

## STUDY AND CLASSIFICATION OF FIGURINES OF QALE ROSTAM, ESFANDAGHEH, JIROFT

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**Abstract:** The site of Qale Rostam II is located in the Esfandagheh area, to the west of Jiroft city. A large number of human and zoomorphic figurines are scattered on the surface of this site. These figurines were obtained from a site that is not very large, and there are few pottery pieces scattered on its surface. In this research, 203 figurines obtained from the site were classified and then analyzed. These figurines can be placed into three general groups: human figurines, zoomorphic figurines, and plate-like dishes. Although these figurines can be placed into these three groups, it is quite clear that all three groups have an organic relationship with each other, meaning that some human figurines are actually mounted on zoomorphic figurines or placed inside dishes. The studied figurines have a completely abstract style and are inelegantly made. Chronology and the usage of these figurines are two important questions addressed in this research. In terms of body shape, human figurines are classified into two types: cylindrical and rectangular, and are generally created in a standing position with hands facing up. In the zoomorphic group, species such as horses, cows, dogs, snakes, donkeys, leopards, and camels can be distinguished. The general shape of these figurines is cylindrical, and they are generally made with long and slim arms, necks, and legs. The third group consists of plate-like dishes, which, although not figurines, are studied due to their close connection with the mentioned figurines. This research has finally concluded that it is not possible to make a definite statement about the chronology of the figurines of Qale Rostam, but they can be placed in the period between the Bronze Age and the end of the 1st millennium BC, and these figurines likely had a ritual use.

**Keywords:** Jiroft, Halil Roud area, Qale Rostam site, clay figurines.

**چکیده:** محوطه قلعه رستم II در منطقه اسفندقه، در غرب شهر جیرفت واقع شده است. تعداد زیادی پیکره‌های انسانی و جانوری در سطح این محوطه پراکنده‌اند. این پیکره‌ها از محوطه‌ای به‌دست آمده‌اند که چندان بزرگ نیست و تعداد اندکی قطعات سفالی نیز روی سطح آن دیده می‌شود. در این پژوهش، ۲۰۳ پیکره به‌دست آمده از محوطه دسته‌بندی و سپس تحلیل شدند. این پیکره‌ها را می‌توان در سه گروه کلی جای داد: پیکره‌های انسانی، پیکره‌های جانوری و ظروف شبیه بشقاب. هرچند این پیکره‌ها را می‌توان در این سه گروه قرار داد، اما کاملاً روشن است که هر سه گروه رابطه‌ای ارگانیک با یکدیگر دارند؛ به این معنا که برخی از پیکره‌های انسانی بر روی پیکره‌های جانوری سوار شده‌اند یا در داخل ظروف قرار گرفته‌اند. پیکره‌های مطالعه‌شده دارای سبکی کاملاً انتزاعی بوده و به‌صورت نسبتاً ناشیانه ساخته شده‌اند. گاهنگاری و کارکرد این پیکره‌ها دو پرسش اصلی است که در این پژوهش بدان پرداخته شده است. از نظر شکل بدنی، پیکره‌های انسانی به دو نوع استوانه‌ای و مستطیلی تقسیم می‌شوند و عموماً در حالت ایستاده با دستانی رو به بالا ساخته شده‌اند. در گروه جانوری، گونه‌هایی چون اسب، گاو، سگ، مار، الاغ، پلنگ و شتر قابل تشخیص هستند. شکل کلی این پیکره‌ها استوانه‌ای است و معمولاً با دست‌ها، گردن‌ها و پاهای بلند و باریک ساخته شده‌اند. گروه سوم شامل ظروفی شبیه بشقاب است که گرچه پیکره محسوب نمی‌شوند، اما به دلیل پیوند نزدیک با پیکره‌های یادشده مورد مطالعه قرار گرفته‌اند. این پژوهش در نهایت نتیجه گرفته است که نمی‌توان اظهار نظر قطعی درباره گاهنگاری پیکره‌های قلعه رستم داشت، اما می‌توان آن‌ها را در فاصله میان عصر مفرغ تا پایان هزاره اول پیش‌ازمیلاد قرار داد. به احتمال زیاد این پیکره‌ها کاربری آیینی داشته‌اند.

**کلیدواژه‌ها:** جیرفت، حوزه هلیل‌رود، محوطه قلعه رستم، پیکره‌های گلی.

### I. Introduction

The site of Qale Rostam is located in the Esfandagheh district of Jiroft city in Kerman province (Fig. 1). Esfandagheh district, whose center is Dolatabad village, is located west of Jiroft. Dolatabad village is situated 72 kilometers west of Jiroft city. The average elevation of this area is 1960 meters, and the dominant natural features of the settlements here are plains and hills (Geographical Glossary of Villages of

Kerman Province, 2003). The site of interest is located five kilometers north of Dolatabad village, the center of Esfandagheh district.

The most important river in the Esfandagheh sub-basin is the Abshor, which is located next to the target site (Fig. 2). This perennial river starts from the mountains in the south and southwest of the basin and, after flowing for about 60 km from south to north, joins the Halil Roud (Ebrahimi, Ebrahimipour, 2017: 261).

