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On Beards, Clothes and Hats... – Reevaluating Typological Indicators in the Case of Southern Levantine Figurines from Persian and Early Hellenistic Times

In the last decade, aspects of regionalization became increasingly important within the studies of Southern Levantine (terracotta) figurines. This holds true not only for the Iron Age finds in Israel/Palestine, but in particular for the figurines from Persian and early Hellenistic times. With this turn, typological indicators like style of execution, headgear, clothing, iconographic features etc. became all the more important criteria for classifying and distinguishing various types of figurines in regional respect (Judean, Idumean, Phoenician, Eastern-Hellenistic etc.). The common and dominant typological characterization “Phoenician” or “Hellenistic” faded against this background. There are no sharp lines in temporal (transition between the Persian and the Hellenistic period) or typological (Phoenician against Eastern-Hellenistic types) respect. However, criteria beyond the simplistic distinctions are lacking in recent discussions of Southern Levantine figurines.

In light of this problem, the paper aims at reevaluating typological indicators using Persian and early Hellenistic terracotta figurines as a case study. By looking at the find distribution from late Persian and early Hellenistic times and analyzing aspects of typology and iconography, the paper seeks to combine aspects of “internationalization” with regionalization and the concept of era with the notion of transition. It will be shown that the evidence does not attest to a clear-cut distinction between Phoenician and Early-Hellenistic figurines, but rather to a more diverse and complex situation (e.g., an overlap of “traditional” and “progressive” types or motives). Thus, the paper offers some insights in terms of methodology, like e.g., the much needed distinction between the type or style of a figurine and the Aussagesystem its iconography refers to.

Images in Transition
The Southern Levant and its Imagery between Near Eastern and Greek Traditions from 5th to 3rd Century BCE

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