

INDO-SCYTHIAN POTTERY FROM SHAIKHAN DHERI: A STUDY OF MATERIAL CULTURE IN GANDHARA

Dr. Jan Muhammad^{*1}, Prof. Dr. Zakirullah Jan², Shazia Bano³

^{*1}Lecturer, Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

²Professor, Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

³Lecturer, Department of Dress Making & Designing, Govt. Polytechnic Institute for (W) Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

¹janhistorian 2010@gmail.com, ²zakirullah@uop.edu.pk, ³shaziajan2010@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: *

Dr. Jan Muhammad

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to emphasize the significance of the pottery dating back to the Indo-Scythian period 1st century BCE to the beginning of the 1st century CE discovered at Shaikhhan Dheri Chasadda in Gandhara, the site located near ancient Pushkalavati adds to its historical importance. The excavations revealed some significant rich material culture of the Indo-Scythian period, including pottery. The pottery expressively contributes to interpreting the material culture of the Indo-Scythian period 1st century BCE in the region and establishing a chronological sequence of occupation at the site. The major collection of the material culture was pottery from the Indo-Scythian period was remarkable, with elaborate designs and various techniques employed, particularly stamped marks including wheel-throwing, molding, firing, and glazing, in Gandhara, highlighting their artistic and cultural importance.

Keywords: Shaikhhan Dheri, Material Culture, Indo-Scythian, Gandhara, Pottery, Stamped, Designs

INTRODUCTION

Shaikhhan Dheri is located at modern Charsadda (ancient Pushkalavati) opposite the Bala Hisar site about twenty-two miles north of Peshawar (Cunningham, 2022; Siddiqui, 2014: 47). Shaikhhan Dheri is the only site in Gandhara that extended the cultural profile of the region from the early history to the main historical period (Husain, 1993, 289-314; Khan, & Amin, 2015: 129-138). As we know the ancient Pushkalavati was a major city of Gandhara and was home to different rules (Cunningham, 1990: 42; Ahmad, & Rehman, 2021: 42-54). For the first time, the General Court started archaeological research in the region in 1836 and highlighted Bala Hisar the famous mound, which remains the concentration of the different activities relating to archaeology (Marshall & Vogel, 1902: 142-143; Warraich,

2011). However, Alexander Cunningham also visited the region and regarded it as the ancient capital of Gandhara during Alexander's invasion (Cunningham, 2022; Vogel, 1902: 142-143; Cunningham, 1990: 42; Ali, T., Coningham, Durrani, & Khan, G. R. 1997: 1-33). A certain classification of cultures from about the 1st century BCE to the 6th century CE was established by Mortimer Wheeler in Gandhara (Wheeler, 1958: 41; Samad, 2011; Dani, 1965; Coningham, & Ali, 2007). The site of Shaikhhan Dheri has contained some significant rich material culture. In the excavations led by Dani, numerous antiquities and structures were unearthed, including pottery, coins, terracotta figurines, and beads (Allchin & Erdosy, 1995; Mohammadzai, 2009: 191-200). However, our

focus lies specifically on the Indo-Scythian period pottery (from the 1st century BCE to the beginning of the 1st century CE). The pottery from this period was meticulously documented by Fidaullah Sehrai in "Ancient Pakistan" in 1965 (Sehrai, 1972). Evidence from layers 5, 6, and 7 indicates a continuous occupation during the Indo-Scythian period, with the discovery of Azes-I coins in layer 6 suggesting occupation during his reign from approximately 57 BC to 37 BC (Dani, 1965: 30-32). Furthermore, pottery findings and the rubble foundation of a stone diaper wall in layer 7 further reinforce the presence of Scythian occupation (Coningham & Ali, 2007). These findings contribute significantly to identifying the region's material culture of the Indo-Scythian period and assist in establishing a chronological sequence of occupation at the site (Muhammad, Sehrai, & Munsif, 2023: 2163-2178). Cultural materials attributed to the Indo-Scythian period were identified during the excavation (Dani, 1965: 32; Allchin & Erdosy, 1995).

1. Discovery of the Site

The site first came to the notice of Mortimer Wheeler when he was busy excavating the ancient mound of Bala Hisar in 1958. Wheeler realized the importance and nature of this buried city from an aerial photograph. The site is situated in the heart of Gandhara (Wheeler, 1958; 1962: 33, 1968: 98; Saeed, 2020: 574-584).

2. Excavation of the Site

The excavation was carried out in two seasons by Dani in 1963 and 1964 respectively significant material culture was discovered during the different periods (Dani, 1965; Ali, I. 1995: 87-98, Hussain, 1995: 75-90). The excavation confirmed the material culture of the Indo-Scythian period of the 1st century BCE to the beginning of the 1st century CE. The city was built on sedimentary soil and the floors were made of river pebbles

(Coningham, & Ali, 2007; Olivieri, 2009: 379-384).

