

The Neolithic Site of Gulgai Kot I: A Fresh Discovery

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For the Bronze Age archaeology, no other region in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan has so far turned out to be so productive as the Gomal Plain has been. This is because of its geographical and ecological setting that had abundantly gifted the region with natural resources—water, agricultural surplus, grazing grounds, etc., in the remote past. The Khaisor and Sheikh Budin ranges bound the region on the north-east, Bittanis hills on the north, Waziristan and Sulaiman ranges on the west, and the River Indus on the east. The entire region gently slopes down from the mountains in the west and north and unfolds a vast plain in the east and south. In the past due to considerable rainfall in the plain and snowfall on the western mountains, source of perennial streams, its ancient climate seems to have been favourable for flourishing the Bronze Age cultures. Almost all the streams have become dry owing to the arid and semiarid condition prevailing in the region today; however, they swell when heavy rains fall there on the western mountains in the rainy season and flood the plain. The people store floodwater by making dams (*bands*) around their fields and afterwards channel it to the cultivated fields.

Explorations and Excavations in the Gomal Plain

When he took over as the Director General of the newly formed 'Archaeological Survey of India', Sir Alexander Cunningham commenced archaeological exploration and survey of the Gomal Plain in 1878-79, but his work was confined to the Hindu Śāhi Period standing monuments (temples and fortifications) of Bilot-Kafirkot (Cunningham: 1879). Subsequently, Harold Hargreaves supplemented its conservation and preservation work (Hargreaves: 1914). In 1927, Sir Aural Stein further broadened the cultural horizon of the Gomal Plain by recording a number of historic period sites in the foothills of the Sulaiman Ranges (Stein: 1904-05; 1934). However, Ahmad Hasan Dani, then the Chairman of the Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar, initiated scientific archaeological investigation in the region and discovered a number of Bronze Age sites and conducted excavations at Hathala and Gumla (Dani 1970-71). F.A. Durrani and his colleagues of the University of Peshawar further augmented the work and added a new chapter in the history of Pakistan (Durrani *et alii* 1988, 1991; Ali 1988; Swati and Ali 1998; Khan *et alii* 2000-a; Rahman 1997; Masih 2000). This not only established a chronological sequence of the Gomal Plain from the Neolithic to the late Islamic period, but also aroused the interest of native and foreign scholars and researchers in this region.

Realising the danger of archaeological sites steadily vanishing in the Gomal Plain, the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of the NWFP, launched an expedition to record systematically all the archaeological sites and monuments and, if possible, excavate the promising ones and those exposed to natural and human hazards. The present author under the supervision of Dr. Ihsan Ali, Director of the above-mentioned Directorate, conducted two-week survey of the region in early 2003. Mir Muhammad, Asim Amin and Muhammad Irfan, graduate students of the Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar, assisted the author in the field. We located fifty-five new sites and monuments roughly dated from the Neolithic to the Mughal period. They are classified as follow:

No.	Category of Site	Number of Sites
1	Neolithic	01
2	Early Bronze Age/Kot Dijian	03
3	Harappan	06

4	Historic Sites	34
5	Temples	00
6	Mosques	05
7	Tombs	05
Total =		59

Worth mentioning among the newly discovered Bronze Age sites are Kot Musa, Maddai, Darazinda, Gulgai Kot-I, Umar Daraz Theri-I and II, Kori Hot, Lal Mahra Sharif site, Takwara (Nang Shah) and Rohri-II. Important historic period sites are Kundian-II and Lalu Kot-I. Here, the author intends to highlight briefly the late Neolithic and early Bronze Age site Gulgai Kot-I, which is the third of its kind recorded in the NWFP, after Sheri Khan Tarakai in Bannu and Jhandi Babar in Dera Ismail Khan.

