

ISLAMIC CLAY FIGURINES FROM EXCAVATIONS AT ISTAKHR AND A SUGGESTED USE OF THE ANIMAL-SHAPED SPECIMENS*

Maria Vittoria Fontana - Serenella Mancini
Sapienza University of Rome

This paper deals with the Islamic hand-modelled clay figurines from the excavations carried out at Istakhr (Fars region, Iran) by the Oriental Institute of Chicago in the 1930s and the Joint Italian-Iranian Archaeological Mission in 2012. S. Mancini presents detailed descriptions of these artefacts, including some technological notes relating to fabrics, as well as a few comparisons help to propose their chronological attribution. M.V. Fontana suggests that the animal specimens can be understood as figurines which children usually placed on the roofs of their houses pending the end of panjī-mas and to welcome in the New Year at the end of a long-lasting ritual of Zoroastrian tradition, as can also be seen in some Seljuk glazed ceramic "house models".

Keywords: Istakhr; Seljuk period; hand-modelled clay figurines; animal-shaped specimens; ceremony of Zoroastrian tradition

1. THE ISLAMIC HAND-MODELLED CLAY FIGURINES FROM EXCAVATIONS CARRIED OUT IN THE 1930S AND 2012 AT ISTAKHR

The archaeological area comprising the mound of the "historical city" of Istakhr is located in the Fars province, roughly 60 km north of Shiraz and approximately 5 km north of Persepolis.¹

This contribution discusses an interesting group of fifteen Islamic hand-modelled clay figurines brought to light during excavations carried out at Istakhr in the 1930s and 2012 (figs. 1-4),² which will be analysed in detail hereafter.

1.1. *The Islamic clay figurines from Istakhr: description*

The three figurines from the 2012 excavations (nos. 3-4 and 15, figs. 2 and 4) and just two of the twelve figurines from the 1930s excavations (nos. 7 and 14, figs. 2 and 4), respectively preserved in storage at the Persepolis Museum and the Oriental Institute Museum of Chicago, have been directly examined by the author. Consequently only the fabrics of these figurines have been described here, while information on the fabrics of the

* Three fragments were uncovered in 2012 by the joint Italian-Iranian Archaeological Mission at Istakhr (sponsored by Sapienza University of Rome, Rome - the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation - the Max van Berchem Foundation, Geneva); twelve fragments were retrieved in the 1930s by the Archaeological Mission of the Oriental Institute of Chicago. The authors are deeply grateful to Jean Evans, the Chief Curator and Deputy Director of the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago, and Donald S. Whitcomb and Tasha Vorderstrasse, respectively Associate Professor and Research Associate at the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, for allowing Serenella Mancini to view the materials and all related data preserved at the Oriental Institute Museum, as well as the publication of photos and drawings.

¹ For a comprehensive history of the field works carried out at Istakhr, starting with Herzfeld's first surveys in 1923, see Fontana ed. 2018 and, in particular, Rugiadi's paragraph "§2.2. *Historical trenches on the ground*" in Rugiadi - Colliva 2018, 133-138, and Di Cesare in Di Cesare - Ebanista 2018, 257-267.

² On behalf of the Oriental Institute of Chicago (1930s), and Sapienza University of Rome and ICHHTO of Tehran (2012), respectively.

other figurines found during the 1930s excavations (nos. 1-2, 5-6, 9-13, figs. 1-4) - whose location is presently unknown - is provided in the final table 1, as taken from the descriptive cards accompanying the drawings of the figurines and currently kept in the Oriental Institute Museum.³ The fabrics examined range from light yellow to brown. The figurines inspected are solid rather than hollow.

The final table 1 also contain all the available information on dimensions and find spots.

1.1.1. Nos. 1-2 - Two saddleless horses with riders (fig. 1)

Two figurines portray saddleless horses with riders (the so-called horse-and-rider type); they were modelled separately and then assembled. Only no. 1 is almost complete and features a rider holding the horse's mane, whereas in no. 2 only part of the rider's legs have been preserved and the rest of the body has been completely lost.

Three legs of horse no. 1 have been lost, the neck is short and bent forward and the tail is missing. The rider, which seem to be merely sketched, is small and has no remarkable features. The head of horse no. 2 has also been lost and its two left legs and tail are missing.

1.1.2. Nos. 3-9 - Seven horses (or six horses and a giraffe) (fig. 2)

The horse-shaped figurines are the most numerous and are characterised by several small details; in most cases they are fragmentary. The backs of those that have been preserved are fitted with saddles. The latter are made of two clay fillets - placed transversely or centrally - which were modelled separately and then applied, except for the saddles of figurines 5 and 7 which were modelled during the manufacturing process.

Only one horse still has its head (no. 5), while only the head remains of horse no. 8. Two small clay buttons with a central circular impression have been applied to form the eyes of both figurines; horse no. 8 also has triangular ears.

Nos. 3-5 and 8-9 have modelled and incised manes (nos. 3, 5 and 9 also feature painted lines). Specifically, the considerable length of the neck of figurine no. 9 could lead to the identification of this animal as a giraffe. The stylised legs, which are missing from most of the artefacts, have rounded or flat ends. The tails, recognisable in only four specimens (nos. 3, 6-7, 9), have been applied on horses nos. 3, 6 and 7.

The fabrics of nos. 3-4 and 7 are described below.

Figurine no. 3 was made with a grey/buff quite fine fabric of medium/high compactness and a chalky feel to the touch. This fabric has few mineral inclusions which are most likely found in the clay matrix in its natural state. It has a porosity of 2%; the voids have an elongated sub-angular shape and range in size from 0.1 to 0.4 mm. Figurine no. 4 has a reddish/pinkish fabric and elongated sub-angular dark red-brown mineral inclusions,⁴ probably argillaceous rock fragments.⁵ Figurine no. 7 has a medium/coarse dark brown fabric with sparse black mineral inclusions; this very hard fabric is highly compact.

³ The author wishes to express her special gratitude to three staff members of the Oriental Institute Museum of Chicago: Helen McDonald and Susan Allison, respectively Registrar and Associate Registrar, and Anne Flannery, Head Archivist, for helping her in the research and archive consultation.

⁴ These fabrics were widely used to produce most of the unglazed wares found at Istakhr and a few pieces of kiln furniture brought to light during the excavations (Fusaro 2016, 87).

⁵ See Whitbread 1986 for the characterisation of argillaceous rock fragments (ARF).

1.1.3. Nos. 10 and 11 - Two camels (figs. 3-4)

Two figurines have been identified as camels (*camelus dromedarius*). Camel no. 10 (fig. 3) is preserved in its entirety with a long-curved neck, the lower part of which is thicker; the muzzle juts out and the two ears are triangular, the body is very stylised and the four legs have been finished with a flat tool.⁶ A saddle composed of two projecting elements has been applied on the back of the animal.

Only the head of camel no. 11 (fig. 4) remains. It is more detailed than that of no. 10 and has a round shape, a protruding muzzle, an open mouth, and small ears placed horizontally.

1.1.4. No. 12 - A horned animal (fig. 3)

Figurine no. 12 is preserved in its entirety and represents a horned animal, probably a gibbous ox (*bos indicus*).⁷ The two horns are very thick and arch back slightly, the muzzle is stylised, and the neck is short and stocky. The body is medium size, the legs were finished with a flat tool, and a hump has been placed on its back.

1.1.5. No. 13 - Cat or lion (fig. 4)

Only the front part of figurine no. 13 is preserved. This quadruped is very stylised: its ears are arched back, its eyes are formed by two small applied clay buttons with a central circular impression and its small nose is merely outlined. The descriptive card identifies it as a cat, but it could also be a lion.⁸

1.1.6. Nos. 14-15 - Two unidentified quadrupeds (fig. 4)

Figurine no. 14 is partially preserved and features an unidentified quadruped. The back part has a well-worked body and the two rear legs are broken at their tips. The short tail seems to have been modelled during the manufacturing process, as it is positioned horizontally and slightly upturned. It is very interesting to note that a clay fillet has been applied to the animal's back also around its tail, suggesting it could be a sort of harness. This figurine was made with a medium/coarse buff fabric with irregular and elongated black temper. The fabric has a porosity of 5/7% and the voids are rounded and irregular.

The only remaining part of figurine no. 15 is a quadruped's leg, which, as usual, is highly stylised. The fabric is the same as that used for horse figurine no. 4, i.e. a medium/coarse reddish/pinkish fabric with dark red-brown mineral inclusions.

⁶ See Schmidt 1939, fig. 85 and https://oi.uchicago.edu/gallery/istakhr-islamic-city-mound#9F12_72dpi.png; cf. also Gibson 2010, I, 54, fn. 44.

⁷ See Schmidt 1939, fig. 85 and https://oi.uchicago.edu/gallery/istakhr-islamic-city-mound#9F12_72dpi.png; cf. also Gibson 2010, I, 54, fn. 44. For Iran as one of the zoological contexts of the *bos indicus*, see Brunner 1980, 35.

⁸ Cf. Fontana, below, and figs. 8-10.

