

## A Note on the Swat ‘Fashion Ware’: Its Origin and Diffusion

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**Abstract:** The note deals with a luxury ware associated to the latest phases of the Early Historic urban site of Barikot, Swat (Pakistan). These phases are positively dated to mid-3rd century CE and associated to a Kushano-Sasanian cultural horizon. The luxury painted ware, denoted as ‘Fashion Ware’, was first found at Damkot (Swat), and collected from surface in Bajaur. A similar pottery was found in the past in later contexts in Rajasthan and Haryana.

**Keywords:** Fashion Ware, Barikot, Swat, Rang Mahal, Farmana, Kushano-Sasanians

### Preamble

The Kushano-Sasanian phases (structural Periods VII and VIII = Macrophase 5) represents the last living phase of the Early Historic urban site of Bir-kot-ghwandai in Swat (Pakistan) (henceforth: BKG)<sup>1</sup>, dated on the basis of 14C analysis towards mid-3rd century CE (with a consistent late Kushan/Kushano-Sasanian coin assemblage; Table 1)<sup>2</sup>.

Stratigraphy clearly indicates that both structural periods VII and VIII of BKG 4-5 and BKG 11<sup>3</sup> (see Fig. 1a) were marked by destructive seismic events. The second earthquake, alongside with the political crisis that had occurred in the meanwhile (the collapse of the Kushana system of power),

was eventually fatal as the city was abandoned, while the Buddhist sites in the countryside were still flourishing<sup>4</sup>. Slightly later, the ruins of the city were re-occupied and transformed into a sort of slum by non-urban or low-class settlers or squatters (Macrophase 6; C14-dated to the late 3rd century CE)<sup>5</sup>.

In Macrophase 5 the SW quarter of the city was divided into 11 single floor blocks (from 300 to 700 square metres), generally dwelling units arranged around a central courtyard sometimes provided with domestic worship areas, but also Buddhist public cultic complexes (Fig. 1b).

These urban cultic complexes (besides a stupa

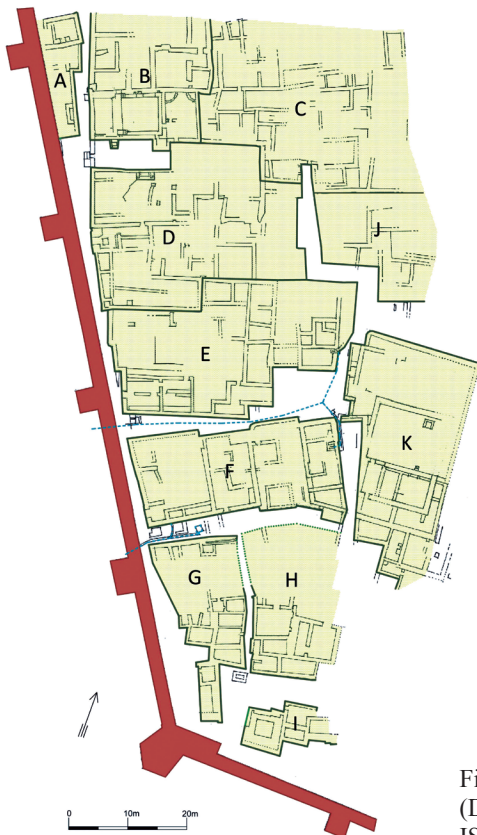


Fig. 1a-b: BKG 4-5/11 excavated area: SW quarters of the city (Drawings by F. Genchi and I. Marati, photo by the Author; Courtesy ISMEO Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan).

complex, they include two temples, K and B, and a sacred precinct B, which seem to have so much in common with coeval Central Asian schemes)<sup>6</sup> yielded several fragments and one whole vessel of a well-defined pottery luxury class, called in NW Pakistan archaeology ‘Fashion Ware’. In these cultic areas Fashion Ware is always associated to two other BKG luxury wares: Red-on-Golden and Red-on-Red Slip Wares<sup>7</sup>.

