

Terracotta Art of Protohistoric Kachi Plain

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Excavations at Pirak in the Kachi plain yielded material evidence suggesting a possible link between the end of Indus culture right upto the emergence of iron. The area is sandy and dry but the alluvial soil is extremely fertile with ample scope and possibility of irrigation. Geographically, the flat alluvial stretches of Kachi plain could be considered as an extension of the alluvial plains of Sindh into the Baluchi ranges.¹ The results of Pirak excavations² are extremely valuable for understanding and interpreting different stages of post-Harappan occupational deposits. This is so far the only example of its kind in the northern part of Kachi plain.³

There are three periods of occupation at Pirak. The first period, assignable to c.16-17th centuries BCE, yielded the remains of unburnt bricks, associated with a huge platform and hand made pottery of medium fabric. The pottery contains paintings parallel to those earlier found in the preceding culture in this region. A few wheel-made potsherds were also collected. Some of the prominent shapes were large jars with handles bearing finger tip decoration, small jars containing incised chevrons and lug handles on the belly besides a few lipped and spouted jars. The coarse pottery is decorated with appliqué bands and finger tip impressions; geometric designs are seen on the

red, pinkish or creamy buff ware on dishes and bowls.

Period I is sub-divided into two viz., A and B. Period I A is marked by mud-brick structures of unbaked clay serving as bases of silos, two small fireplaces against a wall, a carefully made brick-built platform of river pebbles near a fireplace and a massive mud-brick structure.⁴

The occurrence of human figurines in terracotta is another significant feature bearing close resemblance to the forms recovered from Mehrgarh. Other antiquities include circular, square, diamond and cross button seals of terracotta with raised and holed back (boss) with crosses and dots appearing on the seals, copper, flint, bone, ivory and terracotta objects besides semiprecious beads, bricks of trapezoidal shape with rounded edge probably used as firedogs. Large number of horse and camel bones indicate the domestication of these two animals. Period I B showed evidence of five phases of rebuilding and repairing. Importantly some of the older buildings were used as foundation after proper levelling. Mainly wheel-turned pink ware (also noticed in the preceding level) and the toothed flint sickle blades, hafted bone points with incised circlets of antlers of hog deer, square or rectangular

¹ Jarrige et al. (1979), pp.103-122.

² Dani (1970), pp.49-53, pl.31, no.1.

³ The excavations were jointly conducted by the members of French archaeological Mission, Paris and Department of Archaeology, Pakistan from 1968-74, Jarrige et al., (1979), pp.347-411.

⁴ Most remarkable feature is the uniform material culture indicating a homogenous, consistent social and economic organization which lasted for such a long time. The occupation would point to an agricultural settlement although a few seals (of Jhukar style) suggest some commercial purpose. Jarrige (1973), p.165.

compartmented seals in copper with cross or dots are particularly noteworthy.⁵

Almost similar material is collected from Period II but with a marked change in layout of structures showing the successive stages of courtyard, large quadrangular buildings, post-holes and streets in-between the houses. No significant change could be noticed in the ceramic tradition, painted pottery is handmade as seen in the earlier period, predominantly the use of bichrome designs as the monochrome geometric designs were no more in use. There are shapes such as globular jars, basins and medium-sized pots besides antiquities in the form of stone sickle-blades, thick flakes, irregular blades and retouched arrowheads in crystalline flint, copper and bronze flat axe, chisel, mid-ribbed dagger with flat tang, arrowheads with mid-rib, nails, rods etc. Among other objects mention may be made of bone points, ivory combs with incised circlets, small convex buttons, terracotta circular seals with cross designs and perforated boss, beads of terracotta, lapis lazuli, shell bracelets. Iron appears for the first time in this period and the next period is marked by a greater quantity of iron. This deposit is also sub-divided into three phases, viz., A, B and C.

