

TERRACOTTA FEMALE FIGURINES FROM MEHRGARH AND HARAPPA: ANALYSIS OF ORNAMENTAL SIMILARITIES

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ABSTRACT

The study of human figurines is very important to understand the social organization and life style of ancient people. Combined with other evidences, the study of human figurines provides clues about the past cultures, economic condition and the cultural development of the societies. Mehrgarh is the earliest Neolithic period site in South Asia dating from 7000-2500 BCE and provides elegant evidences of figurine making tradition right from its Period-I that continues until its decline in 2500 BCE except its Period-III. Harappa (3700-1500 BCE) is the Bronze Age period site from where Indus Valley Civilization was discovered for the first time and recent excavations and Radio Carbon Dating by Harappa Archaeological Research Project (HARP) has taken back the date of Harappa to 3700 BCE so far. A great similarity is found in the embellishments of figurines which represent that there is continuity of such tradition from Mehrgarh to Harappa with little variation.

Keywords: Mehrgarh, Terracotta, Harappa, Figurines, Ornaments.

INTRODUCTION

Mehrgarh is one of the primitive Neolithic period settlement sites of south Asia that is located in Balochistan, Pakistan at 29° 12' 45" North and 67° 40' 15" East at the foot of Bolan Pass, the region is also called the "Bolan Basin". The location of Mehrgarh is very significant as it adjoins Indus river valley and Kacchi Plain area and played an important role in the culture and economy of the region in Neolithic period.

As far as Harappa is concerned, it is also located at significant place in Punjab about 27 km. away from Sahiwal and is situated at the old bed of river Ravi (Fig.1). Harappa was a big urban center of Indus valley civilization even larger than Mohenjo-Daro.



Figure 1: Location of Mehrgarh

Among the cultural material found from both sites, human figurines are found in abundant quantity. Most of the figurines were hand formed and artisan class manufactured them with precise concentration. Embellishments used to adorn the female figurines were fabulous that included varied hair styles, headdresses, variety of necklaces and pendants. A few figurines were depicted with dresses like skirts, trousers and decorated belts.

A gradual development in the figurines of Mehrgarh is observed from simple unbaked torso to well defined body attributes. Adornment was also from simple strips of clay depicting necklace to more complex variety of ornamentation.

Period-I of Mehrgarh was without ceramic evidence but this time was characterized by the earliest evidences of agriculture, farming and permanent settlement in South Asia. This was the time when the people of this region learnt that how to domesticate plants and animals and built the society which was the result of their stable occupation.



Figure 2: Unbaked clay figurine

In the end of this period, people of Mehrgarh started to manufacture the unfired clay figurines with lower torsos that was faceless and without the depiction of other body attributes (Fig.2).

In Period-II figurines were adorned with jewelry and it was represented by rolled strips of clay around the neck. In Period-III at Mehrgarh, figurines were totally absent due to concentration towards making the pottery which was manufactured on wheel and was decorated with beautiful painted designs. However, in replacement of figurines; a number of bull figurines were formed by the same potters who were expert in making pottery. Disappearance of human figurines was perhaps due to the concentration of potters towards manufacturing of pottery at mass level and they formed bovine figurines which had become an important part of their social life (Jarrige C. 1991:87). Period-IV became dominant in

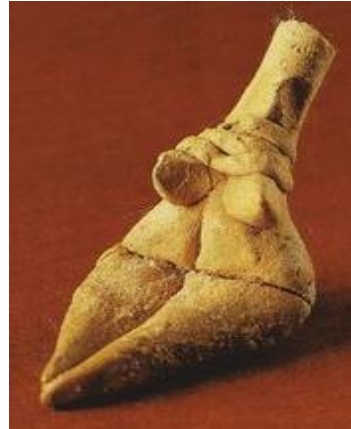


Figure 3: Depiction of jewelry

manufacturing and ornamentation of figurines as compared to the previous periods. In this period artisans adorned the figurines with various hairstyles, jewelry and headdresses. They also depicted face and body features on figurines. In jewelry the representation of discs was quite striking addition which increased the beauty of figurines (Fig.3). A variety of ornamentation began on figurines in Period-V. Varied rolled strips, forming six to seven rows, applied around the neck represented the necklace. A gradual development is observed on the figurines from Mehrgarh which were becoming more diverse and complex. Hairstyle got another change in Period-VI when coils of hair were depicted on right and left side of head in upright position (Fig.4). Coiled hairstyle was the distinction of this period which is not found in other periods.. In Period-VII a variety of adornment on figurines was appeared in Mehrgarh that includes bun hairstyle, straight hair style, curly hair style, colouring on hair, incised dotted hair bands, knot on hair bands, hair bands with bow adornment, beaded hair bands, necklaces, pendants and chokers.