3. Historical Background

The Sakas or Scythians are an ancient group of people (Waghmar, 2020) whose presence in history can be traced back to the Achaemenian era. They were allowed by the Achaemenians to cross the Jaxartes River, (Waghmar, 2020) which marked the beginning of their migration and subsequent settlement in various regions of Central Asia (Melyukova, 1995: 27-58; Kozintsev, 2007: 143-157). Eventually, they established a new homeland in southern Afghanistan and eastern Iran while given the geographical name of Sakastan or Seistan (Kim, 2010: 115-35). Seistan, now known as Sakastan, encompasses present-day eastern Iran, Baluchistan, and a portion of southern Afghanistan. It holds great historical, cultural, and geographical significance. The region's name is closely associated with the renowned Saka civilization, which flourished there (Samad, 2011: 64-65; Majumdar, 1946: 56; Edwardes, 1969: 23; Mitchiner, 1978: 307-308). The Indo-Scythians later emerged as a dominant force, expanding their influence over northwestern India by successfully conquering the local kingdoms previously ruled by the Indo-Greeks (Mitchiner, 1978: 314). This marked a significant extension of Scythians supremacy (Bopearachchi & Rahman, 1995: 170-196; Huntingford, 1935: 785-795). These rulers, accompanied by their successors, are recognized to have dominated ancient Gandhara in western India, Sindh and south-eastern Afghanistan Punjab, and Kashmir (Whitehead 1914: 3; Samad, 2011). The Indo-Parthians ruled the same territories (Colliva, 2018: 89-110). They came into conflict with the Yue-Chi and were driven out of their homeland (Frumkin, 2022). At this point they were divided into two groups (Edwardes 1969:23; Majumdar, 1946: 56).

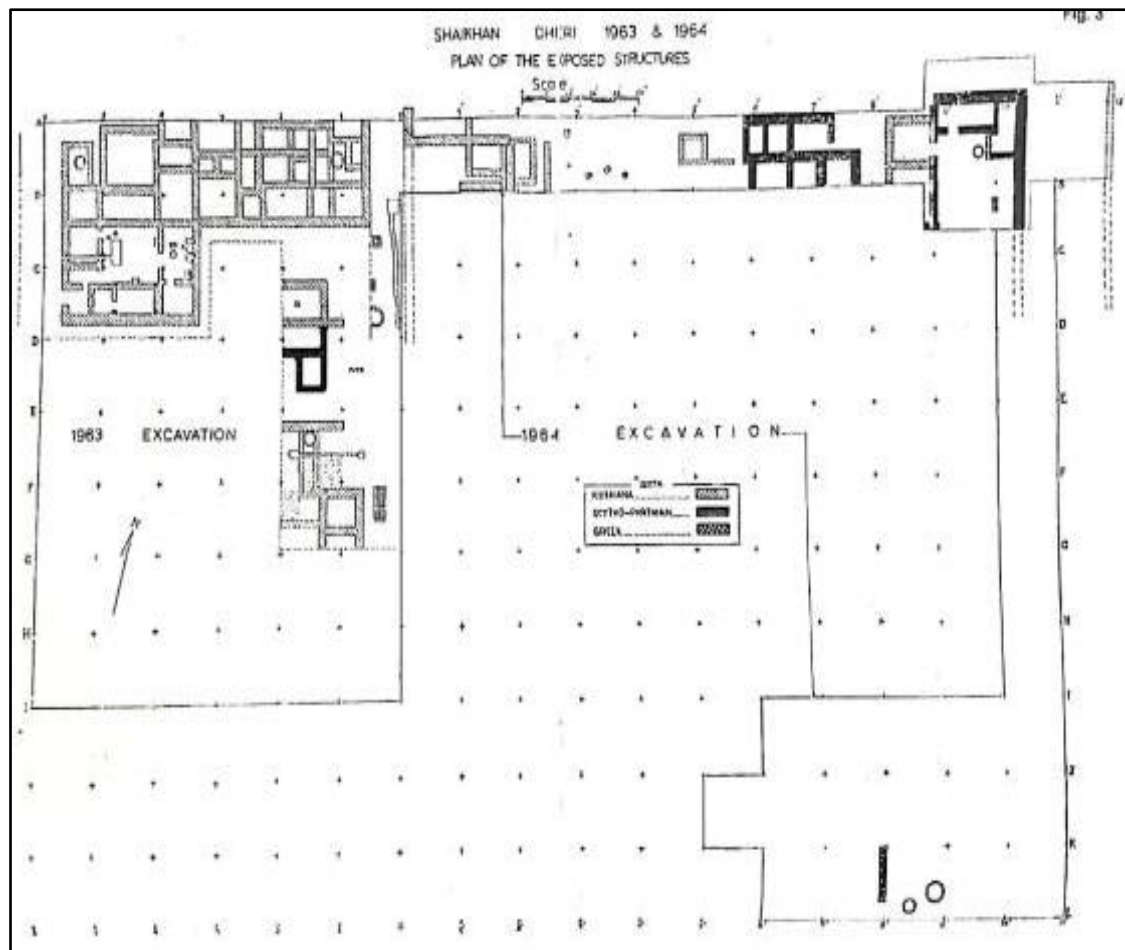


Figure: 1 Plan of the excavation area and exposed structures, Shaikhan Dheri, (after Dani, 1965)