NOS.	FINDSPOTS	IDENTIFICATION NUMBERS	EXCAVATION DATES	SIZES	NOTES
1	FH - 50	Saddleless horse with rider I 2 779	1930s	6.4 × 7.4 cm	Fabric and pigments not examined; «grey medium fabric, medium/ hard»
2	GL - 45 N side OW	Saddleless horse with rider I 2 163	1930s	6.2 × 6.8 cm	Fabric and pigments not examined; «buff colour»
3	SU133	Horse -	2012	5.8 × 5.4 cm	Grey/buff quite fine fabric of medium/high compactness and a chalky feel to the touch. This fabric has few mineral inclusions which are most likely found in the clay matrix in its natural state. It has a porosity of 2%; the voids have an elongated sub-angular shape and range in size from 0.1 to 0.4 cm. Red painted lines on body.
4	SU102	Horse ES31	2012	6.4 × 7.7 cm	Reddish/pinkish fabric and elongated sub-angular dark red-brown mineral inclusions, probably argillaceous rock fragments
5	FH - 50	Horse I 2 780	1930s	6.7 × 6.9 cm	Fabric and pigments not examined; «yellow/grey colour, red painted lines on neck»
6	GL-15 NO	Horse I 2 120	1930s	6.3 × 8.5 cm	Fabric and pigments not examined; «buff medium/fine fabric, medium/ hard»
7	IL-16	Horse I 2 1389-m	1930s	3.6 × 8 cm	Medium/coarse dark brown fabric with sparse black mineral inclusions; this very hard fabric is highly compact
8	FH-30	Horse I 2 135	1930s	5.3 × 1.9 cm	Fabric and pigments not examined; «yellow/brown fine fabric, medium/ hard»
9	GL-35 NW	Horse or giraffe I 2 101	1930s	9.2 × 6.8 cm	Fabric and pigments not examined; «red/grey colour, red paint»
10	-	Camel I 2 437	1930s		Fabric and pigments not examined
11	GL - 45	Camel I 2 701	1930s	4 × 3.8 cm	Fabric and pigments not examined; «grey medium/coarse fabric, medium/hard»
12	-	Horned animal I 2 427	1930s		Fabric and pigments not examined
13	GL - 24 Sherd pile	Cat or lion I 2 362	1930s	3.8 × 4.3 cm	Fabric and pigments not examined; «light yellow colour, medium/ hard»
14	HL-76	Unidentified quadruped I 2 1383-o	1930s	3.3 × 4.7 cm	Medium/coarse buff fabric with irregular and elongated black temper; the fabric has a porosity of 5/7%, the voids are rounded and irregular
15	SU129	Unidentified quadruped -	2012	4.6 × 2.2 cm	Reddish/pinkish fabric and elongated sub-angular dark red-brown mineral inclusions, probably argillaceous rock fragments

Tab. 1 - Description of figurines found during the 1930s excavations.⁹

⁹ The descriptions of fabrics and pigments in quotation marks in the 'notes' column were taken from the descriptive cards preserved at the Oriental Institute Museum of Chicago.

1.2. *The Islamic clay figurines from Istakhr: comparison and dating*

Clay figurines in the shape of both humans and animals have been found at numerous archaeological sites in Iran, Iraq and Central Asia,¹⁰ nevertheless it is quite complicated to find meaningful comparisons. At Istakhr only two clay figurines of the so-called and widespread horse-and-rider type have been found.¹¹ As for the Sasanian and Islamic periods we can cite the Sasanian finds from Vēh Ardashīr and Merv¹² and the Islamic specimens found at Wāsiṭ and Fuṣṭāṭ.¹³

The clay figurines from Istakhr have a distinct stylised character which also seems to be a dominant feature in clay figurines from other sites. This aspect is highly recognisable in most clay animal figurines from Islamic Susa. These usually represent quadrupeds and especially horses which have simply modelled bodies (fig. 5a), four legs shaped together in an extended position, and legs that are often rounded or flat at the end. Paint has also been used to highlight some parts of the animals' bodies, in particular the manes.¹⁴ The chronological attribution of clay animal figurines from Susa is based on ceramic findings: a dating between the 7th and 9th centuries has been suggested.

The figurine found at Tell Abū Sarīfa, whose dating is uncertain but certainly not before the 9th century,¹⁵ also has some elements in common with the Istakhr specimens: the hand-modelled stylised horse with outspread legs also bears traces of decorative bands of red paint (fig. 5b).¹⁶ A wide range of figurines found at Wāsiṭ have been dated to the 13th century.¹⁷ They are made with «fine-grained clay, buff in colour or slightly pink according to firing»¹⁷ and have a strongly stylised character seen especially in the quadrupeds with sketched features: their bodies and muzzles share characteristics with the specimens from Istakhr (fig. 5c).¹⁸ Black and/or red paint was also found on some parts of the animals' bodies.¹⁹

Another comparable feature is the saddle. The saddles of the animal figurines from Istakhr, Susa (fig. 5a) and Wāsiṭ were made by applying two clay fillets across the back of the quadrupeds: they are composed of two rounded or pointed shaped pieces.²⁰

The three clay figurines from Istakhr unearthed during the excavations carried out in 2012 (nos. 3-4 and 15, figs. 2 and 4) can be dated to the Seljuk period. In fact, they were found in phases 5, 7 and 8, and date from the 11th to the early 13th century on the basis of

¹⁰ Especially for animal figurines, see below, Fontana 2.1.

¹¹ The horse-and-rider theme was widely represented during the Sasanian period and in some cases, as we can see at Istakhr, it even survived in the Islamic period.

¹² On Vēh Ardashīr Cellerino and Messina (2013, 124) stated «[...] conforming to a trend already attested from the Hellenistic to the Sasanian period, figurines of horses largely prevail, for they were used for the most, to support riders [...]». For Merv see Simpson 2004, 324 and Herrmann *et al.* 1997, 9 (cf. also fn. 57, below).

¹³ See Safar 1945, pl. XXIIa for Wāsiṭ; Scanlon 1968, 2, text fig. 2a on p. 4, and fig. 1c for Fuṣṭāṭ (cf. also fn. 25, *in fine*, below).

¹⁴ Rosen Ayalon 1974, figs. 248-249, 254-255.

¹⁵ Cf. Wells (2015, 55-57), who has postdated the finds from Tell Abū Sarīfa (Adams 1970, 118).

¹⁶ As for the Istakhr red painted horse (and giraffe) figurines cf. nos. 3, 5 and 9 (table 1).

¹⁷ Safar 1945, 36.

¹⁸ Safar 1945, pl. XXIIa.

¹⁹ Safar 1945, 36.

²⁰ See Rosen Ayalon 1974, figs. 247-250, Kervran 1977, fig. 49.6, pl. XII.1; 1984, fig. 30.5 for Susa; Adams 1970, pl. 8, fig. 16e (*here*, fig. 5b) for Tell Abū Sarīfa; Safar 1945, pl. XXIIa (top left) for Wāsiṭ. Similar saddles can be seen on horse figurines from Nishapur, dated to the 9th-12th century (Wilkinson 1973, ill. 130 on p. 354) and Tell Abū Škhayr, dated to the 13th-mid-14th century (Shammri 1986, fig. 33d).

pottery finds.²¹ We can also suggest a similar date for the figurines found during excavations carried out in the 1930s, for which we do not yet have precise information on the stratigraphy.²² This dating corresponds to that attributed to figurines with similar features found in Wāsiṭ, i.e. the so-called Seljuk revival that occurred in Iraq during the 12th-13th centuries.²³

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2. THE ISLAMIC ANIMAL-SHAPED CLAY FIGURINES FROM ISTAKHR, AND LATE SASANIAN AND ISLAMIC SPECIMENS FROM SOME ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES IN IRAN, IRAQ AND CENTRAL ASIA, AND THEIR SUGGESTED USE

This contribution deals with the Islamic animal-shaped clay figurines found during excavations carried out at Istakhr in the 1930s and 2012 (figs. 2-4).²⁴ The figurines include different kinds of quadrupeds, along with saddled horses and camels - and perhaps also a giraffe - with no rider. The figures with horsemen (which may have originated from the so-called horse-and-rider type), on the contrary, are portrayed riding without saddles. As discussed below, the saddles may indeed be pack saddles, which would indicate that the quadrupeds wearing them were pack animals.

As Serenella Mancini has illustrated, the Istakhr finds include, in addition to two saddleless horses with riders (nos. 1-2, fig. 1), five saddled horses (nos. 3-7, fig. 2), a saddled horse or giraffe (no. 9, fig. 2), a saddled camel (no. 10, fig. 3), a horned animal, most probably a gibbous ox (no. 12, fig. 3), a cat or lion (no. 13, fig. 4), a horse's head (no. 8, fig. 2), a camel's head (no. 11, fig. 4) and two unidentifiable quadrupeds (nos. 14-15, fig. 4).

2.1. Late Sasanian and Islamic clay animal figurines from Iran, Iraq and Central Asia

Some clay animal figurines have been found from the Late Sasanian and Islamic strata of archaeological sites in Iran, Iraq and Central Asia.²⁵

²¹ Serenella Mancini, *La ceramica di Estakhr (Iran): classificazione, studio e confronti*, PhD Thesis, Sapienza University of Rome, Rome, in progress. Some figurines are certainly of local production, cf. above, fn. 4.

²² Donald Whitcomb and Tasha Vorderstrasse are currently working on the documentation of those excavations.

²³ Safar 1945, 37; cf. Adams 1970, 116.

²⁴ See the previous contribution by Serenella Mancini, in particular fns. 1 and 2. The animal specimens constitute the overwhelming majority of unearthed figurines from Istakhr.

²⁵ Only these three great areas (included in Greater Iran) have been taken into account and all comparisons with clay animal figurines dated prior to the Late Sasanian era have been omitted. In fact, the oldest Sasanian animal figurines - such as those from the excavations of the so-called Artisan Quarter of Vēh Ardashīr (in the al-Madā'in area in Iraq, 3rd-5th century, investigated by the Italian Expedition in Iraq of the Centro Ricerche Archeologiche e Scavi di Torino per il Medio Oriente e l'Asia; cf. Invernizzi 1979; 1985, figs. on p. 193; Cellerino - Messina 2013) -, although for the most part also hand-modelled, with very few exceptions (cf. fn. 95, below) show iconographic features and stylistic renderings markedly different from those exhibited by the more recent samples, since the former share the characteristics of specimens extremely widespread in the Ancient Near East from the Neolithic period onwards. Even their intended uses - including ritual, magic-cult, funerary, and so on - do not allow comparisons (cf. Parayre 2003). As for the "other" areas of origin, Gibson (2010, I, 54 and fn. 43) reported a figurine in the form of a horse from Fustāt (Egypt), but in fact it belongs to the widespread horse-and-rider type (Scanlon 1968, 2, text fig. 2a on p. 4, and fig. 1c).

