

The Emerging Tochi-Gomal Cultural Phase in the Gomal Plain, Northwest Pakistan

Saira Naseem and Zakirullah Jan

Abstract: The article is related briefly to a cultural phase that appeared exclusively in the Bannu Basin and Dera Ismail Khan region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in northwestern Pakistan, at the end of Neolithic Age. Typological and chronological sequence suggests that the Tochi-Gomal Phase co-existed for a certain period with other contemporaneous regional cultures of South Asia such as the Ravi (Ravi-Hakra) Phase in the Punjab; Amri - Nal culture in Sindh; Togau & Kechi Beg Phases in Baluchistan and Sothi-Siswal culture in Rajasthan, India. Although reported earlier in 1970s, no proper attention is paid to this cultural phase of the Tochi-Gomal as a separate unit having its own distinctive features. Here in this paper, the diagnostic features are highlighted for identification as well as understanding its pivotal role it played in the emergence of urbanization in South Asia.

Keywords: Gomal Plain, Tochi-Gomal, Bannu, ceramics, figurine.

Introduction

The Gomal Plain has a unique archaeological and cultural history of human settlements that has significantly influenced various cultures in South Asia. In addition to several pre-historic (Morris, 1938) (Ali & Jan, 2005) and historic period cultures, the Gomal Plain is potentially a very rich region of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for the study of protohistoric cultures such as the late Neolithic/Early Chalcolithic culture (Sheri Khan Tarakai Phase) of Jhandi Babar, Darazinda and Gulgai Kot I; early Bronze Age Cultures of the Tochi-Gomal, Kot Dijian and the mature Bronze Age culture of the Indus Valley Civilization (Ali & Jan, 2009) (Jan, Ali, & Khan, 2008) (Tables I & II). Being a plain area in the foothills of Koh-i-Suleiman, Bhattani and Marwat-Kundi ranges with plenty of perennial and seasonal sources of water as well as availability of flora and fauna for human exploitation, the Gomal Plain has been an idyllic region for human colonization during the Chalcolithic/early Bronze Ages. Owing to a natural conducive environment, a cultural phase emerged in the Gomal plain and the adjacent Bannu basin around the end of the 4th millennium

BC (Ali & Jan, 2009, p. 22) or the first half of the third millennium BC (Petrie, Morris, Khan, Knox, & Thomas, p. 81) known to the scholarly world today as the Tochi-Gomal Phase. Gumla (period II), being the first site where this culture was identified in 1970-71 by A.H. Dani of the University of Peshawar. However, the same culture has later on been extended to several other sites such as Rehman Dheri, Hathala, Jhandi Babar I & II, Gandi Umar Khan (P.I), Maru I, Darazinda, Gulgai Kot I, Maddi and Kot Musa in subsequent explorations (Jan, Ali, & Khan, 2008) (Rahman, 1997) (Khan, Knox, & Thomas, 2000). The remnants of the Tochi-Gomal Phase have not only been unearthed on the Gomal plain but also from several sites in the Bannu Basin such as Lewan, Islam Chowki, Lak Largaie and Ter Kala Dheri (Khan, Knox, & Thomas, 1991).

Nomenclature

Since this culture occurred long before the urban phase of the mature Indus and the early-Harappan cultures, hence it was first known as 'Pre-early Harappan' by some scholars. Dani while investigating in the Gomal Plain, simply called it as Gumla II (culture) as it is first discovered from

period II at the archaeological mound of Gumla in Dera Ismail Khan. However, later on Durrani coined the term of proto- Kot Dijian (Durrani, 1981, p. 135) for this culture as he believed on the basis of archaeological repertoire from Rehman Dheri that certain ceramics shapes and their painted designs bear close similarity with that of the Kot Dijian culture. Identical cultural material subsequently discovered from the Bannu Basin by Farid Khan led to a new nomenclature of the Tochi-Gomal Phase (Khan, Knox, & Thomas, 2000, pp. 52-53) (Khan, Knox, & Thomas, 2001, p. 87). This terminology is based on geographical distribution of the archaeological sites belonging to this culture, which are in fact found in these two regions i.e. the Gomal (Dera Ismail Khan) and Tochi (Bannu). The culture is wholly local in character with clear parallels seen in the artifacts of both the regions. It is an important culture of early Bronze Age that can be dated between 3400-2800 BC. This period can be extended further if fresh samples for radio carbon dates are taken from deeper levels of larger sites such as Rehman Dheri (Khan, Knox, & Thomas, 2000, p. 54) and Jhandi Babar.

