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Archaeological Sites along Old Course of the River Beas: A Study of Pre-Historic Pottery

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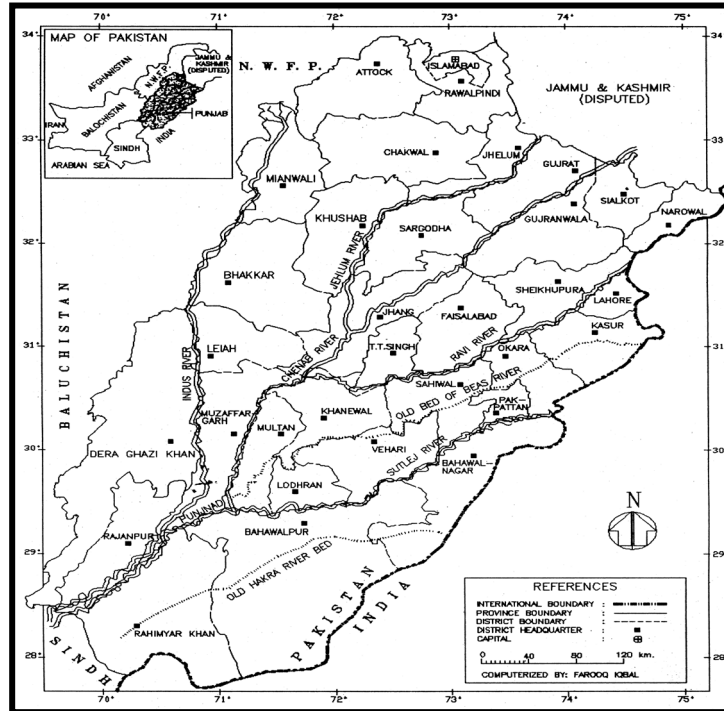
Abstract:

River Beas is one of the major tributaries of the mighty Indus. During the Early Harappan Era, when process of habitation started in the fertile plains of the Indus Domain with thrust, catchments of the Beas were also selected by the people for their dwellings. From early phases of the Kot Dijian to the Late Harappan Period this area remained populated. Due to its central location many shades of activity can, therefore, be observed in this zone which can facilitate to understand Indus Civilization in its total perspective. According to our present state of knowledge, twenty sites are located along the dry bed of river Beas in the jurisdiction of Sahiwal, Khanewal, Multan, Vehari and Lodhran Districts. Obviously pottery is the main material of antiquity that can be observed even in case of surface study of the cultural mounds. It facilitates the researchers to form, more or less, definite opinions with regard to its association with various time spans of the Indus Civilization. In the following pages timeline of the Beas Settlements is discussed in the light of pottery found from Beas Settlements.

Pakistan, especially area included in southern portion of the Punjab, represents cultural and archaeological wealth in almost unparalleled manner. Right from inception of human settlements on permanent basis in the alluvial plains of mighty Indus and its tributaries this ideally located environment offered everything required for habitation and activities related to this process.

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Beas is one of the main tributaries of the Indus and one of those rivers that gave Punjab its name. It ran between the Ravi and the Sutlej. During various spans of history different names were attributed to it. Vipas of Rig Veda¹, Vipasa of Mahabharata², Hyphasis of Arrian³, and Curtius Rufus⁴, Hypanis of Diodoros⁵, Beas of Al-Balazri⁶ and Minhaj Siraj⁷, Abi-yab of Makhдум Jalal-ud-Din Jahanian Jahan Gasht⁸, Ab-i-Siyah of Sirhindi⁹ Darya-e-Siyah of Ahmad Yadgar¹⁰, Biah of Babur Nama¹¹, Machala of Abdul Baqi¹², Bipasa as separate and Hurhari and Dand Nurni, when united with Sutlej of Abul-Fazal¹³, Darya-e-Sultan Pur as separate and Ghara when united with Sutlej of Nizam-ud-Din Ahmad¹⁴, Ghara Wah of Mir Masum Bakkari¹⁵, Darya-e-Gobindwal of Jahangir¹⁶, Ghillo-Ghara, when united with Sutlej of Sujan Rai Batalvi¹⁷, Aib-i-Gobindwal of Qabil Khan¹⁸, Gara, as composed waters of Sutlej and Beas of Tod¹⁹, Suk Viyah of Aulad Ali Gilani²⁰, and Suk Beas of modern days are the known names of river Beas, along with Arjikiya²¹, Uranjira²², Arjikuja²³, Majho-Wah²⁴ and Haryani Dhand²⁵.



