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Kulli Culture or Civilization?

Abstract

This research aims to review the nature of Kulli Culture as a civilization as believed by only G. Possehl. Based on the current data, it does not provide satisfactory conclusion to be called a complete civilization; however, it can be called a semi-civilization⁴. It is one of the well-studied cultures of Balochistan, yet there are still lacunae in the culture. It is contemporary with Harappan Civilization with which the Kulli people collaborated in the field of exchange. Furthermore, plundering of these sites is a common phenomenon as well.

Introduction

Balochistan is a province of Pakistan which is archaeologically a rich with prehistoric, proto-historic and historic sites. Possehl (1999) claims that Balochistan has the potential of thousands of unrecorded sites. In the same way, there are a lot of Kulli sites in Balochistan. There are Kulli villages, towns and probably cities (Possehl, 1999). Kulli Culture, which is on the strategic location for the Harappan Civilization, covers a large area in Balochistan. Some of the important Kulli sites are Kulli (Kolwa), Nindowari (Wadd), Mehi (Awaran), Edith Shahr and Naii Butthi (Las Bela), etc. Nonetheless, Balochistan is still considered an unexplored zone. Many cultures were born here and died on this land as well and each culture has been represented on many sites (Hussain, 2019).

Kulli Culture (c.2600-1900 BCE)

The credit for the discovery of Kulli Culture goes to Stein (1931) from his early reconnaissance in Balochistan. Piggott (1950) studied and organized the Kulli assemblage in order and named it after the type site where it was first discovered; he verified the culture from painted ceramics and figurines mostly. Casal (1966), Fairservis (1971), Possehl (1986), Besenval (1997; 2005), Franke (2008), Jarrige, Quivron and Jarrige (2011), Uesugi (2013; 2017), Hideaki and his fellows (Hideaki et al., 2013; Shudai et al., 2010), and some others have worked on this culture. Nindowari is the only site of this culture which has been excavated somewhat to a large extent (Wright, 2013). Lamentably, many aspects of this culture are missing due to limited number of excavations (Uesugi, 2017).

It is also regarded a Cultural Complex⁵ which is a part of larger cultural entity (Possehl, 1986). Southern Balochistan was the home of this culture (McIntosh, 2008). Furthermore, a current survey by the first author in Panjgur district proves that the western part of Balochistan is rich in Kulli sites. They covered the important strategic locations with many of their settlements i.e. on the top of mountains or stepped hills; they were positioned to overlook the valleys and control the plains and passes (Franke, 2000; Chakrabarti, 2006).

Fairservis (1971) divided Kulli Culture into Kulli Complex A and Kulli Complex B in Mashkai Valley. The sites of this culture are mostly mounds (Piggott, 1950) and were multifunctional (Possehl, 1986). Interestingly, some of the sites cover many hectares (Possehl, 1986; 1999; Jarrige et al., 2011). In addition, evidences show it a homogeneous and original culture of the region (Jarrige et al., 2011).

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⁴ An advance culture lacking very few aspects reaching a level of a complete civilization

⁵ It means that a group of artifacts and traits which occur repeatedly at two or more sites within a restricted region over a time; it is assumed to represent an archaeological culture.

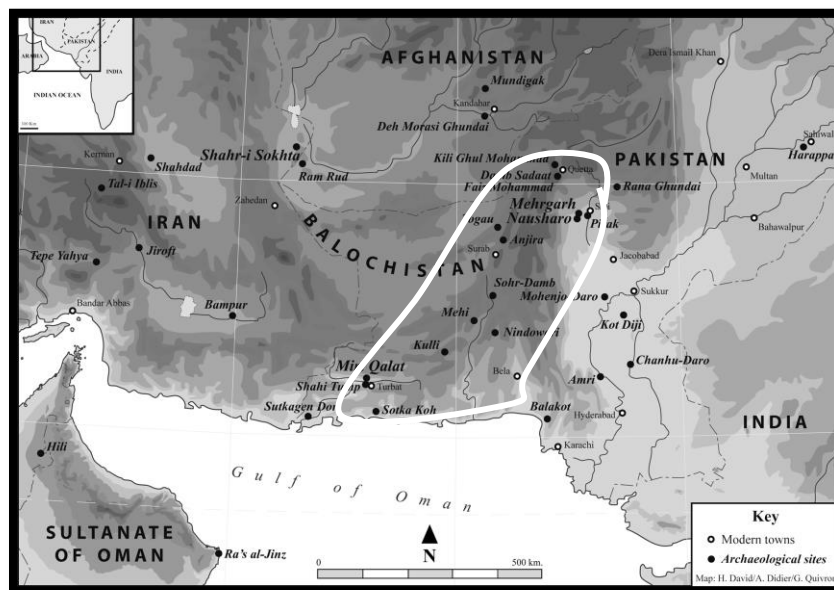


Fig. 1. Map of Kulli Culture Extension (after Jarrige et al., 2011, Modified by the Authors)

