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MacGregor Man and the development of anthropomorphic figures in the Late Predynastic Period

The fact that the black basalt statue (Figs. 1 & 2) commonly known as MacGregor Man (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, no. 1922.70) features in a volume on the forgery of Egyptian antiquities (Fiechter 2005: 157) is significant in that it represents another stage in the debate over the figure's genuineness that began with Edouard Naville's first publication of it in 1900. He noted the statue's similarity to the ivory figurines in Reverend William MacGregor's collection, though he doubted that all the artefacts derived from the same tomb. E. J. Baumgartel (1969-70: 10) in her appraisal of the statue failed to find parallels for the sheath, cap, or beard, and therefore considered it to be a forgery. However, other scholars have noted that at the time the piece was acquired (ca. 1898–1900), the ivories that offer close parallels for its style were not widely known, providing "little opportunity for a master forger to absorb their iconography and create MacGregor Man" (Baines & Whitehouse 1999: 69; cf. Williams 1988: 39).

The main argument against the figure is the lack of precedents in stone (e.g. Payne 1993: 12; Baines and Whitehouse 1999: 68). The discovery of parts of a life-sized indurated limestone statue in Locality 6 at Hierakonpolis (HK6) in 2000 that could be securely dated to Naqada IIAB (ca.3600-3500 BC) provided evidence that complex large scale stone human figures were carved at an earlier date than had previously been assumed (Harrington 2004). With this evidence and the redating of the Min colossi (Kemp 2000; Dreyer 1995: 56), there is now an opportunity to review the position of anthropomorphic figures from Naqada II to the beginning of the dynastic period.

Predynastic human representation

Human representation in stone and ivory is attested at least as early as Naqada I (ca. 4000-3600 BC) with the appearance of tusk figures in burial assem-

1.   2.

Fig. 1 and 2. Two views of MacGregor Man. Courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum.

blages (e.g. Griffiths 1975: 314, fig. 144; Pierini 1990: 55-57, nos. 358, 359; Figure 2), and with "tags" (amulets) early in Naqada II (e.g. Payne 1993: 237, fig. 81, nos. 1959, 1960). Most of the tusks with bearded heads are hollow (Nowak 2004: 895), which may suggest that they were used as stave finials, and might thus have formed part of the regalia of male leadership. If this is the case, it may be significant that at some sites including Nag ed-Deir, undecorated tusks were mostly found in female burials (Podzorski 1993: 124). Only one unprove-nanced hollowed stone tusk figure seems to be known: this has prominent ears but no beard, and has been dated stylistically to Naqada I (Swansea W150; Griffiths 1975: 313). Male heads in stone also appear on maceheads (Fig. 3) and stone vessels, and occasionally decorate cosmetic palettes (Petrie 1920-1: pl. XL, nos. 127, 128; pl. XLIII, no. 1; cf. Spagnotto 1998: 181, no. 115).
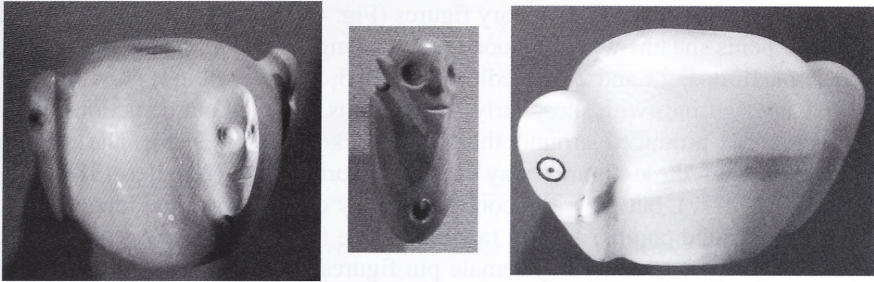
Fig. 3. Two piriform maceheads and a tag or amulet with human heads. MMA 10.176.55 (pink limestone); MMA 10.130.1187 (pink limestone); MMA 10.176.56 (travertine).
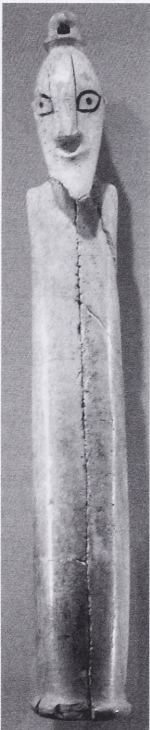

Fig. 4. Hippopotamus ivory tusk figure, Naqada I/II. MMA 23.2.31. Courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum. *Not to scale.*

Fig. 5. Ivory male figure, Naqada I (?). Brooklyn Museum, Charles Edwin Wibour Fund 1935.

