

EARLY COPPER/BRONZE AGE IN SWAT VALLEY

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The Copper/Bronze Age in the Indo-Pak subcontinent greatly varies from region to region according to the local cultural development.¹ The earliest evidences of copper/bronze finds from the Swat Valley have been ascribed to period IV in the Ghalegay sequence, dated c. 1700–1400 BC.² Cultural materials comparable to Ghalegay period IV have been recorded at various sites in Swat, such as, Ghalegay, Loebanr III, Barikot-Ghwandai³ and Damkot near Chakdara in Dir.⁴ A graveyard of the same period had been found in the Gorband Valley, near the confluence of Gorband and Indus Rivers.⁵

However, the spreading of the copper/bronze metallurgy in Swat may probably be ascribed to a previous cultural period. Such possibility is suggested by the following considerations:—

- (1) The earliest cultural period in the Swat Valley (period-I, II, III) have as yet only been recovered in the Ghalegay rock-shelter. No copper/bronze objects were found. But the absence of metal objects from these levels can not necessarily be taken to suggest a Neolithic cultural stage.
- (2) The metal objects and tools from Period-IV, also include large-sized items which have been produced by casting. Moreover, belonging to the same cultural sequence (Ghalegay-IV) is a fragment of stone mould and several smelting slags recovered from Barikot-Ghwandai.⁶ This shows the particular stage of development of the metallurgy in Swat, which cannot be compared with the earliest chalcolithic complexes of the subcontinent.

It may be noticed here that Ghalegay (Pl. 1 and Fig. 1) produced evidence of a spear-head 16.5 cm in length.⁷ At Loebanr-III and at Barikot-ghwandai chisels, pin-like objects, spatulas, fish-hooks, etc. have also been recovered.⁸ From Kalakodheri⁹ came to the light four large arrow-heads (the report is in the press), while in the Kherai graveyard some heavy spiral-shaped ear-rings have been recovered.¹⁰

These different objects are evidently the result of a well-developed copper/bronze metallurgy since 1700 B.C. With reference to the origin of this industry, two possibilities may be suggested:—

- (1) The metallurgy of Period-IV was based upon a previous local tradition for which no evidence as yet has come to light.
- (2) The copper/bronze metallurgy was introduced as a result of trading contacts or immigrations of people (possibly the same immigrations connected with the spread of the Indo-Aryans tribes in the North-Western subcontinent). It is possible, that the introduction of the grey-burnished ware and black-on-red painted ware (including that which shows horses and peepal tree motifs etc.) in Swat might be connected with the spreading of the early metallurgy in the region.

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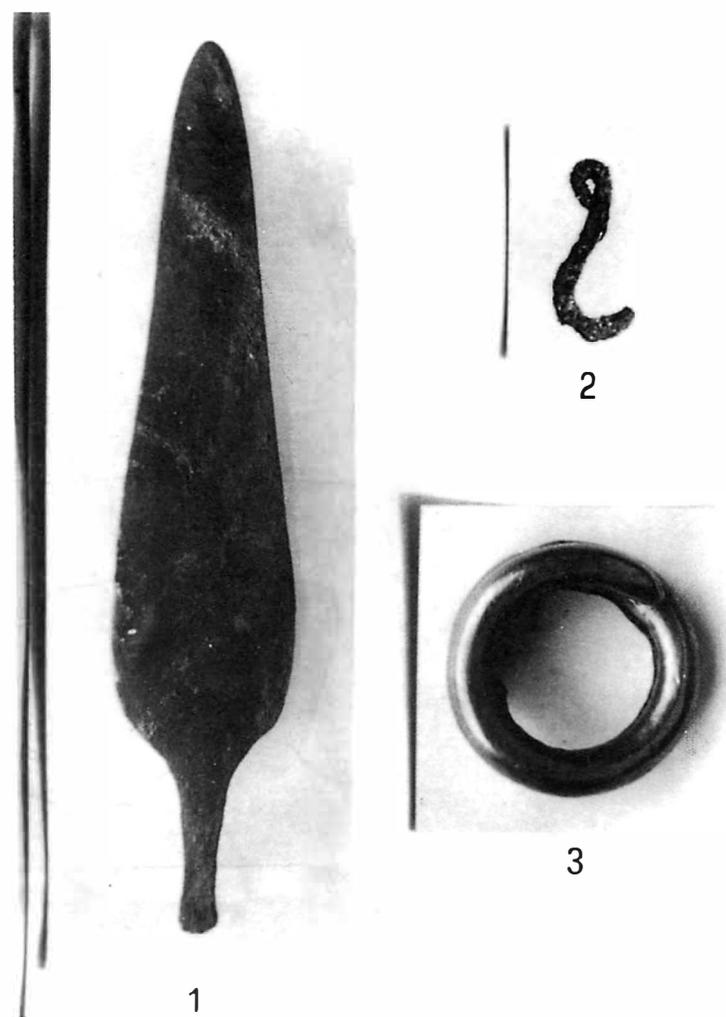
On the whole, the Swat Period-IV Culture cannot be considered as an isolated cultural aspect of the hilly regions of the North-western subcontinent. As regards the pottery, some grey-burnished shapes have been compared with Bactrian and North Iranian types dated to the beginning of the 2nd millennium.¹¹ The gritty-brown cooking pots and jars with mat-impresions on the base, are similar to shapes recovered at Burzahom and at other neolithic sites of the Kashmir Valley.¹² Further links between the Swat period-IV culture and the neolithic phases in the Kashmir Valley include some particular types of the lithic industry, such as, the rectangular holed sickles. The same rectangular sickles as well as the notched sickles and some jade beads have been compared with samples from neolithic and chalcolithic sites of Northern China.¹³ The spreading of metallurgy in Swat at the beginning of 2nd millennium, represents a very late date even in comparison to the Indus Valley and to Mehrgarh in particular where the early Chalcolithic period goes back to the 6th millennium BC. This shows that the technological developments may vary in different regions and countries according to the material culture, to the contacts/exchanges and to the occurrence of deposits of ores too. Trade in particular is an important factor in promoting technological developments.

