

Recent Archaeological Explorations in Ishani, District Barkhan, Balochistan: An Assessment

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Abstract

The land of Balochistan is full of archaeological heritage. One of most prominent site of Balochistan, Mehrgarh, is the antecedent of Indus civilization. In spite of that, several prominent archaeologists and foreign missions came to Balochistan and they explored many archaeological sites in different areas of this land. A huge number of sites are still needed to be explored. This piece of study highlights the ancient archaeological evidences of Ishani, Barkhan. Barkhan is located at the eastern side of Balochistan. The area is attractive archaeological point of view; there are many archaeological traces found on the landscape of Barkhan. The paper only focuses on the selected Shalghara (Khetrani term for mound) of union council Ishani, Barkhan. Only the surface collection of five sites are being discussed in this paper. The researchers collected several fragments of ceramic include rims, body shreds and bases. After the scrutinize the ancient culture of Barkhan noticed black on red, black on buff and black on brown are dominant in the region. The cultural remains of Barkhan may resembles to the Harappan cultures, Mehrgarh, Kili Gul Muhammad, Kot-Dijian, and several other sites of Balochistan. The paper further discuses reconstruction of the ancient history of Ishani, Barkhan on the basis of cultural antiquities.

Keywords: Archaeology, Barkhan, Shalghara, Ishani, Cultural material, Pottery

Introduction

According to Prehistoric point of view, the land of Balochistan is known in the world. Its landmass hid fossils of dinosaur, sand dollars, Paleolithic cave paintings as well Neolithic villages which all show the geographical and

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ancient human history. The ancient Balochistan mostly had trade linked with Oman, Mesopotamia, Iran, Afghanistan, and Indus. During British Period many archaeological missions and prominent archaeologists have conducted surveys and excavations in specific areas of Balochistan. The earliest explorers and archaeologists- Marc Aurel Stain, Walter A. Fairservis and Roland Besenval and other prominent archaeologists have conducted surveys and excavations in different areas of Balochistan as well as the French archaeological mission conducted excavations along the bank of Bolan River at Sibri, Pirak, Nausharo and Mehrgarh from 1968 to 2002 (Kenoyer & Meadow 2004: 196-197). The traces of Mehrgarh have gone back to Eight Millennium BCE. According to the archaeological evidences, the inhabitants of Mehrgarh started first human settlement with early domestication and cultivation of barley and wheat as well early domestication of Water buffalo in South Asia (Jarrige *et al* 1995: 245) The Mehrgarh settlement also used to be a craft center and great market place. The upper land people used to gather in the plain of Kachi seasonally and this ancient practice is still continued in the shape of semi-nomadic people of Balochistan (Agrawal 1985: 124-125).

Nomenclature of Barkhan

The old name of Barkhan was *Junjah* in the period of Akbar (Raverty 1982: 555; Sohodroy 2009: 12). Many writers define the name of “Barkhan” in different point of views, the name *Baroo Khan*, has been coined from the founder of *Barozai* tribe (District profile 2011: 4). The origin of the name is *Bari Khan* or *Barkher*, the homeland of Khetrans (Khan 1991: 44). In a personal discussion with Farooq Baloch (Assistant Professor of History, University of Balochistan), opined that the name Barkhan may have been derived from the name of *Bahar Khan*, which is until a name in Baloch tribes passing from generations to generations. The word “Barkhan” is written in this form but on the basis of phonetics it is spoken as “Bār-k-han.” The reason is the Urdu letter “*Kha*” has no presence in Balochi alphabet.

The Settlement of Khetran Tribe in Barkhan

According to oral and classical history, during the migration of Rind from Makran to modern Sibi (Savi) and Sathghara (Seven villages) in Punjab, Chakar Gat, a short route in Sulaiman mountain range, was used between Kohlu and Sibi districts. However, later on the Marri tribe deserted the group of Chakar and started a new settlement in modern district Kohlu. While the Laghari and Buledi tribes settled down in Barkhan. Thus, still in Barkhan an area is attributed by the name of Laghari-Barkhan. After the war between Gorgach and Buledi tribes, the Khetran and Marri tribes succored the Gorgach tribe while Balach Barger became the hero of this war. He was interred in

Sangsila, an area of Dera Bugti a neighboring district of Barkhan. After the war, the Buledi tribe left Barkhan and went towards the lower lands and the Khetran tribe settled down in Barkhan region (Shahwani 2010: 171-174).

The Ishani Union Council of Barkhan

The Barkhan valley consists of twelve union councils while the Ishani is the largest Union council of all. The term either Ishani or Ehsani is derived from “Ishani” a sub-group of (Dehrawal) Khetran tribe. Ishani is further divided into several small groups while Sirajani is the chief of Ishani (Bray 1915: 9). The author personally discussed with Abdul Qadir (School teacher), and explained that the Ishani is a sub-group of Khoso tribe of Dera Ghazi Khan.

