

Late Neolithic Period Sites Along Koh-e-Suleiman in Dera Ghazi Khan, Pakistan: Recent Discoveries

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Abstract

A recent survey in the area of Dera Ghazi Khan District (Punjab) carried out by a team of the University of Peshawar located some important late Neolithic period sites (akin to Sheri Khan Tarakai phase of the Bannu Basin and Jhandi Babar I in the Gomal Plain) in the foothill of Suleiman Range tentatively dated from 4500 – 3500 BC. In addition, Paleolithic, protohistoric, historic, Islamic and Colonial periods sites have also been recorded in the survey, but this paper is confined to the late Neolithic period settlements in the Tribal Area of District Dera Ghazi Khan, bordering Balochistan along the foothills of Koh-e-Suleiman.

Keywords: Koh-e-Suleiman, late Neolithic, Sheri Khan Tarakai, Dera Ghazi Khan

1. Introduction

District Dera Ghazi Khan is strategically located in southwest of the Punjab Province of Pakistan. It is geographically bounded by Dera Ismail Khan of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province in the north; Barkhan and Musakhel of Balochistan Province on the west; Rajanpur on the south and River Indus, Muzaffargarh and Leiah of the Punjab on the east. This tract of land lies between River Indus and the Koh-e-Suleiman. Currently, the irrigation canals from *Taunsa Barrage* and *Chashma Right Bank Canal* have turned major part of previously uncultivated tract of land into agricultural land that has brought a positive change and prosperity in the socio-economic life of the modern population who grow cash crops like sugarcane, wheat, cotton, vegetables and fruits. The Koh-e-Suleiman has plenty of water sources and green pastures, therefore, a rich and diverse

flora and fauna developed there that attracted human population from the nearby regions.

Remains of the Neolithic culture in Pakistan is discovered at sites such as Mehrgarh, Kili Gul Muhammad, Rehmanzai and Jatti Kalat in Balochistan; Gumla, Jhandi Babar (Ali and Khan 2001) and Sheri Khan Tarakai (Khan et al. 2010) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Mehregarh, Kili Gul Muhammad and Gumla produced aceramic/pre-pottery Neolithic culture whereas the rest of the sites yielded evidences of late ceramic Neolithic culture. The late Neolithic culture identified in Gomal, Tochi and Dera Ghazi Khan, is characterized by hand-built bowls and jars depicted with geometric, floral and faunal designs in deep chocolate colours. Radiocarbon dates for Sheri Khan Tarakai (or SKT) in the Bannu Basin suggest a time frame from 4500 to 3500 BC (Khan et al. 2010).

Previous Explorations

The tough terrain, inaccessibility, difficult routes and lesser means of transportation in District Dera Ghazi Khan previously barred scholars to carry out a comprehensive and systematic archaeological survey. As a result, many mounds and monuments having cultural and historical importance have not been documented. Very little historical data of the region is available in the District Gazetteer of Dera Ghazi Khan that is stretched back to relatively recent Hindu period (Government of India, 1893-97, pp. 23-30). The Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan first in 1961 (Khan F. A., 1965) and later in 1992-96 under Muhammad Rafique Mughal, carried out archaeological explorations in the District Dera Ghazi Khan. The published reports have mentioned only two Chalcolithic/ Bronze Age sites in the area i.e. Vahowa and Kot Qaisrani. While conducting explorations in the Punjab by the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Muhammad Rafique Mughal also carried out archaeological reconnaissance here and mentioned some fourteen sites comprising of seven mounds and seven standing monuments of Islamic period (Mughal, Iqbal, Khan, & Hassan, 1994-96) in the plain. Due to hard terrain, the western part of the district remained unexplored.

Fresh Explorations

Being located strategically in an important zone between Balochistan and the plain of Punjab, Dera Ghazi Khan appears to be

archaeologically also a rich region like the adjacent Gomal Plain. However, the previous exploration was very sporadic and only accessible areas along the main road was surveyed for archaeological sites and monuments. To survey the region comprehensively, the Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar, after getting necessary funding from the Government of Pakistan, initiated documenting sites. The purpose of the survey was to record all the sites that are vanishing rapidly due to natural and human vandalism. Illegal diggers and encroachers in search of antiquity are constantly damaging these heritage sites. As a result of successive fieldworks since 1970s, the University of Peshawar has investigated very important archaeological sites in the nearby Gomal Plain (Ali and Jan 1991; Dani 1970-1971) and the Bannu Basin (Khan et al. 1991; Allchin et al. 1986). In order to establish a link and association with important cultural units of the Gomal and Balochistan, the University of Peshawar felt it necessary to probe in Dera Ghazi Khan region of the Punjab. Although hundreds of sites have been discovered in this exploratory work but here the authors would like to present only six (06) archaeological sites assigned to late Neolithic period.

