

A Reassessment of the Zoomorphic Motifs on Ceramics from Rehman Dheri, Gomal Plain, Pakistan

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Abstract

The proto-urban settlement of Rehman Dheri (early Bronze Age) in the Gomal Plain, Dera Ismail Khan, has yielded a rich repertoire of ceramics from the surface as well as from archaeological excavations, depicted with a variety of geometric, floral and faunal decorative designs. This paper on the faunal/zoomorphic motifs painted on the ceramics of all three identified periods of the Rehman Dheri cultural sequence (Durrani 1988). The study of animal motifs on ancient pottery is very interesting since it gives valuable information regarding the social, cultural, religious and economic aspects of the society that produced it, while it also provides information on the ecology and environment of the referenced period.

Keyword: Rehman Dheri, ceramics, Tochi-Gomal, Kot Dijji, zoomorphic,

1. Introduction

Rehman Dheri, located 23 km north of Dera Ismail Khan city, is a significant South Asian protohistoric settlement where traces of the first urban fabric inhabited by a literate society were unearthed. The entire settlement was enclosed by a massive mud brick wall (Durrani et al 1994-95). Radiocarbon dates indicate that Rehman Dheri was established sometimes between 3400 and 3300 BCE. Stratigraphically, the profile of the site is divided into five successive levels designated as RHD IA; IB; II; IIIA and IIIB. The excavations at Rehman Dheri revealed a rich culture with an array of antiquities related to the Tochi-Gomal, Kot Dijian and evolved Kot Dijian periods in the Gomal Plain. Besides other artifacts, it contains a large proportion of wheel made pottery of well levigated clay, beautifully and skillfully crafted; well fired in slightly different shades of red-buff ware; with medium to fine texture and fabric; slipped in red, brown, sepia and white/cream colors; plain and painted in simple and complex geometric, zoomorphic and floral motifs and symbols in bi-chrome and polychrome colors. The popular shapes include globular jars, carinated and spherical bowls, dishes, basins, etc. The zoomorphic motifs on these ceramics include cattle, sheep, mountain goat, donkey, deer, bear,

probably lion, dog, fish, birds, snake, scorpion, frog, and centipede etc. (Durrani 1977, 1981a, b, 1988 and Durrani Ali & Erdosy, 1990, 1994-95).

2. Styles of Representation and Depiction of Painted Zoomorphic Motifs on Pottery of Rehman Dheri.

The zoomorphic figures have broadly been classified in the following groups.

Horned Deity (with Head and Horns)

One of the popular styles of representation of animals/cattle at Rehman Dheri is the depiction of horned deity on pottery in variation with the head/face of bull, buffalo, cow, mountain goat, deer as well as donkey. The faces are depicted in a simple, long, two dimensional or stylized shapes, sometimes with a beard and a dot on the forehead probably for the eye, and big out-curved horns and ears hanging on the side of the face.

Fig. 2 shows the frontal view of a horned deity with an abstract/two-dimensional face in black with eyes marked as white circles with black dots depicted on a bowl. The top of the head is in white/cream color with black outlines and short growing black hair and upward incurving horns with pointed ends depicted in white with black outlines (RHD Period IA). Another sherd has a frontal view of an animal (probably a donkey) with two big ears on the sides with long face, and a black dot on the forehead, painted carefully in black on a dull red slip (RHD Period IA). Fig. 3 shows a profile head of a mountain goat or a deer with wavy horns painted in black on a cream band of a fine red slip jar. The horns, neck and the face are carefully depicted. The rest does not survive (RHD Period IA). A frontal view of a horn deity in Fig. 4 shows a large and upward curving horns on the sides of the face (only one horn survived), carefully drawn with a soft flow of the brush, painted in black with polished dark red slip, having a stylized long face, two hanging ears and two dots for the eyes in the forehead, all carefully drawn (RHD Period IB). Another one (Fig. 5) shows horns and ears of a possible horned deity in a more naturalistic style (Durrani 1988: Fig LVI, 6; RHD Period IB). A frontal view of a horned deity (Fig. 6) depicts a cow/ or buffalo with stylized upward horns painted in black with a white dot on the forehead (Durrani 1988: LVI, 7; RHD Period IB). Face and horns of a Markhor, ‘a