Terracotta Figurines

The chalcolithic deposit of Pirak yielded crude figurines in terracotta which are devoid of artistic excellence. A variety of forms appear representing both animal and anthropomorphic figurines. Most notable ones are the forms of double-humped camels (Fig. 6). The specimens are depicted with wheels⁶ and largely decorated with bichrome paintings in the style following

the pottery. The painted designs extend upto the legs.⁷ The pronounced hump of the animal appears more realistic. The pinholes are used to indicate the eyes. The bulls are of humped variety, appear more realistic. The details could also be marked in the depiction of cow as well, as found in the examples of camel but the figurines of bull and cow are not so frequent.

The terracotta horse from the site, perhaps the earliest of its kind, is modelled quite realistically, at times with a hole at the back for attaching a tail (Fig. 7). The size of the figurines of horse also varies. Some examples are marked by long neck with paintings in plum coat (Pl. 2). Body of the animal is relatively thin with rounded back and pinched legs which end in a point. In some specimens there is depiction of hump besides a thin line incised on its neck possibly to indicate the belt or string for hanging the bells. A small example of horse with protruding slit mouth has depiction of ears also. The body is marked by dotted designs. In this case, the treatment is realistic with better modelling and mottled coating. Also noteworthy is the occurrence of a large number of unbaked clay figurines along with pawns resembling the animal head.

In addition to the animal representations, there were the figurines of riders which also occur frequently in the later phases, i.e., IB and II. One of the forms shows a faded face with tresses of long hair on the neck. Another fragmentary specimen of rider wears a belt while in case of the other, the upper part of the body is delineated like a bird. The riders (Figs. 1-5) have generally a non-human face as could be noticed in the examples of the upper parts of the two riders. One of the specimens resembles

⁵ These designs are close to those recovered from Shahr-i-Sokhta and Mundigak.

⁶ Jarrige (1981), pp.58-63, pl.XVII-5.

⁷ This type of animal was also found in Central Asia.

a horse while the other has a pointed head. These forms are represented with stumpy arms, thick body without any greater detail. The occurrence of two large heads (Pl. 1) about 8cm high is also noteworthy. The examples made of grey earth, marked by slit eyes, are comparatively realistic though the modelling is somewhat crude. The details are marked on the body in appliqué style. Their features are almost similar, characterized by a crown or cap (Pl. 5), with long spiral earrings and necklace. Only one form wears a beard (Fig. 8; Pl. 1). There were also the discovery of some crude forms of human showing peculiar features with non-human appearance. The figurines have flared bottom (Figs. 1-3), wearing a headgear (Pl. 5) like a cap with two prominent eyes. A number of such examples with similar features, reported from Period II, appear more stylized. Some of the interesting features are the portrayal of crowns and ear-pendants.

The figurines of horsemen from Period IB along with fragmentary two-humped camels. In Period II both baked and unbaked clay horsemen were recovered in a large number. Depicted with a head that of an animal, resembling closely a bird, modelled with a long beak (Fig. 5). Some of the figurines of riders fit exactly into the back of the horse.⁸ Apart from the figurines of horse, two-humped Bactrian camels, human figurines including the riders were recovered in abundance. The horse figurines are interesting which are of varying sizes with slit mouth and long neck slightly bent down. The rounded back of the animal (Fig. 7) gives a realistic appearance. There were recovered with some unbaked figurines of bull. About the camels from Pirak the most noteworthy characteristic is the presence of

double humps.⁹ Another feature that deserves mention here is the painting covering its body beautifully. These were originally provided with wheels (Fig. 6). It is significant to mention here that camel is still known in the plains of Kachi as well.¹⁰

The frequency in the occurrence of horse figurines indicates the importance of the animal in the daily life of the people as an object of some ritualistic significance, perhaps utilized for votive offerings. It is relevant to mention here that the bones and teeth of the animal from the site also corroborate this evidence. But in the present day horse is an animal not fitting in the ordinary needs of villagers in the Kachi plain. The camels perhaps served as an important animal to symbolize the inland and outside trade that might have prevailed during that period for transporting commodities for daily needs.

