

A Brief Note on Archaeological Site Panj Pai in Balochistan

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Introduction

Being the largest province comprising 43% of the territory of Pakistan, Balochistan is barren and thinly populated, however, richer in cultural heritage, existing here in the form of ancient historical and archaeological remains in its desolate plains and valleys. The remains located along the trade route from Assyria across to South Asia offer solution to many enigmatic problems in the common cultural history of man.

The culture richness of the province is attested by a number of geographers, explorers and archaeologists. During the colonial period, renowned scholars and the British agents such as Sir Aurel Stein, H. Hargreaves, Henry Pottinger, T.G. Carless, Charles Masson, Capt. Christie and Gen. Malcolm carried out explorations and laid trial trenches here. After independence in 1947, W.A. Fairservis, Henry Fields and B. de Carde have provided a landmark in the archaeology of Balochistan. Moreover, a number of foreign archaeologists such as G.F. Dales, R.L. Raikes, M. Casal, J.F. Jarrige, V.A. Piacentini and Renald Besenval have conducted excavations, while some of them are still working in various parts of the province.

From 1950 to 57, the team of the American Museum of Natural History, headed by Fairservis, duplicated the excavations and explorations conducted by A. Stein in Balochistan and published the work in a comprehensive report defining and classifying pottery as well. In 1948 and 1957, another important but similar work was accomplished by the British expedition, headed by B. de Carde. They dug out trial trenches at some sites and explored fifty-four archaeological sites in Kalat and Southern Balochistan including Panj Pai.

In 1955, Dr. Henry Field led an expedition on behalf of the Peabody Museum of Harvard University, USA, to Balochistan. The objectives of this team were to trace Stone Age culture, record anthropometric and ethnological data and establish their relationship with those of Southwest Asia and India. During the course of reconnaissance, the team visited twenty three sites in Kej Valley and lower Balochistan and made a large surface collection of pottery and other finds. In 1999, a team of Peabody Museum, this time headed by Prof. Lamberg Karlovsky, again came to Balochistan and visited a number of sites including Panj Pai. A five-member team of Harvard University and Dr. Jamshed Choksy of Indiana University arrived for excavation in the first week of August 2000. The author was attached with the team as coordinator of the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan. After arranging accommodation, purchase of excavation tools and making security measures the excavation started at the site of Panj Pai on 17th August.

The site located in Tehsil Panj Pai, 115 km to the southwest of Quetta city, situated in a desolate plain is a huge mound, 180x135m with 18.0m height from the surrounding level. A trial trench measuring 18.0x3.0m was excavated in the northern part of the mound to assess its archaeological potential. The excavation was concluded on 25th August and the trench was refilled to avoid any natural and human hazard.

To retrieve a detailed information, the trial trench was divided into three parts, each under a separate supervisor, that reflected variable characters. Due to shortage of time, these parts were excavated to different depths ranging from 0.6 to 1.5m and none of them was dug out reached to virgin soil.

Potsherds recorded from here are similar to those from the Sasanian period, Dam Sadat I, Kechi Beg II, Killi Gul Muhammad II, Faiz Muhammad I and Mchergarh II/A. Besides, a great number of Quetta wet ware was also recovered. This is enough evidence collected in a short time and justifies further work here. On the basis of comparative study of the pottery and exposed structures, the site can be tentatively dated from the 4th millennium BC to the 5th century AD. However, results of the samples collected for radiocarbon dating are still awaited.

Excavation of Trench I

The first part, measuring 6.0x3.0m, of the trench located at the top of the mound turned out to be a loose soil mixed with pebbles, charcoal fragments and plain potsherds of thick texture. After digging here for 0.3m, the soil gradually became compact towards the eastern portion, where indication of mud-bricks was coming up. Further down there were a mud-platform and a wall like structure running in east-west direction. The structure was disturbed on the south, probably, due to reconstruction activity of some sort. Leaving them undisturbed, the remaining part of the trench towards north was dug out. At the depth of 1.05m, the soil was loose mixed with fragments of painted pottery, charcoal and stone pebbles. Two stone-blades, one animal figurine and a fragment of human figurine were collected. The notable finds are black-on-grey ware and black-on-red ware fragments on a floor at the depth of 1.2m. The excavation continued in this trench up to the depth of 1.35m from the surface.