A long-awaited study of the BKG pottery material (based on more than 100,000 sherds) has been recently completed, and I thought it might be useful to present here a short preview of one of the most interesting classes of the late pottery production of the region<sup>8</sup>.

### The Fashion Ware

Fashion Ware is a fine Red Ware, painted black

Periods/Phases	Macrophases	earlier	Kushan	late Kushan	Kushano-Sasanian	sub Kushan	other
BKG 11							
Period X	6	1	3	11	1	10	
Period IX		-	1	13	6	13	1*
Period VIII	5	3	15	13	7	7	-
Period VII		1	7	7	-	-	-
BKG 4-5							
Period X	6	-	-	-	-	-	-
Period IX	5	-	-	3	-	-	-
Period VIII		1	12	12	6	6	-
Periods VII		-	8	4	4	5	-
BKG 3							
Period IVB-Phase 2b	5	-	-	11	14	-	-
Phase 2A2		-	-	8	-	-	-
BKG 1							
Period X	7	-	-	-	-	-	-
Period IX		-	-	-	-	-	-
Period VIII	5	-	-	-	-	1	-
Period VII		1	-	-	-	-	-
Total		1	46	82	38	41	1

Table 1 - List of identified coins per Period-Phase/Macrophase in Macro-phases 5 (200-300 CE) and Macrophase 6 (300-350 CE). (N.B.: \* is Western Kshatrapas?).

on red, featuring a thin slip ranging from buff/plum red to brick red. Its chronology is clearly confined to the mid-3rd century CE, and more precisely to the late horizon of Macrophase 5 (mainly Period VIII) (see Table 2)<sup>9</sup>.

Generally Fashion Ware is found in fragments, apart from a complete small jug found in the rear room of Temple K (Fig. 3)<sup>10</sup>. The painted ware clearly refers to an urbanite luxury context. Most frequent forms belong to tableware, drinking and serving vessels: “small globular bowl[s] with slightly out-curving rim, frequent in the Late Kushan period also in plain red ware”, and open bowls, as well as medium-size jars<sup>11</sup>. Dimensions always remain within the small to medium size

range (Figs. 2-4).

The decorative class is characterized by a figurative repertoire, mainly aquatic birds, organized in rows within registers with garlands, vegetal motifs and rows of typically slender cross-hatched triangles<sup>12</sup>. The drawing is rapid and confident, although it has a rather peculiar blurry effect.

“This pottery [...] is very distinctive not only because of its elaborate decoration, but also because the black images appear rather fuzzy on the sharp red background. The blurry effect may be ascribed to the particular manufacturing technique: the ink is applied on the pot at the time when the slip is still wet, causing the lines of the drawings to be blunt

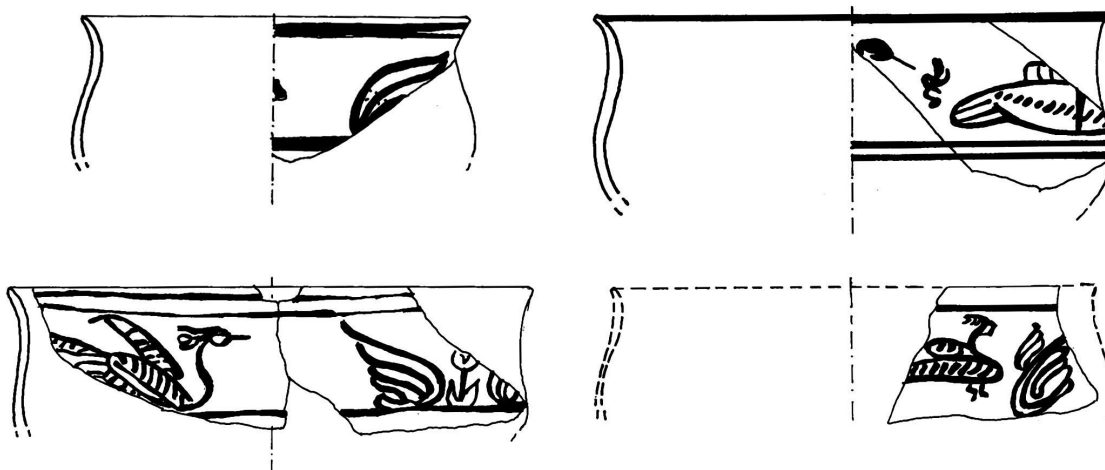
[illegible]

Fig. 2 - Selection of Fashion Ware bowls from BKG (Drawings by F. Martore; Courtesy ISMEO Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan).

and imprecise.” (Brancaccio 2010: 329).