Location of Gulgai Kot-I

The site Gulgai Kot-I located near a village of the same name is lying on the Tank-Wana road at a distance of about 7 km south-west of the Tank city amidst salinity struck barren fields, on the left bank of the Gomal River (Pl. 1). It is situated 300 m towards east of the main road. About 700 m further to the east is lying another but huge mound of the historic period named as Gulgai Kot-II. The Gomal River coming from the Gomal Zam in the foothills of the Sulaiman range was once the main source of water for this and other sites.

The principal access to these sites is from the Dabara village, 2 km away to the west from them, by following a small foot track passing through *kallar* (salinity-affected land) and leading to a few villages towards the east including Gulgai Kot-II. However, easy approach to the site is from the main Jandola or *Tank-Wana* road.

Surface Observations

As scatter of the mound can still be seen in the surrounding fields, it seems that the site once had covered a larger area than it now appears. Presently, it is a small insignificant mound covered along with its surroundings by Acacia and Tamarisks shrubs. It measures 200x160x2m and is the property of Khalifa Mahsood, a resident of Gulgai Kot. The local people have recently bulldozed it for providing shortcut access to the village. The borders of the mound are levelled for constructing a road, which will be metalled in due course of time (Pl. 2). As a result, 2 m thick deposit has been disturbed all over the site except a small corner in the northeast that seems suitable for a trial excavation, to know the nature and significance of the cultural deposit (Pl. 1).

Surface Collection

We picked up cultural material from the surface, especially from the northern half of the site as well as from both the banks of the newly built road. This collection includes pottery, stone tools and few terracotta human female figurines. The material is identical to the artefacts of Sheri Khan Tarakai in the Tochi and Jhandi Babar-I in the Gomal Valleys (Khan *et alii* 1986; Ali and Khan 2001). Correlating it with Sheri Khan Tarakai dated on the basis of C¹⁴ (Khan *et alii* 1987-88), this site can (see conclusion) be dated to 4500 BC; and turns out to be the third of its kind in the NWFP and the first one in the Tank District.

Pottery

The surface collection exhibiting pottery of different shapes and shades can broadly be divided into two main groups, 'A' and 'B', on the basis of manufacturing technique and surface treatment. As discussed below, these groups represent two distinct cultural phases prevailing at the site as well as the entire region.

Group-A

Although pottery of this group is mainly handmade, some of it is turned on a slow table (Swati and Ali 1998). On comparative study, it is dated to either late Neolithic or early Chalcolithic age and is placed in 'Period I' of the site. On the basis of form, surface treatment and decoration, it is further divided into the following two categories.

Category 1

Internally decorated in black on creamy or pinkish buff slip or sometimes on dull red wash, it is a coarse gritty pottery tempered with organic matter, pores of which are visible in the section of potsherds. This category is identical to the SKT 'A' ware, which includes bowls and dishes with slightly incurved or straight flaring rims (Khan *et alii* 1987-88; Pl. 3). The exterior is mostly plain but occasionally decorated with a black band at the rim. Some of the potsherds are brownish and burnished resembling those from Sheri Khan Tarakai and Jhandi Babar (Khan *et alii* 2000-a; Ali and Khan 2001). The geometrical decoration includes lines and bands running horizontally around the rim and internal neck. In some cases pendent lines vertically descend from the bands towards the base. One of the potsherds has a motif of connected half-circles attached to the lower part of horizontal band (no. 14). Although, similar to Sheri Khan Tarakai and Jhandi Babar in technique and decoration, no animal figures are found in the specimens of our surface collection.

Category 2

The pottery of this category is also coarse gritty, handmade and tempered with organic matter, but is different from the above category in decoration, which is done externally on the shoulder and neck of the pot (Pl. 4). The external as well as internal surfaces are decorated with different geometrical motifs in greyish black on buff, creamy or reddish slip. Although largely confined to the exterior, decoration on the interior is occasional and executed with horizontal bands or solid dots. The popular decorative motifs are horizontal and vertical lines and bands, solid triangles, hatched diamonds, etc., (nos. 4; 6, 10). Some potsherds have slurry, terracotta fragments mixed with clay and applied on the surface of pot (no. 14), like those of the SKT 'B' ware (Khan *et alii* 1987-88; Khan *et alii* 2000-a). Almost all rims of this category are outwardly curved. The principal forms include medium size-and-texture bowls and carinated pots.