high-altitude mountain goat' (Durrani 1988: 87; Fig VI, 9; RHD Period IB), in black outline and white filling is painted on a bowl (Fig. 7) with a stylized face having small ears and a dot on the forehead. The horns are curving upward from the head and then down to the sides of the face (Durrani 1988: Fig VI, 8; RHD Period IB). A profile view of an animal-head (Fig. 8) probably a mountain goat or a gazelle is depicted on another fragment in black outlines and white filling, with slanting outward ears and growing hair on the face (Durrani 1988: Fig VI, 14; RHD Period IB). Fig. 9 shows a depiction of a mountain goat (only head survived) in profile showing both eyes, and long delicate horns gracefully curved up and down to the front sides (RHD Period II). A frontal face of a horned deity (Fig. 10) with two dots on the face as eyes and nose or mouth is depicted with hanging ears and a beard or extension of the face, stylized in an abstract with lines drawn with a thick brush or overdrawn (RHD Period II). Frontal view of an animal head, probably cattle/ buffalo, with two relatively short horns curved up on sides is painted on another sherd (Fig. 11). It has two ears, a beard/extension of the face and a dot (probably an eye) on the forehead, carefully drawn in a stylized manner (RHD Period II). A jar fragment bears an incised horned deity (Fig. 12), carefully drawn with upward curving short horns (RHD Period IIIA/IIIB). A bowl shows a horned deity (Fig. 13) drawn probably by an unskilled potter, as the face, horns and ears are distorted (RHD Period IIIA/IIIB). There is also a depiction of a stylized horned deity (Fig. 14) painted on a grooved jar (RHD Period IIIA/IIIB; Durrani 1988: Fig. VI, 6). Another grooved jar (Fig. 15) has a depiction of a horned deity in black outlines and white filling with hanging ears and stylized face with a black round spot and a long pointed beard dated to the RHD period II (Durrani 1988, Fig VI, 3).

Horns of the cattle or buffalo

Another prominent style is the depiction of single painted horns without head/ or face. Fragments of carinated bowls, dated to the period RHD IA, have horn motifs in graceful upward curves and pointed ends, painted in black outlines with cream filling. (Fig.1: 1, 2, 3 and 4: Depiction of single horn).

Full figures of the animals are rare except for small cattle i.e. either a cow/ or a buffalo, mountain goat, pig and dog as a single figure or a few with more than one figure. A fine jar (Fig. 16) is decorated with two wild

boars (Durrani 1988; 56, Fig. XIV, 1), painted in black, one is shown with a frontal face with the two eyes together, and the other one is in profile (RHD Period IA). The ears and the hair on the body are depicted carefully and seem to be realistic in style. Another sherd (Fig. 17) shows a cattle figure in profile on a bowl with horns pointed frontally and a short-pointed tail (RHD Period IB). A profile view (Fig. 18) of a stylized mountain goat with frontal face, two eyes and large ears, is painted in black on a fine jar. The body is cross-hatched and the two frontal legs joined (RHD Period II). Figure of a small mountain goat with a short-pointed tail, small ears, and long horns curved to the front, and body decorated with hatched triangles, is painted carefully with four legs and one eye (as a dot), on a jar (Fig. 19) (Durrani 1988: Fig III, 9; RHD Period IIIA/IIIB). Similarly, a bowl is decorated with a mountain goat (Fig. 20) in combination of two scorpions with turned up tails, and Maltese crosses (Durrani 1988: Fig, LVI, 16; Period IIIB). The horns are turned frontally, and the face is carefully depicted, RHD period IIIB (Durrani 1988: fig. LVI, 10). One beautifully carved ivory seal from Period IB shows two mountain goats, an arrow, I' and T symbol and on the reverse, it shows a frog, two scorpions and T symbol (Durrani, 1988: Fig, XIX) (Fig. 21).