Origins/Roots of this Culture

At first, the Kulli people were living a nomadic life in camps; eventually, they settled in agricultural villages which were turned into developed and bigger towns at that time (Mortazavi, 2005). According to Chakrabarti (2006), Adam Buthi in Las Bela is the earliest Kulli site which dates to c.3000 BCE; it possesses stone terraced dwellings and mostly handmade pottery and few slow wheel-turned ceramics. Moreover, because of the animal and plant motifs on the ceramics of Period ID of Nausharo, these ceramics are claimed to be the prototypes of Kulli Ware which date back to c.2700-2600 BCE (Uesugi, 2017). Also, its roots may be traced from Naal site since its ceramic is found in proto-developed form. Kulli Ware started earlier than typical Harappan Ware. Moreover, “it is now possible to put aside the amalgam made by some specialists between the Kulli ware and pottery of the Indus Civilization, for instance when they define the earliest Kulli style as “Early Kulli-Harappan” ware” (Jarrige et al., 2011).

Structural Remains

Architectural material was selected according to their regional availability. Boulders or ashlar were used to build the structures (Franke, 2000; Chakrabarti, 2006). They sometimes used baked bricks to build the upper portion of a structure (Possehl, 1986). However, in the Panjgur context as currently observed, they most probably used small stones with mud mortar. There are many small village sites (Fairervis, 1984) and many large sized sites which could be regarded as towns in this culture; the towns present a developed and organized picture. They followed systematically an organized plan. Some of the sites have a layout like Indus sites i.e. houses were built in rows with streets and lanes in grid pattern, sometimes with paving. Sometimes, a flight of stairs provided way to the upper terraces (Franke, 2000; Chakrabarti, 2006). There are large public buildings too at some sites (Jarrige et al., 2011 ; McIntosh, 2008).

Subsistence Patterns/Mean, Domestication and Irrigation System

Economically, they depended on cultivated crop cereals from the permanent settlements. The cereals included wheat, barley and grapes (Mortazavi, 2005). The inhabitants of Kulli perhaps hunted fish from rivers and streams. Apart from fish, they used dates as a part of their subsistence. They seem to combine pastoralism with agriculture based on irrigation. There are also claims that Kulli settlements were invariably associated with dams which were used to catch water, divert water towards the fields to deposit silt, for impounding water to later direct it to the fields; hence, it was whole an irrigation system that mainly depended on such a technology in Balochistan after c.3000 BCE (McIntosh, 2008).

Technology

There were many technological aspects found in this culture:

Pottery/Ceramics: The classification of Kulli ceramics or Kulli sequence was drawn largely from Nindowari site; nonetheless, Kulli and Mehi also provided some understandings as this ware was first discovered from these sites. Based on the stylistic and shape studies, it has been classified in to two periods from Nindowari excavation and respectively two styles: Kulli A (Period II) or Early Kulli and Kulli B (Period III) or Late Kulli-Mehi. This has been used for the establishing the chronology (Jarrige et al., 2011; Wright, 2013; Uesugi, 2010). Early Kulli is contemporary with Mature Harappan A and Late Kulli-Mehi is contemporary with Mature Harappan B and C (Wright, 2013; Uesugi, 2010). Nevertheless, Uesugi (2010) questions the chronology; he argues that there is a “stylistic gap between fully developed painting styles of Nindowari II and the painting styles of bulls in Nindowari I”. The stylistic distinction has been recorded from animal decorations i.e. humped bulls, felines, frieze of caprids, plant decorations i.e. pipals and other tree-like designs, and several geometric designs. However, at Mehi one can see the continuation of the decorations from Early Kulli to Late Kulli-Mehi but with significant differences; other differences are clear from pottery shapes (Wright, 2013).