Group-B

Unlike that of Group-A, the pottery of Group-B is turned on a fast wheel and represents another cultural occupation, i.e, Period-II of Gulgai Kot-I, corresponding to the 'Tochi / Gomal Phase' (Khan *et alii* 2000-b). The salient features of this group are well-lavigated clay, well-oxidation and uniform fabric-thickness—varying between 0.5-0.7 cm. The firing is so perfectly done that the pot rings on collision. The main types include medium size carinated bowls, plates, storage jars and pitchers. The majority of them are bowls externally provided with creamy, buff, pink or red wash or occasionally a slip. All of them are decorated with a variety of geometrical designs—vertical and horizontal bands and lines, hatched rectangles, chevron pattern, semi-circles, fish scale, wavy lines, etc., (Pl. 5). Only one fragment of a rim has a petal motif while another a human eye-motif. The other variety is platters, 1.0 cm thick, internally ornamented with simple horizontal lines and bands on red or buff wash. Bases include one flat and four concave specimens. One body-sherd and one concave base of a small pot represent grey-ware. The former has three incised lines making a chevron pattern.

Stone Tools

Mainly flakes and blades, 53 microliths collected from the surface have clear cones of percussion with ripples around them. Mostly wastage, the flakes were knocked off either as primary

or secondary chipping from cores or removed in the process of retouch. The blades, three with crested ridges on the dorsal surface, have parallel-sided working edges (Pl. 6). There is only one fluted core with a flat striking platform and a concoidal bulb of percussion. The only tools in the entire collection are two burins and one arrowhead. Except for few, all microliths have no signs of utilisation.

A fine quality of cryptocrystalline silica—Jasper, Chalcedony and, predominantly, Chert in different shades—has been used for making the microliths. The source of this material might have been dry beds of rivers and streams in the region. The following table shows the quantity of different microliths.

Flakes	Blades	Burins	Core	Arrowhead	Total
24	25	2	1	1	53

Figurines

Three terracotta female figurines found on the surface of the northern bank of the track present the following detail.

One of the figurines with 1.0 cm narrow waist shown seated measures 5.4x3.8 cm in its length and height respectively (Pl. 7, no. 3). The horizontally stretched legs joined together straight have black oval specks in a row at regular intervals. A similar black oval speck is also provided on the abdomen of the figure. Its notable feature is the heavy buttocks, indicative of fertility cult in ancient times. The upper body is very thin and smaller than the lower. Shoulders and arms are compressed and scars of missing breasts are seen on the chest. Head is also missing, however, the neck is 0.6 cm in section.

The second female figurine, bust and legs missing, is made of sandy clay and is ill fired with grey core (Pl. 7, no. 2). Its surface varies from sepia to greyish colour. A deep incised line at the pelvic girdle mark its heavy buttocks. Although broken off, its legs are placed wide apart like those from Sheri Khan Tarakai and Jhandi Babar (Khan *et alii* 1987-88; Khan *et alii* 2000-a; Ali and Khan 2001). Around the waist two black horizontal bands suggest the only drapery or decoration that the figure puts on. From the lower band are suspended short thin strips at regular interval. Unlike that of the above-mentioned figurine, its bulging abdomen probably shows pregnancy, another sign of fertility cult. Above the abdomen partially preserved body is 1.0 cm in diameter.

The last terracotta female figurine measures 3.8x3.8x2.1 cm in height, width and thickness respectively (Pl. 8). Also composed of sandy clay, it is dull red in colour and well fired. Head and lower body missing completely, its torso with short pinched arms survive. The predominant feature is its large appliqué breasts also found at Rahman Dheri-I or "Tochi / Gomal Phase".

A leg of a terracotta human figurine, 3.0 cm in length, is also included among the finds.