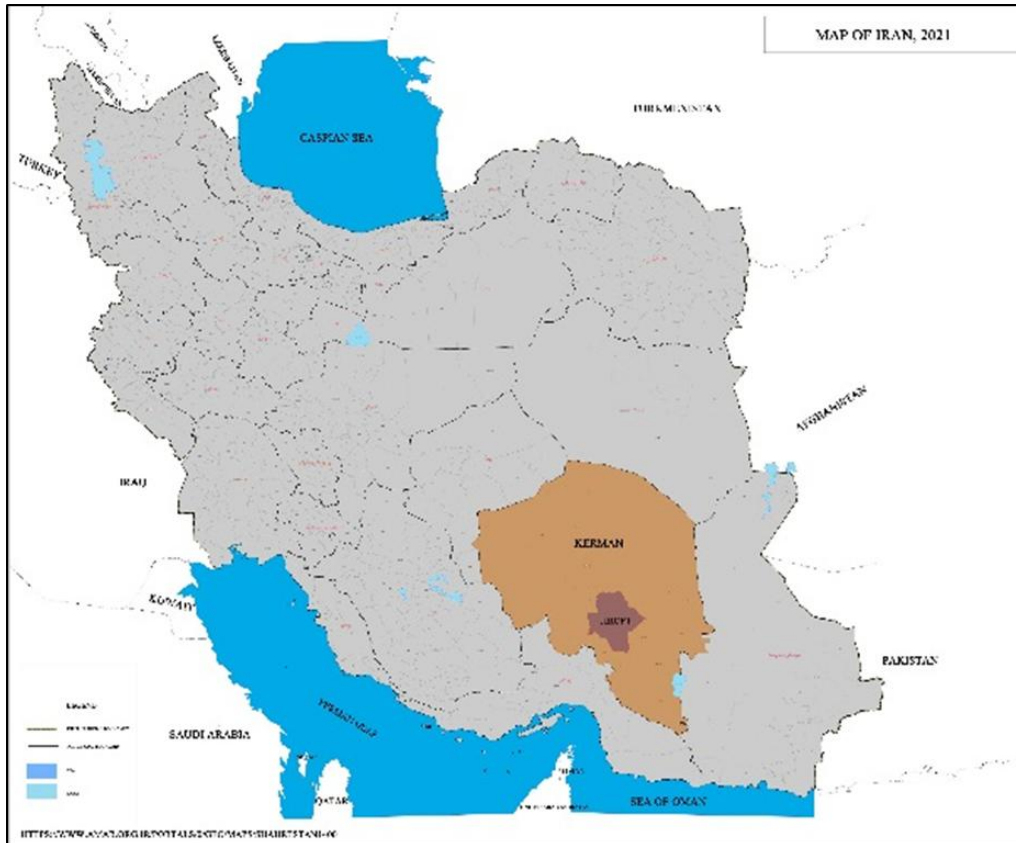


Figure 1: Location of Jiroft County in Kerman Province, southeastern Iran.



Figure 2: Location of the site of Qale Rostam.

### I.1. Location of Qale Rostam site

This site is located on the south side of the three villages of Hossein Abad (No. 1 in Fig. 3), Abshor (No. 2 in Fig. 3), and Mohammad Abad (No. 3 in Fig. 3). The

Abshor River separates this area from the mentioned villages. In this part, there is a relatively long mountain range of rocks, about 1000 meters long, oriented northwest-southeast, with its height increasing from

south to north (Fig. 4). Apparently, this mountain range does not have a specific name and is generally referred to by the name of the nearby famous peak, Qale Rostam, although there is no direct connection between these two natural features. The site of interest is on the western slope of this mountain range, between two points: one at coordinates 40 R 516436 3183149, located at the northern end (No. 4 in Fig. 3), and another at coordinates 40 R 516709 3182711 at the southern end (No. 5 in Fig. 3), at an altitude of 1800 meters above sea level. At a distance of 550 meters south of the southern end of this site (point 5 in Fig. 3), a very tall single rock can be seen, with a height of 1900

meters above sea level (Geographical Glossary of Villages of Kerman Province, 2003) or 1778 meters according to Ebrahimi and Ebrahimipur (2017:100), which is called Qale Rostam (point 6, Fig. 3). This rock, with its integrated vertical walls, is a very interesting natural feature (Fig. 5). According to surveys, only on its north side, at the foot of the peak, a small site has been identified, which belongs to the Islamic period based on surface pottery (Alidadi Suleymani, 2006). The peak is almost inaccessible, but Ebrahimi and Ebrahimipur (2017:101) mentioned that some skilled climbers who managed to ascend the peak reported seeing the brickworks of a tower on it.



Figure 3: Location of the site of Qale Rostam relative to surrounding villages.



Figure 4: Location of the site of Qale Rostam relative to the rocky peak of Qale Rostam, from SW.

As mentioned before, the site of Qale Rostam is located in the western part of the rocky mountain range. This rocky slope, covered with sparse vegetation of wild bushes, leads with a relatively gentle incline to flat land that appears to have been cultivated in the past. Apart from a number of accumulated rounded cairns, there are no architectural remains or artificial features—such as pits, water channels, or leveling works—on the surface of this slope. The mentioned cairns are actually

the remains of graves (Fig. 6) that were opened and destroyed due to unauthorized excavations in recent years. From the middle of this mountain to its northern end, a relatively large number of clay figurines are scattered over approximately seven hectares of the slope. Towards the north, the number of these figurines increases, with the largest concentration at the northern end of the mountain range. This part is directly in front of Qale Rostam and is rocky (Fig. 7).