One group went westward and reached Sogdiana. They went to Bactria through Margiana and settled in Parthia (Mukherjee 1975; Senior 2001: 8-9; Lyonnet, 2022: 46-64). Others migrated southward, passing the Karakorum to Kashmir and present-day Pakistan's northern mountain region (Mukherjee 1975; Senior 2001:8-9; Chaturvedi, & Sahai, 2020; Khan, 2020: 8-24). Their chief, Maues defeated the Indo-Greek ruler Hippostratus in 90 BCE. He extended his kingdom to Punjab and Gandhara. He ruled till 75 BCE and was followed by a Greek ruler Apollodotus- II who succeeded in regaining their lost territories from the Scythians (Bopearachchi & Rahman, 1999; Muhammad, & Jan 2023: 1179-1189). However, his successor, Azes-I defeated Hippostratus, the last Indo-Greek ruler in 57 BCE and put an end to the Indo-Greek rule in this area. He further enlarged his rule up to the Paropmisadae (Kabul Valley) and on the other side to east Punjab. He was followed by his son and successor Azilizes, who succeeded Azes-II in turn (Senior, 2001: 7, Bopearachchi, 2011: 259-

283). It is said that this ruler further annexed Jalalabad and Gardez to his empire (Chopra 2003: 118). He was the last Indo-Scythian ruler, followed by several satraps (Mitchiner 1975/6: 702; 1978: 313). The main sources of the reconstruction of Indo-Scythian history are Pottery, Inscriptions, and coins (Simpson, & Pankova, 2021:1-774).

4. Pottery of the Indo-Scythian Period from Shaikhan Dheri

The most significant cultural material was pottery discovered during the excavations (Allchin, & Erdosy, 1995; Mohammadzai, 2009: 191-200). The presence of pottery in layers 5, 6, and 7 suggests the continuity of occupation during the Scythian period. The coins found in layer 6 suggest that this layer corresponds to the reign of Azes-I, who ruled from around 57 BC to 37 BC (Dani, 1965: 30-32). Pottery has played a significant role in shaping various civilizations' cultural, economic, and social aspects throughout history (Griswold, 2012; Lemonnier, 2013;

Kenoyer, 2006: 21-49). The pottery of the Indo-Scythian from Shaikhan Dheri holds significant historical and cultural importance as it represents the artistic and cultural legacy of the ancient region of Gandhara (Khan, Mahsud, & Amin, 2023: 1-15; Callieri, & Olivieri, 2020: 1-1214). Indo-Scythian pottery is renowned for its exceptional technique, elaborate designs, and unique combination of cultural influences (Srinivasan, 2007:1-27; Shah Nazar, 2002: 85-90; Hussain, 1980, 1993). It serves as a valuable source of information about the religious, social, and economic aspects of ancient Gandhara. The pottery of Indo-Scythian showcases a combination of this artistic amalgamation of elements from different cultures to create a distinct Gandharan style (Muhammad, Sehrai, & Munsif, 2023: 2163-2178; Whitfield, 2023). Gandhara has been the site of numerous archaeological excavations, and pottery remains have been found in abundance (Iori, 2018; Olivieri, 2018: 123-139).

The study and analysis of Gandharan pottery contribute to our understanding of ancient Gandhara chronology, trade systems, and cultural interactions (Rienjang, & Stewart, 2020; Callieri, & Olivieri, 2020: 1-1214). Gandharan pottery is known for its exquisite craftsmanship, delicate designs, and intricate detailing (Hussain, 1980; Sehrai, F. 1965: 141). The artisans of the Indo-Scythian period demonstrated remarkable skill in creating vessels, and other pottery objects. These artifacts are appreciated not only for their historical value but also for their aesthetic beauty. The pottery found in Gandhara is characterized by its unique designs and techniques, which reflect the influence of both the Central Asian and Indian cultures (Dani, 1965: 121; Iori, 2018, Dawar, 2013). The presence of a wide variety of pottery types, shapes, and designs indicates a diverse and complex society with an advanced level of craftsmanship (Sehrai, F. 1965: 134). The use of pottery for storage and cooking also suggests a settled way of life, as opposed to a purely nomadic lifestyle. The Shaikhan Dheri pottery has the potential to reveal a great deal about the economic, social, and cultural practices of this civilization, and highlights the significance of pottery as a form of material culture (Hussain, 1992, 1993; Ismail, & Khan, 2019; Callieri, & Olivieri, 2020: 1-1214).

5.1 Classification of Pottery

The pottery of Shaikhan Dheri may be classified into three groups: I. Grey ware, II Red or Reddish Buff ware, III Black polished ware (Dani, 1965: 27; Hussain, 1980). Indo-Scythian pottery from this site has been classified into two main groups grey ware (Pl. 01) and red ware (Pl. 02) these consisted of bowls with rims, bowls with everted rims (Pl. 10), fragments of bowl polished on both sides, and bowls (Olivieri, & Vidale, 2004: 121-180; Khan, G. R., Durrani, & Samad, 2019: 111-197; Olivieri, 2022; Khan, G. R. 2022: 77-83) without any polish, carinated thali without turned rim along with decoration, variety of bowls, shallow bowls (Swati, 1999: 40-68; Iori, 2018; Rabbani, 2020: 100-228). Hollow pedestal base, flat stepped pedestal, globular jar, tiny globular jar, from Shaikhan Dheri excavation (Hussain, 1980, 1993). The most distinctive group of grey ware of this type of pottery is also observed in Sirkap at Taxila (Ghosh, 1944: 48; Dani, 1968; Marshall, 2013). Wheeler records, it should be noted that this type of pottery is abundantly found in the occupational-level Indo-Scythian periods. During the Indo-Scythian period, a coarse variation of this ware was produced on a large scale, mainly consisting of shallow bowls of varying sizes (Dobbins, 1973: 279-294; Artamonov, 1970: 50-83; Shah Nazar, 2002). Unfortunately, the quality of firing for this rough variety was subpar, resulting in a coarser appearance. The clay used for this particular pottery also contains a higher proportion of sandy particles and other layers (Wheeler, 1962: 49; Dani, 1965: 136; Rabbani, 2020: 100-228).