Initially attributed to the Śāka-Parthian period by A. Rahman (to whom goes the credit of the name ‘Fashion Ware’) at Damkot (Swat/Malakand)<sup>13</sup>, this pottery, which was extensively found in Bajaur by Luftur Rahman<sup>14</sup>, was later attributed to the 3rd century CE on the basis of the BKG evidence<sup>15</sup>.

“The appearance in Late Kushan period, for the first time in historic Swat, of a highly elaborate pottery, its repertoire based on figural motifs, is of particular art-historical significance. Since the Saka period, indeed, the luxury

pottery had been influenced by metal vessels or by Hellenistic embossed wares. This shift to a more elaborate patterning probably reflects a change in the artistic taste after the flowering of Gandharan art.” (Callieri 2000: 864)<sup>16</sup>.

### Comparisons

Apart from the specimens found in Swat (including Damkot) and in Bajaur, this luxury pottery is otherwise unknown in excavated sites in Pakistan. However, evidence possibly comparable with ‘Fashion Ware’ were documented in North



Fig. 3a-c - Small jar BKG 2413 (Drawings by F. Martore, photo by Aurangzeb Khan; Courtesy ISMEO Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan).



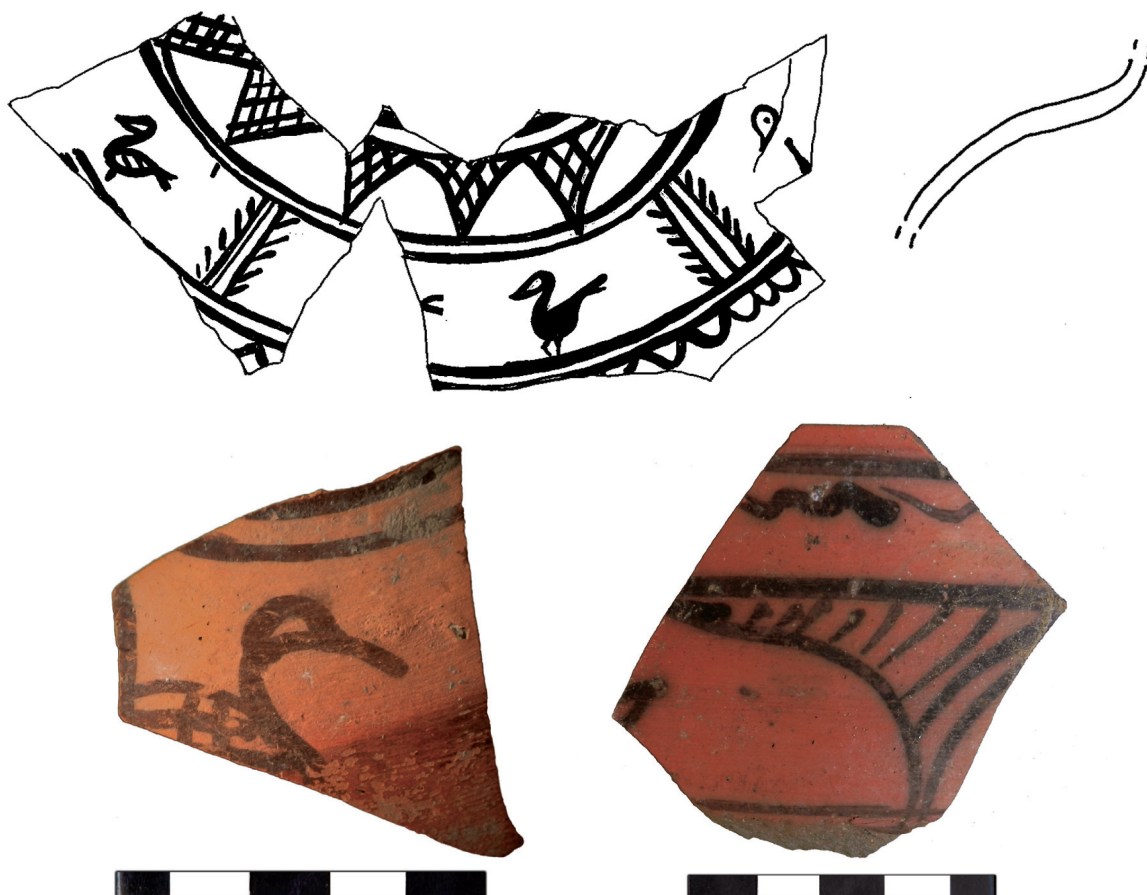


Fig. 4a-c - Fashion Ware specimens from BKG (Drawings by F. Martore, photos by Aurangzeb Khan; Courtesy ISMEO Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan) (Not to scale; Fig. 4a l. c. 20 cm).

Indian sites, especially in Rajasthan (Rang Mahal) and in Haryana (Farmana), but also in other sites (Fig. 5).

