plundered cemeteries. Like the figurines, they seem to have been made primarily for mortuary purposes rather than for daily use.

An early attempt by Margaret Murray (1934) to identify various styles of prehistoric and ancient historic female figurines from various cultures divides the complement into three types: 1. Universal Mother or Isis; 2. Divine Woman or Ishtar; 3. Personified Yoni or Baubo (Murray 1934: 93). Unlike her contemporaries, Murray did not classify all female figurines as examples of the Universal Mother Goddess; rather she differentiated those figurines which do represent a Mother Goddess such as Isis from those which represent other facets of femininity, largely sexual with emphasis on youth and virginity (type 2) or active sexuality (type 3) (ibid 94).

Regarding the Egyptian figurines, Murray placed the Badarian ivory (Fig 2.1a) in category 3 because of the emphasised sexual triangle. She placed the fired clay Badarian figurine (Fig. 3.1) in the second category because the figurine appears to represent a "young girl whose figure has not yet been spoiled by child-bearing" (ibid 94). Murray's system has not made any lasting effect on the interpretation of figurines, at least in archaeological circles, but it has resurfaced in spirit in mythological and psychological classification systems, such as the Jungian-based theory of Erich Neumann (1963), which attempts to group all female imagery together and divide it into categories based on cross-cultural similarities. None of these theories takes into account the findspots (provenance) or material context in which the figurines are found, assuming that an image found as the focus in an historic temple could have the same meaning as a figurine found in a grave or rubbish tip.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MATERIAL CONTEXT

Having determined the mortuary nature of the Egyptian figurines, an examination of the individual cemeteries and graves in which the figurines appear helps to determine what section of the population participated in such mortuary rituals. After a lengthy and detailed account of individual graves, the contents of the graves, and the nature of the artefacts found within them (Chapter 3), a nearly unanimous conclusion emerged that the figurines, although rare, are not considered part of a mortuary ritual reserved only for "special" people. Such "special" people could include the wealthy, the ruling class, or the religious specialists. The figurines come predominantly from the graves of very ordinary Egyptians. A few graves indicate signs of wealth, but most fall into the poor or middle-class categories. Noticeably absent from the graves containing figurines are items associated with power and privilege. Such items would include prestigious offering vessels such as W-class ware and stone vases; the "poor man's" prestigious ware, Decorated Ware; rare materials such as gold, lapis lazuli, turquoise, and other rare and imported materials. Especially, no imported precious materials coincide with the figurines.

Grave figurines disappeared with the rise of a ruling élite, who appropriated raw materials and skilled craftspeople for its own purposes. The élite did not include figurines as a "special" or prestigious grave good, and presumably the new emphasis on the mortuary cult of the king led to an overall impoverishment of grave goods for the remainder of the population.

THERIANTHROPISM

The figurines cannot be grouped together as images of one major supreme goddess, but understanding the figurines as images of divine beings is not necessarily ruled out. Possibly the most significant physical characteristic linking them to the Dynastic artistic tradition of divine iconography is the high proportion of figurines with non-human heads and human bodies.

Therianthropic images are common throughout the ancient world. Creatures which are half-human and half animal, bird, or reptile appear in the mythologies of India, Mesopotamia, and Greece, as well

as Egypt. Usually, however, these hybrid creatures have human heads and their animal attributes are confined to less prominent features such as bodies, feet, and wings. Egyptian therianthropic art distinguishes itself with its animal-headed deities. Over half of the Predynastic figurines have non-human heads, and the most common is the head with a large beak for a face.

Despite the lengthy hiatus between the period of the Predynastic figurines and the development of Dynastic images of deities, this kind of therianthropism prevailed. This peculiarly Egyptian form of sacred imagery[70] leads to the suspicion that the Predynastic therianthropic figurines also represent divine beings rather than dolls, twin substitutes, ancestor figures, or initiation figurines.

What kind of deities?

If, as the therianthropism suggests, many of the figurines represent deities, the question arises as to whether they are supreme or major deities, or lesser spirits. The Mother Goddess theory would maintain that the Predynastic Egyptians worshipped a supreme female deity and that she was represented in the figurines and D-ware imagery. As the theory would determine, with the development of a patriarchal state, power shifted from female into male hands, and religion followed with a shift from the worship of a goddess to that of a male god, who legitimised male power on the throne, as Hassan (1992) concluded.

Some evidence from the ancient world supports such a theory. With the inception of writing, myths glorifying popular goddesses did emerge, and gradually as the culture moved into a more rigid patriarchal structure, emphasising war and power, goddesses attracted increasingly less official attention. Mesopotamia, in particular, provides a good example of this process. At the beginning of the Sumerian period, Inanna and Ninhursaga, both female, were the most popular deities. Temples to Inanna appeared all over Sumer, even in the north (Syria) outside Sumer proper. Ninhursaga, a mother goddess, was a member of the Council of the Gods, which sat at Nippur, home of Enlil. Gradually, however, the myths began to favour male deities over female deities. Ninhursaga was eclipsed by the male god, Enki, who replaced her on the Council (Kramer 1961b: 41). While temples

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[70] The "lizard-headed" figurines of southern Mesopotamia are the exception to this rule. See Parrot (1960).

to Inanna/Ishtar remained popular, myths of male conquest developed, such as the Epic of Gilgamesh and the conquest of the mother goddess, Tiamat, by the male creator/conqueror, Marduk.

In Greece, once powerful female deities such Demeter, Hera, Athena, Pythia, and Hecate had to move over for their new husbands or masters. People may have continued to worship and petition the goddesses, but gods such as Zeus, Apollo, Hercules, and Poseidon became the heroes and rulers.

This kind of mythological evidence does suggest that goddesses, once powerful, became subordinate under a male-dominated, state-based system. But this historic tendency does not prove that, invariably, goddesses rather than gods were held to be supreme, prior to the development of the state.

Certainly even a cursory examination of most small-scale societies which have survived into the twentieth century does not support the theory that non-state based cultures on the whole worship supreme goddesses. Rather, as the religious systems of the Nuer, Dinka, and other African tribal groups suggest, the male principle is often still conceived as supreme. These supreme male gods, however, are generally so remote as to be ineffectual in affecting the conditions of human life, despite the belief that they initially brought all life, even the lesser gods, into being.[71] Supreme gods seem to be more concerned with wider matters than daily human life, and are conceived of as dangerous, remote, supreme powers in the sky, approachable only through intermediate powers, such as lesser sky spirits.

The lesser spirits of the sky, as well as the spirits of the earth, sit closer to human beings. They manifest in various forms, often as animals or birds, and are conceived mentally as divine or spiritual entities who inhabit the same world as human beings. The remote sky god, on the other hand, cannot

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[71] This statement begs the question, "Why should this be so?" Any answer needs an entire thesis of its own, but I offer one, which to me, addresses the frequent appearance of the archetypal family in the structure of deity groupings: father, mother, child. Twentieth-century medical science has informed us of the equal roles of male and female in the process of procreation, but to any outside observer, this is not evident. The male appears remote and uninvolved, yet instrumental through the injection of semen. The female appears passive, receptive, involved at every stage, and yet plays a non-initiating role. Hence, as models for deities, the archetypal father is transcendent and inaccessible, and the archetypal female or mother is immanent and accessible. This pattern, frequently occurring in world religions, seems to me to be based on this external observation in a way similar to the external observation that the sun revolves around the earth, in contradiction to the reality.

be confined to any worldly form. To conceive of such an omniscient being in a localised, limited form not only contradicts its nature, but brings a dangerous power too close to the earth, inviting disaster. The Nuer imagine the power and majesty of the sky god to be reflected in the sweep of the horns of oxen, but when he descends to earth in a tangible form, it is in the disastrous form of lightning.

The sky god is too inaccessible to be embodied or invoked directly; thus lesser beings become the focus for religious worship and ritual. If any spiritual being were to be embodied in a material image, it would be an accessible, sympathetic one who could mediate between the divinity of the sky and humanity on earth. Perhaps the accessibility of Buk and Abuk account for the widespread popularity of these goddesses among the Nuer and Dinka, particularly among the women. They may be lesser spirits of the air and the earth simultaneously, but unlike other spirits of the earth, they are not confined to any particular clan or lineage. In fact, their names suggest that, as two closely related goddesses, they are not confined to either the Dinka or Nuer, and that their popularity and power cross tribal boundaries. The Nuer conceive her representation as a pied crow; if the Dinka conceive her in earthly form, that form is a small grey snake.

If the Predynastic Egyptians conceived of female snake deities, such as Wadjet, their representation did not form part of their mortuary ritual, for none of the therianthropic figurines suggests a snake. The bird, of course, is the most popular of the therianthropic Predynastic attributes, and the human/bird hybrid figurine might represent a Predynastic Egyptian deity who filled for the Egyptians the same role as Buk and Abuk do for the Nuer and Dinka.

SPECIFIC PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

Arm formations

Stump arms

The figurines with stump arms have parallels on the Decorated Ware (Fig. 2.6a,b). The figures painted on the pots often stand on or near boats. Sometimes they are inside a cabin, suggesting that, like the figures with raised arms, some occupy a central position in the mortuary ritual. Occasionally,

a figure with stump arms (or no arms) stands alone on the boat, reinforcing its important position. Whether these figures are male or female often cannot be determined, for, unlike the figurines or the painted figures with raised arms, some have no waists. Their shape constitutes a head atop a peg-shaped form with shoulders.

All that can be said about this style is that it indicates some individuals or spirit(s) important to Predynastic mortuary ritual. They seem to be deliberately made without arms or with arm stumps, as there would be no need to ensure against arm breakage with a painted design. They represent entities conceived without arms, for a painting would not need to exclude the arms, with the expectation that they be "understood" to be there.

During the Dynastic period, a few armless figures appear in the tomb paintings of the Northern Sky (Fig. 6.1). These seem to be minor deities, each representing a particular constellation as it moves around the sky. All are male and nothing else is known about them. Unlike the armless/stump arm figures from the Predynastic, they do not appear prominent or important. As a symbolic feature, the stump arms seem to have nearly died out in the Predynastic, only surviving in these few seemingly insignificant stellar deities.

Raised arms

Fekri Hassan, in his analysis of the role of Predynastic female imagery in the rise of the Egyptian state, chose the female images with raised arms as his principal examples (Hassan 1992: 313-5 Figs. 1,2,3), plus the cow-head palette, the horns of which mimic the raised arms of the figurines (Fig. 6.2). Hassan went as far as to say that:

> the Naqada I Predynastic figurines are characterized
> by a beak-head shaped like that of a bird. (ibid)

This statement ignores 41.6% of the figurine complement, which has human features or no features at all (Table 2.3). It harks back to the method of earlier theorists who found it convenient to leave out the male figurines. As well, Hassan's emphasis on this particular image ignores the majority of figurines, which do not have raised arms and beaked faces. Like Griffiths, Hassan moved towards identifying this female figure with raised arms as an early image of Hathor, associated with the cow –

the raised arms representing the horns (ibid 315). Also like Griffiths, he made no mention of their provenance, preferring to interpret them outside the context of the grave.

In an early attempt to explain the meaning of these figurines, Hornblower (1929) understood them to represent the mother-goddess, and the raised arms to indicate:

> the mother's protection and care, symbolized
> by the arms with which she enfolds her child. (ibid 31)

The enfolding and protective nature of the two raised arms of the *k3*, he felt, represents a similar meaning. Like Baumgartel, Hornblower seemed to combine an acceptance of the prevailing Mother Goddess theory with actual evidence from the material culture, despite his tendency to generalise to the unrelated cultures of Spain and Paleolithic Europe, besides other Near Eastern prehistoric cultures. He understood that a figurine found in a prehistoric grave had a reason to be there:

> they ... are placed in graves to procure nourishment
> and motherly care for the lonely dead. (ibid 31)

His conclusion is purely speculative – people have many reasons for placing a figurine in a grave – but with specific regard to the Egyptian figurines, he at least made some attempt to acknowledge their possible funerary importance in a culture so focused on the afterlife:

> In the Middle Predynastic age the mother-goddess still
> protects the dead. She is now found painted on the red-
> on-buff jars, with thin waist and well-developed hips,
> still holding her arms upstretched over her head; the
> jars are of a purely funerary character and there can be
> little doubt that these paintings of women simply replace
> the earlier figures in the round and provide the same
> services for the defunct. (ibid 36)

Hornblower saw the figures with raised arms on D-ware as successors to the three-dimensional grave figurines with raised arms. No doubt they are connected in some way, for the arms are too distinctive a feature to be merely coincidental. From Hornblower's time on, most archaeologists have connected the figurines with the vase paintings through the shared motif of raised arms.