Excavation of Trench II

The second part of the trench, measuring 6.0x3.0m and supervised by another excavator, was excavated to the depth of 1.5m. No notable features were encountered here and it seemed to be a rubbish pit. However, specimens of buff-ware, Quetta-ware and ribbed-ware have been collected from the excavated debris along with two stone-blades and a stone-ball. The presence of charcoal, loose earth and disturbed lay out to a depth of 1.5m is an interesting evidence, which requires further examination to unveil the socio-economic set up of the settlement.

Excavation of Trench III

The third part of the trench, 6.0x3.0m in size and located towards the north in the lower part of the mound, was almost covered with eroded material and its surface littered with potsherds. In the beginning of excavation loose soil was observed that gradually became compact. Structures of mud-bricks in north-south direction were uncovered at the depth of 0.9m. At the depth of 1.2m from the surface probably a floor-level was noted. Black-on-red ware and some Kechi Beg type ware were collected in addition to terracotta bead, stone blades and a broken animal figurine.

A variety of pottery collected from all the three parts of the trial trench, surface of the site and debris of illegal diggers have been classified in the already established types of the Quetta valley and northern Balochistan. These are: (1) Faiz Mohammad Ware, (2) Kechi Beg Ware, (3) Quetta Buff Ware and (4) Wet and Ribbed Ware.

1. Faiz Muhammad Ware

This specimen of pottery is classified into the following two groups: (A) Black-on-red Ware and (B) Grey Ware (Pl. 1).

A. BLACK ON RED WARE

This type of Quetta ware consists of flat-bottomed open bowls with everted rims, and small mouthed vases with smooth finish and fine paste, decorated with suspended vertical and horizontal black bands, diagonal lines drawn from the neck. Horizontal bands, diagonal hatching, parallel

horizontal strokes, lozenges and bands are common designs. Black-on-red is a typical type of Killi Gul Muhammad ware corresponding to periods IV and V of Mehergarh.

Its two variants are handmade coarse and wheel-made fine paste ware. There is no stratigraphical difference.

B. GREY WARE

A fine Black-on-grey ware is a typical type of Faiz Muhammad site. The decoration usually restricted to the interior of open vessels is found on the rim and shoulder, generally between the rim and the carinated point. It has the following three variants:

- i. This variant including plates of various types is wheel made and has a fine sandy texture, smooth surface and ring-base. It occurs in period G-2 of Damp Sadat in Quetta valley.
- ii. This wheel-made variant has fine-paste smooth finish and is decorated with bold geometrical patterns and, sometimes, stylised birds. Other decorative features include hanging loops, wavy and zigzag lines, sunrays, floated sigma, snakes, dots and circles.
- iii. The third variant also wheel made has sandy texture and smooth finish. It is decorated with floral, geometrical and small wavy patterns, and combination of fine-needle, chequer, parallel painted saw-tooth motifs, and unusual motifs with expanded horns.

2. Kechi Beg Ware

This is an important type of Quetta ware characterised by fine line drawing and red paint interlinear banding. The decorative features are parallel lines, semicircles in horizontal sequence and geometrical designs in red or red brown colour. The pot types, usually small, contain various forms of simple open bowls, straight walled bowls with flaring rims, small mouthed jars with pinched neck and straight walled vases. The rim is usually painted black. A unique type is that of Kechi Beg delicate ware of open and small mouthed jars, decorated on the inner surface. It establishes close affinity with Faiz Muhammad II, Damp Sadat II and Killi Gul Muhammad I and II. (Pl. 3)

3. Quetta Buff Ware

Quetta ware is a loose term used for pottery recorded at various archaeological sites in the Quetta Valley. Generally, it is decorated with black painted designs between multiple horizontal lines. Buff ware is an important type of Quetta ware and has two variants. (Pl. 4-5).

- i. Buff Slipped
It is wheel made, with smooth texture and finished surface. It is decorated with bold geometrical designs in black paint on light slip; floral pattern and stylised animals are occasionally found.
- ii. Black on Buff Surface
It is identical to the Damp Sadat Buff Plain Ware of period G-II. Other types are recovered from H-2 period of Kechi Beg in the Quetta valley. Typical pottery forms are jars with flaring rims, small-mouthed bowls with sharp angles between shoulder and bases and pedestal jars. It is wheel made, smooth, hard textured, decorated with bold geometrical patterns on buff surface. Its three variants are black-on-brown, black-on-red and coarse black-on-brown.