Cultural Traits

There is homogeneity of the cultural material from all the sites of the Tochi-Gomal Phase in both the regions. Diversity in terms of designs and shapes especially of ceramics, as well as technology of certain cultural artefacts may exist but will be studied in future. However, in relation to the preceding Neolithic culture, the bearers of Tochi-Gomal are entirely new people and has no connection with the previous occupation, with their own peculiar cultural assemblage including ceramics and distinct figurines. The people practiced agriculture and were bronze using community (Dani, 1970-1971, p. 39 & 42).

It is worth-mentioning that no connection of any sort is said to have been established in the culture materials between the two periods at Jhandi

Babar I, in the Gomal plain whereas a transition is identified at the site of Ter Kala Dheri in the Bannu basin (Khan, Knox, & Thomas, 2001).

One of the distinctive aspect of the Tochi-Gomal phase is its idiosyncratic pottery, made from a clay which is finely and smoothly powdered to make very fine textured vessels with thin fabrics. The pottery is wheel made in majority of cases and uniformly baked with certain cups have an elegantly sharp turn in the bodies. However, few handmade vessels also form part of this culture. It is painted with simple, complex and highly variable designs mainly in polychromic style in red, chocolate, black and white colours. The outer surfaces of the vessels in case of bowls are painted with different simple and complex geometrical designs including horizontal, vertical, slanting, wavy lines and bands; double eye motifs; step pattern; intersecting circles; inverted and connected triangles; super imposed squares; lozenges; herring bone design; loops; swastika design etc. along with floral and zoomorphic motifs such as fish; mountain goats; scorpions and ass. The shades/ hues used in the paintings are red, black, chocolate, buff and white. The white element used in the combination with other colours is a hallmark of this cultural phase in Western South Asia in the late fourth and early third millennia BC. Jars, bowls, dishes or platters (Figs. I & II) are the principal types of pottery of the Tochi-Gomal Phase (Jan, 2012, p. 95) (Petrie, Morris, Khan, Knox, & Thomas, p. 81) (Durrani, 1988, pp. 27-28) (Swati & Ali, 1998, p. 9) (Durrani, 1986, p. 89 & 93) (Durrani, 1981, pp. 135-136) (Lal, 1997, p. 55) (Khan, Knox, & Thomas, 2002, p. 105) (Petrie, et al., 2008, p. 3).

In addition to pottery, the other important aspect of this phase is the production of human female terracotta figurines shown in seated form, although one is discovered in standing form outside the Gomal region from Lak largae in

Bannu (Khan, Knox, & Thomas, 1991, p. 29). These figurines are easily identifiable due to swinging bents in the legs. However, the second type is also in seated position with extending paired legs without bents. Having large bodies with pinched faces and no hands and fingers, it appears that the figurines were conceptual rather than to have been used as pieces of art. They are rather low on the beautification (Flavin, Ali, & Erdosy, 1994-95, pp. 91-94) (Dani, 1970-1971, pp. 65-68) (Ali & Jan, 2009, p. 25) (Khan, Knox, & Thomas, 2000, p. 31). These figurines have been marked with certain diagnostic features such as small and rounded breasts, unlike the preceding SKT phase, straight shoulders, triangular chest, thin and narrow waists and bulky hips. The figurines from all sites of the Tochi-Gomal Phase show a uniformity in shapes, style and concept. This consistency throughout proves their individuality, uniformity and that they belong to a single and similar culture. With human figurines, animal terracotta's were also recovered in a considerable number, which has been identified as bulls and sheep (Ali & Erdosy, 1994-95) (Dani, 1970-1971, pp. 72-77).

As far as the architecture of the Tochi-Gomal phase is concerned, houses in the form of huts, packed mud, brick-shaped clay slabs and dressed clay blocks have been exposed from various sites especially at Rehman Dheri where rooms and wall of packed mud and brick-shape clay slabs with thatched roofs have been identified (Durrani, 1988, p. 27; Durrani, 1986, p. 87; Durrani, 1981, p. 135).

More sophisticated in this age is the origin and development of craft technology especially of making well-polished beads from different materials in which some were locally/nearby available while some were brought to the site from far off places such as the coastal region of the Arabian Sea, Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia. The beads of this phase in the Gomal Plain

comprise of terracotta, steatite, steatite paste, bone, white stone, agate, alabaster, amazonite, carnelian, gold, jasper, lapis, quartz, serpentine, shell, siltstone, stalagmite and turquoise (Durrani, Ali, & Erdosy, 1994-95, pp. 24-73) (Durrani, Ali, & Erdosy, 1991, p. 45) (Dani, 1970-1971, p. 87 & 88). All these have been exhumed mainly from the much excavated Gomal plain site of Rehman Dheri and Gumla.