Fish Motifs

Fish motifs are painted on fine thin carinated bowls with almost polished red slip in white and black colors (Fig. 22:1-10). This decoration is unique to the ceramics of Rehman Dheri and has not been recovered from any other Bronze Age site in South Asia. The white paste used, seems to be fugitive and was probably applied after firing. Durrani calls these types of fish "Rehman Dheri Fish" (Durrani 1988: 245). Some fish in black outlines and white fillings are depicted in X-Ray fashion with two eyes shown together. They are skillfully depicted in a soft, smooth and fluent motion of the brush probably in a single long curved stroke from head to tail, in a beautiful two-dimensional shape, showing the thoughtfulness of the artist. A different type of Rehman Dheri fish motif is drawn in a wavy pattern, symbolizing perhaps the flowing water as in the Near Eastern Mythology (Durrani 1988: 84). A stylized fish motif with delicate long, cross-hatched body depicted in black/brown on cream slip plate, at RHD IIIB, bears similarity with Mehregarh VII (Durrani 1988: p.286: Fig.

XXXVI, 4, 10). A grooved jar has a simple small fish motif depicted in black outlines on red slip (Durrani 1988: Fig III, 9; RHD Period IIIB).

Bird Motifs

Bird motifs are also depicted in good number on the pottery from Rehman Dheri (Fig. 23). A bird, probably an eagle, is depicted in stylized or abstract shape in black outlines with white filling (Period RHD IA/IB). Another bowl shows a peacock depicted on a white paste band on the interior of a spherical bowl, showing the hind part decorated with thin horizontal lines drawn from its left side (or back), and a thin curved band is drawn from the top of this shape with several fine lines sprouting from it like a branch, all painted in chocolate brown (RHD Period IB). A jar fragment in red buff ware with bright red slip shows “a procession of peacocks” (Durrani: 1988: Fig. XXIV, 8; RHD Period IIIA). A peacock head is seen on a bowl (Durrani, 1988: Fig XXIV, 10; probably RHD III).

Snake Motifs

Fragment of a thick bowl (Fig. 24) with bright red slip has a snake painted in black, which is very carefully drawn in a curly wave, with a head slightly thicker than the tail, probably created with one stroke of the brush from head to tail (Durrani 1988: Fig. LVI, 1; RHD Period II).

Dog Motif

The motif of a dog or perhaps a wolf with open mouth and visible teeth is also painted on a bowl (Durrani 1988: Fig. LI, 1: RHD Period IA). Another sherd shows a thin animal with a thin tail, perhaps a dog painted in black outlines and white filling (Durrani, 1988: Fig. LI, 2: RHD IA). (Fig. 25)

Scorpion Motifs

Scorpion motifs are carefully and skillfully depicted on a number of sherds as a sketch in black and also in black outline and white filling on red slip, belonging to Period IA and II respectively. (Fig. 26)

Centipede Motif

A grooved jar with red slip (Fig. 27) is decorated with a black painted linear design “resembling either a stylized centipede or a fish skeleton” (RHD Period II).

3. Artistic Qualities of Painted Zoomorphic Motifs

The flow and spontaneity of thick and neat lines, in a single continuous curved strokes and softness of the brush show skilled and well-developed quality of line. The two dimensional, naturalistic and linear shapes of the snake, scorpion, birds and stylized or abstract or simplified faces of the animals, especially the horned deity with curving horns, and naturalistic and X-ray like motifs of fish with wavy lines (symbolizing the flow of water), show the sensitivity, aesthetic sense and emotions of the artist(s). All these motifs are painted in bi-chrome or mono-chrome colors, i.e. black and white/or brown and white on red slip, and brown on white slip or black on red slip (all neutral colors) painted on the body of medium size globular jars and carinated bowls and on the interiors of the dishes. The curves of lines, the use of neutral colors and black outlines around the white color have made the motifs prominent, harmonious and attractive. In the case of the horned deities, the emphasis is placed on the horns. The two-dimensional shapes are carefully drawn, giving a naturalistic effect with artistic beauty. The shapes and color of the horns have become prominent with black outlines. The fluency and smoothness of the lines show spontaneity, strong hold, and control of the brush which is achieved with a talent, careful observation and practice.