### Rang Mahal [painted] Ware

The excavation of Rang Mahal<sup>17</sup> is probably – together with the work by H. Härtel at Sonkh – the best urban archaeological project carried out by foreign missions in South Asia before the introduction of the Harris' matrix<sup>18</sup>. The site of Rang Mahal was first occupied not later than 200 CE, and deserted before 600, apparently because of climatological reasons<sup>19</sup>. At the site were recovered several fragments of a typical red slipped black painted ware (brick-red globular pots or medium-size jars) with row of birds with typical rendering of the eye, and dividing elements (geometrical)<sup>20</sup>, both extremely close to the features of the BKG Fashion Ware<sup>21</sup> (Fig. 7). Unfortunately, on the basis of the report on Rang Mahal, it is difficult to understand the chronology of this ware (3rd-

7th century CE), and link it to our Fashion Ware (mid-3rd century CE) with a sufficient degree of accuracy<sup>22</sup>.

A recent study<sup>23</sup> reopened the case of the Rang Mahal [painted] Ware at the light of fresh data from the nearby settlement of Dabri Raman, and from Farmana, a settlement site in Haryana (Fig. 8)<sup>24</sup>. According to the chronological evidence obtained at Farmana, 'Rang Mahal [painted] pottery' is found in layers dated to 5th to 7th century CE<sup>25</sup>. The excavations at Sonkh provided some additional information on this "brick-red, core unoxized, black painted" ware, which is present in Sonkh VI (= post-Kushan/Gupta<sup>26</sup>) and - even if somehow different - still in Sonkh VIII (= post-Gupta/Early Medieval<sup>27</sup>). The new study convincingly brings the chronology of the painted ware from Rang Mahal and correlated sites, to a period, which is a bit later than the evidence provided by BKG<sup>28</sup>. I think this information might be of utmost importance.

