

1997 Figurine Report – Naomi Hamilton

FIGURINES

Naomi Hamilton

During the 1997 season 52 figurines were found, a few of which had been excavated in 1996 but retrieved from heavy residue this year. The majority were fragmentary, and most were parts of humanoid or animal figures. However, several complete or almost complete figures were found, as well as a number of fragments of considerable interest. Almost all the pieces found this year were made of clay, the majority of them lightly baked, a few were of plaster. Figurines were found in all areas of the site - Bach, North, Mellaart and Summit - in contexts which would equate with Mellaart's levels IV/V - VIII. This gives us a reasonable time span over which to view changes and variation.

As previously, most figurines are found outside the living space of houses. A number come from buildings, but this was generally from below the floors or within the fabric of walls and fittings. Most were found in outside areas containing a wide range of materials which could be called rubbish. This is the case with human, humanoid and animal figurines, and makes the interpretation of these artefacts challenging. Until information is available concerning the interpretation of all the detailed and general contexts in which figurines were found, I can only make preliminary comments.

The most spectacular figurine was perhaps the complete one from the Summit trench, found just at the end of this season's work on that area. Numbered 2675.X1, it depicts a seated figure and was hailed as a typical Çatalhöyük 'Mother Goddess'. In fact it is unusual in a number of ways. It is extremely small, only 20mm high, which makes it one of the smallest ever found at the site. It is seated with stub legs or knees in front, rather than the crossed legs or legs to one side under the body which are common on the larger figures; the reduced arms which stick straight out from the body while turning downwards, ending in a point, are very unusual, rather reminiscent of much later figures from Bronze Age sites in Anatolia. The well-known Çatalhöyük figures of this general type normally have complete arms depicted, with hands resting on the knees or upper body, and great attention paid to the hands. Further, although this figure has a bulging stomach, it has no breasts. Some of these unusual features could be attributed to the small size of the figure, but perhaps that itself requires explanation. Finally, this figure has a hole in the top of the body for the attachment of a head, which is missing. This is seen in a number of figurines found both by Mellaart and during the current work, but is relatively rare. The figurine is complete and undamaged. It is rather crudely made, which could be a product of its size. It was found in an external area interpreted as a midden, apparently attached to Building 10, which is probably Mellaart level IV or IV/V. The 'fat lady' figurines from Mellaart's excavations date between levels VI (only one example) and III (several examples), so as far as date goes, this one agrees

very well with what was known previously. Unfortunately, although this figurine was given an 'x' number by the excavators, it was actually found in the sieve, so that precise co-ordinates are not available and it is not known whether it was in association with any other artefacts or with deposits of particular natures. This is the only figurine from Summit area known to me from 1997, although I would be surprised if no fragments had been found in the dry sieve or heavy residue.

Bach area produced 21 figurines, most of them fragmentary. The most notable is 2207.X2, an almost complete humanoid figure. Damage comprises the loss of the tip of the nose and part of the left leg. The figurine is 29.7mm high, which is about average for this type of figure. The body/neck is bent forward more than is common, and the long legs provide a counterbalance so that it was sit unaided. The head is rounded, not triangular as in many examples, and has a clearly-defined cap or mop of hair surmounting a face whose main feature is a long narrow pointed nose.

2214.H6, also from Bach area, is an unusual humanoid figurine in that the neck/body, which is triangular from the front and rear, is much more solid and plump in side view, presenting a view of a body with rounded bulging stomach rather than the long thin neck normally shown. It does not have legs, just a roughly conical base which in this instance is undermined at the front to accentuate the belly. The body is surmounted by a neck which is thick in side-view but thin from the front/rear and is bending forward. Unfortunately the head is missing. This figurine appears to overlap the boundaries of human and humanoid in a way that was seen in a number of figures found in 1996 and several other examples found this year.

2201.H1, from Bach, is a rather formless chunk of hard-baked clay which has been punctured over most of its extant surface. It is possible that this represents part of a leopard figurine, although at present it is not clear what part of the animal, if any, is shown. If it is a leopard, this would be the first one found during the current work; a number were found by Mellaart in good and recognisable condition. (Two other fragments have been found with puncture marks across the surface, but these appear more likely to belong to human figures - the puncture marks are arranged in neat lines, in one case covering only half the extant surface, whereas on leopard figures the punctures seem to be fairly random and cover the whole surface. These two other fragments come from the Mellaart area, found in 1995 and 1996, and are small.)

