

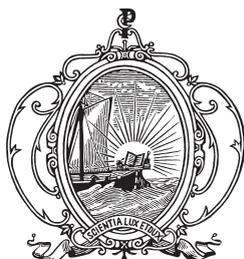
BRITISH MUSEUM PUBLICATIONS ON EGYPT AND SUDAN 3

## NUBIA IN THE NEW KINGDOM

Lived experience, pharaonic control and indigenous traditions

edited by

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# FEMALE FIGURINES AND FOLK CULTURE AT AMARA WEST

Anna STEVENS

## Abstract

This paper presents an assemblage of hand-modelled female figurines excavated recently at Amara West by the British Museum, alongside examples recovered during the earlier Egypt Exploration Society excavations at the site. Most are in the form of flat plaque-shaped figures, hand-modelled in mud, with a small number that have been shaped in the round. The figures are generally naked, often with the pubic triangle, breasts or navel marked; those modelled in the round have very prominent buttocks. There are examples of both shapes with tattoos or scarification. This paper contends that the figures were primarily by-products of personal magic, while a shift towards examples modelled in the round in later occupation levels may reflect growing Nubian influence on figurine production at the site.

## Introduction

During the 2008–14 seasons of the British Museum Amara West Project, fragments of twenty-one female figurines were recovered within the walled Ramesside Period town and adjacent extramural settlement. The Egypt Exploration Society (EES) excavations at the site from 1938 to 1939, and 1948 to 1950, yielded a further sixteen examples from in and around the walled town (P. Spencer 1997), eight of which have recently been donated to the British Museum and studied directly by the author. A catalogue of the figurines is presented in the Appendix. Published assemblages of figurines recovered from modern excavations at Egyptian settlement sites are still relatively limited in number. This paper offers thoughts on the manufacture and role of the Amara West figures, and the ways in which they may reflect everyday life at this small multi-cultural town.

## Figurines as ‘folk culture’

The Amara West figurines are all hand-modelled from clay. Only two seem to be intact, or almost so (F4482 and obj. 564).<sup>1</sup> Twenty-two are of the flat ‘plaque’ type, whereby a slab of clay is shaped to an approximate rectangle into which details are impressed, incised or added as appliqué: pubic triangles, navels, breasts, tattoos or scarification, and other elements (Figs 1–3). They belong to a genre that is well represented at Egyptian sites — although not yet well studied — and seems to span the Middle to New Kingdoms, and possibly beyond (Stevens 2006, 90; Doyen, in press). The remaining seven studied figures are modelled in the round, with pronounced buttocks and, in four cases, a prominently marked pubic triangle (see Fig. 4).

The figures, and especially those in plaque form, are striking in their stylised representation of the female body. In their style, if not their overall iconography, they contrast with the mould-made pottery female figurines that are better known from New Kingdom settlement assemblages (Pinch 1993, 198–234). In a way, the figures represent something of Kemp’s (2006, 141–2) ‘folk culture’: a canvas, on which certain elements find repeated expression and were clearly prioritised, but which allowed people to present them in their own combinations and with their own flair. Hand-modelled figures seem better suited to absorbing people’s ideas than mould-made pieces that were intended to reproduce a standard image with little further modification, apart from painting once the figure had been fired. Within the corpus of plaque figurines we thus find a rare representation of a female with very pronounced pregnant belly from Edfu (Michalowski et al. 1938, 114, pl. XXXVI.5), a possible representation of a woman giving birth from Abydos (Patch 1990, 37), and

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<sup>1</sup> Objects from the British Museum excavations are herein prefixed ‘F’ and those from the EES fieldwork ‘obj.’. As this paper was going to press, the British Museum formally accessioned

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eight figurines from the EES excavations: the new museum numbers are provided in the appendix.

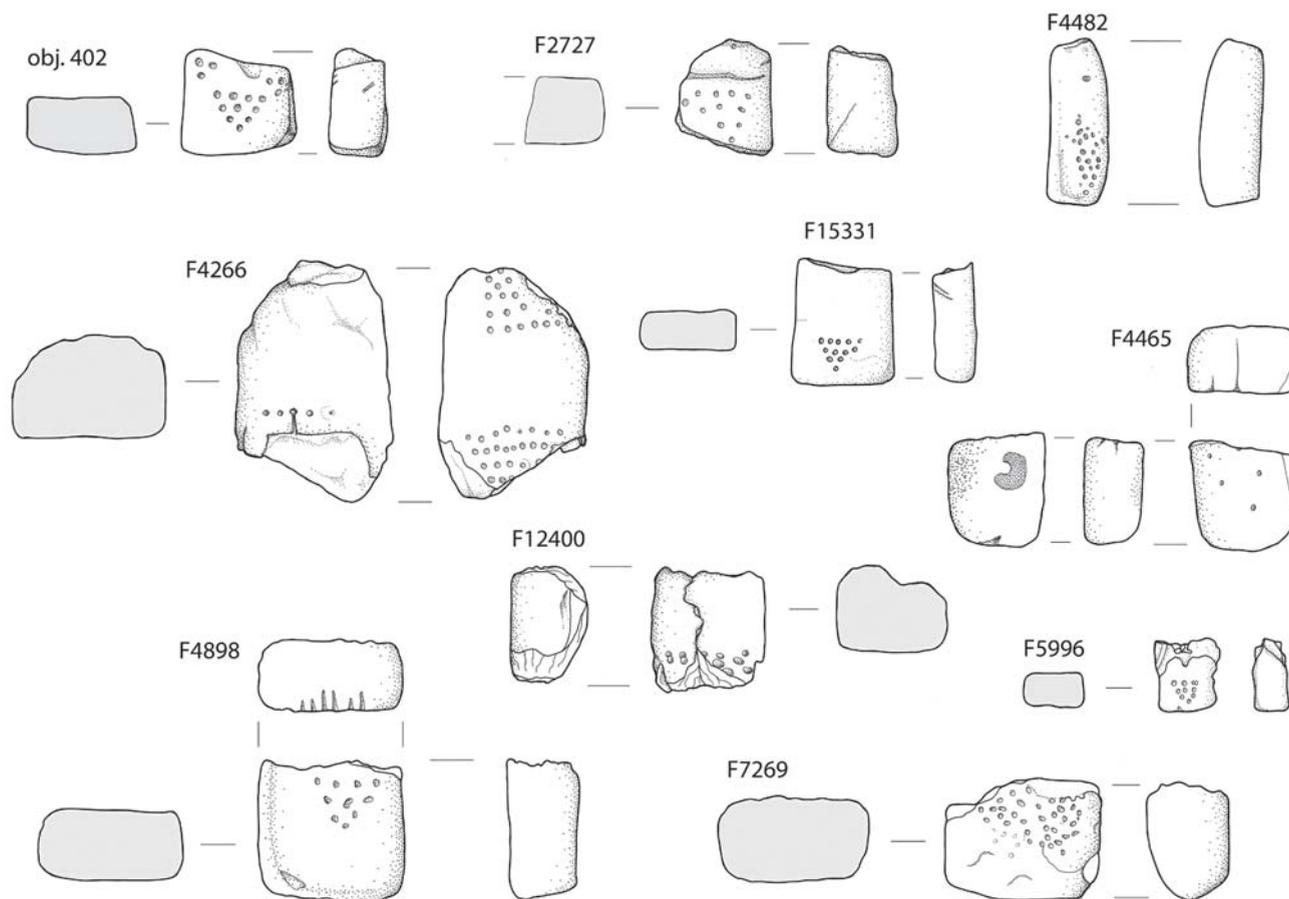


Fig. 1: Plaque-type figures modelled in mud from the British Museum and EES excavations. Scale 1:2. Illustrations by Alice Salvador. Amara West project (British Museum).

on examples from Sai and Buhen incised designs that recall Nubian decorative motifs (Millard 1979, 148–9, pls 53–5, 103; Budka and Doyen 2012, 183; Doyen, in press). Moulding also implies time lapse between the emergence of new ideas and their transference into material culture; there is little scope for spontaneity when a fresh design requires the manufacture of an entirely new mould. Hand modelling could suggest a more direct step from cultural participant to (material) cultural product: a better canvas for absorbing very current aspects of personal lives. The hand-modelled figurines of Amara West thus seem well suited to absorbing something of the nuances of personal lives in a closely packed community in Egyptian-occupied Nubia.

### Representation of the body

Hand-modelled figures such as the ‘plaques’ are not particularly well suited to classification into rigid types,

presenting more of a spectrum of shapes and styles. No two figures are the same. There are, nonetheless, three main aspects that seem to underlie their appearance: the reduction of the torso to a flat geometric form; the addition of certain bodily features drawn from a repertoire primarily of pubic triangle, navel, breasts and head/face; and the optional representation of certain embellishments, including probable tattoos or scarification and jewellery. The choice of what bodily elements to exclude — the limbs as standard, and others optionally — may have been as important a decision as what to include.

Amongst the Amara West plaque figures, the torso tends to be rectangular, although the sides can flare out somewhat towards the base, often almost unperceivably. One example (F4471; Fig. 2) widens noticeably towards the base, almost, to a modern viewer at least, as though the figure wears a dress or skirt. We might wonder whether the unusual band of dots on its lower base and sides represents a decorative weave in a garment.

