The Iron Age

8. The Northern Levant in the Iron Age (c.1150–350 B.C.)

A. Introduction

(i) Phoenician Terracottas, eighth to fourth centuries B.C.

It is unfortunate that, with the possible exception of no. 373, the Ashmolean collection does not include any Phoenician terracottas from a site in the Near East. As Phoenician commercial activity was pervasive, they are encountered throughout the Levant and in Cyprus to a greater or lesser extent, particularly from the eighth century. They were variously handmodelled, thrown on a potter’s wheel or reproduced from single and double moulds, either entirely or in parts. Moulded heads or faces are combined with bodies made in other ways, whilst wheel-turned lower bodies may have handmodelled upper limbs and attributes. The use of the wheel is a significant indicator of the close association of potting and terracotta manufacture pre-supposed in earlier periods, but now explicit. Particularly characteristic from the sixth century are hollow, free-standing anthropomorphic figurines, in a restricted repertory of shapes, with their decorated fronts mouldmade and their plain backs squared or rounded off with or without use of a double mould. Such methods made it easier to manufacture large numbers quickly, though at the expense both of variety in shapes and in surface details. As relatively few of the numerous terracottas known to have been found in the Phoenician homeland are published, their often monotonous character is at present most evident in the excavation of shrines in Cyprus, where Phoenician influence was strong (cf. Reyes 1994, 130–1, 146–7). The typical “Phoenician” types are best known from the eighth century B.C. through into the early Achaemenid Persian Period.

Phoenician terracottas have been found in shrines, some by the sea, as at Makmish (Avigad 1960) and Tell Sukas (Riis 1979, 67–8), in graves, in domestic areas and occasionally as cargo in sunken ships (cf. Linder 1973; Culican 1976). On ships they were also venerated in shrines (Brody 1998, 32, n.106). In both male and female anthropomorphic types three seated variants are pre-eminent; generally hollow and mouldmade. A veil over her hair (“hooded”) distinguishes the seated pregnant female, with her right hand placed on her swollen abdomen and her left on her knees, or holding a cake or a tambourine, or sometimes nursing a child. They vary only in details. Seated males, generally bearded, are distinguished only by headdresses: a variant of the Egyptian atef crown; a square, fez-like or cylindrical hat. One hand touches the beard, the other holds something or rests on the knee. Some female examples are stamped with the sign of the goddess Tanit (Tinnit); whether as a dedication to her or an identity-mark is an open question. The pregnant women are usually identified with the pregnant goddess of Tyre (cf. Culican 1969: “Dea Tyria Gravida”); the male as either Baal or Horon-Baal. Most such identifications turn on the assumption that a divine couple is represented either per se or as shown in a major cult image.

During the Bronze Age breasts and genitals had been emphasized on nude female mouldmade clay plaques. In Iron Age I (cf. Albright 1939, 119ff., pl. A: 6–10) pregnancy is first evident on these nude female plaques. The three-dimensional, free-standing Phoenician females are dressed and seated, rather than naked and standing or reclining. As Culican (1969, 42) pointed out, the Phoenician female’s identity is, in fact, still controversial: “one can only speculate whether... the pregnant figures... represent a goddess, sacred prostitute, or a well-to-do townsman seeking a fruitful delivery by offering a pregnancy charm”. On occasions both the pregnant figures and those nursing or suckling children are found together.

There are marked regional variations within the Phoenician repertory. Horsemen and chariot models in a distinctive style are characteristic of Amrit (Gubel 1986, no. 41; Crouwel 1991) and miniature shrines of Sidon (Gubel 1986, no. 52). During the Persian Period Greek influences are increasingly evident in the terracottas of Phoenicia. They may indeed account for the emergence of scenes from daily life amongst Phoenician terracottas that had not previously been evident in the Levant (Mazar 1993: Achzib) and were
not usual elsewhere even at this time. Clay masks are also a distinctive feature of the Phoenician terracotta tradition (cf. Gubel 1986, nos 43–46). Although the impact of Phoenician terracottas westwards through Cyprus to Carthage and Spain has long been evident and studied in detail, it is only recently that their impact on terracottas in Transjordan (Ammon; Edom; Moab) has become increasingly evident as the archaeology of that region in antiquity has developed (Beck 1995, 186). Kletter (1996: III.3.7, 35–6, App.5.VI) listed “Phoenician” types (“Dea Tyria”; tambourine (“drum”) players; scenes of daily life) from northern Israel, whose coastal region down to Philistia was part of ancient Phoenicia.