Fragments of thirteen figurines were found in the North area, and several others were recovered from heavy residue excavated last year and sorted this year. 2553.H1 is a complete, undamaged humanoid figure found in the packing layers below Space 71, Building 1. It is tiny - only 18.7mm high and very slim. It has divided legs sticking out in front and can sit unaided. The upright body/neck tapers slightly and evenly on all sides towards a small triangular head which is almost flat on top. The pointed nose is at the top of the face, rather than sloping downwards, which adds to the alert, upright impression given by the pose of this neat figurine.

2198.H1, from North area, is a particularly interesting humanoid figurine. Two joining pieces - the head and body/neck - were found in the heavy residue; the rest - the face, part of the neck, and one leg - is missing. The figure is 29.4mm high, with a narrow base and slim body/neck inclining slightly forward. The head is the interesting part - roughly circular in plan, the top is

covered with punctures which also run in neat, horizontal rows around the back and sides (the front is missing). This seems either to represent hair, or to be for fixing hair to the figure. Holes have been found on figurine heads before (and this year 2739.H2), but not in quite this style. It is unfortunate that the face is missing, as it is possible that it did not have the normal long pointed humanoid nose. Rather, it could have been a more natural face such as that on 1073.H2, found in 1996, which is similar in shape though more rounded on top and is missing its body. So far, we do not know which type of body 1073.H2, nor a number of other unique heads, belong to. 2198.H1 appears to be another figurine which crosses the boundary between human and humanoid, and underlines my belief that the humanoid figurines do indeed represent humans, rather than animals, birds or part-bird, part-humanoid creatures as others have sometimes suggested. It was found in an ashy deposit underlying the lowest floor in Space 70, Building 1.

2171.H2, from North, is a humanoid head with a headscarf, or possibly hair, shown at the back by means of flattening the clay and folding it downwards. The head is triangular in plan from above with concave sides all round; the whole face juts forwards, rather than having a pointed nose. The neck is strongly curved forwards. 2558.H1 is another humanoid, noteworthy because the body/neck curves strongly backwards, rather than forwards as seen in a number of others. The head is missing. 2559.H1 is the base of a humanoid figure of the same tiny size as 2553.H1. It has a conical base rather than divided legs. The head is missing. These last two were found in make-up layers below Space 71, Building 1.

2508.H3, North area, is an animal figurine. It shows a quadruped of uncertain species which may be lying down. The rear end is broken away, the front shows two stubby legs which from the side view are invisible as the base of the figure is flat along both edges. Either ears or horns have been broken off, and there is a hole in the break scar on the left side of the head which could suggest an aid in attaching modelled ears or horns. It does not appear to be a stab mark. Overall the figure has a dog-like (or seal-like!) appearance, but with the front of the face, rear end and ears/horns missing it is not possible to suggest a species more strongly. It was found in a make-up/foundation layer beneath Space 71, Building 1.

2131.H1 is a large plaster model of a cattle horn. It is beautifully shaped with careful curves and a pointed tip. It was broken into two joining pieces, and appears originally to have been joined to a head - at least, that end of the horn is broken at a point where one would expect it to join the head. It is 43mm long, far larger than most similar fragments although Mellaart found a number of large animal figurines and horns. Its context was peculiar - it was found in the plaster moulding which seems to have imitated or surrounded a wooden post against the north wall of Space 71, Building 1. The horn was found in the heavy residue, so its precise position in the wall is unknown. However, it may have had considerable significance, and is unlikely to have got into the moulding by accident. The fact that it is made of plaster suggests that it could have been made at the time of the moulding.

Seventeen figurine fragments were found in Mellaart area this year, most of them badly damaged. 2739.H2 is the most important. It is a large figurine head of unbaked clay, possibly briefly sun-dried, and was found in two pieces in an area of ashy midden. It was not recognised during excavation but was retrieved from a bag of stone in the lab, so its position in the large midden and any associated objects or deposits are not known. The head is one of the largest

