



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Archaeological Research in Asia

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ara

Full length article

A “Priest King” at Shahr-i Sokhta?

Massimo Vidale

Dipartimento dei Beni Culturali: Archeologia, Storia dell'Arte, del Cinema e della Musica, Università degli Studi di Padova, Italy

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Shahr-i Sokhta
Helmand Civilization
“Priest King”
Indus Civilization

ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the published fragment of a statuette made of a buff-grey limestone, recently found on the surface of Shahr-i Sokhta (Sistan, Iran) and currently on exhibit in a showcase of the archaeological Museum of Zahedan (Sistan-Baluchistan, Iran). Most probably, it belongs to a sculptural type well known in some sites of Middle and South Asia dating to the late 3rd-early 2nd millennium BCE - a male character sitting on the right heel, with the left hand on the raised left knee, and a robe leaving bare the left shoulder. Preliminary comments on the cultural, historical and chronological implications of this important find are included.

1. Introduction

Alexandra Ardeleanu (1953–2008) was both a hard worker and a good companion during the long months we spent at Mohenjo-Daro as members of the Aachen-RWTH and Forschungsprojekt, later carried out jointly with an IsMEO team (1980–1985). Her (partially) German background did not allow her to speak much, but she had a keen sense of humor, and was always ready to help others to solve the little and great problems that rose in such a wide-ranging and demanding field project. I trusted her, and I remember with a good feeling the afternoon we spent together sorting out a big pile of dusty stones in the reserve collection of the Mohenjo-Daro, eventually re-discovering a fragment of an important stone sculpture mentioned in the field records but never published: limestone fragment HR 5785, from Block 5, House XL, Room 94 in area HR-B (Ardeleanu-Jansen 1984: Figs. 33–35). Alexandra's papers on the stone sculptures of Mohenjo-Daro (1984, 1989) remain milestones for every further consideration on the matter. To her memory, these pages are respectfully dedicated.

2. The find

A small showcase of the Zahedan Museum keeps, among other finds, the fragmentary headless torso of a small statuette in a buff-grey limestone, with a strongly weathered surface. Without opening the showcase, I was allowed to take several pictures of the fragment, from various angles. One of the pictures was taken frontally, from a close proximity. Other pictures were taken from rear and from a side, on the whole with satisfactory results. Fig. 1 illustrates the picture taken from the showcase, plus two drawings based upon this record and the author's personal scrutiny of the piece. Its residual height wavers between 10 and 12 cm.

What remains shows a broken neck slightly off-centered to the right, and a left shoulder lower than the right one. The right arm is broken just below the armpit; originally, it fell vertically, leaving a wide elongated space along the right side of the chest. The left arm, in contrast, is in-carved with the torso; a neat fracture after the elbow shows that it was bent higher than the right one.

On the chest, in spite of the heavy surface erosion, are still visible the volumes of the pectorals and the edge of a robe falling from the left shoulder to the fracture edge of the lower right hip, leaving bare the entire right side of the figure. The curved edge of the robe is more visible on the backside, together with the end of a single braid or pigtail that hung from the nape (Fig. 1 3).

This fragment has been previously interpreted and published as part of a female standing statuette, imagined and reconstructed as a young Indian lady wearing a modern *sari* (Sajjadi 2006: 25, Fig. 4a). In contrast, I propose that this fragment - reportedly found on the surface of the settlement of Shahr-i Sokhta portrays a male character in a peculiar, unmistakable position, well known also in the Mohenjo-Daro series of stone sculptures. Such posture is thus described in Ardeleanu-Jansen 1984, 147:

“...a half-crouching/half sitting position, whereby the left knee is bent higher than the right one. The left hand holds the left knee, the right hand rests flat on the lower thigh. A toga-like garment covers the sculpture's left shoulder and arm, leaving the right shoulder and arm bare.”

Only this iconographic model, in fact, perfectly explains at the same time the higher position of the left arm, the lower bending of the right one, the peculiar robe and the hairdo (at Mohenjo-Daro, on rear the hair were collected in a bun, in a pigtail braid or replaced, like in the “Priest King”, by a double hanging band).

E-mail address: massimo.vidale@unipd.it.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ara.2017.12.001>

Received 18 November 2017; Accepted 1 December 2017
2352-2267/ © 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