The most striking and unique feature of this culture is the discovery of stamped terracotta cakes, which have only been discovered from the surface as well as archaeological context at Jhandi Babar I (Khan, Knox, & Thomas, 2002, pp. 105-6; Ali & Khan, 2001, p. 178). These half-baked cakes are handmade from rough clay mixed with broken pottery sherds and organic materials with coarse and gritty fabric. The important aspect of such cakes is a variety of stamped designs like rosettes, scorpion, house/cottage like motifs and many other, which were inscribed. The cakes are found in rectangular brick shape form, oval with rounded ends and oval with pointed ends. Such or any other types of cakes have never been found from any of the Tochi-Gomal Phase sites. Neither they are unearthed from the Kot Diji phase. However, plain terracotta cakes are very much common element of the Harappan period, but are without any stamps or design except the one from Kalibangan.

The presence and usage of seals in the Tochi-Gomal Phase marks a classic technological advancement, showing importance of trade in this phase on one hand and laying a base for the seals of the Harappan Civilization on the other. The significant one is a squarish, ivory seal from Rehman Dheri with its fine carved features consisting of two mountain goats with wavy horns, and symbols of I, T and an arrow on one side, and two scorpions, a frog and T symbol on the other (Durrani, 1988, p. 28) (Durrani, 1981, p.

136) (Lal, 1997, pp. 55-56). Metal objects further speaks of the technological advancement of this phase, contributed and laid a base for further development. Large scale excavations need to be conducted at the other Tochi-Gomal sites to highlight the different and significant aspects of technology, trade, agriculture and its impacts on the ancient economy.

Conclusion

Chronologically, the Tochi-Gomal Phase is placed after the Neolithic culture represented at Jhandi Babar and before the Kot Diji culture of Bronze Age represented at Gumla, Rehman Dheri etc which is long established by the radio carbon dates and cross dating technique of artifacts of the sites. The C-14 dating is available from different sites of the Tochi-Gomal phase both from Gomal (from Rehman Dheri) and Bannu regions (from Lak largae, Ter Kala Dheri, Lewan and Islam Chowki). Cross dating technique was used in some of the unexcavated sites in the Gomal plain which evinced the presence of the Tochi-Gomal phase at the sites (Jan, Ali, & Khan, 2008, pp. 16-18).

The cultural material shows that Tochi-Gomal phase has played a significant role in promoting

subsequent cultures of the Kot Diji and Harappa. The inscribed seals and sherds of this phase appear to be the starting point of writing system and trade mechanism of the mature Indus Civilization (Durrani & Ali, 1998, p. 17; Durrani, Ali, & Erdosy, 1994-95, pp. 210-17). The animals and the symbols depicted on the earliest seal at Rehman Dheri are different from those found in the Indus Civilization, but it can be said that the idea of having animals with symbols is a continuity from the Tochi Gomal phase to the mature Harappan phase. The marked stylistic departure from handmade to wheel thrown pottery is a perfect technological change. Many of the painted designs of the Kot Diji phase was first discovered at the Tochi-Gomal phase. Long distance trade was in practice which is observed by the presence of non-native lumps of semi-precious stones brought from distant areas, manufactured on the site for making beads such as turquoise, agate, lapis lazuli and carnelian. This indicates that the beginning of long distance trade and the establishment of specialized craft had already taken place long before the fully mature urban sites of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. The stamped terracotta cakes laid a base for the terracotta cakes found in the Harappan contexts, where it is plain.

Table 1: Gomal Plain, site of Tochi-Gomal Phase with details of findings

S #	Sites	Pottery	Figurines	Beads	Structures	Cakes	Seals	Bangles
1.	Rehman Dheri	X	X	X	X	---	X	X
2.	Gumla	X	X	X	X	---	---	X
3.	Hathala	X	X	---	---	---	---	X
4.	Jhandi Babar I	X	X	---	---	X	---	X
5.	Jhandi Babar II	X	X	---	---	---	---	X
6.	Gandi Umar Khan	X	X	---	---	---	---	X
7.	Maru I	X	X	---	---	---	---	X
8.	Gulgai Kot I	X	---	---	---	---	---	X
9.	Darazinda	X	---	---	---	---	---	X
10.	Maddi	X	---	---	---	---	---	X
11.	Kot Musa	X	---	---	---	---	---	X

