The Stone Spirits

By THERESA HOWARD CARTER

Early in the 1964 season of excavations at Tell al-Rimah one of our Bedouin excavators, a colorful Shammur tribesman, brought in a block of basalt roughly cut in anthropomophic shape. We appreciated the statuette as a genuine primitive product of perhaps recent antiquity, and certainly believed Ashawi when he described the find as half-buried face down in the surface soil of the Sinjar Plain some 8 kms. south of our tell. It was considered none of our Second Millennium business, and was shortly relegated to a less ornamental locaion behind the lemon squash bottles in the dining room!

Some weeks later our excavators near the presumed center of the "Palace Mound" brought to light a well-consftructed religious complex consisting of a shrine, adjacent court yard, and at least three shrine magazines. The shrine had apparently been constructed in its extant form in the late Nuzi phase (14th century B.C.) and continued in use with various architectural alterations throughout the Middle Assyrian period (13th century B.C.). Our first excavated statuette reigned in situ on the curiously formed and much re-plastered white bench in the east end of the last shrine. There was here no question of import or age; the lady was in stratified context in a religious situation.

Subsequent excavations in the same season turned up a male counterpart at the base of the antechamber door in the temple mound. He was in situ as well and dated to a phase of late Nuzi restoration. Was it conceivable that the statuettes might be regarded as a pair? I thought they complemented each other rather well, but my enthusiasm proved not to be contagious among my Iraqi and British colleagues.

We acquired the male figure from the temple as part of Philadelphia's share in the division. On the Wednesday following Election Day in that same year, Professor Edith Porada and I were in the storeroom under the University Museum auditorium, brushing dust off some of the material from earlier Museum digs at Tepe Gawra and Tell Billa, and we came across a half dozen statuettes of the same genre. Miss Porada's interest was aroused and she encouraged further research on my part. A check of the Museum catalogue revealed that two of the Gawra statuettes were published, but the bulk of the group came from Tell Billa, several of which must have been returned to the Museum as curiosities since they have no numbers at all. The most expertly carved and sophisticated of the lot was inscribed "FAKE" in bold pencil across the obverse!

In the ensuing five years, while engaged in other projects, I kept notes of possible related pieces in excavation reports and museums. The published ones seemed to come mostly from Syrian sites. One of the most important unpublished collections rests in the storage museums of the Iraq Museum.

The Philadelphia figurines separate into three general forms: rectangular slabs; amorphous squat lamps; semi-naturalistic corporeal shapes. The former examples have stub heads and stumps as limbs; these with heads invariably have discernible noses. The arms are usually modelled along the side contours of the bodies to the waist, where they bend sharply across the front, and often upwards. The other most frequent features are pointed breasts, breasts, and hair queues—decorated and undecorated. Clothing is not suggested except for a horizontal ridge (belt?) separating the "waist" from the base when it is so demarked. Several of the figurines appear to be wearing round caps which are frequently linked to the brow ridge-nose-beard on the obverse and the queue on the reverse. Many have no base, and cannot stand alone, indicating that they may have been set in a firm foundation. The bases are of two types—curved rectangular bases on the slab figurines, or a cubed form, suggesting a seated or enthroned position (cf. Rimah ± 2). No legs or feet are indicated on any examples from Gawra, Billa, or Rimah.

The find spots and stratification of the statuettes from Tell Billa and Tepe Gawra do not contribute much useful information to our study. They come invariably from the fill of numbered squares, unrelated to any particular type of building; or from Level I, serving only to fix a maximum bottom date as about 1200 B.C. The noted excavator of the two sites, Dr. Ephraim Speiser told me shortly before his death in 1965 that the figurines were considered of little significance at the time of excavation, and for this reason the best of the group was thought to have been carved by the workmen! Consequently the Rimah finds—at shrine door and on shrine benches—constitute a bonanza for our interpretive efforts.

The first group consists of simple slabs with no bases. Billa ± 1 has a stub head with a prominent nose; what appear to be arm stumps are really shoulders with characteristic relief arms bent in and upward to touch the four-strand beard. Billa ± 2 is a flattened slab with a full-sized silhouette head, and the ubiquitous horizontal groove marking either waist or separation from the lower section, which may have been planted in the ground, or in a plastered shrine bench. A long pointed beard is the only feature rendered.