2.1. Basti Dozkani

The site of Basti Dozkani is located in Barthi (Tribal Area) towards north-west of Sakhi Sarwar town between longitude 30.27693445° N, latitude 70.23886862° E, in a very tough terrain. The site, currently measuring 90 x 50 m, is some 50 km away from Dera Ghazi Khan city towards west. Situated on a small hill top on the right bank of a stream locally called as *Dat*, the site is the communal property of the local Buzdaar Baloch tribe. It has two mounds having different heights. The surface of the site is littered with various type of ceramics. Two periods can easily be discerned on the basis of surface collection. The earliest one is late Neolithic as the ceramics are akin to the assemblage from Sheri Khan Tarakai in the Bannu Basin (Khan et al. 2000) and Jhandi Babar I in the Gomal Plains (Jan 2002; Rahman 1997; Swati and Ali 1998; Ali and Khan 2001). It is a hand build pottery with bowls and jars as main types, depicted with geometric designs in black/brown colours so typical of the late Neolithic in the Gomal Plain. The second period bears similarity with the Kot Dijian phase of Kot Diji (Khan F. A., 1965) in Sindh and Rehman Dheri in the Gomal

Plain (Durrani, 1988). The main artifacts from the surface collection are the ceramics and stone tools of both the periods.

2.2. Khalath

The small settlement site of Khalath, lying between longitude 29.95650170° N and latitude 70.14278303° E, is situated in Tuman Leghari Zireen (Tribal Area) of Dera Ghazi Khan approximately 13 km west of Sakhi Sarwar town, near Quetta Road/ Dera Ghazi Khan road towards north on a small hill top. It is a circular shape archaeological site of 70 x 50 x 2 m size with surface scatters available on two mounds, northern and southern. The *Mithawan* seasonal stream is flowing on its northern side and was probably the source of water in ancient times for the site. The southern mound is relatively smaller than northern mound. However, both are covered with scanty shrubs and large amount of stream pebbles.

A wall on the western side of the site is partly visible, which is made of both dressed and undressed stones, running in north-south direction. It is 40 cm thick and is attached with a small stone platform as well. Another stone wall is also located on the western side of the mound with a thickness of 01 m and appears to be a perimeter (or possibly fortification?) wall. The site is covered with large quantity of broken ceramics. From the surface of the sites, handmade, wheel made, and wet wares (Kot Diji phase) are collected in addition to stone tools and cores. The main finds from the surface collection are broken pottery pieces and stone tools. Based on the surface collection, the site is tentatively dated to the Late Neolithic phase of Jhandi Babar I (Khan et al. 2000; Ali and Khan 2001) and Kot Diji Period elsewhere. The perimeter wall may belong to Kot Diji phase if not later.

2.3. Khandh Khalat

Khandh Khalat is another late Neolithic site discovered in the Koh-e-Suleiman, which is lying on 29.98882489° N, 70.17060129° E, toward west from Sakhi Sarwar town. The site measures 15 x 90 x 10 m. It can be approached via jeepable track in the tribal area of Tuman Leghari Zireen.

There is a large and high mound, in the center of a large valley. The artificial mound is actually lying on approximately a 10 m high natural mound. Most of its northern side is eroded away by the *Mithawan* stream. Pebbles of various sizes are scattered on the surface of the site. In addition to the late Neolithic cultural artifacts in the form of handmade ceramics, the site also yielded pottery of the historic age, therefore, the height of the site is high, which gives the impression of a deserted fortress commanding the valley. The onsite stone material was utilized in the construction of walls and other structures where remains of two large rooms on the surface are clearly visible.

In addition to stones, a large quantity of sherds is scattered on the mound's surface dateable to both historic and pre-historic periods. The thick ash layer visible in the northern corner of the mound has produced two sherds of the Kot Diji period. From the lower area of the mound, Neolithic period sherds have been collected including basket mark ware, Jandi Babar I type sherds and other different types of wet and polychrome wares. A variety of cores and stone tools were also picked up from the mound. A broken terracotta figurine is also part of the collected material from the site. Illegal excavation carried out by the antique dealers at few places shows ashes, bones and crude pottery. However, the site is feasible for probing which might lead towards new aspects of the protohistory of Pakistan.

2.4. Drohi Dagur Market

This late Neolithic site located in tehsil Karkana, in the Durugh area on 30.83860721° N, 70.241741171° E, at about 70 km west of Taunsa Sharif. The mound, measuring 60 x 50 x 1.5m, is in the narrow valley called Dagur on the border between Punjab and Balochistan Provinces. The site is lying about 1.5 km away from the *Leni* stream, which was the possible source of water in the ancient times. Apparently, it seems to be a low mound but probably the cultural deposits are buried below the present ground level. The soil is semi compact and is brownish in color which includes pebbles. Its northern portion is covered with wild trees and grasses. On the eastern side of the mound the local people have built a small market which is covering a portion of the site.

