

The Ceramic Traditions in Balochistan

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Abstract:

Balochistan has a very rich cultural heritage. However, the cultural Activities started in Balochistan in Paleolithic times around 35000 B.P as the Paleolithic evidences have been in eastern Balochistan, southeastern Balochistan and Suleman ranges. Mesolithic evidences have been found in Zhob are, while the Neolithic cultural activities are not limited to only one region of Balochistan, they are found in all parts of Balochistan. In this regard, Mehrgarh – the first Neolithic settlement not only in Balochistan, in fact, in the South Asia marked the beginning of so many developments that some scholars termed it as “Neolithic Revolution”. The cultural activities don’t end here, they continued later in Chalcolithic Age, Bronze Age, and Iron Age until late historic times. Tradition of Pottery making began at Mehrgarh in the Neolithic period of Balochistan along with many other developments. First potteries were basket marked, then handmade and later with a little development; potteries were made by wheels so the third method is called wheel made potteries. This cultural activity started by people of Mehrgarh, imitated and continued by their successors or contemporary people for a long period with a little change in making technique or decoration. That’s why we have many specimens of various ceramic industries in Balochistan mainly characterized by the style of decoration or making technique. This paper will illustrate these various ceramic industries or traditions as the ceramics are very sensitive and reliable sources which indicate the cultural dynamics in a region.

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Cultural Activities in Balochistan

The cultural activities started on this earth million years ago, continued from prehistoric times down to late historic times.

Moreover the cultural activities started in Balochistan in the last age of the first phase of Prehistory i.e. the late Paleolithic age – late Old Stone Age, the other two being the early and middle Paleolithic age. The general period of this phase is considered is from 35000 until 10,000 BP (Qazi, 1998:9). Balochistan is full late Paleolithic settlements, in this regard we have Paleolithic settlements at *Kot Mondai*, *Marri* Area in eastern Balochistan, *Khokar Kore*, *Lasbela* region in the south eastern Balochistan, and wonderful caves and rock-shelter paintings in the *Suleman* range and its subsidiary ranges in the North-Eastern Balochistan. (Kenoyer, 1998:33-35) We have Mesolithic – Middle Stone Age settlements in *Zhob* District where engravings of Magdalenian people in the rock-shelters have been found. (Ibid, 35)

The Neolithic – new Stone Age phase of Balochistan is extended into a period of 6 thousand years, from 8000 B.C down to 2000 B.C(Qazi, 12) with many new developments, in this regard the *Mehrgarh* – the first settlements in south Asia, marked the beginning of a new revolution (Jarrige, 1995:59-60) So Neolithic settlements first recorded at *Mehrgarh* and continued; furthermore we see many Neolithic settlements throughout Balochistan in *Kachi* Plains, *Quetta* Valley, the *Zhob* Valley and *Loralai*. Important sites of this period include *Mehrgarh*, *Killi Gul Muhammad*, *Baleli* Mound, *Musazai*, *Sur Jangal*, *Anjira* and *Rana Ghundai*.(Jamil, 2012: 2)

Chalcolithic Period begins in Balochistan around 5500 B.C.E. to 3500 B.C.E with settlements in *Quetta* Valley, *Rana Ghundai*, *Sur Jangal* (*Loralai* Valley), *Mughal Ghundai* and *Periono Ghundai* (*Zhob* Valley), *Anjira* and *Siah Damb* (*Khuzdar* Region and *Mehrgarh* (*Kachi* Plains))(Ibid, 2-3).

