
The Tochi-Gomal Cultural Phase at Rehman Dheri in the Gomal Plain, Dera Ismail Khan: Fresh Evidence**Dr. Saira Naseem, Prof. Dr. Zakirullah Jan**

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Abstract

Pakistan has a very rich archaeological and cultural history spanning from the Stone to the Iron Ages. So is the region of Dera Ismail Khan and Bannu Basin in the Northwest Pakistan, where rich heritage sites, diverse cultural traditions and archaeological mounds have been well attested by archaeologist. Around the end of the 4th and beginning of the 3rd millennium BC, a local culture of the early Bronze Age appeared simultaneously in these two regions with distinctive social, cultural, economic and religious traits that significantly influenced the subsequent history and cultures of South Asia. The culture can be placed at the end of the Neolithic/Chalcolithic age of South Asia. First identified at Gumla and Hathala, this culture is unearthed later on at Rehman Dheri, Jhandi Babar, Gandi Umar Khan in the Gomal and at Lak Largae, Lewan and Ter Kala Dheri in the Tochi Valley. The traces being found exclusively in these two regions, hence it is called as 'Tochi- Gomal Phase'. A substantial amount of cultural data of the Tochi-Gomal Cultural Phase has been unearthed at the archaeological site of Rehman Dheri over the years where relatively larger area is exposed from 1976 to 1995. However, fresh probing at the site is conducted in 2015, 2016 and 2017 by the Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar and the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where fresh evidence about the socio- culture aspect of this culture has been obtained. Such evidence in the form of architecture, technology, socio-economic facet of the society, ceramic manufacturing and design/pattern paved the way for the emergence of urbanism in South Asia and the growth of the Indus Civilization.

Introduction

The arid, barren and infertile Gomal Plain where hundreds of archaeological sites have been explored, must have been a fertile region where these ancient settlements flourished for centuries. The existence of this rich archaeological heritage of the pre-urban phase on the Gomal Plain played a vital role in the upbringing of an important civilization in the Indus Plain which has progenitors in the Gomal. The Gomal Plain, northwestern Pakistan, occupies southern part of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that holds an important location connecting Central Asia with South Asia via dozens of traversable passes. The spade of archaeologists over the years has exposed several regional cultures that developed in the Gomal Plain. Among the Protohistoric, in addition to pre and historic period cultures, one of the important Chalcolithic/Early Bronze Age culture in the region that appeared during 4th millennium BC, is now known as the Tochi-Gomal Phase with discernable distinctive traits. The term 'Tochi-Gomal Phase' was first coined by the Bannu Archaeological Project (Khan, Knox, & Thomas,

2000 (d); Khan, Knox, & Thomas, 2001, p. 87; Petrie, Morris, Khan, Knox, & Thomas, p. 80 & 81). They were of the view that this culture exclusively appeared in these two regions of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Before this nomenclature, it is referred to as 'Gumla II' culture, 'Proto Kot Dijian' or 'Pre-Early Harappan' owing to its occurrence long before the Indus Civilization. The Tochi-Gomal phase has specialized cultural traits as compared to the earlier 'Late Neolithic Phase' of Jhandi Babar I and Gulgai Kot I or later 'Kot Diji Phase' identified at dozens of sites in the Gomal such as Rehman Dheri, Gumla, Gandhi Umar Khan, Kot Musa and in the Bannu such as Lewan, Tarakai Qila etc. The ceramic vessels' forms, shapes, designs, manufacturing technology and paintings present a marked difference than the preceding as well as succeeding cultures. It is characterized by its exquisite, wheel made and well-shaped pottery comprising of carinated cups/bowls, jars, dishes being beautified mainly with simple and complex geometric designs (Jan, 2012, p. 95; Petrie, Morris, Khan, Knox, & Thomas, p. 81; Khan, Knox, & Thomas, 2001, p. 87; Dani, 1970-1971, pp. 39, 42 & 43, 130-144; Durrani, 1981, p. 135). The other well-known feature of this phase is its distinct figurines in which swinging legs are the most common and recognized type, along with these, figurines with paired legs are part of the same production. Pottery and figurines were not the only artifacts that filled the assemblage of this phase, they manufactured high quality beads from precious and semi-precious stones/chunks which are either local or imported. Besides the making of beads, bone artifacts and most importantly the arrival of copper which is most likely to be imported acts/acted as an emblem for the phase (Petrie, Morris, Khan, Knox, & Thomas, p. 81). The list of cultural evidence of this phase does not end here. Rehman Dheri has yielded a pristine and beautiful seal in its earliest phase, the Tochi-Gomal and is a very significant discovery which is a quality example of craftsmanship of the people in such early phase. It is squarish ivory seal which measures 3x2.7x0.02 cm. Finely carved on both sides, the one side is shown with two mountain goats with wavy horns, I, T and arrow symbol the other side depicts two scorpions, flanking a frog and a T symbol (Durrani F. A., 1988, p. 28; Durrani, 1981, p. 136; Lal, 1997, pp. 55-56). Bangles and stone tools are also part of the assemblage.

