

A RECONSIDERATION OF THE KOT DIJI CULTURE IN THE GOMAL PLAIN: PRELIMINARY REPORT OF THE FIRST SEASON 2004-05

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1. Progress of the Research

A Japanese team which was led by Prof. H. Kondo from Tokai University, Japan, started their work at Sir Sahibzada Abdul Qayyum Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, University of Peshawar, (hereafter the Peshawar University Museum) on material from pre-Harappan sites in the Gomal Plain in December 2004.

Early in late 1990s, late Prof. F.A. Durrani of the Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar, had kindly offered Prof. Kondo to conduct a joint excavation at some prehistoric sites, but, unfortunately, this proposal could not be realized.

Following this, Prof. Kondo and M. Koiso took charge of an exhibition of the Indus Civilization in Tokyo in 2000. Owing to great support from many scholars and organizations both in Indian and Pakistan, the exhibition was concluded with a great success. Prof. Ihsan Ali of Peshawar University was also involved in the exhibition and, in consequence, kindly offered a proposal to realise a joint work between the Peshawar University and the Japanese team.

In 2003, Prof. Kondo and his colleague visited Peshawar University and discussed about the joint work with Prof. Ihsan Ali and Prof. Taj Ali of Peshawar University. In 2004, the Japanese team re-visited Peshawar University and, under a generous permission from Prof. M. Farooq Swati, the Chairman of the Department of Archaeology and Museum of Peshawar University, the team started re-observing and re-evaluating pre-Harappan material from sites in the Gomal Plain, that is, Gumla and Rehman Dheri. This short preliminary report is the outcome of the work done in 2004.

2. Aim of the Research

The Gomal Plain, which is situated on the north-eastern fringe of the Balochistan Hill tract, is well-known for the richness of prehistoric sites. In the beginning of 1970s, the site of Gumla was excavated by Prof. A.H. Dani, resulting in a full recognition of the importance of the region for the understanding the pre-Harappan culture. In 1980s, the site of Rehman Dheri was excavated by late Prof. F.A. Durrani, strengthening the result of the Gumla excavations. It is now obvious to all those who are concerned with pre-Harappan and Harappan Cultures that the Gomal Plain for a long time in prehistoric period remained a centre for the development of a complex society and was one of the most important regions for understanding the genesis of the Indus Civilization.

In terms of its importance mentioned above, a better evaluation of the regional history of pre-Harappan and Harappan periods in the Gomal Plain must be developed in relevance to other important areas, such as Hakra in the Punjab and Kachi in Sind. Recent excavations at Harappa and Nausharo are rewriting the history of the genesis and decline of the Harappan Culture, partly revealing the process of transition from pre-Harappan to Harappan periods. In the same way, history of the Gomal Plain must be evaluated in the light of recent excavations, conducted by Prof. A.H. Dani and late Prof. F.A. Durrani.

The present work aims at revealing the significance of the Gomal Plain in the inter-regional interaction during the pre-Harappan period: how the Gomal plain was developed as a nucleus centre, how it created relations with other centres, how the society over here evolved into a complex culture, how the society was transformed with the genesis of the Indus Civilization and so on. To answer these questions, ceramics from Gumla Period IV housed in the Peshawar University Museum were studied critically.

3. Preliminary Results of the Re-observation of Pottery from Gumla

At Gumla four cultural strata were established by the excavator Prof. A.H. Dani. Period I is represented by scanty findings from the lowest layer (L. 13) that take it back to the Neolithic time. Period II, comprising L 12–9, yields pottery assemblage, which could be dated prior to the typical ‘Kot Dijian’ assemblage. Recently this period is proposed to be called as the Tochi-Gomal Phase. Period III, corresponding to L. 8–5, yields typical ‘Kot Dijian’ pottery assemblage. From Period IV, consisting of L 4–1, both ‘Kot Dijian’ and several ‘Harappan’ pottery types are discovered.

In this season, we selected pottery from Period IV to understand the nature of the so-called ‘Kot Dijian’ and ‘Harappan’ pottery and the relationship between the two assemblages. While observing the pottery, shapes, surface treatment (including slip, paintings or other decoration methods) and traces of various modelling techniques were essentially taken into consideration.