2.1.1. Animal figurines from Iran

Among the Iranian finds, Donald S. Whitcomb said of the clay animal figurines found during the excavations carried out by the Oriental Institute of Chicago at Qaṣr-i Abū Naṣr (old Shiraz, located in the Fars region like Istakhr): they are numerous and include «mainly ambiguous quadrupeds» and two fragmentary saddles, dating to the Sasanian-Early Islamic period.²⁶

In Susa (present-day Shush, in the Khuzistan province), one of the most ancient cities of the region, the Délégation Archéologique en Iran brought to light a very impressive quantity of clay figurines dating from the 4th millennium BCE onwards,²⁷ 755 of them were animal specimens, the dating of which was sometimes contested.²⁸ Myriam Rosen-Ayalon dated some twenty clay animal figurines found during the excavations carried out in the royal city to the Islamic period: they were divided among the Louvre Museum, the National Museum in Tehran and the former storerooms of the French Archaeological Mission in both Susa and Tehran.²⁹ Most of them are horses, and those whose bodies are preserved are fitted with saddles (fig. 5a).³⁰ All that is left of other two horses are their heads.³¹ Two unidentifiable quadrupeds and two birds are also found.³² Some figurines are painted red and/or black.³³ As for their attribution to the Islamic period and, more specifically, to the 7th-9th century, I would suggest caution, as some figurines could still be dated to the Sasanian period while others could be dated later than the 9th century.³⁴ During subsequent excavations of the sector between the royal city and the Apadana only a few fragments of animal figurines were found, namely horses also dated to the 8th-9th century, of which Monique Kervran published a saddled horse.³⁵

²⁶ Whitcomb 1985, 190 and fig. 72d-i. Unfortunately the poor conditions of the artefacts prevent us from recognising their morphological features and, consequently, the animal species to which the quadrupeds belong.

²⁷ Martínez-Sève 2002; see also Spycket 1992.

²⁸ Martínez-Sève 2003.

²⁹ Rosen-Ayalon 1974, 113-121.

³⁰ The saddles are applied (Rosen-Ayalon 1974, figs. 247-252, 256; pls. XXV.a, c, XXVI.c), a part of in two cases where it seems that they were modelled together with the body of the animals (Rosen-Ayalon 1974, figs. 254-255). Even a two-headed horse with a saddle should be reported (Rosen-Ayalon 1974, figs. 259-259a), while another two-headed horse ridden by a naked woman does not have a saddle (Islamic?, cf. fn. 34, below; Rosen-Ayalon 1974, fig. 258-258a).

³¹ Rosen-Ayalon 1974, fig. 253 and pl. XXV.b. The heads of another three horses have very different features, stressing that they were most likely produced for artistic purposes (Rosen-Ayalon 1974, figs. 264-266, pl. XXV.e; cf. Joel - Peli 2005, fig. 317 on p. 231; see also fn. 34 below).

³² Rosen-Ayalon 1974, figs. 262-263; fig. 268 and pl. XXV.g, respectively. Another bird is most likely a rattle (Rosen-Ayalon 1974, fig. 269, cf. also Joel - Peli 2005, cat. and ill. 319 on p. 232).

³³ Rosen-Ayalon 1974, figs. 251-256.

³⁴ In addition to the previously mentioned two-headed horses, one of which also ridden by a naked woman (cf. fn. 30, above), the three horse heads of horses have very different modelling, which is much more complex and refined (cf. fn. 31, above; Rosen-Ayalon 1974, figs. 264-266, pl. XXV.e; for the last one cf. also Joel - Peli 2005, cat. and ill. 317 on p. 231, where it is also specified that « ce petit cheval présente la particularité d'être creux »). Rosen-Ayalon herself pointed out that the last horse figurine, published in 1954 by Jean David-Weill, was dated by this scholar to the Sasanian period (Rosen-Ayalon 1974, 120, fn. 1). Whereas, the provenance of an opaque-glazed and lustre painted figurine of a probable lion from the « niveau 2 », attributed to the 8th-9th century, is sufficient evidence to resort to a new and later dating of that layer, from which not many clay figurines were found.

³⁵ Kervran 1977, 150, no. 6, fig. 49.6, pl. XII.1; 1984, 142, fig. 30.5.

Charles K. Wilkinson reported that clay modelled figurines of uncertain date (9th-12th century) had been found during excavations by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the Nishapur area in the Khurasan region, along one of the most important trade routes. These figurines are preserved in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the National Museum of Iran in Tehran. A horse figurine equipped with a saddle «formed from two added pieces of clay» was found on the surface at Sabz Pushān.³⁶ A «hen» figurine was uncovered at Qanāt Tepe.³⁷

Some clay figurines, belonging to the Islamic period but again of uncertain date, were found in Siraf, the famous ancient port of the Persian Gulf, and Rayy, the well-known manufacturing centre in the current province of Tehran, respectively. In her archaeological study of the ceramics (8th to 15th century) from Siraf preserved in the British Museum in London,³⁸ Moira Tampoe referred to clay animal figurines, likely horses or mules, one of which is fitted with a saddle, while she suggested that a figurine with a «heavy rounded shape» might be an elephant.³⁹

The excavations undertaken by Erich F. Schmidt (The Boston Museum of Fine Arts / University Museum Expedition to Rayy), which started in the spring of 1934 and concluded in the fall of 1936,⁴⁰ unearthed around 35 clay animal figurines which are now preserved in the Penn Museum in Philadelphia;⁴¹ six of them are painted.⁴² Their entries in the Museum website are not accompanied by illustrations and the animal species are not described, except in three cases: possibly a ram, a ram's head and the horn of an animal.⁴³

Lastly, Muhammad Yussuf Kiani dated from the 10th to 13th centuries some running or standing clay animal figurines from the excavations he directed in Gurgan between 1970-1977.⁴⁴

³⁶ Wilkinson 1973, 325, no. 130, ill. 130 on p. 354. It is kept in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (MMA 38.40.102), also quoted by Gibson 2010, I, 54, fn. 44; for colour images showing it from four different sides and its 9th-century suggested dating see <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/449314> (last access: 18/06/2019).

³⁷ MMA 40.170.206. It was curiously described as having three legs «one at the front, two at the back» (Wilkinson 1973, 324, no. 119). Other two assumptive figurines were found in Nishapur, but Wilkinson was doubtful whether they were really such or applied ornaments: an elephant's head (in the National Museum, Tehran) and a monkey [or sheep]'s head (MMA 40.170.162): the former from Qanāt Tepe and the latter from Village Tepe (Wilkinson 1973, 324, no. 120; and 325, no. 126, ill. 126 on p. 354, respectively).

³⁸ The excavations at Siraf began in 1966 and were carried out for seven seasons. They were directed by David Whitehouse under the co-direction of Gholam-Reza Masoumi, and sponsored by the British Institute for Persian Studies in London.

³⁹ Tampoe 1989, 18, respectively nos. 731, 733 [or 735?], 736, and no. 734, illustrated at fig. 13 on p. 187.

⁴⁰ See Schmidt 1940, 29 and ff.

⁴¹ https://www.penn.museum/collections/objects/site.php?irn=26&object_name%5B%5D=animal+figurine (last access: 18/06/2019).

⁴² Object nos. CG842811-5020, CG842811-4281, CG842811-3612, CG842811-0154, CG842811-8515, 35-8-133.

⁴³ Object nos. 35-8-74, 35-8-70 and 37-11-381, respectively.

⁴⁴ Gurgan, the former Astarābād, is the capital of the homonym historical province - recently re-named Gulistan - adjoining the south-east corner of the Caspian Sea. As far as the dating of the figurines, Kiani (1984, 79) did not propose a stratigraphic reference, but only affirmed: «In general these figurines are datable to the 4th-7th centuries A.H. (10th-13th AD)». No description was given of the animal species or their forms, no illustration is available.

2.1.2. Animal figurines from Iraq

Some clay animal figurines have also been found in Iraq. In Tell Abū Sarīfa (in the Nippur area, southern-east Iraq) one clay figurine was uncovered (from level IV, but near the bottom of level V) during the excavations jointly sponsored by the Oriental Institute of Chicago and the American Schools of Oriental Research. This figurine is a saddled horse with outspread legs, and its saddle has «an exceptionally high cantle and pommel»⁴⁵ (fig. 5b). As some scholars have suggested, the dating to the 7th-late 8th century proposed in 1970 by Adams should be shifted to the 9th-10th century due to the contextual findings of “Samarra Horizon” ceramics.⁴⁶

During the excavations at Samarra directed by Friedrich Sarre and Ernst Herzfeld in 1911 and 1912-13 on behalf of the Islamic Department of the former Kaiser Friedrich-Museum in Berlin, two clay modelled animal figurines were uncovered from the 9th-century House VIIa, namely a cow - with carved details - and a fragmentary horse with applied saddle and bridle.⁴⁷

A large amount of clay figurines were found in Tell Abū Škhayr (al-Dawra, 2 km from Baghdad on the road to Babylon-Karbala') and Wāsiṭ (in eastern Iraq, half way between Kūfa and Bassora on the west bank of the Tigris). During the three excavations campaigns carried out at Tell Abū Škhayr in 1976-1978 by the State Organisation of Antiquities and Heritage of Baghdad, only animal figurines were brought to light. Hussain Abdul Amir Muhammad Shammri, the Deputy Director of the archaeological works, assigned them to two different periods: two quadrupeds (one might be a dog, no. 43) belong to Period I (early 13th century),⁴⁸ and ten pieces are dated to Period II (13th to mid-14th century). Shammri identifies these ten animals as a lioness, a lion, two dogs, a duck, a giraffe, a mythical animal, a bear (?), a horse, and a hyena.⁴⁹ It is noteworthy that the horse has a saddle, «formed from one added piece of clay».⁵⁰

A large number of clay figurines came from excavations, that started in 1936 and lasted until 1942, carried out at Wāsiṭ by the “Directorate General of Antiquities” of the Government of Iraq. The corresponding finds were housed in the Baghdad Museum. Fuad Safar specified that it was «one remarkable group of over four hundred pieces, found among the scanty remains of a building in the Ilkhānid levels of Sounding (shaft) No. 15, which we assume to have been a toy shop».⁵¹ Many of them are human figurines, however a considerable number of animal specimens were also unearthed. Unfortunately, Safar did not list the recognised animal species, but merely reported: «there are also riderless horses».⁵² Nevertheless, from the illustrations he published, several quadrupeds (including

⁴⁵ Adams 1970, 116, 118 (for the level's dating), pl. 8 (fig. 16e). This figurine was also quoted by Gibson 2010, I, 54 and fn. 44. Cf. also Mancini, above, § 1.2.

