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Stephanie M. Langin-Hooper

Terracotta Figurines and Social Identities in Hellenistic Babylonia

Abstract: Terracotta figurines are proposed as a particularly useful object corpus through which to access social identities in Hellenistic Babylonia. Cross-cultural interaction between Greeks and Babylonians has traditionally been the primary interest of scholars researching this society, and figurines were often recruited as evidence for the opposition of ethnic identities. In this work, a new approach to the figurines is proposed, which deemphasizes the categorical rigidity of typology and substitutes a flexible methodology of accessing multiple inter-object entanglements. A particular case study of “nude heroic” figurines (which are often considered evidence for display of cultural difference) is explored in detail, utilizing the entanglement approach. This research reveals that the hybrid qualities of objects were often selected with a sensitivity to both Greek and Babylonian cultural traditions, and with the aim of mutual acceptability. The evidence presented indicates that ethnicity-based concerns were not always the paramount interests in Hellenistic Babylonian identity formation, nor the primary way in which that society was divided.

Keywords: cross-cultural interaction, hybridity, post-colonial, entanglement, terracotta figurines, Hellenistic Babylonia

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Introduction

There is a growing awareness among scholars that the material world plays an important role in shaping a person’s identity. Objects do not just reflect the ideals of the society that creates them, but also influence people by physically embodying and actively participating in the shaping of social norms. Anthropomorphic terracotta figurines are a particularly suitable group of objects through which to access social roles in the Hellenistic Babylonian period. Terracotta figurines were a widely available kind of object made from a readily obtainable material. As miniature representations of human bodies, figurines also provided immediate and obvious connections to the corporeality of their human interlocutors, allowing for mutual identity sharing between object and user. Terracotta figurines thus have an especially rich potential to inform on a variety of social identities.

When considering social identity in Hellenistic Babylonia, most scholars have concentrated on the issue of cross-cultural interaction. For many, the Hellenistic period marks the end of the “ancient” Near East, as Babylonia and the rest of the former Persian Empire came under Greek rule. The dividing line that scholarship draws at 330 BCE is significant – it implies that the influx of Greek culture was of a fundamentally different nature, with vastly more transformative potential, than the population migrations or political regime changes of earlier Mesopotamian history. Our understanding of cultural identities during this period, and our interest in the exchanges between cultural groups, are thus foregrounded in this modern perspective on Hellenistic Babylonian society.

Terracotta figurines are a valuable tool for exploring issues of cross-cultural interaction, as these Hellenistic Babylonian objects display a wide spectrum of culturally-hybrid forms. However, previous approaches to this corpus of material, and to Hellenistic Babylonian social identities in general, have often been reductive. Cultural identity has been conceived of as an either/or scenario, in which “being Greek” or “being Babylonian” are mutually exclusive. Such binary divisions are supported, and even necessitated, by the use of typologies as an organizational device for Hellenistic Babylonian objects.

I propose moving beyond typology, toward a concept of object entanglement, where connections between objects are the flexible and fluid, active creations of human-object interaction. When we approach figurines through entanglements, a richer and more nuanced view of cross-cultural interaction becomes possible. One case study of entangled figurines will be explored in depth. Through this example, instances of cross-cultural hybridity are revealed to be more than just a happenstance conglomeration of Greek and Babylonian features. In many cases, hybrid interactions within the figurines seem to have drawn upon shared cultural values, in order to resonate in very special ways with their audiences. By utilizing the concept of entanglements, we can get at cross-cultural interactions in a more detailed and subtle manner – which, in turn, allows us to get closer to answering the underlying questions of how, and in what way, these social interactions took place.

When the concept of entanglements is utilized to analyze the terracotta figurines, we can also see that there were other, additional social roles and identities that mattered in Hellenistic Babylonian society. Cross-cultural interaction was just one of many factors in a larger spectrum of social relations. Thus, to only focus on cross-cultural interactions loses sight of the bigger picture, in which Hellenistic Babylonian communities were made up of densely intersecting networks of varied identity affiliations.

The Hellenistic Period

The Hellenistic period in Babylonia began with the conquests of Alexander the Great, who between 333 and 330 BCE marched from Asia Minor through Mesopotamia to

defeat the Persian Empire. He designated the ancient Mesopotamian city of Babylon as the capital of his new empire (Sherwin-White 1987: 9). Following Alexander's death in 323 BCE, his massive conquests were broken up by his generals into several successor kingdoms (Walbank 1981: 46). Most of the Near East, encompassing the land from the Mediterranean Levant to modern Iran and Central Asia, was taken by one general, Seleucus, who was a Macedonian Greek married to Apame, an elite Persian woman (Green 1990: 319). During the reigns of King Seleucus I and his multi-ethnic descendants, Greek people immigrated to Babylonian cities.

Around 300 BCE, the Seleucid kings moved the capital of the empire from Babylon to the newly founded city of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris. Although this transfer of the seat of power demoted Babylon from its long-held position of dominant city in the region, it did not destroy the city, nor did it entail its abandonment.¹ Babylon was situated on the Euphrates River, only 60 km from Seleucia, which (as its name implies) was located on the Tigris River, with a royal canal built between the two cities (Sherwin-White 1987: 18–19). Each city occupied a strategic location, and jointly they could control trade and commerce along the two major rivers that led upstream into northern Mesopotamia and Anatolia, and downstream to the Persian Gulf. Babylonia thus maintained the important position it held under the Achaemenids (539–330 BCE), becoming the thriving heart of the Seleucid Empire as well. These political events and the arrival of Greek populations represented a significant social change that we currently define as the beginning of the Hellenistic period.

The end date of this period is more difficult to fix. The Seleucid Empire gradually lost sections of their easternmost territories due to invasions by the Parthians. The capital city of Seleucia, as well as Babylon, was conquered by the Parthian king Mithradates around 141 BCE (Shibley 2000: 321). The Seleucid Empire continued to exist in its western territories, with the secondary capital of Antioch-on-the-Orontes taking over as the royal seat until its eventual annexation by the Romans in 64 BCE (Green 1990: 547–65, 724). However, despite the conquest of Babylonia by the Parthians, cultural and social changes appear to have been slow in coming. In their coinage, Parthian kings styled themselves in the manner of the Seleucids, including the use of the royal diadem (Simonetta 2007: 51–53). Cuneiform documents were still written in the traditional Babylonian temples and elite communities.² Greek styles

¹ The idea that Babylon was abandoned, or even forcibly depopulated in an effort to transfer inhabitants to Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, has been previously held by several scholars. This view has been amended through the work of Van der Spek (1993) on Seleucid-era astronomical diaries. For a full discussion of this scholarly confusion, as well as the evidence for the continued occupation of Babylon, see Sherwin-White 1987.