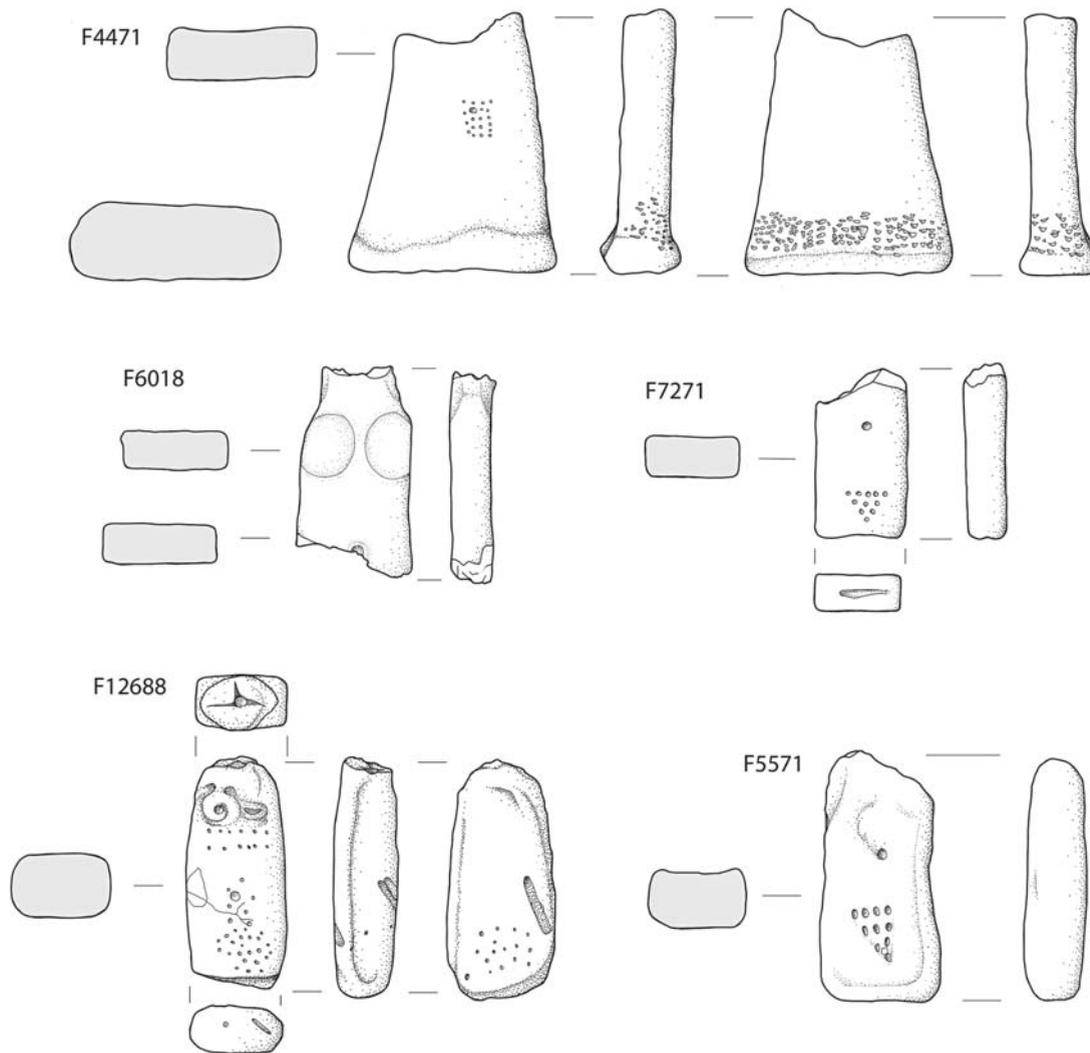


Fig. 2: Plaque-type figures modelled in mud from the British Museum excavations. Scale 1:2. Illustrations by Alice Salvador. Amara West project (British Museum).

The pubic triangle is an important feature, and on the Amara West plaques is shown most neatly as an inverted triangle formed of rows of dots, but perhaps also by the less regular patch of dots that appears on the lower part of several figures. There are, however, two plaque figures in the assemblage that seem not to have a pubic triangle marked at all (F5998, F4245; Fig. 3), so this was not a ubiquitous feature. Ten of the Amara West figures preserve the full length of the torso, or close to it, and on most of these breasts seem to have been shown; F5571 and obj. 814 are the main examples where this is less certain (see Figs 2, 3). The breasts are usually modelled separately and applied. Seven of the Amara West plaques also preserve enough of the upper body to show that they originally had

heads, in all cases likely also to have been applied rather than modelled out of the body of the clay. One of the two intact figures (obj. 564; Fig. 3) preserves what is probably a rudimentary head in the form of a flat featureless disc which has been pressed on to the neck. The other intact example (F4482; Fig. 1) seems not to have had a head or facial features, either applied separately or marked on the upper part of the plaque, so again these were not always present.

The figures that have been modelled in the round (Fig. 4) are distinctive especially in their large projecting buttocks. Some are perhaps in a semi-seated position, suggested by a slight change in angle through the hips — they are referred to hereafter as ‘seated figures’ — although none are preserved intact and it is possible

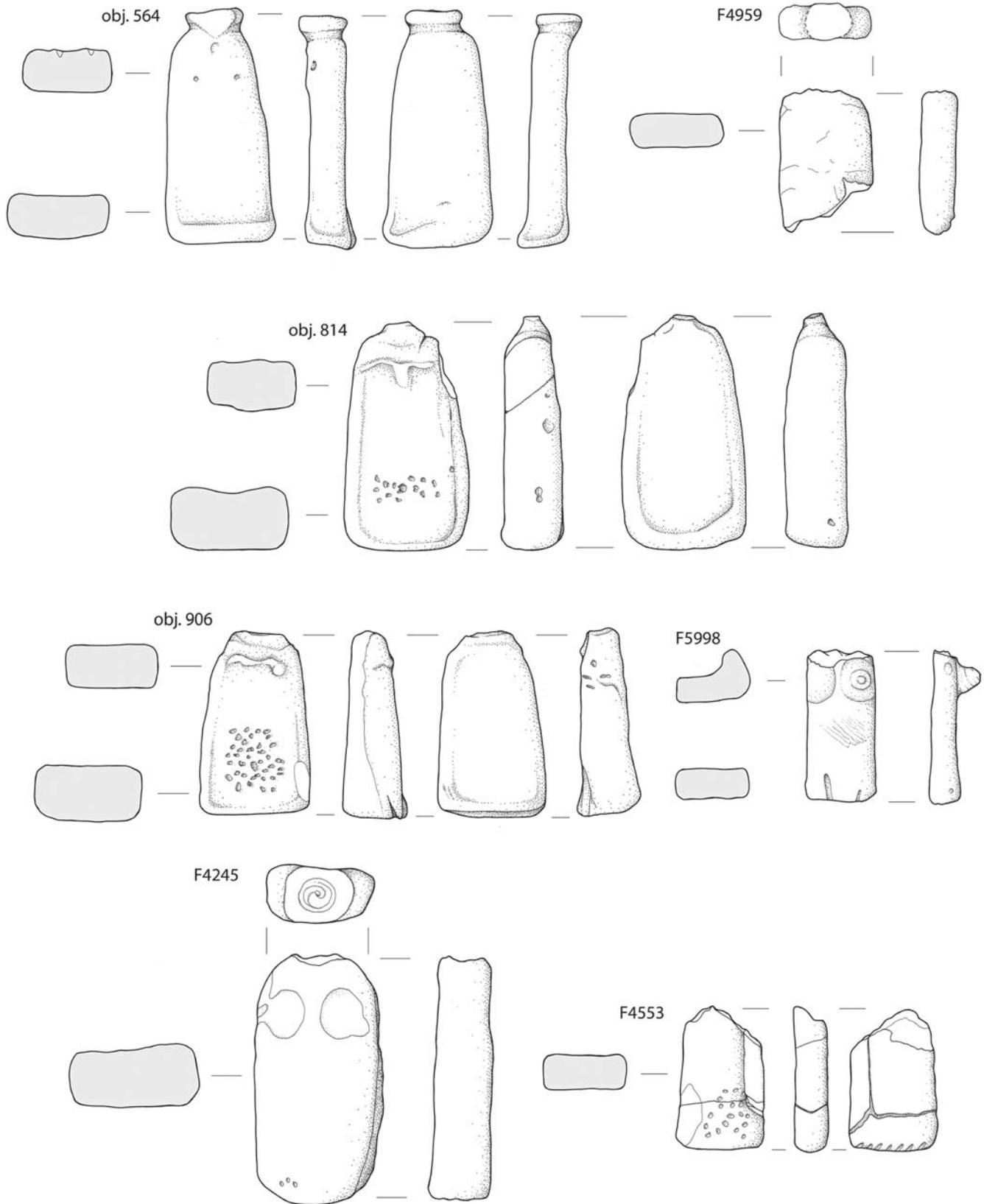


Fig. 3: Plaque-type figures modelled in mud from the British Museum and EES excavations. Scale 1:2. Illustrations by Alice Salvador. Amara West project (British Museum).