SPRING, 1970
The closest relative is a basalt statue from Neirab in the Aleppo Museum. No. 122 is also 16 cm. in height, with a similar stump head, a dominant nose ridge, and indentations marking a triangular beard area. Other ridges suggesting arms originate at the shoulders and the body tapers in to a waist, then flares out again to a bulky base. No. 123 is 23 cm. high and has a tabular slab form surmounted by a silhouette head featuring a vertical nose ridge. The modern expert on Syrian sculpture, Professor Paolo Matthiae, thinks the excavators' date of Neo-Babylonian most uncertain.

Maurice Pecard found a 12 cm. high statuette of volcanic stone at Qadesh (No. X) which is nearly a duplicate of Neirab. Qadesh is 19 cm. high, of course a volcanic stone and exactly the same; this is said to come from the last low level called "Amurud." (possibly meaning the first half of the 2nd millennium B.C.). Qadesh is 2 cm. taller from a "niveau inférieur" but within wall foundations, is 25 cm. high, a pure steatite form with a rounded top, prominent nose ridge, horizontal groove toward the bottom, and completely unique wavy hair tresses on the reverse.

At least two figurines from Alalah unquestionably belong in this simple generally featureless slab group. Alalah D is 24 cm. high, crude, tabular, with silhouette head and eye depressions gouged out to either side of the vertical nose ridge stemming from the hair-cap. This is attributed to Level 4, meaning it dates about 1000 B.C. at the earliest. Alalah E is smaller, crude, undated, but similar.

Gawra I must be a variant of the simple form and consists of a bust with an elongated nose-beard. Arms are crude ridges which bend in to meet at the waist; the figurine stands on the folded arms.

Billa 3 is a more corporeal version of the simple bust. This 9 cm. high statuette wears a round flat cap merging into the brow ridge with a vertical nose-beard extension. A pair of nubbins lower down are possible arm stumps. A flattened bottom enables the figure to stand; the piece was re-discovered in Philadelphia in a box marked "Grinders!"

Gawra 2 is a bell-shaped slab published in the Gawra final report as a female; "she" is featureless apart from two vertical grooves in the face, leaving an impressive eyebrow-nose. Near the lower edge is a horizontal groove. The piece was found loose in the debris.

Alalah C is a rougher bell-shaped stone the upper part of which has been smoothed and a face carved. We illustrate the two sides of the reverse taken under different lighting conditions. The first is a triangular face in high relief with

**SOUTH, 1970**

**Photo courtesy of Miss Joan du Plat Taylor and the Institute of Archaeology, London.**
A collection of 'ancestor idols' from a sanctuary in Risaghe, Jordan, several of which duplicate the face of Asalikh C and in general stress such features as noses and beards.


eyes deeply cut in straight grooves leaving the lower lids and nose in higher relief; some conical apparatus is evident on the head. In the second picture this is revealed as a horned cap, while all the other features apart from a sharp nose are in obscurity! This 73 cm. stela was excavated near a shrine, in a level possibly dating about 1500 B.C.

A striking series of parallels for the face without the horned cap come from the open-air sanctuary at Risaghe. The site is located in the most southeast corner of Jordan very near Aqaba. A large group of these slab figurines, some more than a meter in height, were excavated very recently by Miss Diana Kirkbride in a pre-Islamic ancestor shrine. They are almost entirely of the unfacial slab type with emphasis on facial features, beards, breasts, and bent-in arms. No definite dates have yet been assigned.

The slender stela form with silhouette head and minimal features reaches the acme of its stylization with Qadesh #1. This simple well-cut slab is delicately tapered at top and bottom. A deep wide carved groove separates the vaguely triangular head from the stela. The reverse is slightly concave, and the entire surface is smoothly worked.

Another flat stela in the same idiom with more attention to feature detail comes from Abu Ireyen in the Sefire region. A dominant nose is the salient feature in the triangular relief face. Straight and carefully cut arms emerge from the square shoulders; they bend sharply at the elbows and then immediately upward. Fingers of the right hand on the breast are fully delineated. The rest of the stone is worked but undecorated.

This clear-cut stela from Abu Ireyen, now in the Aleppo Museum, could easily be a link between the traditions of Northern Iraq and Syria and the Risaghe stone slabs.

P. MATTHIESE, Ars Syria, PL 5.
The next major category to be examined continues the general slab form, but with an overall thickening and increased corporeality; on many the lower portion of the stone is carved as a base. Greater attention is given to the rendering of features.

Two pieces should be noted in transition to this group. The first is Billa #4 which exhibits a nose, arms bent in and up, queue on reverse, and carved base. Alshikli #2 is quite similar and is dated about 1400 B.C.