Among these traits of pottery, shapes and modelling techniques are considered to be closely related because specific shape can be modelled by a specific modelling technique; the whole shape of a pottery comprises of several formal features that are modelled by several techniques. It is likely that a set of modelling techniques can be considered as a ceramic tradition which could be inherited from generation to generation. From this point of view, it could be possible that the modelling technique would continue even at the time when new shapes are introduced if the potter groups with a common tradition are the same.

Surface treatment, such as motifs, design styles including compositions of motifs and colours used, could indicate a fashion and a trend in a limited time bracket, as well as regional preferences and tradition. Thus, the period of pottery can be specified on the basis of painted motifs and styles. This hypothesis can be illustrated in the pottery sequence at a single site of Mehrgarh at which various painted motifs and styles can be observed period-wise from the fifth to third millennium BC.

At the same time, the change of painted motifs and styles might reflect spatial factors, such as exchange of ideas on motifs among regions. The wide distribution of *pipal* and horned animals or deities all over Balochistan and the Indus Valley both during the pre-Harappan and Harappan phases is an example of this phenomenon. Preference of specific motifs observed over a wide area could be due to common meanings or beliefs associated with the motifs, shared as social symbols among the majority of the given society/societies.

On the basis of these hypotheses on the pottery factors, material from Period IV of Gumla is classified tentatively into the following eight groups. Although in this classification paintings is considered as the primary one, other factors are also taken into consideration.

- Group I: potsherds with black horizontal bands on red painted surface.
- Group II: potsherds with black and red geometric motifs on white slipped surface.
- Group III: potsherds with black and red geometric motifs on plain surface.
- Group IV: potsherds with wavy incised lines by comb-like tool.

Group V: potsherds only white slipped or washed without paintings.

Group VI: potsherds with plant motifs in black on red painted surface.

Group VII: potsherds with red painted surface without paintings.

Group VIII: potsherds with plain surface without any slip or paintings.

Group I

Group I is a dominant group in the pottery from Period IV. Basically, this group shows a continuity with those from Period III in terms compositions of forms and shapes, and decorative techniques and motifs, except for some formal changes.

At the level of forms, this group consists of short-necked jars, straight-sided bowls, shallow bowls, basins, dishes-on-stand, vases with lids and small vases.

In terms of modelling techniques, most of the specimens of this group are characterised by sharp horizontal striations, most probably, with the use of fast-wheel, dominantly observed on the inner surface and the upper half of the outer one, and scraping with some kind of spatula on the lower half of the outer surface. This combination of techniques clearly indicates the use of fast wheel at some stage of modelling process, but it is not obvious whether the whole shape of pot is created from a single lump of clay on a fast wheel. Although it needs further investigation, it is possible on the basis of observation of sections of some large pottery, such as short-necked jars, that the whole shape of pots was modelled with a technique of coil or ring method or technique of segmentary modelling and jointing.

Group II

Group II, characterised by geometric paintings with black and red on white or red surface, comprises straight-sided bowls, flanged jars, basins and shallow dishes. White surface of pot increases visual effects of black and red paintings. In this sense, white surface is specifically related to the existence of complicated geometric paintings. Among the forms of this group, flanged jars are known to be distributed all over the Indus Valley and Balochistan during the pre-Harappan Phase. This form can be an obvious indicator for this phase.

Group III

Group III is characterised by geometric motifs on a plain outer surface. Although belonging to Group II, they are tentatively classified in a distinctive group here. There are straight-sided bowls and a vase with ridged shoulder.

Group IV

Group IV forms a distinguished group in the pottery of Period IV, though limited in number, since its decorative technique of using comb-like tools is peculiar to this group. There are two types in its surface treatment: one with red painted surface and black horizontal lines at rim and another with white slipped surface. The former is common with Group I, while the latter is similar to Group V.

Incised wavy techniques are found not only in the Gomal Plain but also in Ghaggar-Hakra region and other parts in the Punjab. This means that this group from Gumla indicates a relationship or interaction with those regions.

Group V

Group V that has no paintings but for its white slipped or washed surface consisted mainly of specimens, which were described as the 'Harappan' in the excavation report by A.H. Dani.