5.2 Types of Pottery

A distinctive type of pottery known as grey ware has been discovered in the Shaikhan Dheri excavation and a wide range of vessels, including bowls, deep shallow bowls, cups, jars small and large storage water containers, and ritual objects used in religious ceremonies during the Indo-Scythian period. This type of pottery has also been found earlier by Wheeler in Sirkap, Taxila (Wheeler, 1958: 41; Marshall, 2013; Dawar, 2013). The pottery in this ware is made of fine levigated clay that has been well-fired, with regular darker grey bands inside and outside that create a dark and light shading effect. This type of pottery is found in great numbers at the Indo-Scythian level, suggesting that it was a popular

form of pottery during these historical periods. Additionally, it is observed that a rough variety of this ware was mass-produced during the Indo-Scythian period, indicating that it was an important form of pottery for this culture (Sehrai, F. 1965: 138-144; Ali, T., Coningham, Durrani, & Khan, G. R. 1997: 1-33).

5.3 Features of Pottery

The predominant type of pottery produced by the Indo-Scythian in Gandhara was distinctive red ware and occasionally grey ware. The vessels were typically made from reddish-brown clay and had a smooth surface (Kennedy, 1975; Gokhale, 1995; Chatfield, 2010: 727-736). Indo-Scythian pottery often featured molded decorations (Dani, 1965; Hussain, 1980, 1993). These decorations were typically created by pressing molds or stamps (Pl. 11) onto the clay before firing. Common motifs included rosettes, floral patterns, (Pl. 10) human figures, (Pl. 13), and mythological creatures have been observed. Animal motifs played a significant role in Indo-Scythian pottery (Meyer, 2013; Gordon, 1932: 163-171; Marshall, 2013). The potters depicted animals such as horses, (Pl. 13) elephants, lions, and birds in a stylized manner. These motifs may have had symbolic or religious significance (Marshall, 2013; Rathore, 2022: 127-129). Some examples of Indo-Scythian pottery in Gandhara display incised or painted designs. Incised patterns were created by carving lines or shapes into the surface of the pottery (Shah Nazar, 2002), while painted designs involved applying pigments to the vessel after firing. Indo-Scythian pottery in Gandhara served both utilitarian and ritualistic purposes (Hussain, 1980, 1993; Sehrai, F., 1965: 121-132; Maritan, Nodari, Olivieri, & Vidale, 2020: 342-355).

5.4 Decoration

One of the most striking features of the Indo-Scythian period pottery from Shaikhan Dheri is the decoration. The stamped potter has been discovered in several archaeological sites like Sirkap, Hayatabad, Pir Manakrai, and Shaikhan Dheri associated with the Indo-Scythian period 1st century BCE (Khan, G. R., 2021: 103-186; Shah Nazar, 2003: 85-103; Peterson, & Peterson, 2003; Callieri, & Olivieri, 2020: 1-1214). Artisans employed various techniques and motifs to embellish pottery vessels (Shah Nazar, 2003)

adding beauty and symbolic significance. Painted decorations were commonly applied to pottery vessels (Vickers, 1985: 108-128). These designs often featured geometric patterns, floral motifs, (Pl. 12) human and animal figures (Pl. 15), and mythological scenes, (Pl. 14) (Benson, 1995: 163-177; Dar and Jan 2015: 1-44; Dawar, 2013). Incised decorations added texture and detail to the pottery vessels, enhancing their relief decorations involved creating raised designs on the surface of the pottery (Pl. 08). Artisans achieved this by applying clay or molding it onto the vessel surface (Shah Nazar, 2003: 85-103; Hakal, & Zahra, 2022: 1270-1292). However, the relief motifs could include geometric patterns, stylized floral elements, or figurative representations. These raised elements added a three-dimensional quality to the pottery. The most common decoration frequently identified from Gandhara is the stamped or impressed decorations involve pressing tools or objects onto the surface of the clay to create patterns or textures (Hussain, 1980, 1993). These tools could include carved stamps, engraved rollers, or other objects with distinct designs. Stamped or impressed (Pl. 10 & 11) decorations added repeating motifs or textures to the pottery (Khan, G. R., 2021: 103-186). The decoration of pottery during the Indo-Scythian period in Gandhara showcased the artistic skills, cultural influences, and symbolism of the phase. The use of red and black slip decoration, as well as the use of incision and applique techniques, are typical of Indo-Scythian pottery (Shah Nazar, 2003: 85-103; Dani, 1965).