The most striking of the second group, of which we possess only poor illustrations and very little information, is a virtually life-size basalt statue from Tell Brak. It was found in 1930 buried face down, even with the soil, in a ravine containing much wash from the ancient mud-brick buildings on the highest platform of the tell. The stone was naturally somewhat human in form and the artist has used each accident to advantage; the apparent musculature is inherent to the stone. The dominant nose is again an extension of the brow ridge, and the eyes are cut deeply within depressions. The excavators thought the statue was intended for an outside sanctuary where the play of light and shadow heightens the dramatic effect of the haunting visage in the dark stone. The beveled base is the most elaborate encountered in the series.

Sinjar #1 is in basalt in much the same tradition, with deeply depressed eyes. The right arm is bent up toward the throat, while the left bends in and holds probably a branch on the chest. On the reverse, a token gesture of a queue erupts from the top of the head but is not evident below the shoulders. The floral branch, often detailed as a date-palm sprout, is usually thought to have fertility significance.

A limestone figure 1.19 m. high from Ras Shamra was excavated south of the Baal Temple in 19th century B.C. context. Although badly eroded, the now headless figure seems to have worn a heavy wrap-around garment. Again the left hand holds a branch across the chest.
Billa #8, of limestone, 20 cm., high.
University Museum 32-20-384.

Billa #8 is broken off squarely across the shoulders. Elbows are bent acutely and arms rendered as thin ridges on the chest; within these angles pendulous pointed breasts are defined with similar ridges. This feature recalls vividly the female breast forms on many of the Risqeh monuments. A narrow ridge running down the left shoulder is probably intended as a queue.

Billa #7 is from Level 2, as is Billa #8, and the pointed breasts are rendered in the same manner. Here the beard is described by a triple series of V's within one another. Eyes are the result of a natural hole in the stone bridged by the nose. The combination of breasts and beard makes sexual determination complicated. On the reverse is an elegantly sculptured queue. The closest available parallel for this trait can be seen on a Hittite bronze male figure from Lüdiya dating to the 15th-13th century B.C. Quiffes are generally popular among Hittites in Anatolia. For example, the warrior god in the Bogazkoy gateway dating to the 14th century appears in profile to sport a pigtail. The characteristic may also

SPRING, 1970
Stone orthostates from Alaca Hiyik. Reliefs from other Hittite cities testify to a national pigtail style.

Stone relief from Boghazkoy. In the mid-second millennium B.C. queues were demonstrably popular in Anatolia, as attested by the famous warrior-relief on the Hittite capital gateway.

be seen on Hittite Imperial reliefs at Alaca Hiyik. The Hittite queues date just after the middle of the 2nd millennium, while Billa #7 comes from a Middle Assyrian context of Shalmaneser I (1275-1250 B.C.). Even earlier pigtales have been distinguished on sculptured monuments of the Akkad period. The rock relief at Darband-i-Gwar commemorating Naram-Sin's defeat of the wild Lullabu of the Zagros Mountains in about 2300 B.C., depicts the latter with pigtales. Similar pigtailed captives appear in a possibly contemporaneous rock relief at Kurungum, again in the Zagros.

Billa #9's gender seems in no doubt at first glance, but closer scrutiny reveals a pair of relief breasts; the hermaphroditic aspect is intensified by the addition of a small incised triangular beard. Familiar characteristics include a continuous brow-ridge-nose, angular arms bent sharply inward, and the usual waist indentation.

Comparable sexual traits are to be found on Alalakh A and Alalakh B. These basalt figures were discovered as a pair in the Northeast Gate Tower and date ca. 1500 B.C. The lady (Alalakh A) has a clearly rendered female organ below the waist line; above are the same disc breasts observed on Billa #9. Angular arms are bent straight in across the upper chest. Eyes are depressed, mouth is a gag, and nose a large half-cylinder. On the reverse the Alalakh lady has a groove for spine and queue, as well as a short pigtail. Alalakh B is an almost exact male counterpart of the lady with sexual organs displayed alone below the waist line. Both are slabs without base.

Another pair of basalt statues of approximately the same size (85-90 cm. high) were buried in the City Gate at Duyarbekir and summarily published by Woolley in his Alalakh volume. The style of the lady (Duyarbekir 1) is that of the preceding Alalakh figures and the Kisiksh stelae. Her gender is determined by asymmetrical disc breasts; her left arm is bent in, her right arm in and up. She wears a heavy double torque necklace. The male from the Duyarbekir gate is identified by his long square-trim beard. His body tapers to a slim slab bottom. The similarities be-
The Billa "FAKE" in the University Museum. It is of limestone and is 25 cm. high.

