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## A Review of the Role of Women with an Emphasis on the Figures of Elam

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**Abstract:** The body of women has been observed abundantly in the southern Zagros region from the end of the Neolithic period to the first millennium BC, therefore the purpose of this article is to investigate the evolution of the body of women in terms of their form and type of clothing and decorations in order to understand the beliefs and thoughts of the ancient people. In this regard, it has been tried to classify women's figures based on their appearance and motifs such as the type of hair and face makeup, the type of hats and clothes, and the way of showing the female figures that are repeated in prehistoric works, in order to answer our questions regarding the background, reasons for making, execution methods and practical aspects of female figures this research has been performed using descriptive-analytical and documentary method. The results show that the figurines of the copper and stone period in the South Zagros region are primarily stylized and simplified and mostly include one construction method, but in the early Bronze Age and at the same time as the Old Elam period, the figurines grew and became more diverse and complex. And they are made in different shapes and forms. In the Middle Elam period, we see the production of figurines that are realistic and delicate, and diversity can be seen in the way of construction in different situations and the mass production of various figurines.

**Keywords:** *Figure, Women, Elam, Neolithic, evolution.*

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## ***Introduction***

Human beings have used art to express their thoughts before the appearance of calligraphy, and the worldview and religious thoughts of societies have a great impact on the formation of artistic elements. One of the most frequent motifs in different societies is female images, which are mostly seen in the form of figurines or on objects and dishes, which shows female power and is the embodiment of common myths and legends in societies. According to mythology, the woman at the center of the beginning of life, like the earth fertilized, nurtured, and brought forth the seed of existence. He was the giver of existence, the creator of life, and the guarantor of the survival of the generation and the family (Suleimani et al., 2011:112). Therefore, the images of women have been visible in various forms in many civilizations for a long time and have enjoyed historical continuity (Farshid nik et al., 2012: 199-233). (Dadvar and Taheri, 25:2015-17). Early female figures were in the form of very simplified human shapes and in three-dimensional form, made of clay and pumice. No delicacy has been observed in the construction of these figurines and the main body parts of these figurines have been created by only a slight pressure on the raw mud. Over time, most of the figures have been heated and baked and are closer to reality than before. In the next stages, color was also used in their construction (Islam Maslak and Haririyan, 2012: 25-31). Most of the female figures in different civilizations are shown naked, and the use of clay as a raw material, small dimensions, and emphasis on female organs as an important factor in the continuation of life and childbirth are the most important features of these figures (Jam Tir et al., 29: 2011-37; Islam Maslak and Haririyan, 2012:25-31). Repetition and continuation of the use of special motifs and elements is a reflection of the living conditions in a civilization at a specific time and place and in a way expresses the identity of that nation or civilization, hence prehistoric female figures besides their usual and obvious meaning have special and hidden concepts with religious and social messages symbolically and emblematically.

## ***Research Methodology***

This article is descriptive-analytical and in the way of collecting information based on library and museum studies. In this way, female figures have been examined in this article.

## ***Research background***

Arab and Sharifi Nasab in research entitled "Theocracy; the center of thought and civilization in ancient Elam" referring to archaeological works and evidence that remained from this civilization, investigated the effects of religion in the process of evolution of Elamite art and culture and the effect of Elam religion on the growth and evolution of various arts such as music, sculpture, architecture, relief, and seal making have been studied. The research results indicate that religion, as an important part of Elamite life has had direct effects on the formation and growth of Elamite culture; and perhaps, regardless of religion, the civilization of Elam would never reach such a level of progress (Arab and Sharifi Nasab, 2007). Firouzmandi and Kezazi, in a research aimed at investigating the position of women in prehistoric times, have studied the female figurines obtained from the Hajilar site in Central Anatolia, which includes the culture of the New Neolithic period. According to the findings of this research, the presence of female figurines in Hajilar region indicates the existence of matriarchal system in the Neolithic period, the worship of the mother gods in this period, the close connection of female figurines as mother gods with the prosperity of agriculture and the fertility of the land, the use of figurines as a tool for worshipping the ancestors and the spirits of the dead and abstractly showing distinctive female characteristics such as fertility and birth. On the other hand, this group of