A seventh to sixth century B.C. rectangular (c.6.40 x 2.56 metres) one-roomed stone-built shrine at Sarepta, south of Sidon, on the coast of the Lebanon, is a key context in the study of Phoenician terracottas. Here they were exceptionally revealed in situ by a controlled excavation (Pritchard 1978, 131–148; 1988). It was situated at the edge of the mound, overlooking the harbour. It was separated by a narrow street from the industrial area of the town. The building, with only some 16 sq.m. of floor-space, was entered directly from the street. Adjacent to it was a room, perhaps for the custodian or priest, with possible access to the Shrine. Benches, 20cm. high, 30 to 40 cm. wide, were set along all four walls of the shrine, save for the entrance openings and part of the west wall against which an offering table (“altar”) and socket for a pillar had been set. These all follow Canaanite Bronze Age patterns. The benches were for offerings not for seating. A large cache of votive objects was found adjacent to the table and the socket of a standing pillar, possibly as much as a metre high and of wood. The primary purpose of this relatively small room, which a score of people would have filled, was for display of votive gifts. This public shrine illustrates unusually well a non-domestic setting for terracotta offerings at this time.

The most prominent terracotta was a fragmentary clay throne flanked by two sphinxes in the Egyptianizing style that was a hallmark of much Phoenician art. Amongst the votive objects, with the exception of beads, terracottas were the most common. All were anthropomorphic and all female. Animals were found elsewhere outside the shrine. One female holds a bird; she has a moulded head dowelled into a conical body turned on a wheel. This technique, as on number 373, is typical of Phoenician offering bearers. Another holds a tambourine and a third is seated and pregnant. Painted decoration is sporadically evident. Everyday artefacts, notably pottery, were absent in this shrine, whilst trinkets of a personal nature were conspicuous: amulets, beads and cosmetic equipment. All were, like the figurines, appropriate to a goddess. This was confirmed by the discovery within the favissa of this shrine of an inscribed ivory plaque reading “the statue which Shillem, son of Mapa al, son of Izai made for Tanit ‘Ashtart’”. When discovered this was the oldest known mention of the Carthaginian goddess Tanit and was the first evidence for her cult in the Phoenician homeland.

‘Ashtart (Astarte) was patroness of fertility and love, as well as war, whilst Tanit is particularly associated with children at Carthage. As the excavator observed, they were singularly and together suitable patronesses for a cult “where women performed their acts of devotion to the deity who provided them with the blessings of conception, successful parturition, and the nurture of children from infancy through the hazardous period of their early years” (Pritchard 1978, 148). It is just such concerns that had for so long pre-occupied those using terracotta images in Canaan and Phoenicia whether in public or private shrines.

(ii) Syrian Terracottas (c.1150–550 B.C.)

(a) Free-standing handmodelled

The terracottas manufactured in Syria west of the Euphrates before the Achaemenid Persian Period have not yet been systematically studied. Those east of the Euphrates are even less well known, save in heartland Assyria (cf. Assur: Klengel-Brandt 1967, 24–6, nos 15, 16, 18, pl. 8–9). In the northern as well as in the southern Levant at this time handmodelled terracottas are again pre-eminent, eclipsing for a time the moulded relief plaques so characteristic of the Late Bronze Age (cf. Badre 1980). Pillar-shaped anthropomorphic male and female figurines are typical. Some have solid bodies, some hollow tubular
bodies; but the truncated cone-shaped forms evident in the southern Levant appear to be absent. They are crudely, often very crudely made, though generally well-fired. They are freely modelled either with pinched features or with details added in blobs or strips of clay in the so-called “snowman technique”. There is a broad uniformity of techniques and types southwards of Hama and at times northwards into Cilicia. They differ significantly from southern types. The first appearance of moulded heads on handmodelled bodies in Syria has yet to be established; but a significant number of mouldmade heads were found at Tell Rifa’at in levels attributed to the seventh century B.C. (Novaka 1971, 149–53, pl. 37; cf. Tell Afis: D’Amore 1998, 416–17, fig. 1:1).

Generally they do not appear to have been whitewashed and painted, as often in the south, nor simply painted as is some contemporary pottery. The basic standing poses for men are sometimes embellished with weapons, whilst women sometimes carry a child. Male figures also appear as horse-riders. The excessive emphasis on the breasts found in the Judean Female Figurines Pillar is not evident. Both men and women would appear to be standing in ankle-length garments. It is this almost universal use of the “pillar” form to stabilize free-standing female (as well as male) figurines that casts the strongest doubts on the hypothesis that in Judah it represented a tree-trunk in general and this symbol of the goddess Asherah in particular.