² The last datable tablet was written in 75 CE, although some priests and scholars may have been literate in Sumerian and Akkadian into the third century CE (Geller 1997). While the tablet written in 75 CE is generally recognized as a late survivor, cuneiform scribal practice flourished in the third and second centuries BCE (see Doty 1977 for discussion of evidence, most especially from Hellenistic Uruk).

persisted in some arts (Invernizzi 2007: 129–33). Based on this cultural continuity, I follow many other scholars who work on Hellenistic Babylonia in including the early Parthian era (c. 171 BCE–51 CE) as part of the “Hellenistic period.”³

“Greeks” and “Babylonians”

The archaeological evidence for the presence of Greek peoples in Babylon, Seleucia and the surrounding cities includes new buildings, such as theaters and gymnasia (Van der Spek 1987), as well as small-scale finds such as statues, pottery, and coins.⁴ There is also substantial archaeological evidence to indicate that the native Babylonian communities were still in existence – for instance, traditional Babylonian temples were rebuilt (Hannestad and Potts 1990; Downey 1988) and documents written in Akkadian were still used to record some economic transactions (see footnote 2). The presence of both communities made for a multi-cultural situation in the cities of Hellenistic Babylonia.

This multi-cultural environment in Hellenistic Babylonia has often been interpreted as a tense and polarized state of affairs, in which Greek and Babylonian communities were at odds with one another. Taking the more recent, colonial interactions between Europe and the Middle East as a model, scholars have proposed a situation of Greek versus Babylonian: in other words, a situation of antagonistic encounters between dominant Greek colonizers and a resistant native population of Babylonians. In such a “dualist conception of colonialism,” cross-cultural communities (like Hellenistic Babylonia) are represented “as a confrontation between two essentially distinct entities, each of which is internally homogenous and externally bounded” (van Domelen 1997: 308). When this model of colonizer versus colonized has been applied to the Near East, interest has lain “in tracing the progress of Greek objects across the lands originally conquered by Alexander, and in watching eagerly for signs of ‘Hellenic influence’ pervading native traditions” (Alcock 1993: 163). Such evidence of Greek (or Greek-looking) objects has been used to reinforce the notion of Greek cultural domination, which was thought to be successful to a greater or lesser degree across the Hellenized East based on the strength or weakness of the native resistance.

Terracotta figurines have often been used as evidence in these models of Greek domination over native Babylonians. Large numbers of figurines were recorded by the

Clancier (2011) argues that the continued use of cuneiform for scholarly and literary production as well as for administrative and legal documentation is one outcome of the mutually beneficial relationship resulting from the liaison between members of the Mesopotamian urban elite with the Hellenistic powers.

³ Dates as outlined by Keall (1970: 8).

⁴ A brief selection of useful references: Invernizzi 2007; Valtz 1993; Petrie 1997; Rostovtzeff 1932; McDowell 1935; Colledge 1987; Potts 1997: 276–301.

early excavators of these sites, as well as addressed in various specialist volumes devoted to cataloguing and describing them. Even in early excavation work, the presence of both Greek and Babylonian styles, motifs, and techniques throughout the figurine corpus suggested these objects as a locus for cultural display. For instance, Koldewey, excavator of Babylon, analyzed Hellenistic Babylonian figurines as stylistically separate from earlier Babylonian figurines, and made an attempt to discern the cultural origins of the “griechischer Zeit” figurine motifs and features (Koldewey 1925: 64).

Early interpretations of Greek and Babylonian elements in the figurines focused on such features as evidence of ethnic division in Hellenistic Babylonian communities.⁵ Legrain (1930), in his catalogue of the Nippur figurines, discusses the Hellenistic period corpus as the figurines of “The Greek Domination.” Legrain divides these figurines by the extent to which they were more faithful to Greek originals (labeled as the “pure Greek figures”)⁶ or more provincial pieces (labeled as the “figures dressed in a Greek style”) (Legrain 1930: 11). Van Ingen, in her work on the figurines of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, similarly concludes that Babylonian and Greek artistic interests and cultures existed in parallel. Van Ingen does go further at some points in her analysis; for instance, she recognizes that, in some later figurines, “there is a merging of Greek and Oriental (Greek types done in Oriental style and vice versa, or a more hybrid style)” (Van Ingen 1939: 8). However, even this observation does not seem to have caused her to reconsider the Greek versus Oriental dichotomy in her list of figurine types.

Ziegler (1962) addresses the implications of cross-cultural hybridity more directly in her work on the Uruk figurines. She designates certain figurines as “babylonische Typen,” but in her discussion of figurines with Greek visualizations, she hesitates to call them Greek types, but rather remarks that they are “den von der griechischen Kultur beeinflussten Formen” (Ziegler 1962: 175, 176). When discussing some of these “Greek-influenced forms,” such as figurines depicting a man holding a club and draped with a lion pelt, Ziegler also judges that one such terracotta was “eine mißverständene Nachahmung einer Herakles-figur” (1962: 176). Ziegler seems to be suggesting that people of Greek descent were not participating in the creation of Hellenistic Uruk figurines, but rather that native Babylonian people were producing poorly executed copies of Greek art that misunderstood the forms and meanings of the dominant, colonizing culture’s style. This imitation/adoption model of cross-cultural interaction (Gosden 2004; Langin-Hooper 2007) in which members of the native

5 The distinction of Greek versus Babylonian (the terms favored by Koldewey 1925) was alternately framed as a divide between late period (meaning both/either Hellenistic and Parthian period) and earlier Babylonian figurines (the terms favored by Loftus 1857; Hilprecht 1904; and Watelin and Langdon 1934).

6 Although, for the vast majority of Hellenistic Babylonian figurines, “originals” for the “Greek” types are not found among the figurines from the Greek mainland.

culture are thought to have consciously taken on the visual attributes of their colonizers (in other words, to have Hellenized themselves), begins to carve out social space for the existence of hybrid figurines. However, it also retains the underlying assumption of sharp ethnic divides in Hellenistic Babylonian society, and precludes any kind of substantive interaction between the two cultures.

