F. Khan, J.R. Knox, K.D. Thomas, C.A. Petrie and J.C. Morris,

Sheri Khan Tarakai and Early Village Life in the Borderlands of
North-West Pakistan


This volume is in fact the third one on the archaeology of the Bannu Basin after the Lewan and the Bannu Basin (Allchin et al 1986) and Explorations and Excavations in Bannu District, North-West Frontier Province, Pakistan, 1985-1988 (Khan et al 1991). It is, however, a comprehensive work on investigating the late Neolithic and early Chalcolithic settlements in southern part of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan with emphasis on Sheri Khan Tarakai in the Tochi Valley. The monograph presents a meticulous description in a systematic and logical manner on the stratigraphy, architecture, pottery, lithic assemblage, floral and faunal remains, terracottas and other small finds unearthed at Sheri Khan Tarakai during different field operations. Not only the viewers of this monograph find an insight into the socio-economic life of the people of Sheri Khan Tarakai but also get a clear image of the way of life in the borderlands of North-West Pakistan in the 5th millennium BC. Analysis of the identical material from Girdai, Barai Khaurra I and Ter Kala Dheri in the Bannu, and Jhandi Babar I and Gulgai Kot I on the Gomal Plain have also been made to understand the prevailing settlement and subsistence systems. Likewise, its relationship with numerous sites and cultures in the adjacent region of Baluchistan, Punjab, Kashmir and India has also been discussed thoroughly. Sheri Khan Tarakai presented a unique and unmatched ceramic tradition and human terracotta figurines. The pottery is hand built with bowls and jars as two main types, depicted with simple and complex geometric designs like hatched crosses, hatched triangles, diamonds, bands, pendant, and birds (cranes) and goats. The majority of the human t/c figurines belong to female, which have been modeled in seated form with pronounced buttocks and applique breasts. They are sometimes depicted with black lines around the waist or head, which suggests respectively the arrangement of the cloths and hairstyles.

In the monograph, the physical and human geography of both the Tochi and Gomal regions have been assessed and presented elegantly by using digital maps from GIS, which helps understanding the pattern of settlements. While drawing final conclusion of this single period site, it was aptly contextualized on the basis of findings, which was supported by the radiocarbon dates from Sheri Khan Tarakai and identical material recovered from Jhandi Babar I and Gulgai Kot I. While commenting in section 13.4, page 418, the authors suspect the existence of a transition between the Sheri Khan Tarakai and the Tochi-Gomal cultural phases in the borderland region but the commentary is missing unfortunately.

(Muhammad Farooq Swati and Zakirullah Jan)