

THE PREHISTORIC SEQUENCE FROM GHALEGAY AND ITS CULTURAL RELATION WITH VARIOUS EXCAVATED SITES OF SWAT

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The earliest evidence on the prehistoric Swat has been recovered in the rock-shelter of Ghalegay, as a result of excavations carried out by the Italian Archaeological Mission of Ismeo in 1967, 1968, and 1980 (i). The rock-shelter lies close to the main metalled road which crosses the valley between the present-day village Ghalegay and the Buddhist stupa of Shingardar.¹

The earlier occupation layers in the rock-shelter (Period I), which have been located more than ten metres below the present-day surface, were dated around 3000 BC. A particular feature of this period is the association of a pebbly tools industry (choppers, wedge-shaped flakes, etc.) with a hand-made pottery including jars, cups, biconical bowls and bowls-on-stand. Remains of both, wild and domestic animals have been found.

A deep cultural change falls around the middle of the third millennium BC. The most striking feature of the new cultural complex (period II), is its fine wheel-turned black-on-red painted pottery, very compact and hard-tempered, while the pebble-tools industry completely disappears. Some shapes and decorations of the pottery suggest the Early Harappan or Kotdijian style. The recovered vegetable remains include charred seeds of wheat and rice, which imply a twice-yearly harvest.

A further deep cultural change or break occurred at the very beginning of the second millennium BC. when the fine wheel-thrown pottery almost completely disappears. The chief feature of the new complex (Period III) is a coarse hand-made ware associated with artifacts made from river pebbles. The pottery is represented by hand-made very coarse forms, heavy in section and ill-fired: almost all the pots are featured by mat or basket-impressions on the base. Parallels with wares and shapes from the late Neolithic culture in Kashmir (Burzahom, Gufkral) have been recognised.²

While period I and period II have been up to this time evidenced at Ghalegay only, structural remains of Period III have been also found at Butkara I (below the Buddhist sacred Area³ and at Kalako-dheri, a fortified hill-site in the Jambil Valley.⁴

The subsequent Period IV, identified for the first time at Ghalegay, was evidenced in recent years at various sites of Swat, such as Loebarn III in the Jambil Valley,⁵ Bir-kot-Ghwandai⁶ near Barikot, Aligrama,⁷ Kalako-dheri⁸ and Damkot near Chakdara (where the excavation was carried out by the Peshawar University.⁹ A graveyard was located near the present-day village of Kherai, in the Gorbard Valley, close to the confluence of the Gorbard in the Indus River.¹⁰ On the ground of various radiocarbon determinations, Period IV may be dated between 18th and 15th centuries BC.

Compared with the fragmentary evidence from the previous periods, the excavations in open-air settlements and in a graveyard ascribed to Period IV yielded a much richer cultural assemblage in the Swat Valley.

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Some innovations arise from the beginning of this period, such as new settlements in hilly sites; the development of farming; the emergence of metallurgy; the spread of the black-grey burnished pottery. Other changes occurred gradually and reached their highest point around the mid-second millennium BC., notably; the move from circular/oval semi-subterranean structures to stone-walled houses at the ground level; the importation of "exotic" and "Luxury" goods; increase of the painted, wheel-turned ware, which includes for the first time animal figures and plants in its decoration; and at last the appearance among the faunal remains of the horse (*Equus caballus*).

The different components of the above-mentioned Swat culture clearly stress the active role played by the local tribes at different times and in different directions, short-and long distance contacts/interactions, including immigration, events probably connected with the spread of Indo-Aryan languages in the north-Western regions of the subcontinent, may have contributed to the development of a dynamic system in the framework of a process of integration and fusion. The wide-ranging exchanges/networks, the agricultural economy based on multicroping systems and on a twice-yearly harvest, as well as the occurrence of new transport means, reflect the great transformation which characterised central and southern Asia from the beginning of the second millennium on.

If we look at the subsequent protohistoric times, it becomes apparent that the culture of Period IV was a short-lived chapter in the history of the Swat valley. During the 14th century or later, a new culture spread over the northern, hilly regions (Period V). The course of events brought stability and uniformity to a wide area (some local traditions tend to disappear and led to a further increase in settlements and a growth in farming activities (the main evidence has been recovered at Aligrama¹¹ and at Bir-kot-Ghwandai.¹² Large graveyards as Loebanr¹³, Katelai¹⁴ and Butkara¹⁵ gave evidence of the co-existence of different burial rites, as inhumation and cremation. Yet, at the same time, one has the impression of a gradual process of isolation, which set in as a result of this same course of events, progressively sealing off this area from its surrounding regions, particularly the western plains of the sub-continent.

The diffusion of the iron metallurgy corresponded to the spread of Period VII, around the 5th-4th centuries BC. New settlements were occupied during this times. Deep social differences may be noticed from the graveyards, where the richest graves belong to the warriors and the grave furnishing mostly consists of iron weapons.

It is likely that Period VII precedes the times of Alexander's expedition to India.

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