Dating of Finds

In the absence of proper archaeological context, the artefacts from Gulgai Kot-I are dated on comparing them with similar material from those sites for which absolute calibrated dates are available. Presently, the analysis of our collection makes two main cultural divisions possible, i.e., Period-I of late Neolithic and Period-II of early Bronze Age. The former period seems to be contemporary with the Sheri Khan Tarakai cultural context, while the latter with Rahman Dheri-I, Gumla-II and Lak Largai-I (also known as Tochi/Gomal Phase; Khan *et alii* 2000-b). As stated earlier, in Period-I handmade pottery of SKT 'A' and SKT 'B' types, decorated with a variety of geometrical motifs on the exterior as well as on the interior, is the hallmark. The terracotta human figurines mentioned above are similar to those from Sheri Khan Tarakai and Jhandi Babar also

support its dating to the late Neolithic or early Chalcolithic period (4500-3500 BC). Period-II, corresponding to the Tochi/Gomal phase on the basis of ceramics, differs from the preceding period in technique, surface treatment and forms to certain extent. Thrown on fast wheel, the polychrome pottery of this period is also decorated with floral and geometrical designs.

Conclusion

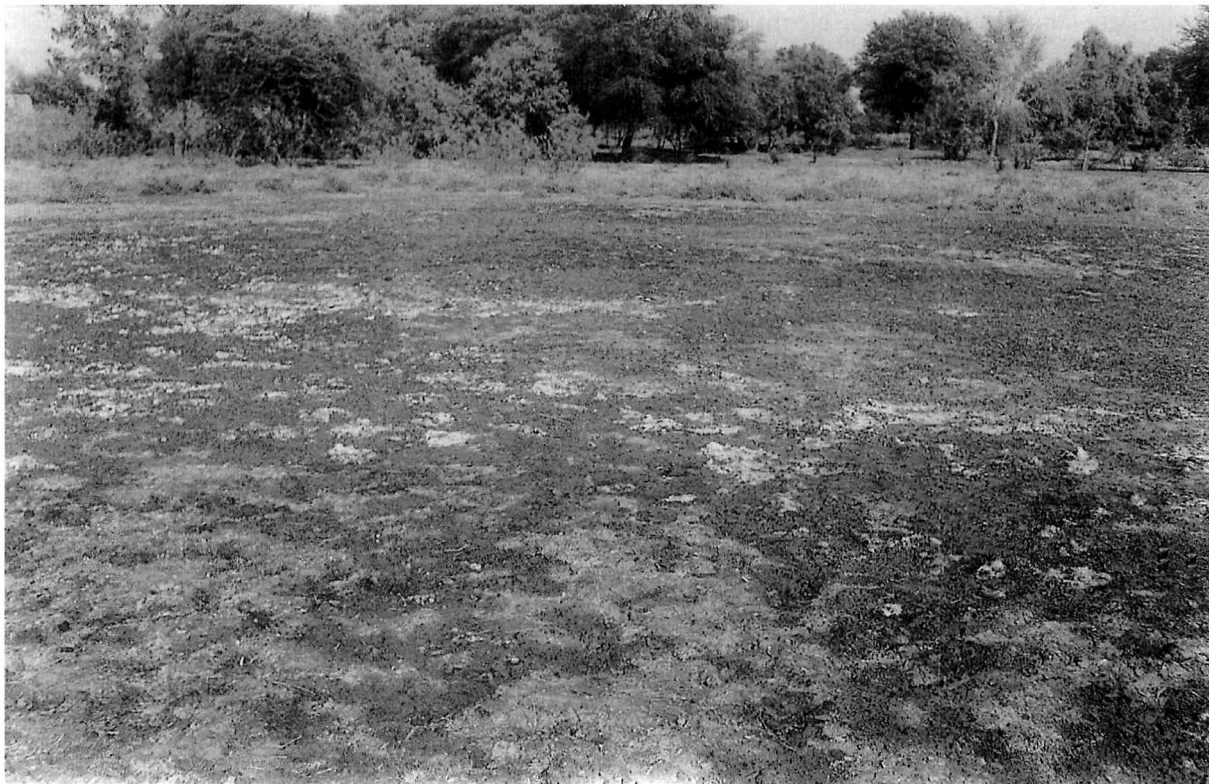
Unless Gulgai Kot-I site is scientifically excavated, we are not in position to draw final conclusion or properly correlate its loosely defined periods, other than those mentioned above, with other sites in or outside the Gomal Plain. Although not as large as the Jhandi Babar site, its compound cultural profile makes it more significant for investigating into the evolutionary process from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age in the region.