5.5 Technique

Wheel-throwing was a commonly used technique, allowing the potters to create vessels with proportioned forms. Molding was another feature to ensure consistent shapes and sizes (Ther, 2020: 172). Through using molds made of clay, and plaster, the potters achieved mass production and uniformity in their pottery. Firing, a crucial step in pottery production involved subjecting the shaped and dried clay vessels to high temperatures in kilns or open fires. This process transformed the clay into durable and hardened ceramic, suitable for everyday use (Marshall, 1951: 296, 2013). While glazing was occasionally used, and artisans applied a glassy coating made from mineral compounds onto the

pottery surface. Glazes added color, shine, and a protective layer, resulting in vibrant colors and a glossy finish. Various decorative techniques were employed to embellish the pottery. These included painting designs with pigments, incising patterns or motifs onto the surface, relief work, appliqué, and stamping (Roux, & de Miroschedji, 2009: 155-173).

5.6 Material

It has been observed in Shaikhan Dheri pottery of the (1st century BCE), that the Indo-Scythians used a variety of materials for pottery production (Bernard, 1994: 99-129; Hakal, & Zahra, 2022: 1270-1292). As we know pottery played an important role in daily life as it served functional purposes such as storage, cooking, and serving vessels, as well as decorative and ceremonial functions (Sehrai, F. 1965: 134). Some common pottery materials used by the Indo-Scythians in Shaikhan Dheri during this period were made from locally available clay, which was the most common. It was relatively inexpensive and widely accessible. Earthenware vessels were typically handmade and fired at low temperatures. Similarly, baked clay was another prevalent material used in pottery production (Marshall, 1960: 588; Iori, 2018). It is important to note that the extent and availability of different pottery materials may have varied based on the social status, economic means, and cultural practices of the Indo-Scythian communities in Gandhara. Local availability of clay deposits and access to firing technologies would have influenced the choice of materials and the range of pottery produced during this period (Sehrai, F., 1965: 134-214; (Dani, 1968; Hussain, 1980, 1993).

5.7 Influences

The pottery that has been reported from the Shaikhan Dheri (Gandhara) was greatly Influenced by the earlier Greek-Bactrian rulers who established a Hellenistic tradition in the region, the Indo-Scythians employed various techniques to shape and decorate their pottery vessels (Dawar, 2013; Callieri, & Olivieri, 2020: 1-1214). Artisans produced a wide range of vessels, including bowls, cups, jars, storage containers, and ritual objects used in religious ceremonies during the Indo-Scythian period at Sirkap, the culture underwent significant changes

due to the influence of Western objects and techniques brought by people exposed to Hellenistic culture in Central Asia under the rule of the Bactrian Greeks (Mairs, 2013: 9-30). Taxila, in particular, became more and more influenced by Western culture during this period. New shapes and types of pottery emerged during this period, including the unguent flask with stable bases, wide girths, and narrow necks. The beaker, which has a pedestal base and a flaring rim, also became popular and is noted for its graceful shape with different designs such as zigzag bands, dotted lines, and animal figures. Other new types of pottery included the bell-shaped amphora with two handles, round water bottles (Pl. 02) with holed lugs for strings, and pear-shaped vases. These new types of pottery became permanent features of local crafts, reflecting the influence of Western techniques and styles on the cultural life of Sirkap (Sharif 1969; Bahadar Khan et al. 2002: 31).

5. Conclusion

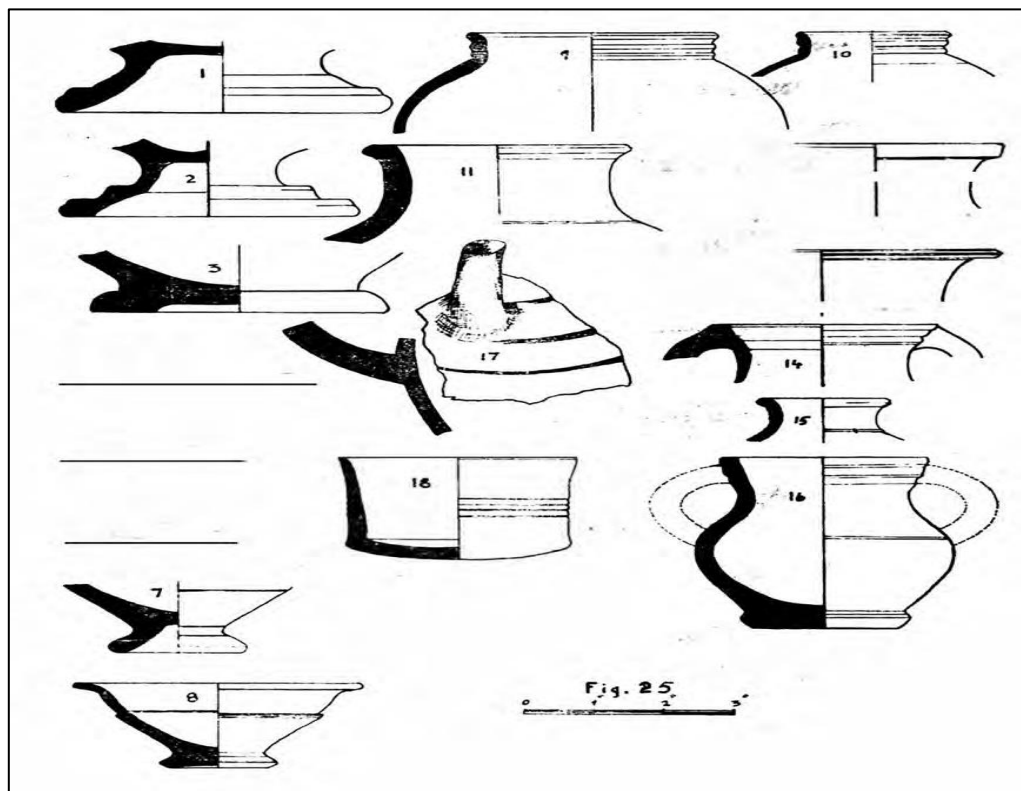
The pottery of the Indo-Scythian from Shaikhan Dheri, shed enough light on their unique historical and cultural significance. The Indo-Scythians were nomadic Central Asian people who migrated to the north western regions of the sub-continent from the (1st century BCE to the beginning of the 1st century CE). Pottery from the Indo-Scythian period at Shaikhan Dheri typically includes a variety of forms such as bowls, dishes, jars, large and small, storage vessels, and water containers. The pottery is often wheel-thrown and features decorative elements such as incised patterns, geometric (lines, dotted) humans, animals, designs, and painted motifs. The material culture of the Indo-Scythian period from Shaikhan Dheri reflects a rich and diverse artistic tradition. The future excavations may highlight new possibilities regarding material culture associated with the Indo-Scythian period from Shaikhan Dheri and Gandhara.

