

## TERRACOTTA FEMALE FIGURINES FROM PROTOHISTORIC SWAT

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In the frontier region of Pakistan a large number of sites were unearthed in Swat, Dir, Chitral and Peshawar Valley showing a new socio-economic and cultural stages marked by diversity, distinct from the Harappans. Extensive field work done during the last four decades in Swat by the Archaeologists from Pakistan and Europe<sup>1</sup> have resulted into the discovery of protohistoric remains with evidence of various types of burials<sup>2</sup> besides pottery and other funerary items of copper, bronze, shell, terracotta and stone. The protohistoric culture is represented in the last three periods<sup>3</sup> in the sequence of Swat valley, distinguished by hand-made and wheel-thrown grey ware with a variety of shades and decorative techniques. Importantly, the diversity in grey ware reflects distinct chronological differences<sup>4</sup>.

### **Distribution and Chronology**

The results of field work prove beyond doubt a very wide distribution of this culture into a large part of ancient Gandhara. It extends from the western border of Afghanistan to Taxila in the east from River Kabul in the south to Chitral and Kohistan in the north (Map). According to the Italian archaeologist Stacul, Swat valley represents the northernmost limits reached by a post-urban Harappan culture in the sub-continent<sup>5</sup>.

Both in terms of relative dating with sites outside India and Pakistan as also on the basis of a number of Radio-carbon dates. There is evidence of long existence of this protohistoric culture in the valley. The chronology is based mainly on the occurrence of metal, i.e. bronze, copper and iron. In the first period complete burials were seen in Dir assignable between the sixteenth and the fourteenth centuries BC. While in the second period along with complete burials, cremation was also practiced by these people all over the region, datable from the fourteenth to the eleventh centuries BC. In the final phase the graves were characterized by iron, advanced pottery and the burials representing fractional or multiple skeletons assignable to the tenth-ninth centuries BC and continued right upto the historical period. Stacul has sub-divided this into two on the basis of excavations in the Swat valley where the latest of the graves were datable to the fourth-third centuries BC<sup>6</sup>.

### **Terracotta Figurines: Features and Types**

The figurines of both human and animal appear, though scantily, are unique for their distinctive features, different from the specimens earlier reported, associated with the Harappan urbanisation. In protohistoric Swat, in the earlier stage human forms show a very elementary form with limbs reduced to mere stumps. Innovation in the form of violin-shaped females besides the examples with rounded bottom and conjoined legs is of special mention.

The female forms are marked by some peculiar features, not reported earlier in any other region. These are all hand-made and coarse with clay usually pressed into the desired shapes without much exaggeration of dress, ornaments and anatomical details. These are stylized and usually red coloured. These roughly executed forms show a flat schematized body having pinched non-human face. The eyes and ornaments are marked by pricking with back of the head pressed by thumb. While a few figurines have a cross band across the body, others show rosettes marked by pricking. Use of colour or painting, incision, pinholes, pricking, punching, perforations is evident but appliqué band or pellete is not seen for indicating the details like eyes, mouth, limbs, dress or ornaments.

The typological study of female forms would indicate four varieties with their variants. In the first type legs are separately indicated and the head-dress is in the form of a cap or diadem. The second type shows the joined legs with or without head-dress. In the third variety the forms are depicted with rounded bottom, broad hips shaped like violin. The last type shows flat pedestalled base found from the settlement sites.