Some early Predynastic human images with raised arms, however, do not appear to be directly related to the bird-headed female figurines. Images of raised arms on Nagada 1 C-class pots are of men. Their arms have the typical inward turning hands (Figs. 3.2 a,b). Some may be in a funerary
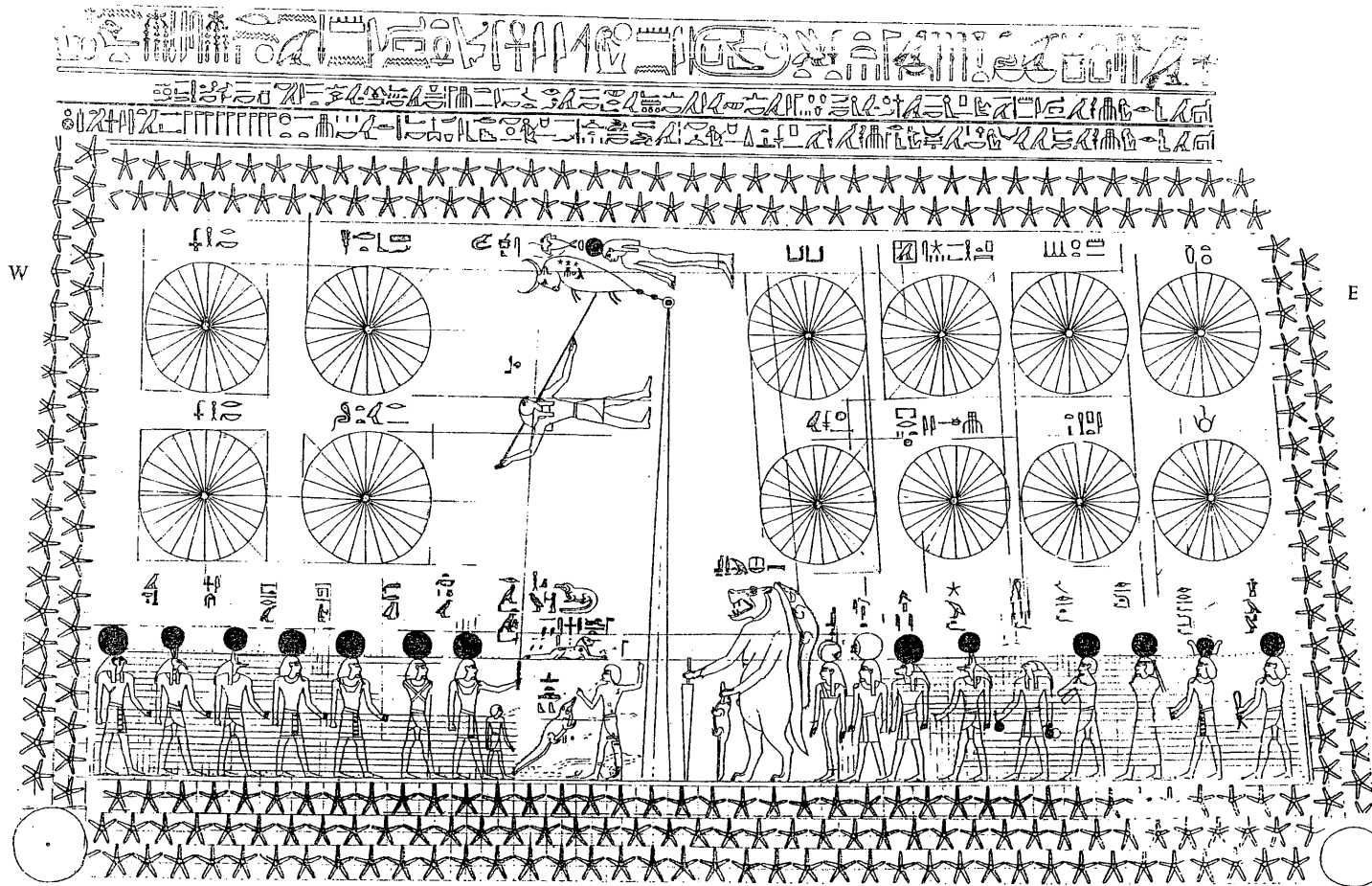
FIG 6.1 The Imperishable Stars of the Northern Sky
From the tomb of Senmut, Dyn XVIII c 1473 BCE
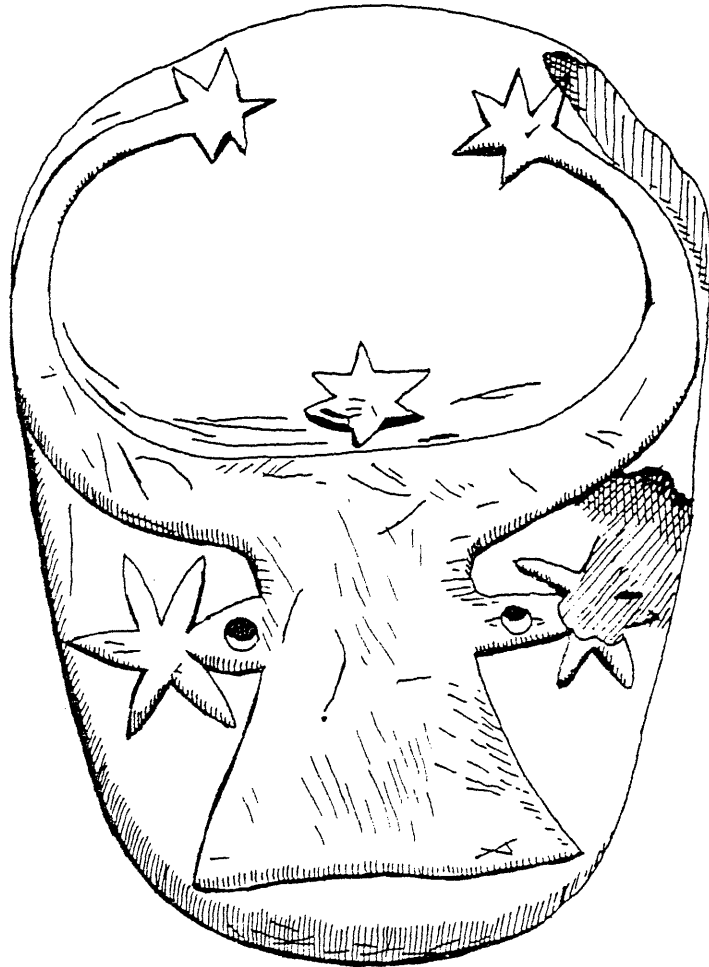
FIG. 6.2   Predynastic palette from Gerzeh, thought to represent an early form of Hathor

context as they appear to be engaged in a ritual dance, but others are under threat to their lives, as hostile spear holders point their spears at them. Perhaps a sacrifice is intended.

Early Nile dwellers also drew boat scenes on the rock walls of caves (Winkler 1938a: 24-26). Occasionally these scenes include illustrations of human figures with raised arms standing in a boat (ibid PL. XXII.1). As on the D-ware, sometimes the figures with raised arms stand outside the boat (ibid PL XIV), but in other drawings, similar figures appear without boats (ibid PL XV.2). The figures in the rock paintings, unlike the figures with raised arms painted on D-ware, are not always female; in fact, many display evidence of a penis and compare favourably with the paintings on C-ware. All have inward turning hands, and Bucrania with inturned horns also appear on the same rock walls (ibid PL XIII.3).

Winkler rejected the "dancing" interpretation. Because some of the figurines with upraised arms occur in a painting apparently about hunting, Winkler concluded that the upraised arms indicate a prayer for luck in hunting (ibid 25). The people in the boats, therefore, raise their arms up in prayer "for something else", perhaps for the dead (ibid).

The variety of situations and the inclusion of male figurines with raised arms indicate that the meaning of the upraised arms is somewhat wider than Hornblower allows.

The $k3$

As mentioned in Chapter 2, raised arms have a variety of meanings in Dynastic Egyptian art. The $k3$ is the most obvious example of a meaning attached to raised arms. It refers to one of three spiritual parts of a human being which survives bodily death, and it also means "embrace" or "clasp" (Hornblower 1929: 34). The outstretched arms of the $k3$ of the sun-god "enfold the human being in a protective embrace" after death (Hornung 1992: 175).

Henri Frankfort understood the $k3$ as a "vital force" which individuals possessed to a greater or lesser degree throughout their lives as well as after death (Frankfort 1948b: 61-65). This understanding of the $k3$ compares favourably with the Dinka concept of *wei*, or life (Lienhardt 1961: 206-7). In Dinka

belief, *wei* is a quality particularly possessed by bulls. The bull, as a figure of vitality, fertility, and strength, has more *wei* than a human being, and for the Dinka, their religious leaders, the Masters of the Fishing Spear, possess more *wei* than ordinary men and thus are treated with respect. With their excess *wei*, the Masters can sustain the lives of other people and their cattle. To a greater or lesser extent, all Dinka people possess *wei*, and it varies in intensity over the course of a lifetime. This *wei* departs at death.

The Dinka connection with *wei* and bulls parallels the Egyptian connection between the *k3* and the vitality of bulls, for the same word, *k3*, in Egyptian means "bull" as well as part of the soul. To the Egyptians, the part of the bull which contained the most spiritual value or "animating force" was the foreleg (Gordon 1996: 34), and this vitality could be transferred to the gods, priests, or deceased at the time of sacrifice. The foreleg also constitutes one of the most important parts of the sacrificed bull or ox to the Dinka (Lienhardt 1961: 24).

As discussed in Chapter 5, the foreleg was so important to the Egyptians that they placed it at the centre of the universe among the "Imperishable Stars". Very often it is depicted as a sole offering in the afterlife at the time of judgment (Fig. 4.15a), and is linked to the reanimation of the deceased at the Opening of the Mouth ceremony:

> The aim of the Opening-of-the-Mouth ceremony
> was to reanimate the deceased, and the presentation
> of the foreleg of the bull (*k3*), the symbol of vitality
> and virility, to the mouth of the deceased was an
> intended highlight of that ceremony. (Gordon 1996: 34)

The raised arms of the Predynastic images begin to take on a meaning intimated by Hornblower but not sufficiently explored by him. The connection between the vitality of cattle and the survival of the human spirit in the afterlife is implied by these images.

The importance of cattle

The cow and bull were potent symbols to the ancient Egyptians as well as to more contemporary Nile dwellers, such as the Nuer, Dinka, and Atuot peoples. The Nuer and Dinka elevated the vitality of the bull or ox to divine status, seeing the power and splendour of their highest deity reflected in the

graceful upturned sweep of a bull's horns. Young boys, and possibly girls (Baumgartel 1955: 81), danced with their arms raised above their heads in imitation of cattle horns.