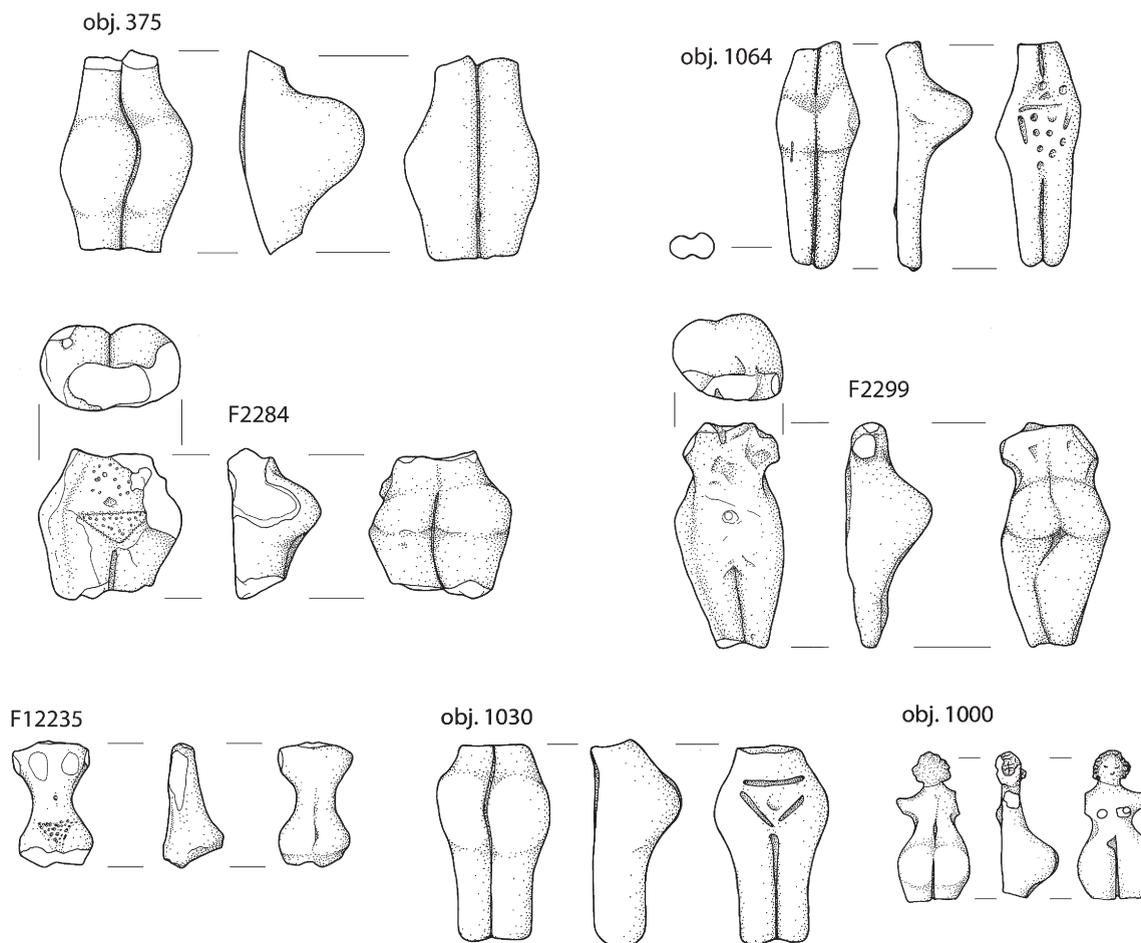


Fig. 4: Figurines modelled in mud in the round from the British Museum and EES excavations. Scale 1:2. The head of obj. 1000 is no longer intact, but was at the time of excavation. It has been reconstructed here based on the drawing on the EES registration card. Illustrations by Alice Salvador. Amara West project (British Museum).

that some were standing with their torso thrust forward. Four of these seven figures have pubic triangles marked, as an inverted triangle of dots (F12235), a dotted triangle with linear outline (obj. 1064, F2284) and an incised triangle (obj. 1030). No pubic triangle appears on the other three. One of the figures (obj. 1000) preserved its head at the time of excavation, although this has subsequently broken away. The illustration on the EES registration card (Fig. 4) shows the head modelled in the round with eyes and mouth marked and a tripartite hairstyle, with bundles of hair pulled to the sides and back of the head. Three of the figures are preserved only from the waist to upper thighs (obj. 375, obj. 1030, F2284), but another (obj. 1064) is intact from the waist down and shows tapering abbreviated legs that end somewhere below the knees, which are not modelled. The three remaining figures preserve the full torso, broken through the neck and

upper thighs (F2299, F12235, obj. 1030). All have the broken stumps of arms that project sideways out from the shoulders. Two have breasts marked, in one case as very small applications (obj. 1000) and the other (F12235) preserving breaks in the paint where applied breasts have fallen off. Four of the figures have navels marked as an impressed dot, while enough is preserved of two of the remaining figures (objs. 375, 1000) to suggest that no navel was shown.

### Body adornment

Probable tattoos and/or scarification appear on both plaques and seated figures, although they are far from ubiquitous. Six of the plaque figures seem to have had no additional adornment, on the torso at least (F4525, F5571, F5998, F6018, F7271, obj. 564), and this is the case also for at least three of the seated figures (F2299,

F12235, obj. 1000). Plaque figure obj. 402 (see Fig. 1) has two groups of three dots above the pubic triangle that are likely to represent markings on the skin, while two figures, plaque F12688 and seated figure F2284, have a circle of dots around the navel (see Figs 2, 4). The latter motif is well paralleled on other female figurines, including plaques (Bruyère 1939, fig. 50; Bourriau 1988, 126, fig. 120; Pinch 1993, 200–1, 217; Stevens 2006, 90–2, fig. II.3.10, 12), sometimes appearing around the breasts or lower abdomen, or even on the lower back/buttocks. It appears on the breasts and around the navels of other partially or fully unclothed female images, such as a statue of a female harpist (Taylor and Antoine 2014, 127), a figure vessel in the form of a suckling woman (Bourriau 1981, 36, no. 50) and a probable serving girl shown in the Theban tomb of Intef (TT155: Säve-Södebergh 1957, pl. xv), all of New Kingdom date. The motif has the effect of highlighting specific elements of the naked female body.

Plaque F12688, which has this dotted circle, is quite an elaborate example, also having two dotted lines below the breasts, a patch of dots on its lower reverse face, and another on the lower front face. The two lines below the breasts do not continue around all sides of the figure, which might indicate that they are skin markings rather than strings of beads. The broader dotted patches are not dissimilar to the scarification on the lower abdomen of one of the tattooed mummies excavated at Deir el-Bahri (Keimer 1948, 8–15, pl. IV). Bearing the latter in mind, it is worth considering that some of the larger, less regular patches of dots that appear on the plaque figures might also represent body markings rather than a pubic triangle, or a combination of the two (e.g. F4482, F4553, F12400; see Figs 1, 3). Plaque obj. 906 is one example, although here the dotted band has a slightly larger central punctate that could represent a navel (Fig. 3). On plaque obj. 814, similarly, a horizontal band of dots flanks a central dot, the placement of which is also suggestive of a navel (Fig. 3).

Plaque F4266 (Fig. 1) shows both a very large area of dotting on what is probably the lower front face, and what may be two conjoined triangles of dots on the upper front. Might the latter find parallel in the diamond-shaped tattoos that cover the breasts of another of the Deir el-Bahri mummies (Keimer 1948, 13–15, pl. VII)? The same figure has a single horizontal row of dots on its reverse that again does not continue around the front face as might be expected if it was a girdle. A further feature of note occurs on plaque F4553, where a series of short lines have been scored

along the lower bottom edge (Fig. 3), but for what purpose is unclear.

### Materials and manufacture

The Amara West figures are made from alluvium, which seems to have been left untempered. They have been formed by hand, the mud pressed and pinched to shape, with varying results in terms of how far a regular, symmetrical form has been achieved and the surfaces have been flattened. Some have been very well shaped. Amongst the plaque figures, F6018 is particularly regular with well-flattened faces and symmetrically placed features (Fig. 2); note also the care taken to provide plaque F4471 (Fig. 2) with a projecting ‘foot’. Others of the plaques are much more rudimentary in shape and finish. The seated figures show a similar range of quality, from small and quite delicately modelled examples (F12255, obj. 1000) to more roughly shaped figures such as F2299 (Fig. 4). At least five of the seated figures show a somewhat unusual modelling technique whereby two strips of clay have been shaped separately, and then joined vertically. The join is then smoothed, to varying degrees. In the case of obj. 1064 it has been smoothed only where the pubic triangle has subsequently been incised, while on obj. 375 it has not been smoothed at all (see Fig. 4).

After modelling, there was the option to add applied features; namely, breasts or a head, the applications often attached with the aid of a small ‘peg’, presumably a twig or similar. Incised and dotted decoration was then added. Sometimes, the dots are regular circles and likely to have been made with a metal point. In other cases, they have a flattened and less regular profile as though made by stiff grasses or very fine twigs. There is little sign that different kinds of tools were used on any individual figure. Two of the figures are painted. Probable plaque figure F4245 bears a coating of yellow paint, while seated figure F12235 is covered in red paint, with black paint highlighting the dotted pubic triangle (Fig. 5). The yellow and red pigments seem to be ochre. Finally, five of the figures, all but one being plaques, are fired to some degree, although it is not clear if this has occurred during manufacture or subsequently, nor whether it was a deliberate action (F4553, F5998, F6018, F7271, F12235). These include the red-painted seated figure F12235, which seems to be very lightly fired, although the yellow painted plaque figure has not been fired, the paint having been applied directly to the mud.