⁴⁶ See Wells 2015, 55-57.

⁴⁷ Nos. 64 and 65, respectively (Sarre 1925, 18, figs. 52-53 on p. 17); both figurines are currently preserved in the Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin, Inv. Sam 160 [64] and Sam 168 [65].

⁴⁸ Shammri 1986, 190, 192-193, no. 43, fig. 16d, pl. XLb on p. 536; no. 44, fig. 16e.

⁴⁹ Shammri 1986, 268-269, 273-276, nos. 202-211, fig. 32 c-f on p. 480 and fig. 33 on p. 481, pl. LVIIIa-b on p. 554.

⁵⁰ Shammri 1986, 276, no. 210, fig. 33 d.

⁵¹ Safar 1945, 36. Instead, Ernst J. Grube suggested it was likely the storeroom of a potter who specialised in manufacturing figurines (Grube 1966, 173; cf. also Graves 2008, 246, and 2010, I, 73).

⁵² Safar 1945, 36.

some gibbous oxen, fig. 5c) and birds, counting at least one nightingale, can be identified.⁵³ The horse recognisable at the top left of pl. XXIIa of Safar's volume wears a saddle. On the contrary, the horses with riders appeared not to be wearing saddles.⁵⁴

2.1.3. Animal figurines from Central Asia

Finally, this next section discusses some clay animal figurines from Central Asia.⁵⁵ All the animal figurines from Merv, a major oasis-city of Central Asia (in present-day Turkmenistan), have been dated to the Sasanian period (5th-7th century).⁵⁶ They are hand-modelled and «occasionally covered with a red slip or decorated after firing with a water-soluble red and/or black pigment».⁵⁷ Many animal figurines were brought to light during the 1993 and 1994 campaigns from the «sixth-seventh century AD contexts».⁵⁸ More specifically, St John Simpson referred to nineteen animal figurines, «mostly consisting of broken legs and/or hindquarters of quadrupeds, but including three recognizable horse figurines, two ovicaprids, a dog and a distinctive monkey-like creature».⁵⁹ Only a few illustrations of animal figurines from Merv have been published, including those of three horses found in Area 5 of Gyaur Qal'a: a sufficient part of the body of one of them still remains, allowing us to observe its saddle.⁶⁰ The «marks on the back where the riders sat» of two horse figurines - part of some surface findings from the "Chilburj" area - are most probably also saddles remains.⁶¹

In the National Museum of Samarkand some ceramic animal figurines found in Samarkand/Afrasiyab are preserved and dated to the 9th-12th century. The catalogue of a 1992-1993 touring exhibition held in three French museums illustrates two modelled specimens: a horned quadruped and a saddled horse.⁶²

Three modelled animal figurines of quadrupeds found in Binket, the medieval capital of Shāsh (the Tashkent oasis), were illustrated in the catalogue of a 1991 exhibition in

⁵³ Safar 1945, pl. XXIIa, right.

⁵⁴ Safar 1945, pl. XXIa. However, the quality of the photograph does not permit an optimal reading of it. M. Gibson reported a hand-modelled horse with red pigment and a large saddle, excavated at Kish (I think she was referring to Kish in Iraq, 12 km east of Babylon), dated to the 9th-11th century and preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Inv. no. C.245.1931 (Gibson 2010, I, 54, fn. 44, and fig. 2 on p. 380).

⁵⁵ For the long Central Asian tradition of clay figurines up to the 6th century cf. Lo Muzio 2010.

⁵⁶ During the 1996 campaign in Gyaur Qal'a, in the northern extension of Qal'a Area 4, «several figurine fragments» were found, in association with slip-painted wares, thus they could be dated to the Islamic period (up to the 10th-11th century). Firstly, however, it is not specified whether the lot also included animal figurines, and secondly, this finding was referred to as «residual small finds from earlier [?] periods» (Herrmann *et al.* 1997, 15). For a history of the archaeological work accomplished at Merv, see Puschnigg 2006, 9-16.

⁵⁷ Simpson 2004, 324. Some specimens of Sasanian horse-and-rider types, some modelled (Simpson 2004, 324) and some moulded (Herrmann *et al.* 1997, 9), have also been found in Merv.

⁵⁸ Simpson - Herrmann 1995, 141-142.

⁵⁹ Simpson in Herrmann - Kurbansakhatov *et al.* 1994, 67; their date is uncertain.

⁶⁰ «1: Head of red-slipped horse figurine with bridle (SF 10242 [Pl. Ia, ht. 7,6 cm], 2: body of horse figurine with saddle (SF 4978), 3: rear end of horse figurine (SF 10283)»: Herrmann *et al.* 2000, caption of fig. 1 on p. 3.

⁶¹ Gaibov *et al.* 1990, 29; cf., above, the fragmentary saddles found at Qaşr-i Abū Naşr, and also Wilkinson 1973, 325, no. 130. Both Gaibov *et al.* 1990 and Herrmann - Kurbansakhatov *et al.* 1994 mentioned other examples known from earlier investigations, citing Pugachenkova 1962, 143, 168, fig. 32.

⁶² Inv. nos. A-37-26 and A-490-2, respectively (Samarcande 1992, 109, cat. nos. 250 and 251, ills. on p. 48). A moulded horned quadruped with rider is also displayed, Inv. no. A-530-I, dated to the 8th century (?; Samarcande 1992, 109, cat. no. 249, ill. on p. 48).

Moscow. They are a camel, a harnessed horse and a saddled donkey, the last one also showing stripes painted with black engobe, all dated to the 11th-12th century and preserved in the Museum of History of the Peoples of Uzbekistan.⁶³

The rather wide chronological span from the 5th to 13th(-14th) centuries, which covers the production of the above-mentioned clay hand-modelled animal figurines, and their different models and renderings do not always enable close global parallels with Istakhr specimens.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, some features, such as fairly coarse modelling, the outspread legs of the quadrupeds, the regular occurrence of saddles - mostly added - on the backs of both horses and, in some cases, other four-legged animals - camels, donkeys, mules, namely pack animals -, can be found not only on animal figurines from Istakhr but also in a large number of finds from other sites, especially Iran and Iraq.

2.2. Discussion

Medieval Islamic clay figurines, both human and animal, are usually interpreted as toys. In particular, the animal specimens would have been toys intended for children during festivities (cf. below). The better known and finest moulded and glazed - sometimes also lustre painted - ceramic figurines produced in Iran during the Seljuk period⁶⁵ have also been compared with the former, even if they were unlikely to have been intended as toys. In recent years Margaret S. Graves dedicated very important and in-depth studies to these small figures, especially the glazed specimens which also include the smaller human and animal glazed figurines placed in those ceramic representations of buildings in miniature commonly referred to as “house models”, coeval to the above mentioned Seljuk luxurious figurines.⁶⁶

The alternative hypothesis suggested here is that the clay animal figurines from Istakhr and some others from other archaeological sites could be figurines that were intended not as common toys for children made and sold during festivities, but as special animal-shaped artefacts for children to “play with”, made and sold during specific festivities for exclusive use during special ceremonies. More specifically, they may be the figurines that children usually placed on the roofs of their houses pending the end of *panjī-mas* and to welcome in the New Year, at the end of a long-lasting ritual of Zoroastrian tradition.⁶⁷ A photo from the

⁶³ Inv. nos. 296/47, 296/48 and 296/49, respectively (Abdullaev - Rtveladze - Shishkina 1991, II, 185, cat. and figs. 722-724). Some clay animal figurines, which J.-C. Gardin (1957, 59-60, 62-63) dated within a very wide period between the 1st and 15th centuries, came from Balkh, in present-day Afghanistan. Among them a horse (Gardin 1957, pl. XI.5), with a muzzle and saddle similar to those of an exemplar from Tell Abū Škhayr (Shammri 1986, fig. 33d), and a camel (Gardin 1957, pl. XI.4) have some features - such as cylindrical and out-spread legs - quite similar to those of late Sasanian and Islamic specimens.

⁶⁴ These figurines should be considered products of local craftsmanship, sometimes also with different features even if they come from a single site, and this does not only depend on their dating. See the comparisons previously made by S. Mancini, § 1.2.

⁶⁵ On these “sculptures” see Grube 1966; Bloom 1975; Treptow 2007, 29-30; Gibson 2008-2009; 2010; 2012; Graves 2008; 2010; 2018.

⁶⁶ Graves 2008; 2010; 2018.

⁶⁷ Cf. Boyce 1977, 49, 51 (see also Fontana 2019).

mid-twentieth century, taken by the famous Zoroastrianism specialist Mary Boyce,⁶⁸ illustrates this occurrence very well (fig. 6).⁶⁹ Boyce was also prodigal with information and in particular she described how the ten-year-old Gushtasp, the youngest member of the Belivani family that hosted her,

«had begun to carry the whitened clay [animal] figures^[70] up on to the roof while it was still light. [...] Gushtasp was able to carry out [...] his task of taking all the figures up on the roof and arranging them in a quaint row overlooking the courtyard».⁷¹

Children used to assemble one (or more) row(s) of clay animal figurines along the perimeter of the central open area of the roof corresponding to the courtyard below, as displayed in some Seljuk ceramic house models (figs. 7-10).⁷²

The Zoroastrian origin of this ceremony - arguably dating back to earlier times - is likely the reason why a precise prohibition was established⁷³ and al-Ghazālī⁷⁴ seems to refer to it twice. M.S. Graves translated a passage from his Arabic work titled *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences):

«Other objectionable practices include selling musical instruments and **models of animals** [أشكال الحيوانات المصورة، *ashkāl al-ḥayawānāt al-muṣawwara*⁷⁵] made for children during the religious festivals [العيد، *al-ʿīd*⁷⁶]. These latter must be broken and, like musical instruments, their sale must be prevented».⁷⁷

al-Ghazālī returned to this subject later in his *Kīmīyā-yi sa'ādat* (The Alchemy of Happiness), in Persian, when discussing the science of earning a livelihood according to the law, and presenting the correct characteristics of goods that are subject to *bay'* (sale and purchase):⁷⁸

⁶⁸ She spent twelve months in Sharīfabād (a village in the Yazdī plain) in 1963-1964 as a guest of the Belivani family and in 1977 published a volume recounting her experiences during this year living in that Zoroastrian community.

