



The Cultural Landscape

Ute Franke

The dynamic and complex development of the cultural history of Baluchistan became already evident with the early research of Sir A. Stein, W. Fairservis and B. de Cardi.¹ The outstanding importance of this region in the time from the Neolithic period to the Indus Valley Civilization became distinct at the latest through the excavations at Mehrgarh. The explorations in the Kachhi Plain provided a cultural and chronological context for some of the many so-called cultural complexes that 'inhabit' the cultural landscapes, a term used in want of a better tool for labelling recurrent clusters of styles and types observed in the material culture and in a certain region. It is not as neutral as 'archaeological assemblage' and differs conceptually from 'communities' and 'civilizations'.² However, all these phenomena are created by groups of people and the according terms are used to associate human communities with interaction, depending, however, on the available data, nevertheless often predominantly based on pottery types as often the only and most frequent category of finds.

Modern research has distanced itself from the likening of pot = people; instead, as many criteria as possible, for instance small finds, architecture, and economy, are drawn into view and interpreted with reference to different levels of meaning. Nevertheless, pottery usually remains the most important and oftentimes – due to the state of research – only means for reconstructing

prehistoric cultural landscapes and social and cultural processes.

While patterning landscapes on spatial grounds is one issue, discerning change through time, or, in other words, cultural development, is another one, though also largely based on pottery. Dating depends on the observation of the sequence of levels, or deposits, and on comparative evidence from other sides: since Indus seals were found in Mesopotamian cities dated to the 3rd millennium BCE, the Indus Civilization was dated accordingly. Such information is still too rare for Baluchistan, where many regions were explored in the early days of archaeology and large-scale excavations are few, particularly in view of the size of the province. Many older excavations were limited to soundings and small test trenches that do not provide a representative picture of the material culture, and – in the greater area of Baluchistan – and were oriented stratigraphically only after 1948.

Patterning the Landscape

Reference to cultural regions is not made by means of separation based on clearly discernible and precisely delimited geographic and cultural zones. It is rather established to regions with differing prominences in pottery technology and styles, connected through the occurrence of certain wares and stylistic aspects, which may change through time, eventually supported by geographical features.

¹ See chapter 2 on the history of research.

² The term is e.g. used for the Kulli complex (Possehl 1986).



Fig. 5.1
Migrating workers
moving from
Ratodero Daro across
the pass to Khuzdar



Fig. 5.2
Pottery assemblage
from a house in Sohr
Damb/Nal, Period III



Fig. 5.3
Polychrome
beaker from
Mehrgarh,
Period V

Northern Baluchistan

Northern Baluchistan is a key area for archaeology in Baluchistan. Culturally, the Kachhi Plain with Mehrgarh, and, though to a temporally and culturally limited extent, also the Bannu Basin belonged to this zone, although located at the foothills of the mountains. This area can be further subdivided, for example into the regions of Quetta-Pishin, Kachhi and Zhob-Loralai.

The region was of particular interest for many researchers and British officers already at an early point in time.³ As a rule, their work did not exceed beyond collecting material, although it often represents the only information available today. This applies, for example, to sites such as Periano Ghundai, Moghul Ghundai, Sur Jangal, Rana Ghundai and Dabar Kot. The regional stratigraphic sequence and the basis for settlement patterns in Quetta and the Pishin Valley were generated by W. Fairservis.⁴ The material known until 1969⁵ formed the basis for Mughal's doctoral thesis (1970), which is still one of the principal studies on the archaeology of this area. The most important site today is Mehrgarh, although it is located outside the highland area. Excavations there and in Nausharo and Pirak have more or less revolutionised archaeology in the region.⁶

The evidence from these sites is augmented by finds from Surab in Central Baluchistan, where the excavations by de Cardi (1965) in Anjira and Siah Damb provided another pillar of support for the chronology (see below). The sites of Kili Ghul Mohammad, Anjira/Siah Damb and Mehrgarh, together forming a triangle that is not too small in

3 See chapter 4 for references.

4 Fairservis 1956; 1959.

5 de Cardi (1983, 1984) led a survey in the area between Quetta and Ornach. The Department of Archaeology conducted a further survey in the highlands in 1972 (Mughal 1970; 1972b; 1974). In 2000, C. C. Lamberg-Karlovsky made a small test trench in Tor Warai, a site that de Cardi had discovered (1965 #11, known today as Panj Pahi).