A group of short-necked vases shows on their shoulder wet ware decoration, which is more abundantly available in central Balochistan at many sites like Mehrgarh and Nausharo. Its characteristic surface treatment as well as wet ware technique shows relations with the Balochistan tradition.

Others, especially tall necked vase, bowl with nail head rim and a bowl with flanged rim are totally different in shape from Groups I to IV, indicating a possibility that these forms appeared with contacts with the 'Harappan' culture, as pointed out in the excavation report.

However, it is worthwhile to notice that these specimens also show traces of scraping technique on the outer surface. Even if these specimens appeared under the influence from the 'Harappan' culture or, in a better expression, 'the outside world', their modelling technique is common with Group I that might be local traditional assemblage at Gumla. This may indicate that there was an obvious intension to produce distinctive pottery with new shapes and a white surface in Period IV, possibly under contacts with the 'Harappan' culture or 'outside' culture, but that they were modelled by traditional techniques. However, this point must call for further investigation with an extensive comparison with material from other sites of the Harappan Phase.

Group VI

Group VI, characterised by black painting on red painted surface, is represented by only two specimens. One is a bowl with a flanged rim and a flat base and another is a fragment of a dish-on-stand. Although the whole composition of black painting is not clear, the motifs seem to be geometrised plants, which is characteristic style of the 'Harappan' pottery.

Besides, it is important to note that string-cut marks are observed on the outer bottom of the bowl. This indicates that a fast wheel was utilised in the process of modelling of this specimen.

Group VII

Group VII is represented by a dish-on-stand with a drooping rim, which is prominently different from those of Group I—a basin and a small vase with similar rims. The shape of this dish-on-stand is similar to that of the 'Harappan' assemblage. However, the shape of the dish-on-stand with a drooping rim is totally different from those of Group I.

Group VIII

Group VIII consists of plain pottery without any slip or painting. Perforated jars, which are well known to characterise the 'Harappan' pottery, are included. These specimens may have probably been imported from some sites of the 'Harappan' culture. A vase with no neck that totally differs in shape from those of Group I shows traces of scraping technique on the outer surface. In this sense, this specimen may be classified into Group V. A basin with a nail-headed rim is also similar to a bowl of Group V. It is highly probable that this group forms of the same category with Group V, that is, new forms in Period IV under contacts with the 'Harappan' culture or the 'outside world'.

4. Problems for further research

In the preparatory observations described above, it should be kept in mind that there are considerable variations in form, shape, surface treatment and modelling techniques. The combination of these factors forms the whole assemblage of the pottery of Period IV. If the

possibility that this assemblage does not reflect an original assemblage but mixture of pottery from various original periods can be excluded, it can be emphasized that the considerable variation of the assemblage characterises the pottery of Period IV at Gumla.

As noticed in the original excavation report, there are roughly two dominant groups in the assemblage, the so-called 'Kot Dijian' and 'Harappan'. In terms of shape and surface treatment, this distinction is quite clear. However, the 'Kot Dijian' includes dominant Group I and flanged jar of Group II, and subsidiary forms of Groups II, III, IV and a part of V (short-necked jar with wet-ware technique), showing a variation in shape and painting. That is, the 'Kot Dijian' pottery at Gumla does not seem to form a single style, but an entity that consists of several traditions or traits. Similarly, among the forms and shapes of Group V, it cannot be said that all of them show typical traits of the 'Harappan' pottery, although it is absolutely clear that typical 'Harappan' traits, such as perforated jars and Group VI, are included side by side.

Thus, the assemblage of Period IV at Gumla poses a great problem on the transition from the pre-Harappan Phase to the Harappan Phase, since the situation in Period IV seems more complicated than ever, as discussed above.

Although in the Punjab and Sind, there are some evidence that the 'Kot Diji' culture, which should be regarded as one of the pre-Harappan cultures, must have prepared a part of the foundation to the formation of a full-fledged urban society of the Indus Civilization, i.e., the Harappa Culture, the situation at Gumla indicates that pre-Harappan traits and Harappan traits coexisted side by side with a clear distinction between the two. This means that there is no continuity from the pre-Harappan Phase to the Harappan Phase, at least, at Gumla, and that the new Harappan Culture did not replace the pre-Harappan culture. The relationship between the two seems to be more complicated.

