

Terracotta figurines from the urban site of Barikot/Bīr-koṭ-ghwaṇḍai (Swat, Pakistan): Some observations on the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines and their contexts of finding

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Abstract

This note presents a preliminary study on the terracotta figurines collected at the urban site of Barikot/Bīr-koṭ-ghwaṇḍai. The site, lying in the middle stretch of the Swat Valley, Northwestern Pakistan, has been excavating by the Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan (ISMEO) since the 1970s. The abundance and reliable scientific frame of the finds make the study one of a kind in the archaeology of South Asia, as it provides a valuable opportunity to create a type-chronological based catalogue.

Keywords: Terracotta figurines, anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, Barikot, Swat.

1. Introduction

The ancient urban site of Barikot/Bīr-koṭ-ghwaṇḍai (Swat, Pakistan) has been excavated by the Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan (ISMEO) since the 1970. So far (2019), excavations have yielded 867 terracotta figurines (275 anthropomorphic and 602 zoomorphic). The terracotta figurines have been documented throughout almost three thousand years of archeological stratigraphy: from Protohistory (c. 15th/8th century BCE) to the Medieval period (c. 10th/13th century).

2. The anthropomorphic figurines

The terracotta human figures collected at Barikot amounts to 275 specimens (Esposito in press). The long chronological sequence of the site reflects a great typological differentiation: some figurines have decorative and stylistic elements linked to the local culture, such as the complex ornamented belts and necklaces (depicted, incised or

appliquéd) on the Baroque and Channivira Ladies; other figures, albeit locally produced, feature decorations typical of the West (the “Hellenistic” type) (Menegazzi 2014).

The main typologies identified are: “Hellenistic” type, Baroque Lady, Channivira Lady, Fiddle-Shaped, Buddhist figurines, and Knights/Warriors. Figurines being badly preserved or lacking comparisons with other productions were not included in any of these typologies.

The “Hellenistic” type (Plate Ia) is the most represented in the archaeological record of the site, probably because they were made from moulds (single or double) and thus easy to manufacture.

The second most represented typology are the Baroque Lady (Plate Ib) (Codrington 1931: 141-145; Dani 1965-66: pp. 48; Gordon 1932; Id. 1934; Id. 1935; Id. 1938; Wheeler 1962: 104-109) and the Channivira Lady¹ (Plate Ic), both featuring decorations and attributes linked to the local culture.

The Fiddle-Shaped (Plate Id) figurines are the most ancient typology (Stacul 1966: pp 56, fig. 65-66; Silvi Antonini 1963: fig. 10-11; Dani 1967: pl. LI, pl. LIII; Jettmar 1967: pl.LI). They were named after their shape, which resembles a violin. Generally, they show necklaces rendered by one line or more lines of engraved points. Some specimens have incised “solar” motifs, representing often the eyes.

The Buddhist figurines (Plate Ie), although present in small quantities compared to the others, show how Buddhism permeated small-scale crafts.

Lastly, the figures of Knights/Warriors, among which is a knight riding a horse (Plate If), demonstrate how, albeit with sporadic attestation, the terracotta figurines were not linked to a female-sphere only.

The graphic in Fig. 1 outlines the trend of the anthropomorphic figurines at Barikot. The majority of them belongs to a chronological phase spanning from the 1st century BCE (Saka/Parthian period) to the

¹ “Channivira Lady” can be distinguished from the “Baroque Lady”-type by specific characteristics. They are made from orange clay and covered with red engobe. In some cases, loose hair is engraved on the back. The main decoration consists of a pair of engraved lines crossing on the chest and, generally, also on the back; this motif can be traced back to the *channivira*, a female ornament also found in Indian stone sculpture.

2nd century CE (mature Kushan period), the latter corresponding to the greatest development of the city.

3. The zoomorphic figurines

As for the terracotta zoomorphic figurines, the excavations have yielded 602 specimens distributed in a ubiquitous manner during the entire life of the site (Alterio in press).

Within the temporal distribution (Fig. 2) there are two attestation peaks: the first dating from the 1st century BCE/1st century CE (full Saka/Parthian period) to the 3rd century CE, (Late-Kushana period); the second during the 7th-15th century CE.

The entire group consists of a bestiary rich in types. There is a prevalence of quadrupeds (Plate IIa) such as cattle, horses, elephants (Plate IIc) and carnivores; birds, monkeys and reptiles are little in number. The identification of the animal remains sometimes tentative or dubious for the absence of qualifying details. In other cases, a distinctive attribute typical of single specie makes the identification clear.

Let us consider, for instance, the cattle figurines. The representation of the dewlap, which is usually placed under the neck, is a significant clue for recognizing the animal. If the figurines present a hump placed near the neck, then a more specific specie can be proposed: in the case illustrated in Plate IIb, that is a zebu.