Rehman Dheri and the Tochi-Gomal Phase

The archaeological mound of Rehman Dheri is located about 23 km north of Dera Ismail Khan city on Bannu Road in a barren and semi-arid area of the Gomal Plain. Discovered by A.H. Dani in 1970-71, the site was excavated by FA Durrani several times from 1976 to 1991 (Dani, 1970-1971, p. 28; Durrani F. A., 1988, p. 17; Young & Coningham, 1997-98, p. 107; Samad and Jan 2016). These probing revealed that Rehman Dheri had been the first and earliest proto-urban center, inhabited by 8000-12000 people, that gave the idea of urbanism to the entire South Asia. Radiocarbon dates from various archaeological contexts of Rehman Dheri suggest that the city flourished between 3340-1900 BC with discernable three cultural phases identified respectively as the Tochi-Gomal (3340-2850 BC), Kot Diji (2850-2500 BC) and Evolve Kot Diji (2500-1900) (Durrani F. A., 1988, pp. 27-29; Durrani, Ali, & Erdosy, 1991, p. 3). After a long gap, excavations were resumed by the University of Peshawar and the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, under Zakirullah Jan and Abdul Samad in 2015, 2016 and 2017. The last three seasons were mainly focused on the earliest period i.e. the 'Tochi-Gomal Phase' of the site, unlike the excavations of Durrani, which revealed the Kot Dijian phase mainly (Samad & Jan, 2016). Here the result of the Tochi-Gomal Phase in the last three seasons of excavations is discussed.

Architecture

Since the occupation of the site, architectural activities at Rehman Dheri have been observed although in limited areas of excavations but are very important to study the living pattern of the ancient society. Durrani has found traces of a 4 feet thick defensive wall of packed clay around the settlement (Durrani, 1988). The base of the defensive wall is 2 feet thicker than the

superstructure to give a solid foundation. House units were also made of packed clay in the beginning and later on of clay slabs/bricks. Thick platforms made of solid and compact clay are essential elements of architecture at Rehman Dheri, which has also been observed in the Tochi-Gomal Phase. Their edges/boundaries have not been cleared owing to limitations, but it appears that they have been thatched with wooden sticks and branches of trees, a feature still practiced in the region. Such platforms have also been noted earlier (Durrani, 1986: 87 - 88) (Durrani, 1988: 21, 26 - 28).

Ceramics

As Rehman Dheri is considered the type of site of the Tochi-Gomal phase, most of the evidence of this culture is unearthed here due to its huge size, important location and frequent investigations. The pottery collected recently also has a high level of sophistication with quality of refinement. The delicate appearance of the sherds clearly indicates that it is wheel thrown except a few hand made. The potters of the Tochi-Gomal phase at Rehman Dheri shaped bowls and jars as the main element in the pottery assemblage. While discussing the Tochi-Gomal Phase pottery from Jhandi Babar I (A-II), Swati and Ali suggested coiling technique before turning them on wheel (Swati & Ali, 1998: 9; Petrie, Morris, Khan, Knox, & Thomas, p. 81). The proficient potters of Rehman Dheri used to manufacture ceramics from well kneaded clay. The ceramics are predominantly red slipped, occasionally buff ware does occur, with dark brown, black and chocolate colour decoration. In addition, white colour is too widely used in filling of patterns with chocolate, black or brown outlines (Plate 1 and 2). The list of freshly discovered pottery consists of bowls, jars, lids and engraved sherds. Bowls are considered as a diagnostic feature of this phase, which have straight walls with either slight or sharp carination. The sharp carination gives an elegant touch to the bowls (Plates 5 & 6). They are either shown with ring bases or seem to be plain without ring bases. The bowls discovered are mainly red ware with slip applied both internally and externally. They are decorated with some very interesting and previously unknown designs. The incorporated designs on bowls are applied on the external surfaces on the bodies and show a combination of three types of motifs, geometric, faunal and floral. The geometric one includes cross-hatched (Plate 1) enclosed in a panel around the body, horned-deity motif (Plate 4), sun motif, pipal leave, lozenges motif with semi circles, endless knot motif. Along with these motifs on the bowls, the usual patterns include oblique wavy lines, step pattern, vertical lines and bands, a panel of triangles (Plates 1 and 2). The faunal designs on the bowls include a bird or a swimming fish(?) and an ass/donkey motif. The motif of an ass/donkey on a bowl is previously known from the site of Gumla by Dani (Dani, 1970-1971). A pipal leave is beautifully depicted on a sherd of a bowl with chocolate outline and pinkish filling. A jar has the depiction of a hound with white body and black spots (Plate 3). Such breed of dogs is still kept by the local people for hunting animals. The jars are relatively less in number than bowls. An example of a flanged rim jar is also known. Their rims are flaring, out turned or everted. The neck of the jars varies from short to long. The spiral motifs depicted on the jars are shown in a variety, such as a panel of only spiral motifs, spiral motifs with I and fish scale pattern, spiral motif with the sign of + (plus), a flying arrow? A panel of squares connected by a horizontal line with a T, a beautiful jar with a flower motif, completes the assemblage of the jars. One of the engraved sherds shows a dried stalk of cereal and the other shows endless knot motif like that shown in painting.