Fig. 5: Painted figures F12235 (left) and F4245 (right) from the British Museum excavations.  
Photo: Amara West project (British Museum).

### Temporal distribution

At the peak of its occupation, Amara West comprised a densely occupied walled town, which included a temple and large residence for the Deputy of Kush, along with areas of extramural settlement and activity. The British Museum excavations have focused upon one area of the walled town, E13, and an extramural area to the west (the western suburb). The distribution of those female figures for which adequate find provenance information is available is shown in Fig. 6. Their find spots are marked only approximately, the diagram intended to show their general spread across the settlement and horizontally through the stratigraphy.

The concentration of figures from E13, in the north-western area of the walled town, can be explained by the more systematic methods of excavation and finds recovery employed here in comparison to the earlier

EES work. The focus of the latter was the temple and Deputy's Residence, although some adjacent housing areas were investigated inside the walled town, and work was also undertaken beyond the town walls to the west and east (P. Spencer 1997). As was common at the time, the clearance and recording of architecture was the priority, and detailed stratigraphic records of deposits and material contained within them are not available. The EES excavators did, however, reconstruct a phasing sequence for the complicated stratigraphic and architectural record that they encountered within the walled town which, in its overall framework, has been confirmed by the recent excavations (P. Spencer 1997; N. Spencer 2014a; 2014b; this volume, table 1).

Four main construction phases can be identified. Phase I saw the creation of the town in the reign of Seti I and his immediate successors, with the construction

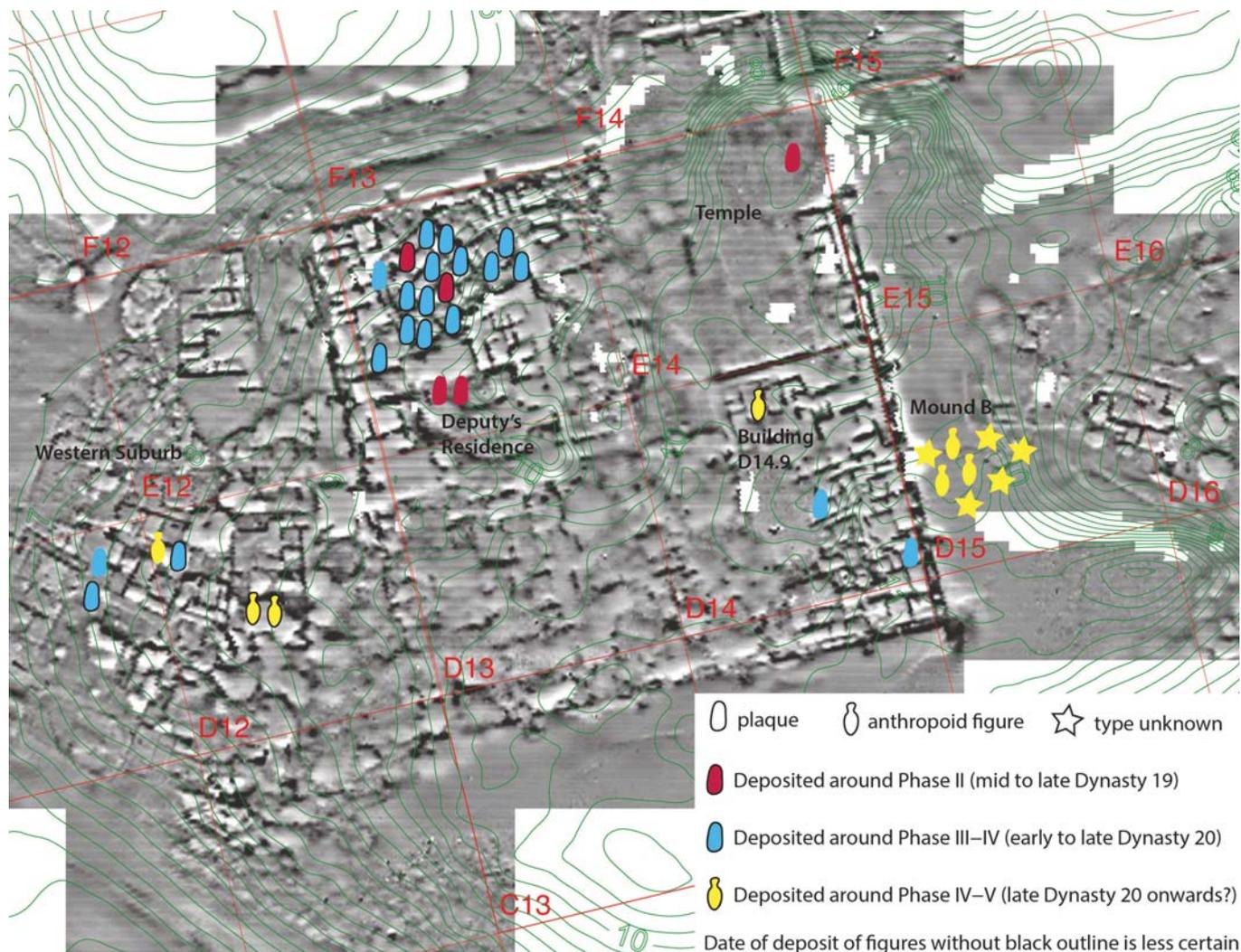


Fig. 6: Distribution map of female figurines excavated at Amara West up to 2014, the site map based on a magnetometry survey undertaken by the British School at Rome/University of Southampton.

of the walled town itself, including the temple, probable administrative and storage facilities, and industrial emplacements that included at least one small pottery kiln (Phase IA). These buildings were subsequently levelled, so that very little of Phase IA now survives in the archaeological record. In their place, a new set of administrative and storage buildings was constructed (Phase IB); in E13, these took the form of at least three contiguous magazines with vaulted roofs and thick dividing walls (E13.14). It is not yet clear how many houses the town contained at this time, and it may be that the population numbered just a couple of hundred people (N. Spencer, this volume). In around the middle of Dynasty 19, however, the walled town acquired a more residential outlook (Phase II). In E13, this saw the magazines converted into domestic spaces, partly

making use of their existing layout but also with quite extensive modification of spaces to create an environment better suited for living in (Phase IIA). Further alteration and expansion of the houses followed (Phase IIB) until around the beginning of Dynasty 20, when the existing architecture, both houses and magazine walls, was levelled and a new horizon of housing built upon the platform of demolition rubble (Phase III). At around the same time, a swathe of houses was built outside the walled town to the west (the western suburb), over the remains of earlier rubbish deposits, garden plots and other structures. Further modification to the houses then followed (Phase IV) and the site remained predominantly residential in nature down to the time of its abandonment sometime around the beginning of the 1st millennium BC (N. Spencer 2014b).

The female figures appear mostly in contexts deposited after the second phase of large-scale levelling of architecture and the conversion of much of the walled town into housing (i.e. Phases III–IV). Only a limited number appear in association with the earlier occupation phases (Phase I, especially, but into Phase II), although whether this is a true reflection of their limited use early in the town's history is not clear. The quantity of archaeological deposit belonging to the early occupation phases is generally low: much of it may have been cleared out of the town and into rubbish deposits of the kind encountered beneath houses in the western suburb (e.g. below D12.5 and E12.10; for the latter see N. Spencer 2014b, 466–8). At the same time, if the town's population was indeed smaller early in its occupation, reduced numbers of 'domestic' artefacts could be expected.

Several figures — including all of the anthropoid seated examples — also appear higher up in the stratigraphy, in deposits we might date to around Phase IV or later; that is, in the final occupation phases. In the western suburb, figurine F1235 sat in windblown sand that had accumulated within house D12.7 after its abandonment, while two figures (F2284 and F2299) were found in occupation deposits that seem to have accumulated after the dismantling of an adjacent house D12.5. The EES recovered figures from a free-standing building south of the temple (D14.9) that was clearly the last to be constructed here (P. Spencer 1997, 143–5, 219), and also found several figures from deposits within 'Mound B'. The latter is a large embankment of sand against the east wall of the town, which the EES excavators sectioned, finding the sand to be interleaved with deposits of rubbish and, at one point, a collection of mud bricks left out to dry (Shinnie 1997, 204–5). Unfortunately, no detailed record of the internal stratigraphy of the mound survives, nor a list of which layers the female figures were recovered from. But the excavators saw the mound as having built up later in the town's history (Shinnie 1997, 204–5); it perhaps attests the growing aridity of the site that may have contributed to its abandonment (Woodward et al., this volume). In Fig. 6, therefore, the Mound B figurines are assigned tentatively to the later occupation phases.