Geographically, Ishani is located on the south of Rakni, on the north of Choarkot, on the east of Baghao, and on the west of Chapper Mountain boarder of the Dera Bugti hills. The area has many archaeological and paleontological remains, such as sand dollar fossils, fossilized eggs of dinosaurs, Karezes (underground water channels), cultural mounds and Muslim Period graveyards. In this paper only focused on the archaeological mounds of Ishani area. The archaeological mounds are discussed below.

Kahta Shalghara (fig. 01)

The site is located at the foot of Rakni-Barkhan road near the border of Rakni in Ishani. The site is located on the east of *Kala Pahar* (black hill), on the north by Dadawari, on the south by Basthi Malik Azeem, and on the west by Kowri Zakirani.

Dimensions

The length of the site is 350 feet to the east-west and the width is 322 feet towards north-south. The site is 20 feet tall from the modern surface level.

Description

The site is located between two streams i.e. Hang and Rakni *nahla*. The site is under the subjugation of Levis Force. The Levis Force constructed a check post over the cultural mound because of which the cultural materials of the site are being destroyed. A Muslim grave recorded on the eastern side as well a mosque is built on the northern side of mound. The author collected two potsherds and crystal stones from the surface. Both of these sherds are red ware.

Kowri Shalghara (fig. 02)

The site is located on the bank of Rakni-Barkhan road in Ishani close to the Kowri *Mohr* on the top of hill. At present the site is surrounded by *Shalghara*

Kowri Middle School on the east, on the north by Kowri *Roh* (mountain), and on the west by the Musa Khan village.

Dimensions

The length of site is 92 feet to the north-south with a width of 75 feet to the east-west. It has an elevation of approximately three feet only.

Description

The site has been extremely encroached both by human and natural consequences. The heavy rainfalls disturbed the mound as it is on the hill top. The site was also disturbed by the treasure-hunters (fig. 07). According to the local source many precious antiquities were illegally excavated and stripped off antiquities, such as bronze combs and other materials. From the surface findings the researcher collected pottery of black on red colour and Copper/Bronze pieces.

Hang Shalghara (fig. 3)

The site is located on the bank of Hang stream near the Rakni-Barkhan road in Ishani. The *Basthi* Ali Mohammad is on the east of the site, the *Basthi* Shahow is on the north, the Kahta check post is on the south, and the Kowri Middle School is on the west.

Dimensions

The length of the site is 144 feet to the east-west with a width of 82 feet to the north-south. The site was measured one feet only and it was mostly ground level.

Description

The site has been encroached due to human vandalism and natural consequences. The site has been cut in the middle by the construction of Barkhan-Rakni road. Further, the eastern side of mound is disturbed due to Hang *nahla*. The author collected cultural material from the surface of the site which comprise of gray ware red ware, brown ware, light brown ware and a piece of may be a gridding stone.

Chwata Shalghara (fig. 4)

The site is located in Kowri, Ishani on the hillock. It is at a distance of 0.7 Kilometer to the northern side of unpaved Rakni-Barkhan road in the Nowdo area. The site is surrounded on the east by the Middle School Kowri, on the north by *Basthi* Zakirari, on the south by *Basthi* Haji Mehmood and on the west by *Basthi* Ismail Khan Khetran.

Dimensions

The site is two 273 feet toward the east-west with a width of 256 feet to the north-south. Its present height is 7 feet from the surrounding plain.

Description

The cultural materials are lying on the surface of the mound while on the eastern corner there we noticed a trench of treasure hunters. The cultural ashes could be seen at the bottom of this illegal ditch. The ashes suggest earlier activities of the site occupants. The wild trees and bushes were disturbed the ancient settlement. On the other hand, human activity damaged the eastern side of site, might be the farmers used the soil of ancient mound for their cultivated fields. The cultural data included ceramics, a spiral sea shell fossil from the surface. The pottery was noticed in red and brown design.

Nakami Shalghara (fig. 5)

The archaeological site is located in the Nakami area at a distance of 10 kilometers to the Ishani headquarter and from the Do Sadaka. The site can be accessed from the paved Baghao road. The site is covered on the east by Mohammad Khan village close to the stream of Dohla *Lahar*, on the south by Bahdani and Waso Taj Mohammad, on the north by Nakmund *Koh* and on the west by the Chapper Mountain chains.

Dimensions

The length of the site is 140 feet to the east-west face with the width of 100 feet towards the north-south face. The cultural mound has an elevation of 13 feet.

Description

The cultural materials of the ancient site were lying on the ground while, this cultural heritage is disturbed owing to natural as well human factors. The principal author found some fresh evidences of illegal diggings (fig 06) on the western side of the mound. The surface finds were some decorated and geometrical design sherds of rim, base and body. We also located brown, red, black set on red and buff ware pottery. Black on red ware culture was dominant on this site.