Map of Pakistan and the Punjab. After Pakistan Archaeology No. 29, 1996.

Process of exploration started along the dry bed of the river Beas after the outstanding discovery of Harappa along the abandoned bed of the Ravi near Sahiwal, the then Montgomery. Chak Purbane Syal (now divided into two separate nearby mounds known as Chishtiwala Tibba & Chak 126/9L²⁶) was the first settlement of the pre-historic nature, discovered by Madho Sarup Vats during his exploratory trips around Harappa²⁷.

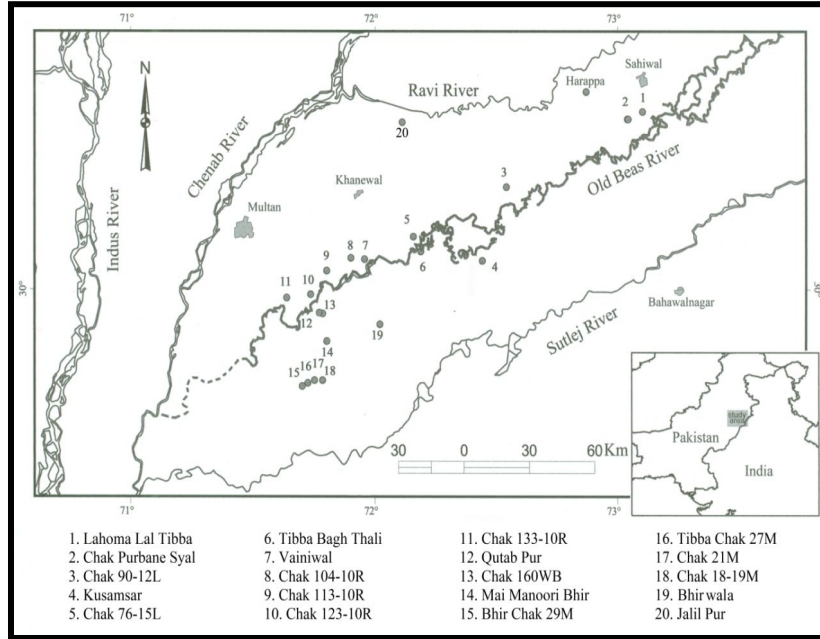
Vainiwal was the second important find that came into light after a considerable gap of more than thirty years²⁸.

During an extensive survey, conducted in the suburbs of Multan, by Muhammad Sharif in 1989, two more Harappan sites Chak 133/10-R and Mai Manoori were discovered²⁹.

In 1992, a large-scale survey was initiated by the Department of Archaeology. In the jurisdiction of Sahiwal, Khanewal, Multan, Lodhran and Vehari districts, fourteen new sites, covering early Harappan to Late Harappan Period, were discovered including Lohama Lal, Tibba 90/12-L, Kusamsar, Bhirki (76/15-L), Tibba 104/10-R, Tibba Bhag Thali, Faujian Wala (160 W.B.), Tibba Qutabpur Sadaat, Tibba 113/10-R, Tibba 123/10-R, Tibba 18/19 M, Tibba 21-M, Tibba 27-M and Tibba 29-M³⁰.

During posting at Multan, the author of these lines managed to visit all the Pre-historic sites discovered since 1920s and fortunately traced another Harappan settlement near Mailsi, namely Bhirwala, along the dry bed of southern channel of the Beas.