It is important to note that black-on-brown ware in decoration and paste is an apparent prototype for the Quetta black-on-buff surface, while black-on-buff slip is a prototype of Kechi Beg black-on-buff slip.

4. Wet Ware

Wet ware is an important type of Quetta Ware. It is wheel-made with smooth finish, decorated with a series of parallel wavy vertical or horizontal ridges and, sometime, with leaf and circle patterns. The decorative ridges are created with a flat tool in wet condition. Usually designs are carved on the shoulder of a pot. A number of variants in shapes and decorative patterns are found in pots recovered during excavation or picked up from the surface of sites. Reported from many mounds, it reached its climax in Damp Sadat G-II and Kechi Beg H-2.

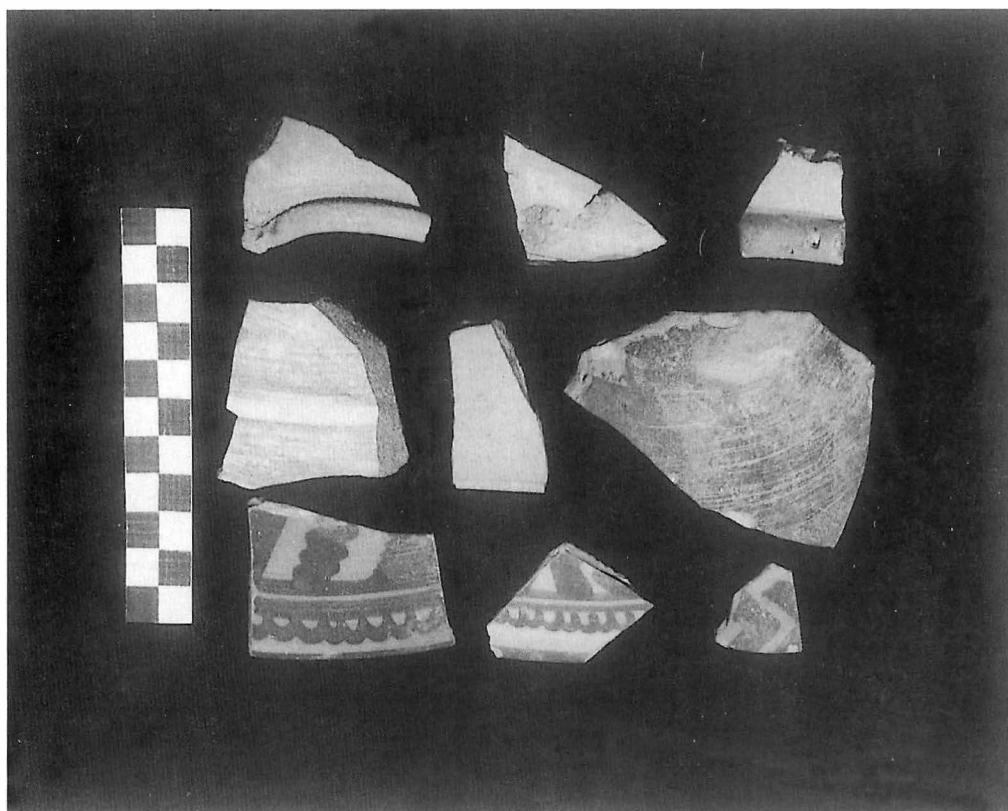
5. Ribbed Ware

This ware is decorated with rib-like pattern, and deep outer grooves alternating with flattened ridge. It is imperative to note that such design has not been observed on the rims or bases of pots. Generally, the paste is fine but occasionally coarse. This type is collected from Killi Gul Muhammad, Kechi Beg and Damp Sadat. H. Hargreaves has recorded this type from Sumpur Mound near Mastung, while A. Stein has done it from Kharan, Makran and Supid Bulindi to the west of Mastung. The same types have also been collected by Stein from Daber Kot and Mughal Ghundai in northern Balochistan. Alcock has also noted such type from the early level of Moenjodaro.