Barkhan culture

The cultural remains of the area magnify the history of socio-cultural, socio-economic and close cultural interaction among the other settlements as well as trade, art and life style of the ancient inhabitants of Ishani, Barkhan. An analytical study of the culture showed that the pre-historic people of Barkhan

had first used the handmade and then Wheel made ceramic technology. During the study of cultural remains there were found decorated, plain and polished on the basis of morphological observation of the ceramics. Besides the ceramic utensils, we also found fragments of bronze which yield another perspective of their life style. This bronze metal demonstrates the use of bronze and other metallurgical elements which signify distinct developmental stages of the past occupants of the region.

The ceramics of Ishani, Barkhan are coarse ware, red ware and buff ware on the basis of fabrics. Red slipped and black on red style pottery are also found but the red ware pottery seems to be dominant as whole throughout the region. The ceramics having different designs and decoration in black and red colours with the implication of geometrical design, crisscrossed, wavy, horizontal and vertical lines are depicted on the exterior surface. Only two ceramics have short rims and incised ring carving on the shoulder and body of bowl/pot. The projected rims are dominant in the region and most of them are in rough shape while the basal remains bear different vessel forms. The body fragments are decorated and polished but well fired fragments are prominent. There also recorded some over-burnt fragmented pottery. The sea shell fossils are found in huge quantity from the surface of sites stone tools as well as bronze pieces were also recovered.

Comparative study

The surface finds were correlated with the already explored, excavated sites and published reports of the other major archaeological sites in the vicinity. With the help of comparative study an attempt was taken in order to detect the cultural interaction, uniformity and similarity on the basis of pottery which interpret the life styles of Ishani-Barkhan with other adjacent regions. The author applied the crass dating method so that to generate the chronology of the ancient culture of Ishani-Barkhan.

Mostly red ware ceramics were noticed on the sites of Ishani-Barkhan. Many of them are red polished and some of them found in decorated with black colour. The Black-on-red slips pottery is similar to Kili Gul Mohammad and Harappan pottery style. While the burnt fragments found from Ishani-Barkhan are thought to be used for the household purposes. The Said Qala Tepe common tempering pottery is a common kitchen utility ware (Shaffer 1978: 71) and mostly this type of pottery is common among the hunter-gatherer societies.

Other than this, several plain buff and black on buff pottery were found which is similar to that of the Damb Sadaat tradition in Quetta Valley. Two rim fragments are decorated which bear the ring-shaped incised carving stamped

on the neck and shoulder that resembles the pottery style of Zhob culture (Fairservis 1959: 345) of Northern Balochistan. Several other rim fragments usually painted on black were found which are similar to the pottery style of Kechi beg ware found from the site of Panj Pai, Faiz Mohammad II, Damb Sadat II and Killi Gul Mohammad I, and II (Khan 2002: 147). The Beaker mound is situated in Rakni- Barkhan whose cultural materials have strong influence from Harappan culture (Kakar 1990: 124) and the ceramics of Ishani are also similar to Beaker mound ceramics.

Conclusion

The research in hand brought into light five *Shalghara* (mounds) in the Ishani union council of District Barkhan. These cultural sites are rapid victims of human and natural vandalism. The archaeological sites provide cultural materials in a huge quantity from the surface of mounds. The morphological study of the ceramics of Ishani, Barkhan are black on red, black on buff, buff, coarse, red, black on brown slip while the red ware pottery is dominant throughout Ishani. There are different fabrics and vessel forms in the same way including handmade and wheel made pottery. The pottery is further classified into three types: rim, body and base.

The Barkhan culture may have interactions with the Quetta culture, Zhob culture, Harappan culture, and Kulli culture manifested on the bases of the designs and geometrical patterns found on the pottery recovered from the sites of Ishani Barkhan. The archaeological data reveal the ancient people of Barkhan had socio-cultural and socio-economical affiliation with the other contemporary cultures, likewise Mehrgarh VII, Damb Sadaat II, Faiz Muhammad II, Periano Ghundai and Said Qala Tepe in Afghanistan. Through crass-dating the archaeological data of Ishani, Barkhan may belong to third century BCE to second century BCE.

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Interviews

Abdul Qadir, School teacher, 42 years, Ishani. 28/04/2014

Dr. Farooq Baloch, Professor of Balochistan University, 45 years, Quetta.
04/06/2014

Wadera Abdul Razaq, a tribal person, 45 years, Ishani. 02/05/2014

Wahid Khetran, M.Phil. Scholar, 35 years, Ishani. 30/04/2014



Fig. 01 A general view of Kahta Shalghara



Fig. 02 A general view of Kowri Shalghara



Fig. 03 A general view of Hang Shalghara



Fig. 04 A view of Chwata Shalghara



Fig. 05 A general view of Nakami Shalghara



Fig. 06 Illegal dig at Nakami Shalghara



Fig. 07 Illegal evidence at Kowri Shalghara



Pl. 01 Ceramic of Kahta Shalghara



Pl. 02 Cultural material of Kowri Shalghara



Pl. 03 Antiquities of Hang Shalghara



Pl. 04 Potshreds of Chwata Shalghara



Pl. 05 Ceramic of Nakami Shalghara



Pl. 06 Potteries of Nakami Shalghara