### Contextual spread

The figures show a strong association with housing areas, and none has yet been found at either of the site's two cemeteries. A hint that they were used

beyond a domestic environment occurs with the EES discovery of a plaque figure (obj. 253) inside the north-east corner of the *temenos* in the vicinity of the temple. The plaque is assigned to a lower level of fill, when this area may have been an open court, but details of its find context are scant (P. Spencer 1997, 61). Nor is the origin of the Mound B rubbish deposits clear. There are several houses in the vicinity, but also a possible shrine containing snake and dog interments in jars, from which these deposits conceivably originated (Shinnie 1997, 205–7, pl. 133); other buildings nearby remain unexcavated.

The figures are most common, however, within the small houses of the E13 neighbourhood, where excavation has been most intensive. Given the complicated stratigraphy here, it can be difficult to relate them to the occupation of specific houses; they sometimes appear in layers of abandonment debris or rubble, in which occupational deposits have become intermixed. But there is little reason to doubt that they were used within this neighbourhood, at least at the moment before they were discarded; there is no evidence of the widespread importation of rubbish deposits or rubble levelling fill, for example, into the E13 neighbourhood. Several figures, however, do appear in archaeological deposits that seem to have remained in their primary context, or close to it. Three plaque figures were found in Room 1 of House E13.4 within layers of silt and mud plaster (4526) that belong to the Phase III/IV occupation (F4465, F4471, F4482), two of the figures lying close to one another (F4471 and F4482). Another figure (F4898) was found in a slightly later trampled floor (4491) within the same room. Room 1 is a long rectangular space that was the first room entered through the main door of the house. It contained food processing emplacements but few other fittings, and was probably a multi-functional, roofed (see Vandenberg, this volume), and perhaps fairly public, household space. House E13.6 likewise yielded two plaques (F5996 and F5998) contained within a silty sherd-rich floor (5341) of around Phase III within Room 4, one of the small back rooms of the house, situated within a converted magazine.

Another of the E13 houses, E13.3-S (N. Spencer 2014b, 468–80), contained a plaque figure (F4553) in its back room, within a fill of artefact-rich rubble (4285) deposited in around Phase III. The same room contained an ancestor bust (F4182) still sitting on a simple brick plinth (N. Spencer 2014b, 473–4) and also dating to around Phase III. Unfortunately, it is not clear

if the rubble containing the plaque was an occupation deposit or infill; some of the back rooms of the houses within the E13 neighbourhood seem also to have been spaces where household rubbish and debris was swept. It seems worthy of note, nonetheless, that the back room (27) of the adjacent house E13.3-N, which had a very similar layout, also contained a plaque figure (F4245). In this case it sat within a horizon of wind-blown sand representing the abandonment of the room in Phase III, but we should allow for the possibility that the plaque may have shifted up into the loose sand from an underlying horizon. Houses E13.3-S and E13.3-N shared a courtyard (E13.13) containing several ovens and fire pits, and one of the latter contained a further plaque (F5571) within a deposit of ash and silt. Somewhat puzzling is the fact that the figure does not seem to have been fired, so the deposit is perhaps secondary sweepings that filled the pit.

One of the western suburb houses, D12.7, contained a plaque (F12688) within layers of silty deposits (12054) within Room 3, a small side room, that seem contemporary with the occupation of the house. Another of the western suburb plaques (F2727) was recovered from a deposit of silt, sherds and charcoal excavated within courtyard D12.10 and likely to be sweepings from one of the adjacent houses. In terms of socio-economic distribution it may be noteworthy that neither of the two large villas excavated in the western suburb (D12.5 and E12.10) has produced figurines from deposits contemporary with their occupation. The Deputy's Residence within the walled town, however, yielded two plaque figures from side rooms (objs 814, 906) seemingly deposited during the occupation of the residence itself — although not necessarily by the Deputy's household.

### Discussion: roles and representations

Naked or partially clothed female figurines are well known from Egyptian sites, and much has been written on their iconography and purpose (e.g. Desroches Noblecourt 1953; Pinch 1993, 198–234; Doyen, in

press). The study of the figurines has now moved well beyond their early interpretation as children's toys, and it is recognised that they are probably products of everyday cult. They are usually associated with personal health and family well-being, and particularly reproduction and sexual vitality, especially when found outside burial contexts. Magical spells occasionally mention the use of female images, including in clay, in rituals to alleviate stomach-ache and repel venomous snakes (Waraksa 2008, 2), showing that they need not have served fertility ritual alone. The figurines vary quite considerably in form and find context, and studies of individual assemblages — for example of 'paddle dolls' from burials (Morris 2011) or pottery figures from temples (Waraksa 2007) — are important to help us avoid conflating interpretations. Little has yet been written on the plaque figures, while well-excavated archaeological assemblages of female figurines are also quite rare. When the latter occur, they allow us to explore the roles of the figures through their find contexts — and life histories — but also prompt the question of how these objects can inform on the communities from which they originated.

At Amara West, figurines are not a particularly prominent component of the object assemblage, and the female figures are by far the most common. They occur alongside a small number of animal figurines (e.g. F2086, F2269, F4855?), probable model boats (e.g. F4990) and some possible model bricks (e.g. F2141, F2238, F2303, F4245, F5776, F7906), all in mud. The EES also recorded a male figurine in baked clay (obj. 945; Shinnie 1997, 202). Further study of the assemblage awaits, but conspicuous in their absence to date are the fired clay female and cobra figurines that are a fairly common component of Ramesside settlement assemblages in Egypt (Szapkowska 2003, 113–4; Giddy 1999, 13–42).<sup>2</sup> Whether through lack of interest, or perhaps skill — the female figures were moulded, and both types require knowledge of how to fire small statuettes — such objects were not amongst the output of the Amara West potters and, if broader community knowledge of how to

<sup>2</sup> Although not ubiquitous at Egyptian settlement sites. Settlement deposits of probable Ramesside date at Sais, for example,

yielded large numbers of cobra figurines, but no female figurines (Wilson 2011, 120).

produce such figurines existed, it was not engaged.<sup>3</sup> Evidently neither type of figurine was considered important enough to import into the site.

The plaque figures of Amara West are fairly low-effort manufactures, made from local materials, with simple shaping techniques and little evidence of firing, although this is not to dismiss the various choices that went into their production. The decision to use mud, for example, and to leave the mud unfired, may have been quite a purposeful one, to engage the life-giving properties of this material. The remarkable longevity of their form, spanning at least the Middle and New Kingdoms, may owe much to the simplicity of their technology.

One framework that may suit the figures is to view them as by-products of personal magic, important in the fact of their production itself. We might see them as having been made by the people who they were intended to benefit: held in the hand as features were marked in the clay, accompanied by spoken magic. It seems unnecessary to argue that adequate religious knowledge for such everyday rituals would not have been available in the community. Perhaps a particular individual who was versed in such matters was present. But if the manufacture of the plaques itself was restricted to such persons, we might expect them to be much more standardised in their form. Community manufacture provides a better context for their variation in quality, which could arise simply out of differences in artistic skill across a group of people. And it could help to explain their abbreviated form, at least in part: they were perhaps reduced to a simple image that anyone could create. In the end, the quality of the product may have been secondary to the process of embedding the person seeking benefit within the ritual itself.

Something of the idea that they were personal objects, and not group-owned, might be reflected in the occurrence of groups of figurines in House E13.6, and especially E13.4, where three figures were deposited within the same floor horizon. Were these associated with individual (female?) members of this household? Or might these have been used collectively, perhaps in

prescribed arrangements, as in the spell against nightmares calling for the placement of cobra figurines in each of the four corners of a room (Ritner 1990; Szpakowska 2003)?

After production, they may have been suited to various purposes, as charms, icons or within healing or votive rituals. Unfortunately, neither the find contexts nor the form of the figures offers much direct insight into such aspects. But we need not assume they were always manufactured with secondary roles in mind, while some use may have been intended to enhance the effectiveness of the figure after its ritualised (?) production. Within the home, the figures could have been used spontaneously, or somewhat informally. Little else may have been required in the way of accompaniments or fixed cult installations, ritual space delineated by items such as mats or portable stone tables, or via magic words and actions. The figures could also have functioned in association with other figurines, such as the model 'bricks', which they resemble in shape,<sup>4</sup> or with more formal cult images — stelae and statues — and emplacements such as pedestals and wall niches, all of which are attested amongst houses at the site (N. Spencer 2014a, 48–51). Plaque F4471, modelled with a slightly flared base, is one figure that may have been intended for ongoing display, on a pedestal or in a niche perhaps. The excavation of figure F4553 in the same room as the ancestor bust could hint that these objects functioned or were displayed together: in the context of seeking the continuation of the family line from past to future?

Beyond a domestic setting, we can wonder whether obj. 253, found close to the temple, was deposited as a votive offering or in the context of a healing ritual (cf. Waraksa 2007). Other traces of votive or dedicatory activity at the temple, of a somewhat more formal nature, include finds of stelae and statues, including one stela built into the external wall of the hypostyle hall (P. Spencer 1997, 37–8, pl. 40A).

Several of the plaques have worn surfaces and signs of firing, and most are broken. There is little to suggest

<sup>3</sup> Figurine production is not well understood for Pharaonic Egypt. The presence of fired and unfired figurines at a pottery workshop at Tell el-Amarna places their production within a workshop environment, although the occurrence of moulds for female figurines in residential areas of the same site suggests joint scope for household production (Stevens 2006, 261–3).