In summary, it may be said that the spreading of early metallurgy in Swat still needs to be discussed in the light of new archaeological evidence. The present data, ascribed to Period-IV (from c. 1700 BC.) may represent a provisional evidence only. The metallurgy of Period-IV may have been derived from a previous local Chalcolithic cultural stage for which material evidence has not yet been found. Foreigners may have introduced the metallurgy early together with the spreading of the grey-burnished ware, the black-on-red painted pottery, faience ware, etc. Or the development of trade, during Period-IV, promoted the importation of copper and other raw materials from long-distance countries. With reference to the trade, it has been stated that timber might have represented the main export item for the Swat protohistoric peoples.¹⁴

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Pl. I Copper (Nos. 1, 2) and gold (No. 3) objects from Swat, Period IV (c. 1700–1400 BC.).
From Ghalegay: No. 1; from Birkot-Ghawandai; No. 2; from Kherai; No. 3

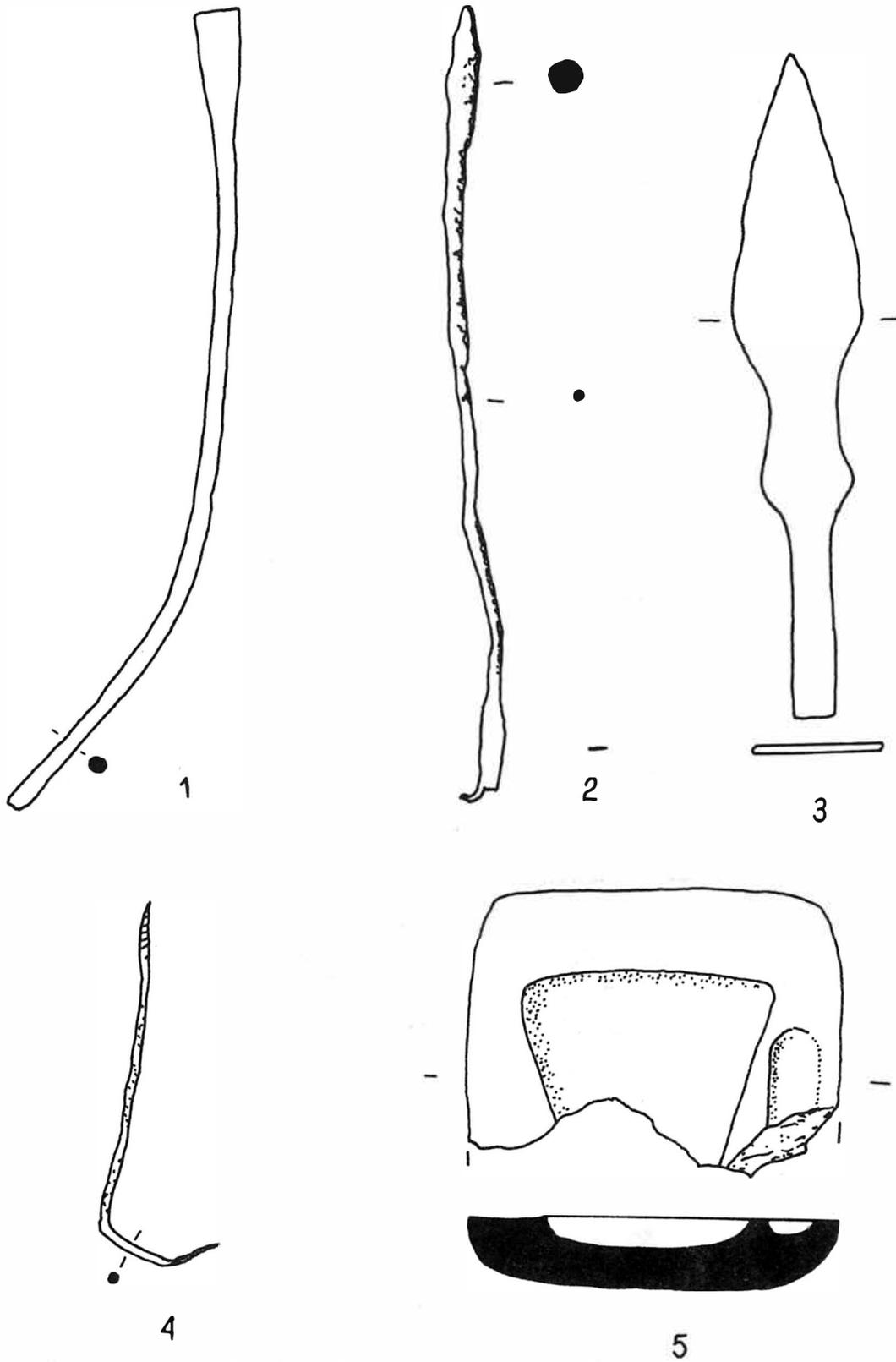


Fig. 1. Copper objects (Nos. 1–4) and stone mould (No. 5) from Swat, Period IV (c. 1700–1400 BC.). From Birkot-Ghawandai: Nos. 1, 2, 5; from Kalako-deray: No. 3; from Ghalegay: No. 4. Scale 1:1