⁶⁹ Boyce's caption reads: «A group of Panji figurines on the Belivani roof, with wind-towers in the background» (Boyce 1977, pl. IVa).

⁷⁰ As for the whitewashing of the figurines cf. fn. 109, below.

⁷¹ Boyce 1977, 224. «[The day after] his [= of Gushtasp] sisters meantime had gone up to the roof again to fetch the clay figures (which had gazed down on us, white against the blue sky, while we breakfasted below)» (Boyce 1977, 226). Cf., *here*, fig. 6.

⁷² See Fontana 2019. Cf. also fn. 89, below.

⁷³ Cf. fn. 87, below.

⁷⁴ He was born in Tūs, eastern Iran, in 1058, and died in 1111.

⁷⁵ al-Ghazali, *Ihya'*, II, 333.

⁷⁶ al-Ghazali, *Ihya'*, II, 333.

⁷⁷ Graves 2008, 246; emphasis added.

⁷⁸ al-Ghazālī's *Kīmīyā-yi sa'ādat* is an abridged Persian version of his *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*. More precisely, Ian Richard Netton, reviewing a revised and annotated translation by Elton L. Daniel (1991) of Claud Field's (incomplete) 1910 translation from an Urdu version into English of the original Persian *Kīmīyā-yi sa'ādat*, reported «Daniel tells as that 'in the introduction to the Persian text, Ghazzālī explicitly states that he wrote the *Alchemy* as an epitome of the Arabic *Revivification* and some of his other writings, simplified and written in Persian in order to reach a broader, popular audience'» (Netton 1993, 117). Cf. also Bilal ed. 2001, xxii-xxiii.

«As for the clay **figurines** (صورتها, *ṣūrat-hā*) for children to play with: for any of these that has the shape of an animal, its sale is invalid, its value is **unlawful** (حرام, *ḥarām*), and it is mandatory to destroy it; but the shape of trees and plants is **lawful** (روا, *ravā*). [...]».⁷⁹

In another passage of this work, he dwells on the “misdeeds of the markets” (*munkarāt-i bāzār-hā*):

«[...] and they sell **animal figurines** (صورت حیوانات, *ṣūrat-i hayvānāt*) for children during the *‘ayd* (عيد), and they sell wooden swords and shields for Nawrūz, and earthen trumpets for Sada. [...] Among these things, some are **unlawful** (حرام, *ḥarām*), some are **execrable** (مکروه, *makrūh*). As for the animal figurines, they are **unlawful** (حرام, *ḥarām*). As for what they sell for Sada and Nawrūz, such as wooden shields and swords, and earthen trumpets, these are **not unlawful** (حرام نیست, *ḥarām nīst*) in themselves, but the display of emblems of the **Zoroastrians** (گبران, *Gabrān*) is **unlawful** (حرام, *ḥarām*) [...]».⁸⁰

Furthermore, Graves mentions a passage, already cited by Irwin,⁸¹ in the sixth chapter of the *Ma‘ālim al-qurba fī aḥkām al-ḥisba*⁸² by al-Shāfi‘ī Ibn al-Ukhuwwa (Egyptian, d. 1328-9), entitled «Forbidden Commercial Transactions»:

«It is not permitted [...] to sell **figurines** (الصور, *al-ṣuwar*) made from clay in the form of animals, which are sold during the festivities (الاعیاد, *al-a‘yād*) for children’s play, and it is legally mandatory to destroy them, while the figurines of trees are tolerated;^[83] as for the clothes and dishes with images of animals on them, their sale is lawful (فیصح, *fa-yaṣīḥu*), as is the case for curtains^[84]».⁸⁵

⁷⁹ The English translation from al-Ghazālī’s Persian text (*Kīmīyā*, I, 330) is by Mario Casari (I am deeply grateful to him); emphasis added.

⁸⁰ The English translation of Ghazālī’s *Kīmīyā*, I, 522 is by Mario Casari (emphasis added). For both al-Ghazālī’s Persian passages, cf. also Bilal’s translation (Bilal ed. 2001, 471, 474, 694). As regards the latter passage see also Lambton 1968, 277 - even quoted below -, and cf. also Gibson 2010, I, 53 and fn. 39.

⁸¹ Graves 2008, 246; 2010, I, 74; Irwin 1977, 173. Cf. also Gibson 2010, I, 54.

⁸² This work is «a manual for the guidance of persons invested with the office of the ḥisba (“Censorship”) or charged with the duty of maintaining public law and order and the supervision of market dealers and tradesmen» (Levi’s introduction to Ibn al-Ukhuwwa 1938, 1).

⁸³ On the tolerance of figurines in the form of trees, cf. the first Persian passage by al-Ghazālī, above. As for trees connected to Zoroastrian ceremonies, also performed in Islamic times and mentioned by Islamic sources - especially Ḥamza Iṣfahānī (10th century) recounting special festivals focusing on a cypress in the Nishapur area - see G. Terribili, Relocating the Prophet’s Image. Narrative Motifs and Local Appropriation of the Zarathustra Legend in Pre-/Early Islamic Iran: *Iran and the Caucasus* 24 (forthc. 2020), in part. fns. 29-36.

⁸⁴ For a similar sentence concerning the lawfulness of animals depicted on clothes, dishes and curtains, see what was reported earlier by al-Ghazālī (*Ihya’*, II, 334-335; *Kīmīyā*, I, 330); cf. also Graves 2018, 61 and note 5. For other literary sources discussing this topic see Talbi (1954, 304), who quoted the *qāḍī* of Cordova Ibn Rushd (d. 1233) as reported by Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Qāsim b. Sa‘īd al-‘Uqbānī Tilimsānī (d. 1467); and Ghabin (2009, 210, and fn. 117), who mentioned both the Ḥanbalī jurist Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī (d. 1223) and the *imām* al-Mu‘ayyad bi-llāh Yaḥyā ibn Ḥamza (d. 1344). In my view the lawfulness of these depictions is to be ascribed not only to the use in the private sphere of the objects that reproduce them - on the use of generally figured textiles during prayer see, instead, Flood (2018, 62) - but also to the fact that they do not

Graves properly concluded her argument by saying that «modelled figures of animals in clay, intended for children, were made and sold in medieval Iran and other parts of the Islamic world, were associated with festivals, and were popular enough to require formal laws forbidding their manufacture» and also noted that «these *hisba* citations do not mention human figures at all».⁸⁶

In my opinion, the fact that human figures are not mentioned among the “forbidden things”, which only include animal figurines, confirms that these prohibitions should be understood not as having an iconoclastic purpose, but rather to discourage those ceremonies related to rituals performed by Zoroastrian communities which only involve animal figurines.⁸⁷ As a matter of fact, al-Ghazālī’s texts, both Arabic and Persian,⁸⁸ talk not about “toys” but “animal-shaped figures” with which children usually “play” on the occasion of religious festivities (almost certainly Nawrūz in the Persian text).⁸⁹ Thus, I would argue that

have a shadow (and therefore lack realism), as much as they do not deal with those (unlawful) animal figures intended for objectionable Zoroastrian ceremonies, with which, in fact, they are compared.

⁸⁵ The English translation from Ibn al-Ukhuwwa’s Arabic text (1938, 56, at the end of passage no. 78) is by Mario Casari (I wish to express my sincere gratitude to him once again); emphasis added. Cf. also the English translation by Levi in Ibn al-Ukhuwwa 1938, 19. Klein (2006, fn. 15) generically referred to the prohibition of «children’s toys [emphasis added]» in other literature; instead, more precisely Ghabin (2009, 210, and fn. 118) mentioned the *hisba* treaty by al-‘Uqbānī Tilimsānī, who, reporting Ibn Rushd, related what occurred in the 12th-13th-century Cordoba (cf. previous fn.). A summary of this passage can be found in Talbi (1954, 304, emphasis added): «En outre, il [= Ibn Rushd] réprouvait les **jouets en forme d’animaux** [الصور الحيوانات, *al-ṣuwar al-ḥayawānāt* (figurines of animals), after Chenoufi 1965-1966, 243 (٩٨) - l. 15], telles les girafes qu’on avait coutume de fabriquer au Nouvel An (*nayrūz*) en Espagne. ‘Uqbānī note à ce propos que la même coutume existait à Tlemcen au mois de janvier et ajoute que, d’une manière générale, on fabriquait des **jouets** du même genre à l’occasion de toutes les fêtes, coutume qui, à son avis, ne pouvait dénoter qu’une origine chrétienne». This passage is also reported by Casanovas 2001; cf. also Gibson 2010, I, 53-54.

⁸⁶ Graves 2008, 246 (cf. also Graves 2010, I, 72-73). It is not clear, moreover, what exactly Abū ‘l-Qāsim al-‘Azafī (governor of Ceuta, d. 1278) referred to in his *Kitāb al-durr al-munazzam fī mawlid al-nabī al-mu‘azzam* (a text on Christian festivities in al-Andalus), regarding the «*figuras prohibidas que ce hacen en el nayrūz, [...]*» (de la Granja 1969, 48). As for dolls, see again Graves (2010, I, 74 and fns. 250-251), who referred to Ibn al-Ukhuwwa and al-Ghazālī’s *Ihya*, both reporting the tale of ‘Ā’isha and her dolls. See also al-Māwardī, a jurist who was born in Bassora in 972 and died in 1058, who stated: «As for dolls, playing with them does not constitute religious disobedience, but trains girls in bringing up children and in household managements. They do contain an element of sin in that they portray living beings and have some similarity to idols. There are occasions for permitting their handling, and other occasions for preventing it, depending on the evidence in each case. The Prophet, may God bless and grant him peace, entered [a place] where ‘Ā’isha, may God approve of her, was found playing with dolls, and let her be, not objecting to her conduct. [...]» (al-Māwardī 1996, 272).