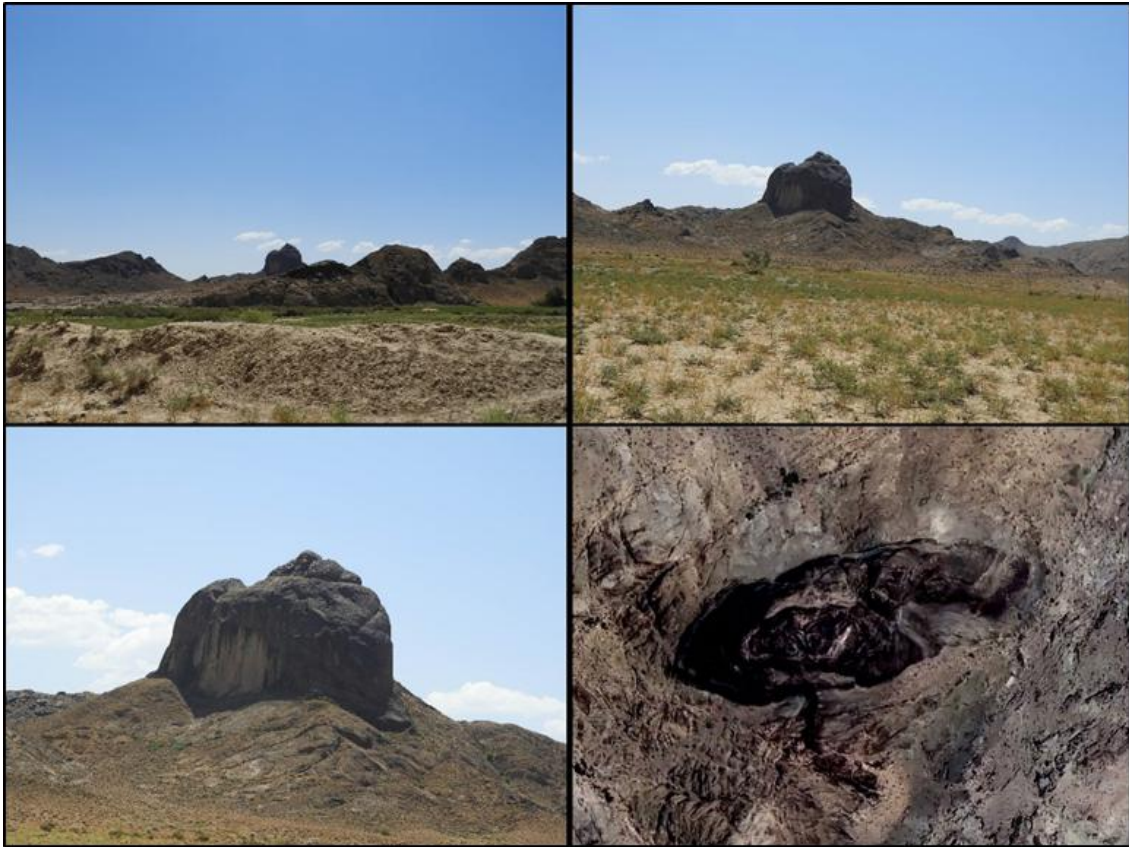


Figure 5: The rocky peak of Qale Rostam: up left from SW, up right from N, bottom left from close range, bottom right from above.

## II. Literature Review

The site of Qale Rostam was first identified in 2006 during the archaeological survey of the Esfandagheh area by Nader Alidadi Soleymani (2006). A preliminary

report on this site, along with several photos and drawings of the figurines, was included in the volume of the survey report.



Figure 6: Remains of cairn burials.



Figure 7: The northern end of the mountain range: Up from E, bottom from N relative to the rocky peak of Qale Rostam.

### III. Discussions

The target statistical population of this research consists of 203 figurines obtained through various means. Most of them, 81%, were collected from the surface of the site during archaeological investigations conducted by Alidadi Soleymani in 2006 and the authors in 2022, while the remaining 19% are donations or confiscations. Due to the direct impact of the methods of obtaining these figurines on their final analysis, actions were taken—in cooperation with security forces—to locate the exact origins of the figurines acquired through donations or confiscations. The results of these investigations indicate that they all belong to the site of Qale Rostam. From this perspective, it can be said that the only site where such figurines have been found, at least in the Esfandagheh Plain, is Qale Rostam (Qale Rostam II).

These figurines can be divided into three general groups:

- A) 103 human figurines
- b) 63 zoomorphic figurines
- c) 35 dishes

Before starting the discussion, two points should be emphasized:

a) This division and classification are not entirely sufficient or accurate because these figurines have an organic relationship with each other. Most of the figurines are not actually separate and individual pieces but are related and connected. For example, many human figurines are placed inside dishes or made as riders on other zoomorphic figurines, especially horses. In this way, studying dishes without the human figurines inside them, or horses without their riders, would be meaningless and misleading. However, the above classification is inevitable given the available materials and information, since the figurines have reached us broken, fragmented, and separate.

b) From a technical point of view, all these figurines—including those in all three groups—share similar characteristics: they are pottery with brick-colored pastes, sufficiently fired, with soft to medium temper, and are very strong. These features indicate that the creators had sufficient knowledge of pottery and kiln conditions. The only decorative method observed in some figurines is a claret (deep reddish-brown) motif, applied as a uniform thin coating or bands (slip) on the surface.

#### III.1. Morphological analysis

##### III.1.1. Human Figurines

All human figurines generally share the following features:

a) They are abstract and unrealistic, lacking accurate human proportions. In fact, they can be considered human based only on their overall appearance and posture.

b) The body is simple and devoid of any details or complications.

c) The artist or creator made no effort to depict facial details. This may be due either to the figurine makers' limitations or to an intentional stylistic choice that did not emphasize detailed representation.

d) The gender of these figurines cannot be recognized, but due to the absence of any features or signs indicating they are women, they can be considered as representing men.

e) Regarding their clothing, there is no clear evidence of clothing or recognizable details; however, they cannot be assumed to be naked unless it is supposed that they wear a simple long dress. Some figurines appear to wear something similar to a handkerchief on their heads, while others seem to cover their bodies with a robe or cloak-like garment.

f) It seems that most of these figurines were attached to another object. This is indicated by evidence such as roughness on one surface or side.

g) Most of the figurines are depicted standing.

These figurines, in terms of body volume, can be placed into two categories: rectangular and cylindrical figurines.

*Rectangular figurines (Pl. 1 & Pl. 6)*

This group is named for the general shape of the bodies, which are wide or tend toward a rectangular form. These figurines can be further divided into two categories: simple rectangular (QR-) and cloaked rectangular. The latter category is distinguished by the presence of a curtain-like feature on one side of the body, resembling a cloak or robe (e.g., QR-22, QR-34, QR-36, QR-24).

*Cylindrical figurines (Pl. 2 & Pl. 6)*

Because of the general cylindrical shape of their bodies, this group is named cylindrical figurines. These figurines can be divided into six groups based on their general shape and posture: cloaked, with crescent-shaped legs, gift-bearers, with a headscarf or turban, and seated figurines. The sixth group includes figurines that do not have any of these characteristics and are classified as simple cylinders.

- *Cylindrical figurines with cloaks*: These appear to be wearing cloaks similar to their rectangular counterparts (e.g., QR-7, QR-27, QR-28, QR-37, QR-38, QR-84, QR-93, QR-94, QR-95).

- *Cylindrical figurines with crescent-shaped legs*: This category refers to standing figurines whose legs are separated in the shape of brackets or crescents. It seems that these figurines were originally riders mounted on horses that are now broken and separated. Supporting this interpretation are scars on the backs of some horse figurines that match the shape of the legs of these figurines (e.g., QR-14, QR-13, QR-8, QR-11, QR-26).

- *Gift-bearer cylindrical figurines*: This category is characterized by figurines holding something, shown in two ways:

1. With one hand bent at the elbow, holding an object on the chest as if embracing it (e.g., QR-30, QR-98, QR-100).

2. Holding a flat, tray-like object with two open hands facing forward (e.g., QR-29).

- *Figurines with headscarves or turbans*: Some figurines wear something resembling a headscarf or turban. Despite varying sizes, the shape of these head coverings is consistent, resembling a long shawl tied around the head and draped down the back. The length of these bands varies, extending from the back of the neck to the middle of the waist (e.g., QR-10, QR-11, QR-15, QR-16, QR-17, QR-19, QR-31, QR-53, QR-58, QR-92, QR-99).