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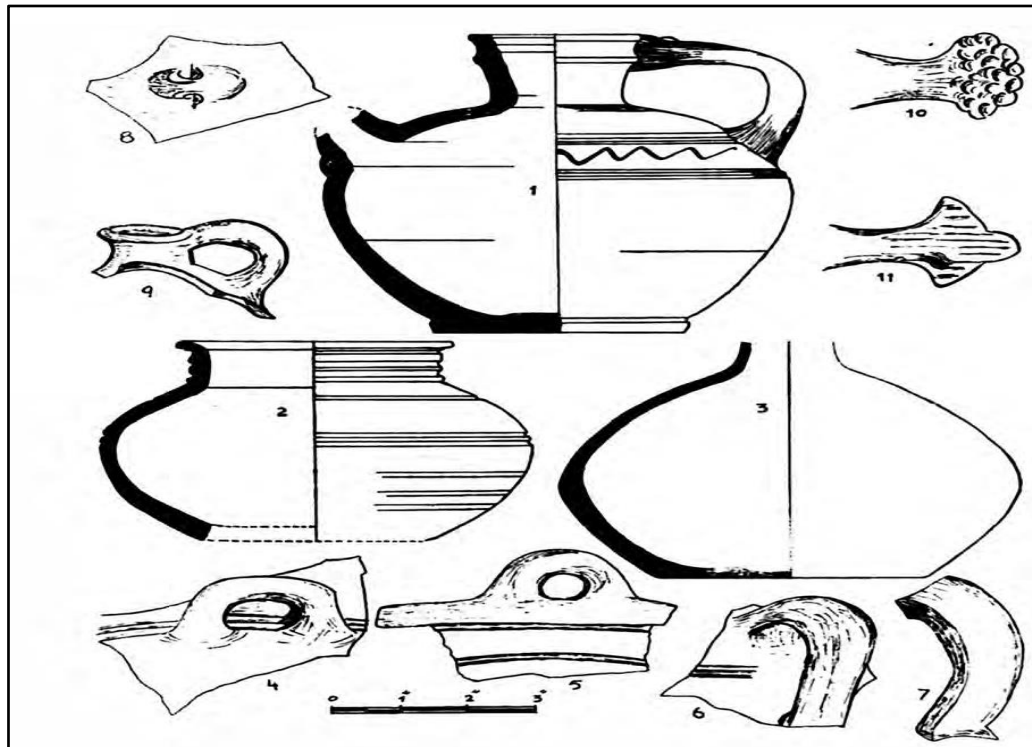
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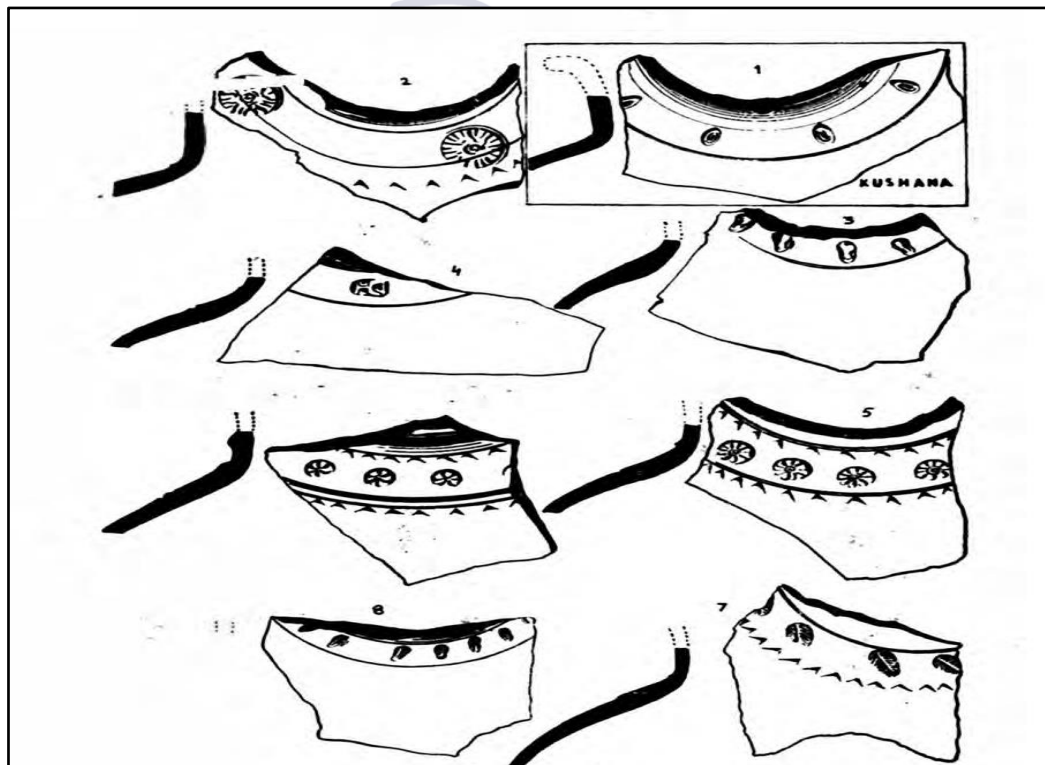
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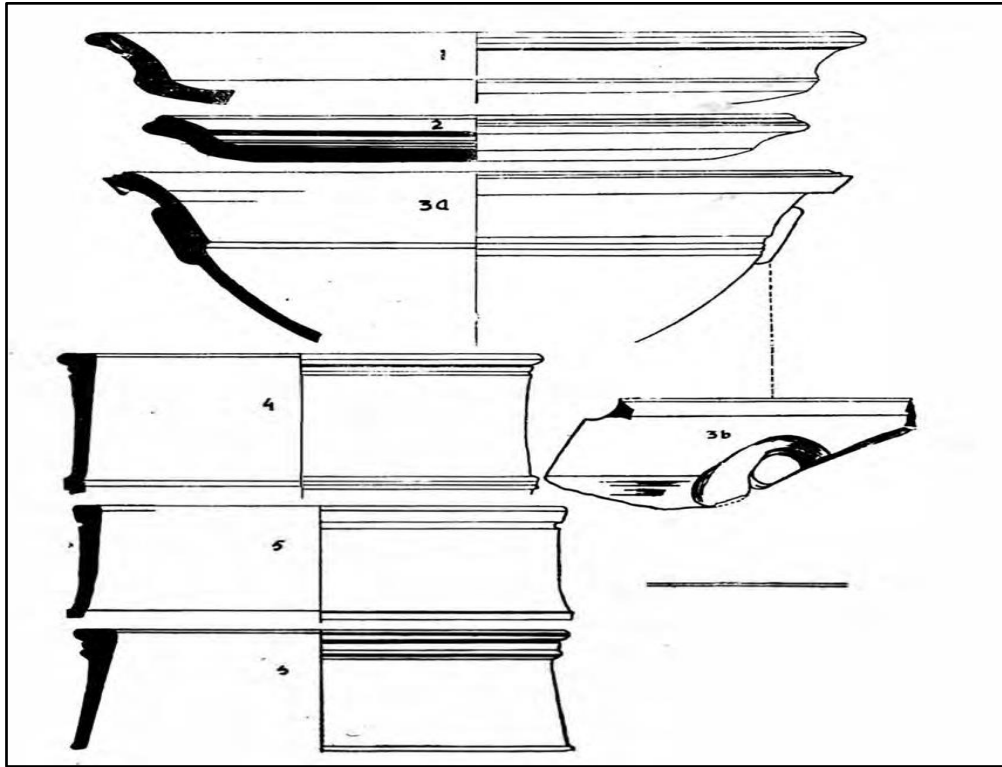
Pl. 1 Grey ware, Shaikhhan Dheri, Charsadda (after Sehrai, 1965)