The resemblance of the Predynastic raised-arm motif and the Sudanese "cow dances" was known to early archaeologists such as Elise Baumgartel, but so little attention has been given to the relationship, that Egyptologists rarely acknowledge it. J. Gwyn Griffiths, in his discussion of the raised-arm motif on D-ware, scoffs at Baumgartel's suggestion that the figures with raised arms on D-ware are performing the "cow dance" and that the boat standard mimics the arms (Fig. 2.7):

> Dr. Baumgartel, who interprets the dance (if it
> is a dance) as a 'cow-dance' ... a phrase which is
> itself not easy to interpret (does it mean 'a dance
> like that of a cow'?) Has any one seen cows
> dancing?, wants to explain the concentric curved
> circles of the boat-standards as 'the horns and arms
> of the cow-goddess'. This double interpretation
> seems to impose too great subtlety on a simple design.
> (Griffiths 1996: 14)

Had Griffiths been aware of the Sudanese dances, he could have enriched his association with Hathor the cow-goddess and the figurines with raised arms.

Transferring the energy of the bull (*k3*), particularly that contained in the foreleg, to the deceased formed one of the main aims of Dynastic mortuary ritual. Also, by eating the foreleg of the bull sacrificed during the rituals, the living could strengthen their *k3* (Gordon 1996: 35). All food contains *k3*, and the word for food, *k3w*, like the words for new beginnings – such as a pregnant woman (*bk3t*), vagina (*k3t*), or a new creation (*k3t*) (ibid 33-4) – contains the root word *k3* possibly more for its meaning than for its phonetics. All offerings of food to the deceased, whether at the funeral rituals or later to the *k3* statue, aimed to sustain the vitality of the deceased and "re-animate them in the next world" (ibid 35).

Increasingly, the evidence suggests that the raised arm motif signified to the Predynastic Egyptians continuing life after death, perhaps an early visual form of the concept of the *k3*, which was later condensed to a symbol incorporating only the raised arms.

Body position and "the Dance"

Many of the female figurines with raised arms, and those with arms in other positions, are described as either standing and leaning forward or sitting and leaning backward. Sometimes, whether a figurine looks more convincing standing or sitting is debatable, and both options are included in the description. These figurines, when displayed in museums, are sometimes positioned on a base which attempts to correct the "problem" (Fig. 6.3).

This unusual position, particularly for those figurines with raised arms, has been interpreted as a dance. As discussed earlier, the arms accompanied by the tilt of the head and the often upturned feet strongly suggest a ritual dance with precise gestures. Recently, in a revised edition of *The Egyptians*, Aldred interpreted this dance to have been inspired by the mating dance of birds (Aldred 1998: 74, Fig. 37). Perhaps the figurines which have been understood to be seated and leaning backward are really standing and bending far forward in a gravity-defying dance step.

The cow and ox dances of the Sudanese Nilotic tribes are not described in this way. Rather, the participants run with their arms sweeping up over their heads, fingers turned inwards, palms outward. They are the cows and bulls running together, the arms representing the horns. With the Nilotic tribal emphasis on the vitality of cattle, especially bulls and oxen, such a dance is intended to stimulate bull-like vitality amongst the young members of the group and ensure strength, fertility, and vitality for the participants, who constitute the future of the community.

Despite these differences, a similar "dance" appears to have been part of Predynastic mortuary ritual, as evidenced by the D-ware and figurine imagery. Possibly early notions of the survival of the human *k3* inform this dance. This does not mean that the Egyptians restricted this "dance" to the funeral. Like the more southern Nilotes, they too could have celebrated the bull-like vitality of life and youth in their own villages. Some of the bending or leaning figurines display rolls of fat, which in Dynastic times were paralleled by the rolls of fat on the fecundity figures, bending under the weight of their bounteous burdens (Fig. 2.5b).
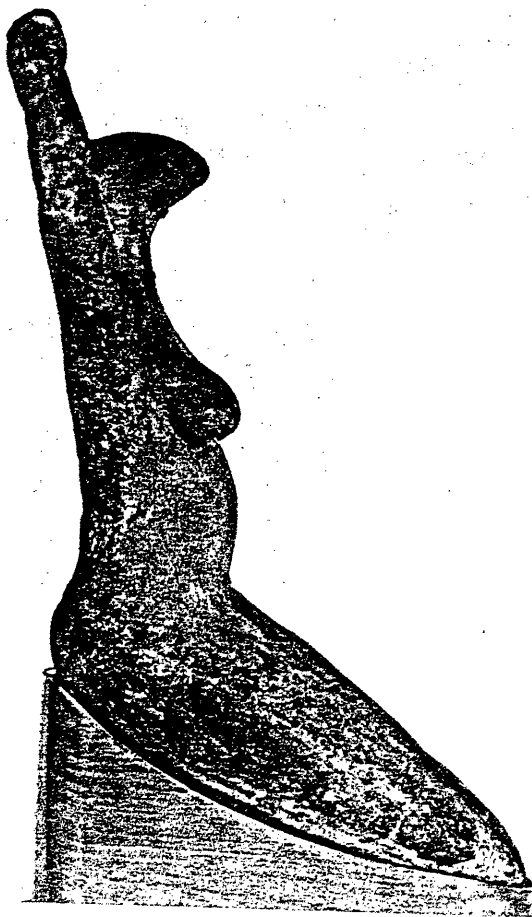
FIG. 6.3   "Leaning" female figurine with raised arms placed in a seated
position by use of a prop.

The notion of the dance occurs to Egyptologists mainly in order to explain the gestures of these figurines. The standing and leaning figurines must be leaning for some reason, the most logical that they are dancing. If we, however, put to one side the notion of a dance for a moment and do not attempt to place the figurines in either a standing or a seated position, another possibility emerges.

The figurines might not be touching the ground at all, either in a seated or a standing position. Perhaps they are intended symbolically to cover or spread over the body of the deceased. Some of the leaning figurines have turned up toes, if the figurine is considered to be standing. In a horizontal position overhead, the toes would point down towards the corpse in a manner which completes the convex curve of the figurine's body, stretching out to envelop the body of the deceased. The significance of this suggestion will become evident later in the discussions of the goddesses Nut and Isis.

DYNASTIC ICONOGRAPHY

Shabti, servant, and other Dynastic grave figurines

Before proceeding to discussions on various Dynastic goddesses, other possible interpretations need to be explored in the context of Dynastic imagery. Shabti figurines, appearing in the Middle Kingdom (Spencer 1982: 68), performed compulsory state labour for the deceased in the afterlife, such as that required for dike building, irrigation works, and state building projects. Therefore, shabtis are not likely to have been a part of Predynastic mortuary practice, prior to unification and state control.

A tiny fraction of the Predynastic figurine group, however, could be classified as servants or offering bearers, performing the same tasks for the Predynastic deceased as the tomb paintings of servants in the Dynastic period. The most obvious are the 5 ivory female figurines from grave 271 in Nagada Cemetery NWest. These figurines stand out from the majority as they bear vases on their heads. Grave 271 is uncommonly wealthy for a grave with figurines (Table 3.1), and the figurines, positioned

within the upper class cemetery of NWest, could represent servants or funeral offering bearers for this privileged member, who, unlike other members of the upper class, participated in figurine use.

Another figurine which may also represent a servant comes from the cemetery at Adaima, grave unknown. Oddly, this figurine has a beaked face, but unlike the other beak-faced figurines, is in the unusual position of holding on to a very large vessel, nearly the same size as the figure (Needler 1984: Pl.85, Fig.3). This figurine seems to be the only example of a Predynastic figure in action, performing some ordinary daily task as might be required of an ordinary person, a servant, or a slave. Its beaked face contradicts the impression given by the other beaked figurines, for the others appear to hold a more exalted position. Since no other examples have been found, interpreting such an anomaly is exceptionally difficult, and one must put it to one side until further data appears to enlighten its possible significance.

Figurine 145 from Ucko's catalogue also holds a vessel on her head. Like the Adaima figurine, she has a beaked face, but her arms are raised above her head to hold the vessel. Like many of the other unlocated figurines with raised arms and beaked faces, she appears to have a swelling stomach, possibly indicating pregnancy. The presence of the vase, however, excludes her from the "dancing female" category and cautions against any simple, over-generalised understanding of the group of figurines with beaked faces. As an offering bearer, she and the figurines from Nagada grave 271 could be involved in the nourishment of the dead in the afterlife. More examples of figurines with vases or performing domestic tasks will need to be found before a servant-like interpretation of the Predynastic figurines can be applied. Until then, these few examples suggest a roll for some of the figurines in providing nourishment to the deceased, as did the inscriptions and paintings on the walls of the Dynastic tombs.

One point needs to be kept in mind regarding images that contradict a trend. Rival groups often demonise or humiliate each other's benevolent deities. Seth is a good example of a rival deity to Horus. Seth originally took his place alongside all the major Upper Egyptian gods. An early king, Peribsen, adopted Seth rather than Horus as a symbol of his rulership. As time passed, and the

supremacy of Horus established itself, Seth became his arch-rival and enemy, and by the first millennium BCE began to symbolise evil generally (Baines 1991c: 124).

In the mythology of the Nuer and Dinka peoples, the colwic spirits suffer similar treatment. To the Dinka, the colwic spirits are dangerous and kill people who wander away from the homestead (Lienhardt 1961: 62). To the Nuer, the colwic spirits are the spirits of people who have been taken by *Kwoth Nhial* through a lightning strike and are elevated to the status of divinity. The Dinka seem to have demonised these unique and special Nuer spirits. Therefore, the iconic humiliation of a rival's special deity may be operative in the relegation of a beaked figure to servant or slave status.

A variety of other Dynastic grave figurines have attracted various interpretations. Dynastic nude female figurines found in tombs, for example that of Queen Neferu, 11th Dynasty, are thought to act as replacements for the deceased should the human body be destroyed (Ockinga 1997: 9). Other figurines in mummy form occupy model boats found in tombs, and these may represent the owner on the boat journey to Abydos to become an Osiris (ibid 10).

Stephen Quirke (1992) argued that female figurines found in Dynastic graves cannot be concubine figures because they are found in both male and female graves. Rather, he offered the interpretation that in some way they represent the female aspect of the life-giving power of Amun embodied in the living king's wife (ibid 124). Elise Baumgartel, as discussed earlier, understood the Predynastic figurines to be bound up with fertility, but as petitioners in the afterlife on behalf of the living, as were examples from Dynastic graves (Baumgartel 1950-1). Some Dynastic grave figurines have been identified as women's votive offerings to the goddess Hathor (Baines 1991c: 180-181; Pinch 1993: 199-233). Figurines of deities are found in Roman Egyptian graves, as well as in the home (Frankfurter 1998: 134). During the same period, worshippers brought figurines of priests and priestesses home from festivals (ibid 202), and magician priests used figurines in their rituals (ibid 229).

All these interpretations are possible, and demonstrate that, since no one interpretation covers all figurines in the Dynastic period, it is unlikely that any single interpretation can cover all Predynastic figurines as well.

Mourning, dancing, rejoicing, praising, blessing

Dynastic mortuary iconography depicts mourning women, performing ritual weeping for the deceased. They also raise their arms in grief, showering themselves with ashes as they lament the death (Fig. 6.5). For this reason, the Predynastic figurines lend themselves to this interpretation. But since the D-ware figures occupy such a central position, often on the main cabin of a boat, it is difficult to accept that they are mere hirelings, performing a ritual function. Rather they seem to be more central to the drama being enacted and the mythology represented.

The arm positions of the Dynastic mourning women are different from those of the Predynastic figurines. Dynastic mourners raise their arms in front of their faces; their hands sprinkle dust on top of their heads. The elbows are in front of the face rather than at the sides of the head, and the palms face down towards the head, rather than outwards.

Women performing ritual dances at funerals and feasts are also depicted on tomb walls (Fig. 6.6). Like the mourning women, they raise their arms, but not in the characteristic Predynastic sweep above their heads. Like the mourning women, they are peripheral to the main ritual, and if dancing at a Predynastic funeral feast, would not assume a prominent place in the central boat cabin.

Other raised arm gestures in Dynastic art include praising, protection, rejoicing, blessing, and adoration, and in some cases the arms of deities such as Min, Horus-Min, and Min-Amun are raised to the side rather than to the front, with palms facing out (Wilkinson 1994: 194-7). This particular pose, rather than the dancing and mourning configurations, suggests that of the Predynastic figurines, and reinforces the possibility that the figurines and figures on D-ware are divine.