According to Dani¹¹ 'the material from Pirak represents an original synthesis of regional elements and outside contributions from various sources. The Pirak material is unlike either the Jhukar or Jhangar cultures. It is distinguished from many other sites in the Indus Valley or in Gujarat by the absence of clearly visible survivals of Harappan features. The excavators are of the view that "the introduction of the horse, the camel and the new cereals such as rice, sorghum and different varieties of millet was connected with the establishing of agricultural foundations that can be compared with those in the contemporary settlements." It is further stated that the evidence from Pirak

⁹ Raverty (1893), p.22.

¹⁰ The country to the west of the Indus was considered to be famous for the breeding of two humped camels which were in great demand as far as Khurasan and Iran.

¹¹ Dani (1988), p.68.

⁸ Jarrige, op.cit. (1981), pl.XVII-7.

does not reflect a 'village living in isolation but it indicates a contact with the far flung areas of Central Asia and Iran' even during the post-urban phase of the Indus.¹²

South Cemetery at Mehrgarh

To the post-Harappan period of second millennium BC also belongs the South Cemetery at Mehrgarh and Sibri in the Kachi plain. The excavated¹³ evidence from the sites like Sibri and Nausharo indicated the presence of north-east Iranian elements in the lower Indus valley around c. 2000 BC which mingled with the Indus culture that mark the post-Harappan period, as reflected by the seals of Jhukar period at Chanhudaro in Sind, at Shahi Tump and Mehi in Baluchistan. South Cemetery at Mehrgarh near Dadhar and Sibri in north Kachi plain revealed funerary objects comprising plain grey pottery, jewellery and ornaments of limestone or mother of pearl and bronze vessels, datable to the second millennium BCE.¹⁴ These excavations¹⁵ are significant as they have provided the data to fill the chrono-cultural gap that existed in the Kachi plain until recently. Besides, the material from South Cemetery and Sibri demonstrates the presence of a strong Central Asian related element on the periphery of the Indus valley.¹⁶

At Sibri the site was occupied for a short duration. The upper level now badly damaged by erosion, indicates the traces of walls with broken jars, pots and figurines all lying on a

layer of charcoal. In the second layer was exposed a better preserved wall with a niche having its inner surfaces burnt. The objects associated with this niche include potsherds, ornaments of mother of pearl and bone. A platform oven, fireplaces and furnaces were also exposed. The ceramics show two main types; hand made sherd-tempered coarse ware and the wheel-turned pottery tempered with both vegetal matter and pieces of sherds. Only a few pots were painted either with geometrical designs in brown colour or stylized flowers, birds, besides an appliqué decoration and incised wavy lines. These have affinities with the lower Murghab region of south Turkmenia. Pieces of alabaster and chlorite vases with incised rim were also collected along with grinding stones, pestles, polishing stones, hammer stones and sling balls.

The objects of terracotta present a variety, represented by pawns, small wheels, spindle-whorls, rattles, sling balls, fragmentary crucibles and discs. Two types of seals, compartmented seal of bronze or stone and a cylinder seal of black steatite are noteworthy. The cylinder seal with a boss pierced on top contains a figure of zebu facing a lion and a scorpion. Along with these two beads of black steatite probably formed a necklace. Bronze shaft-hole axe-adze and a few flint tools consisting of arrowheads, lunettes, a few retouched blades, bronze pins were also recovered from the area. Ball-headed pins of

¹² Jarrige et al. op.cit. (1979), pp.409-411.

¹³ Santoni 1984, pp.52-60.

¹⁴ The ceramic tradition and objects of bronze closely resemble the examples from Bactria, Margiana, south Turkmenia, Shahbad region, Tepe Hissar and Afghan Seistan.

¹⁵ Jarrige et al. (1989), pp.150-160.

¹⁶ They were later contemporaries of the Harappan Civilization.

ivory and bone were also recovered.