More recent works, such as those of Invernizzi (1970–71; 1985), Karvonen-Kannas (1995), and Menegazzi (2007), have been more delicate in their approach to the cross-cultural make-up of Hellenistic Babylonian society. These scholars suggest that cross-cultural interaction might not have been the same in every community or city of Babylonia, and Invernizzi (1970–71) extensively reviews the localized variations in the figurines. However, these scholars all retain the notion of culture-based divisions in the figurine corpora: Invernizzi (1985) divides the figurines of Seleucia into “Hellenistic” and “Mesopotamian,” with an acknowledgement that these features could be “sometimes mixed” (1985: 98). Karvonen-Kannas (1995) similarly divides the Babylon figurines into “Traditional Mesopotamian Types,” “Persian’ Types,” “Western Types,” etc.; a “New Variations” type is included, but without an exploration of the cross-cultural interaction that would have made such figurines possible. Menegazzi, in her discussion of the figurines from Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, is also consistent in noticing and describing cross-cultural hybridity in the figurines; her discussion of cultural exchange in the figurines as “basato sulla coesistenza e sul dialogo fra elementi di origine diversa” speaks to her nuanced viewpoint in interpreting that hybridity (Menegazzi 2007:129). However, in articulating this hybridity, Menegazzi tends to focus on figurines as evidence of Greek cultural diffusion and Hellenization (“capillare capacità di penetrazione della cultura greca”), with the implication that Greek culture was impressed upon the local people (Menegazzi 2007: 133).

Postcolonial theory, deriving from the work of Said (1978) and Bhabha (1994), has been beneficial in illuminating the ways in which the modern European history of entrenched culture clashes between East and West have colored our understanding of the past. A major feature of postcolonial theories has been an “attempt to identify and weed out colonial habits of thought within the western intellectual tradition” (Gosden 2001: 243). The works of Said have been particularly influential in this respect, as he has identified many of the underlying assumptions made in the Western cultural mindset concerning the former colonial subjects (particularly the cultures of Middle Eastern colonies) of Western imperial powers, which were used for “dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Said 1978: 3).

In addition to deconstructing many imperial-based biases, postcolonial theorists have also created a new understanding of the varied processes that operated in ancient colonial situations. There are two major features that unite postcolonial theories and form the background of postcolonial thought. The first is a non-essentialist view of culture, in which cross-cultural similarities and differences are interpreted as gradients, rather than utilized to create artificial boundaries between distinct and discrete cultural groups. The second feature of postcolonial thought develops from this non-

essentialist view and posits that colonial situations are characterized by cross-cultural negotiation. This process builds on the underlying similarities between the cultures to create new, shared meanings for traditions and objects. Communities involved in cross-cultural negotiation also actively engaged in a “reworking of various elements rather than merely combining two complete cultures,” and invented completely new cultural elements (van Dommelen 1997: 309). This process could lead to the production of objects, such as figurines, which we now view as cross-culturally hybrid.

Through postcolonial theory, more recent scholars have begun to develop alternative models of cross-cultural interaction between Greeks and Babylonians. Sherwin-White and Kuhrt (1993) have been most influential in pointing out the deficiencies in earlier, simplistic approaches to modelling cultural interaction in the Hellenistic East, and in calling for newer, more nuanced analyses of those processes. In so doing, they and others have stressed the importance of “avoid[ing] the reductionist tendencies inherent in the traditional overarching definitions of ‘Hellenism’ and ‘Hellenisation’” (Petrie 2002: 86). Postcolonial approaches have also been applied to the terracotta figurines of Hellenistic Babylonia, by both myself (Langin-Hooper 2007) and Westh-Hansen (2011). Both works propose that a division of figurines by cultural origin of motifs lacks typological soundness, as alternate typologies can be devised which demonstrate pervasive cross-cultural hybridity throughout the figurine types.

The introduction of postcolonial discourse into the study of Hellenistic Babylonian figurines has added theoretical depth to the study of these objects. However, concepts of cultural interaction and hybrid exchange have not yet been pushed to their most productive extent. Rather than simply identifying instances of hybridity, I propose that postcolonial thought, in concert with materiality theory, can be used to probe the meaningfulness of hybridity itself. How does hybridity develop, and why does it matter? In order to answer these questions, I turn now to a more detailed and nuanced look at the terracotta figurine evidence, which holds more information about cross-cultural interaction than has previously been accessed or interrogated.

Why do figurines matter?

Terracotta figurines are one of the most ubiquitous art forms of Hellenistic Babylonia, and potentially one of the most informative on issues of cross-cultural interaction. The presence of Greek and Babylonian features throughout this corpus has long been recognized, thus placing them as a significant piece of evidence indicating a Greek and Babylonian society. But beyond their capacity for bearing culturally specific features, figurines have other physical attributes and interactive qualities that make them particularly well-connected to the identities of their human interlocutors.

Terracotta figurines reached a much wider audience than most other art forms in Hellenistic Babylonia, because they were cheap and easy to make. Immense numbers of these objects were found at Babylon, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, Uruk, and Nippur;

between these four cities, thousands of Hellenistic period figurines have been recovered. Smaller numbers of figurines have also been excavated from Hellenistic period levels at Kish and Borsippa. Taken together, these figurines represent one of the largest corpora of objects known from Hellenistic Babylonia. The vast quantities of figurines discovered across the cities of Hellenistic Babylonia indicate that they were widely available to a broad swath of people. Also, because figurines were inexpensive, they were made, used, and discarded often – indeed, the vast majority of figurines have been discovered in trash deposits. This means that, of all the arts of Hellenistic Babylonian society, the styles and motifs of terracotta figurines had the potential to respond most quickly to changes and evolutions in cross-cultural interactions.

Figurines are also a particularly useful corpus for the study of multiculturalism because of the intimate relationship between this kind of art and its human viewer. As Pollock (2003: 182) has put it: “why do we like looking at images of other human beings? ... An image of another or even ourselves might have no meaning or actually threaten us. There must be a reason for and a mechanism by which we delight in images, especially those that are ‘like’ us, human images.” This power to entrance and engage – a power that all human images share – is given peculiar emphasis in figurines because of their miniature size (Bailey 2005: 33–41). Miniature human images can not only be viewed, but they can also be *possessed*, in a complete physical sense that goes beyond mere ownership to a mastery that is attained when a tiny “person” can be grasped in the hand (Bailey 2005: 38–39, 70). The power to control a miniature human is alluring, and through this emotional bond, the figurine’s owner is also subject to a reciprocal relationship with the object. Physical contact with a miniature human body establishes a deeply personal – as well as mutual – connection, similar to that experienced when touching a real human body (Bailey 2005: 38). The intimate interactivity and potential for subject-object co-identification that figurines provide make them ideal objects through which to investigate personal and social identity.