In the early levels of Aligrama<sup>7</sup> there occur a figurine with broad shoulder and flanks with multiple pinholes and incised lines, arranged in a row running horizontally on the chest with no clear indication of sex. The specimen is fragmentary, crude and thick. The lower portion of it is broken and the head is also missing. But it has a thick raised neck and broad tapering shoulders. The figurines occur around the fireplaces in the earliest occupational level at Loebanr and Bir Kot Ghundai<sup>8</sup> along with animals. Another group also of flat type is generally having two separate long legs and a broad hip<sup>9</sup> is known from these sites, at times resembling a violin or flat i.e., steatopygic type. The violin-shaped figurines are strikingly different from the anthropomorphic forms of earlier periods, which bear typological similarity with those obtained from the Chalcolithic deposit from Anatolia<sup>10</sup> and Southern Turkmenia<sup>11</sup>. Their prominent face and pinched-nose make the appearance non-human. In some examples, large shoulders formed to depict their stumpy arms. Although no specific indication is made to emphasize their physical details, depiction of pinched or appliqué breasts are indicative of their feminine character. The violin-shaped forms<sup>12</sup> are reported from Kalako-deray Period VII which show flat body, rounded bottom, conical pinched head, projected arms, prominent nose, perforated ear and eyes, characterized by an incised cross-belt, a pointed necklace and impressed rosette. Another form of baked clay, partly damaged has perforated ears and incised eyes, close to the specimen known from Loebanr I grave 135. Besides one specimen from Zarif Karuna<sup>13</sup> bears triangular motif marked by multiple incision to emphasize the pubic region<sup>14</sup>. The evidence from Hathial<sup>15</sup> shows the lower portion covered by a group of circles executed by pinholes, without exaggerated breasts. These figurines are of baked variety, either red or grey in colour but having a coarse surface. They are of bi-dimensional type with decoration appearing sometimes on the back side also. The ornaments and anatomical features are marked by pinholes, appliqué pellets and occasionally by incision. In some specimens, dots appearing on two sides of the head signify ear ornament containing a large central plaquette while some other examples have traces of hair marked by parallel lines. The head is stylized and almost triangular in profile<sup>16</sup> modelled flat by pressing but are usually without any elaboration of head-dress. In one or two examples head-gear or a diadem could be seen. The mode of adornment for the decoration of female figurines is either by incision or punctuation and pricking which consists of neck and ear ornaments and occasionally a girdle. The breasts indicated by pinching expressing their feminine character, are slightly raised and pointed. The conical nose is pinched up prominently, closely resembling a parrot or an animal and the eyes are also incised or marked by dots and small holes. The arms are splayed and the shoulders are broad<sup>17</sup>.

The figurines with conjoined legs have been obtained from the graves of Loebanr, Katelai, Zarif Karuna and Hathial. In this category also there are variants with their bottom portion delineated in different styles, such as rounded, pointed or conjoined legs, separated by a deep incised line as found at Zarif Karuna. The specimens from Loebanr<sup>18</sup> and Katelai show a pointed bottom below the thighs, heavy buttock and splayed arms. Almost similar representation occurs at Hathial<sup>19</sup> also. The waist band depicted below the waist portion is composed of three rosettes with the central one bigger in size. Two holes each occur at the back side on the shoulders and the hips. The specimen from Zarif Karuna is notable for having a fan-shaped head-dress<sup>20</sup> which has been adorned with a series of horizontal incised lines in three groups, arranged in double lines with oblique strokes. In this example the neck ornament also has been shown by similar incisions. This kind of linear neck ornament is noteworthy which possibly indicates a simple string or a chain. The necklaces comprise

multiple pinholes marked around its neck. The face and breasts are executed in appliqué style, giving an impression of goat or the appearance of an animal as reflected by her animal-like projected features<sup>21</sup>.

The examples with split legs are also decorated with similar ornaments with broad shoulders and stumpy arms having no marked variation in portrayal. Such specimens have been obtained from Loebanr, Timargarha, Aligrama, Katelai, Balambat, etc., representing both, male and female forms. In case of female forms, hair is raised up smoothly with a slight curve in front and ending in v-shape. The example of female forms from Loebanr<sup>22</sup> is in fragmentary condition without any indication of limbs. A series of pinholes in three parallel lines occur to signify her braids. From Butkara, a bust of human figurine was obtained with similar hair style at the back.

### Parallels

While the earlier forms are indicative of local origin, outside influence or intrusion could be marked in rounded bottom with broad hips and violin-shaped forms. Of all these forms, the violin-shaped form is unique besides those with rounded bottom or conjoined peg-like legs. Such type of forms are also known from the South cemetery at Sibri<sup>23</sup> in Kachi plain (Pakistan) besides from the contemporary chalcolithic and Early Iron Age sites of Haryana<sup>24</sup>, Central India<sup>25</sup> and Ganga valley<sup>26</sup> in India. The violin-shaped forms are unique for its parallel could be traced in the early Iron Age Cultures in India showing similar decoration. In the Indo-Gangetic divide and the Ganga valley, the inhabitants using the Painted Grey Ware introduced a variety of figurines in terracotta, particularly those depicting violin-shaped forms besides the female figurines with broad hips. The pre-NBPW deposit in the central Ganga valley is also distinguished by the occurrence of unique female form with broad hips adorned with an appliqué girdle<sup>27</sup>. Along with this, the violin-shaped female forms also continue to appear in Central India<sup>28</sup> with details of the body marked by incision. In all these forms, navel is distinctly shown. While the earlier representation with broad hip is more naturalistic, the one with violin-shape appears to be merely symbolic. Almost coeval in time these specimens, perhaps served as foundation or models for evolution of female forms in later period in terracotta and stone. This type of form is also known from South Central Asia, Near East and Middle East. Examples from Tell Ahmar and Tell Brak in Mesopotamia (3000 BC); Tepe Gawra in Assyria, Altyn Tepe in Central Asia associated with the burials, Sumer, Early Bronze Age of Anatolia and the eneolithic culture of Tripolie which would perhaps speak of some ethnic, social and trade contacts during that period<sup>29</sup>.