Nut

Still associated with life after death are the raised arms of the sky goddess Nut, who is depicted on the inside of coffin lids in the Middle Kingdom (Fig. 6.4).

Nut, as the mother of the gods in their celestial forms, gives birth each morning to the sun-god and at night swallows him up. Drawings of Nut depict the various stages of the sun as it moves through her body and out between her legs. The celestial bodies, as embodiments of the Egyptian gods, are also daily swallowed by Nut and traverse the length of her body, to be born through her vagina (Bleeker 1973: 34).

As the night sky or the underworld, she hovers over the deceased in the coffin, covering the full length of the body with her outstretched limbs. She raises her arms high over her head, pointing her toes downward, turning herself into a canopy covering the deceased. Opening herself thus to the dead, she welcomes them into her embrace where she gives them new life in the night sky, as she does the stars and planets every day. Of the deceased king in the coffin, the *Pyramid Texts* say:

> Your mother Nut has spread herself over you
> in her name of St-pt. (*Pyr.* 638)

The *Pyramid Texts* also characterise Nut as a cow goddess of the sky, who receives the king into the afterlife:

> Nut the Great puts her hands on him, (even)
> she the long-horned, she pendulous of breast.
> She suckles this King and does not wean him,
> she takes him to <herself> at the sky ...
> (*Pyr.* 1344)
>
> It is my mother the great Wild Cow, ...
> pendulous of breasts, who has lifted me up
> to the sky ... (*Pyr.* 1566)

These passages raise the question as to whether the figurines with raised arms represent a mortuary goddess more akin to Nut than Hathor. The bird heads, however, present a problem, as Nut, although a sky goddess, does not seem to be associated with birds in any way.
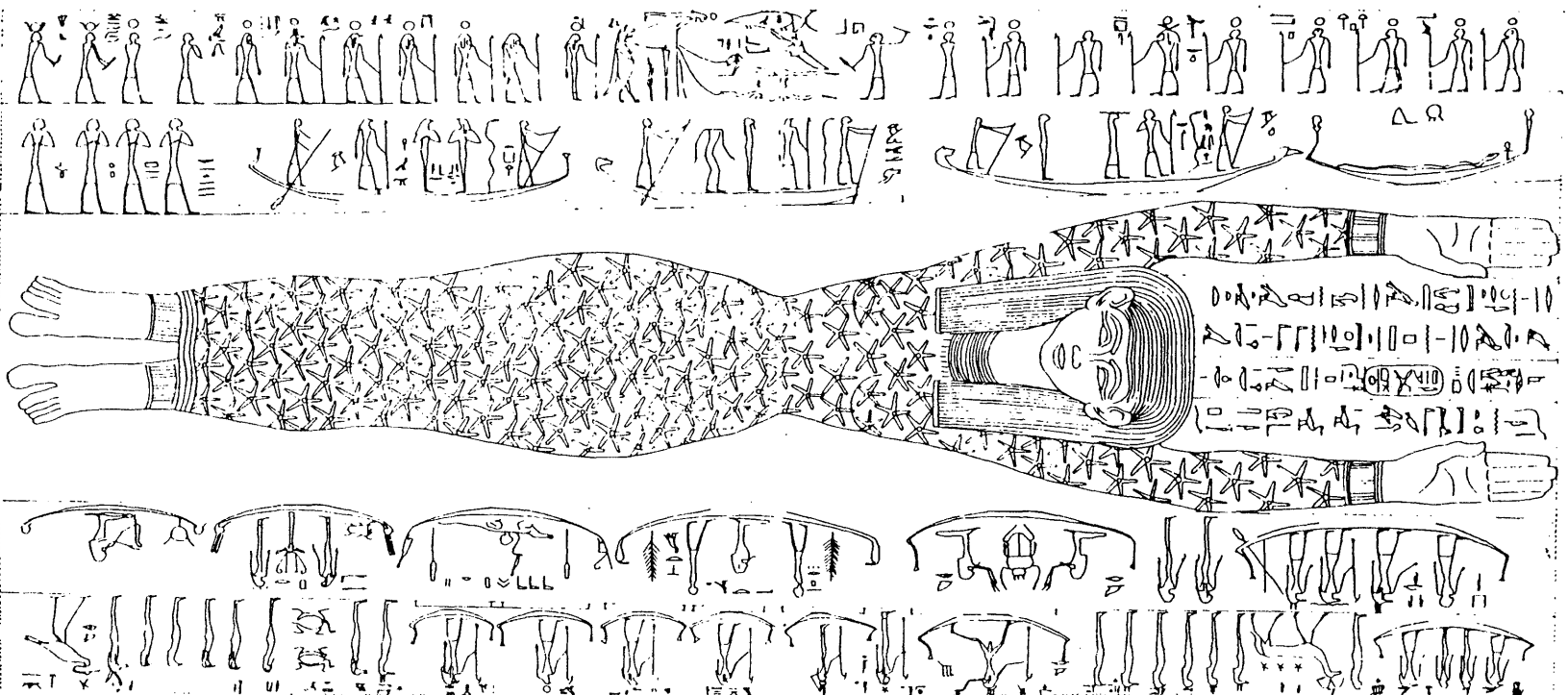
FIG. 6.4

The sky goddess Nut, painted on the inside of the sarcophagus lid of Pausennes, Dyn. XXI 999 BCE

FIG. 6.5   Mourning women from Ani's *Book of the Dead*

FIG 6.6 Dancing women from the banquet scene in the
tomb-chapel of Nebaum, Thebes c1450 BCE

Hathor

If the Predynastic figurines are understood to be early representations of Egyptian deities, probably the favoured one will always be Hathor. Hathor's iconography and identification with the cow can be traced back through the material record to early Nagada times. Amulets identified as cows' heads with horns have been found in several graves throughout the Nagada period. If the raised arms of the figurines and the images on the D-ware are understood to mimic the horns of cattle, then Hathor above all is suggested. Her association with bird imagery on the boat standards painted on D-ware places her alongside Horus, as either his mother or his wife. Amulets of Hathor continued to be used during the Dynastic period, and votive figurines of Hathor were placed in women's graves (Baines 1991c: 180; Pinch 1993: 225), offered in shrines and temples, and used in houses (Pinch 199-225).

Despite the numerous links between the female figurines and Hathor, however, the bird heads confound the connection, as they do in the consideration of Nut. Even as far back as the period prior to unification, Hathor was imagined with human face and cow's ears. The Narmer palette (Fig. 4.5) provides the best example of her early royal form. During the Dynastic period, she was most often depicted anthropomorphically, with a therianthrophic hint of the cow in the of shape her ears. Sometimes she was shown completely in animal form, as a cow, but never with any bird-like attributes.

Her position as a sky goddess (Bleeker 1973: 11) obliquely provides her only connection with birds, by placing her in the same spiritual sphere as a bird. Like the bird, she partakes of both sky and earth. As the mother of the falcon god, Horus, she assumes bird qualities. She has even been called "mistress of the sky, queen of the stars, ruler over Sirius, the great, who makes *H'pj* (the Nile) come" (ibid 27). But despite the tangential association with birds, her Dynastic iconography never suggests it.

That aside, as ruler over Sothis and impetus for the Nile, she assumes Isis' role as rejuvenator of Osiris, god of the underworld and of the inundation. This places her in the context of mortuary

beliefs, further suggesting that Hathor could be the goddess represented both on the D-ware and by the figurines. In her role as mortuary goddess, Hathor has an intimate relationship with the deceased:

> As for his (sic) fate after death, the Egyptian also
> placed his hope on Hathor. She who granted abundant
> life on earth was also expected to take care of the
> departed. The Coffin Texts say of the deceased:
> "Hathor has anointed him, she will give him life in
> the West (realm of the dead), like Re, daily." (ibid 42)

The symbolism and context of this group of figurines with raised arms so suggest Hathor that it is tempting to end the investigation at this point. But because of the prominent bird heads of so many of the figurines with raised arms, extending the Hathor interpretation to these figurines is problematic, despite her association with the sky. The figures on D-ware are more promising as Hathor, as they have round, not bird heads. Perhaps for this reason, Griffiths (1996) did not include the figurines in his discussion of Hathor and the D-ware. For the figurines, the raised arms might symbolise her connection to cattle, but the bird head contradicts Hathor's Dynastic characterisation, making it necessary to probe a little more deeply into the character of various Dynastic goddesses for clues to the meanings of the bird heads and cattle associations.

Bat

The cow and ox dances of the Nuer, Dinka, and Atuot provide tangible evidence that the raised arms of the figurines and the illustrated figures on D-ware mimic the upward reaching horns of cattle. For this reason, as explored, Hathor comes to mind most readily, for since the 4th Dynasty (Fischer 1962: 12), her classic crown comprised the sun placed between two graceful, upwardly curving bovine horns, and it could be that the round heads of the figurines on D-ware represent the sun. Hathor's horns, however, curve outward – a minor point perhaps, but one that has significance when seen in the context of a crown of another cow-goddess in which the ends of the horns curl inward.

Bat, the cow-goddess of the Upper Egyptian nome 7, is presumed to be older than Hathor (ibid 7), and occupied the nome adjacent to Hathor's main home, Dendera. Hathor eventually eclipsed Bat

everywhere, except in Bat's home nome, by absorbing her identity. For contemporary Egyptologists, Hathor's appropriation of Bat creates the impression that the emblem of a human head with cow's ears crowned by two inwardly curling horns is an emblem of Hathor as well.

According to Fischer, Bat is represented during the Predynastic by the Gerzeh palette (Fig. 6.2), on which is carved in bas-relief a cow's head pointed out by five stars (ibid 11) positioned at the tips of each horn and ear, and one on top of the centre of the head. This image is usually accepted as an early representation of Hathor. A similar image can be found on a First Dynasty diorite vessel from Hierakonpolis.[72] This latter image, however is accompanied by a relief carving of a jabiru stork, the phonetic name of which is *b3*, pronounced "ba" as in ba-bird. As the name Bat (*B3.t*) is the feminine form of the word *b3* (ibid 7), Fischer believed that the stork signifies that the goddess image is of Bat rather than Hathor.

A number of related symbolic meanings conflate when imagining Bat to be the goddess represented in the Predynastic figures with raised arms. The most obvious comparison is the inward curve of the tips of the horns and the deliberate inward curve of the fingers of the figurines and D-ware images. The cow-headed amulets display the same inward but downward curve of the horns.[73] As far back as the Nagada I record, the cross-lined ware clearly indicates an inward curve to the hands (Figs. 3.2 a,b). The horns on the Narmer "Hathor" heads turn inward as well (Fig. 4.5), and Fisher's observations on Bat prompted even Hornung to speculate whether these heads are of Bat rather than Hathor (Hornung 1983: 103).

Outwardly curving arms or horns do not seem to be part of Predynastic symbolism except as suggested by one of the boat standards painted on the D-ware (Fig. 2.7). This particular emblem has been understood to incorporate the outwardly curving Hathor horns with the falcon represented between them (Griffiths 1996: 15), or a falcon crouching on a crescent moon (Baumgartel 1955: 47). Hornblower included in his discussion of the Predynastic figurines an illustration of one with raised,

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[72] See *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 44 Plate IX

[73] Photographs of these amulets appear in Petrie (1920: Plate IX, Figs. 4,5); and Baumgartel (1960: Plate VI, Fig. 2).

inwardly turned arms but outwardly turned fingers (Hornblower 1929: PL. VI, Fig. 4).[74] This hand style contrasts all other illustrations I have seen of this figurine type, and since Ucko did not record any female figurines having raised arms with fingers turned outward, this example is probably a forgery.