The idea of a powerful connection existing between a person and a terracotta figurine would have been particularly at home in a Hellenistic Babylonian context. Anthropomorphic figurines were commonly used in Mesopotamian rituals to stand in for living people, whether a particular individual, such as in the *maqlû* incantations against witches (Abusch 2002), or the entire Babylonian population, as in the purification of the *Esagila* temple for the *akītu* festival (Bidmead 2002: 54–59). The practice of using figurines as human substitutes was undoubtedly intertwined with the mimetic quality of figurines, which visually approximate the human body (albeit in miniature). However, additional links between people and terracotta figurines are suggested by some versions of Mesopotamian creation myths, in which clay is often featured as a substance used by the gods to create human bodies. In *Atrahasis*, for instance, all human beings are created from a mixture of clay and divine flesh (Dalley 2000: 15); in a similar fashion, the goddess Aruru creates Gilgamesh’s uncivilized companion Enkidu from a pinch of clay (George 1999: 4–5). Several other cultures of the ancient

world also believed in a primordial connection between clay and the human body; most notably for the purposes of this paper, Greek mythology refers to clay as the formative material used in the creation of Pandora, as recounted in Hesiod's *Works and Days* (West 1999: 38–39). Thus, the idea that human beings and clay figurines were deeply connected, both in shape and in substance, would likely have had resonance with both the Greek and Babylonian components of Hellenistic Babylonian culture.

Beyond Typology: “Entanglement” as a New Approach to Figurine Groupings

In order to utilize this rich potential of terracotta figurines as bearers of social identity concerns, I suggest that we need to approach the entire issue of cross-cultural interaction in a more detailed and subtle way. Combinations of Greek and Babylonian features within the Hellenistic Babylonian terracotta figurines were myriad. As has been previously described, both Greek and Babylonian styles, motifs, and manufacturing techniques were drawn upon in order to create a variety of hybrid art pieces (Langin-Hooper 2007; Westh-Hansen 2011). For instance, double molds (originally a Greek technology) were used to create Babylonian-looking figurines of women supporting their breasts. In other cases, Babylonian poses of women carrying infants were combined with Greek style drapery and hairstyles. Few of these hybridities were superficial; in fact, most would have required an in-depth exposure to the tools and techniques of each cultures' coroplastic craft, as well as a significant re-thinking of form and motif, in order to produce structurally sound and visually coherent figurines.

For instance, in order for a traditionally Babylonian figurine form of a woman supporting her breasts to be created in a double mold, not only does the manufacturer need to know how to make and use a double mold, he/she must also invent a modeled backside (complete with human anatomy, costuming, and hairstyle) for this previously flat-backed form. To account for the multiple versions of such figurines that were produced and used, there must additionally have been a sufficient audience of figurine users within society willing to accept this complex interplay (and new invention) of cultural forms. Thus, the in-depth exchange within the figurines signaled that Greeks and Babylonians were not living in separate communities with antagonistic relationships, but rather that members of both groups interacted across a richly multicultural society. My earlier research sought to create new typological structures to more accurately reflect this situation. This typology did not divide figurines into “Greek” and “Babylonian” categories, but rather could accommodate cross-cultural combinations of features, as well as hybrid developments of new forms (Langin-Hooper 2007).

Yet, is it sufficient to point out that many Hellenistic Babylonian figurines are hybrid? To assign new labels to figurines – in other words, to call them “hybrid”

instead of “Greek” or “Babylonian” – allows for a greater variety of figurine forms to be recognized by scholars. However, without additional analytical depth, the use of the “hybrid” label does not advance our understanding much further concerning how or why cross-cultural figurines were participants in ancient social worlds, nor does it get much closer to accessing society identities.

I suggest that this limitation derives, at least in part, from the typological structure with which Hellenistic Babylonian terracotta figurines are usually ordered, and from which hybridity is deduced. Although helpful organization tools, typologies are also a limited – and limiting – approach to inter-object association. A typology is built on a series of nested assumptions: everyday categories are natural and self-evident; the best way for scholars to study ancient objects is to systematize these natural, everyday categories through the naming of “types” and the creation of a typology; and these typological schemas can be projected back into the past as if they were ahistorical and therefore universal.

Each of these assumptions can be unpacked and shown to be problematic. As described by Keane (2005: 188), all objects have innumerable qualities (such as color, shape, texture, flammability, hardness, etc.) that are bundled together to compose the complete materiality of the object. When a person arranges objects into types, he or she privileges certain features of the object (which are considered instrumental in deciding what type of object it is) and ignores (or considers irrelevant) other features of the object. However, the non-type-determining features remain bundled with the other attributes, even if ignored by the current object user in his or her process of classification. At another time, place, or by another person, the ignored qualities could become selected as relevant and privileged in defining a new purpose, name and function for the same object.

New systems of signification and new typologies can thus arise around features of an object that were previously considered to be irrelevant. There are many overlapping and competing ways of organizing objects – a typological flexibility that is routinely utilized, even if we do not consciously realize it (Bowker and Star 1999: 2–3). Because the bundled qualities of an object are always multiple – indeed, too numerous to be comprehensively listed or classified – the ways in which an object can potentially be categorized are practically limitless. Object pluralism allows for the existence of “many equally legitimate ways of dividing the world into kinds” (Meskell 2004: 42; also Dupré 1993).

Typologies make it difficult to think about this multiplicity of inter-object associations, because in order for a typology to be created, scholars must choose to consistently privilege some object similarities over others. Often this happens along lines familiar to the modern typologizer, resulting in the application of modern categories to ancient objects. When we use categories such as “standing nude female” – categories that we may feel comfortable with in our own lives – and apply these to ancient figurines, we unwittingly retroject categories onto the past as if they were universal. The use of a typology, in particular, encourages reductive approaches to the material,

such as binary divisions (that is, clothed/naked or male/female). Then, through the structural division of typologies into categories and sub-categories, these assessments about figurine features are cemented into a hierarchical ranking of more and less important similarities. In this way, the core organizing principles underlying typology can hinder our understanding of the richly textured and varied associations between figurines.