The use of black and white paint on red slip is also a characteristic feature of the ‘Sothi Ware’ in Rajasthan, which bears similarity with pottery from Rehman Dheri I and II (Tochi-Gomal and Kot-Dijian phases) while the use of black and white or white on dark slip is also found at Mehregarh IV-V and Damb Sadaat I-II (advanced Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age of the Mehregarh sequence) probably in the same time period as RHD I-II or slightly earlier while the Kot-Dijian period of Kalibangan (Rajasthan) probably comes later than RHD II.

Frequency Chart of different Animal Motifs Painted on Rehman Dheri Pottery

Animals	IA	IB	II	IIIA	IIIB	Total
Horn motifs of cattle	4	1				5
Horn deity of cattle	1	2	4	1 grooved 2 painted		10
Horn Deity of an Ass	1					1
Horn Deity of Markhor		1				1
Horn deity of Mountain Goat	1	1	1			3
Bears Motif	1					1
Cattle/goat, full body			1 goat 1 Cattle	1 goat	1 goat	4
Dog/or wolf motif	2					2
Total motifs	10	5	7	4	1	27

Frequency Chart showing motifs of Small Animal on Rehman Dheri Pottery

Fish motif	3	4			4	11
Eagle/bird motif	1	1			1	3
Peacock motifs		1	1	1		3
Scorpion motifs	1	1		1		3
Snake motifs		1		1		2
Centipede motif			1			1
Total	5	8	2	3	5	23

4. Summary of the Evolution of Zoomorphic Motifs at Rehman Dheri

These animals, depicted on the ceramics of Rehman Dheri, might have been domesticated or occurring in the everyday environment of the region. It was the choice of the people or of the potter/artist to depict those animals that attracted them the most or the ones that appeared more frequently in their surroundings and played a role in their daily life.

Beautiful upcurving single horn motifs of cattle without the face; horned deities with donkey and markhor features, wild-boars and dog motifs seems to be present only in period IA and IB i.e. the Tochi-Gomal

Phase. The horned deities of cattle are in greater frequency and consistently found throughout the cultural sequence at the site i.e. the Tochi-Gomal, Kot-Djjan and Late Kot-Djjan Phases, and the horned deities of mountain goats and full figures of cattle and mountain goats are found in period II and III as well.

Rehman Dheri fish motif is greater in frequency and mostly evident in period I. No such example appeared in period II whereas period IIIB has a rare and peculiar style of fish with cross-hatched body which have similarity with Mehregarh VII (Durrani 1988: 286). The representation of birds is rare, among which the eagle only appears in RHD I, while the peacocks seems to be present throughout the sequence and becomes more common in period II (Durrani 1988: 104, 284, Fig. XXXVI, 1). Scorpions and snakes are also rare but seem to be found throughout the sequence. Two scorpions in composition with a frog and two mountain goats are engraved on an ivory seal from period IB. Centipede motif only appears one instance in period II.

According to the present sample as a whole the greater frequency of zoomorphic motifs is found in period IA-IB and continued through period II till period III B, decreasing in frequency. These motifs are depicted on very fine and thin vessels with fine red slip and painted in black outlines with white filling in period IA-IB. The pottery slowly decreased in frequency and slightly became thicker and coarser with time, and black painting on red slip became common in later periods (II-III). The color of the slip became dull while the zoomorphic motifs became rare towards the final phase and also lost the fluency and beauty of line, shape and style. The face of a deity is distorted in one example on a bowl (Fig. 21), and the other one is carved on an unslipped plain jar in period III (Fig. 20). The bowls and jars with zoomorphic motifs are comparatively finer than the other pottery in period IA and IB but the bowls with the fish, single horns, birds and scorpion motifs are exceptionally fine and unique with almost polished bright red slip.

5. Other Evidence of the Presence of Animals at RHD

A proof of these particular animal depictions in the form of sculpture at Rehman Dheri is also shown by terracotta animal figurines from period IA/IB that include short horned, and humped cattle, dogs and birds, which continued in period II and became common in period III. Likewise, the

faunal remains from Rehman Dheri period IA include buffalo, cattle, sheep, goat and fish, period IB has cattle, sheep, fish and perhaps fowl and various other birds of different sizes, which also continued in Period II and III.