Terracotta Figurines

It is significant that Sibri presented a large number of human figurines along with a few animal representations made of sherd tempered ware. The violin – shaped female forms are the most commonly depicted examples (Pl. 4) These forms are characterized by applique pellets to indicate the eyes and breasts. Most of the specimens contain pinholes in the pubic area and the armpits. In case of hair dresses also, the appliqué method was generally used. These figurines have been decorated with necklaces and ornaments, shown by small pinholes. The examples show two stumpy hands ending in points as they are shaped by hands. There is no indication of legs and the bottom is rounded with a concave base. At times, pinholes occur in different part of its body possibly suggesting some kind of a dress or other details. The head portion is not shown separately, in some examples, forms show only a slight projection marked by pinching the clay, containing multiple pinholes on the body. In one figurine multiple pinholes in two rows occur on the arms and the chest.¹⁷

The other type of figurine has close resemblance to those from south Turkmenia, which represents a seated Callipygian¹⁸ figurine. There is one more type depicting a flat standing figurine with small appliqué breasts.

The animal representations comprise mostly the humped bulls. Although there are some other animal representations not properly identifiable. But the faunal remains of cattle, sheep, goat, pig and wild equid reveal the existence of these animals. Cultivation of barley is also attested to by the occurrence of charred grains found at the site.

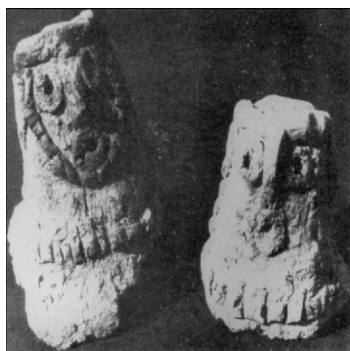
Sibri has been compared with Mehrgarh VII C (c. 2500-2400 B.C.) and the evidence of ceramic industry, metallurgical skill, agriculture and animal husbandry suggests a settled occupation of the people related to Central Asia. The representation of terracotta and stone objects from South Cemetery of Mehrgarh and Sibri also reflect a strong ‘Central Asian ‘ association and may be dated to the centuries preceding and succeeding c.2000 BCE.

¹⁷ These figurines are interesting as there is comparable evidence from Murghab delta, Pirak and Navdatoli.

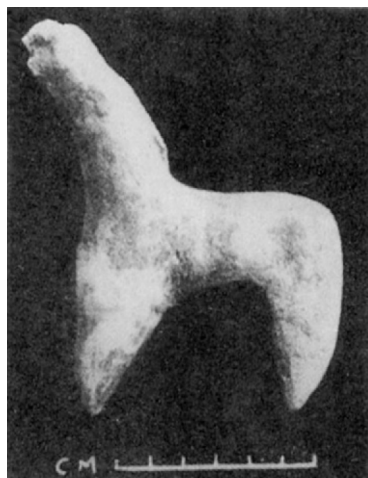
¹⁸ Masson et al.(1972), pls.26-28.

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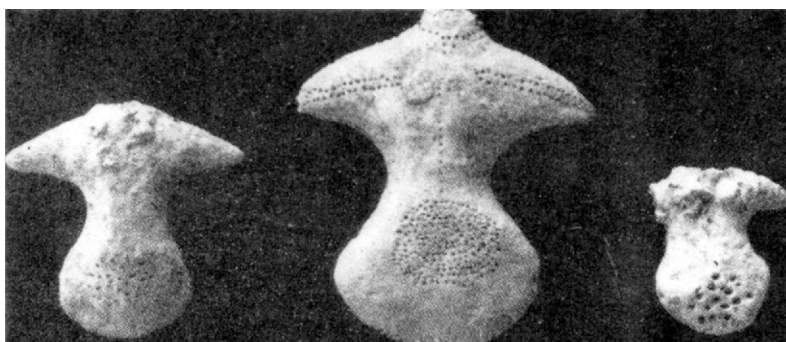
Pl. 1. Pirak: large-sized heads



