

An Unglazed Jug with Moulded Decoration from Gor Khatri, Peshawar City, Northwest Pakistan

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An unglazed jug with moulded decoration, briefly referred to earlier in a preliminary note on an archaeological excavations at Gor Khuttree [*sic*], situated in the walled city of Peshawar (Ali *et alii* 1997: 197 ff.), needs a detailed description for presentation to the scholars taking interest in the early Islamic period pottery.

Made of fine clay, it is a small thin fabric jug, which is lightly fired and has a creamy surface. It is 19cm high and 11.7cm wide at the maximum. Manufactured in four distinct parts—neck, shoulder, lower half and handle, the last is applied at the end (Grube 1976: 33; Lane 1968: 27, Pl. 36a).¹ The first three parts, although, fused together skillfully, yet a seam between the lower body and the shoulder is clearly visible (Pl. 1).

The neck having flaring sides and wide-open funnel shaped mouth is wheel made. The mouth is partially broken off and it is difficult to say whether it was spouted or not. The upper half is decorated with incised wavy lines worked out with a sharp tool. The base of the neck carries a band of thumbnail incision. The neck is as high as the lower part of the vessel. The lower end of the neck is fitted into a slit in the shoulder and fused together (Pl. 2).

The handle, having a raised prominent midrib and a buttoned top, is handmade and applied to the vessel after its completion. The lower-body, wheel-made, has a disc base with a circular groove and is decorated with incised lines like those of the neck, but framed by a simple incised line above and below.

The middle part of the vessel, i.e. the shoulder, is moulded having finger impressions on the inner surface. Decoration on this part consists of a pearl band, rosettes, scrolls and inscriptions. The pearl-bands, originated in the pre-Islamic period and associated with the Sāsānians, were frequently used in the succeeding centuries and assimilated into the arts and crafts of the Muslims. The decorative motif rosette, used since remote antiquity, narrates the same story. Grube has mentioned one of the earliest stamped rosette examples on a bottle of the eighth century AD. He has also described three bowls with slight variation in the decoration along with other preceding and contemporary examples (Grube 1976, nos. 1, 3-4: 25).

Scrolls and tendrils, their roots extending to the Hellenistic and Roman cultures, found their way into the arts and crafts of the Umayyad and the Abbasid dynasties from the Byzantinian scheme of decoration. They are either used as a background to inscriptions or occurs alone. In the present case they fill the space between rosettes and Arabic words, even some letterheads such as 'wāw' and 'alif' terminate into scrolls or trilobed designs. Another decoration on the shoulder is an Arabic benedictory inscription. Such inscriptions became an integral part of buildings, ceramics and metal objects in the early Islamic arts and crafts. The present description of the jug, inscribed with three words, provides an opportunity to correct my earlier reading of the inscription, which is written in the fluent cursive Kufic style. The words read as follow:

Transliteration: *al-salāmah wa al-daulah al-barakah*

Translation: 'security and good fortunes, blessing [to the owner of the vessel].

Orthographically the letters have certain shortcomings in the making of the inscribed letters. It seems more likely that the scribe rather than the mould-maker is responsible for this mishap who handed over the script to the latter for copying. This is obvious from the interpolation of an

additional '*alif*' between '*wāw*' and '*lām*' in the word '*al-daula*'. The second point seems to be a mistake of the mould-maker. In this case the '*lā*' and '*mīm*' of the word '*al-salāma*' are fused together. The mould-maker, master in his skill, has placed four rosettes at equal distance from each other to give the register symmetry and, for this purpose, he even did not hesitate to split the word '*al-daula*' into two.