The second symbolic association favouring Bat above Hathor is implied by her name. The *b3* to the Dynastic Egyptians meant the personal "soul". The *k3* signifies the more impersonal life-producing element present in all living things (Gordon 1996: 31), although it also means the personality (Gardiner 1957: 172-3). The *k3* leaves the body after death to reside in the underworld. The *b3* survives death and leaves the body, but only during the day. At night it must return to the tomb, where it receives the sustenance necessary to maintain its existence. The *k3* also requires nourishment and it inhabits a representative statue of the deceased, ideally perpetually fed by the offerings of the living. In their need for nourishment and their individual survival after death, the *k3* and *b3* appear related and contrast the *akh*, the spirit, which also survives the death of the body, but goes to the stars and is free from earthly ties. These three separate aspects of the soul do share some traits, but only the *b3* has an earthly image – either a human-headed bird, which flies in and out of the tomb at will, or a stork-like bird (Gardiner 1957: 173).

In the raised arms and the bird-like heads of the figurines, the combination of the *k3* and *b3* are brought together to some degree. With the symbolic confluence of two concepts of soul in association with the spiritual essence of cattle, Bat more so than Hathor becomes a plausible candidate for the identity of this component of the figurine collection.

Although Hathor comes to absorb Bat into herself, during the Predynastic they could have been distinct deities, each with her own community of worshippers and each with her own spiritual sphere of influence. Hathor came to be associated with royal power, while Bat retired to her own home territory, falling into obscurity outside her own nome. Hathor's name, House of Horus, and her hieroglyph, incorporating a falcon enclosed in a building, demonstrate her relationship with the falcon god, who came to be the emblematic deity of rulership. Unlike Bat, she does not combine the bird

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[74] British Museum 53875, not catalogued by Ucko (1968).

and cow imagery in her iconography in a way which alludes to eschatological concepts implied by the figurines and painted figures. But before reaching a conclusion on Hathor or Bat, this discussion explores the funerary nature of other deities in order to reveal more complex possibilities, as proposed in the final conclusion.

Isis and Nephthys

Funerary goddesses

Isis and Nephthys, unlike Hathor, manifest in bird form, like the Nuer twins, *Kwoth cuekni*. Both are kites – hawk-like predatory birds from the falconidae family, with a high pitched keening cry. The kite, rather than a water bird or a seed eater, is implied by the sharp hooked beak of the bird-headed figurines.

Together, Isis and Nephyths perform the official mourning at the king's death, and appear in the *Pyramid Texts* as the mourning birds. Perhaps the wail of the kite evoked to the ancient Egyptians a cry of grief:

> Thus said Isis and Nephthys: the 'screecher'
> comes, the kite comes, namely Isis and Nephthys;
> they have come seeking their brother Osiris, seeking
> their brother the King. ... Weep for your brother, O
> Isis; weep for your brother, O Nephthys... (*Pyr.* 1280-81)

As kites, both Isis and Nephthys also mourn Osiris' death, taking their positions before and behind the coffin (Bleeker 1963a: 191). With their wings, they shade Osiris from the searing sun; they fan a cool breeze to resuscitate him (ibid 193); and they bring about his resurrection, rather than passively mourn (ibid 219):

> Nephthys has cleaned you, even your two great
> and mighty sisters who gathered your flesh together,
> who raised up your members and who caused your
> eyes to appear in your head. (*Pyr.* 1981)

Surprisingly, the Predynastic figurines have not suggested to Egyptologists the mourning birds of Isis and Nephthys.

Isis, wife of Osiris

Isis, as a funerary goddess and wife of Osiris, is often depicted with wings. Sometimes these wings protect the child Horus; at other times, they embrace the coffin of the deceased in a protective gesture, as on Tutankhamen's coffin. Frequently Isis is shown as a bird hovering over Osiris' phallus in the embalming chamber. From this union of the living Isis and the dead Osiris comes Horus, the new divinity on earth, the god-king (*Pyr.* 632-33). Osiris, as the dead king, passes on his earthly power to Horus through the intervention of Isis, as a bird, in the process of death. The king is the soul and life of Egypt, and Isis turns death into life through giving birth to Horus, the king on the throne.

Isis, as the active but dutiful wife, makes it possible for Osiris to exert his power as king of the Underworld. Unfit for life on earth, Osiris retires there as the judge of the dead and symbol of the immortal soul. Through the mediating role of Isis, deceased kings go to Osiris; they become Osiris and rule the underworld in death as they have ruled the world in life. When official religion recognised the same fate for commoners as for royalty after death, women became Hathor (Bleeker 1973: 45) while men became Osiris. Prior to that, in the minds of the élite at least, only the king enjoyed such a relationship with the ruler of the dead.

For Osiris, Isis serves as the animating principle. Without her he has no power, and new life (Horus) cannot be born into the world. As Orion, Osiris appears before Isis in the seasonal movement of stars across the sky. While his appearance signified imminent new life in the coming of the inundation, not until Sothis (Isis) appears can the Nile return. While Osiris symbolises the life-bringing principle of the Nile water, Isis symbolises the power which enables Osiris to bring the Nile to life. Once the Nile inundation begins, new life is possible, but only through the co-operation of Isis and Osiris.

Proto-Isis

The spirit of Isis is recognisable in those figurines which raise their arms and bend in a way which suggests hovering. In her bird form Isis hovers over the body as a hawk hovers over the land, her feet turned up like the balancing tail of the hovering bird. In just this position, she hovers over Osiris' body, impregnating herself.

The arms of the figurines sweep up and behind, wing-like, over the head. Perhaps the Predynastic Egyptians recognised the visual similarity between the upward curve of cattle horns and the upward thrust of a bird's wings, inspiring them to detail carefully the fingers of some figurines to resemble feathers (Fig. 2.4).

The bird-headed Khizam figurines, in particular, bring Isis' role to mind. With upturned feet and upswept arms, they hover like a bird – like Isis over Osiris, their pregnant stomachs representing the new life that comes after death. Like Isis, they take from the deceased the germ of life, bringing about its new birth as a *k3* in the afterlife.

The invisible underworld deity, Osiris, and the immanent, accessible female deity, Isis, possibly had their counterparts in the Predynastic mortuary beliefs. Like Orion, the deceased departed for a period of time, only to be reborn immortal in the underworld. This rebirth would be facilitated by a goddess who mediates between the remote sky and the earth. Bringing new life in the afterworld to the dead, she also brings new life to the living as she heralds the inundation. Both new lives find a visible metaphor in the movement of Orion through the seasons during his 70 days in the Duat and his 290 days of fluctuating periods of visibility on earth in the night sky.

Such an intimate analogous spiritual connection between the agricultural and human life cycles possibly formed the core of religious belief for the Predynastic farmers. Their lives depended on the fluctuations of the Nile, and the new life appearing shortly after its wake indicated that they, subject to the same laws governing the waxing and waning of the living world, would also find new life following a period of fallow after death. The figurines placed in a few of their graves display attributes suggesting the power which transmutes death into this new life. While only those with precise symbolism can be connected to Dynastic beliefs, enough symbols exist to make at least a convincing connection.

That the figurines come from the graves of commoners, both rich and the less well-off, suggests a folk practice based on popular beliefs rather than a new emerging official élite mortuary culture. A brief examination of some of the Dynastic myths surrounding Isis demonstrates that she, despite

being a throne goddess, has a "common touch"; in fact, her myths speak more directly to the ordinary person than to the ruling class she ostensibly served.

Dynastic Isis, the saviour and protector of commoners

So much of the mythology surrounding Isis places her foremost as a popular deity of the common people. Although her official role primarily was to legitimise the inheritance of power on the throne, her widespread appeal as a goddess for all people suggests she was not the invention of the early priesthood.

Isis was renowned for healing snake and scorpion bites, both lethal menaces to the agricultural workers who spent long hours amongst the dangerous marshes. The aristocracy would be far removed from such labours. Through the image of her as a mother of a young child, she appeals to all mothers, setting an example by curing her own son of bites, scalds, burns, and other afflictions, only too well-known to those most exposed to such dangers. As a devoted mother and wife, who protects and saves her husband and son from misfortune and death, she appeals to every mother and wife in the state, not just to the aristocracy.[75]

According to C.J. Bleeker, a saviour is one who bridges the cleft between the human and remote divine worlds (Bleeker 1963b: 2). Through the connection with humanity, the saviour exhibits human feelings and consoles humanity in its suffering, and at the same time, offers victory over death. At times the saviour even takes part in human suffering. Bleeker thought that Isis conforms so well to this definition, that, although the Egyptians did not "officially" think of her in these terms (ibid 1), her actions connect her to the suffering of humanity rather than to the aloofness of the other gods, such as Ptah, Amun, Re, and Thoth, with their more abstract, impersonal concerns.

Like Buk and Abuk, Isis is the one to petition for assistance, protection and consolation. She even has such power over the higher gods that she can threaten the life and well-being of even the highest god of all, Re. By manipulating Re so that he is bitten by a snake, she extracts his name by

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[75] For a succinct summary of the myths of Isis, see Anthes (1961: 68-85) and Watterson (1984: 89-131).

promising in turn to cure him of the fatal bite (Anthes 1961: 77). The only deity to know Re's real name is Isis, and possessing that knowledge gives her control over him, implying that she is even more powerful than he. With such power over the highest authority, Isis can be petitioned in all evil, misfortune, and life-threatening situations, for, "it was assumed that Isis knew every spell which could avert danger and make life prevail over death" (Bleeker 1963b: 5).

Her appeal to ordinary people and the expansion of her jurisdiction beyond the narrow concerns of the aristocracy ensured her popularity and survival beyond the Egyptian world. She became the focus of a major mystery religion in the Graeco-Roman world, and in this wider Mediterranean context, her power promised to ordinary mortals salvation from the "hostile cosmic forces that produce in individuals feelings of helplessness and powerlessness" (Corrington 1989: 397):

> Thus it is the popular sentiment, which regarded
> Isis as the maternal 'savior in all perils of life' ... which
> furnishes the framework for the Isaic religion of the
> Greco-Roman world. (ibid 403)

Perhaps Isis' most revealing association with commoners occurs when she outwits Seth in his appropriation of Horus' right to the throne (Watterson 1984: 95). Disguising herself as an old woman, she pleads with Seth for the rights of her son in a dispute over the herd of cattle inherited from his father. Seth rules in favour of the son's right to his inheritance, not realising that the issue is a metaphor for the right of Horus to rule his people. Apparently the word Isis uses for "cattle" also means "people".

The story is not told through a metaphor from the lives of royalty. Rather, it is issue still appropriate in today's cattle herding Nilotic societies. A young man's position in the Nuer world is based on the size of the herd of cattle inherited from his father. Without a cattle herd, a young man cannot marry, for he does not possess sufficient cattle to offer as a bride-price. Families with marriageable daughters will try to confine their daughters' relationships to young men with an adequate inheritance, making it difficult for disinherited boys to attract wives and attain position (Evans-Pritchard 1951: 53).

During the Predynastic period, cattle were vital to the well-being of individual families and tribes. The distinct possibility that Predynastic people performed the ox and cow dances demonstrates the

spiritual and material importance of cattle, and any challenge to an inheritance of cattle would create a major crisis. In the agricultural communities of Dynastic Egypt, cattle herds would have still been an important indication of wealth and position.

The story of the dispute over Horus' inherited power over his people (cattle) has the mark of a story older even than the beginning of the institution of kingship. In the same way, many of the stories about Isis suggest Predynastic myths about the powers of protective goddess(es); their mediation between the remote sky gods and humanity; and their use of divine powers (magic) to ameliorate the inevitable misfortunes of a life subject to unexplained illnesses, fatal scorpion and snake bites, and the life-threatening dangers of pregnancy and childbirth.