Pl. 2. Pirak: horse



Pl.3. Pirak:horse



Pl.4. Sibri: Violin-shaped female forme



Pl. 5. Pirak: head with a round cap

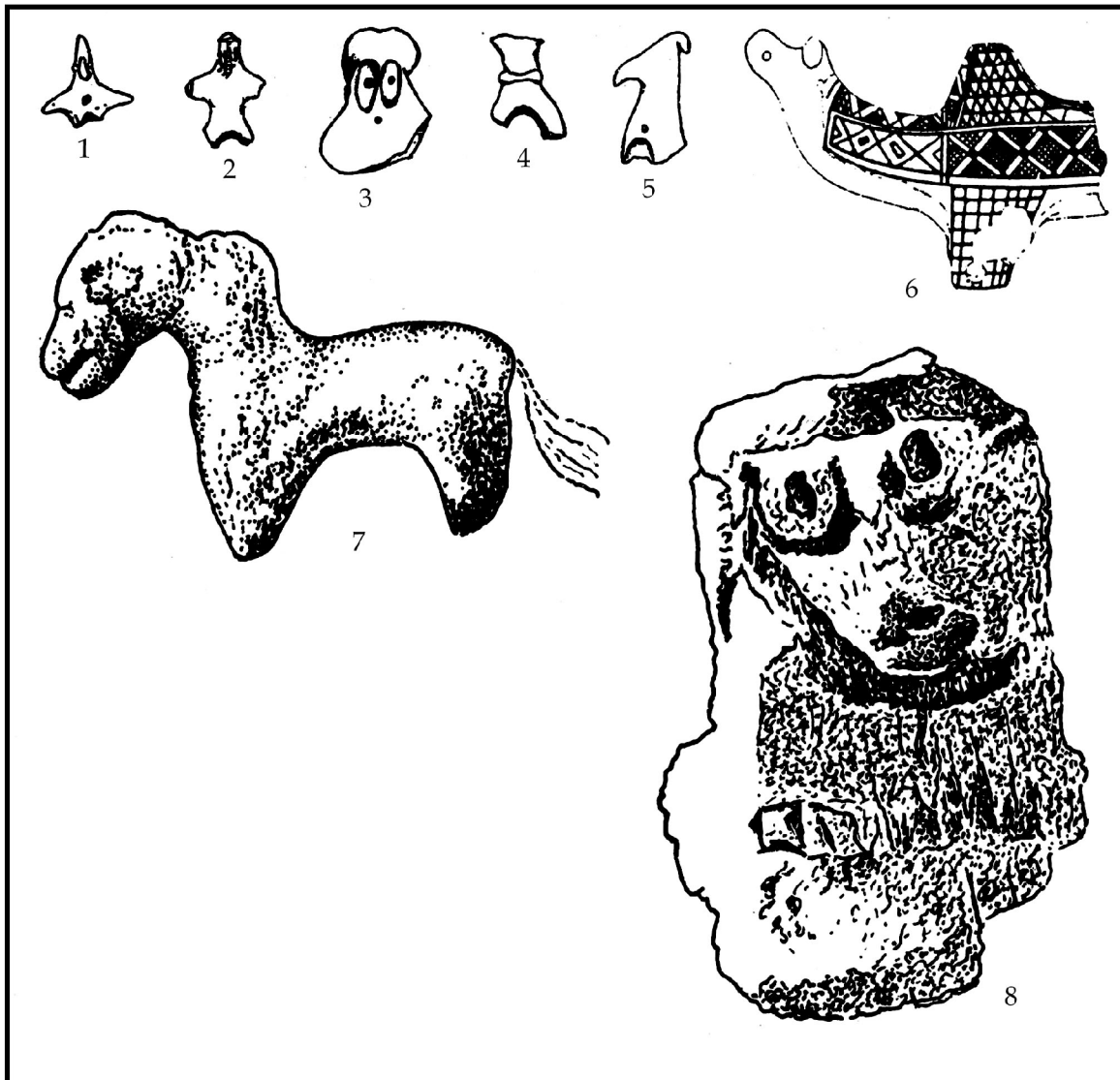


Figure 1-8