- *Sitting figurines*: These figurines can be divided into two categories:

- a) Figurines that are inside containers and attached to their walls (Pl. 9) (e.g., QR-168, QR-174, QR-175, QR-180, QR-187, QR-183, QR-186, QR-181).

- b) Free-standing figurines, of which only one example was found (QR-23).

### 3-1-2- III.1.2. Zoomorphic figurines

Although zoomorphic figurines, like their human counterparts, are abstract, unrealistic, and lack proper proportions, they are generally made with more precision, detail, and delicacy. These figurines share several common features:

- Eyes and noses are represented by round, relatively deep holes.
- The overall construction method is similar; they are made in several pieces (including body, hands, and feet) which are then joined together.

Despite their abstraction, many of these figurines can be identified with varying degrees of certainty. Some can confidently be attributed to specific animals such as horses, cows, dogs, leopards, and snakes, while others are tentatively attributed to camels, bears, wolves, and donkeys. Interestingly, figurines of boars and birds are absent. The following section discusses the general classification of these figurines.

*Horse figurines (Pl. 4)*

The largest number of zoomorphic figurines in the studied collection—20 in total—are horses. Features such as the mane, the shape of the muzzle, the accessories on the muzzle including remnants of a mouthpiece and reins, the long neck, and the shape of the ears clearly identify these figurines as horses. In terms of size and dimensions, they are fairly consistent, with an average height of about 8 cm. Although they appear quite diverse at first glance, they can be analyzed from several perspectives: the shape of their noses, the design of the bits and accessories, and whether they have a rider or not.

Six of these figurines have an unusual trumpet-shaped mouth (QR-115, QR-116, QR-117, QR-118, QR-119), while the rest have normal mouths with four-sided, rectangular faces. The noses of the first group tend to be oval, resulting in a closed, concave mouth shape. What these features signify and whether they relate specifically to horses remains unclear, as current information is insufficient to draw conclusive answers.

Almost all horse figurines, whether with a normal or trumpet-shaped mouth, have bits and reins. The types of these accessories are very diverse—so much so that

it is rare to find two figurines with the same bit. This variety likely reflects the makers' or their clients' extensive familiarity with horses and riding.

Five of the figurines have riders (QR-104, QR-105, QR-107, QR-142, QR-108). Although only one intact figurine with a rider was found in the studied group, it appears that the majority of horse figurines originally had riders.

Only one horse figurine in this group has a relatively complete rider (QR-104), although fractures are visible on its head and hands. Since this is the only intact example of its kind and no similar figurines have been found, providing a convincing explanation for rider-carrying figurines is challenging. An interesting point is that the human figurine riding this horse shares the same general characteristics as the human figurines in the studied collection.

#### *Cow figurines (Pl. 5 & Pl. 7)*

The group of cow figurines can be considered the most beautiful, delicate, and well-made in the studied collection. Although their number is small—only five figurines can be attributed to this animal—they display the greatest diversity in size and height. In fact, both the tallest and the shortest figurines in the collection belong to this group.

These figurines can be divided into two categories: first, whether they are humped or not, and second, whether they are large or miniature. There are significant differences between the tall and small figurines, to the extent that they cannot be considered similar in shape.

*Large figurines (QR-129, QR-128)* have slim bodies, long legs, a hump under the neck, and two relatively thick appendages on the head, which are fractured but likely represent horns. It is assumed that these horns were long and curved inward.

*Small or miniature figurines (QR-126, QR-167)*: This group has a short, thick torso with short arms and legs, and a much more realistic shape compared to the larger figurines. The horns in this group were likely made attached directly to the sides of the head and differ completely from the horns of the large figurines.

*Humpbacked cows (QR-128, QR-129, QR-167)*: Three figurines can be identified as humpbacked cows due to the presence of appendages on their waists, where the waist meets the neck. The exact shape of the hump cannot be determined because these parts are broken or missing. These three figurines vary in size—two are long and elongated, while one is small and miniature.

*Cows without a hump*: Only one figurine falls into this category, which belongs to the miniature group (QR-135, QR-126).

#### *Dog figurines (Pl. 5)*

According to their general characteristics, three figurines from the studied group can be identified as dogs. These figurines have small, cylindrical snouts with open mouths, two horn-like cylindrical appendages on their heads—which are broken in all three cases—and relatively long, thick necks. The three figurines are very similar in appearance. One, which is almost intact, has a tail curved from the end of the body toward the head (QR-121). Another, a broken half-back figurine (QR-122), shares the same long, elongated neck and overall shape as QR-121. The third (QR-123), of which only the head and neck remain, closely resembles the previous two.

#### *Camel figurines (Pl. 5)*

Only one case (QR-132) of the figurines can be attributed to a camel or a similar animal. Only the head and neck of the figurine remain; the rest of its body is missing. The neck is long and arched, leading to an elongated head shaped like a tetrahedral cylinder. Although a piece from the front of the nose is broken and the face seems incomplete, it is clear that the mouth and nose are not shown. Two small, shallow round holes on either side of the head—probably created as stumps—represent the animal's eyes. A fracture can be seen on the head, and it is unclear what organ was in this part, though it can be assumed it was related to the animal's ears.

#### *Sheep figurine (Pl. 5 & Pl. 7)*

Two of the figurines (QR-140, QR-141) can be considered related to sheep. Both figurines are broken. It seems to be intentional because the place of their break is very smooth and orderly. This break is such that it is not possible to comment on the stability of these figurines, as they cannot be imagined in a vertical or standing position, nor in a horizontal or four-legged position. The third possible option for these two figurines is their dependence on and attachment to another object, for example, a handle-like function or even a decorative function. But this situation also does not help to solve the problem, because apart from the place of fracture, there is no other effect on their surfaces that shows their connection to another object or dish, and their dimensions are neither suitable for decoration nor for a handle.

#### *Leopard (Pl. 5 & Pl. 7)*

Only one figurine (QR-136) can be identified as a leopard based on the physical evidence and the type of decorations on its body. This figurine is one of the few with painted decoration, featuring cherry-colored patterns similar to small round circles scattered in relatively large numbers across its surface. The figurine

is broken almost at the middle of the waist, with the lower half of its body missing; however, the upper half—including the head, neck, and both hands—is intact, and the break appears to be intentional.

*Bear (Pl. 5)*

There is one figurine (QR-127) in the studied collection that may be considered to belong to a bear. This figurine has a small, narrow, upturned nose with small ears on both sides of the head. Since there is no fracture at the site of the ears and nose, we can strongly assume it is a bear. Only the head remains; the rest of the body is missing. The neck fracture is smooth and regular, and appears to be intentional.