figures refers to a society in which gender roles are well-defined and separated in such a way that men and women each assume different responsibilities and duties (Firouzmandi and Kazzazi, 2009). Soleimani et al., in research entitled "Investigation and Analytical Study of Female Figures in the Central Plateau in the Neolithic Period" consider the abundance of female figures in the Neolithic period as an indication of the existence of a patriarchal system and female rule in the societies of this period, and it indicates the position of the social characteristic of women rooted in the active social and economic role of women in agricultural work (Soleimani et al., 2009). In a research, Mousavi Haji and colleagues have investigated the role of women's bodies in the ancient world (based on archaeological discoveries). The results show that women's figures are the symbol of childbirth (mother goddess), religious and ritual aspects. These figures, which were worshiped as goddesses, show the importance of women and their high value since the Neolithic era. In general, the results indicate that women had status and dignity in politics and power, and had the ability to rule and govern the society, they also had economic and audit power, and they even had the first place in the position of worship (Mousavi Haji et al., 2013). Dadvar and Sadeghi Taheri, in a research with the aim of investigating male roles in the civilization of Elam (from the beginning of the third millennium to the middle of the first millennium BC), the results show two different characteristics in the civilization of Elam, one is violence and heaviness, which somehow refers to statehood, formality and the religiosity of the civilization of Elam and the other is the freshness, purity, and simplicity of the folk that is sometimes full of individuality. The attention and emphasis of the Elam civilization on the difference between the roles and positions of men and women in society can be clearly seen in their works. Despite the great importance that the Elamites attached to the female sex, the place of men was also reserved in social, political, and cultural affairs, and this means the same thing that people in different civilizations have been looking for throughout history (Dador and Sadeghi Taheri, 2013). Yahivi Alamdari and Khabazi have studied the figures of female deities with the aim of investigating the social position of women in the Neolithic period of Iran. The results showed that the figures of female deities have undoubtedly been special elements in religious beliefs in different eras, and for this reason, they have special features such as the emphasis on female organs, and the abundance of these figures was simultaneous with the era of agriculture, probably indicating the belief of the effect of the earth fertility and the growth of plants, and the existence of all kinds of female gods in the mythology of different civilizations, which caused the fertility of the earth and the growth of plants, is the reason for this claim. But the abundance of these female figures has caused the emergence of various theories about the type of system governing these societies, as well as theories about the existence of feminism and matriarchy in these societies. The conducted studies show that the frequency of these figurines (goddess of women) is characteristic of the position of women in the Neolithic society of Iran. This is undoubtedly due to the important role that women played in the Neolithic society (Yahavi Alamdari and Khabazi, 2014). In this research, the characteristics and evolution of female figures from the late Neolithic period to the first millennium BC in the Zagros region have been investigated.

### ***Discussion***

According to the investigations and studies that have been carried out in the field of the development of female figurines in the late Neolithic period to the first millennium BC in the South Zagros region, it can be concluded that the production of figurines in this period is simple and at the same time conceptual and philosophical. At first, the bodies are divided into T-shaped, violin-shape and cylindrical types (fig 1). Statues with the head of a snake known as a cobra were also made in Susa during this period (fig. 2)





Fig 1. T-shaped figurine (Herzfeld, 2002: 372)



Fig 2. The figure is known as a cobra  
Snack (Amiet, 2015: 86)

The head of these figures is in the shape of an animal and there is no human image, and if it is rarely seen, it is completely changed and undoubtedly, it is a female figure, because all the early nations preferred women over men in their paintings (Amiyeh, 2014: 21) and maybe it is an indicator of a human wearing a ritual mask in the shape of an animal. A large number of figurines similar to these (fig 3) have been found in southern Mesopotamia at the same time during the period of Ubid Uruk (Dimes, 2008: 227). According to the details of the large and Obeid Uruk figurines, we see huge differences, and these differences indicate that the large figurines are native to this region (Southern Zagros).

In the following, we gradually see the construction and appearance of stone or bone bodies in the late copper and stone period. The first fossil obtained from bone was found in Choghamish (fig 4). All the stone copper figurines are naked, terracotta, and rarely made of stone, and their bodies are decorated with colored motifs. It seems that the stone copper figurines are more of a kind of religious or fertility rituals and practices, the Bronze Age figurines are an offering produced for a dead person. It seems that at the end of the copper and stone period, in the first stage of urbanization, i.e., at the same time as the old Elam period, figurines entered a new stage of production in terms of the type of construction and use, and gradually this method of construction became meaningful and the precision in the details of the figurines evolved. It seems that showing the



Fig 3. Obed-Uruk's women (Majid Zadeh, 2001: 247)