Fig. 6. Side view of MacGregor Man, showing cylindrical profile.

From Naqada I onwards, ivory figures (Fig. 4-6) depicting males with bald heads and penis sheaths were produced (e.g. Baumgartel 1960: figures 1-5; Petrie 1920-1: pl. II, nos. 23 and 24; Needler 1984: 345, no. 275, pl. 67; Naville 1900: pl. V). Clay figurines with short curly hair, sheaths, and without depictions of the feet were also produced around this time (Ucko 1968: 13-15). The slightly pointed chins of these figures may indicate short beards (Needler 1984: 344; Ucko 1968: 76-77), but they are iconographically distinct from the long-bearded heads on tusks and combs, and the tapering of the face is not necessarily realistic or gender-specific, as shown by female pin figures (e.g. Ucko 1968: 17, fig. 19, no. 25; 27, fig. 28, no. 37; Petrie 1920-1: pl. II, nos. 6, 9, 29). The function of these pieces is unclear: while some derive from the tombs of males and could be regarded as status markers or fertility-related figurines (e.g. Ucko 1968: 77, no. 14), at least one was found in association with a female burial (Ucko 1968: 97).

Ivory figures of Naqada IIIAB provide the most direct parallels for the features of MacGregor Man. The Gebel el-Araq knife handle depicts a battle, probably between groups loyal to regional rulers of Upper Egypt, where the knife was supposedly found. The warring factions are identified by caps or shaven heads and long penis sheaths, which reach almost to the knees, versus men with long hair and shorter sheaths (Asselberghs 1961: no. 58, pl. XLI). In both cases, the scrotum is visible on either side of the sheath with the knot above the belt reaching navel level, features shared by MacGregor Man (testicles are clearly indicated, not "tassels" as stated by Payne 1993: 13). The same sheath type is also found on ivories from the Main Deposit at Hierakonpolis (Quibell 1900: pl. VIII, nos. 1, 3), and one was among those acquired with MacGregor Man (Naville 1900: pl. V; cf. Grimm & Schoske 2000: 36, no. 46), but the faces are clean shaven (Baines & Whitehouse 1999: 67), and so are only partially comparable to the basalt statue. Faces with the latter's distinctive hair and beard type are uncommon and date to the end of the predynastic period (e.g. Baines & Whitehouse 1999: 68, no. 1.21; Quibell 1900: pls. V, [no. 2], and pl. VII, no. 2). Other iconographic parallels for the statue may be found on ceremonial greywacke palettes, such as the reused 'Queen Tiye' palette (Cairo JE 46148; Bothmer 1969-70: fig. 5), but the closest match for the distinctive merged lines that join the eyebrows to the nose are the raised relief Bat heads (Fig. 7) on the Narmer Palette (e.g. Asselberghs 1961: no. 168, pl. XCIV). This unusual facial feature alone seems to be a fairly secure dating criterion for MacGregor Man.

Early statuary

Prior to the discovery of the Naqada IIAB statue at Hierakonpolis there was scant evidence for the production of stone statuary in the predynastic period, and nothing of the size of MacGregor Man (39.5cm from the cap to the knees) in such a hard stone (e.g. Stocks 2003: 17) was known. It is possible that a range of
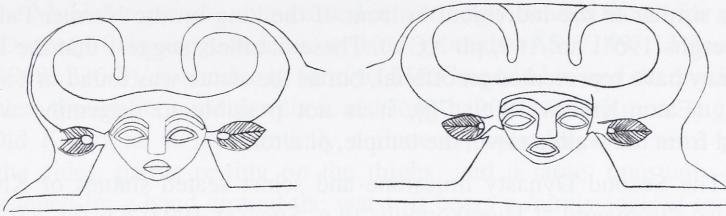
Fig. 7. The Bat heads on the recto of the Narmer Palette, which dates to Dynasty 0.