A variety of zoomorphic figurines, also handmodelled, both solid and hollow, in the “snowman technique”, appear alongside the anthropomorphic images and may well generally outnumber them. Horses are evident, but other quadrupeds are difficult to identify specifically. There is sporadic evidence for model vehicles, although, as often in earlier contexts, so-called “model wheels” may be spindle-whorls. Already in Iron Age I (c.1150–1000 B.C.) these handmade types are evident. Both the very basic forms and decorative techniques then persist for centuries. Evidence before the mid. to late eighth century, the time of the Assyrian invasion, is too sparse at present to provide the basis for generalizations. Lehmann (1998) has analysed the trends in local pottery development from this time through the Achaemenid Persian Period. Local pottery traditions remained almost unchanged until about 650 B.C., then they changed “dramatically”. The terracottas catalogued here from Carchemish and the immediately adjacent region are likely to date a generation or two before the sack of the city by the Babylonian army in 604 B.C. They were described as numerous by Woolley (1952) in his excavation of late seventh century levels, though he noted that they were then “the last examples of a long-lived tradition”.

Woolley (1939) also excavated the “Yunus Cemetery” of cremation graves at Carchemish which are likely to be a century or more earlier. It was in use before and possibly for sometime after, the Assyrian invasion of 720 B.C. “The most elaborate graves were those of children. In them, against the side of the urn, there would be placed a clay feeding-bottle and a set of terracotta figurines, female figures in the case of a girl, horsemen and riderless horses in the case of a boy” (Woolley 1939, 16, pl. VI.2). As the placing of terracottas in graves (about 10% of them in this case) is generally a restricted phenomenon, this is significant. However, at least one grave (38) yielded both a horse-rider and a female figurine, whilst there was no independent evidence of the sex of the person, whose ashes were in the relevant urns, to substantiate Woolley’s generalization (cf. Pruss and Novak 2000). This case is sometimes cited as evidence that terracottas were as often as not childrens’ toys. They may well have been; but in this case there is no reason to suppose that they might not equally well have been representative of parents, if such images are seen as human beings or of a male or female deity, if that is the preferred identification.

Here, as so often, this remains an open question. In the absence of any clear indication of divinity these terracottas are assumed here to represent human worshippers of a deity or deities unknown. It is possible that both the male and the female figurines relate to the same goddess. In Syria in the Iron Age forehead plaques for horses, both in carved ivory and in repoussé decoration on sheet bronze, depict nude females, variously associated with animals and plants, which are very evocative of Late Bronze Age female imagery on clay plaques (cf. Kantor 1962; Orchard 1967, nos 135–139). Some late Achaemenid or early Seleucid terracottas show a single flat-capped rider astride a double-headed horse with a standing nude female set
between his arms and the heads of the horses (cf. de Mecquenem 1943, 42–3, fig. 36:2 (Susa); Ghirshman 1976, 78–81, pl. CXI–II). In the contemporary shrine at Kourion in Cyprus clay horsemen are generally assumed to be votaries of Apollo (cf. Young and Young 1955, 218–23).

(b) Mouldmade relief plaques

Kletter (1996: App.5.III, fig. 7) listed the “coastal and northern moulded types” within the modern state of Israel of the Pre-Achaemenid Iron Age. The coastal region of heartland Phoenicia, in the modern Lebanon through into modern Syria, is not so well covered by publications in this respect. It remains consequently difficult to chart the survival of Canaanite female plaques and the emergence of new, if related, forms there in the earlier Iron Age. The production of hollow figurines seems particularly characteristic of southern Phoenicia (Gubel 1991, 132), whilst northwards into Syria compact statuettes made in single moulds were preferred (cf. Braidwood 1940, fig. 9:6; Thalmann 1978, fig. 30:100). According to Gubel (1991, 132) “both areas, however, have yielded vast amounts of small “Astarte” – plaques reproducing the same motif with a blush of red and black paint” (cf. Braidwood 1940, fig. 9:6). Stratified Iron Age II examples are published at Ashdod (Hachili 1971, fig. 64:1–3, 5–7). Inland from these primarily coastal distributions it is not clear how much the tradition of moulded plaques owed on the one hand to an enduring Canaanite legacy, on the other to Babylonian influences after the eighth century B.C. and before the Babylonian invasion at the end of the seventh. When Cyprus formed part of the Phoenician world in the seventh to sixth centuries B.C. moulded clay plaques of draped female figurines, some holding a flower, are illustrated by examples from Amathus on the south coast (Karageorghis, J. 1987, type XXXIV, fig. 25). Whether or not they precede the more familiar ones, wearing the “Persian Robe”, of the fifth to fourth centuries B.C. in Syria, is an open question. Cypriote aversion to depiction of the nude female is also evident in stone statuary where draped females hold their hands over their covered breasts in what was now a meaningless gesture (cf. Yon 1974, 41–3, pl. 12:42). Exact copies of the ‘nude female’ Levantine prototype in Cyprus at this time are rare (cf. Perrot and Chipiez 1885, fig. 380).