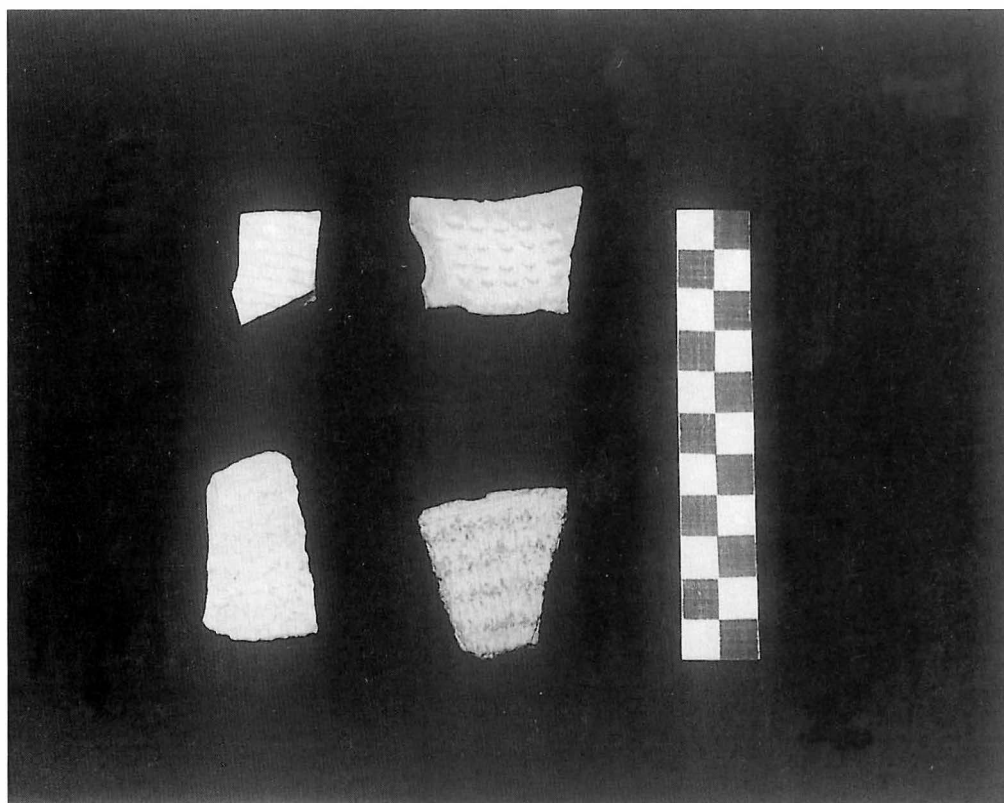
Further systematic excavation is essential for establishing a complete cultural profile of the site to investigate its life style, construction technology, household objects, chronology and association with other sites of the region.