Fig 4. The figure of the beginning of writing in Choghamish (Everly Deims, 2009: 139)

details has not only added to the beauty and artistic aspect of the figurines compared to the copper and stone period, but also these details indicate the purpose of making the figurines and their various uses, including religious and ritual aspects in the period. It shows the next ones and gradually we see the evolution of the bodies. In a way that at first the head changes and they are made with human characteristics. The cylindrical base of the figurines turns into real human legs and the wing-like hands into the right and left hands of humans in various situations, and the details in the construction method take the place of generalities. According to the studies that have been conducted in line with this research, it is almost certain that the figures of this period in terms of general postures are standing, some are sitting in a very small number. According to these studies, all the figurines of this period were made individually and alone, and this is because most of the figurines of this period are naked. Among the main elements, the leg is the least and the head is the most fractured. Most of the figurines in the copper and stone periods were made of clay, but other materials such as bone and stone were also used in the construction of the figurines. In this period, most of the figures are still naked and all their organs and appendages such as hats or headbands and forehead bands, decorations, or the breast and bra with color or floral additions are shown (fig 5). From this period to the Middle Elam period, these figurines moved towards realistic shapes, and most of the body parts of the figurines were depicted with fine lines that used to be carved inside the mold. The sites of Bakun and Shush have the largest number of bodies in this period. In this regard, it seems that these two sites in the South Zagros region played the role of mass producers in the region and the specimens were exported to other regions after being produced in these sites.

### **Characteristics and development of female figures in the time period of ancient Elam**

Since in the historical period of Elam (Bronze Age), civilization and parallel to it artistic productions grew and became more diverse and complex, a more detailed study, classification and chronology of various subjects were done and among them volumetric art (sculpture) and iconography has a special place. From the Bronze Age onwards, we see a wide attention to other iconographic subjects. Anyway, one of the topics that are prominent in all prehistoric periods is



Fig 5. The figure of women (Amiet, 1992, MDP: 52 101)



Fig 6. The figure of women with the head animal (Amiet 1992, MDP: 52 104)

the subject of figurines, especially the figurines of naked women. According to the studies carried out in this research, it seems that the tradition of making naked figures has maintained its continuity during the copper and stone periods and has been transferred to the bronze period. According to the figures of this period, it is clear that some of them have a series of bald heads. The first characteristic and distinguishing feature of these figures is the lack of hair, probably they used wigs for these figures. It seems that after the transfer of this tradition, in the period of old Elam, the figures were removed from the abstract state and moved towards realism (fig 6).

In making figurines in terms of variety, the figurine-making artist has not spared any effort and it seems that religious and ritual beliefs have not been unaffected in this variety. The existence of various figures from the old Elam period (until the end of the new Elam period) shows complex beliefs among people who hardly open their mouths to their mystery. It seems that not only the different postures of the figures in the old Elam period are related to different occasions, which were performed in temples in different ways, which can represent mythological subjects or derive from their ceremonies and rituals. In this regard, the transmission of Mesopotamian beliefs to the neighboring lands, which originates from their myths, cannot be ignored.

### ***Data Analysis***

According to these studies of all the figurines in the Middle Elam period, it seems that the evolution of semi-realistic and in some, very simple and naturalistic figurines enter a new stage of art from an aesthetic point of view, and with their mass production in the form of molds, it becomes more widespread. It seems that with the expansion of the temples in the Middle Elam period and the spread of special customs, rituals, and ceremonies, at the same time, completely independent and legal, the construction of figurines and their personal use gradually reached mass production. It seems that by building worship centers and performing special religious ceremonies in them, it shows the fact that we are gradually witnessing the promotion of theocracy and religious government in the Middle Elam period. Cities such as Shush and Choghazanbil and the buildings of Nin Khor sag citadel and Choghazanbil temple are witnesses to this claim (fig 7). It should be noted that many figures have also been found in these important archaeological points. The connection between the discovery of figurines and these important religious centers is the application that the figurines have in these centers. For us, the actual use of figurines in these centers, which are sometimes political and sometimes religious, cannot be

