DIS-Asia-Indus-Harappa- Bajaur Valley-Acolyte

## Female figurine, Bajaur River Valley, Indus River Valley Tributary, Harappan Civilization, 2800-2600 BCE.

## This hollow bell-shaped terracotta figurine is probably from Bajaur valley (area of 600 sq. miles), a hilly area located northwest of Malakand at the border between Pakistan and India, in the sphere of influence of the early Harappan Civilization during the so called Regionalization Era, 2800-2600 BCE (Kenoyer 1998).

# The figurine has applied terracotta arms, breasts, brow and facial features. A pinched beak-like nose is suggestively avian, recalling many Neolithic female cultic acolytes with bird-like features possibly indicative of their worship of an avian heavenly deity. It is well known that among the cultures extending from the Tibetan Plateau to western India and Pakistan through Afghanistan to Turkey, the practice of excarnation or allowing carrion birds such as vultures to ingest the bodies of the deceased and so imbibe their spirit wasextensively practiced. In this context the curve of the votive cultic offrand suggests that the deity involved was associated with the local carrion birds, which in the case of Harappa would have been the gyphon vulture. Prominent breasts indicative of being nubile are emphasized with arms pressed against the chest to enhance the signification of fullness, but there is no indication of pregnancy. The bell-shaped hollow body is illustrative of the flowing skirts of Bajaur Valley female cultic figurines. This figurine has an uplifted head in a orant or praying pose with an open mouth suggesting that a prayer is being uttered to a deity for protection in childbirth -- a cinematographic moment caught in time. Three lines of impressed punctures below the chest may signify folds in a skirt. Above the chest, punctures on each shoulder and the throat possibly signify tattooing or body paint. On the left side of the rear, punctures may signify acupunctures designed to relieve the pain of birthing. Each ear is pierced, suggesting the presence of earrings and may indicate an elevated social status. The hairdressing has a single braid in the back extending from a frontal gathering that suggests a stylistic trait indicative of the social role of this figure, possibly depicting a worshipper of the goddess Asherah or her cognate in the Harappa civilization. The neck appears to have been cracked but is now in place without loss. Weight 833 grams, height 22 cm. Est 6,500 USD (2016; Barakat Gallery, 405 North Rodeo Drive, Beverly Hills, California-90210); Pd 600 USD archaeo\_line, France, 2016). Extremely rare.

# REFERENCES

## Kenoyer, Jonathan Mark. 1998. *Ancient cities of the Indus Valley Civilization.* Karachi, Pakistan: American Institute of Pakistan Studies, Oxford University Press.

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