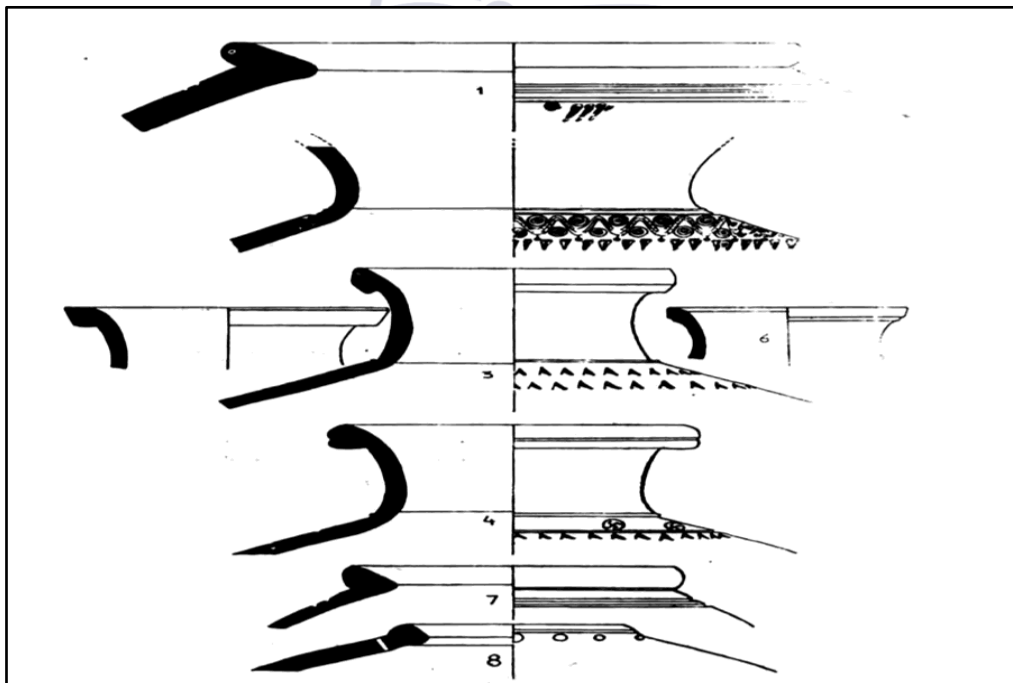
Pl. 2 Red ware, Shaikhhan Dheri, Charsadda, (after Dani, 1965)