clearly investigated, but from the evidence, it seems that the use of figurines in these centers in the Middle Elam period is ritualistic, and religious, in line with which people went to the temple with the idols and used the idols as a mediator or savior for a personal wish that was consistent with his belief. As a result, figures, including naked figures, cannot be considered only as a symbol of fertility, but we attribute various uses to figures according to popular beliefs of the people. According to the studies, it is concluded that there is a noticeable diversity in the bodies of this period. The results that can be obtained from the study and examination of these figurines are that, in general, the figurines that have a standing position have the largest number among the studied figurines, and according to the type of construction which is in most of the figurines, it can be concluded that They were hung from a place like the wall or the central platform of the temples. From the different positions of the hands, it seems that each figure with any position of the hand represents the work done in temples or holy places, that is, each figure is an example of a maidservant or a goddess or a god, which have actually performed the ceremony in a real way. Girshman deduces about the naked figures of Susa that "a lot of these statues were found in the streets and alleys, and it showed that these small statues were thrown there. It is desirable to have a small statue of this goddess. As far as it can be inferred from the state, these small statues were the expressions of the idea of fertility, so this goddess and her statues were, undoubtedly reserved for women. So why did these women not make any effort to preserve and protect these small statues? It seems that women easily removed these small statues in private. Why and for what reason did they do this? Why did they break the statues of this goddess who should be involved in the multiplication of the family? And they throw it in the streets and passages of the city? The quite impressive number of broken and crushed small statues that we found in the public streets of a relatively limited neighborhood of Susa city allows us to conclude that most of these statues were deliberately broken and scattered in the corners of the public streets. I don't see any other description and interpretation that can explain so well the reason for the small broken statues in the public streets of the city and if we accept this theory, the number of these statues must be related to the birth of the era in which we opened our workshop. Therefore, this workshop covers an area of one hectare, a large area for an archaeological excavation in the Middle East, especially when we consider that we have reached a depth of fifteen meters. This neighborhood of Shush, which was excavated and liberated by us, included nine streets and alleys in the 14th city, which included about a dozen houses, the largest of which lonely had fifty-one rooms. This interpretation and interpretation of the role of the goddess Manzat allows us to explain and interpret her state: by protecting her breasts, this goddess reminds and embodies their swelling, because this is one of the signs of puberty (Fig 8).

In this regard, Everly Deems concludes that "these bodies were discarded when they have lost their primary function. Probably, these figures were magic tools. According to Girshman, these figurines are special objects that one or more people made in the area and probably wanted to reach something by mediating them. Apparently, this is the reason why absolutely similar figures are never found in the same area. According to the surveys and studies, there are more naked figures than clothed or semi-clothed figures. according to the studies of this research clothes of the figurines in the Middle Elam period are different, but long, sequined, scaled, and simple clothes are among the types of clothes that have been mostly used. Elamite women's clothes are generally divided into short dresses and long dresses. It seems that the long, scaled, and decorated dresses indicate the social rank or position of the queen, temple maids, or courtiers, and the short dresses are associated with maidens who have to go through certain stages in religious orders (fig 9).





Fig 7. Female figure (Majidzadeh: 2007:129)



Fig 8. Goddess Manzhat (Amiet 1992, MDP 52: 129 1130)

Napirasu's queen and the maids continuously appear in long and beautiful dresses. While in the prominent role of Kurangun in Fahlian, it shows the maidens who stand behind the king or princes and courtiers in a religious ceremony with short skirts of different sizes, and while tying their hands in a manner of respect to each other. They are lined up in different rows in a special order. The different postures of the hands in the studied figures have considerable diversity. These modes are also clearly recognizable in the Elamite relief. Among these different states in the hands, the two groups have the most statistics. The first group of figures are those who have their hands on their chests and the second group of figures are those who have their hands tied under their chests or on their stomachs as a sign of respect and humility. This state of the hand includes most of the figurines that have been found either in temples or in holy places. This hand position can be clearly recognized in Elamite seals and relief figures. Considering that all the figures and reliefs are in different positions without shoes, it seems that there is a connection between the tied hands in the figures and the feet that do not have shoes. It seems that in terms of the respect that people had for the gods in the temples, as a sign of supplication and humility and to avoid polluting the temples and holy places, they considered wearing shoes as a kind of shame or disrespect. Today, we see these religious habits in mosques and holy places in the religious societies of the Middle East, which can have roots of several thousand years (according to the religious habits of the people of Elam and Mesopotamia). The type of accompaniment in the figures of this research and among the people of Elam is diverse, but the figures are single and only have the most statistics. Among them, there are figures who are flirting in different positions, and some others have a child in their arms, which reminds us of the fertility of the crop after the ceremony that was discussed in the previous lines in the discussion of nudity and holy marriage (fig 10). During the socle period, emphasis was placed on the main lines of the body and facial features. The hair was hidden under a delicate here, and in some cases thin, body-hugging brimless hat. Although the naked Elamite figurines of Susa were mass-produced, they are very delicately made. Again, as for the tradition of the Copper and Stone Ages, women are depicted as broad, but sometimes they are shown as violins or figure 8, and of course, they have large hips. It is here for the first time that we see the display of aris-