Figure 4: Depiction of huge thick coils

Necklaces may further be divided into five types for instance Simple Necklaces, Incised Dotted Necklaces, Incised Dotted Necklace with Disc, Necklace with Single Disc, Necklace with Varied Discs. A variety in Pendants and Chokers is also found such as Single Stripped Pendants, Double Stripped Pendants, Triple Stripped Pendants and Incised Dotted Pendants. Chokers are found in two styles such as Plain Chokers and Incised Dotted Chokers.

The Kot Dijian period found at Harappa also represent the terracotta animal and human figurines making tradition when painted red and black design found on animal and human figurines very commonly (Kenoyer, 1998). The development of figurine

tradition at Harappa had been the result of development of the earlier figurines tradition at Mehrgarh (Clark, 2016:183). Variety in adornment is usually found on the figurines of Harappa during Mature Harappan Period (2600-1900 BCE). Figurines from Harappa have close similarity with Mehrgarh figurines in terms of shape and more likely in embellishment. Close resemblance reflects either the tradition has continuity in adoption at Harappa and tradition of adoring figurines travelled from Kacchi plain of Balochistan to alluvial plains of Indus river valley. For comparative study and to see the similarities between the figurines of Harappa and Mehrgarh, the data of Harappan figurines was collected from Lahore Museum (Fig.5)



Figure 5: Photography and recording of Harappan Figurines (Courtesy Lahore Museum)

HAIRSTYLES

Rope hairstyle with the addition of cone in center was adored on the figurines of Harappa which was also represented on the figurines of Mehrgarh. With little variations, the figurines of Mehrgarh represent more elaborated adornments than the figurines of Harappa. On the figurines of Mehrgarh various kinds of hairstyle are found while most of the figurines from Harappa contain variety of headdresses. As far as jewelry is concerned, figurines of Harappa seem to have an influence from the jewelry of Mehrgarh. Similarity between embellishments characterizes the fundamental concepts of adornment at both sites for beautification (Fig.6).



Mehrgarh



Harappa

Figure 6: Rope like Hairstyle

Loose styling hair were also the prominent features of figurines at both sites but depiction had some variation for instance the central parting of hair with spreading of hair behind the neck and shoulders was the feature of Mehrgarh figurines while similar kind of hairstyle was depicted on Harappan figurines but without central parting. Hairs were falling at both shoulders of the Harappa figurines. (Fig.7).



Mehrgarh



Harappa

Figure 7: Loose or straight hairstyle

Another popular hairstyle was making bun of hair that reflects that women at Harappa and Mehrgarh liked to bind their hair into bun style. Figurines depict that there was a little variation that women in Mehrgarh bound their hair at the edge and at the back of head and women of Harappa used to mound their hair on top of the head and fixed them with headbands (Fig.8).



Mehrgarh



Harappa

Source: <http://www.harappa.com/figurines/28.html>

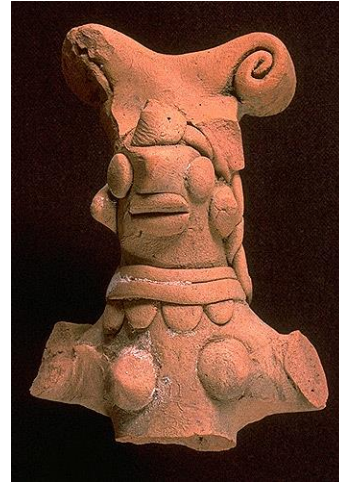
Figure 8: Bun Hairstyle

JEWELRY

Figurines at both sites are represented with appealing choker as neck embellishment. Depiction of choker has little difference as the figurines of Harappa were adorned with two clay strips whereas Mehrgarh figurines were elaborated with two strips of clay in which upper strip is incised dotted (Fig.8). Choker was used to give nice look at neck with jewel adornment. The similar type of jewelry was first taken at Mehrgarh and then adopted by the people of Harappa.