materials including wood or mixed media were used for some early statuary, which would leave little trace in the archaeological record, an exception being the First Dynasty(?) bearded face of a composite statue (Berman, Doxey & Freed 2003: 56-57), and the feet of statues from the funerary temple of Qa'a at Saqqara, also of the First Dynasty (Emery 1961: 27). A limestone head from Hierakonpolis with the same beard style and prominent upper lip as the basalt statue dated to Dynasty 0 (Quibell 1900: 6), bears stylised hair or a woollen cap which merges with the beard and covers the ears (Ashmolean E.294; Quibell 1900: pl. V, no. 1). Two life-size limestone statues of a kneeling man found on the east side of the temple at Hierakonpolis near the Main Deposit date to the same period (Quibell 1900: pl. II, no. 1; Quibell and Green 1902: pl. I); of the second, Quibell and Green (1902: 35) stated: "The face is curious: the eyes are prominent; the beard, which is broken, was wide and not of the narrow and short form of later time; the whiskers are marked in slight relief, as in later statues, so as to look like a band supporting the beard". The profile, including the projecting lips and distinctive beard line provide close parallels to MacGregor Man (see also Fay 1999: 116, figs. 57-58), and the incised lines depicting strips of cloth that cover the genitals are similar to those worn by the captive on the reverse of the Narmer palette (e.g. Asselberghs 1961: no. 168, pl. XCIV; cf. the Scorpion Macehead; Fay 1999: 144, fig. 52).

Another limestone statue from the temple site is an almost life-size, extensively damaged striding figure (Ashmolean E.3925; Eaton-Krauss 1999: 70, no. 1.23), considered by its excavators to be "of the most archaic and crude type" (Quibell & Green 1902: 15). The elongated right arm terminating in a clenched fist with the thumb extended is reminiscent of the colossi of Min, the hand of which was also pierced to hold an emblem. Although the head of the striding statue is missing, the raised surface on the upper chest indicates that a long, wide beard was originally present (Eaton-Krauss 1999: 70). The figure wears a robe that probably reached the ankles similar to the figure on the obverse of the Battle-field Palette (e.g. Asselberghs 1961: no. 151, pl. LXXXVI) and several Naqada III ivories (Fay 1999: 139-141), and the left arm was folded across the chest in a

gesture similar to the individual in front of the king on the Narmer Palette (e.g. Asselberghs 1961: no. 169, pl. XCV). These parallels suggest that the limestone torso may have represented an official, but as the statue was found in a secondary context (Eaton-Krauss 1999: 70), it is not possible to determine whether it derived from the walled town, the temple, or a tomb.

The Second Dynasty limestone and schist seated statues of Khasekhem were also discovered at Hierakonpolis (e.g. Spencer 1993: 68, fig. 47; Tiradritti 1998: 45). These statues are particularly pertinent to the discussion of Mac-Gregor Man because of the manner in which the lines of the crown and the hair below it are defined on both of them: MacGregor Man's cap and hair merge into a single entity, but in both cases the ears are set well back on the head. The line demarcating the edge of Khasekhem's crown runs to the centre of his ear, leaving a small gap beneath for the short cropped hairstyle to emerge that partially covers the neck, most evident on the schist statue (Quibell 1900: pl. XLI; alternatively, this could be part of the crown, as depicted later; cf. e.g. Nebkheperre Intef; Polz 2003: 15). The modelling of the hair and crown, which is also apparent on a First Dynasty(?) ivory royal figure from Abydos that is swathed in a jubilee robe (British Museum EA 37996; Spencer 1993: 75, fig. 52), marks a further stage in the development of the rendering of human form in three dimensions, from the early ivories, through MacGregor Man, towards the establishment of royal and elite iconography during the Old Kingdom (Fig. 8).

Fig. 8. The Third Dynasty statue of Netjerkhet (Djoser) in the serdab of his funerary complex at Saqqara (plaster cast of the original limestone sculpture in Cairo, JE 49158). The continuity from early iconography is apparent in the king's long beard and compact form.