*Snake (Pl. 5 & Pl. 7)*

There is only one figurine in the studied collection that can certainly be considered related to a snake. This figurine is a wide oval piece—about five centimeters long and one centimeter thick—on one side of which an irregular fracture can be seen (QR-134). Both the top and bottom surfaces of this piece are decorated with cherry-colored round motifs. Due to the presence of holes at one end of the figurine, it seems that this was the head of a snake, with the rest of its body broken and missing; these holes can be considered the eyes and nose of the animal.

It is not possible to give an exact opinion about the type and cause of the breakage of this piece, but we have two approaches:

- a) If we imagine that this figurine had a remainder, its body length can be estimated to be at least 30 cm. If it fell to the ground and broke for any reason, intentionally or unintentionally, it would likely break into several pieces. In this case, the probability that only the animal's head remains is not very high.
- b) Considering that the body is part of a collection where a significant number are only the remains of heads or the upper bodies of animals, it is acceptable that this fracture is intentional, even if it is not very smooth or orderly.

In addition, there are other items in the studied collection that are probably related to snakes, although these are not figurines or three-dimensional artifacts, but strips attached to the bottom of plate-like dishes (see below). These strips are placed in different positions on the dishes and appear in various forms, such as twisted or torus shapes, which evoke a resemblance to a snake.

Generally, next to these strips, there are also small flat circles that do not show any particular order. It is not known what these worm-like shapes are, which appear in large numbers. It would not be wrong to consider them snake eggs because of their shape and

proximity to the snake-related strips. However, this assumption is not confirmed by any reliable evidence, especially since some dishes also contain traces and remains of human bodies.

*Unidentified figurines*

A number of figurines cannot be confidently attributed to a specific animal, including:

- Figurines with small, narrow snouts, elongated necks, round eyes, and short waists, which may be attributed to donkeys (Pl. 5 & Pl. 7) (QR-124, QR-125).
- A figurine with a narrow, elongated nose and upturned ears that cannot be attributed to a specific animal, but which the authors suggest resembles a wolf or a fox (Pl. 5) (QR-133).
- Two figurines with hump-like organs on their backs, which cannot be attributed to a specific animal (Pl. 5 & Pl. 7) (QR-159, QR-160).
- Two figurines with cylindrical bodies (Pl. 5 & Pl. 7) (QR-131, QR-130) featuring an angle of almost 90 degrees. These figurines are broken on one side and lead to a cylindrical head on the other, with elements such as a mouth, eyes, and ears. What distinguishes these figurines, in addition to the unusual shape of their heads, is their mouths, which have four regular grooves on the front. It is not possible to determine whether these grooves represent the creatures' teeth or are related to some kind of bit or bridle.
- 33 pieces of almost the same dimensions, all broken. Although nothing certain can be said about them, it seems these pieces were the hands and feet of human or animal figurines left on the surface of the site after breaking (Pl. 9).

### III.1.3. Plate-like dishes (Pl. 3)

Although not much pottery was observed at the site of Qale Rostam, and it does not seem that much pottery exists there, among the artifacts collected from the enclosure of Qale Rostam, there are 35 pottery dishes that should be considered figurines due to their special conditions and characteristics.

What are called dishes in this collection are earthenware pieces similar to round plates with short or long walls, which are a bit rougher than the figurines. They do not vary much in size—on average, their height is 3 cm, the diameter of the bottom is 16.6 cm, and the diameter of the edge is 15 cm—and there is no decorative style on their surfaces. In fact, these artifacts could never be used as dishes. However, considering

their direct relationship with figurines, it is acceptable to consider them as a group of figurines.

What is common in all these dishes is the presence of human figurines and bands, which appear as additions on the inner surface or walls of the dish. Additional strips were mentioned earlier, but regarding the human figurines, it seems they were placed or embedded in these dishes in three ways:

- a) standing on the edge,
- b) sitting or standing inside the dish, usually attached to the inner wall so that the figurine leans on it, and
- c) standing on the bottom of the dish in various positions.

### III.2. Content review

In general, it is very difficult to analyze the figurines of the studied collection and their content because:

a) These figurines were obtained from only one site, and no similar figurines have been reported from other sites within Jiroft city, the Halil Roud basin, or neighboring areas.

b) Their chronology is unknown, and there is no other indicator method or tool available to propose even a relative history for this collection.

c) Although it is possible to classify these figurines based on apparent differences and similarities into several groups, it is not currently possible to determine how accurate these classifications truly are.

For example, while human figurines can be divided into cylindrical and rectangular groups with clear differences, it cannot be said with certainty that the creator(s) intentionally and deliberately shaped them this way to represent different types. On one hand, the figurines are obviously different from each other, but on the other, the similarities between both groups are strong enough that the difference in shape may not be very significant.

One of the most important points about the figurines is their fractures. As mentioned earlier, almost no intact figurines are observed—neither among the human figurines nor the zoomorphic figurines, nor even in the dishes. It is sometimes difficult to determine the cause of these fractures due to the extensive erosion they have suffered over the centuries. The fractures can be divided into three general categories: natural fractures, intentional fractures, and adhesion fractures.

Natural fractures refer to any breaks that are not intentional. Intentional fractures occur when the maker, user, or a third party deliberately breaks the figurine in a specific area or areas. This type of fracture, unlike natural ones, tends to be regular, smooth, and usually oblique. With this explanation, natural fractures can also

be called non-intentional fractures, although they are difficult to recognize. They can generally be considered secondary—that is, caused by human factors such as cattle grazing or villagers breaking them for recreation or curiosity, long after the site was abandoned.

Another type or method of breaking is also seen in some figurines, which is best described as “attachment” fractures. This type, which is quite different from the others, is more complex and requires detailed explanation. It relates to figurines that were placed inside dishes, mounted on horses or other four-legged animals, or made in several pieces.

By “attachment,” it is meant that the figurines are broken at their points of connection to containers or other items, and as a result, they appear almost intact. However, this apparent intactness is questionable. Considering the placement of figurines inside containers or on quadrupeds, if they were broken—either intentionally or unintentionally—at least some part of them, such as the ends of their bodies, should still remain inside the dishes.