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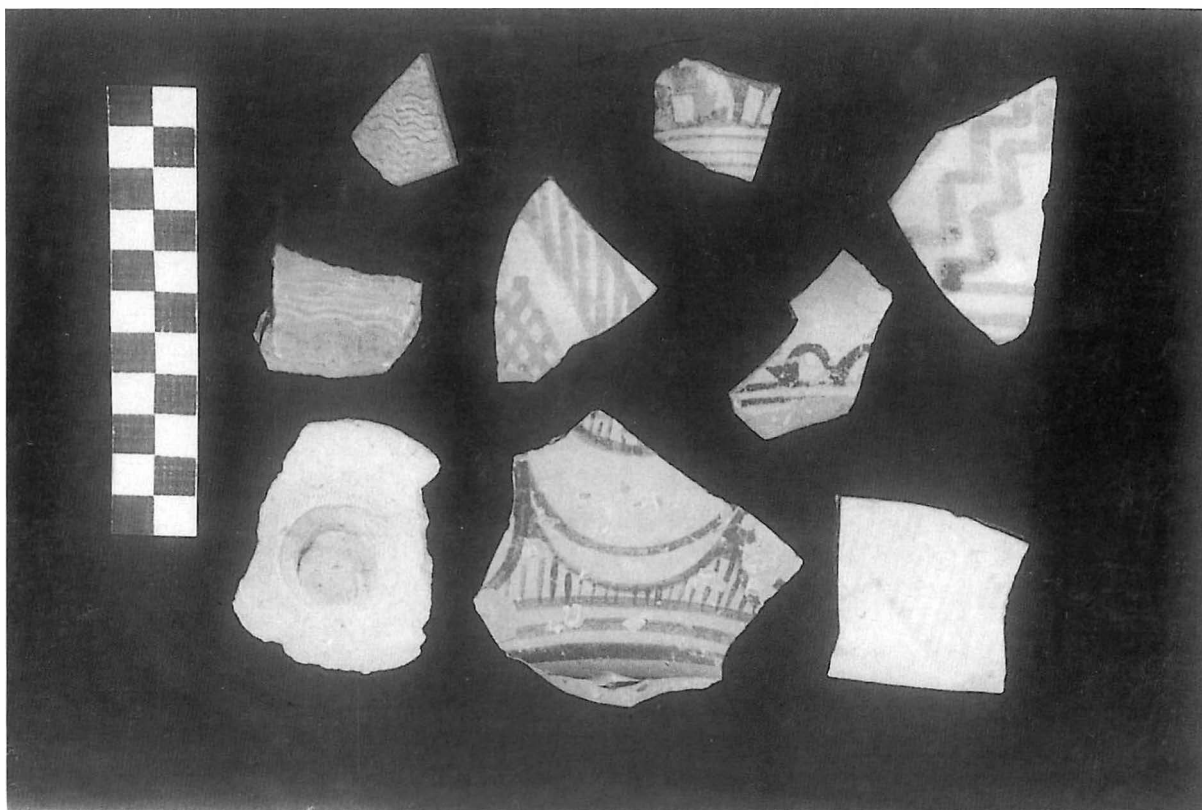
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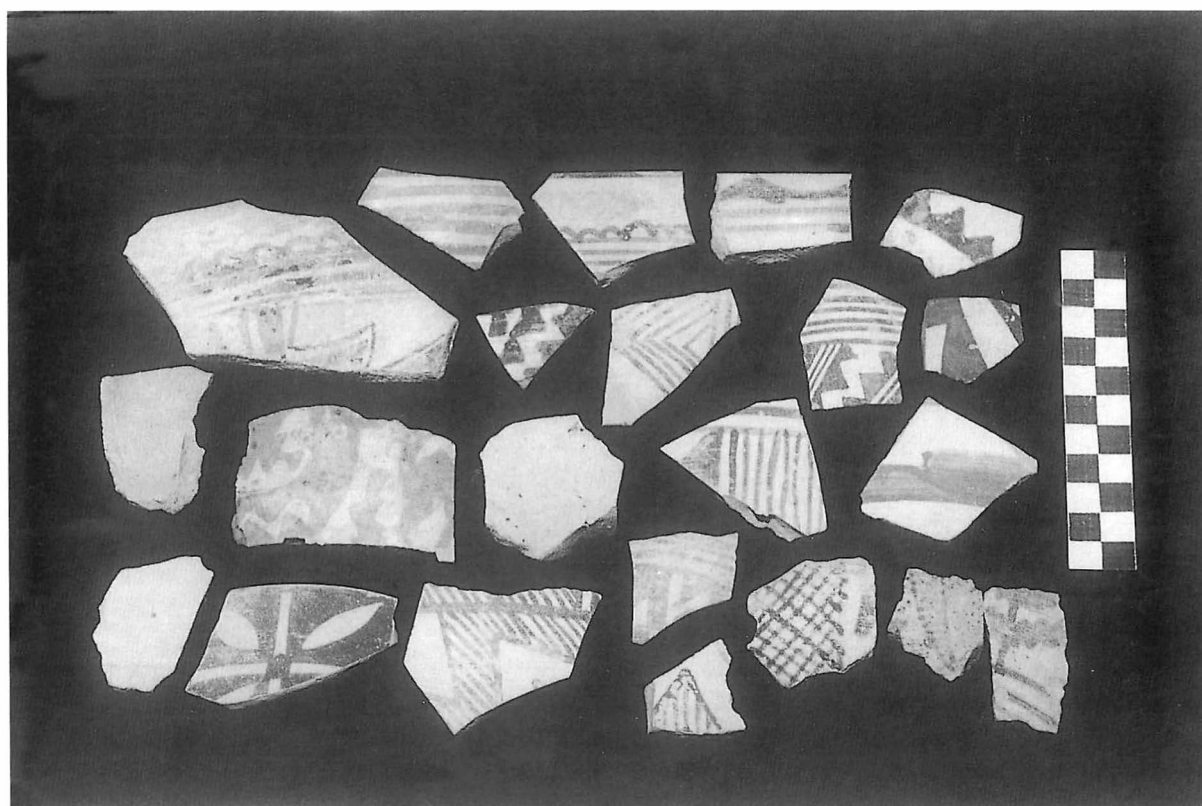
Pl. 1: Faiz Mohammad Ware (Black on Grey)