6. Zoomorphic Motifs from Coeval Sites in the Gomal, Bannu and Indus Valley

Among all the coeval Kot Dijian (early Harappan) sites in the Gomal, Bannu and Indus Valley, Rehman Dheri is the most prosperous one, as evident from its rich cultural material, especially the pottery. The zoomorphic motifs in Gumla include depiction of single horns, horned deity of a donkey and mountain goats (similar to RHD), full figures of a lion, fish, bird and peacock motifs and some unidentified animal and plant motifs in Gumla II (Tochi-Gomal) and the horned deities of cattle on jars in Gumla IIIa (Dani 1970-71: Pl. 1a, 1b; Fig. 16, 76- 90: p. 108). The quality of depiction is deteriorated towards Gumla III-IV (Kot Dijian and late Kot Dijian). At the site of Hathala in the Gomal plain, a horned deity with cattle figures is depicted on a sherd (contemporary with Gumla Period II/III) similar to Rehman Dheri (Dani 1970-71: 63), and a procession of birds in a circle is painted in black on a cream slipped dish of the Kot Dijian period. Jhandi Babar I (period II) and Jandi Babar II (period I) also have a bird motif painted on a bowl.

Lak Largai site in the Bannu Basin has a bird motif painted on a bowl in Period I, the Tochi-Gomal Phase (Khan et al, 1991:24- 28). The pottery from Lewan in the Bannu (Khan et al, 1986: 210-52) has horned deities of cattle and a procession of fish painted around the interior of a bowl-on-stand in period I (Tochi-Gomal). A unique style composition at Lewan II (Satyawadi 1994: 129) where two horned deities with two pairs of different style of curved horns (no faces) probably of bull and cattle supplemented by a mountain goat, are beautifully depicted in a horizontal band. The sun symbols are hanging from the ends of the pair of out-turned horns, and a branch with three pipal leaves is sprouting between the middle of the pair of incurving horns (Allchin et al 1986: 190-191). Besides Rehman Dheri, this depiction has a similarity of style and decoration with the horned deity depicted on pottery of Kot-Diji in Sindh, and Tali-Bakun in Iran (Langdorff, 1932: Plates 69-76).

The pottery from Amri (period ID and IIA) in Sindh has depiction of humped bulls, some stylized and elongated (contemporary with RHD II - III). Dogs and birds are also depicted on yellow or brown surface. Jalilpur, the Kot Dijian site in the Punjab has a lizard/turtle motif depicted on a jar, belonging to period II (Mughal 1972, 1974). Kalibangan, the Kot Dijian site in Indian Punjab, has fish, birds, stags, ibex, bull, duck and one human, all depicted in black in period I and Period II (Lal, 1979: 65).

The type site of Kot-Diji has animal motifs on pottery, contemporary with RHD IIIA/IIIB (Khan, 1965: fig. 14, 5: fig. 16, 6: fig. 17, 13) i.e. goats with cross-hatched body; a dog and peacock; the horned deity of cattle is in a very unique style with the face of cattle/water-buffalo depicted with beautiful curved horns and flowers between them. The eyes, nose and ears are carefully drawn but showing no mouth. It bears similarity in style and design with the deity from Lewan and partially from Rehman Dheri.

Harappa site, in the Ravi Phase (contemporary with RHD I), has bird motifs on jars. Motifs of a dog, goat, deer and a lady with a child are depicted in the Harappan period. Pottery from Mohenjo-Daro also has painted motifs of goat, ibex, fish with a goat, humped and hump-less bulls and goats depicted with cross-hatched elongated bodies. An example shows a goat depicted with a jackal and a fish, and one with a snake (Mackay, 1937-38: 217- 18: Plate LXVIII).