The similar situation could be found in the east Punjab as well. In this sense, further research should be directed to investigation the relationship between the pre-Harappan culture and Harappan culture, which seems to vary from region to region. Besides, further research of the material from Gumla can propose a model for the relationship between the pre-Harappan and the Harappan cultures.

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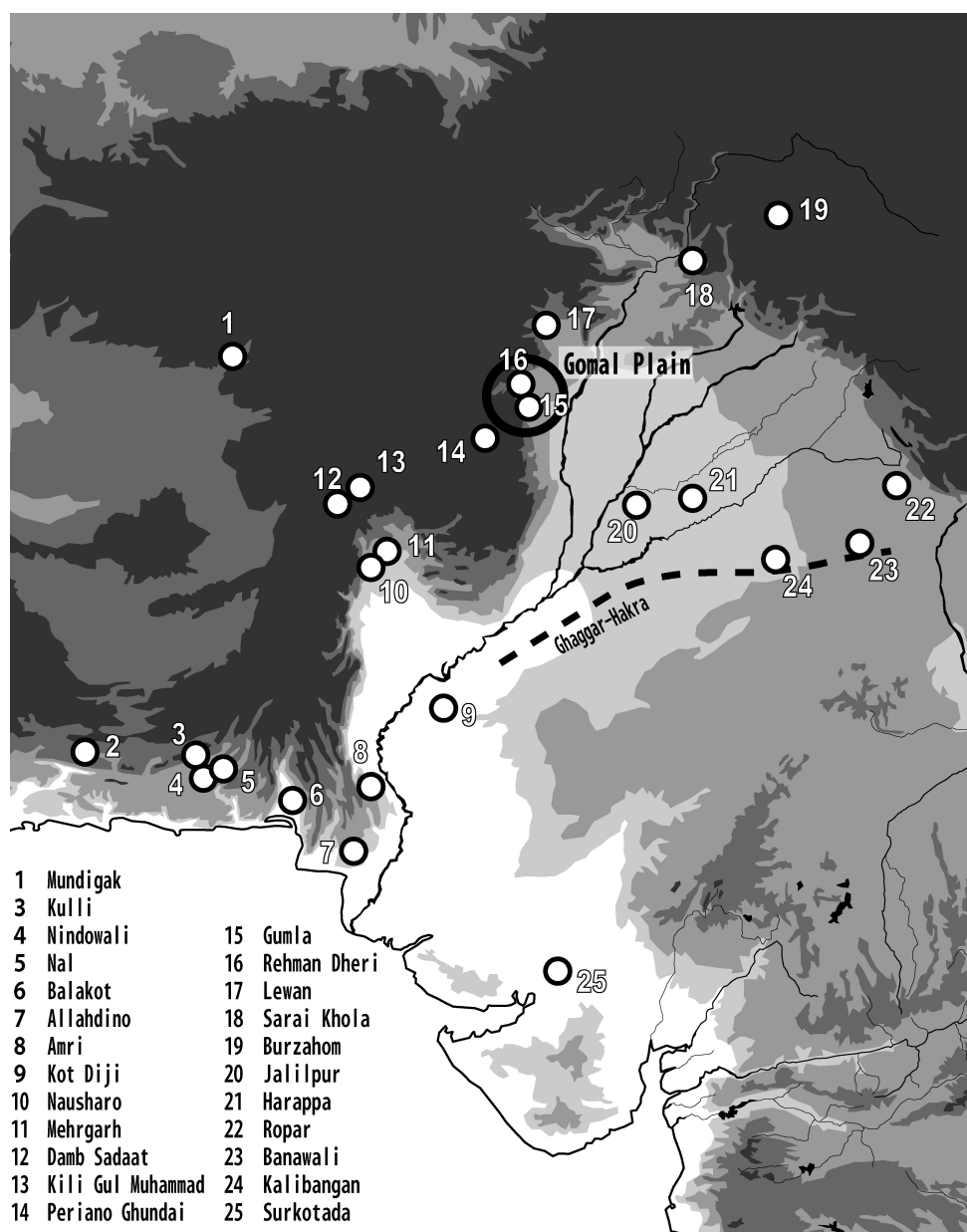