Elephants are qualified by the presence of a trunk with tusk on both sides or by large ears, which often occupy entirely the sides of the face.

In the representations of horses, much attention was given to the treatment of the mane and forelock as well as the harness, which was often applied and/or engraved. Horses, however, were not manufactured in this manner only.

Harness can be also found on figures that, for the presence of other qualifying elements, can be identify with other animals, such as cattle, camels, elephants.

4. The terracotta figurine inside the context

Table 1 shows the association of figurines in relation to the areas and spaces of provenance (Callieri and Olivieri 2020: 215-266).

The materials comes from Trenches BKG 4-5 and BKG 11 and are related to a chronological period spanning from the mid-3rd century BCE to the late 3rd CE.

The samples analyzed in Table 1 represent only 82 figurines, both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic.

Data provided by the associations shows that about 44% of the sample comes from waste areas, where materials associated with cooking activity (mortars and saddle quern) were documented.

The figurines, therefore, seem to have a limited life: they have been discarded right after being damaged or lost their function whatever it was. This is confirmed by the high presence of mutilated specimens found in waste areas.

Almost 30% of the figurines sample was associated with traces of fireplaces, possibly pertaining to kitchen or work areas. Only three figurines have been found in situ in a kitchen area.²

The fact that the figurines are associated with areas of production and handling of raw materials (food and manufacturing) suggests that they were part of the religious sphere of the productive segment of the Barikot society and not of the elites. No doubt, they are the manifestation of a substratum of popular religiosity which has remained lively within the dominant (Buddhist) religious culture.

As confirmed by the analysis on samples of terracotta figurines, the production of them, at least during the urban phase of the site, was handed over to potters.³ The two productions were almost certainly executed in parallel, and probably in the same workshops.

The link between the two productions acquires a significant value if the different meanings of the artifacts are considered: ceramic production is highly functional, terracotta figurines are not.

Within the selection of anthropomorphic figurines there is a unicum, namely TF 0716 (Plate Ig) (2nd century CE), which comes from a residential area. It represents an infant with a body rendered by simplified forms and with deep impressed eyes.

² The figurines are: TF 0035 (zoomorphic), TF 0286 (anthropomorphic), TF 0278 (anthropomorphic)

³ Archaeometric analysis made by Prof. Lara Maritan of the Department of Geosciences of the University of Padova.

Zoomorphic figurines have also been found within Court 107 inside the Trench BKG 11. Together with Rooms 108/109 (Temple K), this courtyard was part of a public religious space in Unit K during the 3rd century CE. It housed a Buddhist chapel [1023-1123] in front of which abundant offerings are documented in the collapse strata of the second half of the 3rd century CE (Olivieri, 2014: 119-125).

It is significant that these offerings did not include human figurines, while the zoomorphic ones show features of specific species: lions (TF 0500, Plate IIe; TF 0501), an animal traditionally associated with royalty and horses (TF 0498, Plate II f; TF 0502, Plate II d; TF 0200) with detailed harness. These figurines seem to be linked to male activities.

In conclusion, it is evident how, within our assemblage, the terracotta anthropomorphic figurines and the zoomorphic behave differently: the first are only found in function areas, while the second in cult areas. This data is important as it links the anthropomorphic figures to domestic and rural religiosity.

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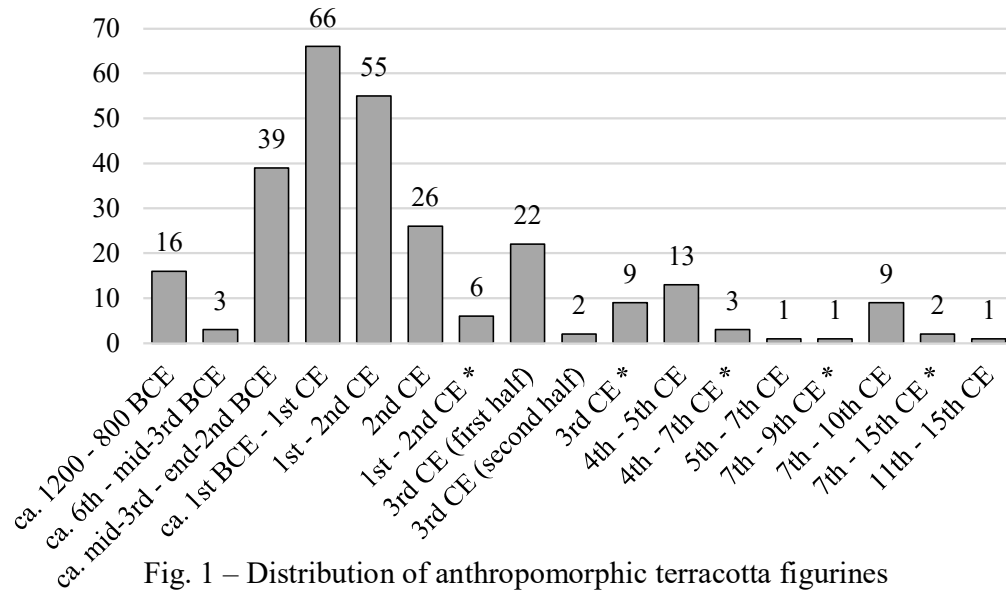


Fig. 1 – Distribution of anthropomorphic terracotta figurines through times.