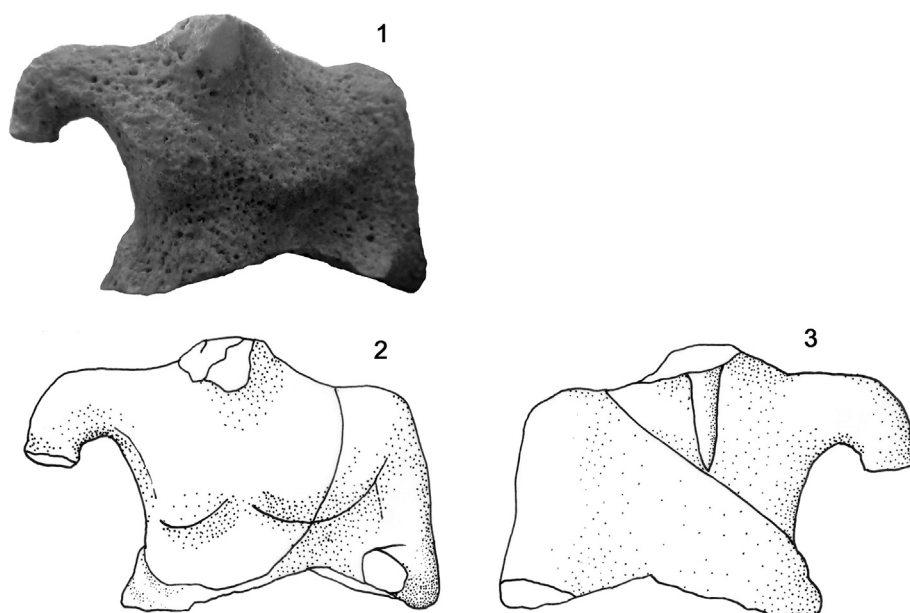


Fig. 1. 1: a frontal picture of the Zahedan torso. 2 and 3: graphic enhancements of the front and rear of the same fragment based upon 1.1 (picture and drawings by M. Vidale).

3. A possible reconstruction

This fragmentary torso strongly suggests that the three limestone heads previously found in the Seistan basin and at Mundigak (Dales 1985; Jarrige and Tosi 1981), as originally suggested by G. Dales, and *contra* the negative opinion of Wheeler, 1997: 89, footnote 2) actually belonged to stone figures very similar to the Mohenjo-Daro series.

Fig. 2 shows a conjectural but likely graphic reconstruction of a Kandahar- Helmand limestone figure. This ideal model is composed by the head found on the surface of Tepe Chah-i Torogh 2 (Fig. 3; from C. Jarrige and Tosi 1981: 133, Fig. 5b), over the Zahedan torso (dotted portions) while the missing parts are based on the outline and general proportions of alabaster sculpture L 950, from the Citadel of Mohenjo-Daro, presently at the National Museum, Karachi (Marshall 1931: Pl. C, 1–3; Ardeleanu-Jansen 1984: Figs. 19–21). The statuette broken and abandoned at Shahr-i Sokhta must have been extremely similar, both in form and size (originally, ca. 30 cm high). (See Fig. 7.)

4. Distribution and chronology of the sculptural type

In this new light, the Zahedan torso confirms that the same sculptural model had a widespread distribution, which is encountered in a single leg and lap fragment at Gonur Depe on the Murghab delta in Margiana, in the head found at Mundigak on the Arghandab river in Kandahar, Afghanistan, in other heads from sites of the Seistan basin, as well as in various states of conservation at least two major sites of the greater Indus valley such as Mohenjo-Daro (12 specimens) and Dholavira (one fragment; for references see below).

As far as chronology is concerned, the picture is quite partial, but somehow coherent. Mundigak IV, 3, the context of the head found near the terraced building of Mundigak (Casal 1961), is contemporary to Shahr-i Sokhta late Period III to Period IV (Phases 3 to 0, ca. 2200–1800 BCE, according to the ceramic evidence presented in Biscione 1974 and 1979). The head from Tepe Chah-i Torogh 2, on the other hand, was found on the surface of a site exclusively covered by pottery of Period IV, phase 1 (the main phase of occupation of the Burnt Building, see Tosi 1983). According to the absolute chronology

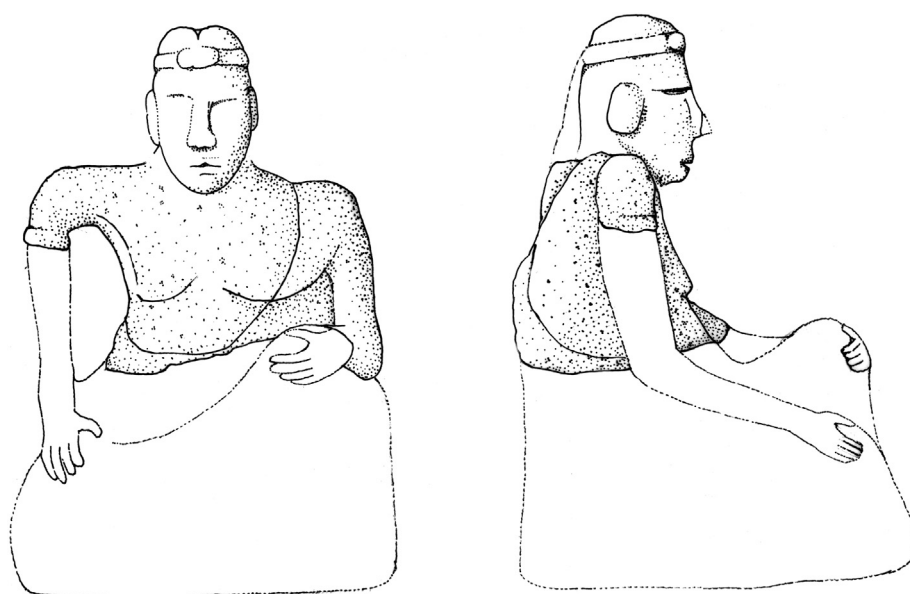


Fig. 2. Conjectural graphic reconstruction of the likely original setting of the Zahedan torso as a “Priest King”, based upon the head from Chah-i Torogh 2 (Seistan, Iran) visible in Fig. 3, and the general form and proportion of statuette L 950 (Fig. 4). The side view is less certain than the front and the rear ones (drawing M. Vidale).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/8942503>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/8942503>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)