6 Described in various chapters (4, 6, 11, 12, 13), see in the bibliography Jarrige, Quivron and Meadow.

size, provide the chronological framework for further regions. The earliest pottery complex is Kili Ghul Mohammad, followed by Kechi Beg and Quetta, all of them widely distributed and represented in the museum collection (chapter 6, 10).

Central Baluchistan

The region to the south of Mastung near Kalat at the boundary to Drakalo in the south and to Awaran or Jhal-Jhao in the west is denoted as Central Baluchistan, but in fact it is difficult to draw a line towards the north and south in terms of cultural markers, since the predominant styles are widely distributed.

In 1931 a large-scale field survey was carried out by A. Stein, who discovered important sites such as Nundara, Kargushki Damb, Kulli and Mehi. The survey conducted by B. de Cardi in 1948 followed the main highway between Khuzdar and Quetta and the neighbouring side valleys and basins, for example, Mungachhar, Chappar, Surab and Baghwana. Test trenches undertaken by A. Stein as well as the first excavations in Sohr Damb/Nal⁷ are stratigraphically insufficient, and the principal sites are Anjira and Siah Damb east of this area.⁸ This information was augmented by survey material from 77 sites. Sixty-five sites lie within the area of the route connecting Quetta and Ornach, indicating a focus in this area. Assuming a similar settlement density as in only poorly or not investigated areas, the total number of settlements was probably much higher. Typical pottery types for this region are Togau and Nal ware, described more precisely in chapters 7 and 9.

Southeastern Baluchistan

The geographic designation of Southeastern Baluchistan refers to the area south and southeast of Khuzdar. It belongs in part to Jhalawan and

7 Hargreaves 1929.

8 de Cardi 1965.



Fig. 5.4
Bowls with black
and white paint,
central Baluchistan,
late 4th mill. BCE



Fig. 5.5
Polychrome
canister, Nal,
early 3rd mill. BCE



Fig. 5.6
Biconical pots,
Nal-horizon,
early 3rd mill. BCE

encompasses the regions of Wadh, Drakalo, Ornach, Las Bela and the Hab-Saruna Valley (Kirthar West). In spite of geographic barriers, the lowland of Las Bela is divided (viewed from Sindh) by the Mor, Pab and Kithar Mountains in the south and the Bhit and Hallel Mountains in the north; from a cultural perspective, the eastern mountain slopes and river valleys draining to the Indus belong to this region. While the area between Bela and Khuzdar was often visited, the less accessible interior parts between the mountains,



Fig. 5.7
Coastal
Baluchistan



Fig. 5.8
Mud vulcanoes
at the Hingol

with the perennial Kharari, Windar, Hab, Saruna and Bahlol Rivers, were more or less unknown until 1996, when surveys and excavations were conducted by the German-Pakistani Archaeological Mission to Kalat.⁹

In cultural terms this region is linked by a horizon that encompasses Togau, Nal and Amri¹⁰ features, including shapes and forms that differ from those further north. An important horizon is the Kulli complex, described in chapter 12. At the end of the first half of the 3rd millennium BCE it expanded from Makran to the east, creating a link between these regions, altogether known to the Greeks as Gedrosia.¹¹

⁹ See chapter 8.

¹⁰ Located in Sindh.

¹¹ Possehl 1999, 315.

Southwestern Baluchistan

The last area to discuss here is Makran, which begins west of the Hingol River and was likewise part of Gedrosia. Southwestern and southeastern Baluchistan are distinguished in terms of material culture not only in the beginnings of their settlement history (Miri Qalat I-II), but also later, as apparent from the Shahi Tump and Dasht assemblages, notwithstanding shared features. The surveys and excavations conducted by Mockler (1877) and Stein (1931) were followed by short surveys by Field and Khan (1959) and, later, G. F. Dales.¹² Comprehensive and new fieldwork has been undertaken since 1986. The according work and the pertaining vessels in the collection are described in chapter 11.