Table 2: Gomal Plain, Association of Tochi-Gomal Phase sites with other Protohistoric cultures

S #	Sites	Late Neolithic	Tochi-Gomal	Kot Diji	Mature Harappan
1.	Rehman Dheri	-----	X	X	-----
2.	Gumla	-----	X	X	X
3.	Hathala	-----	X	X	-----
4.	Jhandi Babar I	X	X	-----	-----
5.	Jhandi Babar II	-----	X	X	-----
6.	Gandi Umar Khan	-----	X	X	X
7.	Maru I	-----	X	X	-----
8.	Gulgai Kot I	X	X	-----	-----
9.	Darazinda	X	X	-----	-----
10.	Maddi	-----	X	X	-----
11.	Kot Musa	-----	X	X	-----
12.					

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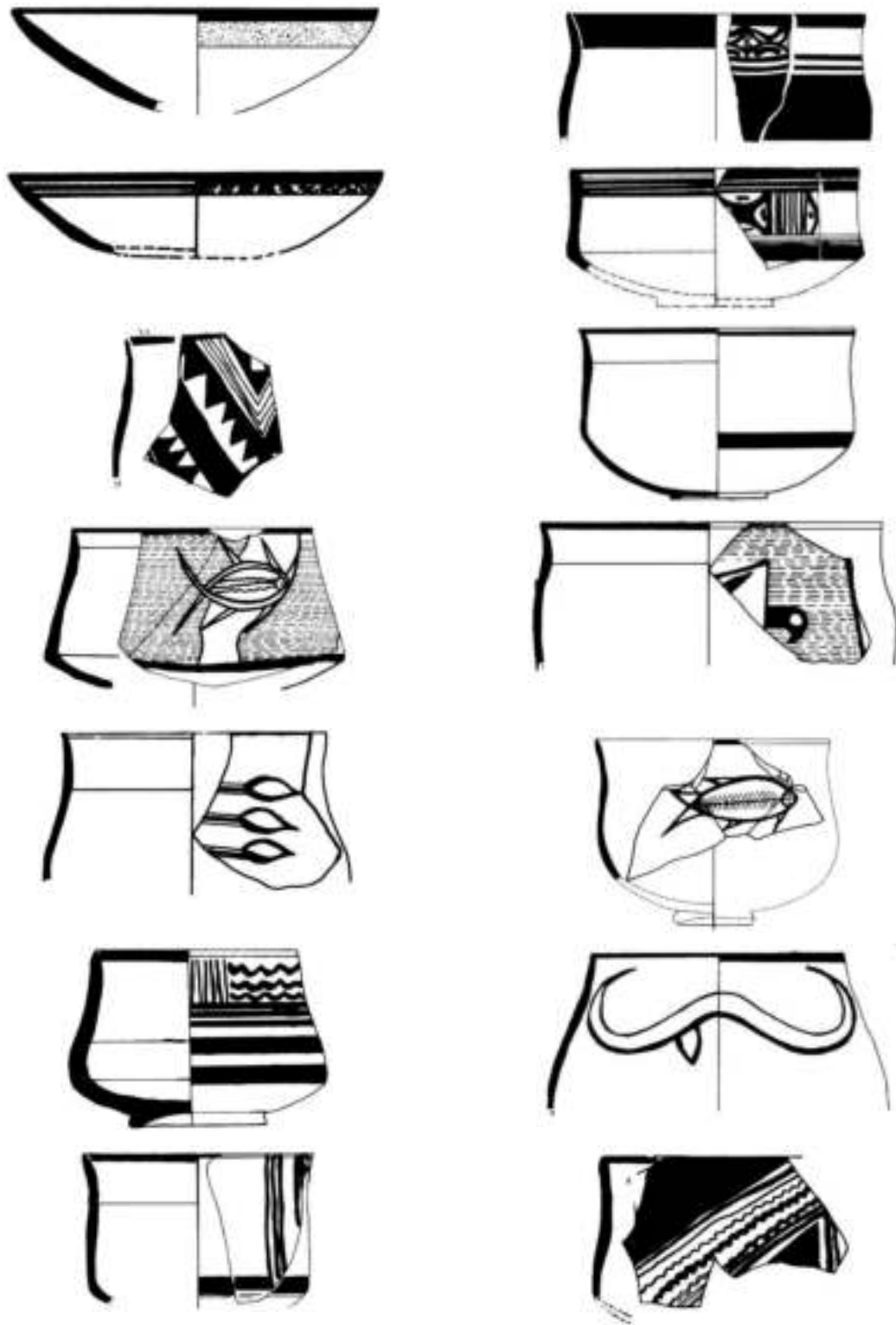