However, such a thing did not happen, and their full height or full length can be observed. This situation is especially evident in human figurines with crescent-shaped ends (see the description of human figurines with crescent-shaped ends in this section). Another group consists of human figurines that have neither deliberate fractures nor a foundation to stand on; this group seems to have been embedded inside another object because their ends are either flat or slightly bent outward, and their entire length remains intact.

Additionally, small and large, deep and shallow holes can be seen on the bottom of some dishes, with diameters matching those of the human figurines. It is quite possible that the mentioned human figurines were placed in these dishes, and it is possible to reconstruct how they were arranged. At least in one case, the author succeeded in such a reconstruction.

From these observations, it appears that the figurines were placed in the dishes or on quadrupeds in such a way that they could be easily separated from them with a single blow without breaking. It is important to note that this action was done intentionally. Therefore, this group of figurines can also be classified under intentional fractures.

For a better understanding of this phenomenon, the author proposes that the assembly of the human figurines inside the dishes or on the backs of quadrupeds was done in two stages: first, the human figurines were made and fired to complete their production; then the dishes or zoomorphic figurines were made. When not completely dry and before firing,

the human figurines were placed inside or mounted onto them, and then the whole was fired. In this way, if the body was broken intentionally or not, the human figurine could be completely separated from the inside of the dishes or the back of the animal.

Although fractures in human figurines are observed in different areas, they generally occur at the end part—that is, the legs. Few figurines remain unbroken in this area. Even if fractures appear in other parts of the body, including the head and hands, this area almost always (except for the attachment type) shows a fracture. This section comprises nearly the last fifth of the figurine and was created in the deliberate manner described earlier.

None of the zoomorphic figurines are without fractures. In this regard, three important points should be noted:

- a) These fractures show no difference across species.
- b) The fractures do not occur in a specific or detailed area; they have been observed on various parts of the body, including legs, hands, waist, head, ears, or branches.
- c) Generally, the figurines are sometimes broken in several places simultaneously—for example, a half-body with broken hands and ears.

All the dishes are broken; there is no intact dish in this group. It is not possible to comment on how the breakage occurred in this group.

According to the above, the authors suggest that:

- a) All these figurines should be studied together and considered part of the same collection, with the existing differences attributed to different workshops and artists of varying abilities.
- b) Accepting this assumption, the collection likely belongs to a short period—no more than a few decades and at most two or three centuries.

This assumption is strengthened by the relatively small number of figurines found, which, according to investigations, suggests that not many remained on the site due to its special conditions, despite extensive looting and removals from the surface. Additionally, the absence of architectural remains on the site's surface, as discussed further, supports this assumption.

### III.3. Comparison of typology

There are very few examples that can be compared with the figurines of Qale Rostam. These samples were obtained from various regions both inside and outside the borders of Iran—including Shahr-i Sukhta, Konar Sandal, Rameshk, Jordan, and Cyprus—and represent different species and time periods.

There are six clay figurines from Shahr-i Sukhta,

including two human figurines and four cow figurines, which are very similar to those in the studied collection. The human figurines (Seyyed Sajjadi & Moradi, 2015: 40; Seyyed Sajjadi, 2017) closely resemble the rectangular human figurines of Qale Rostam. Four figurines of humpback cows were also found at Shahr-i Sukhta (Seyyed Sajjadi, 2017: 711), similar in shape and size to the humpback cow figurines of Qale Rostam. However, they differ in two important ways: first, they are made of raw mud; second, details such as eyes, branches, and humps are clearly depicted on them.

South Konar Sandal: Among the findings of the south Konar Sandal, from Trench 8 (Majidzadeh, 2020 A, pictures 284 and 302), several clay figurines, abstract, and cylindrical with upturned hands and heads without facial parts were found, which are comparable to QR-84, QR-99, QR-95, QR-74, QR-43, QR-28, QR-22, QR-18 figurines.

Of course, the Konar Sandal samples have two important differences from the Qale Rostam samples: they are more elegant and well-made and free of fractures, complete, and independent.

North Konar Sandal: From the excavations of this hill, a marble figurine (Majidzadeh, 2020 B: 113) and a clay figurine, which was mentioned as "an abstract human clay figurine" (Majidzadeh, 2020 B: 127) It has been stated that they are comparable with the samples of Qale Rostam.

Rameshk: The dog figurine on the handle of the famous Rameshk amphora (Choobak, 2004: 169) is fully comparable to the dog figurine from Qale Rostam (QR-121).

Gilan: The dish from Gilan (Kyani, 2000, photo on the cover of the book), currently kept in the National Museum of Iran, is very similar to the dishes from Qale Rostam. This object features 12 human figurines standing on the edge of a shallow plate-like dish in various poses, with their hands facing forward or upward. The figurines lack facial and other detailed features, and all wear turbans or hats. The similarity in the dish's design, the arrangement and general appearance of the human figurines—especially their turban- or hat-like head coverings—to those from Qale Rostam is so strong that at first glance, the vessel appears to originate from Qale Rostam. According to the authors' reconstructions (Pl. 4), this assumption is reasonable, particularly since the dish was not recovered through scientific excavation but rather through illegal digging.

Jordan: From the Khirbet ez-Zeraqon site in northern Jordan, dating to the Bronze Age, 29 pottery

figurines have been found (Papantoniou and Bourogiannis, 2018: Figure 1). Some of these figurines can be compared with those from Qale Rostam.

Cyprus: Thousands of clay figurines have been found across different regions of Cyprus (Papantoniou and

Bourogiannis (2018: Table 1), representing some of the most interesting and remarkable phenomena of

the ancient world. These figurines are highly diverse, crafted in various styles and belonging to different periods (see Bourogiannis and Papantoniou, 2018: Table 1). Among the most significant finds are the figurines from the Sanctuary of Apollo Hylates at Kourion in the south (Young & Young, 1955; Winter, 1991) and Agia Irini in the north of the island (Bourogiannis, 2018). These figurines—including horsemen, dishes, and human figures—are in some ways comparable to those from Qale Rostam, with notable similarities in style and construction approach. This resemblance is so striking that the Cypriot figurines provide considerable insight into understanding the Qale Rostam figurines. Before studying the Cypriot examples, the authors had already formed conclusions about the making of Qale Rostam figurines, and the study of Cypriot figurines to some extent confirms the accuracy of these reconstructions.