⁸⁷ Particularly in the Iranian world these animal figurines were likely purchased for children who did not necessarily belong to solely Zoroastrian communities, as supported by the significant production of many Seljuk ceramic house models which could hardly have represented ceremonies performed exclusively within Zoroastrian communities (cf. above, fn. 72 and figs. 7-10). Nevertheless, the incidence and diffusion of the phenomenon must have been such as to justify on the one hand al-Ghazālī’s Persian version of his work which could have reached a «broader, popular audience» (cf. above, fn. 78) in his homeland, and on the other hand the requirement of more all-encompassing «formal laws forbidding their [i.e. of the animal figurines] manufacture» (Graves 2008, 246; cf. above).

⁸⁸ Besides, Ibn al-Ukhuwwa and al-‘Uqbānī Tilimsānī’s texts (for the latter see fns. 84 and 85, above) would seem to be perfectly in accordance with those of al-Ghazālī.

⁸⁹ Arranging the clay animal figurines in one or more rows on the roof could certainly have appeared as a game to children.

these animal figures were intended as an inherent part of the above-mentioned Zoroastrian ceremony performed by children, as Ann K.S. Lambton postulated:

«Ghazālī has a curious passage in the *Kīmiyā al-sa'āda* on forbidden things (*munkirāt*) in a bazaar, which gives a glimpse of the life of the people. Among the items which should not be sold he mentions effigies of animals for children at the holiday (*'īd*), swords and wooden shields for the Nau-Rūz (the festival of the vernal equinox), and clay pipes for Sada (the festival of the autumnal equinox). These things were not in themselves forbidden but they were a manifestation of Zoroastrian customs, which were contrary to the *sharī'a* and for this reason unseemly. Further, excessive decoration of the bazaars, making much confectionery and extravagance on the occasion of the Nau-Rūz were not fitting: Nau-Rūz and Sada should be forgotten⁹⁰».⁹¹

Mary Boyce witnessed this ceremony in the 1960s.⁹² At least three saddled quadrupeds can be identified among the clay animal figurines portrayed on the roof of the Belivani house (fig. 6): a camel, a giraffe, and a donkey or mule carrying loads.

«[...] and on that day [i.e. when children modelled the clay figurines⁹³] in the Belivani household Pوران [Gushtasp's fifteen-year-old sister] stitched tiny panniers of homespun cotton to put on the little clay camel, and also some cotton bags. [...]».⁹⁴

Almost all the animal figurines depicting quadrupeds usually intended for riding or carrying loads - found during excavations carried out in the above-mentioned sites, especially from Iran (including Istakhr) and Iraq - wore saddles but were riderless, thus we can assume they were pack animals.⁹⁵ Furthermore, the presence of birds such as the

⁹⁰ A *ḥadīth* is reported in Abū 'l-Qāsim al-'Azafī's work mentioned above (see fn. 86, above), preceded by a long series of transmitters: «Quien se educa en tierra de no árabes y celebra su *nayrūz* y su *mahrayān*, será juntado con ellos el día del juicio final» (de la Granja 1969, 51). Previously al-'Azafī also stated: «No puede aceptarse de nadie un regalo en el día de *nayrūz*, ni en la noche del *mahrayān*, ni en la noche que llaman "noche de la vieja". El que acepte regalo en esas tres innovaciones, de cualquier persona que sea, se asocia en ellas con los innovadores en el pecado y oprobio que suponen» (de la Granja 1969, 48; for the «noche de la vieja», see de la Granja 1969, fn. 5 on p. 42).

⁹¹ Lambton 1968, 277. Cf. also Whitcomb 1985, 190. Furthermore, musical instruments - the sale of which, in close connection with clay animal figurines, al-Ghazālī denounces as prohibited - are held by figures of musicians attending the banquets portrayed in some house models (cf. Graves 2008, 243; 2010, 39, 66-67; 2018, 96; and Scerrato 2014, 16). In a number of al-Ghazālī's passages, Graves seems not to distinguish the prohibition of the sale of musical instruments - together with animal figurines - on the occasion of festivities, from the prohibition of their use, commonly combined with drinking wine (in this regard see also al-Māwardī 1996, 272; cf., *here*, fns. 86 and 108), she also cites some of Ibn al-Ukhuwwa's passages on the latter interdiction (Graves 2008, 244-245; 2010, I, 68-70).

⁹² Real people, instead, took part in the following sequence of the ceremony inside the houses, as some house models testify (fig. 7 and cf. fn. 71, above).

⁹³ See fn. 109, below.

⁹⁴ Boyce 1977, 215. Should the packages represent gifts?

⁹⁵ As for the horse clay figurines from Vēh Ardashīr (cf. fn. 25, above), dated to the period of the first Sasanian kings, Antonio Invernizzi stated: «Il est donc possible que nos chevaux sassanides de terre cuite, sellés mais sans aucune trace de chevalier, soient à considérer en général complets, sauf que le chevalier ne fût exécuté

nightingale is also remarkable on both the roof of the Belivani house and among some archaeological finds. Therefore, in my view the reference to the mentioned Zoroastrian ceremony should be carefully considered.

As for some special quadrupeds such as the lions and hyena found at Tell Abū Škhayr, or a possible cat or lion from Istakhr, as well as oxen or other horned animals from Istakhr, Rayy, Samarra and Wāsiṭ,⁹⁶ and dogs from Tell Abū Škhayr,⁹⁷ it is reasonably necessary to again refer to the very probable representation of this ceremony in the glazed pottery house models. Lions or cats (it is very difficult to distinguish between domestic and wild felines) are placed on the roofs of some house models: two such models were auctioned by Christie's and Sotheby's, while another is preserved in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (figs. 8-10). The exemplar once housed at Sotheby's also features some species of horned quadrupeds and possibly dogs too (fig. 10).

The human figures usually seated around a table (in most cases the latter may be set with the *haft sīn*)⁹⁸ in the courtyards or inner parts of these house models - sometimes both human (inside) and animal (on the roof) figurines are displayed (fig. 7)⁹⁹ - corroborate the hypothesis that most house models represent the events that took place during this celebration of the end of *panjī-mas*, according to the Zoroastrian ceremony for the New Year.¹⁰⁰

Moreover, M.S. Graves recently rightly referred to the topic of "sweet" citadels or castles populated with figures made on the occasion of festivals and intended as gifts, which she compared to the house models,¹⁰¹ actually perfectly fitting the hypothesis proposed herein. In fact, she mentioned the treaty of Abū 'l-Qāsim al-'Azafī¹⁰² where cakes in the form of citadels populated with figures baked by Andalusians for the Nawrūz are mentioned:

«En estas fiestas se hacen unos a otros preciosos regalos que han elegido de antemano, y "ciudades" [*madā'in*]¹⁰³ en las que forman e inventan diversas figuras (fn. 2: De estas ciudades, prodigio de la repostería [i.e. pâtisserie]

avec du matériau différent » (Invernizzi 1979, 242). It is also interesting to note the fragment of a third-century clay animal figurine (a horse?) with an attached clay piece on its back (probably the remains of a saddle) from Ardashīr I's (224-241) palace in Qal' a-yi Dukhtar (Huff 1976, 173, fig. 7c and pl. 46.3).

⁹⁶ Cf. also Merv and Samarkand, above.

⁹⁷ Cf. also Merv, above.

⁹⁸ Literally, "seven *sīn*" (the letter *sīn* in the Persian alphabet is "s"), i.e. seven objects whose names begin with "s". In this regard and for the number of objects on the tables displayed in the house models, see Graves 2008, 248.; 2010, I, 78; Scerrato 2014, 14, 18, 25.

⁹⁹ Majda 1989, p. 184, fig. 3; cf. also Fontana 2019, fn. 17 and fig. 2.

¹⁰⁰ This interpretation suits the different features which instead characterise some quite coeval (13th-14th century) clay figurines from Islamic India. The clay horses found during excavations in the Punjab village of Theh Polār, in fact, do not have saddles: they were most likely intended for other purposes (toys also?), according to local ancient traditions (see Banerji 1966, 150-151 and figs. 1-2). As for the intended use of the house models, different opinions are offered by Grube (1976, 174; 2003, 461) and Scerrato (2014), who assumed the ceramic representations of buildings in miniature were wedding gifts; on the intended uses of the house models suggested by Graves, see in particular her last publication on the matter (Graves 2018, 15 ff.).

¹⁰¹ Graves 2018, 15, and fn. 42.

¹⁰² See fn. 86, above.