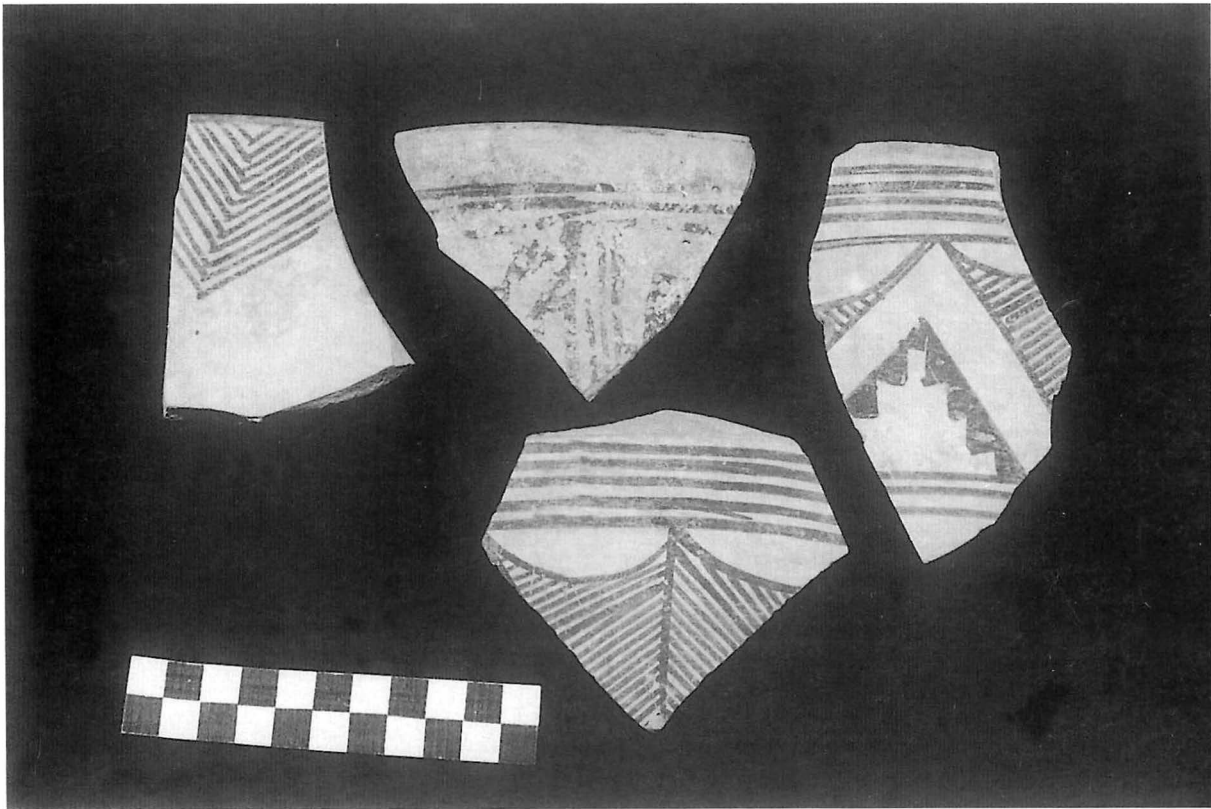
Pl. 2: Wet & Ribbed Ware



Pl. 3: Kechi Beg Ware



Pl. 4: Quetta Buff Ware



Pl. 5: Quetta Buff Ware