A horned deity of cattle on a jar found at Kili Gul Muhammad (Satyawadi 1994) is carefully depicted with a small, neat face and beautiful stylish curved horns, similar to Rehman Dheri. Other figures include mountain goats, a dog, and humped cattle with crisscross lines (Damb Sadaat II) (Fairservis, 1956: 169, 325, 437). Periano Ghundai in Balochistan also has a horn deity depicted on a buff ware oval jar. Rana Ghundai and sites in Loralai, Balochistan, have cattle motifs depicted in thin and elongated style (Asthana 1985: 63). Rana Ghudai have bull, dog, stylized humped and hump-less Indian domestic cattle, black bucks and sheep of typical moufflon type of horns depicted in period II, (the Chalcolithic) (Ross, 1946). Mehregarh site has humped cattle motif with birds and sun symbols, a procession of fish in a circle in MR VI, stylized goat motifs, caprids and gazelles composed along with geometrical motifs, birds, leaves, and fish, usually with water plants or water animals and a lion figure from Mehrgarh VI-VII (Jarrige, 1981: 81, 82; fig. 1.12, f; fig. 1.18, a, b, c, d;). Nal pottery (Fairservis 1975: 79) has animals and birds,

Sindy ibex, Persian gazelle, fish, winged lion, tortoise, humped bulls, cow and goat. The beautiful complete figure of a bull is very carefully drawn with plants and bird motifs (Hargreaves 1929: 17; Sankalia 1974: 320). A horned deity with the face and curved horns has similarity with RHD horned deity. At Kulli and Mehi (Early- Harappan sites), pottery shows highly stylized humped cattle/bull and black bucks/goat motifs (Asthana 1985: Figs. 3.39; 3.40; and 3.41; Satyawadi 1994).

7. Conclusions

The animal motifs on the pottery and figurines and the faunal remains of these animals show that “subsistence economy was based on agriculture, supplemented by domesticated cattle, sheep, goat, wild ungulates and a variety of fish and birds” (Durrani 1988: 347). The depiction of painted zoomorphic motifs is an important aspect of the rich cultural complex of the early Harappan/Kot Dijian people of Rehman Dheri (Gomal Valley). Ideologically and technologically they already had achieved growth in the field of agriculture, domestication of animals, town planning crafts making, producing wheel made pottery of good quality, styles and shapes, plain and painted, with simple as well as complex geometric, zoomorphic and floral motifs in monochrome, bi-chrome, and polychrome colors. The development of visual art i.e. the decoration of pottery with designs and especially the depiction of animal motifs on pottery is a milestone of their achievements. It shows prosperity, peace, and the intellectual and social stance of the community. It was socially an interactive society at Rehman Dheri that developed competition with the surrounding regions, achieved excellence and improved the standard of living. Beside other luxuries, it gave way to the aesthetic sense and artistic qualities, i.e. the decoration and beautification of objects of everyday use, and as a result the creation of art came into being. The depiction of zoomorphic motifs on pottery, must have been developed due to the demand and appreciation of the community especially the upper class, because the pottery with these motifs, mostly carinated and spherical bowls, dishes and some medium-small globular jars, are extra fine, and these vessels were probably used for serving the food or drink on special occasions.

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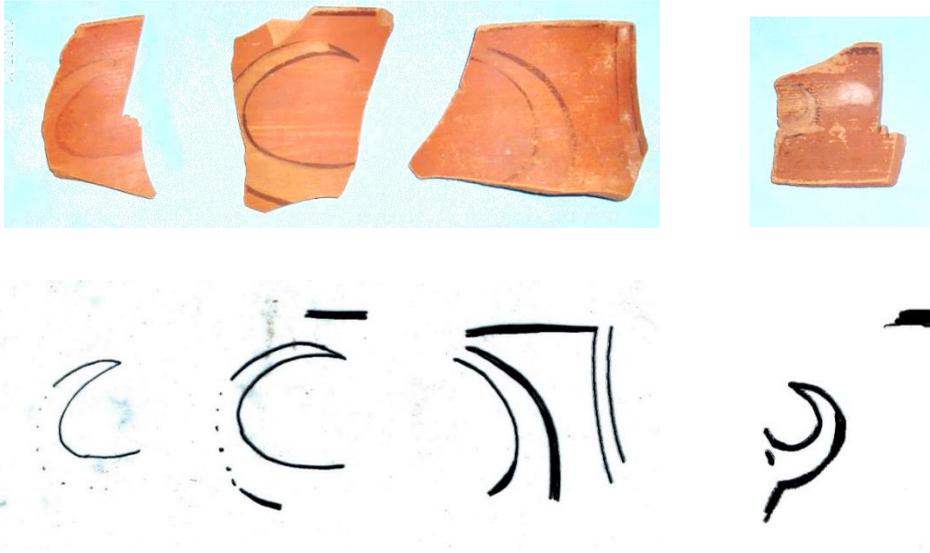


Fig. 1 - Rehman Dheri, depiction of single horns.