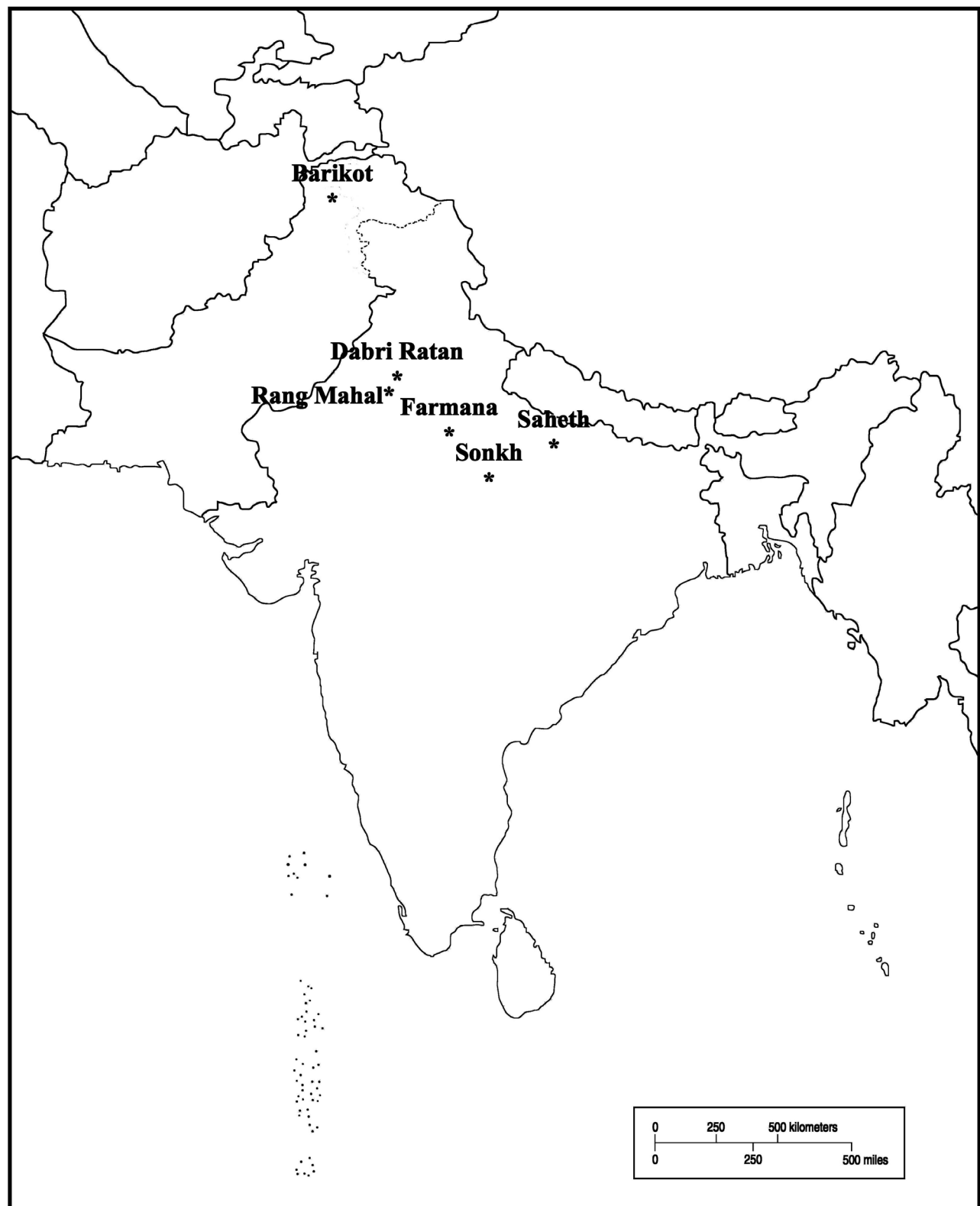


Fig. 5 - Map with archaeological sites cited (Courtesy alabamamaps.ua.edu).



Fig. 6a-b - Painted jars (details) from Rang Mahal (after Rydh 1959: pls 34.8 and 36.3) (Not to scale).

“The evidence from sites to the west of Yamuna including Sonkh, Farmana, Dabri Ratan and Rang Mahal exhibits that the paintings were a vital element of the Rang Mahal pottery, whereas in the region to the east of Ganga no painting are to be found. This evidence indicates that the Ganga-Yamuna doab was a kind of boundary in terms of painted Rang Mahal pottery. In order to understand this regional variation in the spatial distribution pattern of painted pottery, we need extensive data from many more sites. If the presence of paintings is probed to be a regional cultural manifestation in the region to the west of Yamuna or in the Ghaggar plains, which is the place of origin of these paintings? *As no painted pottery has been found from any ‘Kushana period’ site in North India* [italic is mine], it appears that the paintings, which characterize the Rang Mahal pottery were introduced from some region around the third or fourth centuries AD. Besides, the widespread distribution of the Rang Mahal pottery over Rajasthan, Haryana and Gujarat suggests that the paintings played a pivotal role in the dispersal of this pottery over these regions.” (Uesugi 2014: 149).

