



Central Baluchistan from c. 3000 to 2500 BCE: A Patterned Landscape

Ute Franke



Fig. 10.1
Plan of
excavated areas

The centuries from the late 4th to the mid-3rd millennium BCE are marked by the expansion of settlements, their growth in number and size, the emergence of monumental architecture, perimeter walls, platforms, seals and first graphemes; an advanced technical diversity and craft specialization indicate an increasing economic, cultural and social complexity. A similar development is witnessed in the eastern lowlands, where the spread of certain pottery types and other features – first Hakra and Ravi Ware in Punjab and, from c. 3000 BCE onwards, the Kot Diji horizon – indicates an increased

mobility between the highlands and the plains. This development is accompanied by the appearance, transformation and disappearance of pottery styles, which link different parts of Baluchistan with Sindh and Punjab, but also Iran and Central Asia. Through the gradual replacement of Baluchi features at Harappa during Period 2 (2800–2600) and the appearance of Kot Diji traits, the major Early Harappan lowland cultural complex in Baluchistan and the borderlands seems to signal an expansion of this horizon, which is regarded as the nuclear region for the formation of the Indus Civilization.



Fig. 10.2
Aerial image showing
rows of houses

Fig. 10.3
Trench I, 'Burnt
Building' and
gravel foundations
with beams

While some of the cultural horizons described before continued to be produced until c. 2500 BCE, others faded gradually, such as Togau and Nal. This development, however, differs in time and between regions: while Togau D Ware is no longer attested in Period II at Sohr Damb/Nal, it continues in southeastern Baluchistan at least until 2700 BCE.¹

1 It is also not attested in Anjira IV and after Mehrgarh VI.

The major cultural complex that continued to exist parallel to Nal Ware is the Quetta horizon, defined by S. Piggott (1947) and W. Fairservis (1956) as marked by a buff or red ware painted with a fine brush with complex, black geometric patterns, based on black-and-white contrasts and arranged in friezes that cover large parts of the body. This pottery type occurs at Damb Sadaat, the mound near Quetta, in Periods II and III, together with figurative and floral motifs, simple linear designs, and unpainted vessels.

Simple lines and bracket motifs are hallmarks of later stages.² The criteria for a proposed stylistic development from Damb Sadaat Period I to III are far from clear and the excavations at the site were small, but evidence from Mehrgarh links typical Quetta Ware with Period VI and late Quetta pottery with Period VII and Nausharo IA–C. At Sohr Damb/Nal, Period II, only a few Damb Sadaat II sherds were found, but Sadaat types become common in Period III. The bracket motif is particularly frequent in southeastern Baluchistan, where it occurs together with Early Harappan types described in Chapter 8.

While comparable patterns and shapes were widely distributed, differences are also noted on the regional and even sub-regional level. Yet, the large variety of vessels that share similarities with one or the other pottery type and still remain distinct as an overall assemblage, results in a multitude of types and heterogeneous styles. Considering the wide distribution and range, the rare occurrence of examples from this horizon, particularly from the earlier phase, in the museum collection is noteworthy (e.g. cat. nos. 645; cat. nos. 660–665).

Therefore, Sohr Damb/Nal, where Period III is the most extensively excavated occupation, is presented here to provide an impression of a village at that time. Along with the excavations described elsewhere in this catalogue, these chapters reveal the many different layers of information obtained by controlled excavations.

2 Late Quetta, late Damb Sadaat III = Sadaat.

Sohr Damb/Nal Period III

Period III at Sohr Damb/Nal marks the building of a new settlement at a time when the previous houses were already in ruins and covered with sand or ashes. This uppermost occupation was extensively excavated and uncovered over a total area of approximately 2,700 m² in several trenches (Fig. 10.1).³ Remains of the Period III settlement were found in the topmost layers of the smaller Trenches II, IV and VII, where stratigraphic sequences from Period I to Period II were obtained, but the most complex structures were excavated on the hilltop, in Trench I, where this period is represented by 7 m high, compact strata from the top of the mound (+13.50 m) to the lowest levels (+6.70 m) reached so far (title image). In the large area excavated farther to the north (Trenches V, VI and IX, Fig. 10.2)⁴ horizontal excavations revealed cleared blocks of houses and working areas. Their further exposure was made impossible by the political disturbances after 2006.

The division of Period III into three phases and six building levels is mainly based on the archaeological contexts and the building sequence of Trench I (title image).⁵ During five seasons, architectural complexes with about 50 rooms and 500 archaeological units were exposed. The surface near the summit of the mound, where also H. Hargreaves' Trench D was located, is marked by thick layers of ash and burnt clay, which gives the surface a strong reddish touch. Altogether, 15 buildings were partly uncovered, belonging to at least four phases with 21 levels. Most structures have massive walls, with gravel foundations and beams, upon which the mud brick walls were built. Remains of mud plaster with reed impressions

3 The excavations in Trench I were supervised and recorded by St. Langer, whose untimely death in 2009 left a big gap. Bibliographic references are Franke-Vogt 2003/4; 2005a; Langer 2008.

4 Area D, excavated in 1925 by Hargreaves (1929), as well as Trench X in the very south also belong to this period.

5 Langer 2008, 110. She provides a detailed description of the evidence from Trench I.



Fig. 10.4
Trench I, 'Burnt
Building', different
building phases,
collapsed wall

illustrate that houses were probably built with similar means as the present ones.