Several visits and careful surface collection proved extremely helpful to understand various shades of the prehistoric culture that nourished in catchment of the river. First important issue was to ascertain time zone, in which process of habitation started in the area. Detailed analysis of prehistoric material, especially pottery, gave evidence of progressive inhabitation during the Early, Mature



Map indicating abandoned route of the Beas along with old settlements in its catchments. After Rita P. Wright, 2005. Bhirwala is added afterwards.

and Late Harappan Periods. It transpires that the settlement process started during the transitional period between the Hakra and the Kot Dijian Phases of the Harappan Tradition. This factor is established in the light of limited wheel made sherds of applique and incised nature, associated with the Hakra Period, from Vainiwal, Chak 18/19- M and Chak 21-M. As regards applique vessels, treated on the external surface with a thick coating of mud mixed with pottery bits that are precisely identical to the Hakra Applique Pottery, they occur at Early Harappan sites in addition to Hakra. Their presence suggests continuity of the applique pottery making tradition from the fourth to early third millennia B.C. The

basis of such an inference comes from the stratified levels of Jalilpur, where applique pottery first appeared in levels assigned to Period-I, related to the Hakra domain, and then continued to occur in the Kot Dijian occupation of Period-II³¹. Occurrence of wheel made Hakra Applique Pottery along with an advanced form of Hakra Incised with difference in fabric, slip and depth of incisions on the main body of the pot at Chak 21-M, Chak 18/19-M and Vainiwal apparently indicates that the pottery is related to the transitional period between Hakra and Kot Dijian Era.

After passing through transitional phases, habitation process started with thrust, and sixteen out of twenty sites were selected by the Early Harappans to build their dwellings. This phenomenon remained dominant in settlements like Chak 18/19-M and Chak 21-M, situated along the southern channel of the river Beas, whereas most of the sites along the northern branch of the river were not more than hamlets in the Kot Dijian Era in all probability. At 113/10-R, 123/10-R, 133/10-R, 90/12-L and Bhirki very few pottery sherds associated with the Early Harappan Period were noticed, contrary to the sites located in the south where Kot Dijian Period was in full bloom. Related to the Kot Dijian or Early Harappan Era, Banded, Grooved, Striated, Quetta Buff / Wet, Loralai Red, Faiz Muhammad Grey along with Black on Red Ware observed in the Beas settlements. An interesting phenomenon was less representation of grooved pottery at the Beas sites in contrast to the sites located along the Ravi and Thal area or across the river Indus on the foothills of Koh-i-Suleiman. Instead of grooved, banded pottery was abundant on these sites. Only one sherd of Quetta Buff was found at Chak 18/19-M but there were many representing Faiz Muhammad Grey Ware at Chak 18/19-M and Chak 21-M. Early examples of this pottery type, with red/sepia decorative motifs on grey surface and succeeding motifs in black on grey, both were available in the Beas sites.

During the Mature Harappan Period, leaving the exception of Bhag Thali aside, all the settlements remained actively involved in the cultural activity and society touched peak. This was an era of vast experimentation and almost all types of pottery were observed at various sites. Pottery sherds with *pipal* leaves, eye and sun motifs, hatched leaves, loop and balls, fish scales, geometrical

designs with circles, straight and wavy lines were seen in abundance. Some sherds were representing flora and fauna of the environment. Pieces of dish on stand and incised pottery were present in large number. Dishes were simple as well as decorated, sometimes with black on red designs and occasionally with lineal patterns or nail incisions. Mud wash, fluted, perforated and with Periano reserve slip sorts of pottery were also observed during the surface collection. Some sherds were having close resemblance with the pottery found in various sites in Baluchistan.