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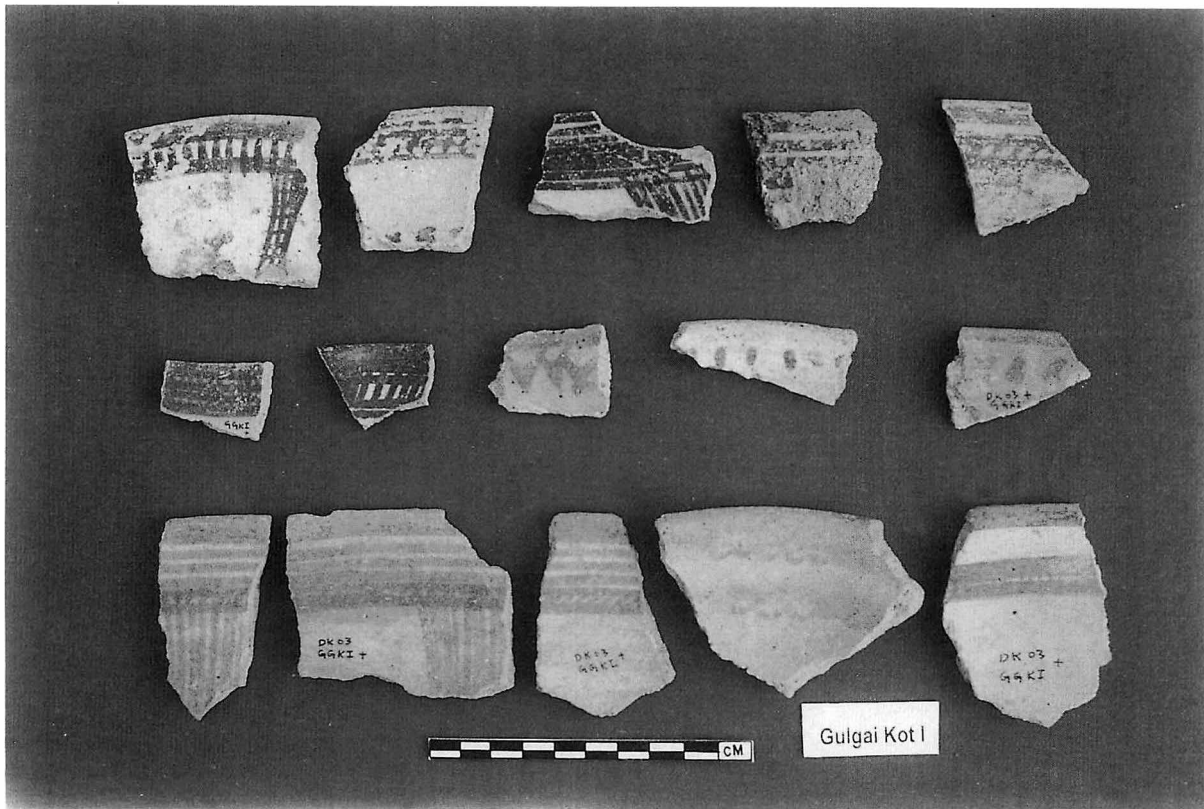
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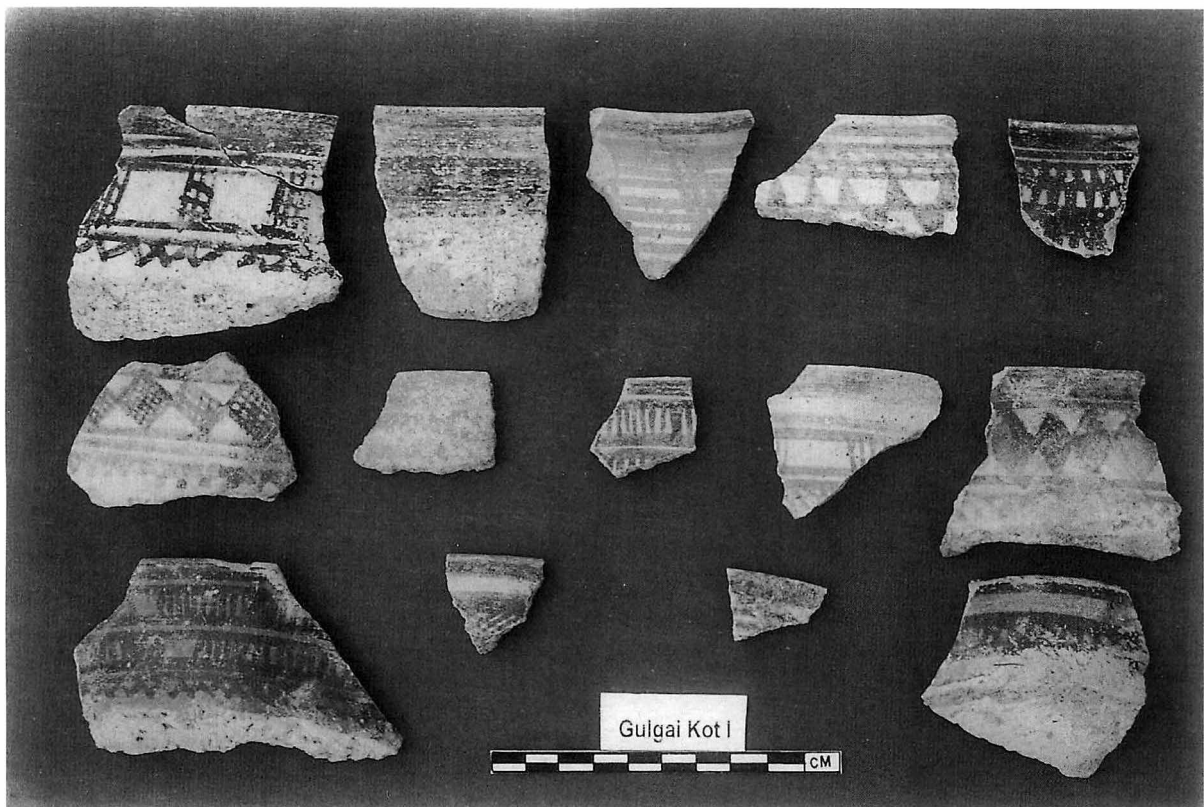
Pl. 1: Gulgai Kot I: General view of northern portion.