As one way forward, I propose a new system of accessing inter-object associations, based on a theory of object entanglement. “Entanglement” is a concept that is currently used in anthropological and archaeological literature, most significantly by Hodder (2011; 2012), but also by scholars such as Thomas (1991), Gosden (2011) and, less explicitly (through material engagement theory), Renfrew (2001). In these usages, “entanglement” usually refers to the mutual entrapment between the human and object worlds, which come into being, shape, and even depend upon each other. “Entangled” is also used, such as by Stockhammer (2012), as a substitute for “hybrid” in describing specifically cross-cultural objects. In my approach, I deploy the term “entanglement” to talk about the associations between all objects (regardless of their degree of cross-culturalism), highlighting interconnection and similarity as opposed to interdependence and functionality. While this is a slightly different inflection than other scholars have given this term, its meanings (and the social processes which underlie it) are similar. In this usage, the term “entanglement” expresses the varying connections between figurines – some figurines are more stylistically similar than others, some figurines have a more similar size, weight or fragility, some have more similar motifs. None of these potential inter-object associations needs to be privileged over others, as any of them might have been significant to a particular ancient user at a particular moment of human-object interaction.

To look at three figurines from Nippur as an example: CBS 1952⁷ (Fig. 1) is usually grouped with CBS 2858 (Fig. 2), as their predominant feature is the female gender. Indeed, as Legrain (1930: 20–21) catalogued them, these figurines are included as numbers 110 and 116, respectively, in a section of the typology for “Babylonian ladies” (clothed or partly clothed female figurines). CBS 1954 (Fig. 3) is seen as a separate figurine type – a “tambourine player” – and in Legrain’s catalogue several other figurine types, such as “Herakles” and “warriors,” are placed between it and the entries for CBS 1952 and CBS 2858 (Legrain 1930: 22). However, my approach of investigating entanglements allows for other connections. For instance, CBS 1952 can also be grouped – or “entangled” – with CBS 1954, with which it shares features such as the tripartite headdress and posture of holding the hand(s) to the chest. This collection of shared features may even make these two figurines more closely associated in the eyes of an ancient user than the more traditional, gender-based typological connection.

⁷ All figurines in this article are referred to by their museum number in an effort to avoid restrictive and subjective labeling.



Figure 1: CBS 1952. Height: 19.3 cm, Width: 6 cm. Photograph by author, courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

The language used here to describe these figurines and their features might at first strike the reader as deliberately artificial, because it requires the breakdown of so many layers of assumptions and interpretations that we bring to the material. For instance, the word “feature-bundles” is used to talk about groups of features that were consistently entangled together. But the phrasing assists in drawing out the parallels



Figure 2: CBS 2858. Height: 11.3 cm, Width: 5.2 cm. Photograph by author, courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

between objects and allowing new connections to be made beyond those first recognized as giving an object its identity and purpose. These inter-object associations have existed all along in the figurines, but might have been overlooked from the perspective of a modern, Western scholar, who has been culturally conditioned to engage with objects in ways that are specific to our own time and place. Using a concept of entanglements allows a variety of associations between objects to be made, some along traditional typological lines, and some which differ considerably from the traditional approaches to these objects.

Drawing upon entanglements provides a deliberately subtle and flexible approach that is not intended to be all-encompassing (nor is such comprehensiveness even possible). It cannot lead to a complete accounting of all associations between objects, nor does it approximate every way in which an ancient viewer or user might approach and interact with a figurine. It also remains open, so that the ideas and approaches of future scholars who consider the material – as well as Hellenistic



Figure 3: CBS 1954. (Cast from original.) Height: 9.3 cm, Width: 6.2 cm. Photograph by author, courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

Babylonian figurines that might be discovered in future archaeological excavations – can be incorporated. This deliberate flexibility allows for more possibilities to be accessed – possibilities which, through their multitude, have the potential to approach ancient social realities.

The various possibilities for inter-object connection allowed by a concept of figurine entanglements become a particularly productive site for scholarly inquiry in cases where a web of connections seems to be shared repeatedly, with many objects sharing the same sets of feature-bundles. These I have termed the “popular” or “trendy” associations between figurines. While any connection between figurines might have been important to an individual ancient person, the associations that were particularly trendy were those most likely to have been meaningful to at least some

portion of the Hellenistic Babylonian population. In these trendy entanglements, we can begin to access how figurines participated in the creation of social roles, norms, and ideals.

Entanglements within the Hellenistic Babylonian Figurines: A Case Study of Mature Masculinity and Lion Hunting

A case study exploring a group of entangled figurines demonstrates one particular way in which hybridity was meaningful in Hellenistic Babylonia. Through this case study it becomes clear that trendy figurines were often not only hybrid, but also hybrid *with a purpose*. Hellenistic Babylonian hybrid figurines reveal a combination of entangled features that can be seen to be the result of inclusive impulses, in that their features would have been acceptable across ethnic divides. The existence of such hybrid figurines from Hellenistic Babylonia indicates that ethnically based categories of “Greek” and “Babylonian” were not always the most important divisions in society, nor were these categories necessarily set in opposition to one another. Rather, the terracotta figurines themselves were co-creators of a social reality in which ethnic and cultural difference could at times be smoothed over and made into a less operational part of daily life.

Nude, bearded males that are usually identified as the Greek god Herakles are one grouping of figurines that tends to be at the center of discussions of Greek versus Babylonian ethnic divisions in the figurine corpus. Yet even among these objects, cross-cultural exchange and mutual intelligibility seems to have been cultivated. In keeping with the methodological approach outlined in this article, I suggest that it is more productive to refer to these figurines not as “Herakles,” but as figurines which include a cluster of entangled features such as beards, male genitalia, nudity, carrying or wearing a cloak/lion pelt, and standing on a low plinth. As will be demonstrated in this section, a move away from the traditional typological label of “Herakles” facilitates recognition of the range of associations with which these figurines could engage – including connections with ancient Near Eastern lion-hunting heroes.