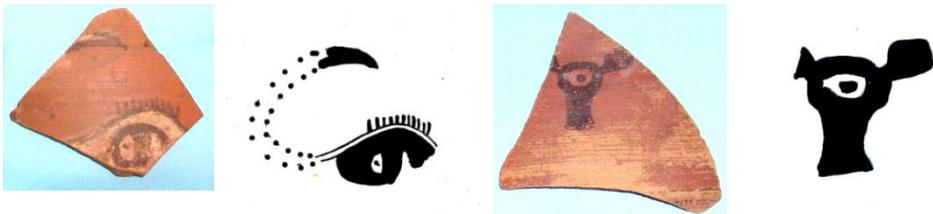


Fig. 2 - Rehman Dheri, horned deity with face and profile view.



Fig. 3 - Rehman Dheri, head of mountain goat.



Fig. 4 - Rehman Dheri, frontal view of horned deity.



Fig. 5 - Rehman Dheri, horns of a deity.

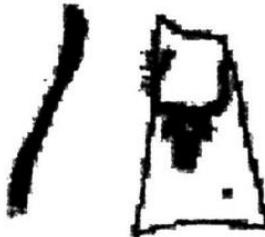


Fig. 6 - Rehman Dheri, frontal view of a horned deity.

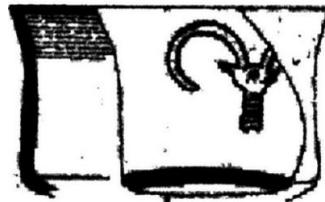


Fig. 7 - Rehman Dheri, horned deity as markhor.



Fig. 8 - Rehman Dheri, animal head.



Fig. 9 - Rehman Dheri, long delicate horns of mountain goat.

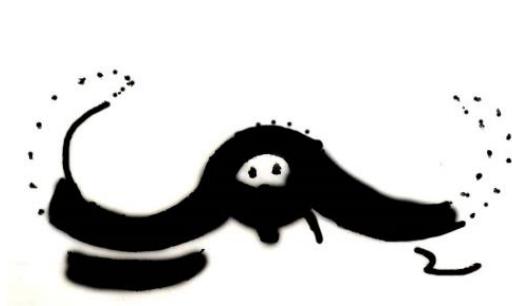


Fig. 10- Rehman Dheri, horn deity frontal face.



Fig. 11- Rehman Dheri, head probably cattle.

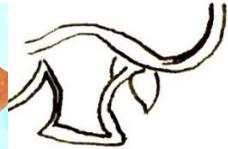


Fig. 12 - Rehman Dheri, incised horned deity.



Fig. 13 - Rehman Dheri, distorted horn.



Fig. 14 - Rehman Dheri, grooved sherd with horned deity.



Fig. 15 - Rehman Dheri, stylized face of horned deity.



Fig. 16 - Rehman Dheri, wild boars.



Fig. 17 - Rehman Dheri, short pointed tail animal.



Fig. 18 - Rehman Dheri, stylized mountain goat.

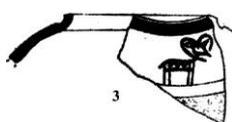


Fig. 19 - Rehman Dheri, small mountain goat.



Fig. 20 - Rehman Dheri, scorpion & mountain goat with Maltese cross.