Mehrgarh



Harappa

Source: <http://www.harappa.com/figurines/10.html>

Figure 8: Choker with Disc Beads

Chokers had a variety in its types for instance Harappan figurines were ornamented with complex designs alongside depiction of pendants and necklaces. Similarity in depiction of choker, pendants and necklaces is also observed but with little difference in jewelry attachment. At Harappan figurines, the attached conical bits of clay with the choker and pendant show the bead adornment while attached pieces with necklace were in the shape of round discs represented on Mehrgarh figurines (Fig.9).



Mehrgarh



Harappa

Figure 9: Choker with Triple Stripped Pendant

Pendants and chokers with the attachment of round discs have resemblance that highlight the likeness of adornment of figurines at both sites. Mehrgarh figurines were decked with the choker of simple strips of clay and pendant with circular disc on the other the same type of jewelry was depicted on the figurines of Harappa with the depiction of choker and pendant with round discs (Fig.10).



Mehrgarh



Harappa

Source: <http://www.harappa.com/figurines/16.html>

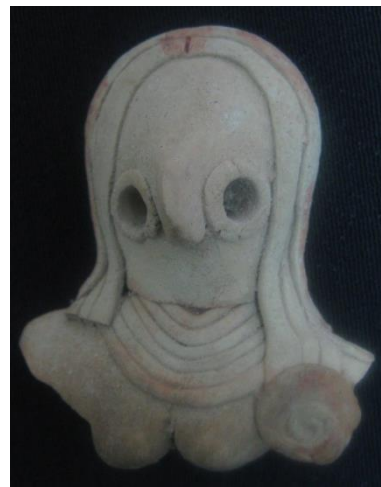
Figure 10: Choker and Pendant

HEADDRESS

Rosette ornamentation was also a significant feature of figurines from Harappa and Mehrgarh that added beauty on them. Similarity in such adornment is found but with little variation. Design of flower is similar but adoration has difference as Mehrgarh figurines are depicted with rosette at the edge of hair while such kind of depiction is found at the head of Harappa figurines in the form of wreath (Fig.11).



Mehrgarh



Harappa

Source: <http://www.harappa.com/figurines/16.html>

Figure 11: Flower Arrangement

The rope braid headdress was an attractive addition in the hairstyles of ancient time. Such kind of hairstyle is found on the figurines of Harappa and Mehrgarh. Somewhere it gives the look of rope hair braid elsewhere it gives gesture of turban. The headdress used on the figurine of Mehrgarh falling right and left side of the head looks like the rope hair style while on Harappa figurines it looks tied around the head and seems as a turban but such kind of hairstyle is popular in modern era as well (Fig.12).



Mehrgarh



Harappa

Source: <http://www.harappa.com/figurines/16.html>

Figure 12: Rope Style Headdress

Headband was a functional hair decoration which was used to control hair at one place to avoid its movement. Figurines at Harappa and Mehrgarh were also decorated with such kind of headdress (Fig.13). Similarity is observed in headbands which were simple in design but some of the headbands from Mehrgarh contains incised dotted designs looks like beaded headband.



Mehrgarh



Harappa

Source: <http://www.harappa.com/figurines/16.html>

Figure 13: Hair Band

CONCLUSION

Mehrgarh and Harappa are two most significant sites of Indus valley civilization which gives a long tradition of continuity of figurines tradition in the region from Neolithic period to the Bronze Age. The systematic analysis of figurines from both sites represents not only the naturalistic manifestations but also provide a deep imminence into the complexity of culture of the vicinity which was spread over a larger area in Indus valley. Every figurine had distinct features which highlighted the life style and fashion of that time that was adopted by the women at Mehrgarh ad Harappa.

The ornamentation clarifies the social complexity of fashion, culture and traditions. Ornamental features highlight the colossal aesthetics of the artisan class and magnificent assortment of the people in ornamentation. Adornment of figurines reflects the prosperity of people and also represents the economic stability and cultural richness of the sites. Similarity in embellishment reflects the continuity of the art of figurine making and adoration tradition from Kacchi plain to other Indus Valley sites. The similarity of decorative features of the figurines of Harappa with Mehrgarh reveals that the embellishment of figurines in Indus valley acknowledged the art continuity in later periods with regional variations.

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