The ceramics are manufactured with elaborate decorations and different forms and color (Possehl, 1986; Chakrabarti, 2006). Basket marked pottery was also recorded in this culture (Possehl, 1986). The Kulli pottery has been found in domestic and funerary contexts suggesting it was used for both purposes. However, owing to its elaborate painted designs, it must have been used for special occasions as well (Uesugi, 2017). Moreover, there is no clear influence of beginning of Indus Valley Civilization on the materials of Kulli Culture at Nindowari (Jarrige et al., 2011).

Manufacturing Techniques: Two techniques are used in the construction of ceramics: Turntable technique and wheel thrown technique. To be more specific, it was constructed either on a turntable or on a wheel from start till the end. However, it is worthy to note that only small ceramics are manufactured throughout on the wheel; whereas, others included a combination of processes like on wheel and turntable to complete them. Moreover, most probably turntable was used as a potter’s wheel as observed from the ceramics. Both techniques were used side by side in the same temporal context (Hideaki et al., 2013).

Shapes/Forms: The shapes also underwent a change. There are a variety of shapes used in this culture as barrel or cylindrical shaped vessels, bowls, jars with flaring walls, carinated pots, globular jars, plates, short based jars, tall jars, dish on stands, cups on stand, large jars, bulbous short mouthed jars, short based bowls, vases, pots, etc. (J. Jarrige et al., 2011).

Decoration Repertoire: There is rich of iconography of figurative motifs combined with symbols and other signs. Based on iconography (though some changes) and change of shapes, Kulli ceramic is divided into Kulli A and Kulli B. They share many motifs and differ in some. Some motifs disappear and new motifs appear. Generally, the painted decorations include geometric, naturalistic and zoomorphic representations. Geometrics include straight and wavy bands (sometimes lined in between), and applied relief on exterior. Additionally, friezes of chequered triangles and squares, festoons, etc. are the other motifs. Animal motifs consist of rows of tiny stylize caprids, humped bull friezes, caprids and felines are almost always represented with sigmas, small combs and pointed circles (Jarrige et al., 2011). The rows of animals are the best recognitions for this culture (Piggott, 1950; Jarrige et al., 2011). The iconography of Kulli culture most probably has a symbolic background i.e. myths etc. (J. Jarrige et al., 2011; Uesugi, 2017). In fact, it is interesting to note that is Kulli iconography influences at Amri IIIC, Chanu Daro and Mohenjo Daro (Uesugi, 2010).

Firing Technique: They are well fired in oxidizing conditions.

Distribution Area: This culture is distributed to Quetta Valley, Loralai, Zhob, Khuzdar, Awaran, Kalat, Makuran, and North of Las Bela (Uesugi, 2010; McIntosh, 2008).

Anthropomorphic and Zoomorphic Figurines: Scholars have found female and animal figurines were from different Kulli Culture settlements (Piggott, 1950). They found human figurines with bird-like faces with their hands either placed on the chest or waist and some with visible breasts and some with applique discs; different hair styles were represented with coils (twisted or incised) and some wore turbans or hats of clay; they are wearing necklaces, pendants and sometimes bangles made of clay coils either incised or plain; some of the figurines had suckling babies with them and some pawn shaped figurines were recorded as well. Stein considered his found female figurines as Mother Goddesses. However, his findings also consisted of male figurines. Moreover, painted animal (mostly bull)

figurines were recorded in large quantity (Jarrige et al., 2011). The terracotta animal figurines are regarded to be for religious purposes of the local Kullis (Uesugi, 2017).

Other Objects: The material culture consisted of large stone querns and rubbing stones, beads made of lapis lazuli, black stone, agate and carnelian, bone bangles, objects of copper, gold and glass (?) (Chakrabarti, 2006), seals, mortars, pestles, containers, etc. (Jarrige et al., 2011).

Harappan Objects from Kulli Sites and Vice Versa

Indus seals from Nindowari and weights Mehi and Kinneru and toy carts [from Kulli, etc.] were found on several Kulli settlements. Moreover, few Kulli objects were found on Indus sites like steatite boxes, and other objects in Nausharo, Lohumjo Daro and Moenjo Daro (McIntosh, 2008). In addition, Kulli ceramics were found on the upper levels of Mohenjo Daro (Uesugi, 2010). Kulli region was rich in mineral resources which they traded with the Harappans; they include copper ores in Las Bela region, steatite and agate in Zhob and Makuran, carnelian and jasper in Hub Valley and “chert, the latter probably exploited from the Harappan settlement of Bakkar Buthi”. They possibly exported dates and fruits too (McIntosh, 2008).

