

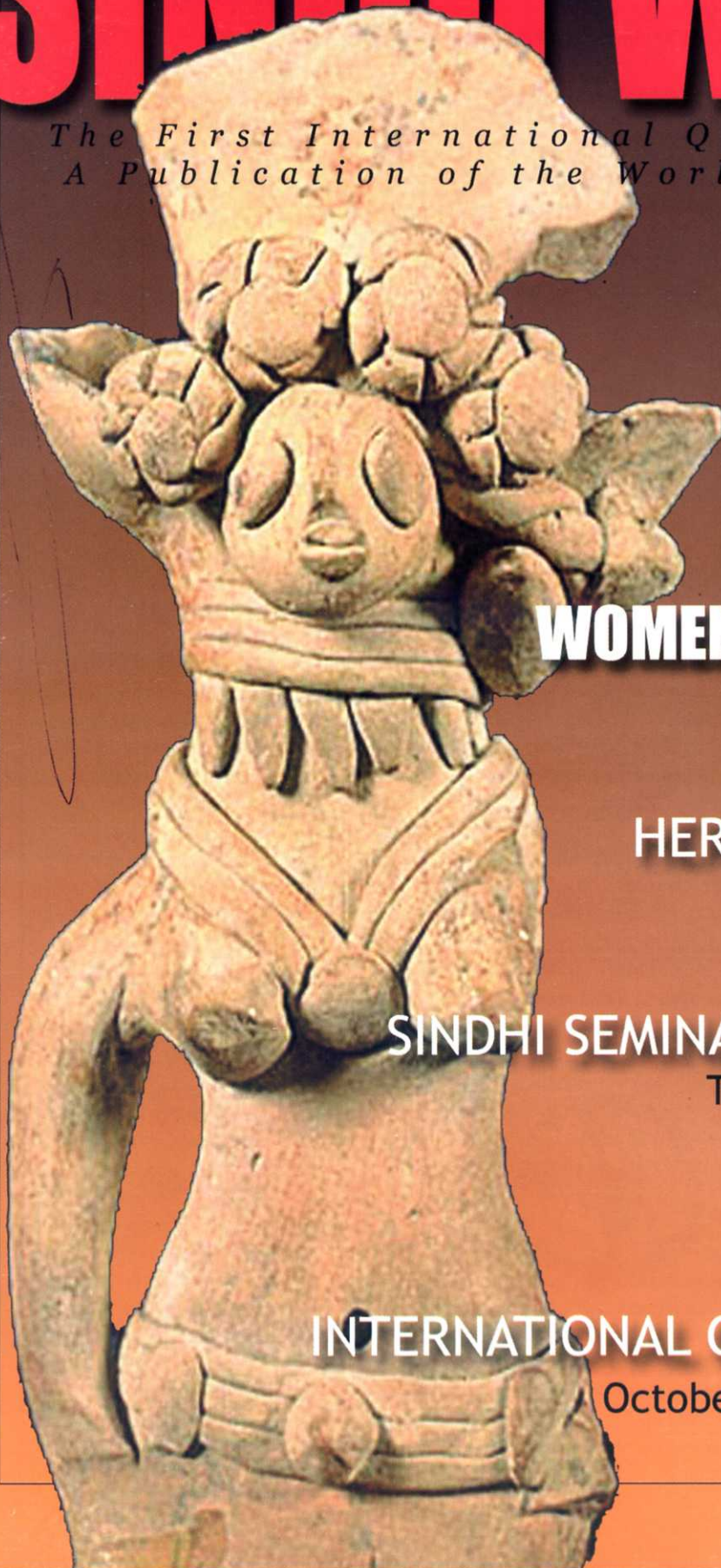
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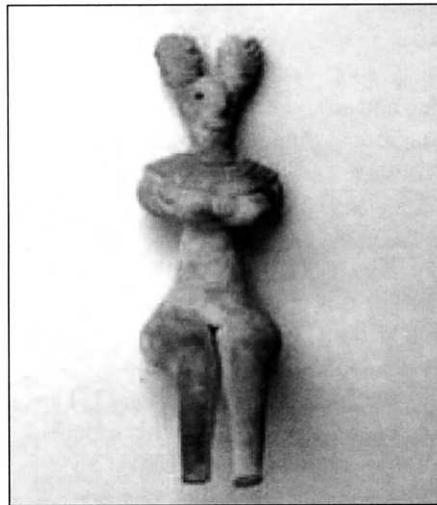
WOMEN IN ANCIENT SINDH

Bronze Age Figurines of the Indus Valley Civilization

*Text and photos by Paolo Biagi
Department of Sciences of Antiquity and the Near East
Ca' Foscari University, Venice, Italy*

It is during the Bronze Age Indus Civilization, which developed throughout the entire third millennium before Christ, that a community in the Indus Valley - almost completely devoid of religion-like beliefs, violence, and war-like activities - adopted new ideogram writing. Even though they have never been fully translated, mainly because of the absence of bilingual inscriptions, the writings' symbols were often incised on different types of steatite and copper seals or stamped below the rim of different types of ceramic vessels and containers, which were sometimes traded across the Arabic Sea as far as the coast of Oman, the ancient Magan, and the southern shores of the Persian Gulf. If we take into consideration some of the most interesting finds of this civilization, we notice that an important role was played by the ceramic human representations, many of which consist of female figurines, although male and animal specimens were also common. Nevertheless, the female images are of much greater interest because they provide us with unique information regarding hairstyles, ornaments, and clothing tendencies, which would have otherwise been unknown, because they are entirely absent from the accepted archaeological records of this era and area yielded by conventional excavations.

All of the found Indus Valley female figurines are in standing positions. Interestingly, they have never been resurrected from the few graveyards investi-



*Third millennium B.C. figurine
from Mehrgarh (Balochistan)*

gated in the Valley; instead, they have only been found in fragments, or burnt, inside rubbish structures or heaps of refuse, thus indicating their temporary use in ancient times. Their manufacturing was unique and complex: Each specimen was made of two vertical halves, from head to foot, which were later conjoined. Their arms are often absent or very schematized, and, whenever portrayed, the breasts - the symbolic representation of femininity in this context - are not added appendages, but rather constructed from the same clay used to shape the body. Many of them show numerous and rich ornaments, which consist of different types of necklaces and pendants, while others are represented with a series of

neck-rings. The most typical figurines are dressed in a sort of mini-dress and turban, of which there appear to be several types, and, according to some authors, might indicate the ethnic group or tribe to which they belonged.

According to the most recent discoveries, the figurines' origin is local, although, prior to a few years ago, it was believed they were derived from Near Eastern prototypes. The excavations carried out at Mehrgarh, in the Balochistan province of Pakistan, assign a date to the earliest clay female figurines discovered as the seventh millennium before Christ, when the first Neolithic settlement was established in the region, along the right terrace of the Bolan River.

The impressive stratigraphic sequence brought to light at Mehrgarh by the French Expedition led by Jean-François Jarrige has shown that clay female figurines made their appearance during the Neolithic occupation phase and continued to be produced up until the end of the Bronze Age. The detailed analysis of hundreds of samples has revealed their almost continuous typological evolution. The oldest types are represented by simple specimens made of unbaked clay, very schematically modeled, often in a seated position, sometimes painted with red ochre. Around 4000 BC, composite statues began to be manufactured in the form of seated representations, with a stylized face and cylindrical neck, orna-