The significance and purpose of these figurines associated with the grave culture is not easy to determine, but they suggest that the inhabitants were accustomed to place in their graves, the objects of beauty and rarity to help the dead on his new journey of life. The examples obtained from the settlement sites were perhaps connected with some domestic cult<sup>30</sup> like fertility or agriculture connected with magico-ritual cult. According to Tucci<sup>31</sup> these figurines cannot be classified under totems as suggested by Dani<sup>32</sup> but he considers them as varieties of local goddesses or hypotases of the so-called Magna Mater or more simply the goddess of fertility. The tiny flat figurines of terracotta in the final phase of the Swat necropolises have been defined as presenting an archaic flavour.

The post-Harappan terracotta figurines reveal a marked change from the Harappan terracottas mainly in respect of stylistic variations, aesthetic quality and embellishment, which declined almost totally in the post-Harappan times. Two main features are noticed in the post-Harappan period, first, the limited production and second, the absence of anatomical details as found in the preceding culture of the Harappans. The study indicates that technically though the earlier style continues, the stylization in modelling of the earlier periods decreases gradually. The human figurines were not

naturalistically modelled. The heavy hip, however, characterizes the female forms. The composite forms with bird or animal-like face and the body that of a female and stylized figure with violin-shape, rounded or conjoined legs survive with very little emphasis on the anatomical details<sup>33</sup>. These feminine representations are perhaps the forerunners of the elaborate female forms with voluptuous hips of the Ganga valley which became the main centre of attraction for terracotta modelling that served as the primary source for further evolution of later art forms in baked clay, thus bridging the gap between the two urbanizations. The feminine forms were more common now and had a deep rooted impact on the stone sculptures fashioned in a variety of style in the succeeding phases of Indian culture.

What distinguishes the terracotta art traditions of different stages is primarily the variation of forms and qualitative change in the delineation of figurines. The grey ware though of related variety, occurs in the Gandhara grave culture before the middle of second millennium BC, it will not be without any basis to look for the origin of the iron using pre-NBPW culture towards the north-west, where these new elements occur as early as 1600 BC onwards.

Thus, it would not be out of place to mention here that the introduction of new art forms in Gandhara region was the result of the advent of new people showing affinities with north-eastern Iran and Turkmenia. It also suggests movements of new people or group from the north-west and the impact could be noticed on their material culture. This stage marks a partial break in the cultural tradition from post Harappan period to a local or regional culture. It is this phase which served as the formative stage for the growth of urbanization in the NBPW period.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Please refer to Bibliography.

<sup>2</sup> These excavations revealed extensive cemeteries characterized by inhumation, cremation and urn burials succeeding a local Neolithic culture. These graves were discovered for the first time by G. Stacul who termed it as pre-Buddhist because some stupas were found over these cemeteries at Butkara and Katelai. Dani located similar type of graves in the southern part of Dir district, Bajaur and in the Peshawar valley, north of River Kabul and renamed these as Gandhara Grave culture for their location in the Gandhara region (Dani 1967). Silvi Antonini and Stacul ((1972) termed these as protohistoric graves.

<sup>3</sup> These last three periods are best represented in the valley. In the final phase of this protohistoric period, iron appears but with no significant change in the material remains. G. Stacul (1969a), pp. 44-91; and (1970), pp. 92-102.

<sup>4</sup> This culture was previously known from the graves but subsequent excavations revealed settlement sites at Balambat on the opposite side of the Panchkora river, A.H. Dani (1967), pp. 237-246; Aligrama, G. Stacul et al. (1975), pp. 291-321; (1977), pp. 151-205; Loebanr III and Bir-kot-Ghundai, G. Stacul (1976), pp. 13-30; (1980), pp. 67-76 and (1978), pp. 137-150 ; Hathial, G.M. Khan (1983), pp. 35-44.

<sup>5</sup> In the Swat valley there is an increase in the number of sites which demonstrate new form of stable agricultural settlements connected with population growth, marked not only by technological evolution of pottery and stone tools but also a new settlement pattern, well-developed agriculture as revealed by the discovery of wheat, barley, oats and rice, multiple long distance trade and human figurines which testify new ideology, G. Stacul (Cambridge 1984), pp. 209-210.