Nindowari: A Kulli City?

Firstly, Possehl (1986) claims Nindowari a city based on its huge size [50 hectares]⁶. Secondly, huge public structures probably built with the efforts of the inhabitants to create an urban settlement. Thirdly, writing wise, two Indus seals with Indus script were found and some sherds bore graffiti that may have been an ancient form of local writing. It had a fully urban system.

Burial Practices and Offerings

The burials were only found at Mehi site; two types of burials were found: First, the dead were cremated and placed in large pots separately alongside smaller vessels, figurines, and other objects. Second, the burials were cremated and placed in a small pit covering it with earth which is called actual cremation (Possehl, 1986). Having similar kind of practices at Periano Ghundai in Zhob, Fairservis (1971) assumes Quetta Valley and *Gedrosia* have played some roles in this ritual complex.

Connection of Kulli Culture and Indus Valley Civilization

Earlier it was assumed that Indus Civilization is the result of Kulli Culture; notwithstanding, the idea is generally not accepted among the scholarship now. Today, existed at about the same timeframe, both the cultures interacted and exchanged goods and ideas consistently. The result of these interactions is seen in different artifacts found from both cultures (Mortazavi, 2005). The Kulli pottery borrowed some of the elements from Harappan pottery which shows a close connection between them because of strong interactions with the Indus Valley Civilization (Uesugi, 2017).

It is indeed no longer sustainable to interpret the Kulli Culture, after and allegedly rather first phase, as a hilly provincial version of the great urban Indus civilization. The originality displayed by the Kulli A and B styles is even more striking that their distribution area is, as we said it several times, an enclave in the wide area of diffusion of the Indus civilization material culture. [They further add] that Kulli pottery and the Indus pottery were for some of their shapes and decorations related to an early common local tradition. Therefore, some resemblances between the Kulli pottery and Indus pottery do not always imply direct influences but can be explained by a common heritage (Jarrige et al. 2011). However, Jarrige (1991) once believed: “The Kulli culture...represents an interesting synthesis between the Indus Civilization and local traditions”. Regarding the Miri Qalat, Wright (2016) has stated that “There is every reason to believe that the two [Kulli and Harappan Cultures] were involved in a competitive relationship”. Whereas, Besenval (2011) believes that the site attracted the Harappans because of its agricultural potential and here they got other products which were not available in the alluvial plains. Moreover, Wright (2016) asserts, Harappans were hurdles for the Kulli people to expand its extent westwards which had control over coastal trade in the shape of Sutkagen Dor and Suthka Koh. Their presence at Miri Qalat assures their control of this important inland trade route to the west. Hence, there certainly has been economic and political connections between the two cultures which must have resulted in their peaceful lives.

⁶ It is generally believed that towns are 30 or less hectares whereas cities are more than 31 hectares or even more (Watson, 2005).

Piggott (1950) emphasizes similarities in Kulli and Indus objects i.e. pottery forms (plates, dishes on stand and perforated jars) and fabric though their designs are quite different. There were certain Indus objects i.e. toy carts, terracotta cakes, puppet figurines, etc. as well (Possehl, 1986). Moreover, Possehl (1986) claims that few painted motifs resemble the Indus motifs. Furthermore, they also have been in constant contact with Harappan Culture, yet they kept their originality in terms of pottery and figurines (Jarrige et al., 2011). Kulli pottery and figurines were found among Harappan objects at Balakot [II] (Asthana, 1985).

Writing System of Kulli Culture

There were signs different from potters' marks; they might represent short inscriptions as elements of cursive script (J. Jarrige *et al.* 2011: 190, see Fig. 16).