Fig. 1 Map showing the location of Gumla

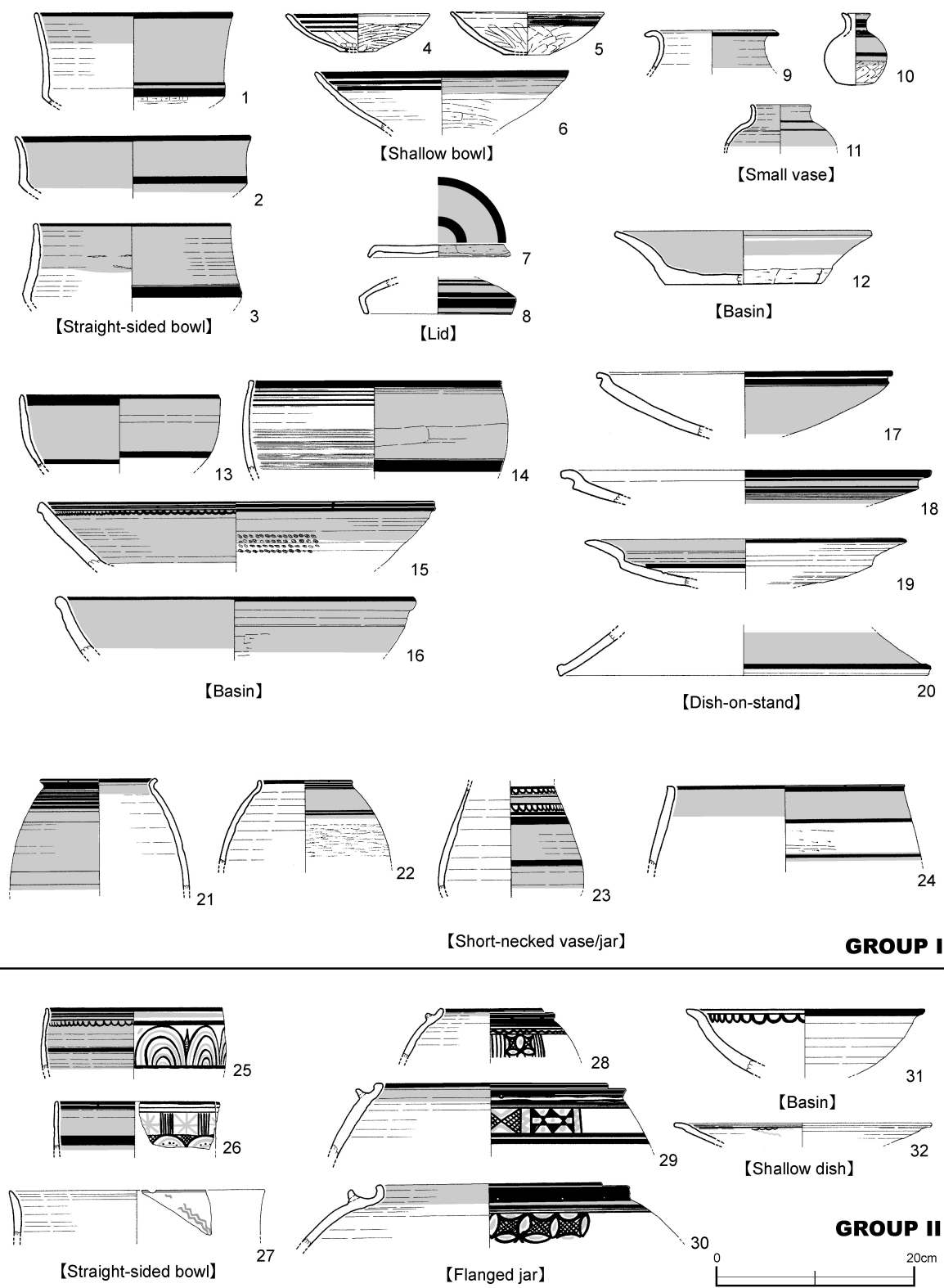


Fig. 2 Pottery from Gumla (1)