Fig 9. Female figure (Amiet, 2015: 140)

tocratic women, but unfortunately, their social status is not yet known. According to the type of clothes that these figures wear, it must be said that they definitely had a high social base. These women sometimes wear puffy clothes that reach their ankles and cover their legs completely. Another garment is a delicate short-sleeved shirt, sometimes worn over a cloak or bolero, which is attached to the shirt with a few pins. The lower part consists of an embellished or simple belted skirt worn over a dress. The dress of Princess Bar-Uli, daughter of the last king of Middle Elam, Shilhak Ishushing, which is carved on a large piece of Yemenite agate, also shows these characteristics. Simple clothes with a wide shawl that covers the entire breast can also be seen. In the old Elam period, women's hair was shown with additional balls of flowers, but later on, in the Middle Elam period, it was turned around the head and became in the form of a headscarf, which was sometimes covered with a thin and transparent hat without a brim. In the case of other women, especially noble ladies, and queens, it seems that they have semi-long hair that is tied around their foreheads with a headband, or they have a complex hairdo that consists of several braids tied together with a ribbon. This

type of hairstyle can be well seen in Sardis and uncovered masks from Haft Tepe. In the Bronze Age (Middle Old Elam), according to Everly Deams, "women are not only depicted as symbols of fertility" because there are standards in the clothing of Elamite women, which can be used to provide information about daily life, the shape of normal everyday clothes, and formal clothes.

### ***Characteristics and development of female figures in the time period of New Elam***

At the end of the New Elam period, Khuzestan left its role to Lorestan and Fars in terms of figurine production. From now on, women's figurines were made of gold, copper, ivory, bronze, or precious stones or on reliefs. The aristocratic women of New Elam are decorated with various motifs, while the queens of Persia have long hair and a central prominence on the head. According to the investigations and studies that have been carried out in the field of the evolution of female figurines in the New Elam period in the southern Zagros region, it is concluded that the figurines are generally as elegant as possible in the way they are made, with complete details in the figurine-like objects, vessels of water or liquids of the fish goddess (fig 11), memorial statues and inscriptions, and such findings have been manifested and the production of figurines has somehow stopped in the time period of New Elam. The vast majority of sculptural objects in this period are made of bronze, and it seems that in terms of the material, baked clay has replaced bronze metal. All the sculptural objects in this period are clothed and each detail is made and treated with great care. It seems that the reason for stopping the production of figurines in this period is the appearing of metal and the change in rituals in this period of history. Archaeological studies in the future can determine the reason for this stop and new production of physical objects.

### ***Conclusion***

According to the studies and investigations carried out in this research, it seems that the copper and stone age bodies in the South Zagros region are at first stylized and simplified and mostly include a construction method. All these figures are naked, engraved, and have marks



Fig 10. Female figure (Amiet 1992: 34, MDP 52, 1186)



Fig 11. Fish goddess Joubaji (Shishegar, 2015: 373)

like tattoos along with wing-like hands with the same body and heads in the shape of animals like snakes. According to the figurines of the same period of this region as Mesopotamia, it seems that the figurines of this period, especially those known as Snake, have a completely local origin, and the appearance similarities are not a good proof for that the figurines are imported. At the end of the copper and stone period, with the formation of cities, followed by the formation of temples, the construction of figures changed and the naturalistic style became a realistic style. If at the end of the copper and stone period, we see the construction of a type of figurine that shows stone maids wearing clothes that are distinguished from other figurines with tangible elegance. As a result, at the end of the copper and stone period and at the same time as the old Elam period, the issue of clothing and a kind of respect for the gods in temples is clear. At the beginning of the old Elam period, statues were still made in the style of sterilized. According to the studies carried out in this research, it seems that the tradition of making naked figures has maintained its continuity during the copper and stone periods and has been transferred to the bronze period. At the beginning of the Bronze Age and at the same time as the Old Elam period, artistic productions, including figurines, grew and became more diverse and complex. In this period, the figurines are made with different shapes and forms, and the forms are on the path of evolution toward realism. The making of figurines in a mold way happened for the first time in this period. In the Middle Elam period, we see the creation of figurines that are completely realistic and elegant. The diversity in the way of construction in different situations and the mass production of all kinds of figures in perfection indicate the size of the cities and the increase in population, and besides that, it shows us the importance of the category of religion in this period. According to the evolutionary path in the way of construction and its forms, one can gradually expand the temples and then feel the mystical need for an inner belonging of man to a single power. From the Bronze Age onwards, we see a wide attention to other iconographic subjects. Anyway, one of the issues that is prominent in all the periods before Islam is the issue of figurines, especially the figurines of naked females. Since most of the figurines in this region were found in temples or holy places, it seems that there is a connection between the making of figurines and their use in temples and holy places. According to the features of the decorations, the type of clothing, and the characteristics of the clothes, it seems that each of these