It should be emphasized, however, that these similarities do not imply any direct or indirect connection between the figurines of Qale Rostam and those from Agia Irini; rather, the resemblance appears to be coincidental. An interesting example is a rimless, plate-like dish from Agia Irini, which features five human figurines (one man in the center and four others—two likely women—around him) who seem to be standing and possibly dancing in a circle (Bourogiannis, 2018: 7). Although a complete and intact dish was not found at Qale Rostam, several rimless, plate-like dishes (QR-188, QR-190, QR-195, and QR-203) are present in the studied collection. These dishes bear protrusions that are likely remnants of figurines that were lost after fracturing.

Another example is a figurine with open legs shaped like a bracket from the Sanctuary of Apollo Hylates, whose head is broken and missing (Plate 59.Y). This figurine is fully comparable to similar examples from Qale Rostam (QR-8, QR-9, QR-10, QR-11, QR-13, QR-14, QR-19, QR-26). Additionally, the horse-and-rider figurines found abundantly in Cyprus closely resemble similar pieces in the studied collection in terms of construction.

It can be seen that typological comparison does not contribute significantly to dating these figurines, as the

compared samples come from different periods: those from Shahr-i Sukhta, the southern hill of Konar Sandal, and Jordan belong to the Bronze Age; the sample from the northern hill of Konar Sandal dates to the 2nd millennium BC; and the Rameshk sample belongs to the late 1st millennium BC and the Parthian period. On the other hand, the only truly comparable sample, both in terms of form and style, is the one from the southern hill of Konar Sandal. Considering these cases, it seems that these figurines can be attributed to a period ranging from the middle of the Bronze Age to the end of the 1st millennium BC.

#### III.4. Analysis of the site

An important aspect regarding the figurines is where and how they were found, the context of their discovery, and the objects they are associated with. On the south side of Qale Rostam lies a small fertile meadow formed by sedimentation from the Abshor River. Even today, large villages are situated on this plain.

The site itself is located on the slopes of a mountain range characterized by minimal vegetation and no notable geographical or natural features. However, about 500 meters south of the site's southern end stands one of Esfandagheh's most important and famous natural landmarks — Qale Rostam Mountain.

Regarding the function of the site, two main assumptions can be made: it either served as a cemetery or as a settlement site. These possibilities are discussed below:

##### (a) Cemetery function:

Apart from three or four graves, no other artificial features have been observed on the surface of the site (see Photo 3). These graves appear to belong to a burial tradition common throughout the southeast region of Iran (see Lamberg-Karlovsky & Humphries, 1967; Khanipour and Kavosh, 2022; Khosrowzadeh, 2007; Sarlak and Nowrozi, 2017; Hashemi et al., 2014; Shاهشwari and Dumari, 2012).

At first glance, it might seem that the figurines are associated with these graves; however, this assumption is unlikely for two reasons:

a) No similar figurines have been identified from other cemeteries in the region, many of which have been exposed and subjected to illegal excavations (see Majidzadeh, 2008).

b) The figurines are found in large numbers and concentrated in areas where there is no trace of graves.

Therefore, the hypothesis that these artifacts are connected to the nearby graves at Qale Rostam is rejected.

**(b) Settlement function:**

No traces of a settlement, particularly architectural remains, have been observed at this site. Given that the site is situated on a rocky bed, there is no cultural stratigraphy or layer in the subsurface. On the surface of the flat land to the west of the site—an area that appears to have been leveled and possibly cultivated at some point—only a few scattered cultural materials, primarily pottery fragments from Islamic periods, were found in very small quantities.

Therefore, it is not possible to attribute a settlement function to this site. This conclusion is further supported by the very limited amount of pottery and the absence of any other cultural materials on the site's surface. Moreover, the few pottery pieces that do exist are not diagnostic and cannot be reliably used for chronological purposes.

The conclusion drawn from these observations is that this site, based on the materials found, likely served a special function—probably a ritualistic one. However, the exact nature of this activity remains unclear and cannot be definitively interpreted at this time.

**IV. Conclusion**

This research examined 203 figurines from the Qale Rostam site, categorized into three main groups: human, zoomorphic, and dishes, each with further subdivisions. While the zoomorphic figurines tend to be slightly more realistic than the human ones, all three groups appear to be interconnected, forming a cohesive collection. Nearly all the figurines are broken or fractured, with no complete specimens recovered. Given the regular patterns and specific locations of these fractures—commonly on the hands, feet, head, or

midsection—it is reasonable to assume that many were intentionally made.

It is currently not possible to precisely date these figurines, but they can generally be attributed to a relatively short period spanning from the middle of the Bronze Age to the end of the 1st millennium BC. Given the absence of architectural remains on the site's surface and the presence of a prominent rocky peak known as Qale Rostam—an imposing landmark overlooking the area—it is plausible that these figurines were created for special ceremonial purposes. Further investigation at the site itself is unlikely to yield significant new information. Therefore, progress in understanding these figurines will likely depend on future discoveries and studies of similar artifacts from other regions. Only then might some of the mysteries surrounding these figurines be revealed.

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**Observation Contribution**

Athareh Hatefinasab: Data collection, data analysis, development of ideas, illustrations. Meysam Shahsavari: Data collection, fieldwork, writing of the manuscript. Nader Alidadi Soleymani: Head of the field mission, data collection, and fieldwork.