Within Egypt, the rulers and priests did not provide Isis with a main temple and accompanying official cult. This seems odd treatment for a goddess intimately associated with kingship and divine power. Rather, chapels dedicated to her accompanied major temples, for example at the Temple of Sety 1 at Abydos and the temple of Augustus at Dendera (Hart 1986: 106). Not until the end of Egyptian rule was a great temple built for her (in the Delta by Nectanebo II, 360-343 BCE). Despite her role as throne goddess, her real patronage seems to have come from the ordinary Egyptians, who would have sought her help in these various places of worship throughout the country. Unlike other major deities, she was not served by a retinue of priests and officials in her own temple, and, like the Predynastic figurines, her ministrations favoured the ordinary people rather than the rich and powerful. Although her iconography establishes her as the personification of the throne, hymns dedicated to her make no mention of this role and instead focus on her abilities to heal and overcome obstacles (Quirke 1992: 67).

Hathor's appeal is quite different. Her association with royalty and the official cult eventually led to the institutionalisation of her marriage with Horus, accompanied by a major annual festival performance of the marriage after her public and ceremonious journey from her temple at Dendera to the Horus temple at Edfu (Bleeker 1973: 63). Conversely, Isis' marriage to Osiris has a tragic feel, with its emphasis on the more serious subjects of death and resurrection. Also, although Hathor may share some traits with Isis, such as protector of pregnant women and childbirth, Hathor's concerns are

more for the fun of life than for its problems. Despite her wrathful alter ego, Sekmet, she is the goddess of love, intoxication, music, and the bringer of happiness (Watterson 1984: 133; Bleeker 1973: 104-5). One cannot imagine Isis, as saviour, protector, and royal mother, lifting up her skirts to expose herself for the amusement of Re, as Hathor did (Bleeker 1973: 39). Rather, when she does lift up her skirts, she intends to stimulate maternal fertility and marital happiness (Frankfurter 1998: 104), not to amuse an ageing, cranky god. Like Sumer's Inanna, Hathor is the divine "good time girl", perhaps prone to bad temper and pique, while Isis, like Ninhursaga, performs the more sober and responsible roles of divine mother and protector.

Isis' nature takes her beyond the historical confines of the Dynastic royal house and into the wider world of the Predynastic agricultural community. Here, as an agent of salvation from death and from life's misfortunes, conceivably, her popularity would have spread over a large portion Predynastic world. Her ability to inspire loyalty and trust would eventually ensure her a powerful position within the divine hierarchy of the aristocracy, who chose their ruling deities very astutely for many reasons, including securing support from the wider community.

CONCLUSIONS

Male figurines

This study, like so many before it, is biased towards the female figurines. Shelley Smith (1984) in her examination of the gender implications of material remains in the Predynastic observed that the female figurines tend to be more unusual and unnatural than the males (ibid 106-7). The male figurines tend to display human faces with detailed features, while the females have large round eyes and beaked noses. The bodies of the female figurines are also more likely to be exaggerated than the males. She concluded that:

> The unrealistic, exaggerated, and sometimes
> surreal depictions of females lend support to
> the notion of their possessing qualities beyond
> the normal range. (ibid 107)

In short, the female figurines are much more interesting than the males. For this study of the possible religious implications of the figurines, the females also possess more characteristics which could be interpreted as symbolic. With the exception of the few male figurines with beaked faces and with raised arms, symbolic attributes are generally not present on the males. The stump arms do connect them tenuously with the "armless" male stellar deities, but without more specific iconic clues, with few exceptions, the males are too difficult to interpret. They may represent purely anthropomorphic deities, but little connection can be made between them and any historic deity. Elise Baumgartel (1960: 71) also found the male figurines difficult to interpret, giving the inadequacy of the excavation reports as the reason.

Shelley Smith also seemed reluctant to interpret the male figurines. Their more accurate anatomy, she felt, "grounded [them] in the realm of normal human experience", as opposed to the female figurines, whose abnormal appearance suggested to her supranormal, or perhaps, supernatural experience (Smith 1984: 107).

The recognition of the significant presence of male figurines in prehistoric cultures as a whole threatened the prevailing theory about the supremacy of a mother goddess, and attempts have even been made to undermine the importance of the male figurines. The three "exceptional" male examples from Predynastic Egypt, which share in some of the symbolic attributes of the female figurines, such as beaked faces and raised arms (Table 2.7), have been dismissed as an indication of the futile attempt of the authoritative male to supplant "the mother, the first known source of life", whose position was "gained countless centuries before" (Hornblower 1929: 36-7). Hornblower did not take into account that the earliest representations of raised arms occur on Nagada I Cross-lined ware, with the males possessing the raised arms (Figs 3.2 a,b). He also seemed to be unaware of the rock drawings, which included male images with raised arms.

The raised arms of these few male figurines also compare favourably with the Dinka gesture in imitation of an ox's horns (Fig. 4.3). Like the k3 hieroglyph, the arms bend at right angles at the elbows and are not raised up above the head as in the ox or cow dance. All three figurines have beaked-faces, as do seven other male figurines, and three have non-human pinched faces. Despite

Smith's conclusions and first glance impressions, it seems that a substantial portion of the male figurines also share in the "surreal" world, and are "beyond normal", although the largest single category (14 figurines with human faces, Table 2.7) conforms to Smith's description.

Several male falcon-headed deities are known from the Dynastic period, the most familiar is, of course, Horus. Male falcon-headed deities appear in the illustrations of the Northern Sky and the Decans, one performing the sacrifice at the centre of the Imperishable Stars (Fig. 4.14). None seems to be associated with the Underworld or the afterlife, although an extremely slim association with the *b3* bird may be possible. The larger number and specific body positions of the female figurines with these characteristics, plus the D-ware imagery, make it easier to hypothesise an interpretation for them, looking back from the historic mythology.

Few male figurines have been found, and few are represented in any specific style. The 3 with the provocative arm and beak style compete for first place with the 3 ivory males with penis sheaths. One can only venture that the former male figurines demonstrate a belief and/or ritual which, like the cow and ox dances of the Sudanese people, are shared by both male and female elements, spiritual and/or human. The latter ivory figurines provide no clues for interpretation other than that they seem to outlast the others and similar ones appear as votive offerings in the early temple at Hierakonpolis.

Conventional interpretations which have been applied to male grave figurines, such as concubine substitutes, twin substitutes, and initiation figurines, could be applied to the remainder of this group. All would require a specific sex correlation with the deceased, and the scant limited data, unfortunately, cannot suggest any trends. Only 7 graves with figurines (12 in total) have been identified as containing male skeletons, and out of the 12 figurines, 8 can be sexed: 6 females and 2 males (Table 3.6). The six female figurines seem to rule out a generalisation about initiation or twin figurines, but can hardly be considered numerous enough to suggest concubine figures.

The sex of some of the pin figurines is ambiguous, for they combine the female characteristic of a small waist with the conventionally male characteristic of a beard. But as discussed in Chapter 2, this ambiguity may be deliberate. The fecundity figures of the Dynastic period display male and female

characteristics, as does the Nile god Hapy. Hapy and his similar counterparts are considered male and yet they have large, pendulous breasts, much like those of Taweret (Figs. 2.5 a&b). They also have distended stomachs, which spill over their low belts. The breasts and stomachs alone, if displayed on a Predynastic figurine, would classify these figures as female. The only really "male" characteristic they possess is a beard, perhaps more a symbol of their divinity than their masculinity.

The masculinity of these Dynastic figures is indicated more by the heavy body type. With the exception of Taweret, female deities do not display distended stomachs and, unlike the collection of Khizam figurines, are not represented as pregnant. Female Dynastic images are lithe and petite, undoubtedly portraying an ideal rather than a reality. Hapy and the fecundity figures betray their masculinity in their heaviness and rolls of fat, suggestive of plenty.

The beards, therefore, on the Predynastic pin figurines may indicate divinity rather than masculinity, turning the pin figurines into goddesses, in the same way that Queen Hatshepsut deified herself through her bearded images. Conversely, the beards could contribute to a combination of masculine and feminine traits associated with abundance. The figurines may be neither male nor female, or like the Dynastic figures, they may be a specific sex, but only recognisable to a Predynastic Egyptian.

Female figurines

Again, the female figurines with beaked faces and raised arms attract most of the attention. They possess the greatest number of interpretable symbols and thus constitute the focus of this interpretation. The remaining female figurines can be interpreted in a number of ways, but most, with the exception of those with the stump arm motif, remain unconnected to Egyptian mythology and Dynastic iconography. However, conventional definitions for the female figurines, such dolls, pregnancy aids, twin substitutes, spouse substitutes, and initiation figurines can be challenged on a number of points.

Only 13 skeletons with accompanying figurines can be identified as female (Table 3.6). Two of these graves contain male figurines, 6 contain female figurines, and 5 contain figurines of undetermined

sex. A generalisation about spouse substitutes would only be possible in a world in which same sex relationships were acceptable, and this situation is not supported by ethnographic parallels. Small-scale societies are generally very conservative when it comes to marriage and partnerships. Initiation figurines, which require same sex correlation between the skeleton and the figurine, could be the case for some of these figurines, but the 2 opposite sex correlations undermine any generalisation. These figurines might be childhood dolls or pregnancy aids taken to the grave, but the fact the figurines are found only in graves and not in settlements weakens any interpretation which places the figurines in a domestic environment prior to the death of the owner.

Possibly these female figurines also represent some sort of protective spirits, perhaps different from those represented by the more symbolically rich figurines from Khizam and Ma'ameriah. Like the Nuer and Dinka, the Predynastic Egyptians probably had a range of deities, which varied from group to group. Hippopotamus amulets found as early as the Badarian period imply that a version of Taweret existed from the earliest Predynastic times. The cow-head amulets and images from the Predynastic and Early Dynastic point to an early form of Hathor and/or Bat. Carefully interred animals and other animal and bird images also suggest specific Dynastic deities. Originating from such a heterogeneous collection of migrants, the early Egyptian religion would have contained a large number of disparate beliefs and accompanying deities.

An Isis/Osiris-like myth might have operated in some communities, but not all. Varying, but similar beliefs in the afterlife and the deities involved would have been distributed throughout the Predynastic Upper Egyptian world. This situation is far more likely than the existence of a uniform belief system with standardised spirits and rituals, for it displays the untidy nature of fact, rather than the orderly nature of fiction.

Of the Dynastic deities, Isis possesses the greatest number of qualities which can confidently be assigned to the symbolically rich Predynastic figurines. She is occasionally associated with a cow when she adopts Hathor's crown, and the implications for equating the vitality of the $k3$ with the vitality of cattle, and the suggestion of the $k3$ in the raised arms comply with Isis' role as instigator of fecundity, both in the Underworld and the agricultural world. The hawk symbolism, the hovering body

form, and the implications of pregnancy in the afterlife bring this group of figurines in line with Isis' role in her partnership with Osiris.

Besides Isis, Hathor and Bat remain candidates, despite the more limited symbolic similarities. It might, however, not be necessary to chose one above the other. Keeping in mind the Egyptian tendency to conflate or syncretise deities, as in the absorption of Bat by Hathor very early in Egyptian history, Hathor's tendency to share Isis' roles and attributes might not be only a Dynastic phenomenon. Hathor and Isis share many qualities and responsibilities regarding Horus, the afterlife, and the Nile. Later Isis and Hathor become nearly identical. As Fischer suggests for Bat and Hathor, "a common substratum of ideas ... lent the two goddesses a somewhat similar character" (Fischer 1962: 12).

Possibly, a "common substratum of ideas" about the afterlife existed among the Predynastic communities of Upper Egypt. Each community seemed to share similar beliefs, expressing them in similar rituals and offerings of grave goods dispersed through trade and communication between groups. Despite this uniform appearance, conceptions of spiritual guiding forces on the afterlife journey probably varied in expression across Upper Egypt, in the way that Abuk and Buk differ in name and form, but come from a "common substratum of ideas" drawn on by both Dinka and Nuer people. This wider interpretation could also extend to the less symbolic female figurines, whose meanings might have been similar despite the diversity of form. Support for this supposition comes from Dynastic iconography, which demonstrates variations in iconography, especially for Isis, who appears with bird or throne indications, and sometimes without either.