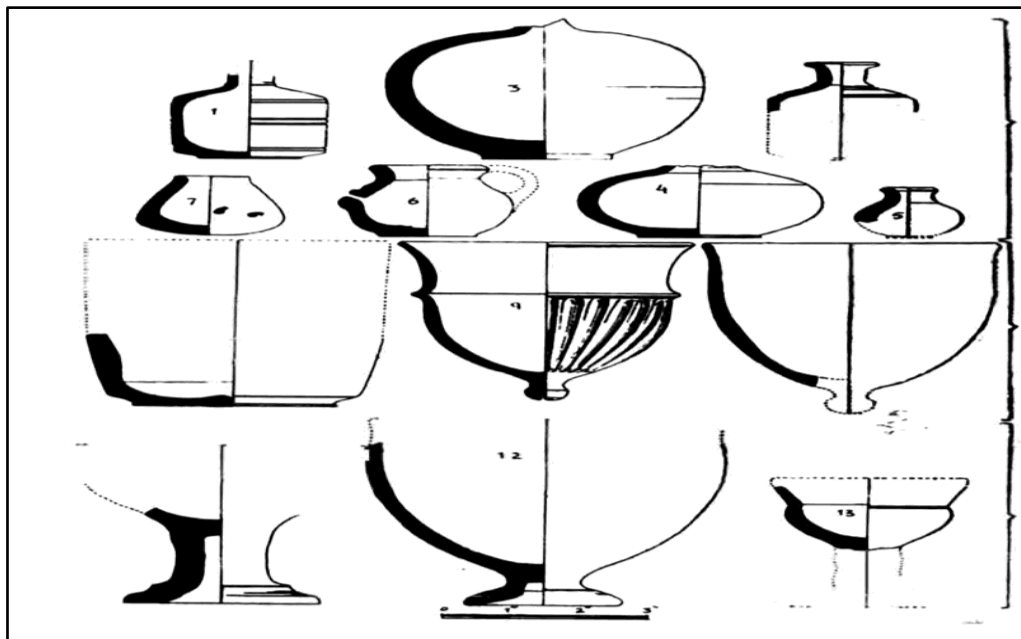
Pl. 3 Red ware, Shaikhhan Dheri, Charsadda (after Dani, 1965)



Pl. 4 Red ware, Shaikhhan Dheri, Charsadda (after Sehrai, 1965)



Pl. 5 Red ware, Shaikhhan Dheri, Charsadda (after Sehrai, 1965)



Pl. 6 Red ware, Shaikhhan Dheri, Charsadda (after Sehrai, 1965)



Pl. 7 Wine flagon, with horse designs, zigzag dotted lines, Shaikhhan Dheri (after Dani, 1965)



Pl. 8 Wine flagon, with zigzag band designs, Shaikhan Dheri excavation (after Dani, 1965)



Pl. 9 Different Potsherds with floral and lines designs Shaikhhan Dheri (after Dani, 1965)



Pl. 10 Bowl with corded rims, Pir Manakrai Haripur (afte, Dar & Jan 2015)



Pl. 11 Stamped designs on potsherds, Hayatabad excavation Peshawar (after Gul Rahim, 2019)



Pl. 12 Potsherd of a bowl with different designs Hayatabad Peshawar (after Gul Rahim, 2019)



Pl. 13 Potsherd with (Horse) depiction stratum VI, 1st CBCE, Sirkap (Marshall, 1951)



Pl. 14 Mythical scene on a Megarian bowl Pir Manakrai (Dar & Jan 2015)



Pl. 15 Stamped vine scrolls and animal figure Pir Manakrai (Shah Nazar, 2002)