

## CHOGHA MISH

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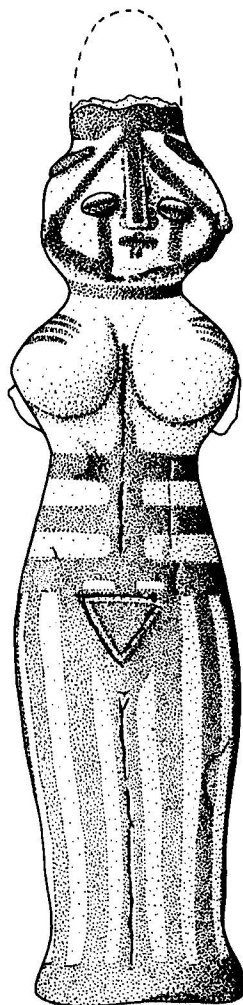
**T**he female figurines found almost universally in early prehistoric cultures are normally interpreted as reflections of the concern of early agriculturalists with fertility, whether of their fields, flocks, or themselves. Chogha Mish is no exception to the rule; female figurines are prominent in the early prehistoric periods, but rare or non-existent in the later ones. Levels of the Early Susiana period, datable to the early part of the fifth millennium B.C., yielded parts of terracotta figurines representing women standing or sitting with outstretched legs. Head and torso fragments that did not originally belong together (Figs. 1–4) can be combined into a composite reconstruction of a standing figure (Fig. 5; drawing by Abbas Alizadeh). The execution is quite elaborate. On the head pellets of clay represent eyes and eyebrows; paint emphasized the features of the face and ornamented it with diagonal and vertical bands. Horizontal stripes of paint on the waist and vertical ones on the lower body indicate a patterned robe. Good parallels for the Chogha Mish torso fragments were found in the Early Susiana settlement at Jaffarabad near Susa (G. Dollfus, "Les fouilles à Djaffarabad de 1972 à 1974," *Cahiers de la Délégation française en Iran*, Vol. 5 [1975], Fig. 32: 1, 3). Related figures occur across the modern Iran/Iraq border in the Mandali area of the Upper Diyala at Choga Mami in deposits of the Samarra culture (Joan Oates, "Prehistoric Investigations near Mandali, Iraq," *Iraq*, Vol. XXX [1968], Pls. I, II A [heads] and "Choga Mami 1967–1968: A Preliminary Report" *Iraq* [1969], Pls. XXVI A–F).

• Fig. 1. Head of an Early Susiana figurine (Ch.M. VIII–85). Field photograph.



In prehistoric studies comparable objects are of great value since frequently they are the only clues to the relationships and relative chronology of different sites and cultures. The presence of the same figurine types at Chogha Mish and Jaffarabad is part of the evidence identify-

- Fig. 5. Composite reconstruction of an Early Susiana figurine based on various fragments (Figs. 1–4). Drawing by Abbas Alizadeh.



ing both as Early Susiana villages. The similarities between the figures from Khuzestan and those from eastern Mesopotamia are part of a cluster of features that show the contemporaneity and the connections between the Iranian Early Susiana and the Mesopotamian Samarra cultures. In historical periods, also, archaeological evidence may provide information not available in the written sources. Similarities, however, even when strikingly close, must be used with caution, particularly if they are isolated features occurring in countries far apart. This is the case with some figurines from Neolithic Greece that resemble examples from Chogha Mish in general shape, painted decoration, and, in particular, an unusual character not yet pointed out. Several figurine fragments from Chogha Mish consist of only one half of the body in lateral section (Figs. 6, 7). This does not seem to be accidental; the fragment of an upper torso used in the reconstruction of Fig. 5 shows a deep cleft remaining between the

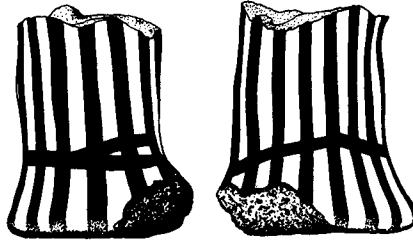
- Fig. 2. Fragment of the upper torso of an Early Susiana terracotta figurine (Ch.M. 8.695). Photograph by Diana Olson Rasche.

- Fig. 3. Fragment of the lower body of an Early Susiana figurine (Ch.M. VIII-84). Field photograph.



breasts but almost filled in at the waist (Fig. 2). It is likely that many of the figurines at Chogha Mish were made in two lateral halves which were then pressed together to make the cylindrical figure. This seems to be a purely technical feature, with the discovery of individual halves showing that the welding of the two parts was not always done tightly.

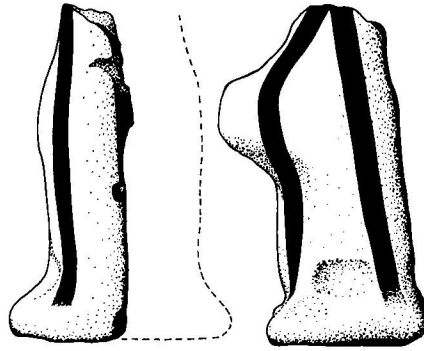
● Fig. 4. Fragment of the base of an early Susiana figurine (Ch.M. 5.702). Drawing by Abbas Alizadeh.



The features just described for Chogha Mish are matched by figurines of the Middle Neolithic period from the northern Peloponnesus (Lauren E. Talalay, "Rethinking the Function of Clay Figurine Legs from Neolithic Greece: An Argument by Analogy," *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 91 [1987], pp. 161–169; compare her Figs. 3–6, two figures from Francthi cave, with our Figs. 3, 4, 6, 7). As far as the chronology goes, these figures also belong somewhere in the fifth millennium B.C. They occur in a far distant country in a culture totally different from and unrelated to Early Susiana. Nonetheless, examples from the Francthi Cave painted with vertical stripes (*ibid.*, pp. 164–165, Figs. 3–4) are practically interchangeable with Figs. 3, 4, 6, 7 from Chogha Mish. Furthermore, the Greek fragments occur as lateral parts, in two instances with a lump indicating that they had once been joined to a second leg (*ibid.*, pp. 166–167, Figs. 5–6).

An ingenious proposal has been advanced to explain the discovery of separate figurine legs in the neolithic Peloponnesus. After citing ethnographic analogies and written evidence from classical Greece, Lauren Talalay suggests that the function of the figurines was to serve as "contractual devices or identifying tokens" rather than to invoke the forces of fertility. Among her examples from classical Greece and Rome is the retention of the parts of irregularly broken tokens by each party to an agreement or by families linked by ties of hospitality. The gap from the classical period back to the Neolithic is huge, but

- Fig. 6. Front and profile views of right half of lower body of an Early Susiana figurine (Ch.M. Ill-731). Drawing by Abbas Alizadeh.



nonetheless the suggestion is an attractive one. The striking similarity between the single figurine legs from Chogha Mish and neolithic Greece must be completely fortuitous. Still the function Lauren Talalay proposes for the legs from Greece indicates the possibility of explanations other than mere technique of manufacture.

The Early Susiana figurines from Chogha Mish enlarge our knowledge of the representational style and preoccupations of the period. The apparently exclusive production of female figurines and the emphasis on the breasts and pubic triangle indicate the strong concern with fertility, though there is no reason to identify the figures as fertility goddesses rather than as human women. In addition, the comparisons both with adjacent areas in western Asia and the coincidental similarity with figurines far removed geographically add more dimensions to the significance of these objects.

- Fig. 7. Back and profile (median side) views of left leg of an Early Susiana figurine (Ch.M. 8.1011). Photograph by Diana Olson Rasche.