<sup>6</sup> G. Stacul (New Delhi 1979), p.341 and (1974), pp.239-243; and *op. cit.* (1969a), pp. 44-91.

<sup>7</sup> G. Stacul (1977), fig. 42; also *op.cit.* (Cambridge 1984 ), fig. 26: 5 c-d .

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* (1984), fig. 26. 5.

<sup>9</sup> G. Stacul (Leiden 1979), fig. 50.

<sup>10</sup> Violin-shaped female form from Anatolia is noticed in Early Bronze Age. H. Von Der Osten (Chicago1937).

- <sup>11</sup> V.M. Masson et al. (London 1972), figs. 40, 42-43.
- <sup>12</sup> G. Stacul (1993), pp.69-94 also SAA 2001 (Paris).
- <sup>13</sup> G.M. Khan (1979), pl. XVII A.
- <sup>14</sup> The broad hips and pubic triangle is also known from the Chalcolithic cultures of Central Asia, Turkmania, prehistoric cemeteries (c. 4000 BC) in Nile Valley, Egypt, Uruk (c. 2500 BC), Tepe Gawra in Assyria, Iraq. Genital Triangle is also marked in the figurines from the pre-dynastic Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia, Iran, Asia Minor to Troy, the Aegean Islands, Crete and also to southern Europe. Eric Neumann (London 1955), pls. 10-11, 24 and E.O. James (London 1960), p. 49.
- <sup>15</sup> A.H. Dani, *op. cit.*, (1986); p. 36 and Khan (1983), pp. 35-44.
- <sup>16</sup> C.S. Antonini et al. (Rome 1972), pl. LIC.
- <sup>17</sup> This cross band is termed a *chhannavira* which is seen on the chest of a figurine from Timargarha but it does not appear to be a female form. Similar type is also known from Aligrama. The figurine from Timargarha shows a red coloured figurine with pinched-face and a depression at the back of its head, eyes shown by dotted circles and a thread marked by incision, has been depicted on both the shoulders in criss-cross manner. The figurines from Balambat are fragmentary and crude, closely resembling the type recovered from Timargarha. At Timargarha the human forms are associated with the ritual of fractional burials but at Loebanr and Katelai anthropomorphic figurines are associated with single and double inhumation burials, cremation burials or burial with no traces of bone. These are placed under the arm-pits or head or near the deceased body.
- <sup>18</sup> C. S. Antonini et al, *op.cit.* (Rome 1972), pl. LI A-B.
- <sup>19</sup> A.H. Dani, *op.cit.* (1986), p.36.
- <sup>20</sup> The variety with fan-shaped head-dress could be the forerunner of the ones reported from Charsada, Sardheri and many other Sunga specimens demonstrating a transformation of head-gear into rosettes indicating thereby a strong affinity with these forms.
- <sup>21</sup> The animal headed forms are also known from the early Iron Age sites in India
- <sup>22</sup> C.S. Antonini, *op.cit.* (1963), pp. 23-24.
- <sup>23</sup> M. Santoni (Cambridge 1984), fig. 8.4 b.
- <sup>24</sup> J.P. Joshi (New Delhi 1993), pl. XXX, 2 and 5.
- <sup>25</sup> N.R. Banerjee (New Delhi 1987), pl. XXVI A.
- <sup>26</sup> Arundhati Banerji, (New Delhi 1994), pls. 85-86.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pls.87,94, 96 and 99.
- <sup>28</sup> N.R. Banerjee, *op.cit.* (1987), pl .XXVI A.
- <sup>29</sup> E.O. James, *op. cit.* (1960), pp. 48-49.
- <sup>30</sup> The violin-shaped forms perhaps formed part of a magico-ritual fertility rite which served as the life-producing mother – the personification of fertility. Along with bulls, worship of goddess was supreme as a symbol of fertility, prosperity and well being of the society to venerate maternity as a divine symbol.
- <sup>31</sup> G. Tucci, *op.cit.* (1977), pp. 29-30.
- <sup>32</sup> A.H. Dani, *op. cit.* (1967), p.32.
- <sup>33</sup> Arundhati Banerji, *op. cit.* (1994), pls.89-100.

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### **Abbreviations**

AP (Ancient Pakistan); EW (East and West); JCA (Journal of Central Asia); PA (Pakistan Archaeology); SAA (South Asian Archaeology).