Besides the jug under consideration, a few potsherds with moulded relief decoration have also been recovered from the same context in a separate but recent excavation conducted by the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of the Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan, in June 2003 (Pl. 3).² Excavated from a limited area, these potsherds suggest that some moulded vessels were used as utility ware. Two of the pieces are exactly identical in decoration to the Jug described above (Pl. 4). One of them shows an incomplete rosette and the Arabic word [*al-sa*] *lāma*, which proves that other pots with similar inscriptions and decoration also existed at the site. Moreover, the inner surface of the sherd has finger impressions illustrating that the clay was pressed into the mould with fingers. Close similarity between the old and new examples indicates manufacture of the vessels in the same mould. Another fragment shows an incomplete Arabic letter [*al*] *salāma* and an incised decoration. Slightly differing in workmanship from the earlier examples, it seems to have been produced in another mould (Pl. 4). Another sherd of fine thin fabric bespeaks of a more refined finishing process. Made of whitish fine well lavigated clay, it varies from the preceding examples in artistic details. It shows precision and a marked development in the moulding technique. The inscription is executed in *floriated Kufic* style and has a refined workmanship.

Close proximity of our examples to the moulded decoration of the Abbasid period does not date this jug to the 8th-9th centuries, it rather shows the continuation of the pre-Islamic, Sāsānian and Byzantinian, artistic traditions through to the Islamic period. All published types of early Islamic pottery are accidental discoveries and are dated, on the basis of certain characteristic cultural/regional traits, to the first five centuries of the Muslim era. Undervalued by the art dealers, the commonly used unglazed pottery, either with relief or painted decoration, has been neglected from further investigation (Lane: 27). Although very few early Islamic period sites have been properly excavated, they have enriched our understanding of the potter's art and its development through space and time.

Pottery with moulded relief decoration has been recorded from various sites in Iranian Baluchistan and the Makran coastal line in Pakistan (Stein 1937). In Iran the Islamic period pottery, dated from the early time to the 13th century, has been excavated from Siraf. The origin of unglazed pottery with moulded decoration from here is traced back to the Sāsānian period (Whitehouse 1968: 14; fn. 26). An unglazed Jug with several bands of relief decoration found at Tepe Dasht-i-Deh in southern Iran was manufactured in four different moulds and the different parts were joined together skilfully (Williamson 1971: 182-83).

Among the important archaeological sites excavated by the French Archaeological Mission in Afghanistan are Balkh, Bamiyan and Lashkari Bazar near Bust. Pottery from Balkh has several sherds with moulded decoration or Naskhi inscriptions, which are mostly wrought on the rims or shoulders of vessels dated to the 10th-12th centuries (Gardin 1957: 35-36; Pl. XIV, nos. 4,7,8,9).

Archaeological excavations conducted at Banbhore and Jalilpur in Pakistan have yielded a large quantity of stamped as well as moulded pottery (Khan 1976: 39-40; *Pakistan Archaeology* 1968: 176 ff., 186 ff.).

The Jug under review, being of great historical significance, is discovered in a stratified deposit supported by numismatic evidence, which dates it in the reign of Mas'ud of the Ghaznavid dynasty.

This article is dedicated to Prof. Dr. Farzand Ali Durrani in recognition of his meritorious services, which he rendered for the promotion and development of Archaeology and Museum Studies in Pakistan in general and the Northwest Frontier Province in particular. He established the Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar, on a firm foundation and through his untiring efforts added to it Sir Sahibzada Abdul Qayyum Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, which is a jewel of the University of Peshawar. His archaeological excavations at Rahman Dheri, a pre-Harappan site at Dera Ismail Khan in the Gomal valley added a new chapter to the Bronze Age Archaeology of the subcontinent and changed the classical view about the origin and development of the world fame Harappan civilization. His love for the city of Peshawar is evident from the fact that he initiated Gor Khatri Research Project in order to establish the cultural profile of the city.

His services will be remembered a long way in the history of Archaeology and Museum Studies in Pakistan both at home and abroad.

In conclusion let us repeat together the inscription on the jug mentioned above for Prof. (Dr.) Farzand Ali Durrani: '*Security, Good Fortunes and Blessings*' for the honourable and dedicated Teacher.