Trade or Barter System

The trade links started from Kulli A and continued in Kulli B which resulted in the expansion of the culture later (Wright, 2016). Kulli Culture was engaged trading with Harappan, Mesopotamian civilizations, Iranian Plateau, and Dilmun (Bahrain) (Wright, 2013). Some Kulli settlements were positioned at strategic locations which covered major trade routes in the Kulli region. It was indulged trading with Harappan Culture. The trade routes of the time connected Harappan Civilization with Makuran and Iran. These routes linked the Harappan settlements of Makuran coast with high terrain and Kacchi-Bolan region and Indus or Sindh region when sea journey was difficult or almost impossible. They also controlled the routes from Sindh in Kulli region. The transhumant shepherds and herders who seasonally moved to Indus regions acted as carriers; they were being loosely controlled by the Kulli Culture (McIntosh, 2008). Hence, Possehl (1986) claims that Kulli and Harappan Cultures formed a highland and lowland partnership to benefit from the commercial relations with Mesopotamia; in other words, they formed an alliance which helped them in their urbanization process (Wright, 2013). There was high volume exchange of goods from Mesopotamia which was mostly maritime. At this time, it emerged as a center of trade (Wright, 2013). Interestingly, in one of the texts from Mesopotamia mentions a place name between Meluha and Marhashi which was known as Kupin which is now somewhere Makuran region (Steinkeller, 2014; Wright, 2016). While Wright (2016) calls 'textual references to Kupin are to the Kulli' region.

In general, Kulli Culture had connections with the surrounding regions (i.e. Indus Valley Civilization, other parts of Balochistan, south-east Iran and western Arabian Peninsula, Mesopotamia and South-Central Asia). Hence, this culture had close relationships with urban societies of southern Asia. In late urban phase, because of its trading connections with west societies, its pottery remains predominant on the interaction networks in Balochistan and part of Indus Valley. The southern expansion of inhabitants of this culture in Balochistan was to control the trade activities with the west (Uesugi, 2017).

Illegal diggings and Illicit Trafficking

The heinous act of illegal digging and illicit trafficking are common throughout Pakistan from which Balochistan is no exception. It is even more in Balochistan. Many sites are plundered and destroyed to fulfill the needs of their greedy nature which is clearly against the laws of the province and country. In the recent surveys in Panjgur and Khuzdar, the author has largely witnessed these phenomena in which outsiders and locals are equally responsible. There is no appreciation and care for heritage throughout Balochistan in the hearts of locals; during a visit of site in Khuzdar a local guided us towards the rich area of the mound where it was already dug by the treasure hunters.

Discussion and Conclusion

Scholars define civilization with some characteristics 1) cities with monumental structures; 2) specialized workers; 3) complex or organized institutions/religion; 4) writing (Watson, 2005; Littel 1999). In the case of Kulli, the large sized sophisticated structures, sophisticated agricultural practices with impressive water management with *gabarbands* high cultural homogeneity in its assemblage, with complex iconographic pottery indicates "a well-structured social organization". These all things apply on Indus Civilization by on a larger scale (Jarrige et al., 2011). Possehl (1986) considers it a civilization based on the presented data; however, the authors also have the similar opinions in some stances. It has cities (?) with monumental structures, specialized workers, complex or organized institutions/religion, and writing system. Hence, their presence was but on a smaller scale than the Indus Valley Civilization. Justly, for now it should be called a semi-civilization rather than a fully-fledged one since we are short of complete data regarding it being a civilization. Moreover, it must have been due to the climatic

conditions of this harsh land with hardly any large rivers like Indus River which hindered this culture into a full-fledged civilization. The villages supported towns and cities (?)⁷. Their subsistence included cereal and animal domestication and hunting of fish. For cereals, they had collective granaries. The future researches maybe be fruitful to support these theories. We should not forget that Balochistan is not completely explored yet and sites which are not found until now and other major sites are not excavated extensively; furthermore, we should forget that diffusionist theories were presented about Indus Valley Civilization which were discarded after the Mehrgarh excavation. So, there are chances of Kulli Culture cities to be discovered in future.

The extensive study of the materials has shown that this culture developed indigenously. It kept its originality despite having strong connections with neighboring civilizations (Wright, 2013). J. Jarrige and G. Quivron (2008) has regarded “complete misconception to interpret Kulli culture as a composite culture mixing some local surviving traditions with a strong Indus cultural component (Wright, 2013). In southwestern Asia around late fourth millennium BCE, the regional societies were connected. This period and region attested the rise and fall of cultures, movements of people, trade and commerce, exchange of technology, ideas and information, conflicts over resources and power, shifts of political and economic centers, and many more (Uesugi, 2017). Its trade relations were with Mesopotamia, Indus Valley, Iranian Plateau, Afghanistan, Gulf region, etc.