A large wall with a thickness of 1.5 m oriented from east to west is also visible on the site towards the south. It seems to be part of an important structure. Another 40 cm thick wall is also visible, which runs in north-south direction and probably belong to a room. Both wall structures are constructed from the local river's pebbles. Only excavations can determine the chronology of the structures. Large quantity of broken ceramics is scattered on the surface of the mound. The collected samples from the surface include different varieties of pottery, a broken female figurine (painted with chocolate color lines) and stone tools. The main period is although Kot Diji but prehistoric (Palaeolithic) and late Neolithic remains have also been discovered. The late Neolithic cultural artefacts bear similarity with Jhandi Babar I and Sheri Khan Tarakai cultural phases as far as the pottery is concerned.

2.5. Dhori Phugla

The site is located in Phugla Janubi in Tehsil Birot Mundwan of the Tribal Area, towards west of Taunsa Sharif on a jeepable track about 60 km away. It is lying on the bank of *Lahr* stream on 30.81896022° N, 70.27850210° E. The mound that measures 200 x 120 x 5m is littered with stream pebbles. The southern end of the mound is disturbed by rain erosion which has formed ups and downs on the surface. At a place in the eroded section an ashy layer is clearly visible. At certain place on the ground there are visible traces of walls and structures. In the western part of the mound, a circular structure/platform with a low height is also visible on the surface of the site. In addition to Kot Dijian assemblage from the site, late Neolithic material like pottery of Jhandi Babar I (period I) have also been collected. Some pottery has cloths impression and basket marks as well. The jars with lower slurry part as known from late Neolithic Jhandi Babar and Sheri Khan Tarakai are also part of the collection.

2.6 Wattey Wala Kot

The site is located in Tehsil Durugh of Musa Khel at a distance of 90 km from Dera Ghazi Khan city on 30.85791272° N, 70.17383787° E. Measuring 250 x 120 x 2.5 m, the site is lying on the left bank of *Leni* stream near *Durugh*. The site is very promising and feasible for

excavations. The mound is covered with stones of various size and wild shrubs. The southern and eastern sides of the mound are occupied by the local people for cultivation and construction of houses. Some stone structures on the surface making rooms are clearly visible. The walls are made of undressed stone blocks. The site yielded handmade, basket marked and cloth impressed ceramics of the late Neolithic period identical with Jhandi Babar I in the Gomal and Sheri Khan Tarakai in the Bannu (Khan, Cartwright, Joyner, & Petrie, 2010). In addition, various types of stone tools like blades, bladelets and cores have also been collected from the surface of the site. Prehistoric (Palaeolithic) and Kot Dijian assemblage is also found here in addition to late Neolithic.

3. Conclusions

As expected, due to its strategic location, being dissected by several hill torrents, the region of Dera Ghazi Khan turned to be a very fertile and core region for development of several prehistoric, protohistoric and historic period cultures. In addition to prehistoric and historic period sites, the survey has brought to light new and very interesting archaeological sites of the late Neolithic cultural phase identified at Jhandi Babar I in the Gomal and Sheri Khan Tarakai in the Bannu Basin, contrary to the Neolithic of Mehregarh and Kili Gul Muhammad. All of these sites mentioned above are multi-period sites, which make them more interesting for understanding the links and relationships among these proto-historic cultures such as Jhandi/SKT, Tochi-Gomal, Togau and Kot Dijji, in addition to their evolution and impact on urban revolution in south Asia. The late Neolithic cultures traced in the Koh-e-Suleiman is an extension of the culture unearthed at Jhandi Babar I, which is, so far, the largest site of this cultural phase. The late Neolithic sites are relatively smaller in size and are located in the piedmont area of Koh-e-Suleiman, suggesting a settlement pattern different from the subsequent Chalcolithic and Bronze Age cultures that developed in the flood plain area eastwards. The surface scatters include pottery like SKT A and SKT B wares in limited number along with stone tools. However, the human figurines that are recovered in hundreds from Jhandi Babar I and Sheri Khan Tarakai, are absent so far from the sites in Dera Ghazi Khan. These sites are very pivotal to understand the socio-cultural environment in the late Neolithic period and

hence need proper archaeological excavations to comprehend the early village life of nomadism and pastoralism in South Asia in general and Koh-e-Suleiman in specific.