(iii) Syrian Terracottas (c.550–330 B.C.)

(a) The Female Images

The most typical local terracottas of the period of the Achaemenid Persian Empire in the West, embracing Mesopotamia, Syria and the Lebanon, representing females were moulded clay plaques depicting them, either nude or dressed. Until a new corpus is published, a paper by Riis (1948–9), entitled “The Syrian Astarte Plaques and their Western Connections”, still provides a basic typology for female clay plaques, with references to typical examples up to the revival of fieldwork in the Near East after the Second World War. The title makes clear that Riis was primarily concerned with questions relating to the western rather than eastern connections of these plaques. They, together with the three-dimensional “Persian Riders”, virtually monopolized terracotta production in Syria within the Achaemenid Persian Empire, c.550–330 B.C. (cf. Moorey 2000).

Riis isolated three Naked Types (A) on which the hands cup the breasts. There are two facial types, one “round and blunt with large eyes and a prominent nose”, the other “elongated with rather regular features”; the former has “a more or less thick mass of hair”, whilst the latter has “two thick, vertical, and twisted shoulder locks”. A variant of the latter (including no. 375 (AN1913.339)) has “groups of pearl locks instead of thick shoulder locks”. On a fourth type both arms hang down against the sides of the body. It may indeed be Late Bronze Age in date, as also are some of the other examples cited by Riis.

In groups I and II of the Dressed Types (B), devised by Riis, the only variant from the corresponding types of Naked Females (A) is the costume, since they clasp their breasts, which are almost certainly exposed. Group III (“uncertain”) are related to I and II. Group IV embraces those with arms down their sides and “wig-like hair”; whilst Group V recognizes another significant variation of pose, with the right arm down the side and the left holding a flower between the breasts. Group VI lists heads only, whilst VII
and VIII are only separated by their hair-styles. More significant, is the appearance of a headdress in the form of a tiara, termed a “kalathos” by Riis.

In retrospect the use of Greek terminology in this classification system was unfortunate, as it conceals the impact of the Achaemenid Persian Empire from the middle of the sixth century B.C. on their production and imagery. Pruss has investigated their patterns of distribution: “The mouldmade “Astarte Plaques” and “Persian Riders” were found in nearly every north Syrian settlement of the Achaemenid period, covering an area from the foot of the Taurus in the north to the Nahr al-Kebir in the South, from the Levantine coast up to the banks of the Habur” (Pruss 2000, 52). Across this area they appear from the early fifth century B.C. through to the late fourth. They are found, as were earlier Iron Age Syrian terracottas, in household debris and in some graves. He noted that all were made in a one-piece open mould; but significantly there were cases of identical examples not only at the same site but also at different sites, illustrating patterns of distribution.

At this time, at least in Syria, the method of making the moulds apparently changed. Formerly they were simply made from a positive pressed down into a lump of clay, and the negative then baked (contra Barrelet 1968, 45). Although no example of the new type of mould has yet been reported, its appearance is evident from the flatter relief and in the sharp definition of linear detail on the female garments on these Achaemenid Period plaques; they indicate a mould worked directly either in stone or metal. This appears to have allowed for the manufacture of more plaques from a single mould than was previously the case. Similar features are also evident on the horse-riders, where the horse and rider were handmodelled in a very compressed style with the bearded face of the man mouldmade with well defined detail. This procedure for rendering facial features may be noted first in the mature Iron Age (II B/C) in the southern Levant and Cyprus. Whereas before this time moulds might be made by any potter for production of plaques, the specialist skills of engraver in metal or stone, and suitable raw materials, are more likely to have been confined to a number of “central places”. This generated a trade in moulds and a greater standardization of imagery within the two primary categories then in circulation.