Gawra #3, of terracotta, 20 cm. high. University Museum 32-21-544.

Rimah #1, of calcite, 25 cm. high, now in Baghdad. (Above) The statue on plastered bench in shrine. Tell al-Rimah Expedition photos.

between these two pairs of gate figures in size, material, and style should not be lightly dismissed.

The Philadelphia "FAKE," presumably from Billa, continues the slab tradition with carved base. The familiar stick-like arms trace down the sides of the stone; the left is bent in at the waist and the right up toward the throat. The lady sports a heavy torque and disc pendant. This figure is much better modelled than most of our series and the face is semi-naturalistic in a generalized way. The reverse is plain, although the neck is marked by an indentation.

Gawra #3, our only terracotta figure, shows the lower portion of a figure which has a striking similarity to the Philadelphia "FAKE." A ridge separates the base from the torso. Arms are bent in across the chest and simple bracelets ornament each wrist. The piece came from a well and the excavators suggested a date of 2100-1800 B.C. A dowel hole in the upper surface indicates repairs in antiquity.

Rimah #1, the seated lady from the palace shrine, seems closely related to the Philadelphia "FAKE" although she has gained in substance, so that her form is squat and pyramidal. The oval face slants back in a better. Limbs are slightly indicated, and bend in without emerging from the stone. She also wears a heavy torque. Nose,
Limestone statue of Dagan from Mari. Rimah #2 imitates the form of this possibly much earlier figure, but he also holds a branch.

Syria 39 (1962) Pl. 10 #4

Breasts, eyes, and hair queue are casually molded, while scapulae and buttocks are rendered in more detail on the reverse.

Rimah #2, the seated gentleman from the doorway of the temple shrine is far less sophisticated, more squat, and more cuboid; his broad face also slants back in a batter. An intrinsic shell forms the lower part of the face and small beard. The simian head is lodged directly upon the square shoulders, which apparently terminate in arms across the front. Rimah #1 and Rimah #2 are conceivable stylistically as a pair, in the same order as Diyarbekir I and Diyarbekir J, or Alalakh A and Alalakh B. However, both of the latter were found as pairs in city gates, whereas the Rimah couple, although both dated to later Nuwi and both associated with shrines, were excavated in the palace and temple respectively.

A so-called statuette of Dagan from the Mari sanctuary was designed as something much more elegant, but age has eroded the details so the general form is not far from Rimah #2, especially in the region of face and beard. Seated on a decorated throne, he wears a tunic, skirt, and holds a date (?) branch in his lap. The earliest Dagan sanctuary dates to Early Dynastic times, but it seems possible that our bearded statuette belongs to the 2nd millennium rebuilding.

A little statuette from the Coupole de Loth at Qana is close in form to Rimah #2 in the head, shoulders, and pointed beard. This much worn basalt man is seated on a stool or throne; his spindle legs are visible in front. His context is dated by a fragment of a contract in a Babylonian script of Akkadian known from the Amarna tablets (14th century B.C.). Some superficial resemblance in seated profile to the basalt statue from Tell Mardikh has been noted.

Rimah #2, of olivine limestone, 18 cm. high. University Museum 64.111.4. (Left) The statue in situ at temple ante-chamber entrance. Photograph in nis made by Tell al-Rimah Expedition.

EXPEDITION

Statue of volcanic stone, 20 cm. high, from Qana. This little enthroned man is a refined version of Rimah #2 and is one of the very few in our series to possess identifiable legs. Photo: Syria 8 (1927) Ph. 79 #1 and 80 #1.

This proper sculptor's statue of about 1500 B.C. from Tell Mardikh has only roughly the form of our seated statue, and a totally different function. It is of blue-gray basalt and is 58 cm. high.

Davico et al., Missione Archeologica Italiana in Siria, 1964, pl. 59.
This stone statue from Hawa Hüyyik, now in the Aleppo Museum, was probably initially cut by a genuine sculptor, but left unfinished. It also typical of palace or temple art and would not have been employed in a stone spirit position.

PaoLo MatthaeuS, Ars Sylva (Rome 1962) Pl. 4.

An apparently unfinished seated statue from Hawa Hüyyik relates to the Rimah male in concept, if not execution. A chunky-headed bearded figure is roughed out of a plaque-like background. The left arm is bent in on the lap; details of legs and skirt are partially completed below.