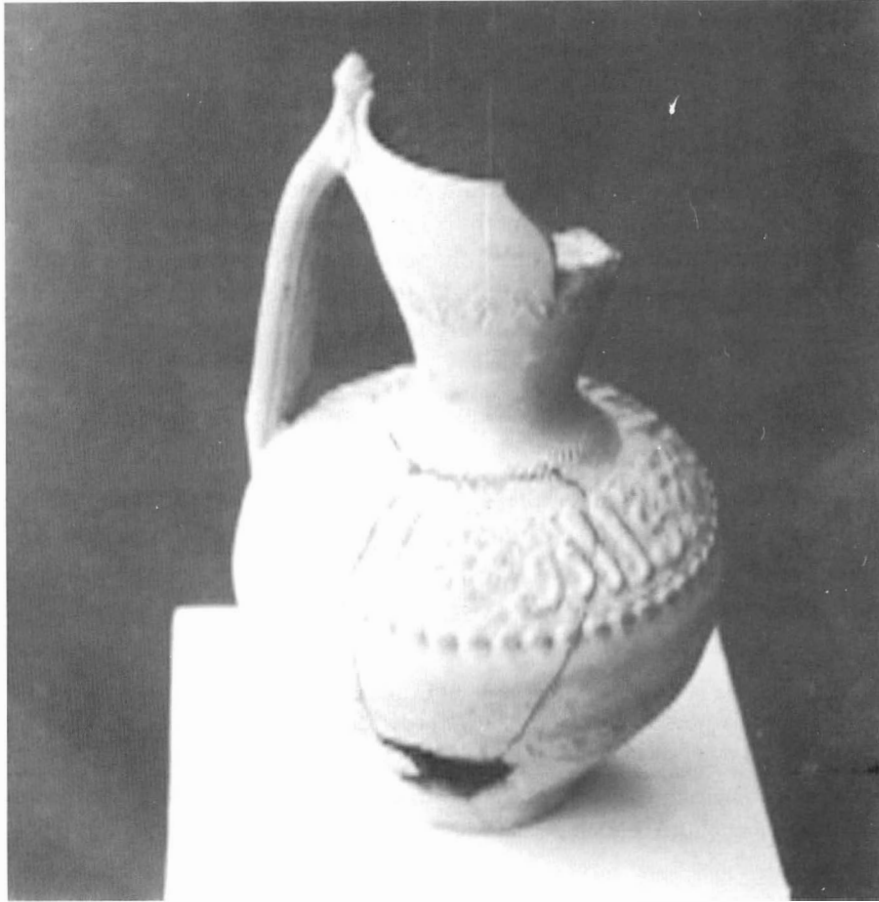
Notes

¹ In the fn. 2 Grube states that the pot was probably made in two different moulds, one each for its upper and lower body. The top, neck, spout and handle were applied after the two body parts had been united. The joints of various parts are so skilfully fused together that none of them are clearly visible.

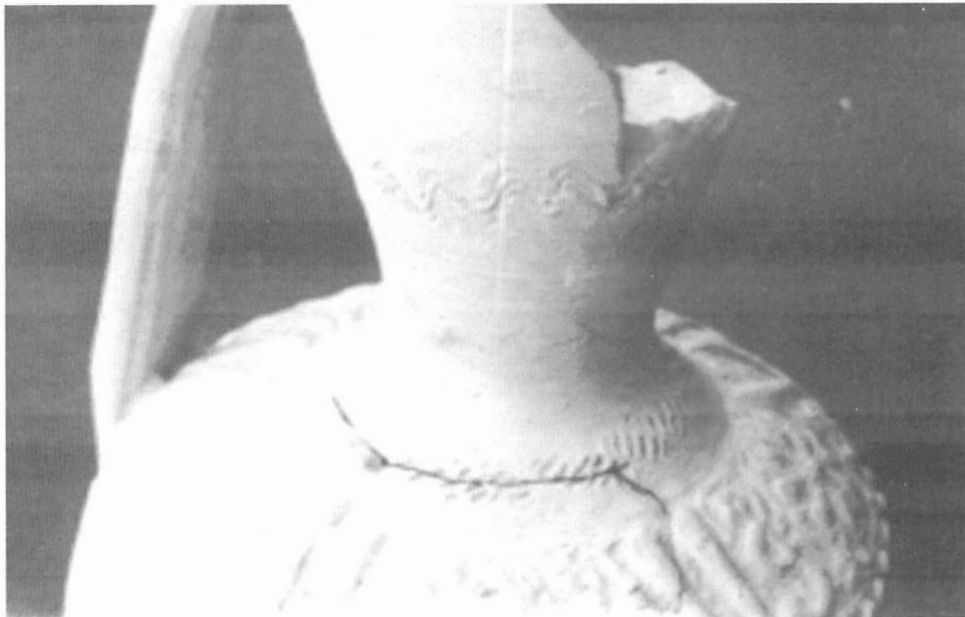
² The author visited the archaeological excavations at Gor Khatri and photographed the inscribed sherds illustrated here with the permission of the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Govt. of the NWFP.