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Balochistan has also gone through Bronze Age, this age is represented at many important archaeological sites including Mehrgarh. Of the important survey carried out during pre and post partition periods mainly confined to a limited area in Quetta Valley, *Zhob* Valley, *Khuzdar* District, Makran Region, Lasbela, Region, Kachi Plains (Bolan Valley), Turbat (Kech Valley), etc.(Ibid, 3)

Beginning of Pottery in Balochistan

The pottery marked its beginning at Mehrgarh, Balochistan in the Neolithic phase of prehistory. This phase, which took Balochistan into a new stage, witnessed many new developments and inventions along with the pottery making tradition such as mud brick houses, use of fire, agriculture, the concept of domestication of animals etc. (Jarriage, 59-67) Because of these features of the Neolithic Period, in 1050 Gordon Childe regarded the new stone age as “Neolithic Revolution”.(Ibid. 3) The introduction of pottery no doubt is one of the signs that show the beginning of settled life. The ancient people had chosen settled life rather than hunting and gathering activities. The potters introduced three different techniques to prepare various pots. The first method was basket mark pottery, second hand made ceramics and third the wheel made pottery. In this phase kilns were made in which bricks and ceramics were baked.

This is the archaeological assumption that ceramics are the most sensitive and reliable indicators of cultural dynamics.(Shaffer, 1978: 78) Ceramics are very important tool to understand the tradition and chronology of a particular area. Ceramic is used as criterion for classification. The names of *Zhob* Valley, of *Nal* polychrome, *Kulli*, Quetta tradition, Makran tradition, *Bampur* tradition, are in fact specimens of various ceramic industries mainly characterized by the style of decoration.

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Quetta Tradition:

Quetta Ceramics were manufactured from a buff-red paste; and decorations were applied either directly to the surface or onto a white-buff slip. Motifs are mainly geometrics with zoomorphic motifs occurring in later periods. The basic motif combinations are: chevrons formed by combining thick and thin Bands an overall pattern made up of diagonally divided squares, pairs of opposing triangles, and, most distinctive, various stepped and oval motifs. In the early periods geometrics motives are depicted while in the later periods, zoomorphic motifs occurred. (Ibid. 122-123)

So Quetta tradition is not only very distinctive, but also one of the best defined for Balochistan. Its geographical area corresponds to the *Sarawan* region of Balochistan. Major Sites classified as belonging to this style zone are: *Mundigak*, *Deh Morasi Ghundai*, *Said Qala Tepe*, *Damb Sadaat*, and other Quetta valley sites.

In the Quetta Valley a number of shreds have been collected by Fairservis that did not fall within the limits of the prehistoric ceramic corpus and therefore are attributable to the immediately post-prehistoric or historical periods. It was readily apparent that the decorated wares could be divided into 13 groups, as follows: 1. Ghul Painted 2. Pishin black-on-red 3. Finger-tip decorated 4. Applique 5. Stamped 6. Mould-made 7. Ring 8. Ribbed 9. Rope 10. Loop and comb incising 11. Glazes 12. Modern or Islamic 13. Handles and lugs. (Fairservis, 1956: 336-343)

Zhob Tradition:

Piggott has originally classified the ceramic style of Zhob as belonging to Red Ware group. However, Fairservis described several buff ware variants for this area and style. As noted by Fairservis, there is a strong resemblance between early periods of the Zhob and Quetta Traditions. Given this close geographical proximity, such similarity is not unexpected.

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Motifs are mainly geometric and executed in panel designs with a black paint on a red slip. The most distinctive characteristic of this tradition is the zoomorphic motifs of Period II Motifs of ibex and bovines are highly stylized with elongated legs and bodies. The area between the legs is hatched filled giving this tradition a very distinctive appearance. (Shaffer, 125-126)

Periono Ghundai is the most prolific pottery site in the Zhob Valley as its ceramics represent great many periods and cultures ranging from prehistoric to Sassanian times while historic or later wares have been found at Moghul Ghundai include Rope ware and various incised, stamped and painted wares. (Fairservis 1959: 329-359) Utilizing the distinctive female figurine associated with these ceramics, Fairservis has proposed the existence of a “Zhob Cult Phase” for Balochistan Prehistory. (Shaffer, 1978: 126).