<sup>4</sup> One object amongst those donated to the British Museum by the EES is a model brick-like object, broken at both ends, but with one face entirely covered in dots (obj. 1029). It is not obviously a female figurine, but in form and decoration is not so dissimilar.

that the latter was a result of ritual use, a practice suggested for female figurines from the Mut Temple at Thebes (Waraksa 2007) and considered for cobra figurines from Sais (Wilson 2011, 119–20). There are no obvious tool marks across the breaks, for example, although the figures could have easily been snapped by hand. To judge from their presence amongst rubbish and domestic debris, many plaques did not retain ongoing sacredness or special significance. Nor, it seems, did they have enough personal value to be included amongst burial goods — or perhaps they were not appropriate for this context. This is in keeping with the idea that their key role was their manufacture itself.

The personal circumstances that prompted their production and use can only be guessed at. Were they made in response to immediate threats to well-being and health, or to mark life events, such as the onset of puberty or a wish to conceive a child? They may have been adaptable to a variety of personal circumstances. We might wonder if there was a meaningful difference in the choice of features marked on individual plaques. It is conceivable that a figure such as F4245, for example, which only has the breasts marked, represents a different wish to one with prominent pubic triangle. Or might they have been produced by individuals at different stages in their (ritual) lives?

Visually, there is no immediate sense that the plaques represent individual women as such, although words could have helped to imbue them with identity. Figure F4471 is again an example that stands out, with its flared garment (?), shown in combination with what is possibly a small pubic triangle, although placed quite high up on the body. Its iconography recalls something of the wooden ‘paddle dolls’ of the Middle Kingdom, which are likewise shown wearing garments but with the pubic triangle marked. Morris (2011) has suggested that they represent *khener*-dancers who would lift their skirts to flash their genitalia to the Sun-god during ritual dances. The garments of the paddle dolls are much more elaborate, and their pubic triangles larger, but perhaps something of this idea can be applied to F4471.

We might also read embellishments such as the tattoos as identifying elements. Tattoos, of course, were

not a uniquely Egyptian phenomenon, and are closely associated with Nubian culture, especially visible on C-Group figurines (Keimer 1948, 37–8, figs 30–7). It is possible that tattooed Egyptian figurines were inspired by Nubian body embellishments (Pinch 1993, 212–13), and there is nothing to say that tattooed figures could not have represented Nubians directly. Amongst the Amara West assemblage, however, there are no examples yet with especially ‘local’ motifs, such as the wavy lines that mark examples from Sai and Buhen (Millard 1979, 148–9, pls 53–5, 103; Budka and Doyen 2012, 183; Doyen, in press) and that may speak more immediately to a Nubian influence.

Cultural interplay may, however, find expression in the Amara West corpus with the seated figures. Neither the very prominent buttocks nor the bent posture of these figurines is common within the Egyptian tradition of figurine production. In these aspects the Amara West figures show closer parallels to Nubian figurines such as those of the C-Group (e.g. Keimer 1948, 37–8, figs 30–7), also bearing some parallels to probable indigenous figures from the New Kingdom Egyptian town at Askut (Smith 2003, 131–2, fig. 5.31), although they are not exact matches to either group. The unusual production technique of the seated Amara West figures, whereby two rolls of clay are joined vertically, is also not typical of Egyptian figurine production, perhaps arising from the Nubian tradition of coil-forming pottery vessels.

The seated figures seem to be associated with the later history of Amara West, repeatedly occurring high up in the stratigraphy of the town site (Fig. 6). The later phases of the town’s history are difficult to reconstruct. While people were still being interred in the cemeteries, in an increasingly Nubian fashion, into the 8th century BC (Binder, N. Spencer and Millet 2011), archaeological evidence for occupation in the town itself after the New Kingdom is difficult to pinpoint, although scatters of Napatan pottery on the surface of the site hint at occupation.<sup>5</sup> The figurines could have been deposited either during occupation that occurred after the abandonment of the site by the Egyptian administration, perhaps prompted by increasing aridity in the

<sup>5</sup> Marie Millet undertook a surface survey of the town site in 2010, identifying Napatan/Dynasty 25 material, including imports from Egypt.

region, or within the latest phases of activity within the period of Egyptian rule. In either case, they may have arisen from a mixed community, perhaps one re-emerging from Pharaonic occupation. There are other finds that suggest that a kind of hybrid material culture emerged, on occasion, at Amara West over time. Most conspicuous are an ivory amulet of the Egyptian god Bes wearing an African mask from a post-New Kingdom burial (F9459; Binder 2011, 46, pl. 13; also Binder, this volume), examples of Dynasty 20 plates made in typical Egyptian forms but manufactured by hand (N. Spencer and Millet 2013, 656–7, fig. 13; Spataro, Millet and N. Spencer 2014), and the incision of desert animal representations on Egyptian storage jars (N. Spencer 2014a, 55, fig. 21). The seated female figures are not so strongly hybrid in form, but do recall the Egyptian plaque figures in their material, and the style of their decoration.

### Concluding remarks

The female figurines from Amara West, found amongst houses, low-effort manufactures and not infrequently showing signs of an ‘individual touch’ in their decoration and quality, seem suited to production by people within the context of magic directed towards their own personal well-being — and thereafter conceivably used for various secondary purposes. In a way, they suggest a degree of personal empowerment vis-à-vis tackling personal problems, including those thought to have been caused by otherworldly beings.

They speak of a community living somewhat on the fringe, without access to a particularly wide range of figurines, but in which Egyptian folk culture — not only formal literature (Parkinson and N. Spencer, this volume) and temple cult — remained prominent. The

appearance of hand-modelled plaque figurines in distant communities like this suggests the resilience of material culture borne from simple technologies likely passed down through community knowledge, and the practices and beliefs that underscored its use. And, like the hybrid Bes amulet, the female figurines may illustrate that concerns for personal health and family protection offered a particularly fertile environment for cross-cultural exchange (cf. Smith 2003, 131–5) in the realm of everyday life.

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## Appendix: Catalogue

### *Plaque figures from the British Museum excavations*

#### **F2727** (Fig. 1)

Middle portion of a clay plaque-type figurine. On the front face, the pubic triangle is marked by small dots arranged roughly in rows to form an inverted triangle. A horizontal line is incised above the upper row, perhaps to define the top of the pubic triangle. It does not continue around the other faces. Along the upper break a further punctate probably marks the navel.

Height 2.8cm; width 2.5cm; thickness 1.8cm

From the western suburb, Courtyard D12.10, context (12212), a deposit of silt with many sherds and pieces of charcoal, probably deposited during the occupation of the surrounding houses.

#### **F4245** (Fig. 3)

Probable plaque figurine with a separately modelled head (not preserved), shaped fairly roughly in clay and left unfired. It is larger than average and unusual for being covered in yellow paint. The paint is somewhat worn on what seems to be the reverse face but better preserved on the front, and here there are two conspicuous breaks in the paint where applied breasts have probably fallen off. The adjacent end tapers slightly before being broken, the break preserving a small hole that probably served a peg for the attachment of a separately modelled head. On the lower front face are three fairly clear impressed dots that may be deliberately made.

Height 8.9cm; width 4.4cm; thickness 2.1cm

From the walled town, House E13.3-N, Room 27, context (4282), a horizon of windblown sand representing the abandonment of the room in Phase III.

#### **F4266** (Fig. 1)

Mid-part of a probable female figure. One surface bears, at either end, a patch of small lightly impressed dots, arranged quite carefully in rows. Both patches extend beyond breaks and their original shape is difficult to make out. One group, however, may taper to form a broad triangle and so represent the pubic area. In profile, the plaque flares very gently outwards towards this end. The other patch of dots may comprise

two bands, perhaps roughly vertical and joined along the bottom row of dots. On the reverse there is a single row of dots that sits just above the line of the 'pubic triangle' on the front face.

Height 6.4cm; width 4.0cm; thickness 2.7cm

From the walled town, Magazine E13.14 (re-purposed for domestic use), context (4319), a loose silty fill with some mud-brick rubble, pottery and bone representing an occupation deposit of around Phase II.

#### **F4465** (Fig. 1)

End of a plaque-like object with fairly smooth surfaces and slightly rounded edges. On one face are five small and widely spaced dots. Its identification as a female figure is tentative.

Height 2.8cm; width 2.8cm; thickness 1.5cm

From the walled town, House E13.4, Room 1, context (4526), a surface comprising layers of silt and mud plaster belonging to the Phase III/IV occupation. Plaque figures F4471 and F4482 were found in the same context.

#### **F4471** (Fig. 2)

Lower part of a reasonably large plaque which flares out markedly in profile towards the base. Here, the clay has been pinched out, perhaps to enable the plaque to stand upright, an unusual feature. On one face is a roughly rectangular, but not well-centred, patch of small dots. It may represent the pubic triangle, although is placed quite high up. Also unusual is the band of very small dots 0.85cm high that runs around the reverse face and sides just above the flaring base, not extending around the front. The dots often have a flattened profile and were perhaps made with a piece of grass.