### Where did Fashion Ware come from?

A partial solution to that problem may actually be found in the pottery sequence of BKG. A possible antecedent of the ‘Rang Mahal [painted] pottery’ - or better of these typical decorative patterns - might be searched in the Gandhara region, given that the earliest dated specimens of an analogous painted luxury ware come from Swat (BKG).

We know from petrographic analysis (L. Maritan in Callieri and Olivieri, in press) that all the luxury ware in use at BKG (including Fashion Ware) was locally produced by the BKG pottery workshops<sup>29</sup>. It can be hypothesized that these decorative patterns, being distinctive of a luxury ware, might have travelled, and have been reproduced and transformed elsewhere<sup>30</sup>.

In the early phases of the Sasanian Kushanshahr in the South of Hindukush (mid-3rd century CE), at BKG we documented a distinct Kushano-Sasanian material culture. The latter is defined by a cultural architecture unusual for Gandharan ‘standards’<sup>31</sup>, by the massive introduction of stucco decoration<sup>32</sup>, and by the large-scale introduction of the so-called ‘Vasudeva type’ copper coins probably from the Kushano-Sasanian mints of Bactria<sup>33</sup>. These late issues were accompanied by the diffusion of the so-called ‘sub-Kushan’ copper coins, probably locally minted as convertible issues (= 1/8 of the Vasudeva type coins, and 1/4 of the Kushano-Sasanian issues<sup>34</sup>).

Besides architecture and coinage, also luxury painted wares were diffused<sup>35</sup>. The taste for one of the most distinctive of these painted wares (Fashion Ware) remained limited, initially, to the urbanite elites of Swat and Bajaur, but might have later become appreciated in the settlements along the Ganges-Yamuna *doab*, and then in Rajasthan. May be Fashion Ware and ‘Rang Mahal [painted] pottery’ do not belong to the same class of luxury ware, but both share for a great part a common decorative repertoire, as well a distinct brushwork style, that





Fig. 7 - Painted sherds from Rang Mahal and Dabri Ratan (Rajasthan)  
(Courtesy and photos by A. Uesugi = Uesugi 2014: Fig. 7).



together represent an important distinctive pattern in post-3rd century CE contexts.

Whatever was the original production centre of Fashion Ware<sup>36</sup>, BKG is a fixed point in the history of this luxury ware. BKG is the only centre where this ware is documented (a) in a clear association to an urban environment, (b) in a clear chronological context, (c) well before a somehow similar decorative taste got diffused (with local and later variants) in the East. This can be seen as a possible side consequence of the establishment of trade links between the Kushanshahr, the post-Kushana principalities of the Ganga-Yamuna, and Gupta territories. In this regard, the model of "communication networks" (Ray 1986: 140) may be here better utilized to understand the spatial distribution of luxury items and decorative patterns<sup>37</sup>. In any case, Fashion Ware, with its limited chronology, is a formidable marker of the Kushano-Sasanian and post-Kushan horizons and trade networks in Gandhara.