The Ceramic evidence at Moghul Ghundai would seem to indicate that incinerary pot burial was common during the Zhob Cult Phase. The Bull figurines and a hooded Zhob mother-goddess figurine found furnish additional evidence on the existence of this cult (Fairservis, 1959: 359-360).

Nāl Tradition :

Nāl ceramics are one of the most distinctive pottery styles for the whole Iranian Plateau. The Nāl style zone corresponds very roughly the geographical region of northern Jhālāwān Pottery was manufactured from a buff paste. There were two major methods of style execution: a black –on-buff and true polychrome. Motifs were primarily geometrics, with distinctive zoo-morphic (fish, scorpion, bull, and ibex) motifs recorded for later phases. Both geometric and Zoomorphic motifs are executed in a style which involves utilization of panel designs, often with multiple outlines including curvilineals.

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Panels are frequently left open in the black-on-buff method, whereas they are often filled with different colors (black, yellow, red, green, and blue) in the case of polychromes.

This utilization of multicolored panes, especially for zoomorphic motifs, has made Nāl ceramics one of the most distinctive pottery styles for the whole Iranian Plateau (Shaffer, 1978: 124)

Kullī Tradition:

This tradition has some connections with the Nal Tradition because of the presence of Anjira Ware at its area. The geographical area of this tradition lies in the southern Jhalawan. Fairservis has done limited excavations on the Edith Shahr Complex of Sites – namely Niai Buthi and more extensive excavation has been done by Casal on Nindowari. Ceramics were manufactured from a buff paste. The motifs are executed with a black paint on a pinkish slip (Ibid: 126).

The typical painted decoration on Kullī ware consists of zones of non-representational motifs between which, in many instances, runs a frieze of natural representation of animals and plants. This frieze forms a single continuous band around pot representing a standard scene, in which two animals, usually humped cattle but sometimes felines, dominate in grotesquely elongated form, a landscape with very stylized goats. Above the major animals W-shaped friezes may represent conventionalized birds, a fish is present in at least one instance, and various rosettes and other symbols fill the background on some pots. (Ibid: 126-127)

The Kullī tradition has acquired much of its importance from its contemporary with the Harappan Tradition, and supposed influence upon later phases of other Balochistan Traditions.

Bampur Tradition

It lies in the Iranian Makran. Its ceramics are of two kinds of paste red and less frequent gray with geometric and zoomorphic motives.

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Bampur ceramics were manufactured from two kinds of paste; one was red and the other, less frequent, was gray. Ceramics of both pastes almost always bore some kind of decoration. The cohesiveness of these ceramics is an indicator of a stylistic tradition was noted by DeCardi in her reference to a 'Bampur Culture.' Motifs, especially in Periods I-III, are predominantly geometric. However, a few zoomorphic and floral motifs were among the illustrated specimens for these periods.(Ibid: 125)

Throughout the Balochistan we have seen much cultural continuity. Many sites of Balochistan are linked with each other sharing same features. The sites of Balochistan also have with the other closing sites. The prime example is the Bampur site which is located in the Persian Makran but it has close resemblance with Quetta tradition. As Shaffer states, a resemblance exists between these geometric motifs and vessel forms and those of the Quetta Tradition. The main distinguishing feature of Bampur motifs is the filling of large geometric motifs with a fine cross-hatching, where as in the Quetta Tradition, such motifs have solid infill.(Ibid: 125)

Conclusion

Balochistan has been a cradle of civilization throughout the prehistory and history. Though this land has very rough and dry geographical conditions, still this land witnessed the rise and fall of great cultures. Many cultures flourished, thrived and saw either their downfall or transformed or diffused into other neighboring cultures. This transformation and diffusion of cultures in Balochistan has continued from the earliest time of cultural activities, in the Late Paleolithic time until late historic times. Because of the same reason we see a great similarity, as evidenced on potteries, among these cultures which proves the theory of interregional migration and trade.

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