found during the current excavations, being 49.2mm high - taller than many complete figurines - and is unlike any other head found so far. The back is nearly straight, while the front is dominated by a large roughly modelled nose with two punctures for nostrils. Below the nose is a puncture for a mouth, and either side of the bridge of the nose are punctures representing eyes. The forehead slopes back to meet the upright back of the head in a ridge, through which there are seven perforations which may be for the attachment of hair or a head-dress. Another puncture hole near the base of the back of the head may be related to these perforations, although it is possible that it is accidental, pertaining to the breakage of the head down the middle from top to bottom. Inspection of the puncture in the broken edge showed that it is of the same shape and depth as the puncture representing the left eye, which is also on the break. On either side of the head are large modelled ears of peculiar shape, in the base of each of which is a large indentation. Overall, the head shows similarities to a number of others, while being unique. It cannot stand unaided - the leather-hard clay has been cut on a slope across the base. This appears to have been reworked in antiquity, although it is possible that this is damage caused during excavation, - some marks were certainly new. The softness of the clay makes this more difficult to ascertain. Because of the shape of the base, it is not certain what angle the head should be at - whether the back was vertical, so that it had its nose tilted up, or sloping gently forward so that it was looking straight ahead. This is only the second head found during current work which could belong to a large figurine of the type found by Mellaart in a couple of buildings. It came from a deposit which would equate with Mellaart's levels VII-VIII, somewhat earlier than the large figurines he found, which were in level VI and were made of stone. Our other large head was also of clay, and came from Mellaart's backfill in 1995.

2321.H1 is an atypical humanoid figurine. It is fairly large - 36.5mm high - and has a conical lower body with a very concave base, the hollow being suitable for a thumb whilst holding it in the hand. The rather thick neck widens at the top, and the head has a pronounced nose which dominates. The measurement from nose tip to back of head is greater than the diameter of the base, giving it a rather commanding pose. The figurine is quite crudely manufactured. It is damaged on the edges of the head, but part of the top of the head remains, and the nose is complete.

1653.H3 is a badly damaged fragment, but a rare example of a 'typical' Çatalhöyük figurine. It is the lower part of a seated 'fat lady', of which all that remains is the base, most of the left leg, and a small part of the surface of the right leg. It appears that both legs were in front, with knees slightly raised and feet together. This may be the earliest example of this type known so far, as it comes from a context regarded as equivalent to Mellaart level VII/VIII. Mellaart's earliest figurine of this type was from level VI, and that was the only example pre-dating level V. (A leg of a similar figure, made of plaster and painted red, was found last year in the same or similar level. It seems to be from a composite figure.)

2032.X1 is a humanoid figurine which verges on the human. Unfortunately the head is missing, and the upper body/neck is damaged. The lower body has two legs but the division between them is gently curving, a small semi-circular bite out of the fabric rather than the normal definite modelling of two legs. From the side, the figurine looks more like a kneeling figure with rather bulging posterior than a normal humanoid, and instead of a long thin neck, this has a short thick upper body which may actually have breasts. The damage makes it impossible to say whether

this is breasts or the beginning of a large nose. If it is a nose, the neck is extraordinarily short if not non-existent. This figurine is another example in a growing group that appears to blur the lines between human and humanoid figurines, suggesting it is not so much what is represented, but what use the figure is to be put to, that determines its form.

1862.X2 is a small fragment of lightly baked clay with one remaining surface, which has been punctured in regular lines of holes. There are 10 holes, roughly 2.5mm deep. It is thought that this belongs to a figurine - the fabric is certainly similar - but what it represents is unclear.

1873.H1 is a large and sturdy cattle horn made of plaster. Broken at both ends, it appears to be similar in size to the one found in North area. This example is 36.9mm long, and seems to curve in one direction only, unlike 2131.H1 which curves twice. . It is interesting that both these large horns should be made of plaster.

2801.H1 is another unusual piece - or indeed, pieces. This consists of four fragments which all seem, from fabric and manufacture, to belong to the same artefact but none of which join. What makes them interesting is that they appear to have been fairly two-dimensional. They have been formed from a flat piece of clay, which has been moulded to create a plaque rather than a figurine. At present, the form is uncertain - one piece may be a horn, another may be a horn or a leg, another could be a cattle head with part of a horn attached. This is the flattest piece, with the back unsmoothed and the front moulded. One reason why this is interesting is that several other pieces have been found which are better made than this but also seem to be two-dimensional cattle heads rather than figurines proper. Hopefully finds in the future will help us to understand these pieces.

The other figurines from this season consists of fragments of humanoids, animal horns, and a few possible human arms.