The Munich torso of a man carved in a strongly banded stone, for which a date in Dynasty 0 is suggested on stylistic grounds (ÄS 7149; 11.2cm high; Grimm 1998: 226-7), is similar in form to MacGregor Man and the predynastic ivory males, though its muscular chest and long hair or wig are more suggestive of the Old Kingdom. It is essentially a flattened cylinder, with arms pressed against the sides, palms resting on the thighs, and a large, unusually shaped sheath fastened by a band around the waist. It bears a faintly incised serekh on the chest, possibly of a catfish, but this is not visible in published photographs (Grimm 1998: 226; Grimm and Schoske 2000:33, cat. 40), and may be a later addition. The long hairstyle is comparable to the Gebel el-Araq knife handle or the First Dynasty tag of King Den from Abydos (Spencer 1993: 87, fig. 67), though by this point the kilt had mostly superseded the penis sheath as a mark of status (cf. Djoser; F. Friedman: 1995: 3, figs. 2a, 2b). The closest parallels for the sheath are the captive on the Narmer Palette, an ivory figurine of a bound prisoner (Quibell 1900: pl. XII, no. 5), and the statue of a knife-wielding "deity" (?) dated to the Third Dynasty (Brooklyn 59.192; Cody 1999: 43, no. 6), though in spite of its archaic style, the back pillar places it in the early Old Kingdom. If genuine, the banded stone torso is probably later than MacGregor Man.

Reconstruction of the statue from the Tomb 23 complex in HK6 is at present far from straightforward, because it was smashed into thousands of pieces in antiquity, and only a few hundred fragments have been recovered. Of these, a nose, two ears, part of the base, two circles (eye sockets?), and a rounded piece that may be part of a penis sheath (Harrington 2004; cf. Jaeschke 2004), indicate that the figure was life-size, and suggest that it represents a male in a form comparable with and probably based on ivory figurines. Renée Friedman (2005: 7) compares the ears of this statue to those of MacGregor Man and observes that while the equally lobe-less HK6 ears are carefully shaped (Fig. 9 and 10), they were not drilled, although the nostrils were drilled using a similar technique to that employed on contemporaneous ivory figures. Little remains of the basalt statue's nose, but one may assume that the nostrils were also drilled. Parts of two ceramic funerary masks were excavated from the same tomb as the HK6 statue, but the ears are more lifelike and completely different in style (Friedman 2005: 7); this distinction may relate more to the function and icono-graphic origins of the artefacts than the materials from which they were created.

The most puzzling feature of the basalt statue, and one that has been raised as part of the argument against its authenticity, is the damage that the nose and ears have sustained (Fig. 11). The destruction is deliberate and must have taken considerable effort; the nose was carefully chipped away using a narrow chisel-like blade without damaging the surrounding area, and tool marks are clearly visible on the upper surface of the ears. A reconstruction of the nose is

possible based on the slight remaining projection; parallels for its size may be found on commemorative palettes including the Battlefield Palette (e.g. Malek & Forman 1986: 22-23). The purpose of the statue's mutilation is not clear: it is possible that if MacGregor Man represented a local ruler it would be a target for

Fig. 9. The front/right side of MacGregor Man, showing one of the drilled, protruding ears, and the damaged nose. Courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum.
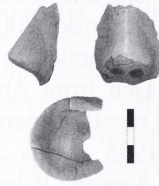
Fig. 10. The nose and right ear of the Locality 6 statue from Tomb 23 at Hierakonpolis. Further pieces of the ear have been found since these photographs were taken (R. Friedman 2005: 7). Courtesy of the Hierakonpolis Expedition.
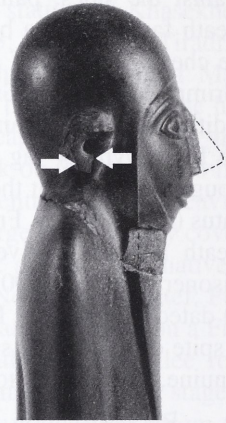
Fig. 11. Side view of MacGregor Man with a reconstruction of the nose, and arrows showing the location of slightly abstract incised lines around the ear. Courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum.

opponents, as seems to have been the case with the Locality 6 figure. The energy expended in obliterating parts of the statue would be further justified if it was believed that this would symbolically harm the individual in the afterlife. The breaks at the neck and waist may have occurred at the same time. Whatever the reason for the curious disfigurement of the statue, ancient destruction is perhaps more plausible than modern "antiquating", which could have been achieved with less industry.