Bibliographic References

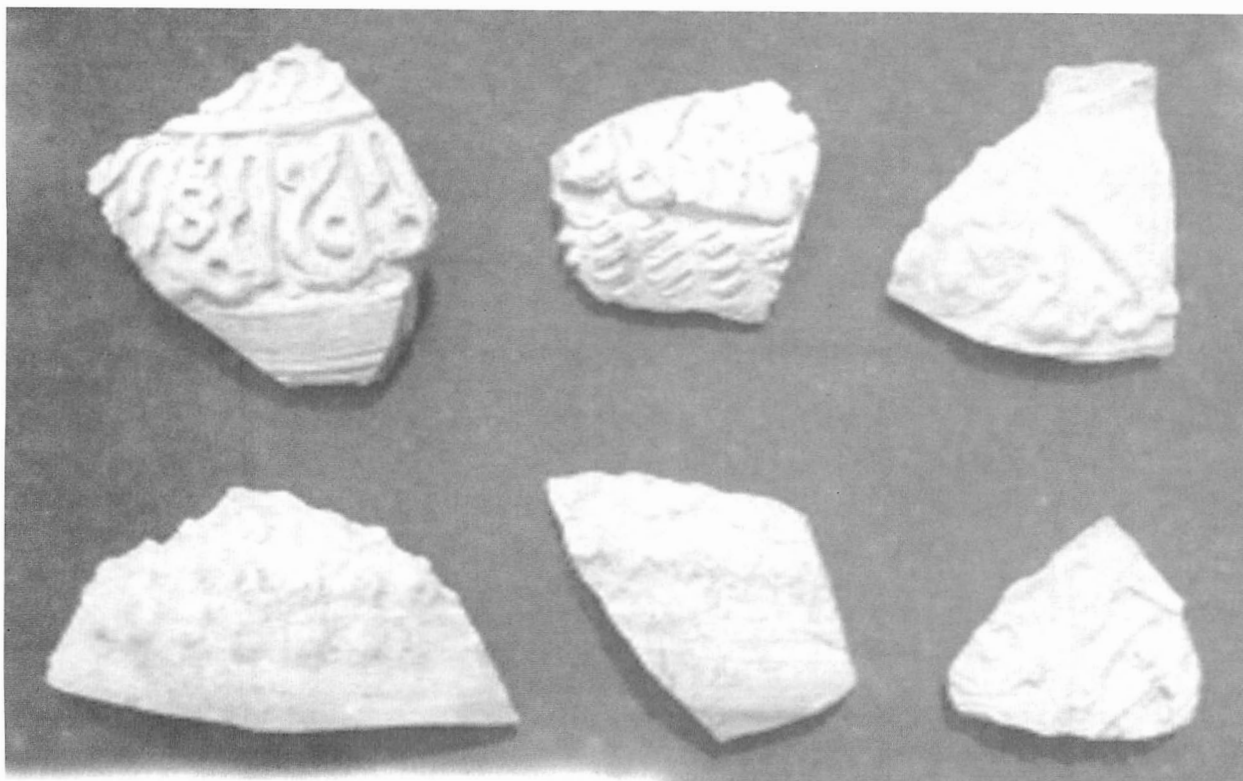
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Pl. 1: Gor Khatri: View of the jug.



Pl. 2: Gor Khatri: Fusion of the neck and shoulder.



Pl. 3: Gor Khatri: Potsherds with moulded relief decoration.



Pl. 4: Gor Khatri: Pot sherd with the Arabic incomplete word [al] salāma.