Height 7.0cm; width 5.5cm; thickness 2.0cm

From the walled town, House E13.4, Room 1, context (4526), a surface comprising layers of silt and mud plaster belonging to the Phase III/IV occupation. It was found close to F4482.

**F4482** (Fig. 1)

Roughly hand-modelled rectangular plaque, with a distinct but probably unintentional curve through its length. It seems to be intact. One face has a roughly oval cluster of dots that covers around half of its surface area and may represent a pubic triangle. There is one fairly deep and prominent punctate at its top that might represent the navel. Near the other end, to one side, is a single hole that might have been used to attach a breast on a peg. There is no corresponding hole next to it but the surface is lightly roughened here, as though a second breast, attached as an appliqué only, might have broken away.

Height 4.8cm; width 1.7cm; thickness 1.4cm

From the walled town, House E13.4, Room 1, context (4526), a surface comprising layers of silt and mud plaster belonging to the Phase III/IV occupation. It was found close to F4471.

**F4553** (Fig. 3)

Badly damaged pillar-like figurine, re-joined from three fragments. It seems to be very lightly fired. On one side, ending just above the base, there is a cluster of roughly arranged dots that presumably represents the pubic triangle, its upper edge broken away. The sides of the figure flare out gently to this end. Along the lower reverse edge is a row of scoring marks.

Height 5.0cm; width 3.1cm; thickness 1.4cm

From the walled town, House E13.3-S, Room 26, context (4285), a rubble fill rich in artefacts sealed beneath a floor. It is not clear if the rubble is *in situ*, or infill. It dates to around Phase III and overlies a deposit (4363) containing a scarab inscribed with the name of Ramses III (F4561; see N. Spencer 2014b, 471, fig. 8). The same room contained an *in situ* ancestor bust (F4182).

**F4898** (Fig. 1)

Lower part of a female plaque with a pubic triangle formed of rows of dots, which extend into the broken edge. It is hand-modelled in unfired clay.

Height 3.6cm; width 3.8cm; thickness 1.9cm

From the walled town, House E13.4, Room 1, context (4491), a probable trampled floor belonging to the Phase III/IV occupation.

**F4959** (Fig. 3)

Fragment of a probable plaque figure with the beginnings of a projection on one end, presumably for a head. The figure is broken at the other end. There is no sign of breasts or a navel on the part of the torso that survives.

Height 5.2cm; width 3.3cm; thickness 1.2cm

From the walled town, Street E13.13, north end, context (4652), loose silty fill of around Phase III/IV.

**F5571** (Fig. 2)

Lower part of a rectangular figure with heavily abraded surface preserving a pubic triangle marked by four rows of dots roughly tapering along one side to form an inverted triangle. Above this a single dot represents the navel. Enough of the upper body is preserved to suggest that breasts were never marked, either by incision or application.

Height 6.4cm; width 3.0cm; thickness 1.5cm

From the walled town, Oven court E13.13, context (4864), ash and silt fill of a fire pit deposited in Phase III.

**F5996** (Fig. 1)

Lower part of a plaque with a roughly triangular patch of incised dots near the base that is presumably a pubic triangle. Above, an indentation in the broken edge may be a navel.

Height 1.8cm; width 1.6cm; thickness 0.8cm

From the walled town, beneath House E13.6, Room 4, context 5341, a silty floor of around Phase III rich in ceramic.

**F5998** (Fig. 3)

Mid-part of a relatively well-made female plaque, tapering at the top into a head, which has broken away at the neck. The torso is formed of a flat regular plaque, two oval scars in its surface indicating the presence of breasts just below where the neck begins. A shallow punctate indicates the navel, the rest of the plaque being broken away below this. The clay has been fired or burnt, the surface a slightly glossy black.

Height 5.5cm; width 3.0cm; thickness 1.0cm

From the walled town, beneath House E13.6, Room 4, context (5341), a silty floor rich in ceramic deposited around Phase III.

**F6018** (Fig. 2)

A relatively regular plaque, broken through its upper edge but with a modelled breast just below the break, and the scar from a second detached breast beside it. Near the base are two or three faintly incised lines that may demarcate the pubic triangle. As with F5998 it has been fired or burnt, and also has some white surface excretions.

Height 5.5cm; width 2.5cm; thickness 1.4cm

From the walled town, under House E13.6, Room 10/17, context (5248), a silty deposit rich in pottery and animal bone that seems to be levelling material for the Phase III constructions.

**F7269** (Fig. 1)

Fragment of unfired clay probably from the base of a plaque figurine with a broad patch of irregularly spaced dots on one face that continues into the break and may indicate the pubic area.

Height 4.0cm; width 3.0cm; thickness 2.2cm

From the walled town, House E13.5, Room 6, context (5662), a silty deposit probably representing multiple occupation horizons around Phase III.

**F7271** (Fig. 2)

The lower two-thirds or so of a plaque figure. It is quite well formed, with regular faces as though these have been pushed against a flat surface during modelling and smoothed. The base is also flat and the figure can stand upright on a flat surface. On one face is an inverted triangle, not perfectly centred, formed of four rows of quite neatly arranged dots. Above this a further punctate presumably represents the navel. The figure has been fired or burnt.

Height 4.3cm; width 2.4cm; thickness 1.3cm

From the walled town, House E13.5, Room 6, context (5653), a silty deposit probably representing multiple occupation horizons around Phase III.

**F12400** (Fig. 1)

Fragment of a probable female plaque, in two re-joined pieces but still missing both ends. Near one end is a band of dots roughly arranged in two to three rows, some running into each other. The reverse is very worn and little of the original surface remains.

Height 3.0cm; width 2.8cm; thickness 2.2cm

From the western suburb, Courtyard D12.10, context (12201), windblown surface sand with a little material culture, about 3cm deep.

**F12688** (Fig. 2)

Narrow plaque figure in clay, shaped into a rough rectangle with quite rounded edges. The surface is now somewhat abraded but the decoration was relatively elaborate. Near the base is an irregular patch of dots, presumably representing the pubic area. Unusually, a similar patch occurs on the reverse face. Three small dots appear on one adjacent side, but it is not clear if they are intentional. On the front face, a larger dot marks the navel, around which is a circle of five dots that may mark a tattoo or scarification. Near the top are two much deeper holes surrounded by circular irregularities in the surface of the clay which probably mark areas where two breasts have been attached by means of small pegs. The plaque begins to taper inwards slightly at the top and on its upper edge has a further hole that presumably allowed attachment of a separate head.

Height 5.9cm; width 2.9cm; thickness 1.7cm

From the western suburb, House D12.7, Room 3, context (12054), layers of silt with one plaster lamina representing the gradual accumulation of occupation deposits.

**F15331** (Fig. 1)

Lower part of a plaque figure in clay, with a pubic triangle formed of four rows of small dots on one face. Overall, the plaque is well made with smoothed and flattened faces, although the pubic triangle is neither perfectly symmetrical nor centred. The plaque has been lightly fired, leaving it with a slightly glossy blackish-brown surface. Part of the front face is lightly abraded. The base is flat and the fragment stands upright on a flat surface.

Height 3.0 cm; width 2.5 cm; thickness: 0.9 cm

From the walled town, under House E13.5, Room 5, context (10391), a horizon of charcoal and ash that is perhaps sweepings from a firing or heating installation.

***Plaque figures from the EES excavations donated to the British Museum***

These objects, excavated by the EES during the 1938–9 and 1947–50 seasons, were originally assigned to the Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, as part of the division of finds. The figurines, and the other objects from Amara West, were donated to the British Museum in 2016.

**Obj. 402 = British Museum EA 85615** (Fig. 1)

Lower part of a plaque figure. On the lower front face is a fairly carefully marked pubic triangle formed of four rows of dots. Above this are two groups of three dots that lie close to the broken upper edge, but may be complete. They probably mark tattoos or scarification. The dots are consistent in shape and size, and have perhaps been made with a circular metal point. The figure is quite well modelled, with flat faces. The base is not perfectly flat, but as the figure is quite thick it may have stood upright.

Height 2.8cm; width 3.0cm; thickness 1.5cm

From the walled town, Magazine E.12.2 (P. Spencer 1997, 185), deposited around Phase IV.

**Obj. 564 = British Museum EA 85616** (Fig. 3)

Almost intact plaque figure, including a highly stylised head. The figure has the form of a flat rectangular plaque, which flares out very gently towards the base in profile. It has been modelled with reasonable care. Two widely spaced holes, surrounded by circular interruptions in the surface of the clay, mark areas where breasts have broken away. No navel, pubic triangle or body decoration has been marked. The head has been applied separately, and slightly off centre, as a low flat disc. There is little room to show facial features, and none have been marked. The clay along the base of the figure has been pinched out, especially along the reverse, but the figure seems unlikely to have stood unsupported. Just along the top of the ridge on the front face, which is not particularly distinct, is a faint horizontal incision that is perhaps deliberate.

Height 8.5cm; width 4.0cm; thickness 2.0cm

From the walled town D.14.13D, a small house south of the temple, 'below floor 1 of A' (P. Spencer 1997, 156). Around Phase II/III.