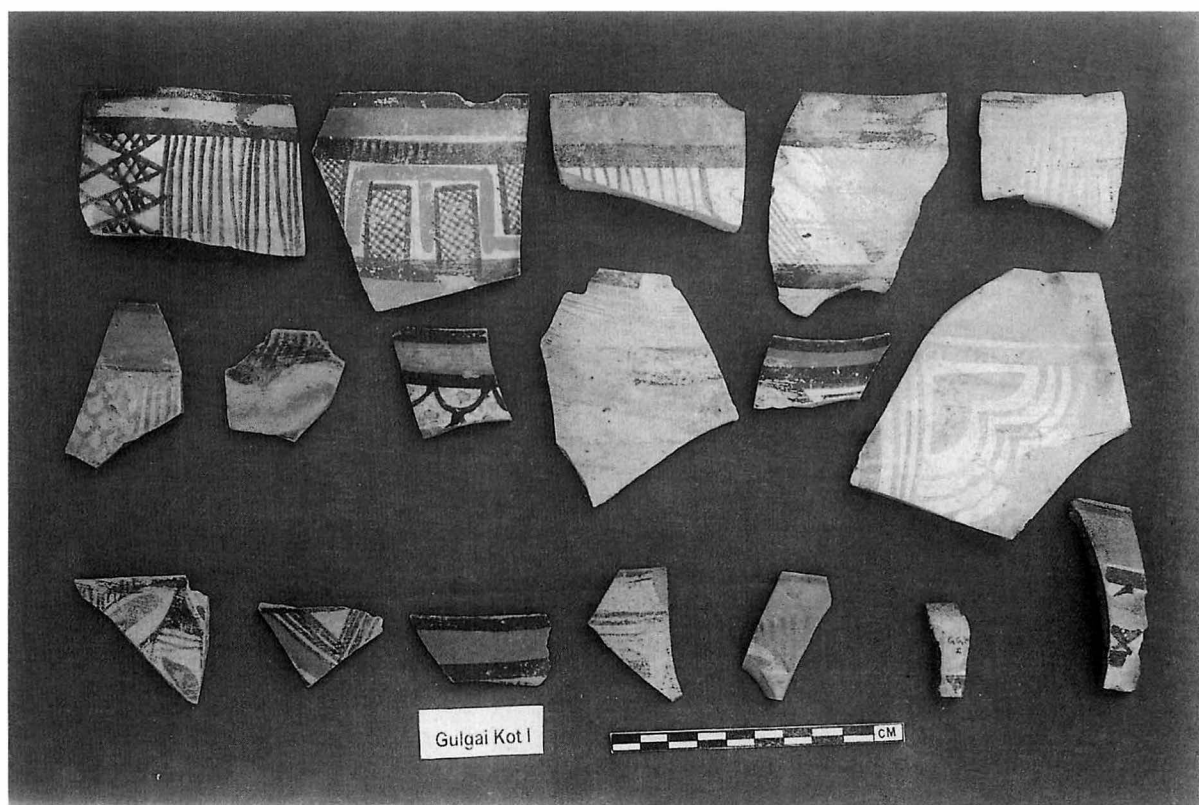
Pl. 2: Gulgai Kot I.