One figurine that shares this feature-bundle is M14884 (Fig. 4), found at the site of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris. This figurine is labeled by Van Ingen in her Seleucia-on-the-Tigris figurines catalogue as “Resting Herakles” and is grouped with the “Various Types, Mostly of Greek Derivation,” which is a sub-set of the “Nude and Semidraped Men” category (Van Ingen 1939: 106–107). M14884 is a double molded figurine with detailed and highly three-dimensional modeling, although the surface is somewhat worn. The face is round and distinguished by a small but prominent nose. The hair appears thick and closely cropped; the beard is full and trimmed into a softly squared shape. The head is inclined downward and to the figure’s left. The figure stands in a



Figure 4: M14884. Height: 13.6 cm. Photograph courtesy of the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, University of Michigan; reprinted with permission.

contraposto position, left shoulder angled downward. The left arm holds a club against the ground, over which a lion skin is draped. The right arm is bent and arches behind the back. The torso displays muscular definition, and the penis is carefully modeled. The right leg is straight and supports the weight of the figure, while the left leg is bent and positioned further forward. The feet of the figure blend into the low plinth or base, which is splayed wide to give the figure vertical stability. Despite this detailed frontal modeling, the back is given little attention (with the exception of the buttocks), and the backs of the legs are not modeled at all.

The above description is only meant to apply to M14884 as an individual object and does not constitute the definition of a type. Indeed, there is a cluster of closely entangled objects that share certain features with M14884, but also display a host of differences. Such associated figurines were excavated at several of the Babylonian cities (including Uruk, Babylon, and Nippur); however for the purposes of comparison – and to illustrate the wide variety of associated figurines at one site – the



Figure 5: B16934. Photograph courtesy of the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, University of Michigan; reprinted with permission.

figurines discussed in this section are all from Seleucia-on-the-Tigris. B16934 (Fig. 5), as another of these associated figurines from Seleucia, shares the beard, nakedness, male genitalia and lion pelt with M14884. However, the club is held in the right hand (not the left), a wreath is worn on the head, the contraposto stance is absent, the head is lifted upward, and the limbs are modeled in an openwork design that allows free space between the legs and the bend of the right arm. As another example, M15544 (Fig. 6) also shares a display of male genitalia with M14884, as well as the contraposto stance and defined abdominal musculature that B16934 lacks. However, M15544 has a more youthful and slender body, both a lion pelt and cloak are present, and it was made using a single mold. This last feature of M15544 is highly significant, as it means that this figurine has a completely unmodeled backside. It is unknown if M15544 would also have had a bearded face or a plinth to stand on, as the figurine is broken at both the neck and the ankles.

This small sample of three figurines, all of which come from Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, demonstrates that there are significant shared features among the objects, but also substantial differences. There is no clear path to deciding which of these shared



Figure 6: M15544. Height: 9.5 cm, Width: 5.0 cm. Photograph by author, courtesy of the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, University of Michigan.

features should be privileged as most important. Should it be the contraposto pose, as this feature links the figurines to Greek statuary tradition? If so, B16934 would be removed from consideration, even though it is the only one of the three to wear a circular wreath, which would seem to connote Greek heritage. Alternately, should typological privilege be given to the use of the Greek-invented double mold, with the

potential for modeling the back half of the figurine? This feature allows terracotta figurines to function as miniature statues in the round, and thus would satisfy what is often regarded as “a typical Hellenistic concern for multiple viewpoints” (Connelly 1989: 153). However, neither of the two double molded figurines discussed above fully realizes the sculptural potential of this technique: the back of the legs on M14884 are left unmodeled, while B16934 is in a fully frontal stance that does not take advantage of the plastic, three-dimensional possibilities of double molding.⁸ In both instances, despite the potential for the Greek-introduced double-mold to create very different-looking figurines – which, in turn, could have been a locus for the display of ethnic division – in fact, these double-molded figurines look very similar to single-molded figurines, albeit with more vertical stability.

As the sample size is increased and comparable figurines from the other cities are included, the proliferation of similarities and differences grows still larger. This extreme diversity of figurine form, motif, and technique is especially characteristic of Hellenistic Babylonia (Invernizzi 1985: 97; Ristvet 2011), and makes the use of a typology particularly unhelpful for this corpus of objects. Entanglement, on the other hand, can be a productive concept here, for it does not require a rigid or absolute adherence to rules of form in order to recognize similarities between objects.

For instance, as described above, the three figurines discussed include a cluster of entangled features such as beards, male genitalia, nudity, carrying or wearing a cloak/lion pelt, and standing on a low plinth. Not all the features discussed were preserved in every figurine; for instance, it cannot be assumed that all these trendy features existed in the partially broken figurines (M15544 may not have originally had either a beard or a plinth). However, all of these figurines are interconnected through the sharing of at least some of these features – features which set these figurines apart from other trends, such as figurines shown holding musical instruments. These particular features also are more commonly shared than some of the other attributes of these objects – such as the contraposto pose or the double mold, which are shared only on a more limited basis. These features – the beards, male genitalia, nudity, carrying or wearing a cloak/lion pelt, and standing on a low plinth – seem to have been the more popular traits in antiquity, and thus I have chosen them for discussion as a potentially productive avenue of inquiry into social identity and issues of hybridity.

Two of these features in particular – the lion pelt and the plinth base – may help to lend insight into the cultural identity concerns that were bound up in these figurines. Many of these figurines are shown either wearing or holding a lion pelt, which could be draped over either arm. The head of the lion is often visible hanging

8 Differences in the execution of the modeling, physicality, and plasticity of the so-called “Herakles” figurines from Babylonia from similar figurines in Greece were also recognized by Klengel-Brandt (1993: 192).

near the figure's knee, while the pelt of the lion is stippled to show curled fur. In the case of the plinth, both the single and double mold techniques used to manufacture these figurines was manipulated in order to give the figurine considerable vertical stability. When the double mold was used, the hollow space between the two molded sides was often substantial, resulting in a large diameter base. When a single mold was used, the original mold was carved deeply, allowing the figurine to be molded in high relief and thus imparting a vertically-stable thickness to the figurine; the bottom of these single-molded figurines was often flared and pressed flat, in order to create a low plinth or base. Through this variety of techniques, vertical stability was almost universally imparted to these figurines. This indicates that the figurines were meant to stand in an attitude of vertical display, like statues.

One possible meaning for these display postures and leonine associations was that such figurines represented a god. As mentioned previously, most scholars identify this motif as a depiction of Herakles, and associate the contraposto pose and use of the double mold as traits typical of Hellenistic Greek figurine production. A similar bronze statue, measuring 85.5 cm high and named as the god Herakles/Verethraghna,⁹ was found at Seleucia-on-the-Tigris; this statue depicts a mature male, wearing a rounded full beard, standing in a contraposto pose with his hand on his right hip (Invernizzi, 2007: 64–65). The existence of both the statue and the figurines suggests that there was a popular appeal in Hellenistic Babylonia for figures that had close visual associations with the Greek god Herakles.