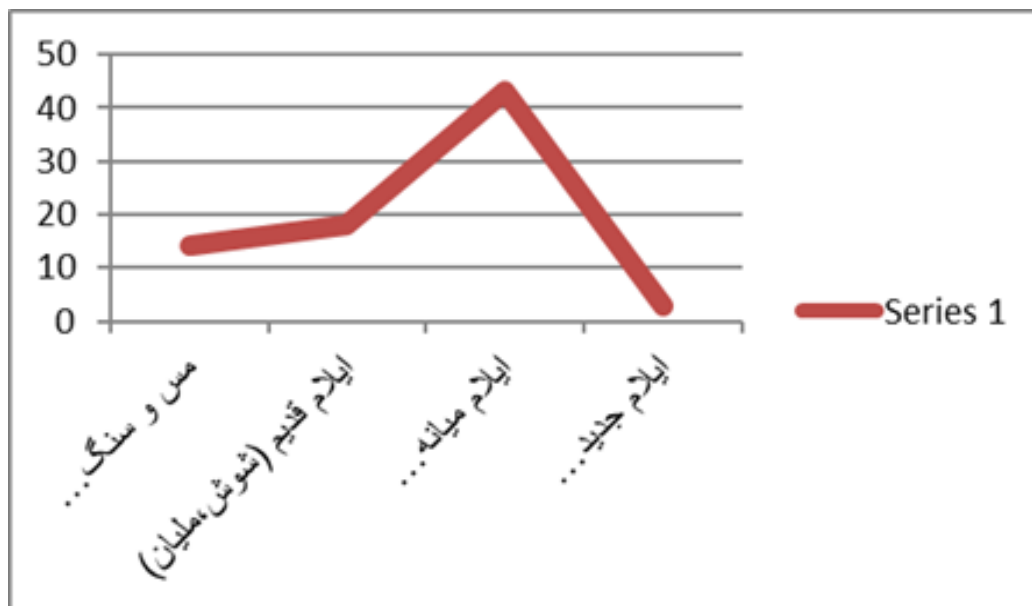


Diagram 1: representative of periods, areas, and chronology according to the number of figures (author).

characteristics and accessories that have appeared in the figures has special meanings that the people of that period of history believed in them, as a result of the types of decorations and the type of clothing and the characteristics of clothes have a deep connection with the beliefs and religious commands of these people. Due to this, none of the sub-sets that have been discussed in the decorations, type of covering, and specifications have not been used only for beauty and decoration. For example, the appearance of a collar and necklace, minus its aesthetic aspect, can be a sign of servitude in the eyes of the gods. According to this research, clothing plays the role of mediator between people and gods, and people have sought something from God or her representatives through these figures. This need can be related to people's livelihood and life system. As a result, these bodies cannot be regarded as absolute fertility symbols. Considering that most of the female figurines in South Zagros had a religious use in the considered period. The role of goddesses and gods in this context becomes more colorful. According to this issue, it can be concluded that we are witnessing a kind of religious government in this era, and women play a unique fertility role. It seems that there are similarities between all female figurines from the beginning of the Neolithic to the end of Elam, and an evolutionary course can be seen in the form of the figurines, but considering the entire South Zagros region, the Fars branch of the figurines is on its evolutionary path, and the Khuzestan region's figurine branch in this path has evolved. It seems that the production of figurines in Fars's region was stopped at one point, and this is the case that this development has reached perfection in the Khuzestan region, while at the same time, at the end of the Bronze Age, figurines were produced simultaneously with the period of New Elam. It suddenly drops or stops. This issue can be rooted in the different religious or governmental structures in the late Elam period. According to the investigations in this research, the figurines obtained from different regions of Zagros have common and distinctive features in terms of implementation methods, materials, and practical aspects.

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