¹⁰³ Pérès 1937, 304. The latter pointed out: « On donnait à ces gâteaux la forme de villes (*madā'in*) et on les appelait *madā'in min al-'aḡīn* : "villes de pâte" » (*ibid.*).

andaluza, nos ha dejado una buena descripción Abū ‘Imrān Mūsā, poeta de Triana del siglo XI [...]).¹⁰⁴

These sweet citadels populated with figures were perhaps not so different from those presented during the banquet in Cairo to celebrate the end of *ramaḍān* 380/December 990, as mentioned by the Egyptian historian al-Maqrīzī (d. 1442) in his famous *al-Khiṭaṭ*:

«châteaux de sucre ainsi que les images (en sucre) et les assiettes où étaient des images en confitures (ou pâtisseries). [...] On avait déjà fait dans dār al fiṭrat deux châteaux de pâtisserie [...] de forme élégante, vernis de feuilles d’or et dans chacun y avait des figures en relief qu’on aurait dites fondus dans des moules, pièces par pièce».¹⁰⁵

A similar banquet was described for the end of *ramaḍān* 415/December 1024 by ‘Izz al-Malik Muḥammad al-Musabbihī al-Kātib (Egyptian, d. 1029-30) in his *Akhbar Miṣr*:

«On Friday at the end of Ramaḍān in 415/1024, a diorama, made of sugar candy and depicting a banquet (*simāt*) with figurines (*timthāl*), decorations (*tazwīn*), and castles (*qaṣr*), was paraded through the city streets. Wazir Najīb al-Dawla Abū al-Qāsim ‘Alī al-Jarjalā’ī supervised the display, which boasted 152 figurines and 7 big castles. Officials on horseback and a Sudanese drum corps led the parade, and the people gathered to see it».¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, in particular these sweet figurines call to mind the animal-shaped hanging sugar candies sold in Cairo as gifts for children, as al-Maqrīzī recounted:

«In the month of Rajab, a beautiful sight appeared in this market: hanging sugar candies (*ilāqa*) shaped like horses (*khayl*), lions (*sab’*), cats (*quṭṭa*), and more, were hung from threads in front of the shops. They all sold out, as gifts for children, every size of candy, [...] Other markets in Cairo and al-Fustāt, and even in the suburbs (*al-aryāf*), were full of similar sugar candies. These same candies were also produced in the month of Sha‘bān, a custom that continued until quite recently. [...] When sweets production began each Ramaḍān, the markets of al-Fustāt, Cairo, and the suburbs were full of these kinds of sweets».¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ de la Granja 1969, 34. In the introduction to his translation of al-‘Azafī’s treaty, de la Granja (1969, 2) stated that «del *nayrūz* en al-Andalus tenemos sólo unos pocos datos inconexos: la noche que le precedía era considerada por los andaluces como la más propicia para la consumación del matrimonio; en ese día se cocían bolos [i.e. cakes] en forma de ciudades, se cruzan regalos y [...]». Pérèz (1937, 303) specified that « la fête du *Nayrūz*, fête d’origine persane, ne tombe pas le 1^{er} mars comme en Orient, mais les premiers jours de janvier et tend à se confondre, en Espagne musulmane, avec le premier jour de l’année ou mieux, avec le jour de l’Épiphanie », namely the day dedicated to gifts, especially for children.

¹⁰⁵ Makrizi 1920, 109-110 [Arabic text in al-Maqrīzī 1854, I, 387]; cf. Ashtor 1968, 1027.

¹⁰⁶ Translation by Sato 2015, 58 [Arabic text in al-Musabbihī 1978-1984, I (1978), 65].

¹⁰⁷ Translation by Sato 2015, 167 [Arabic text in al-Maqrīzī 1854, II, 99-100]; cf. also Sato 2015, 59, 123, 139, 178. On the subject of sweet figures, Mary Boyce can be mentioned again in referring to what went on in the 1960s in the Yazdī plain: «on the last day of *Panjī mas* the dishes baked for consecration included little men made of a sweet dough and animals, stars and the like» (Boyce 2005, 24). For other Muslim sources on both

2.3. *Final remarks*

Except for cases in which clay animal figurines are dated to the late Sasanian or early Islamic period (up to the 9th-10th century), the 11th-13th centuries are chronological references for the very large quantities of more homogeneous finds. The stratigraphy of the 2012 excavation campaign in Istakhr related to the findings of the figurines would suggest a period up to the 12th century (including at least the beginning of the 13th century) and this date fits well with the period in which al-Ghazālī was writing and reporting on the prohibition of these figurines.

It is interesting to note that al-Māwardī of Bassora - who died when al-Ghazālī was born - did not mention a ban on the sale of figurines or musical instruments at public feasts; yet he provided precise rules for the market supervisor with regard to the «use in public of the forbidden musical instruments».¹⁰⁸ Is it possible that the wide diffusion of the above mentioned ceremony among the Muslim community and the consequent extensive sale of clay animal figurines and musical instruments - the latter accompanying the banquet of *Nawrūz* and the former to be placed on the roofs of houses by children the night before - did not begin until the second half of the 11th century, that is, in the same Seljuk era when the production of ceramic house models also began? It is likely that, just after the Mongol conquest - and with their ongoing prohibition, as Ibn al-Ukhuwwa's passage demonstrated - the industrial production of these clay animal figurines slowed down, and they may have been produced not only in lesser quantities and in Zoroastrian-majority areas, but also in small local and seasonal workshops or - as attested for the most recent periods - at home.¹⁰⁹

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sweet and vegetal essence figures, cf. Graves 2010, I, 80-81, and fns. 274-275; cf. also Gibson 2010, I, 53 and fn. 38. For human and animal figurines «made of gold, silver, and amber, all ornamented with pearls, sapphires, and crysolite» which filled golden trays and were brought on the west bank of the canal in Cairo during the procession ceremony to cut the canal in 517/1123, see Sanders (1994, 105-106 and fn. 47), who cites al-Maqrīzī 1854, I, 473.

¹⁰⁸ al-Māwardī 1996, 272; cf., *here*, fns. 87 and 91. The French translation of al-Māwardī's text is actually slightly different: «L'usage public d'instruments de jeu ou de musique prohibés» (Mawardi 1915, 536).

¹⁰⁹ In this case, they were most likely not baked. Boyce reported her experience: «[...] it was usually on the first day of Panji-kasog [i.e. the Lesser Pentad], Ruz Aštad of Isfand (Spendarmad) Mah, that boys fetched clay to model figurines for the gahambar-e Panjivak. The figurines were actually shaped on the following day, Ruz Asman, when the worked clay had hardened sufficiently; [...] On the first day [of *panjī-mas*, i.e. the Greater Pentad] Tahmina Khanom [Rustam Belivani's wife] whitewashed the little clay figures, and she and her daughters spread out a white cloth on the clean new floor of the *ganza-pak*, and arranged all the proper objects beside it: [...] and the charming group of little white figures, the camel with its head to one side, as if craning to see itself in the mirror. The nightingale had a fragrant gourd, striped red and orange, in the hollow of its back, and grapes between its cane legs» (Boyce 1977, 215, 217; see also 220 and 223); «so during *Panjī kasōg* fine clay was kneaded and shaped into figurines of familiar objects such as camel, donkey and nightingale, with easier, but highly symbolic sugar-cones; and during *Panjī mas* these were whitewashed and placed in the *ganza-pāk*, the 'pure room' prepared for the visiting souls» (Boyce 2005, 24). More information about the two Pentads are to be found in Boyce (1977, 213 and ff.); for the Iranian festivals of Zoroastrian origin, see also Boyce 1999. Cf. Gibson (2010, I, 55), who mentioned Boyce stating: «Mary Boyce [...] found that yet another of the annual festivals, the sixth *gāhambār* which celebrated creation and took place just before *Nawrūz*, was also celebrated with the production of figurines».

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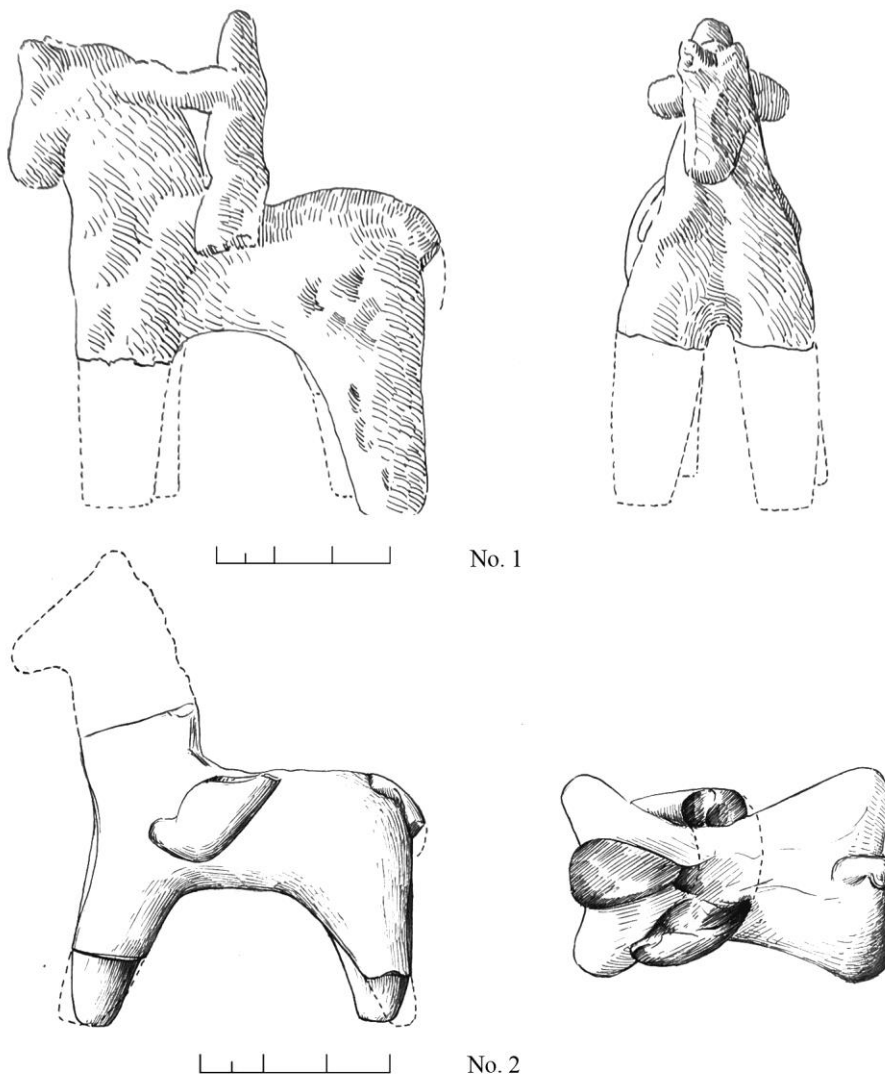


Fig. 1 - Clay figurines from the 1930s excavations at Istakhr: two saddleless horses with riders (nos. 1 and 2), 11th-early 13th century (© Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago).