## Notes

- 1 The site of Barikot (Bīr-koṭ-ghwaṇḍai; 34°40'51"N, 72°12'46"E; approx. 799 m asl), dominating the entire middle course of the Swat River, is located to the West of the modern village, and is surrounded to the North by a crescent-shaped hill (*ghwaṇḍai*, acropolis), bathed by the Swat River and to the South by two tributary rivers of Swat. After 33 years and 24 excavation campaigns the Early Historic site of BKG, can be considered, the most crucial Early Historic excavated settlement site in the North-West of Pakistan. The area of the ancient town, including the acropolis, measures about 12 hectares. The ancient town and the acropolis are encompassed by a walled circuit positively dated to c. BCE 150. The BKG urban defensive wall thus represents the only Indo-Greek urban defensive works to be excavated, as well as the easternmost example of Hellenistic military architecture in Asia (Callieri 2007).
- 2 Olivieri et al. 2014a, Olivieri 2015.
- 3 Trench BKG 4-5 is a trench excavated in 1990-1992 at the southernmost corner of the South-West quarters of the ancient city (Callieri et al. 1992). In 2011-2016 the entire South-West quarters (approx. 1 ha.) surrounding BKG 4-5 were exposed (Trench BKG 11: Olivieri et al. 2014; Olivieri 2011 [2015], 2012 [2017]; Moscatelli et al. 2016).
- 4 Olivieri 2012. The urban elites involved in the Kushan system of local alliances, or the new aristocracy of the early Kushano-Sasanian period, probably had insufficient financial power, or interest, to warrant the maintenance of the complex metropolitan system. According to the archaeological data, the pivot of the economy, after the collapse of the city, was firmly in the hands of the Buddhist communities in the countryside. All the Buddhist complexes in the *ager* of BKG managed to cope with the general crisis.
- 5 See Olivieri 2012, Cupitò and Olivieri 2013, Olivieri et al. 2014.
- 6 Olivieri 2011 [2015], 2012 [2017]; Olivieri et al. 2014, Moscatelli et al. 2016.
- 7 Olivieri 2013 [2017]. Interestingly, a Fashion Ware (?) sherd (thin-walled bowl) was also found in the Buddhist sacred area of Saidu Sharif I (Callieri 1997: fig. 186.300); from another Buddhist site in the same region (Ranigat, Buner) comes a larger water pot with a possible Fashion Ware black-on-red painted animal figure (Namba 2011: fig. 9.39).
- 8 Callieri and Olivieri, in press; See also the seminal paper on the decorated pottery from BKG (Callieri 2000).
- 9 Olivieri et al. 2014: 219.
- 10 BKG 2413 in Olivieri et al. 2014: 219, fig. 160 (Figs. 3a-c).
- 11 Callieri 2000: 863.
- 12 In Bajaur the decorative repertoire includes also people, horned mammals, and lizards (Rahman, L. 1993: 211). Cross-hatched patterns, which are typical a class of painted pottery of the early Macro-phases at BKG (BCE 3rd-1st CE; Eastern Triangle Ware), reappear also in late and post-urban periods at BKG (Macro-phases 5-7).
- 13 Rahman, A. 1968-69: 201, 227-29, 229-35, pls. 98, 191a.
- 14 Rahman, L. 1993: 213; Id. 1994: 75. In Bajaur Fashion Ware forms are more elaborated and include ring-foot bowls and on-stand vessels (drinking vessels) (Rahman, L. 1994). The