Being contemporary with Indus Valley Civilization, in one way or the other they complimented each other in terms of town planning, pottery, figurines, and other artistic objects, etc. It covers a large region which was the strategic point used by the Harappans. The Kullis used the town planning of Harappans, borrowed each other's pottery decorations and possibly techniques, borrowed other host of ideas from each other. Because of their strong trade relations, their artifacts were usually found each other's sites. Harappans look to have hindered the expansion of Kulli Culture at Miri Qalat. The land resources attracted them in west region which may be the result of political and economic cooperation at Miri Qalat. As a result, they shared ideas of art and technology with each other either directly or indirectly.

They were great artists and believers in some sort of powers. Their pottery is unique, of high quality and attractive with a diversity of decorations which may include some symbolic meaning; they used it for domestic and ritualistic purposes. Furthermore, human and animal figurine sometimes with applied pigments, semi-precious stone beads, and other metallic objects, etc. were other marvels of their artistic knowledge. There is no doubt they were great planners, though borrowed from Harappans, who made houses according with the availability of different materials in the regions. Some towns and cities (?) had monumental structures built by architects with precise knowledge. They had a set of beliefs which they followed. They followed two types of burial practices: Both included cremations and even burials with objects may indicate the concept of afterlife. The figurines may be attached to their religious beliefs as well as some of the decorations on the pottery. A shrine at Nindowari is also related to their religion.

However, still more work is needed to fully understand the ancient lifestyle of these inhabitants. Many aspects are either not well known or completely missing i.e. political, religious, technological, cities, etc. Still, however, this culture is comparatively known better than others. There is no protection the sites of this culture; its sites are affected by the treasure hunters.

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⁷ This fact is in doubt and requires more research. However, Edith Shahr in Las Bela is a large site with 29 hectares but according to archeologists it cannot be considered a city.

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Plates



Plate 1. A Kulli Room at Kulli Site
(after Stein 1934: 84) Not to Scale



Plate 2. Kulli Ware with Decorations
(photograph by author)



Plate 3. Kulli Ware from Quetta Museum
(photograph by author) Not to Scale



Plate 4. Kulli Ware at Islamabad Museum
(photograph by author) Not to Scale



Plate 5. Kulli Culture Pottery at Islamabad Museum (photograph by author) Not to Scale



Plate 6. Kulli Culture Figurines (photograph by author) Not to Scale



Plate 7. Kulli Culture Animal Figurines from Sultan Shahwani Collection (photograph by the author)

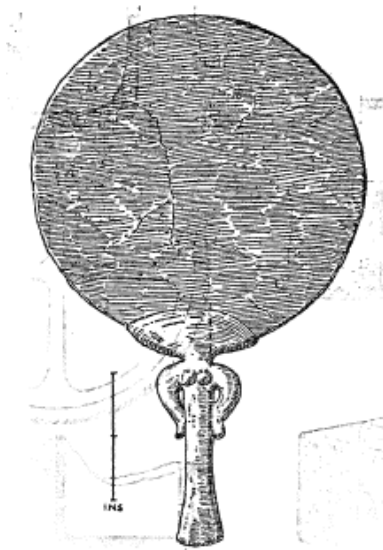


Plate 8. Bronze Mirror of Kulli Culture
(after Piggott 1950: 112)

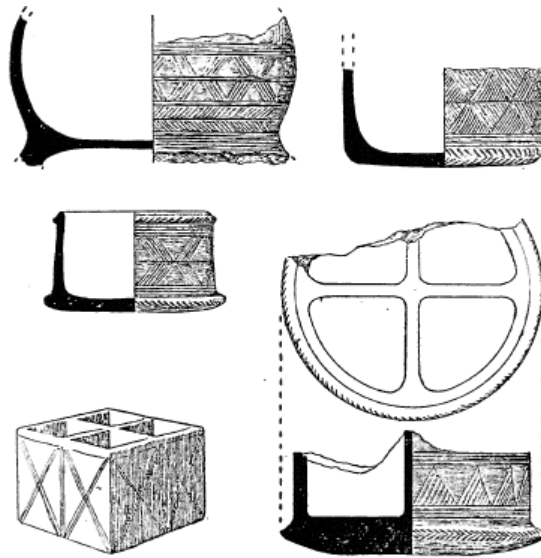


Plate 9. Kulli Incised Stone Vessels
(after Piggott 1950: 111) Not to Scale