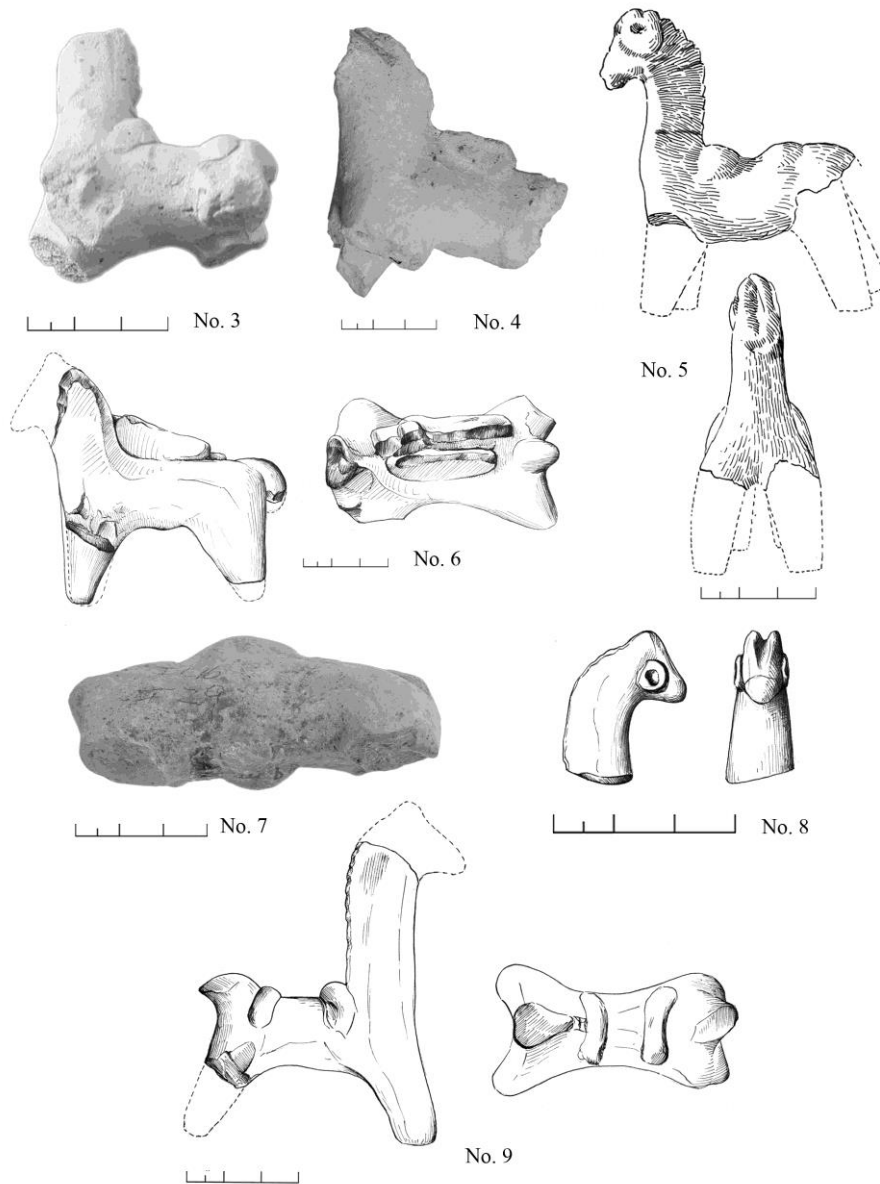


Fig. 2 - Clay figurines from excavations at Istakhr: two saddled horses (nos. 3 and 4) unearthed in 2012; three saddled horses (nos. 5, 6 and 7), a horse's head (no. 8) and a saddled horse or, most likely, a giraffe (no. 9) unearthed in the 1930s, 11th-early 13th century (nos. 5-9 © Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago).



Fig. 3 - Clay figurines from the 1930s excavations at Istakhr: a saddled horse (no. 10) and a horned animal (probably a gibbon ox, no. 12), 11th-early 13th century (after Schmidt 1939, fig. 85).

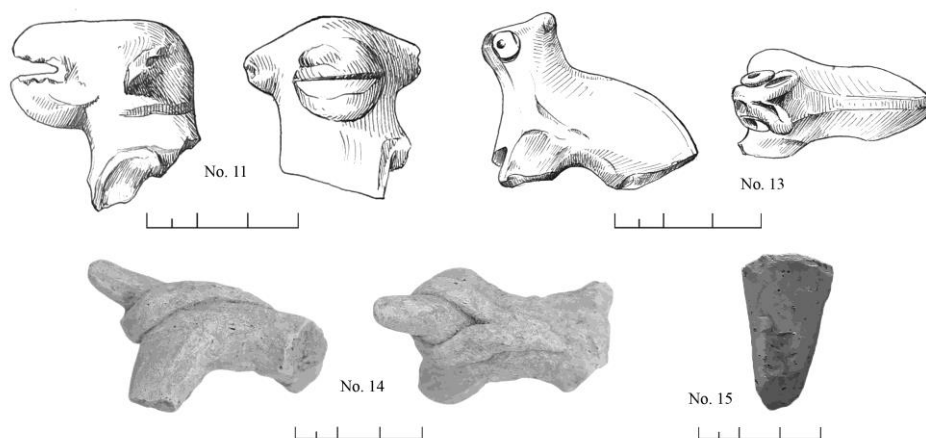


Fig. 4 - Clay figurines from excavations at Istakhr: a camel's head (no. 11), a cat or lion (no. 13), an unidentified quadruped (no. 14) unearthed in the 1930 excavations, and a quadruped's leg (no. 15) unearthed in 2012, 11th-early 13th century (nos. 11, 13 and 14 © Oriental Institute Museum, Chicago).



Fig. 5 - Clay figurines of quadrupeds from Susa (Iran; saddled horse, after Rosen-Ayalon 1974, fig. 248), Tell Abū Sarīfa (Iraq; saddled horse, after Adams 1970, pl. 8, fig. 16e) and Wāsiṭ (Iraq; gibbous ox, after Safar 1945, pl. XXIIa), dated to the mid-7th-8th century, 9th-10th century, and 13th century, respectively.



Fig. 6 - A row of clay figurines in the shape of saddled quadrupeds and a nightingale on the roof of a Zoroastrian house in the Yazdī plain, overlooking the courtyard (after Boyce 1977, pl. IVa).



Fig. 7 - House model showing a row of (damaged) quadrupeds on the roof and some people attending a banquet inside, stonepaste glazed in transparent turquoise with blue painting, Iran, 12th-early 13th century, Warsaw, National Museum, Inv. SKAZsz 2263 MNW (<http://masterpieces.asemus.museum/masterpiece/detail.nhn?objectId=14188>).

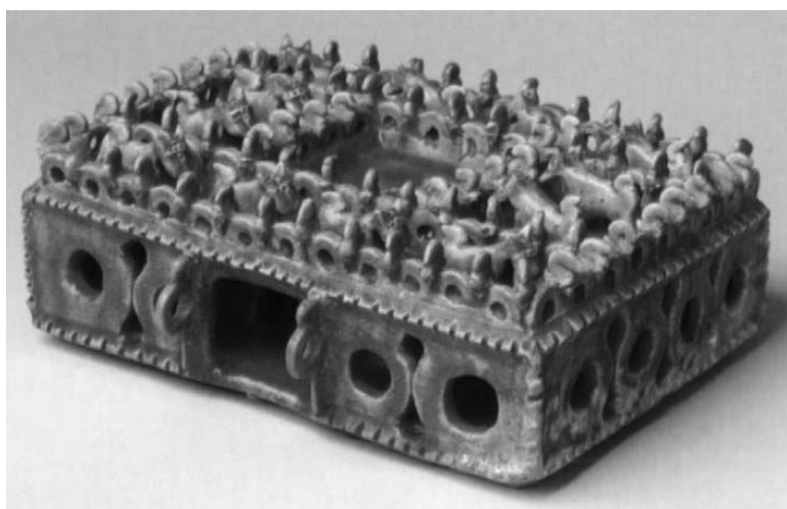


Fig. 8 - House model showing a row of lions or cats on the roof, stonepaste glazed in transparent blue, Iran, 12th-early 13th century, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Goldman Sachs Gift, 2007, Inv. 2007.354 (once Hadji Baba Gallery, London) (after Fehérvári 1996, ill. on p. 151).

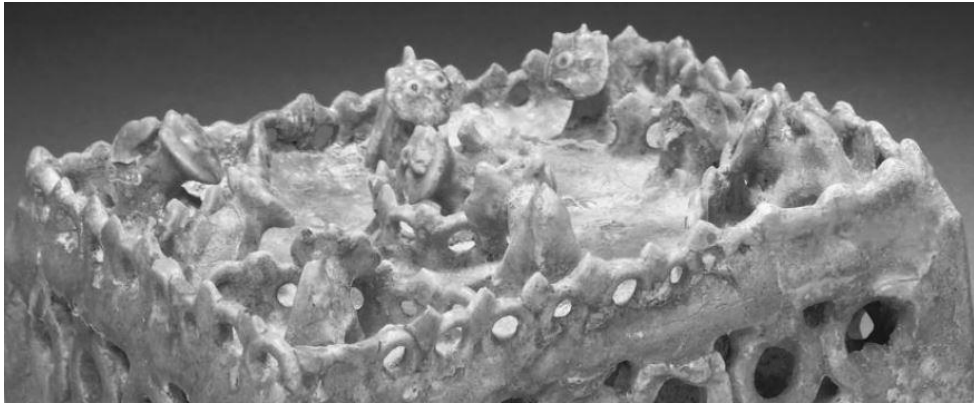


Fig. 9 - House model showing lions or cats on the roof, stonepaste glazed in transparent turquoise, Iran, 12th-early 13th century, detail (after *Christie's* 2008, lot 274).



Fig. 10 - House model showing lions or cats, horned animals and perhaps dogs on the roof, stonepaste glazed in transparent turquoise, Iran, 12th-early 13th century (after *Sotheby's* 2013, lot 19).