However, it is a different matter, and perhaps a step too far, to suggest that these figurines were evidence for a display of ethnic difference and division. These figurines are some of the only popular terracottas in Hellenistic Babylonia that have close visual links with Greek mythological figures. Figurines depicting other male gods popular in the Hellenistic world, such as Apollo or Dionysos,¹⁰ were uncommon in Hellenistic Babylonia (Karvonen-Kannas 1995: 82–84, 159). Many scholars have observed – but have been unable to convincingly explain – the contradiction between the official popularity of several Greek gods (Apollo, for instance, was worshipped as the ancestor of the Seleucid kings) and the “all the more surprising” fact that figurines of these gods “have not been discovered in greater numbers” (Karvonen-Kannas 1995: 84). This seeming contradiction also extends to the bronze statue from Seleucia (that was explicitly given the Greek name of Herakles, as well as a Parthian god name), which was dedicated in a temple to Apollo (Al-Salihi 1987). If Greek religious practice was the sole reason for the existence of figurines and statue(s) that visually approximated Herakles, then one might question why such representations

⁹ These two divine names for the statue were given in the Greek and Parthian inscriptions, respectively, on the statue's legs (Potter 1991: 278–79).

¹⁰ For a discussion of the general popularity of the Greek gods, especially Dionysos, in figurines throughout the rest of the Hellenistic world, see Ammerman 1990: 40–41.

were particularly successful when three-dimensional images of other gods, such as Apollo, were not.

One of the theories commonly offered to explain this apparent contradiction proposes that Herakles figurines were uniquely popular because they were used as votives by members of the Seleucid army. However, while one such figurine was found at the Faïlaka fortress (Connelly 1989: 152–153; Connelly 1990: 98–99), many similar figurines were found in various non-military domestic contexts in cities such as Seleucia-on-the-Tigris and Susa (Van Ingen 1939: 106–109). Additionally, a connection with a Greco-Macedonian military does not adequately explain why the particular prevalence of such figurines in the Hellenistic East (Babylonia, Susa, and the Persian Gulf)¹¹ outpaced the popularity of similar figurines in Hellenistic Greece and Egypt – regions that also supported massive military forces. Another hypothesis for the Babylonian popularity of “Herakles” figurines suggests that the syncretization of Herakles with the Mesopotamian god Nergal was responsible (Klengel-Brandt 1993: 198). However, this explanation seems overly specific, especially as Nergal was not one of the major gods of the Babylonian pantheon, and (as seen in the inscription from the Seleucia-on-the-Tigris statue) he was not the only Near Eastern god with which Herakles could be identified.

As an alternate explanation for the popularity of these figurines, I suggest that the basic assumption made by most modern scholars – that such figurines should be typologically classified as part of the Greek tradition of Herakles statuary – should be reconsidered. A “Herakles” identity may only have been one possible reading of these objects, and thus did not encapsulate the entire range of ancient meaning conceivable for this figurine trend. Greek connections could have been noticed and called to the fore by some viewers, but could also have been unknown, unnoticed, or considered unimportant by others.

To consider what alternative identifications might have been possible, I suggest concentrating on the potentially meaningful inclusion of the lion pelt detail (and, in some cases, the club, which could have evoked the hunting and killing of that lion). Attributes of lion hunting consistently appear in Hellenistic Babylonian figurines that visually approximate Herakles, whereas other details of Herakles iconography from the Greek tradition – such as the Apples of the Hesperides (seen in, for example, the Farnese Herakles statue) or even the more ubiquitous Late Classical and Hellenistic Greek focus on Herakles’ downturned head as an expression of his exhaustion and vulnerability – were much less commonly employed.¹² While the physical fatigue of semi-divine bodies or magical apples had little or no resonance in Babylonian tradi-

11 For the popularity of “Herakles type” figurines in the Hellenistic East, see discussion in Connelly 1990: 98–99; Invernizzi 1985: 98; Martínez-Sève 2002: 726–28.

12 This particular popularity of lion-hunting attributes (the club and the lion pelt), as opposed to other features usually associated with Herakles in the Greek world, is also shared in the terracotta figurines at Susa (Martínez-Sève 2002: 704).

tion, the lion pelt was more significant. To a viewer versed in Near Eastern culture, an image of a heroic-looking male nude with a lion's pelt could have provoked comparison with the nude belted hero motif of earlier Mesopotamian art.

Monumental images of lion-hunting men survived into the visual world of Hellenistic Mesopotamia through multiple avenues. While few explicit representations of the nude belted hero would likely have endured, variations on the motif – depicting the king or other heroic figure grappling with lions – were portrayed on Mesopotamian palace walls throughout the first millennium BCE. These included the so-called “Hairy one” relief at the Neo-Assyrian palace at Khorsabad, as well as images of the Assyrian king hunting lions depicted both on palace wall reliefs and seals (Collon 1987: 130). Similar imagery existed in Persia: reliefs of the “Persian Royal Hero” were carved on the doorjambs of Darius's palace at Persepolis; both the Royal Hero and other lion-hunting figures were popular on Achaemenid stamp and cylinder seals (Curtis and Tallis 2005: 92–94; Garrison 2000: 126–51; Collon 1987: 92). Neo-Assyrian palaces may have been completely inaccessible by the Hellenistic period; however, Neo-Assyrian seals have frequently been recovered from later contexts (Collon 1987: 135–39). Additionally, the reliefs at Persepolis, as well as the small scale Achaemenid arts, would still have been accessible as media for the circulation of ideas throughout Mesopotamian society.¹³ Nude, bearded male figurines would present striking visual similarities to these royal images, through the shared upright posture, bearded face, well-muscled mature male body, and lion-hunting attributes.

If the ancient viewer recognized a visual association between the Mesopotamian royal representations and the heroic-looking nude male figurines, s/he could make new meanings through this visual entanglement. Figurines viewed by some people as “Herakles” could have gained additional, or alternate, layers of significance relating to Mesopotamian history, myth, and kingship. Indeed, this association between the nude bearded figurines and the nude belted hero may have been one of the reasons why Mesopotamians felt comfortable engaging with these figurines. Outside the realm of the nude belted hero, and the associated contest scenes and hunting motifs, male nudity was not considered a positive attribute in Mesopotamian art; indeed, it was generally a symbol of humiliation reserved for captives and dead enemies (Asher-Greve 1998: 20). Even when the lion-hunting hero motif is depicted, the first millennium versions are usually not shown completely nude. However, the continuity of such motifs with the earlier Mesopotamian tradition of a specific kind of heroic nudity may have allowed nudity in terracotta figurines of lion-hunting heroes to be less problematic. The concordance of the Greek idea of Herakles with several of the attributes of the Mesopotamian nude belted hero provides one possible explanation as to why the “Herakles” figurines became accepted and popular, whereas depictions

13 On the importance of seals as portable media of idea exchange in first millennium BCE Mesopotamia, see Uehlinger 2000: xxv–xxvi.

of other nude males derived from the Greek tradition (such as Apollo or Dionysos) were less prevalent.