The Japanese excavations at Tell Mastuma, southwest of Aleppo, revealed an instructive series of “Astarte” plaques in the top level (‘O’) of their excavations dated to the Persian Period (c.550–330 B.C.) (Nishiyama and Yoshizawa 1997), where both naked and clothed females were directly associated. They were found in “ash pits or in the tell accumulation” of level O. One was found in a storage bin and others from the fill of rooms; all those found in “architectural remains” were naked; “Persian rider” figurines were found with them in pits, as at Tell Denit (Shaath 1990), Tell Mardikh (Matthiae et al. 1995) and ’Ain Dara (Abu ’Assaf 1996). They appear to be associated with a relatively unsophisticated settlement, occupied for a short time in the fifth or fourth centuries B.C. The excavators noted that naked figures had red paint on their backs and along the legs, whereas clothed figures rarely had it on the back, but on the front it is painted in bands round their relief figure. It is interesting to note that in traditional Jordanian jewellery the colour coding of beads has red signifying fertility. There was a pattern of breakage that may have been deliberate: the clothed figurines are generally broken at the neck; the naked at neck, waist or legs in relatively even numbers.

The nude females, the “Oriental” type in Riis’s pioneering classification, come at the end of a long tradition originating in Babylonia in the last quarter of the third millennium B.C. The Late Bronze Age Canaanite “Astarte Plaques” (cf. Keel and Uehlinger 1998, 97–108) showed nude females without attributes (cf. nos 300, 301A). These are now usually not thought to represent a deity, either per se or in the form of a cult-image. The distinctive features of the dressed females of the Achaemenid Period are both the style of their costume and certain attributes. Culican (1975, 106) pointed out that these are not, as Riis had argued, of western inspiration: “there is a greater likelihood, considering the lily-carrying posture, crowns and necklaces, that they represent votaresses in Achaemenian dress, or in a Syrian or North Mesopotamian version of it”. In fact, the “sleeved chiton” of the Greek World was adopted by the Greeks through their contacts with the Persians in Anatolia or Syria, as it had been adopted there previously by local women (cf. Miller 1997, 156–7, 165–6). Sleeves had not been a feature of male or female costume
in the earlier Near Eastern Iron Age; but they were a significant aspect of the costume of the Irania-speaking peoples, particularly on the so-called “Persian Robe”, worn both by men and women (Rudenko 1970, 83–95).

Other traits of the dressed female plaques originated with the Iranian-speaking peoples. Some of the females wear tiaras and carry a flower (variously identified; perhaps most often a blue lotus) in their right hand between their breasts, which in some cases, if not invariably, are exposed through holes in the upper garment (cf. Peltenburg et al. 1995, fig. 24; Mayer-Opificius 1998, fig. 1). On a piece of woven fabric used as a saddle-cloth in kurgan 5 at Pazyryk, in the Altai of Central Asia, there is a repeat design in square panels showing a scene of worship in which two females stand on either side of an incense-burner. Those closest to it in each case are the taller, indicating relative social status (cf. Azarpay 1994, 180). All four wear tiaras, and the two of higher status have veils falling down their backs from the tiara; the breasts of all four appear to be exposed. The smaller, socially inferior females, have their farside hand placed on their extended nearside arm, holding some kind of textile, perhaps a towel, folded over. The taller females raise their nearside arm, gesturing with their fingers, whilst their farside hand holds a single flower like the females on the Syrian clay plaques. It is not certain where this textile was made within the Achaemenid Empire. Zick-Nissen (1966) has suggested a western rather than an eastern workshop. These are certainly not divine figures.

The same would also appear to be the case on a well-known cylinder seal from the de Clercq Collection (Louvre A0 223559; Frankfort 1939, pl. XXXVIIIc), on which a parallel scene involving women is engraved. An enlargement of the impression shows key details (as Hicks, 1978, p.81 (lower)). A woman is seated in a high-backed chair with foot-stool, wearing a Persian Robe with a dentate tiara, from which a veil hangs freely down her back. In her right hand she raises a flower to her face. It is not clear what she does with her left hand. Her breasts may be exposed. Before her stands a figure wearing the Persian Robe, with a tight-fitting cap or helmet from the top of which a “pig-tail” falls down behind, who offers her a bird. The headgear suggests this may be a young man rather than a young woman; perhaps a boy rather than a youth, if scale does not simply indicate lower status. Behind him is an incense-burner and then a standing female, looking towards the seated figure. She wears a Persian Robe and a dentate tiara; but with her veil folded and pendant from the back of it. Her breasts may be exposed. She carries a small bucket from which to replenish the burner. This scene belongs to a repertory of élite domestic scenes in Achaemenid glyptic, which includes, on stamp seals, seated ladies holding flowers, sometimes both a bird and a flower (cf. Gadd 1938, pl. 124 W,Y).