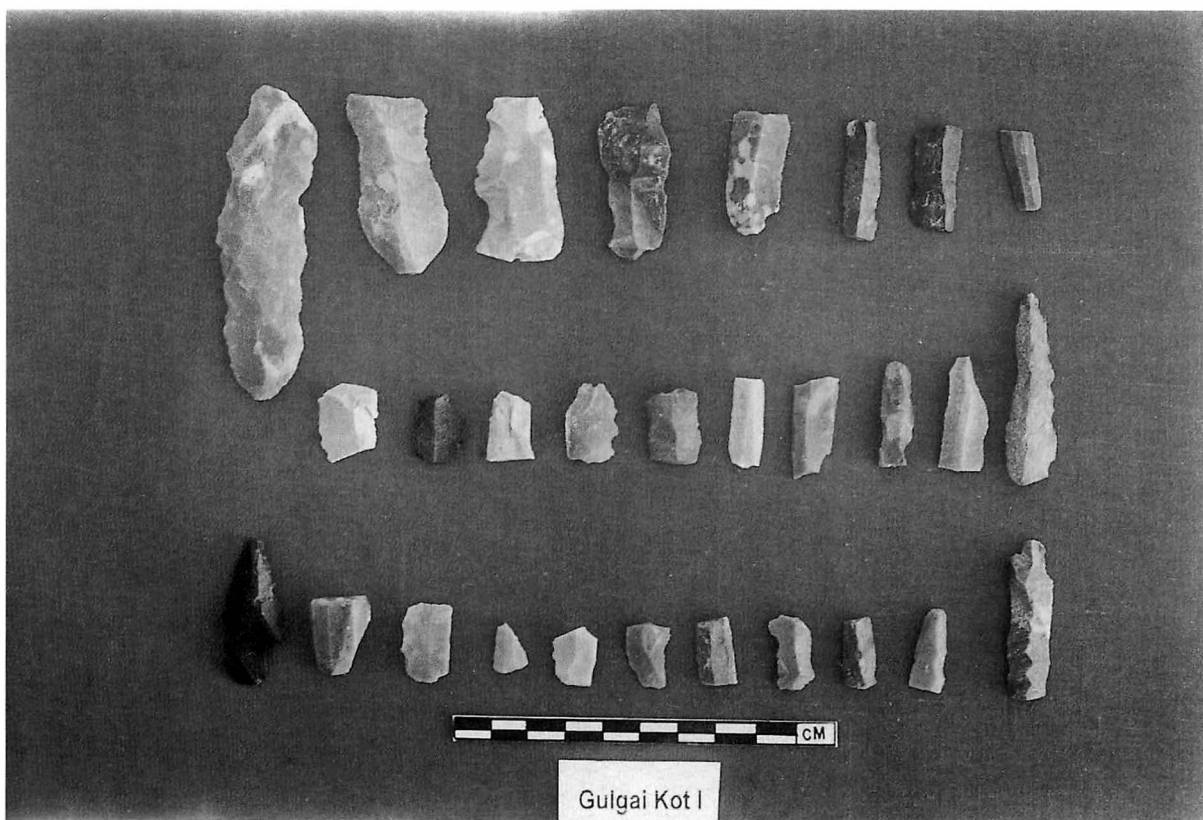
Pl. 3: Gulgai Kot I: Group A Category 1 pottery.