In addition to this emphasis on features with potential linkages to heroic representations in Mesopotamian art, an importance also seems to have been placed on the statue-like display quality of figurines such as M14884, B16934, and M15544. As noted above, several of the features of these figurines seem to have been designed or manipulated for the purpose of keeping the figurine in a vertically stable position. Plinths in particular not only add to the vertical stability of figurines by creating a wide base, but also construct a visual divide between the figurine and the surface on which it rests – literally raising the image up and away from the mundane world, as if it were a statue to be viewed from afar rather than an active participant in its surroundings. This is in contrast to most Hellenistic Babylonian figurines, which generally did not have wide bases or other vertically-stable constructions; such figurines would need to be held or propped up in order to be engaged with. Thus the lack of vertical stability in most figurines encouraged tactile interaction, as well as close physical proximity, between human and object that was unnecessary for figurines like M14884, B16934, and M15544. The statue-like qualities of these “nude heroes” enabled a more distant viewing experience, in which the figurines could be looked at and received by an “audience” rather than an “interlocutor.”

It is important to note that the scale of a figurine differs substantially from that of a bronze statue. Statues and figurines would have conditioned very different experiences of human-object interaction. We cannot therefore look to statues to provide the meanings of the figurines – which, indeed, suggests that the Herakles identification of the Seleucia-on-the-Tigris bronze does not automatically condition a similar Herakles identification for figurines. Rather, both the statue and the figurines operated within a space in the Hellenistic Babylonian cultural mindset that was open to the concept of nude, male, bearded, lion-hunting identities. The further association of statue-like qualities with the figurines suggests that both were regarded as objects – or, further, identities – for display.

In analyzing these figurines’ statue-like qualities, it seems significant that they are among the few male figurines from Hellenistic Babylonia shown wearing beards. Prior to the Hellenistic period, beards were considered a sign of mature masculinity and virility in both Greek and Babylonian culture. However, during the Hellenistic period, the artistic depictions of men, including images of the Seleucid kings, shifted to a more youthful ideal.¹⁴ This switch toward portraying kings as young men may be the reason why so few Hellenistic Babylonian male figurines are bearded – indeed, the majority are beardless. So if the ideal was youth and beardlessness, why

14 This shift is due largely to the successes Alexander accomplished at a very young age (coupled with the fact that, due to his premature death, he never aged into a mature man). Alexander’s youthful portraits had a strong influence on shaping the image of the ideal Hellenistic king, and many of the Hellenistic kings who succeeded Alexander imitated him (Stewart 1993: 75).

would the Hellenistic Babylonians portray the less fashionable, bearded, male maturity in statuesque figurine form? One might understand the reification of bearded, male maturity into statue form as part of a process of distancing the former bearded male ideal from usefulness in contemporary society. Bearded ancient Mesopotamian kings or bearded Classical Greek scholars were admired, but also remade as larger-than-life heroes that were remote, unreachable, and with whom it was difficult to self-identify. This visual impression would have been further reinforced by the use of statuesque qualities – such as the raised positioning provided by the plinth – common to such figurines. Such features set the figurines apart from their human viewers, who were not required to engage with the objects in a physical or tactile manner.

To return to the consideration of M14884, B16934, and M15544 specifically, these figurines would appear to be not just *hybrid*, but more specifically *hybrid with a purpose* – a deliberate combination of features designed to negotiate the sensitivities and visual traditions of multiple cultures in order to be as broadly appealing as possible. This hybridity is even further extended and elaborated in other groups of entangled figurines, with thickly entwined meldings of Greek and Babylonian motifs, forms, and techniques. However, even in these so-called “Herakles” figurines – figurines which at first glance seem to suggest a display of ethnic difference – cross-cultural exchanges of form were cultivated, as well as the ambiguity of representation that allowed for the kinds of multiple interpretations that could transcend cultural differences. Less ambiguous, and perhaps more specific, were the ways in which these figurines defined gender and age identity – relegating bearded mature males to a statuesque role as revered, but inactive, relics of now-defunct political systems.

Conclusion

Through an investigation of these trends and entanglements, figurines as an art corpus contribute greatly to our understanding of Hellenistic Babylonian identities. Most significantly, the trendiest figurines were often those that negotiated a common ground by speaking to both Greek and Babylonian cultural traditions. Such figurines combined techniques, motifs, and visualizations into hybrid, multicultural creations that had the potential to be acceptable and appealing to people of differing cultural backgrounds. In keeping with this preference, there also seems to have been a general avoidance of elements that were exclusive to only one cultural tradition. Thus, I argue that terracotta figurines were not only active participants in the negotiation of ethnic identities, but could also facilitate social interactions and personal identity creation in which the importance of ethnic affiliation was minimized.

Based on this evidence, I seek to open a broader perspective on Hellenistic Babylonian social identity. Ethnic identification of individuals as either “Greek” or

“Babylonian” may not have been the singular – or even the primary – way in which Hellenistic Babylonian society organized itself. Instead, we should consider that other kinds of social identity – such as age, gender, status – may have held importance in Hellenistic Babylonian society. The lack of a singular focus on ethnic division allowed other social identities to exist in dialogue with cross-cultural concerns, as part of a larger network of social relations. A broader consideration of these Hellenistic Babylonian social identities is beyond the scope of this paper; however, my research has laid the groundwork for such future investigations.

This is not to suggest that scholars should not continue to research the issue of cross-cultural interaction in Hellenistic Babylonia; in fact, quite the opposite. This article has shown that evidence for cross-cultural interactions, when approached in a more subtle and nuanced way, can reveal previously unknown layers of complex inter-cultural negotiation and purposeful hybridities. However, even as we contemplate such rich prospects for probing the Greek-Babylonian relationship, we should be mindful that cross-cultural interactions did not take place in a vacuum and may even have taken, at times, a subordinate position to other identity concerns.

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