- specimens currently at the Metropolitan Museum, New York, which are said to come from Bajaur, may belong to a later and much more elaborated class of luxury ware (which can be termed 'Bajaur Ware') painted with "Huna" iconographies (Brancaccio 2010). For the latter, which maintains some basic style and themes of our Fashion Ware (such as the 'buzzy' painting, and isolated 'wing' or 'fang' motives) a later chronology has been proposed (Brancaccio 2010, followed by Callieri 2010). The shapes of these vessels include pitchers and globular bowls (drinking and serving vessels) (Brancaccio 2010: 331).
- 15 Callieri 1990: 686f; Olivieri et al. 2014a: 215-219. This chronology fits better with the newest excavation data, rather than the 4th-5th centuries CE proposed in Callieri 2000 (see p. 863).
  - 16 Fashion Ware-like iconographies can be found in some birds represented in the 'medallion-stamped pottery' of the Begram III horizon (Kuwayama 1992 in 2002: fig. 24).
  - 17 Rydh 1959.
  - 18 See Allchin 1960.
  - 19 Rydh 1959: 180f.
  - 20 Rydh 1959: pls. 34-37.
  - 21 As anticipated in Callieri 2000: 866. Probably, as noted by A. Dibyopama (see below), the first sherds of this painted pottery were recovered (at the Bhader Kali site?) by the Italian Indologist Luigi P. Tessitori during his exploration of the Bikaner District in 1916-18 (reported in *A Report on Tours in Search of Archaeological Remains Made in Bikaner State during the Years 1916-17 & 1917-18* sent to J. Marshall in 1918; by the way, did Tessitori already noted Rang Mahal, at Suratgadha/Suratghar?). Tessitori could not complete his fieldwork along the river-bed of Ghaggar as he died in 1919 in Bikaner where he was buried.
  - 22 See Helms 1997: 74.
  - 23 Uesugi 2014.
  - 24 Many other 'Rang Mahal [painted] Ware' sites have been recently located in Rajasthan. See Dibyopama (2015); On the Rang Mahal painted pottery see also the recent article by Miller (2017).
  - 25 Uesugi 2014: 136, table 1.
  - 26 Härtel 1993: fig. VI.30 on p. 405.
  - 27 Härtel 1993: fig. 174, figs. VIII.1, 2 on p. 410.
  - 28 Lastly, one cannot underestimate that the layers from Saheth, a site in Uttar Pradesh (Saheth III = Early Gupta?) while presenting materials associable to Rang Mahal, Farmana, and Sonkh do not yield any evidence of painted pottery (Uesugi 2014: 145).
  - 29 The skill and advanced ability both for shaping/finishing and firing have been largely demonstrated by the archaeometric study of the BKG pottery (L. Maritan, in Callieri and Olivieri, in press). Analogous situation regards the c. BCE 1700-1400 painted pottery from BKG (the so-called 'Period IV' of BKG, see Stacul 1987: 103-109), which is a typical luxury production of the local potters, and found exclusively in the archaeological deposits of BKG. The relationship between this painted class and the late Harappan painted pottery (Cemetery H), introduced by Stacul 1984 (and more or less followed by others, for example Mughal 1990), was never further elaborated on proper archaeological and chronological bases.
  - 30 One the basic postulates elaborated after the study of more than 100,000 pottery sherds from BKG, says that shapes, technique and decorative patterns are likely to "travel" rather than vessels (Callieri and Olivieri, in press).
  - 31 From mid-3rd century CE cultic architecture at BKG includes (1) a stupa court with three chapels, (2) a walled precinct facing a shrine with cultic niches and altar, and benches running on two sides, (3) a distyle temple aligned on the long side, and (4) a single-cella tetrastyle temple (see Callieri et al. 1992; Olivieri 2011 [2015], Id. 2012 [2017] and Moscatelli, Olivieri and Niaz Ali Shah 2016).
  - 32 Cf. Ferreras Martínez et al. 2014. In the countryside, stucco and limestone decoration were massively introduced anew in Buddhist complexes around end-3rd century CE. Their use, which was certainly associated to the progressive decline of the local schist quarry activities, radically changed the look of the Buddhist architecture (comm. of the Author to the workshop *From Gandhāra to Gupta* organised by N. Hill, C. Luczanits, and D.

- Park at the and Professor David Park at The Courtauld Institute of Art, London 12-13 May 2017).
- 33 Pers. comm. by R. Bracey and J. Cribb, British Museum (see also Bracey 2012, Cribb et al. 2012; Jongeward, Cribb and Donovan 2014).
  - 34 McDowall and Callieri 2004: 69.
  - 35 Besides Fashion Ware, one should take into account two other Kushano-sasanian luxury wares: Golden Slip Ware and Red-on-golden Slip Ware (see Olivieri 2012 [2017], Callieri and Olivieri, in press).
  - 36 It is not excluded a possible 'Afghan' presence of this pottery class, as suggested by some, so far sporadic, findings in Eastern Afghanistan, including but not limited to the controversial pottery material discovered in the Province of Ghor at the site of Ahangaran (Leshnik 1967). The new material from Afghanistan, as well as the old material from Ahangaran are currently under study by the present writer, and they will be the object of a second note in the near future.
  - 37 Rather than a vague and outdated "diffusionism".

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