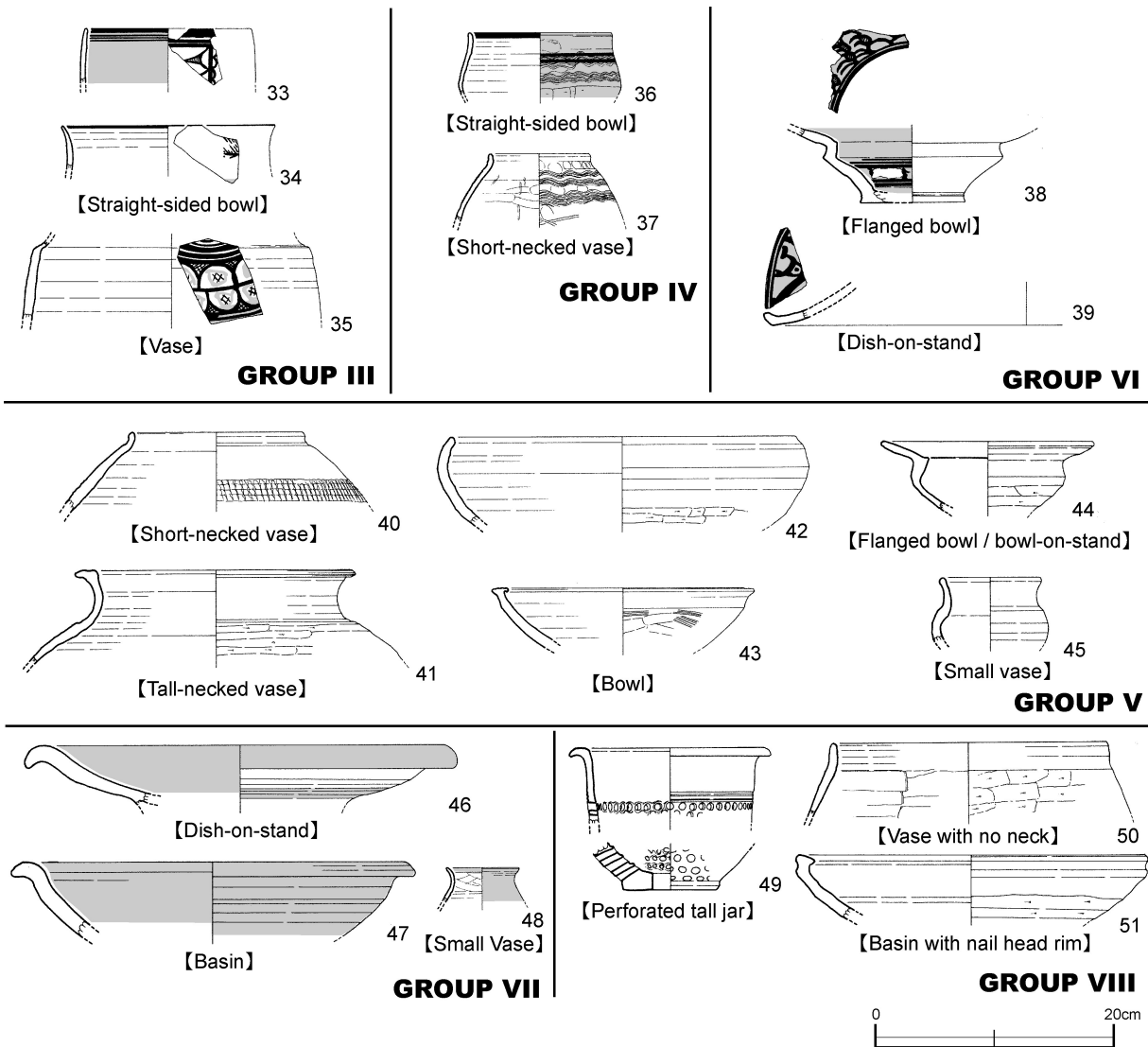


Fig. 3 Pottery from Gumla (2)