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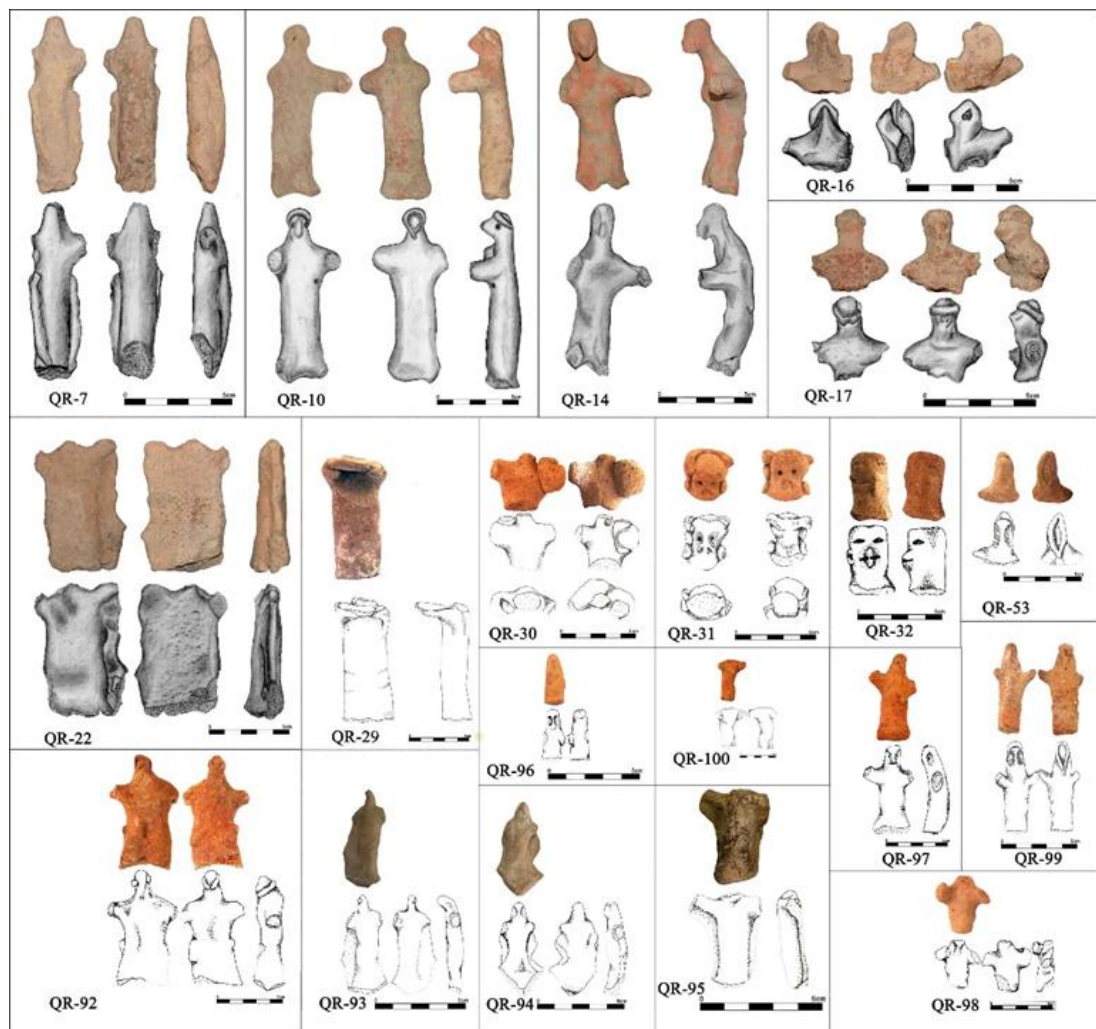
Pl. 3



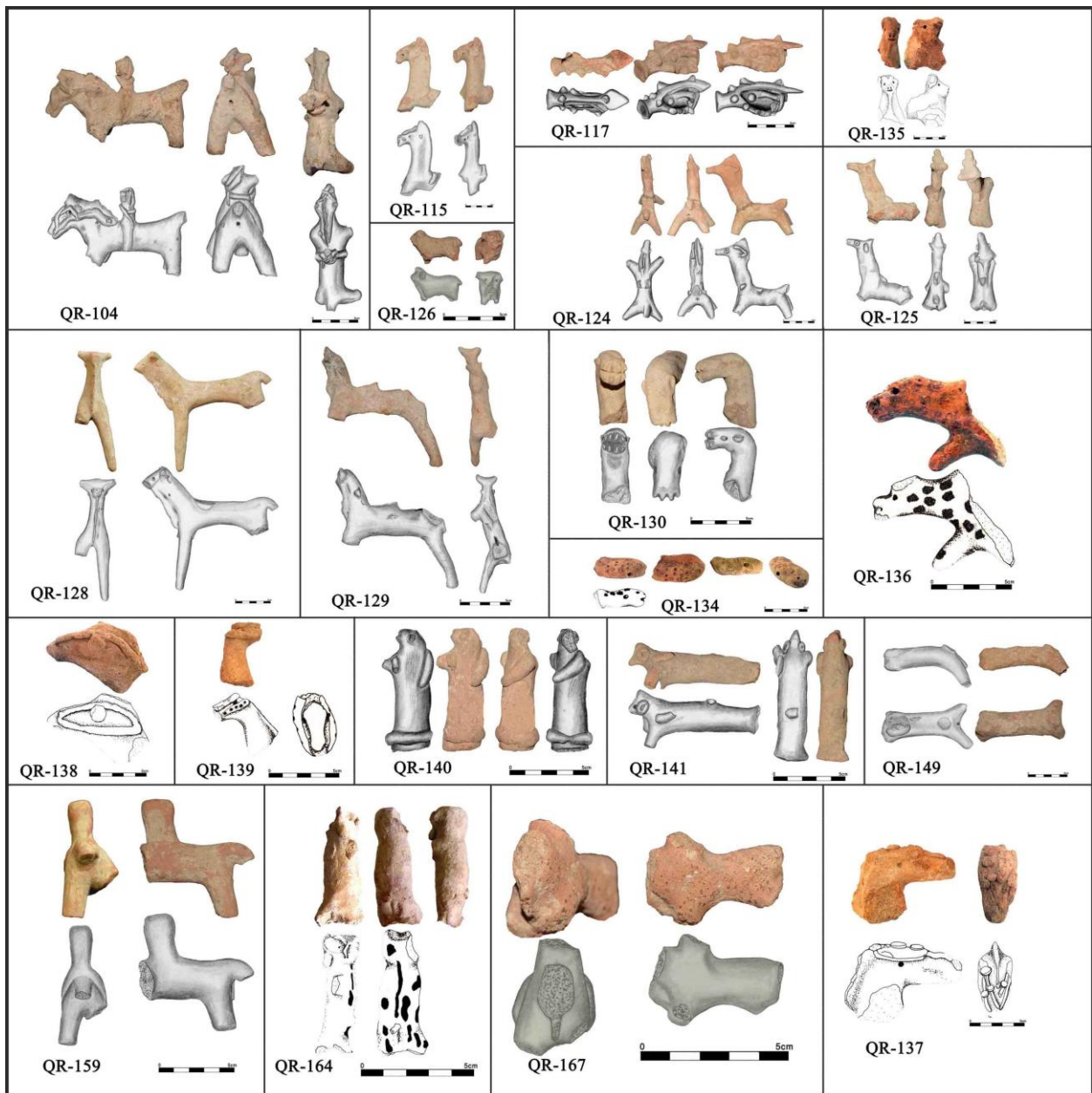
Pl. 4



Pl. 5



Pl. 6



Pl. 7



Pl. 8



Pl. 9



Pl. 10