This overview illustrates that Baluchistan as a cultural landscape is not divided in clearly defined zones and regions, but composed of loosely interwoven entities which, through time, underwent transformations and phases of change, coupling tradition as well as innovation. The tradition of the Greater Indus Valley, as defined by J. Shaffer (1992) embraces several cultural systems – or horizons –

¹² Dales / Lipo 1992; see also chapter 4.

with sequential stages. The smallest unit are phases, which represent coherent archaeological units that are by and large distinct from other phases and delimited spatially and temporally. The main feature of a phase is a characteristic style of pottery that appears during a certain time at one or several sites. While this concept is well suited to the archaeological reality in Baluchistan, the problem nevertheless remains that neither the distribution nor the chronological frame can reliably be defined. This confinement sets the frame for the following chapters in which pots are assigned to certain phases and stages at given times, linked by the Greater Indus Valley tradition in which Baluchistan has been the major component for a long time.

One of the most remarkably painted vessels in the collection is an example for the problem to define the cultural association and date. The S-shaped pot with a wide belly and concave base shows between two thick wavy bands four long-necked birds, most likely herons, two-paired facing each other holding a fish in their long beaks. The bodies, necks and heads of the elegantly painted birds are hatched vertically, horizontally or crosswise. The ellipsoid eyes are dotted, the mouths open. The fish have similarly hatched and cross-hatched bodies with tail and fins. Depicted between the pairs of birds, on the neck of the pot, are two other animals. Their ellipsoid bodies and triangular tails are solid black with two short legs. Circular lines frame the front. Their identification is still open to interpretation.

No comparable pot with regard to shape and design is known to us, hence it still needs to be assigned to a specific region and chronological period. Based on its morphological, stylistical and technological characteristics we assume an origin in southwestern Baluchistan and a date between 3000 and 2500 BCE.

Earthenware, red; w/m, spiral marks on the inner bottom; thin red slip on outer and wash (?) on inner surface.

Size (cm): d. (rim) 20.8, d. (base) 14.5, h. 33.6

Doc. No. 0751–786

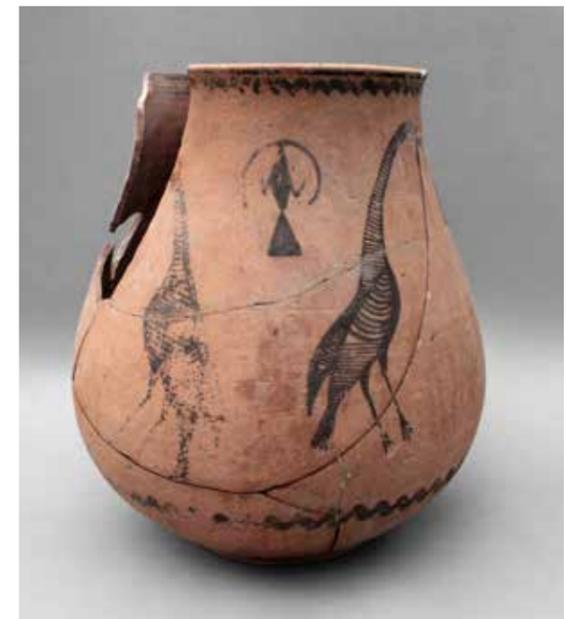
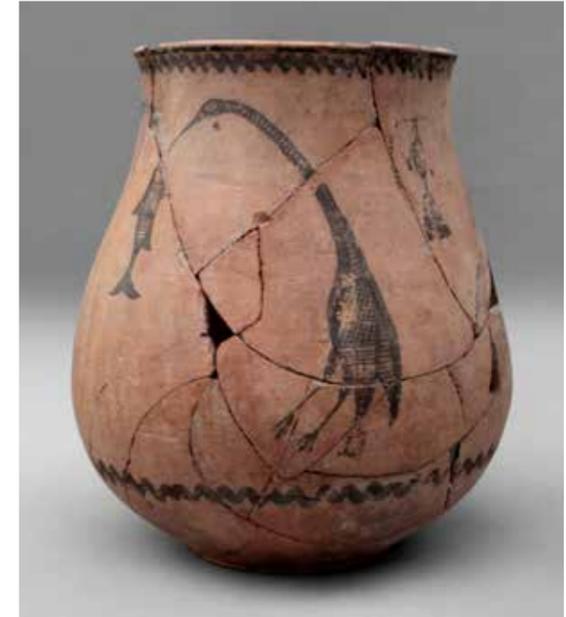


Fig. 5.9, a-c
Jar with the
depiction of two
herons with a fish,
early 3rd mill. BCE