Further along these lines, Isis and Hathor could share a common origin predating their royal identities. Both have royal responsibilities, and Isis' main concern is for the stability of the throne. Her main task is to provide the royal heir and protect him from harm. Her divinity and relationship with the god of the underworld, father of Horus, ensures that her offspring will be the divine spiritual child of the former king, who has become an Osiris in the afterlife. Considering Hathor's very early position in

legitimating royal power, as demonstrated especially by the Narmer palette,[76] it is odd that she did not assume these responsibilities. Hathor, however, still takes her name from her royal position. As the "House of Horus", her name links her identity to the ruling power of the falcon over the throne. Her hieroglyph, a house enclosing a falcon, places her name firmly amidst early Dynastic rather than Predynastic interests.

These concepts focusing on royalty would have no counterpart in a loose confederacy of independent Predynastic village communities, linked by trade and lineage rather than by state authority. Isis' other responsibilities and powers for the vivification of the Nile, rejuvenation of the soul, rebirth in the afterlife, and general fecundity and vitality, as expressed most succinctly in the concept of the *k3*, are not restricted to royalty. These would be the qualities of any Predynastic Isis, who would not be known by that name. Hathor's principal concern with vitality and fecundity as a cow-goddess are also not contained in her Dynastic name.

While their royal, Dynastic roles separate them, Hathor and Isis may have emerged from a single Predynastic goddess of fecundity and rejuvenation. With the evolution of the state and the need for a legitimising spiritual power, conceivably, Isis split off from an original deity combining the powers of both goddesses. To her former position in the mythology surrounding death and rebirth, would be added new responsibilities relevant to the new statehood, and a new name, pertinent to her new position, would be assigned – *3st* – meaning "seat" or "throne". Instead of a pair of raised horns, her crown became a throne. Meanwhile, Hathor/Bat retained the horned crown and the cow insignia, and Hathor unofficially retained her previous reputation as mother of Horus, mistress of the stars, protector of the dead, stimulator of the Nile, and ruler over Sirius – all positions more readily understood to belong to Isis.

Perhaps a single deity comprised all these qualities under the feminine name of the *k3*. Like *b3.t* (Bat), such a goddess may have been called *k3.t*. Budge's dictionary, though out-of-date, aligns the concepts of the *k3* and *b3*, stating that the *k3* is "the vital strength of the Ba-soul" (Budge 1978: 782-3). His entry for "Ka-t" (feminine form of *k3*) defines it as a cow, and the plural as "the two cows Isis

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[76] The possibility must be kept in mind that Bat rather than Hathor may be represented on this palette.

and Nephthys" (ibid 785). The cow, bull, *k3*, and *b3* join several Dynastic goddess into one essential spiritual unity, and this unity is expressed by the combination of symbols displayed by the figurines from Khizam and Ma'ameriah. As the feminine form of the *k3* (meaning both bull and vital essence), the Predynastic figurines with raised arms, including those without beaked faces, can be interpreted as Isis and Nephthys as two cow goddesses, along with Nut, Hathor, and Bat, their arms over their heads expressing their link with the divine essence of cattle. The beaked forms more closely suggest Isis and Nephthys as mourning birds, rescuing and resuscitating the dead, effecting their rebirth as *k3*(s) and *b3*(s).

On the other hand, the shared aspects of Nut, Bat, Isis, and Hathor may represent overlapping attributes of several Predynastic goddesses who were coalesced into a few clearly different goddesses by the scribes and priests of the early Dynastic period. These early officials were skilled at categorisation and classification, for they ordered a chaotic mixture of deities and creation myths into logical, or at least comprehensible, systems. Although they still ended up with two divine lineages - the Ogdoad and the Ennead - three major creation myths, and three major supreme deities, the pantheon is manageable considering the possible number of separate religious systems released from a collection of disparate communities into a unified culture. The distinctly separate goddesses of Nut, Isis, Hathor, and Bat could be the result of official rationalisation of the spirit world and an attempt to re-assign independent responsibilities to various Predynastic goddesses who shared common attributes.

To sum up

Making sense out of the tangle of Dynastic Egyptian deities is difficult enough without trying to understand how this historic religion developed from the beliefs and practices of its predecessors in the prehistoric period. Even the Egyptian attempts to order the cosmos resulted in numerous contradictory beliefs and systems.

To place the figurines within the context of Egyptian belief brings further difficulties, for the changes, rivalries, and accommodations between the disparate communities of the Predynastic can only be

surmised from the guesses implied by the hints provided by a material culture which is now 6000 years old. Within the changing political, economic, and religious climate of the Predynastic, a small group of figurines, as disparate as the communities who originally formed the culture, demonstrate at least some shared notions of mortuary ritual and perhaps an afterlife. Only those figurines which can in some way be linked to the subsequent historic mortuary practice and beliefs provide any clues to the meanings of the Predynastic figurines.

Not all figurines provide such clues. The favoured Badarian ivory remains a sole representative of her kind and reveals little about her meaning other than she is female and probably associated with mortuary beliefs. The well-carved male ivory, despite the survival of his kind into the early Predynastic, remains something of a blank. He, too, is associated with the grave, but like his Badarian sister, nothing more can really be said about him.

Other figurines are less ambivalent. The hawk-like bird-heads and stump arms can be traced to Dynastic tendencies. Even in the Predynastic the members of the falconidae family seemed to suggest important spiritual power. The stump arms, popular on Predynastic figurines and pot images, however, still remain a mystery despite the appearance of "armless" minor deities guiding some of the stars. Nothing is known about them which could be applied to the Predynastic images, other than the continuity of arm style and the association with minor deities.

The most promising figurines, of course, are those with raised arms, and especially those with a combination of raised arms and bird's heads. These figurines, both male and female, bring together the spiritual power of cattle and the Dynastic concepts of the k3 and b3. They combine these ideas with the spiritual implications of birds as mediators between the remote sky powers and humanity. These ideas in the context of a belief in the afterlife suggest that the Predynastic Egyptians, like the Dynastic Egyptians, believed in a spiritual force which survived death and entered a new life in the underworld, probably in the West, judging from the tendency of placement of the bodies in the graves.

Besides the eschatology focused on the metaphor of the sun, the Dynastic deities of Isis and Osiris incorporate and express the myths of the afterlife. Despite their names, which associate them with the throne and royal power, both display very profound affiliations with the agricultural cycle and the spiritual needs and aspirations of the common farmers and herders. Although no symbolic material evidence has been acknowledged to support their existence in the Predynastic, their myths and natures suggest an existence prior to being chosen to represent the throne. Osiris, in particular, as a cosmogonic (night) sky god, would not be represented by any earthly image. Rather, his mediator, Isis, as both a sky and an earth deity, qualifies for embodiment.

Their Dynastic identification with the constellation of Orion and the star Sirius (Sothis) not only applies to the behaviour of the heavens after unification. From the earliest period of agricultural development along the Nile, these two celestial formations coincided with the return of life – the inundation of the Nile – as well as the period of the death of vegetation and the time of want. Orion, in particular, watched over the rise and fall of the Nile and reached his maximum power at the time of planting and the appearance of the seedlings. Osiris as a grain god, symbolised by sprouting barley, originates in this phenomenon.

The examination of the figurines in the context of Nile village culture, both contemporary and Predynastic, leads me to conclude that a significant portion of the figurines can be placed within the eschatology focused on Isis and Osiris. No doubt their names would have been different, and Isis possibly shared a combined identity or a "common substratum of ideas" with Hathor, Nut, and Bat, for so many features of these goddesses overlap in the historic period. But the peculiar features chosen for the goddess Isis are best expressed by the bird-like figurines with raised arms, especially those hovering, pregnant ones, who may, like Isis, have hovered over the deceased, engendering a new life as a k3 in the afterworld.

APPENDIX I: CATALOGUE OF FIGURINES

The following catalogue is an abbreviated and updated version of Ucko's (1968) catalogue and is designed to provide the reader with the basic data leading to the tables in Chapters 2 and 3. It also allows the reader to correlate this data with Ucko's catalogue in order to make personal assessments on any variations in sex determination and interpretation or exclusion of data.

LOCATION	FIGURINE NO per Ucko and P.D. period	TOMB/GRAVE OR FINDSPOT & SEX OF SKELETON[1]	SEX	ARM POSITION	MATERIAL	HEAD/FACE	OTHER
Ab'adiya	5 Nag II	B83 fill	F	stump	clay	pinched	
	6 "	B83 fill	M	stump	clay	?[2]	
	7 "	B83 fill	M	down	clay	?	
	8	B101 (F)	F	stump	V.P[3]	?	hip:waist suggests F
	9 Nag I	B101	F	stump	V.P?	?	
	10 "	B101	F	various[4]	V.P.	?	
	11	B119	M	stump	clay	features[5]	
	12 Nag I	U96 fill	M	various	clay	features	
	13 "	U96 fill	M	?	clay	features	
	LXXVII Nag II?	B109 (F)	F	stump	clay	projecting nose	
Abusir el Meleq	146		?	incised	steatite	features	
Abydos	74 Nag I	21 cemetery U	F	stump	clay	features	
	97	temple area	F	down	clay	?	
	98	early levels	?	stump?	mud	features	beard?
	99	early levels	?	?	mud	no features	
	100	early levels	?	?	mud	no features	
Adaima	110		?	holding vessel	clay	beak	

340

Alawniyeh	49	Nag I	209 Site L	M	stump	clay	no features	hip:waist + beard sug.M
	50	"	209 Site L	M	stump	clay	projection[6]	
Assuan?	163		6	F	stump	clay	snout	protruding stomach[7]
	225		desert	?	on knees	clay	features	
Badari	I[8]	Bad	5227 cemetery 5200	F	various	clay	?	
	2	"	5107	F	down	ivory	features	
	3	"	5769 cem. 5700-5800	F	stump	mud	pinched nose	
	4	Nag II	3740 (F)	F	?	V.P.	?	
	85		settlement 3200	F	stump	clay	?	
	86		settlement 3000	F	armless[9]	clay	pinched nose	large hips suggest F
	87		cemetery 3700 rubbish	?	?	clay	no features	
Ballas	47	Nag I	394	F	stump	clay	features	
	48	"	394	F	stump	clay	?	
Diospolis	80		Cemetery B	M	stump	clay	?	
	88			F	stump	ivory	features	pin fig. hip:waist=F
El Amrah	14	Nag II	A56 (M)	M	stump	clay	features	
	15	"	A56	M	stump	clay	features	waist wider than hips suggests M
	16	Nag I	B202 (M)	?	?	clay	beak	
	17		A41 (F)	M	stump	V.P.	pinched nose	tapered=male[10]
	18	Nag II	A94 (F)	M	stump	V.P.	features	
	19		A57 (F)	?	?	?	?	fragment
	20	Nag II	A117	?	?	clay	?	insufficient document-
	21	"	A74 (Child)	?	?	clay	?	ation. figurines
	22	Nag I	A90 (M)	?	?	clay	?	lost
	23	"	A72 (M)	?	?	clay	?	"
	24		A67 (F)	?	?	clay	?	"

El Rizeiqat	105		F	raised meet above head	clay	no features	
	106		F	raised	clay	pinched nose	
Gebel el Tarif	109	necropolis	?	incised	clay	features	
Gebelein	89		F	stump	V.P.	pinched nose	
	90		M	stump	V.P.	pinched nose	
	101	necropolis?	M	stump	calcite	features	hip:waist=male"
	102	necropolis?	?	stump	stone	features	
Khizam	103	grave?	?	raised	clay	features	
	104	grave?	?	raised	clay	features	
	111	under earthenware covering	M	down	clay	features	
	112	"	F	raised	clay	beak	slight swell of stomach
	113	"	F	raised	clay	beak	"
	114	"	F	raised	clay	beak	"
	115	"	F	raised	clay	beak	"
	116	"	F	raised	clay	beak	"
	117	"	F	raised	clay	beak	great swell of stomach
	118	"	F	raised	clay	beak	slight swell of stomach
	119	"	F	raised	clay`	beak	"
	120	"	F	raised	clay	beak	"
	121	"	F	raised	clay	beak	"
	122	"	F	raised	clay	beak	"
	123	"	F	raised	clay	beak	"
	124	"	F	raised	clay	beak	large swell of stomach
	125	"	F	raised	clay	beak	slight swell of stomach
	126	"	F	raised	clay	beak	"
	127	"	F	raised	clay	beak	"