Eaton-Krauss (1999: 70) has suggested that the Hierakonpolis limestone statue stood on a deep plinth partially buried in the ground to provide stability. This may have been the case for all early statuary including MacGregor Man, as

back pillars were an Old Kingdom innovation, while several of the ivory figurines on which stone figures are likely to have been modelled possess a tang beneath the feet, presumably for insertion into a base of a different material (e.g. Spencer 1993: 31, fig. 15, EA 32142; Naville 1900: pl. V, no. 1; cf. Adams 1974: pls. 44-45, no. 360). Kemp (2000: 230) in his initial reconstruction of the Koptos colossi provided the statues with feet and heavy pedestals, but later changed this as he believed that he was "allowing [himself] to be too strongly influenced by the tradition of Pharaonic statuary". He instead used standing stones from the temple mound at Hierakonpolis as a guide, and suggested that the colossi terminated in a "long plain stump which would have been sunk in the ground" (Kemp: 2000: 228-230). However, this method of reconstruction involves treating the statues as pillars, not as human figures; with the exception of pin-figures, most representations of the human form included the depiction of feet during the predynastic period.

The early iconography of deities

Naville (1900: 68) thought it very unlikely that MacGregor Man represented a king, and did not raise the possibility of the statue's depicting a deity. It is reasonable to suggest that at this formative stage in Egypt's history, only gods or highly influential individuals, such as kings, would merit the time and resources involved in the production of stone statuary. The later iconography of anthropomorphic deities, including Min, Osiris and Ptah, who were depicted standing and as though bound in white cloth, is likely to evoke early forms of statuary in ivory or bone. This explanation provides answers to some of the questions raised by Hornung (1982: 107).

Most of the earliest depictions of gods in human form show a body without separate limbs. The use of this iconography certainly does not reflect a lack of artistic skill, but must have some other, as yet undiscovered, meaning. Mummy form, which is depicted in a similar fashion, cannot have been the model because mummification was not practised until several centuries later. The archaic figure of a god shows no more and no less than necessary to evoke an image in human form. Should we see here a deliberate restraint, in which no more is said about the gods than is absolutely necessary?

The latter suggestion could be applied to the only extant statues of a god prior to the Old Kingdom, the colossi of Min from Koptos (Payne 1993: pls. II and III). In his description of the colossi, Williams (1988: 39) notes features similar to those of the basalt statuette: "The crown is smooth as though the head were wearing a close fitting cap, which is actually indicated by a line that curves from the temples onto the forehead where it disappears into the destruction." On the basis of the one surviving head, he also notes that the figures had protruding

ears (Williams 1988: 39; Payne 1993: pl. I), though they were lobed unlike those of MacGregor Man. The date of the colossi is uncertain, but probably no later than Naqada IIIA (Kemp 2000: 226; cf. Payne 1993: 12-13) and thus slightly earlier than the basalt figure. While it seems improbable that MacGregor Man represented a god or deified king given its resemblance to the people of Upper Egypt as depicted elsewhere and the find location attributed to it, such a statue is hardly likely to have been created for anyone of lower status than a local ruler.

Conclusion

In light of the statue discovered at HK6, and the fact that all officially excavated human figurines of the First and Second Dynasties were found in tombs (Baumgartel 1968: 8), there seems little reason to suggest that MacGregor Man derived from a temple rather than a funerary context, or that it should be separated from the ivories with which it was said to have been unearthed (cf. Baines & Whitehouse 1999: 69). It is carved from basalt, a particularly hard stone that required quarrying and transportation (Aston, Harrell & Shaw 2000: 23), which indicates the high status of the owner, who was probably an Upper Egyptian leader in Dynasty 0. It is possible that the statue was originally positioned in a mortuary complex, in a similar way to the HK6 statue around four centuries earlier and the images of officials and kings several centuries later (Barta 1998: 65-67). Stylistically, the statue can be dated to Nagada IIIB. It seems highly unlikely that MacGregor Man is inauthentic; as Williams comments (1988: 39): "If [it] was forged, the forger must have been prescient."

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