A small basalt surface find from Megiddo rounds out the group of squat compact cuboid forms. Like Rimah #2, his head is planted immediately on his shoulders and the oval face with the sharp nose lengthens into a triangular beard. On the side of the body is a bent arm in relief.

Two other pieces, too crude for category, are included for the sake of completeness. Billa #6 is a thick fat form which cannot stand. A slight attempt has been made to describe a beard and a right arm; a definite groove marks the waist. Billa #5 has a head stump, two arm stumps, and flares toward the bottom; a vertical ridge marks the nose.

As the information accumulates the confusion mounts, yet we must attempt a few concluding remarks.

In the manufacture of these figurines, basalt and dark volcanic stones are preferred. This is evident in the places where they are available; apparently, however, there were none to be had in the Northern Iraq sites. There is no doubt some significance, which we do not understand, in the fact that legs and feet are largely ignored, even on seated forms. The features of consistent interest are noses, breasts, breasts, arms, and pigtails; more conscientious and painstaking artists included other details when so inclined. Can we analyze why these particular features are emphasized? The nose immediately marks the figure as anthropomorphic. The beard sets the figure apart as something worthy of veneration, by lending dignity and becoming thereby more potent, which must be the desired result wherever he is used. Breasts make the spirit a female, and are also symbols of fertility, useful in any situation. Those with hermaphrodite attributes are definitely of the spirit world, since they cannot reasonably represent any actual person. The arms have a very vital meaning in old Mesopotamian times about 2100 B.C. Our evidence comes from inscribed terracottas found buried at doorways and gates. The arrangement

Billa #5, of limestone, 11 cm. high. University Museum 32-20-380.

Billa #6, of limestone, 21 cm. high. University Museum.
of the arms signifies "Come in Good. Banish all Evil." Thus these are most effective guardian spirits.

Pigtails have been associated with mountain men of the Zagros in the 3rd millennium; in these situations the queue might be called an ethnic indicator. In the 2nd millennium the queue is associated with Anatolians from beyond the Taurus, and is perhaps more of a tradition for a particular class of spirit rather than a reflection of current fashion. We really don't know enough to stretch the evidence further.

Casual references have been made throughout to "artists." Clearly in such metropolises as Alalakh and Rimah, where contemporaneous major sculpture exists, these are not products of sculptors' studios. They are instead produced locally, either at home in leisure time or by the craftsman who makes the stone bowls, pivot stones, and grinders. The resemblances between pieces from different sites are easily explained, since this is a period of much trade and travel.

The distribution of the stone spirits falls neatly in a crescent pattern, although a much more limited interpretation of Breasted's concept. This geographic consideration eliminates the native cult theories and simultaneously renders hopeless attempts to link these productions with ethno-linguistic groups.

The ground distribution has greater range than the chronological spread. The Alalakh couple from the Gate Tower date possibly about 1500 B.C. Of the firmly stratified pieces from reliable context, the Rimah ones (after 1400) are next in date. The most recent figurines, although not precisely fixed, are the stelae from the Risheh sanctuary.

We turn now to the question of what the statues mean. Miss Kirkbride's evidence for ancestor stelae is very convincing. Spirits of deceased relatives set in the ground in open-air sanctuaries is a reasonable practice for nomadic peoples. Such a use also accounts for scattered surface finds in remote places.

The stones are not satisfying as deities. The only specific mark of deification is the horned pointed cap worn by Alalakh C, who is definitely unique, possibly unfinished, and found near a shrine. Rimah 2 on the shrine bench must have been the shrine statue, in the last phase of the shrine's existence at any rate. She and the Philadelphia "FAKE" both wear jewelry, usually restricted to deities and cult figures. These ladies in shrines are not however to be confused with major cult statues from temples. Rimah 2 only guards the door of the temple antechamber. In general these figures do not even rank with the vast class of minor deities who appear in hundreds of glyptic introductory scenes.

The fertility aspect of the figurines may be involved to some extent where reproductive organs are emphasized, or when they hold special branches, but fertility is not the primary function. These figures are in fact guardian spirits who are equally at home at temple doors, in city gates, in house doors, in ancestor shrines, and in palace shrines. The more details rendered the more potent the figure. They are the antidote par excellence against evil and bad magic. The more stone spirits in one's immediate surroundings, the greater the security for mortals.

Photographs which do not carry an individual credit line were all made by Mr. George Quay, the University Museum photographer, and his staff. To them and to Mrs. Caroline Dosker who made the whole project possible, I wish to express my gratitude. I also appreciate the courtesy of all those who have allowed me to use their pictures.

—T.H.C.

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