Kom el Ahmar?	81			?	?	clay	?	
	82			?	?	clay	?	
	83			F	stump	clay	beak	
Luxor?	208			F	?	clay	beak	pubic hair suggests F
	209			?	various	clay	beak	
	210			F	down	clay	beak	
	213			F	down	clay	features	
	214			F	stump	clay	beak	
Ma'amerieh	56	Nag I?	186	F	raised	clay	beak	
	57	"	186	F	raised	clay	beak	
	58	"	186	F	raised	clay	beak	
	59	"	186	F	raised	clay	beak	
	60	"	186	F	raised	clay	beak	
	61	"	186	F	raised	clay	beak	
	62	"	186	F	raised	clay	beak	
	63	"	186	F	raised	clay	beak	
	64	"	186	F	raised	clay	beak	
	65	"	186	F	raised	clay	beak	
	66	"	186	F	raised	clay	beak	
	67	"	186	F	raised	clay	beak	
	68	"	186	F	raised	clay	beak	
	69	"	186	F	raised	clay	beak	
	70	"	186	F	stump	clay	beak	
	71	"	186	F	stump	clay	beak	
	72	Nag I	2	F	raised	clay	beak	
	73	"	2	F	raised	clay	beak	
			37[12]	M?	stump	ivory	features	narrow waist possibly jar on head
			73[13]	?	?	ivory	features	head only

Mahasna	51		H41 (M)	F	armless	clay	features	in burial position[14]
	52 Nag I		H29 (F)	M	down	ivory	features	
	53 "		H97	?	?	clay	features	bird head with green paint[15]
	54 Nag II		H33	?	?	clay	?	
	55 Nag I		H42	?	?	clay	?	fragments
Matmar	77		2643 Cem 2600-2700	?	?	mud	?	fragment
			2682[16] (M)	F	?	ivory	?	found in a box
			2682	F	?	ivory	?	" "
			2682	F	?	ivory	?	" "
			2682	F	?	ivory	?	" "
Mermide	76			?	?	mud	?	fragment
Mostagedda	25		1832	M	stump	ivory	features	pin hip:waist suggests F
	26 Bad		village rubbish	F	stump	clay	small projection	
	27 "		494 (F)	F	stump	clay	small projection	stomach projection
	78		village rubbish	?	stump	clay	no features	
	79		1872 fill	F	?	limestone	?	hip:waist & stomach projection suggests F
	107		area 11700 surface	F	stump?	clay	?	projecting stomach?
	108		area 1800 surface	?	stump?	clay	projection	
Nagada	28		1802	?	raised to head level	clay	beak	
	29		1895	?	?	clay	?	
	30		1895	F	one arm - bent at waist	clay	?	
	31		1895	?	stump	clay	?	
	32 Nag I		271	F	stump	V.P.	features	
	33 "		271	F	stump	ivory	features	pin. hip:waist suggests F

34	"	271	F	stump	ivory	features	pin. hip:waist suggests F
35	"	271	?	?	ivory	features	
36	"	271	?	stump	ivory	features	
37	"	271	?	?	ivory	?	pin
	"	271[17]	?	?	clay?		
38	"	1611	F	stump	clay	?	protruding stomach
39	"	1611 fill	?	?	?	?	fragment
40		1413	F	?	V.P.	?	hip:waist suggests F
41		1413	?	?	V.P.	?	
42	Nag II	1687	?	?	clay	?	
43	Nag I	1503	?	?	V.P.	?	
	"	1503[18]	?	?	clay?		
44	"	273	?	?	ivory	?	
45		1488 (F)	F	stump	V.P.	?	
46		1488 (F)	F	stump	V.P.	?	
147			F	various	clay	features	
153			M	various	clay	features	
154			M	various	clay	features	
155			M	various	clay	features	
156			M	various	clay	beak	
157			M	various	clay	beak	
158			?	?	clay	beak	
159			M	stumps meet at back	clay	beak	
160			?	?	clay	features	
167			F	stump	clay	beak	
195			F	raised	clay	?	protruding stomach
		1677[19] (M)	?	?	ivory	?	fragment
		1329[20] (F)	?	?	ivory	?	
		1329[21]	?	?	alabaster	?	
		1705[22]	?	?	V.P.	?	
Qau	75 Nag II	113	?	?	clay	?	
	84	cemetery	F	stump	clay	projection	

Suâide	168	F	raised	clay	snout/beak

NON LOCATABLE

91	M	down	ivory	features	
92	F	stump	ivory	?	pin. hip:waist suggests F
93	F	stump	V.P.	features	hair & waist suggest F
94	F	stump	ivory	features	slight swell of stomach
95	F	stump	V.P.	features	
96	F	stump	clay	features	
128	F	stump	clay	?	
129	F	various	clay	features	
130	F	raised to side of head	clay	features	
131	F	raised to side of head	clay	features	
132	F	raised to side of head	clay	features	
133	M	small arms?	clay	features	
134	F	raised	clay	pinched nose	projecting stomach
135	F	stump	clay	snout/beak	
136	?	thin arms	?	snout	
137	F	thin arms	limestone	snout	protruding stomach
138	F	raised	clay	no features	
139	M	forward	clay	beak	
140	M	raised to head level	clay	beak	
141	M	various	clay	beak	
142	M	various	clay	beak	
143	M	raised to head level	clay	beak	
144	F	around breasts	limestone	beak	stomach - sharp proj.
145	F	raised to support vase	clay	beak	swelling stomach?

148	F	stump	clay	features	
149	F	stump	clay	features	
150	F	holding baby	ivory	features	protruding stomach[23]
151	F	holding baby	ivory	features	
152	F	holding baby	wood	?	
161	?	?	V.P.	features	
162	?	stump	clay	beak	
164	M	raised above head bent at elbows	clay	beak	
165	F	raised	clay	beak	
166	F	stump	clay	?	protruding stomach
169	M	stump	clay	beak	
170	F	stump	clay	beak	
171	F	bent to breasts	clay	beak	
172	?	curving down & back	clay	beak	
173	F	raised	clay	features	swelling stomach
174	F	?	clay	features	
175	F	under breasts	clay	features	
176	F	?	clay	?	stomach -sharp proj.
177	?	various	mud	features	
178	?	?	clay	features	
179	?	down	clay	features	
180	?	stump	clay	beak	
181	?	?	clay	?	
182	F	stump	ivory	features	
183	F	stump	clay	beak	stomach - sharp proj.
184	?	down	clay	beak	hip:waist=1:1 - may be M
185	F	raised	clay	beak	
186	?	down	ivory	features	
187	F	various	clay	beak	
188	F	stump	clay	?	hip:waist suggests F
189	F	stump	lead	?	protruding stomach
190	F	under breasts	clay	pinched	

191	F	under breasts	clay	?	stomach - sharp proj.
192	M	stump?	ivory	features	hip:waist=M beard
193	F	stump	clay	beak	
194	F	stump	clay	beak	
196	M	down	basalt	features	
197	F	stump	clay	muzzle	
later addition	F	stump	clay	muzzle	
"	F	stump	clay	muzzle	
"	F	stump	clay	muzzle	
"	F	stump	clay	muzzle	
"	F	stump	clay	muzzle	
198	F	stump	clay	muzzle	
199	F	horizontal	clay	beak	
200	?	stump	clay	snout	
201	?	stump	clay	snout	
202	F	under breasts	clay	features	
203	F	raised	clay	pinched nose	
204	F	to side of breasts	clay	beak	
205	F	stump	clay	pinched nose	
206	F	stump	clay	pinched nose	
207	F	stump	clay	no features	stomach - 5 fat folds
211	F	down	serpentine	?	
212	?	down	bone	features	hip:waist=1:1 - may be M
215	F	raised	clay	beak	protruding stomach
216	F	?	clay	beak	protruding stomach
217	F	raised	clay	beak	
218	?	?	clay	beak	
219	?	stump	clay	wedge nose	
220	?	?	wood	features	
221	?	stump?	clay	no features	
222	F	stump	stone	features	
223	?	?	stone	features	
224	?	down	stone	features	

226	?	on knees	clay	no features	seated

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[1] if known

[2] ? indicates that it is not possible to determine for this trait because of damage or absence of any indication.

[3] Vegetable Paste

[4] left and right in different positions

[5] "features" indicates human-like attributes: ie nose, mouth, eyes, etc.

[6] "projection" cannot be classified as human, yet it cannot be assigned to any particular animal or a bird. It suggests animal or bird, however.

[7] Ucko categorised a number of stomach styles: projecting, swelling, protruding. I have grouped his descriptions into 6 with sharp projections, 28 with slight swells or protruding stomachs, 2 with large swellings, and 1 with fat folds. All are female where sex is clear. Therefore I have used it as one indication of femaleness where other attributes are absent.

[8] Numbers 1-3 incl. have been assigned to the Badarian period. One other, No.27, has also been dated Badarian. With the exception of these 4 figurines, the remaining are either Amratian or Gerzean. In so many cases, it is impossible to determine which. I refer the reader to Ucko (1968:176) for his typology according to sex and period for all stratified figurines and those unstratified which can be assigned a date.

[9] The figurine was deliberately made with no arms.

[10] In this case the waist is wider than the hips. The figurine tapers, and in the presence of a possible beard, I have assigned it to the male sex.

[11] The waist and hips are equal, and in the presence of a beard, I have designated the figurine as male.

[12] Found in Needler 1984: 381-1, Fig. 1.

[13] H. de Morgan 1912: 34

[14] Baumgartel 1960: 67

[15] Needler 1984: 344

[16] The following four figurines were found in a box in a Matmar grave (Brunton 1948: 14), but for some reason were not included in Ucko's catalogue. Brunton provided no details about body position, arm position, or facial features.

[17] Payne 1987

[18] Payne 1987

[19] Baumgartel 1970a: LIV

[20] Baumgartel 1970a: XXXIX

[21] ibid

[22] ibid LV

[23] A penis is suggested but the presence of a child and a protruding stomach weights in favour of F.

APPENDIX 2

THE RISING AND SETTING TIMES FOR ORION AND THE SUN ON THE 21ST OF EACH MONTH 4000 BCE

Month	Sunrise	Orion rises	Sunset	Orion sets	Hours of visibility of Orion (to the nearest 1/4 hour)
June	4:54	2:57	18.20	14.18	2
July	4:43	1:00	18:39	12:20	3 3/4
Aug	5:00	22:57	18:43	10:19	6
Sept	5:26	20:52	18:27	8:13	8 1/2
Oct	5:50	18:54	17:56	6:15	10 3/4
Nov 7	6:00	17:44	17:40	5:16	11 1/2
Nov 21	6:10	16:52	17:28	4:15	10 3/4
Dec	6:36	14:54	17:04	2:19	9 1/4
Jan	6:57	12:56	17:06	0:16	7 1/4
Feb	6:55	10:50	17:21	22:10	4 3/4
Mar	6:32	9:00	17:40	20:30	2 3/4
Apr	5:54	6:57	17:51	18:17	1/2
May	5:15	5:00	18:04	16:20	0

Note: These times are taken at sea level with no adjustment for twilight, altitude, topography, or atmospheric conditions. Graph I, derived from these figures, subtracts one hour from the visibility of Orion, but the result may still err in favour of greater visibility. In addition, the times for Orion are taken from the rising of the first star to the setting of the last star of the constellation, which may not accurately represent the stars visible to the human eye. Therefore, these times represent the maximum possible visibility.

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