Fig.1: Tochi-Gomal Phase: Bowls from Rehman Dheri (after Durrani 1988)

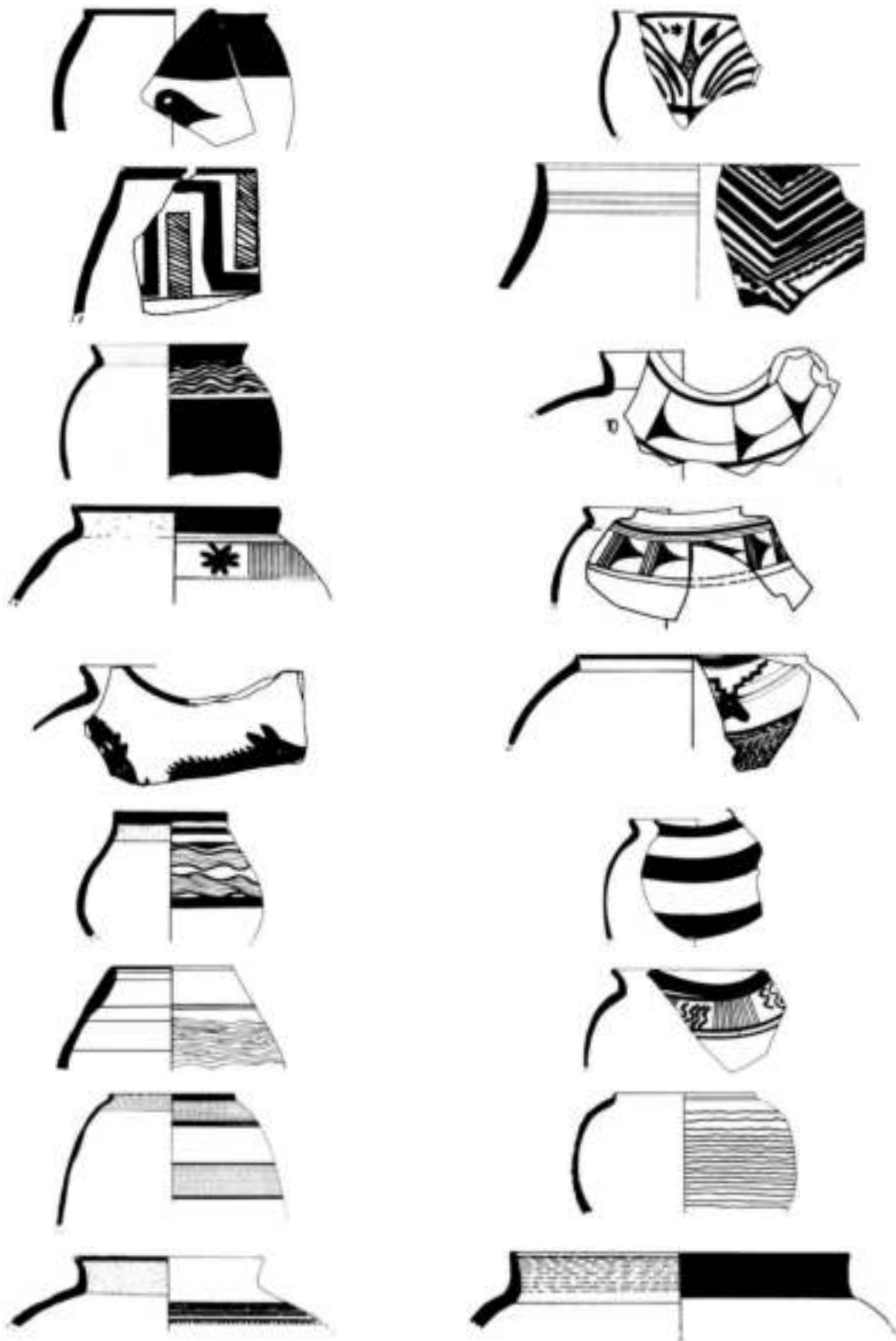


Fig. 2: Tochi-Gomal Phase Jars from Rehman Dheri (after Durrani 1988)