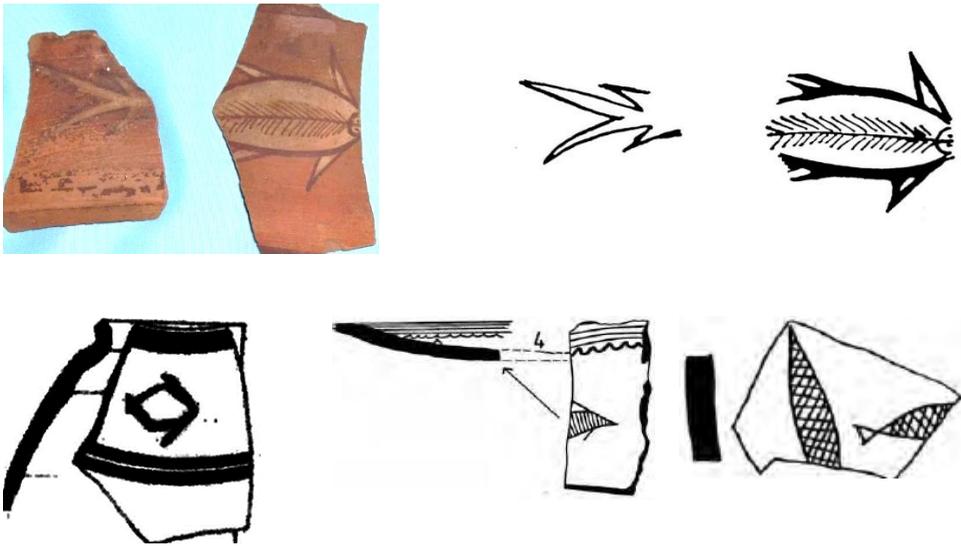


Fig. 21 - Rehman Dheri, 1 to 10 - different shapes of fish motifs.



Fig. 22 - Rehman Dheri, mountain goat with arrow, I and T symbols with frog and scorpions on a seal.

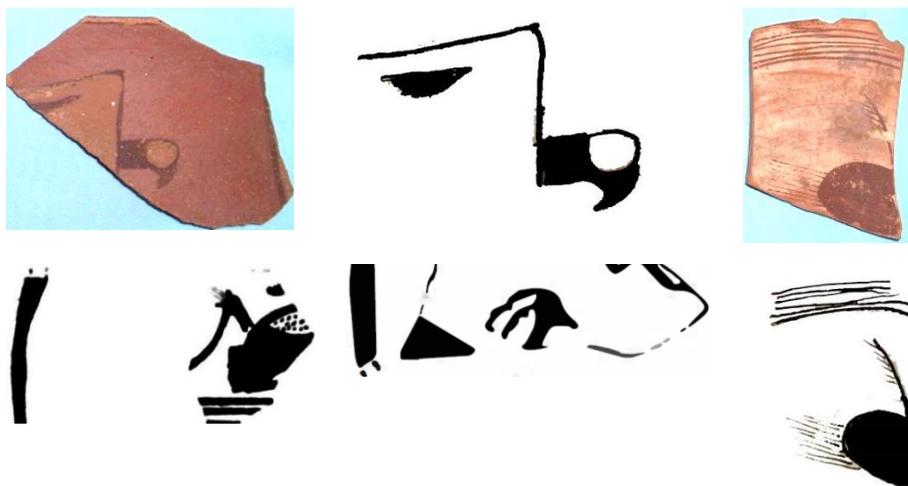


Fig. 23 - Rehman Dheri, 1 to 4, bird motifs.



Fig. 24 - Rehman Dheri, snake motif.

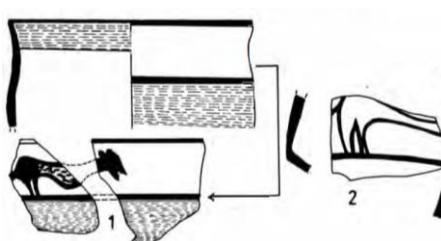


Fig. 25 - Rehman Dheri, dog motifs.



Fig. 26 - Rehman Dheri, scorpion motif.

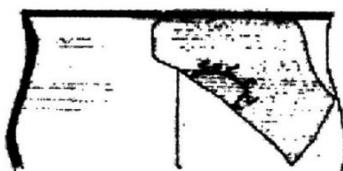


Fig. 27 - Rehman Dheri, centipede motifs.