Figurines

The figurines freshly unearthed belong to the earliest phase of Rehman Dheri. These are mostly broken at the waist as they are figured with attenuated waists which are more inclined to break and some are broken at their feet. In any of the figurines the head is not shown. From their appearance, they show huge buttocks, straight parallel legs, thin waists, pinched noses and upward arms. The figurines are all simply made by hand with no technicality seen. They are

made by the process of rolling, tooling and pinching. Their manufacturing process involves three steps. Both the legs are processed separately by rolling and tooling each leg and then attached to the upper part of the body. No eyes and mouth are delineated. The nose shown is pinched from the same lump of clay as the torso.

Discussion

From the archaeological probing at Rehman Dheri as well as other sites, it appears that the people of Tochi-Gomal phase lived in villages on the plain near the sources of perennial water streams or in the interfluvies between rivers (Thomas, 1999: 313; Khan, Knox, & Thomas, 2002: 120), and practicing agriculture. A sickle blade of stone used for harvesting crops has been unearthed at the site of Gumla (period II) (Dani, 1970-1971: 42), showing the Tochi-Gomal to be agrarian based society. Botanical remains in charred form from the grain silos as well as storage jars were found in excavations. Although wheat dominated, it also included barley. The presence of large storage jars indicates that the crops were processed out of the rachis probably in the houses, stored in the storage jars and milled by the grinding stones. The bones of buffalo, cattle, sheep, goat, fish and possibly fowl and other birds show animal husbandry as part of subsistence and economy of the people. The bones of wild species such as onager (wild ass) and wild pig throw light on fauna of the time. The evidence of dress is too meagre and can partly be reconstructed from the figurines, which too is insufficient. The people, especially the womenfolk and children, appear to be fond of wearing jewelry as they made different types of beads of precious and semi-precious stone, in addition to terracotta and bone. The artifacts/ceramics/figurines/stone tools/beads collected from the Tochi-Gomal Phase at Rehman Dheri were locally produced as well as important material. In recent excavations, a semi-industrial unit has been unearthed where kilns for baking ceramics as well as figurines have been exposed dated to the Tochi Gomal Phase. Rehman Dheri had a well-established bead manufacturing industry making beads locally at the site as appeared from many discoveries. The presence of both finished and unfinished beads, the drills and micro-drills collected, evidenced the production of the bead industry at the site. Several materials in raw form were brought from far off places, which shows their trading contacts with the outside world. Their merchandise links were spread to remote areas. Many finished and unfinished beads were collected from the stratified layers, but the earliest example came from Tochi-Gomal phase (Durrani, Ali, & Erdosy, 1994-95: 15- 17).

Conclusion

Archaeological investigation was started much earlier but drastically accelerated in the 1970s. It was Dani's excavations in the Gomal plain at the site of Gumla from which for the first time evidence emerged of the Tochi-Gomal Phase. However, it was by the efforts of the Bannu Archaeological Project in Bannu since 1985 who brought this culture to acknowledge as a separate cultural phase, found it similar with some sites in the Gomal and Bannu regions and slogged it as Tochi-Gomal phase. This cultural phase has a tremendous impact on the development of the succeeding cultures. The bearers of this culture were craft specialists, artisans, agriculturalists who explored economic resources and developed their technological capabilities and provided a strong base for the flourishing of Kot Diji as well as the well-known Indus Valley Civilization. The recent discovered sherd with an endless knot motif is also observed in Harappan period artifacts suggesting continuity of tradition until the historic age (Buddhist). There are strong evidence of the origin and inter-regional trade of the Tochi-Gomal with contemporary Central Asian cultures such as Namazga II (4000- 3500 BC) and Kara Tepe.

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Plate 1: Tochi Gomal Phase, painted pottery



Plate 2: Tochi Gomal Phase, painted pottery



Plate 3: Tochi Gomal Phase, painted hound



Plate 4: Tochi Gomal Phase, horned deity

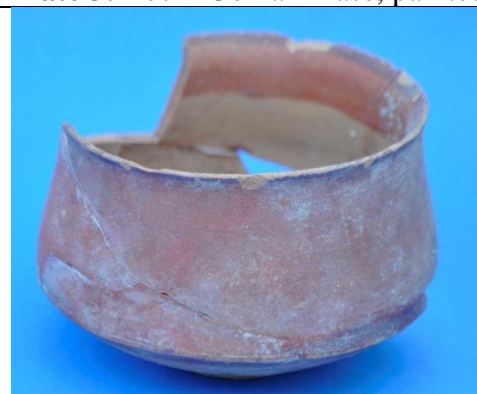


Plate 5: Tochi Gomal Phase, carinated bowl



Plate 6: Tochi Gomal Phase, painted carinated bowl