**Obj. 814 = British Museum EA 85617** (Fig. 3)

Large, solid plaque figure, almost intact. It is rectangular, flaring out very gently in profile towards the base. The faces are not perfectly flat, but it has been fairly carefully modelled. The base is gently curved and the figure would not have stood upright on its own. The top tapers to a slight projection, the neck, in which is a small hole that might have facilitated the attachment of a head by means of a peg, although it is not a very substantial depression. Certainly, though, a head was once present. On the lower front is a band of dots in two fairly rough rows with a larger central dot that is probably a navel. The dots do not continue around the sides; on one edge there is a depression that is probably incidental. The upper front is very lightly roughened with two slight horizontal ridges in the clay above and it is just possible that breasts have broken away here, but this is far from certain. A chip is missing from an adjacent edge.

Height 8.5cm; width 4.5cm; thickness 2.3cm

From the walled town, E.13.2.Z (c): a side room in the Deputy's Residence. The room seems to have fallen out of use by Phase IV.

**Obj. 906 = British Museum EA 85618** (Fig. 3)

Relatively thick plaque figure with a roughly rectangular patch of quite deep dots on its lower front face. One is fairly central and slightly rounder than the others and is perhaps a navel. Above, there is a slight disruption in the surface of the clay, probably where applied breasts have become detached. The plaque tapers towards its top and is here broken away but has the remains of a small hole c. 1mm in diameter, suggesting that a head was once attached by means of a peg. The plaque flares out gently towards the base in both profile and section view, with the clay pinched out very slightly along the lower front face. It was probably able to stand upright. It is reasonably symmetrical, with quite flat faces.

Height 6.5cm; width 4.0cm; thickness 2.3cm

From the walled town, E.13.2.A (a, b), part of the Deputy's Residence, Level 3. Likely deposited during the use of the residence.

*Seated figures from the British Museum excavations***F2284** (Fig. 4)

Waist to upper thighs of a hand-modelled figure of a female, with pronounced and carefully modelled buttocks and hips. The original posture of the figure is not clear, but it could be seated and leaning back through the torso; it is certainly slightly bent at the waist. On the front, a pubic triangle is marked by two roughly incised rows of small dots contained within an incised triangle, above which the navel is represented by an impressed dot surrounded by a roughly defined circle of smaller punctates, possibly representing a tattoo. The surface of the clay is somewhat friable and there is no sign of pigment. The figure may have been modelled in two strips, joined vertically.

Height 3.9cm; width 3.7cm; thickness 2.2cm

From the western suburb, House D12.5, Room 11, context (2314), an occupation layer that accumulated after mud bricks were robbed out of the house walls.

**F2299** (Fig. 4)

Somewhat roughly modelled female figure in unfired clay preserved from the shoulders to the knees. A small part of the left arm projects horizontally from the torso. The main feature on the front is the navel, incised as a circle. There is no sign of breasts, but the surface is slightly abraded. The buttocks project very prominently on the reverse face, and the join between the thighs is not clearly marked here. The figure may again have been modelled in two vertically joined strips.

Height 6.0cm; width 2.8cm; thickness 2.3cm

From the western suburb, House D12.5, Room 11, context (2320), an occupation layer that accumulated after mud bricks were robbed out of the house walls.

**F12235** (Figs 4–5)

Small figurine of a seated woman, preserved from the shoulders to the top of the thighs. It is hand-modelled in clay, the surface painted red. A patch of rough dots over-painted in black mark a large pubic triangle, the navel is indicated by a punctate and two oval breaks in the paint indicate where breasts were once applied, high up on the torso. The modelling is somewhat exaggerated, the waist very narrow, the hips wide and the buttocks pointed.

Height 3.3cm; width 2.0cm; thickness 1.8cm

From the western suburb, House D12.7, Room 3, context (12051), lenses of windblown sand that built up in the room after its abandonment, but before its collapse.

*Seated figures from the EES excavations donated to the British Museum***Obj. 375 = British Museum EA 85614** (Fig. 4)

Probable waist to thighs of a female with very pronounced buttocks. The figure was probably in a seated posture, but leaning back quite markedly. The hips are somewhat pronounced in profile but the focus is on the buttocks projecting from the reverse face. There is no clear effort to model the waist although it is somewhat thinner than the thighs. The figure is reasonably well modelled but not entirely symmetrical. It has been formed by modelling two separate lengths of clay and joining them vertically. Unusually, no attempt has been made to smooth the clay across the join. There is a very thin ridge of clay between the two joined halves, especially visible on the back, which is perhaps the remains of mud slurry used as an adhesive.

Height 5.5cm; width 3.5cm; thickness 3.2cm

From the walled town, House D.14.9, a free-standing mud-brick house immediately south of the temple enclosure wall (P. Spencer 1997, 143, 221), of Phase IV/V.

**Obj. 1000 = British Museum EA 85619** (Fig. 4)

Small and quite delicately modelled figure preserved from the base of the neck to the upper legs, with large buttocks and thighs, a narrow waist and very small breasts. The figure may have sat, leaning back at an angle. It has been modelled in two strips joined vertically, the join largely smoothed along the torso, although just visible along the back. The join delineates the thighs, at the top of which on the front is a slightly circular interruption that is just possibly a pubic feature. On the upper torso are two small circular breasts that are probably applied separately. Relatively little space has been given to the torso, but it has been neatly done. Two arm stumps project horizontally, but too little is preserved to determine their posture. Whilst the figure is now headless, the head was evidently still intact at the time of excavation, the drawing on the EES registration card showing the figure with a rounded

anthropomorphic head on which two eyes and a mouth were marked, and a distinctive hairstyle in which the hair seems to be bundled in three groups, one each on the side and another on the back of the head.

Height: 4.0cm; width 2.4 cm; thickness 1.8 cm

From outside the walled town to the east, Mound B, D.15.N (P. Spencer 1997, 204–16) and probably dating later in the occupation of the town.

**Obj. 1030 = British Museum EA 85620** (Fig. 4)

Waist to mid-legs of a hand-modelled female figure, broken at both ends. The figure may have been seated, but if so it was leaning back at a marked angle. A relatively large pubic triangle is marked by three thickly incised lines, while on the reverse the buttocks are large and carefully shaped. The hips taper in towards the waist, which would have been quite narrow. The figure has been modelled in two strips and joined vertically, the join smoothed along the front face but not along the reverse so that it delineates the buttocks and legs here, but also continues along the lower back.

Height 5.2cm; width 3.0cm; thickness 2.3cm

From outside the walled town to the east, Mound B, D.15.R (P. Spencer 1997, 204–16) and probably dating later in the occupation of the town.

**Obj. 1064 = British Museum EA 85621** (Fig. 4)

Modelled female figurine with prominent buttocks and pubic triangle, and finished lower legs which are rounded off without any shaping of the knees or feet. The buttocks project markedly out from behind, but there is relatively little attempt to shape the hips, waist or thighs. A pubic triangle is marked fairly roughly, and placed quite low down, as a group of lightly incised lines in which are four dots. A separate circular dot above marks a navel. The figure is a relatively narrow and delicate example, although not very finely made. It has been formed as two separate hand-modelled strips,

joined together vertically. The join is not particularly neat and has not been smoothed, apart from where the pubic triangle has been marked. One strip is pushed into the other somewhat, and was probably thicker to begin with.

Height 6cm; width 2.1cm; thickness 1.9cm

From outside the walled town to the east, Mound B, D.15.K (P. Spencer 1997, 204–16) and probably dating later in the occupation of the town.

*Possible female figurines from the EES excavations that have not been located*

**Obj. 253**

Stylised pottery figurine with head missing. From the walled town, E.14.2, inside the north-east corner of the *temenos*, location of the temple, from a low level (P. Spencer 1997, 61).

**Obj. 476**

Half of a clay object with decoration of holes. From the walled town, D.14.19a, a side room in a fairly substantial house south of the temple (P. Spencer 1997, 130–1).

**Obj. 807**

Rough human figure from the walled town, E.13.2, east of room Y in ‘redim’ below EES Level One (=Phase IV/V) wall (P. Spencer 1997, 200).

**Obj. 966**

Lower part of a clay female figurine, retaining no find provenance (P. Spencer 1997, 215).

**Obj. 1043<sup>6</sup>**

Part of a clay female figurine from Mound B, D.16.K (P. Spencer 1997, 213).

<sup>6</sup> This and the following figures are from the 1949–50 excavations in Mound B. Their destination is not specified in the field records but there are three female figurines from this season in the Sudan National Museum (SNM 10258, 10270, 10298) that are likely to be from this group; Mound B was the only area excavated in this season. The author has not had a chance to

study these pieces directly, but they are described on the registration cards, kindly provided by Senior Curator Ikhlas Abdul Latif, as: ‘legs of clay figurine’ (SNM 10258); a ‘fragment of a clay figurine (buttocks?)’ (SNM10270); and a ‘fragment of a clay figurine of woman, one breast and pudenda indicated by small holes. Red slip.’ (SNM 10298).

**Obj. 1082**

Lower portion of a female mud figurine from Mound B (P. Spencer 1997, 216).

**Obj. 1087**

Fragment of a clay female figurine from Mound B (P. Spencer 1997, 216).

**Obj. 1088**

Fragment of a clay female figurine from Mound B (P. Spencer 1997, 216).

**Obj. 1093**

Fragment of a clay female figurine from Mound B (P. Spencer 1997, 216).