It would appear that it was Persian concepts of decorum that had introduced, at some time in the later sixth or earlier fifth century B.C., dressed females into this age-old type of mouldmade plaque; but, significantly, without displacing the nudes. This suggests that the women using a plaque identified directly with her chosen image. This would appear to indicate that the dress might have been for social identification, distinguishing dressed females of higher status who, if not ethnically “Persian”, were in their own eyes at least, members of the new ruling élite. The nude females, loyal to local tradition, may then represent not only members of the indigenous population, but also those of lower social status. Chronological distinctions are not yet secure enough to indicate whether mouldmade Cypriot plaques of females in local costume (i.e. not the Persian Robe or variants of it) holding flowers anticipated the arrival of the new overlords there or not (cf. Karageorghis, J, 1987, 35–7: type XXXIV (Amathus)). The imagery of the Pazyryk textile and the Louvre cylinder seal strongly suggests that, at this stage at least in their history, these images represented a “self-image” of the owner as supplicant not a representation of the divinity supplicated by its human owner. This would be consonant with identifying the contemporary horse-riders as human male “self-images” rather than as representations of god per se or his cult-image. They might then all have been suppliants either of the same god or goddess, paralleling the combination of male and female terracottas earlier in the Iron Age in Cave 1 at Jerusalem or area E-207 at Samaria (see above).
(b) The Male Images

The miniature riders of terracotta, commonly known as “Persian Riders”, have long been accepted as one of the more consistent indicators of an Achaemenid military presence in the regions where they are found. ‘Persian’ here refers to dress not to ethnicity. This embraces the ‘Median’ costume with trousers, so suitable for riding, as well as a distinctive felt hat (kyrbasia) with a high pointed top, sometimes stiffened to a point, at others falling forward so that it resembled a cock’s comb. It was replaced on terracotta horsemen at the time of Alexander the Great by flat round headgear plausibly identified as the beret-like kaunia of felt, which was the traditional male hat of Macedonia (cf. Ziegler 1962, pl. 41: 504–5).

One of the most remarkable variants in the imagery of terracotta horsemen in the Near East appears with the flat cap. In some cases a single flat-capped rider astride a double-headed horse, a much older phenomenon amongst Iron Age terracotta riders (cf. no. 361), has a standing nude female set between his arms and the heads of the horses (cf. de Mecquenem et al. 1943, 42–3, fig. 36: 2 (Susa); Ghirshman 1976, 78–81, pl. CXI–II). This immediately associates the terracotta male and female imagery with a single deity. The Nude Female had long been identified with horses and horse-harnessing in the Near East. She appears in the Iron Age in Syria on both ivory and sheet bronze frontlets for horses (cf. Kantor 1962). Earlier she is shown standing on a horse in Egypto-Canaanite iconography of the Late Bronze Age (Winter 1983, 110–114, fig. 39a), where she is commonly identified with Atirat/Asherah through her epithet qds (“holy”; cf. Keel and Uehlinger 1998, 66, n.7; 71–72).

The “Persian Riders” may indeed on occasion have depicted men from Iran or the Iranian-speaking peoples; but more often they differed in no significant way in their function or in their ethnicity from the male riders current in the Levant before 550 B.C. The mastery of horsemanship traditional amongst the Iranian-speaking peoples ensured that this skill received even greater prominence thereafter, both as a practical preparation for war and as a metaphor for the most prestigious role to which men might aspire in their daily lives. Both Ezekiel and Josephus illustrate the actual social context: “And all the Assyrians with them, young and desirable, all governors and nobles, all famous officers and horsemen...” (Ezekiel 23: 23–4; cf. 6–7); “If you wish to cover with glory the man whom you say you love let him ride on horseback wearing the same dress as yourself” (Josephus: The Antiquities of the Jews XI:6:254).

The extent to which free-standing handmodelled zoomorphic images and models of buildings and furniture in clay were manufactured through the Achaemenid into the Hellenistic Period is obscure. The former are sporadically evident, the latter appear to pass into eclipse.