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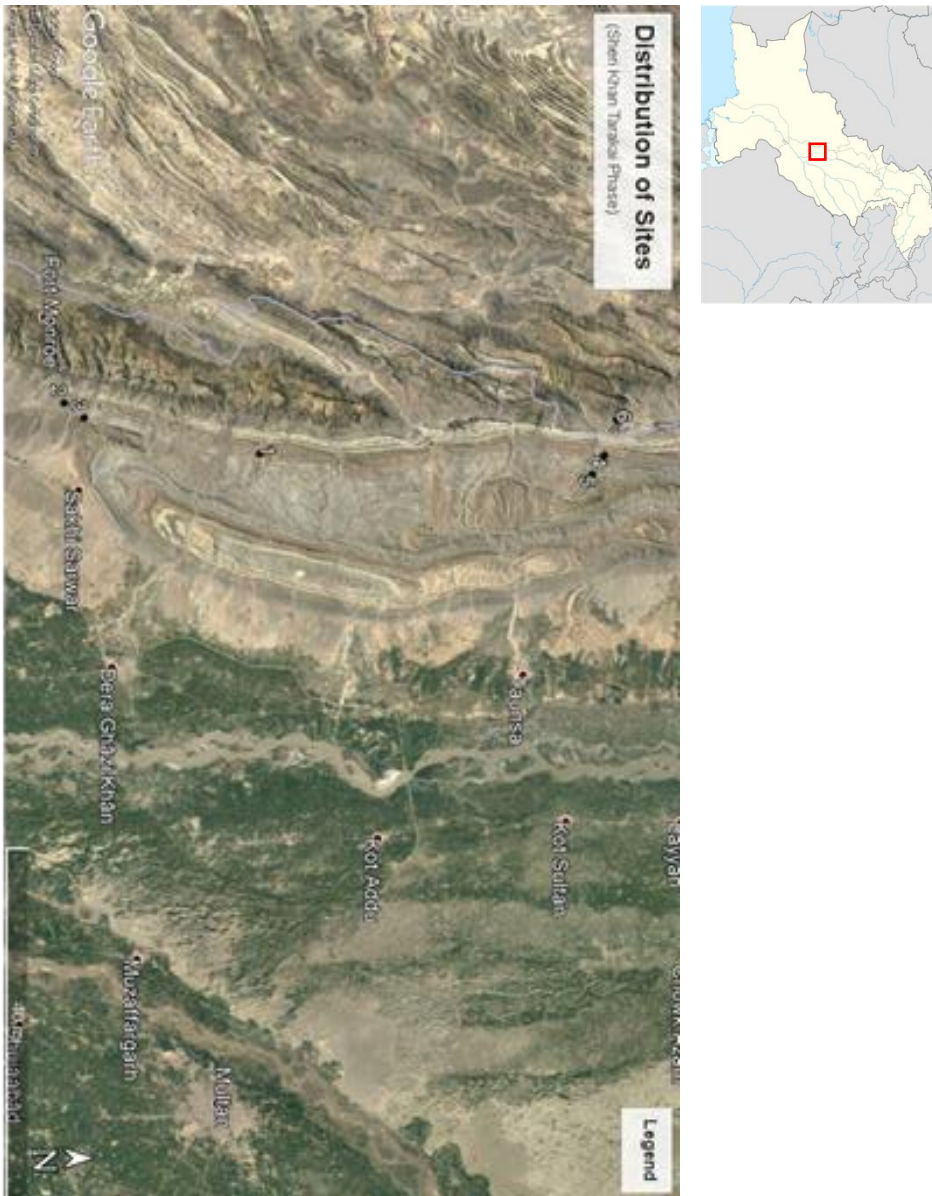
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Late Neolithic Period Sites Along Koh-e-Suleiman...



Pl. 1 - Map of Dera Ghazi Khan and the distribution of late Neolithic Sites (from Google Earth – Wikipedia Map).



Pl. 2 - Dera Ghazi Khan, late Neolithic site of Basti Dozkani.



Pl. 3 - Dera Ghazi Khan, Basti Dozkani, Pottery and grinding stone.



Pl. 4 - Dera Ghazi Khan, late Neolithic site of Khalat.



Pl. 5 - Dera Ghazi Khan, Khalat, ceramics and stone tools.



Pl. 6 - Dera Ghazi Khan, late Neolithic site of Khand Khalat.

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Pl. 6 (a) - Dera Ghazi Khan, Khand Khalat, pottery and stone tools.



Pl. 7 - Dera Ghazi Khan, late Neolithic site of Drohi Dagur Market.



Pl. 8 - Dera Ghazi Khan, Drohi Dagur Market, pottery.



Pl. 9 - Dera Ghazi Khan, late Neolithic site of Drohi Pugla.



Pl. 10 - Dera Ghazi Khan, Drohi Pugla, pottery and stone tools.



Pl. 11- Dera Ghazi Khan, Drohi Pugla, pottery.



Pl. 12 - Dera Ghazi Khan, the late Neolithic site of Wattey Wala Kot.



Pl. 13 - Dera Ghazi Khan, pottery from Watey Wala Kot.