In the Late Harappan Period, activity dwindled to a considerable extent. Lohama Lal and Chak Purbane Syal were inhabited, perhaps due to their bondage with Harappa, but rest of the area, commanded by the Beas waters, was left with only two functional settlements; Vainiwal and Bhag Thali. Vainiwal had a long history and resisted the declining trend due to its internal strength, whereas, Bhag Thali was inhabited and abandoned during the Late Harappan Phase. Forms and decorative motifs related to this span of prehistory were quite limited and few sherds of fluted pottery and pointed goblets indicated relevance with the Late Harappan Period.

An overall view, indicating cultural association of various settlements in catchments of the Beas, is as under:

S. No.	Site	EARLY	MATURE	LATE
1	Lohama Lal	✓	✓	✓
2-3	Purbane Syal (126/9-L + Chishti Wala)		✓✓	✓✓
4	90/12-L	✓	✓	
5	Kusamsar	✓	✓	
6	Bhag Thali			✓
7	Bhirki	✓	✓	

S. No.	Site	EARLY	MATURE	LATE
8	Vainiwal	✓	✓	✓
9	104/10-R	✓	✓	
10	113/10-R	✓	✓	
11	123/10-R	✓	✓	
12	133/10-R	✓	✓	
13	Mai Manoori	✓	✓	
14	Qutabpur	✓	✓	
15	Faujjan Wala		✓	
16	18/19-M	✓	✓	
17	21-M	✓	✓	
18	27-M	✓	✓	
19	29-M	✓	✓	
20	Bhirwala (Buttanwala-Peer Ghaib)	✓	✓	
		16	19	5

As already mentioned, most of the Beas settlements came into existence during the Kot Dijian Period. But at certain sites like Vainiwal, Chak 18/19-M and Chak 21-M, evidences go beyond this phase as well. Wheel made applique and incised forms of pottery, having close resemblance with Hakra pottery of the same but earlier tradition, can easily be associated with the transitional

period between the Hakra and the Kot Dijian Phases of Harappan Age. This factor also indicates possibility of finding earlier forms of such pottery types from the Beas settlements. However, the final opinion in this regard can only be made after an appropriate study of the stratigraphy of these cultural mounds up to the level of virgin soil. During Kot Dijian and Mature Harappan Periods, prehistoric society touched its peak and then faced decline in accordance with unchanged pattern of the Mother Nature.

Conclusion

As is evident from the above discussion, habitation process started during early phases of the Kot Dijian Era, when Beas Catchments were selected for exploitation by the Indus people. This date can even prove to be earlier as a result of further studies and proper excavations up to level of virgin soil. Pottery evidences indicate importance of the Beas Region, which was located in middle of the Indus Domain, offering opportunity to cultural traits from all corners of the civilizational network for representation. Only some shades of the ceramic tradition are discussed in this brief article. There is tremendous space for further deliberations in this regard.



Chak 21-M: A wheel made applique sherd of the Hakra tradition, associated with the transitional phase between Hakra and the Kot Dijian era.



Vainiwal (Chak 56/10-R): Incised and applique pottery associated with the transitional phase between the Hakra and the Kot Dijian period.



Chak 18/19-M: Pottery sherds of vessels, associated with Early Harappan Period, indicating small and big pots / bowls.



Chak 18/19-M: Sherds of flanged vessels decorated with geometrical patterns in black on red, related to the Kot Dijian Period.



Chak 123/10-R: A beautiful sherd of red ware having red slip and pipal leaf motifs.



Chak 133/10-R: Perforated pottery of the Harappan tradition, indicating base and rims of various pots of different shapes and sizes



Faujjanwala (Chak 160 W.B.): Sherds indicating dishes and stands. Pots were decorated with dark red slip and black lines on them.



Vainiwai: A beautiful sherd of the Faiz Muhammad Grey-Ware tradition with peacock, piple and hatched leaves, perhaps fetched from Lal Shah near Sibbi.



Chishtiwalla: A terracotta pointed goblet discovered by local farmers during leveling activity for the cultivation purpose

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