Living Spaces

The largest architectural complex is the 'Burnt Building', (AK 6, Figs. 10.3–6), in which in two superimposed horizons hundreds of vessels and domestic utensils, such as grinding stones, pestles, bone tools for leather working and potting, as well as unbaked and baked clay figurines, mostly of humped bulls, and beads were found (Figs. 10.7–14). Compared with examples from the closeby Trench II, where the uppermost mud brick architecture rested upon 2 m of ashy deposits sealing Period II remains, the multiplicity of contemporaneous styles is evident (Figs. 10.15–18).⁶

A quite unique ensemble came to light in a neighbouring house, including the large cylindrical vessel, reminiscent of Indus shapes, but local in fabric, the 'goat pot' which depicts motifs rather common in central and northern Baluchistan, a

6 In particular Quetta, Damb Sadaat III, Rana Ghundai III and 'early Kulli'.



Fig. 10.5
Trench I, wood
remains and broken
vessels

Fig. 10.6
Trench I, plaster with
reed impressions



Fig. 10.8
Trench I, Phase III.4,
black-on-purplish red
painted pot

Fig. 10.9
Trench I, Phase III.3c,
globular jar with
reserved pattern
in black

Fig. 10.7
Trench I, red-
slipped beaker with
geometric designs

Fig. 10.10
Trench I, Phase III.4,
pot with reserved
pattern in black

Fig. 10.11
Trench I, globular
pot, pipal motif with
leaves

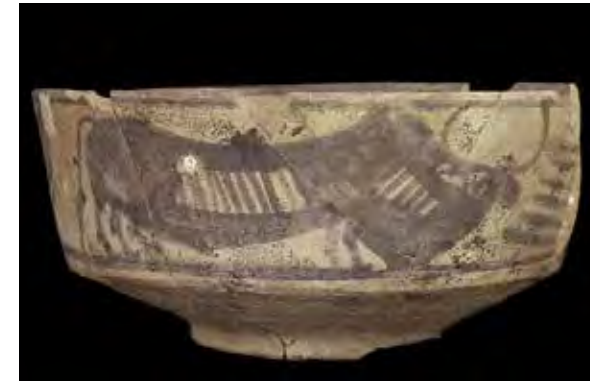


Fig. 10.12
Trench I, bowl
showing a bull in
front of a tree

Fig. 10.13
Trench I, bull figurine
painted with a fish

Fig. 10.14
Trench II, human
figurine with necklace

Fig. 10.15
Period III architecture
in Trench II

Fig. 10.16
Trench II, pot with
frieze with back of
a 'leopard' (?)
and bull

Fig. 10.17
Trench II, beaker with
comb design



Fig. 10.18
Trench II, bowl with
pipal tree with roots



Fig. 10.19
Trench I, cylindrical
vessel with notch for
lid, fired to pinkish

Fig. 10.20
Trench I, vessel with
friezes of 'butterfly',
ibex, and brackets



small beaker with a 'comb pattern', which was popular on Kulli pottery (see Chapter 12), and a pedestalled, double-headed bull figurine which, to my knowledge, has conceptual parallels only in the Indus Valley (Figs. 10.19–21).

Several grinding stones and tools testify to a domestic use of the rooms, related to food-production and storage. A larger number of particular stone and bone tools were probably used for leather working, to which might also belong large amounts of discarded animal bones in a pit dug into Trench II. Terracotta figurines are also frequently found in similar contexts, showing that they were rather toys than related to ritual purposes. Most common are humped bull figurines, present in all sizes and often carefully painted. The occurrence of unbaked examples shows that they were produced locally.

The structures unearthed further north, in a large area that connected a couple of trenches, differ in various aspects from the findings in Trench I (Figs. 10.23; 24). Extended excavations exposed blocks with well-aligned houses and lanes just below the surface. The rooms are more spacious, with hearth and storage areas, still filled with complete inventories.

The beautiful red-slipped pot with petal motifs and white infill was found in a storage chamber, along with grinders, beakers and stone tools (Figs. 10.25; 26). Storage jars are usually large, pear-shaped vessels, thrown in a chuck and decorated with bracket patterns or red bands. One of these jars still had its cover (Figs. 10.27–29). Red slipped beakers with motifs and vases or bowls with pipal-patterns were very common at the time (Figs. 10.17; 18; 30 and 31, from the museum collection, cat. no. 666). Most unusual is



Fig. 10.21
Trench I,
small pot with
comb design



Fig. 10.22
Trench I,
pedestalled, double-
headed bull figurine



Fig. 10.23
Aerial view of the
northern part of the
mound

an example of a Burnished Grey Ware pot. Of this type, which is typical for northeastern Iran, also a pedestalled dish was found in the room shown in Fig. 10.38. The beads, though made from different materials – steatite, copper, lapis lazuli, and clay – were found in a kitchen area, together with a bone comb (Figs. 10.34; 35).

Not too far away, an at first glance inconspicuous fragment turned out to be a broken sealing. Its shape, traces of rope and threads, which could be

identified as silk⁷, show that it probably sealed a curved clay lump, probably attached to lock a door or vessel. Stamped while still wet with a seal, access to the room or goods were there-by controlled – a typical feature in the early advanced, bulk trade economies. Unfortunately, only the edge of the seal impression is preserved but not the pattern of the motif on its face. A small petal-shaped platelet,

⁷ I am grateful for her analyses to I. Good.