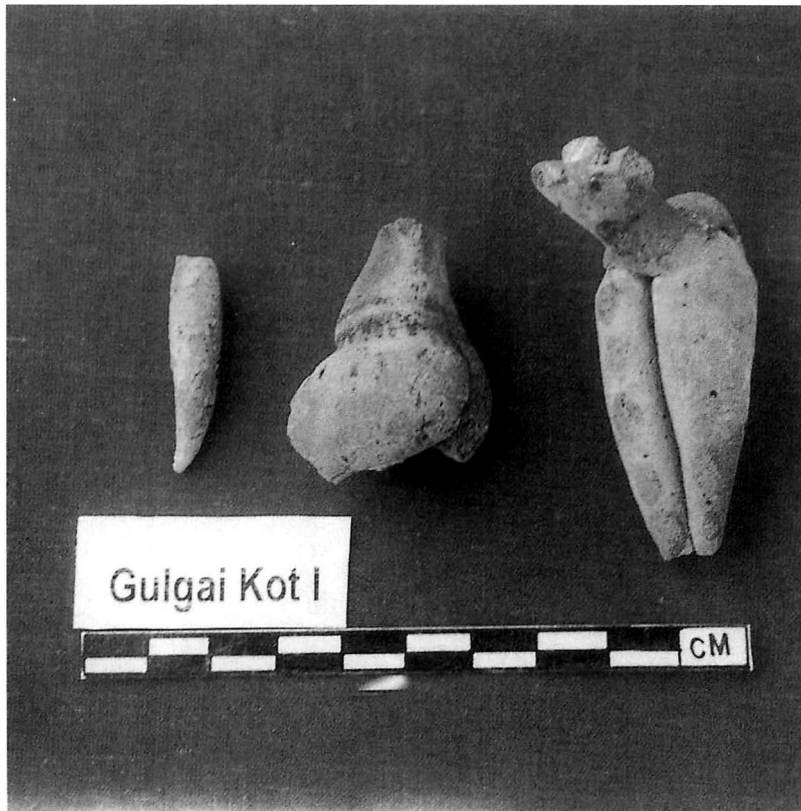
Pl. 4: Gulgai Kot I: Group A Category 2 pottery.



Pl. 5: Gulgai Kot I: Category Group B pottery.



Pl. 6: Gulgai Kot I: Stone tools.



Pl. 7: Gulgai Kot I: T.C. Figurines.



Pl. 8: Gulgai Kot I: T.C. Figurines.