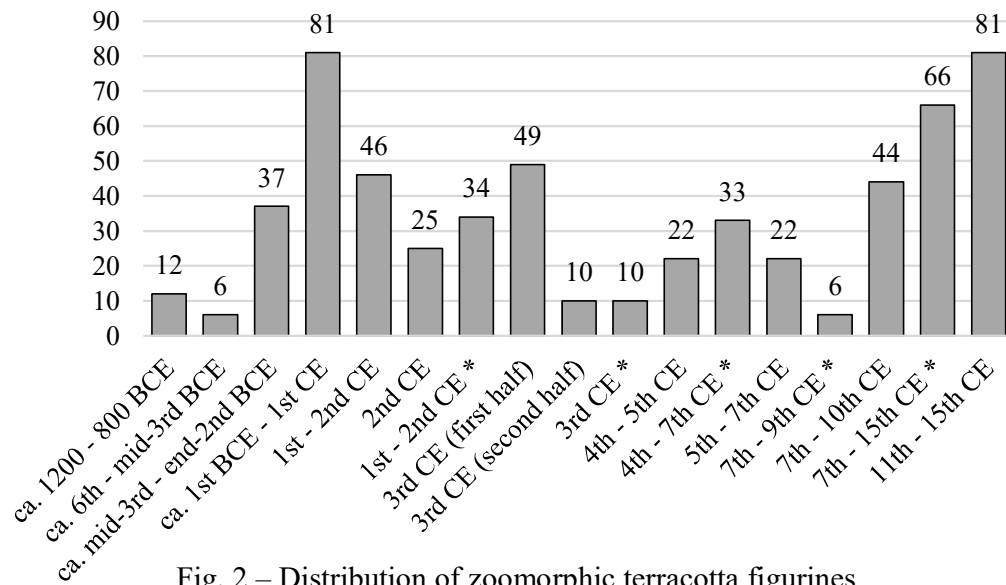


Fig. 2 – Distribution of zoomorphic terracotta figurines through times.

* Undefined periodization currently under study



Pl. I – Anthropomorphic terracotta figurines; a. TF 0592 (Photo by C. Moscatelli); b. TF 0374; c. TF 0407; d. TF 0447; e. TF 0494; f. TF 0383; g. TF 0716. [The entire photo, unless otherwise indicated, are by G. Alterio/G. Esposito (2019) reproduced with the permission of the ISMEO Archaeological Mission in Pakistan].



Pl. II - Zoomorphic terracotta figurines; a. TF 0051; b. TF 0862; c. TF 0414; d. TF 0502; e. TF 0500; f. TF 0498. [The entire photo, unless otherwise indicated, are by G. Alterio/G. Esposito (2019) reproduced with the permission of the ISMEO Archaeological Mission in Pakistan].

No. Catalogue	Typology	Provenience	Period	Area
TF 0319	Animal	4 W (2764)	ca. mid-3rd - end-2nd BCE	Waste area: associated with mortar
TF 0612	Human	11 K 1900 (1904)	ca. mid-3rd - end-2nd BCE	Working area: associated with iron processing slag
TF 0096	Human	401 (925)	ca. mid-3rd - end-2nd BCE	Waste area: associated with a saddle quern
TF 0339	Human	453 (1451)	ca. mid-3rd - end-2nd BCE	Surface: trace of fireplaces
TF 0286	Human	413 (1482)	ca. 1st BCE - 1st CE	Kitchen floor: trace of fireplaces
TF 0012	Animal	433 (1309)	ca. 1st BCE - 1st CE	Residential area: trace of fireplaces
TF 0061	Animal	433 (1324)	ca. 1st BCE - 1st CE	
TF 0213	Animal	433 (1327)	ca. 1st BCE - 1st CE	
TF 0067	Animal	519 (2773)	ca. 1st BCE - 1st CE	Waste area: associated with a saddle quern
TF 0080	Animal	519 (2773)	ca. 1st BCE - 1st CE	
TF 0206	Animal	519 (2773)	ca. 1st BCE - 1st CE	
TF 0231	Animal	519 (2773)	ca. 1st BCE - 1st CE	
TF 0289	Animal	519 (2773)	ca. 1st BCE - 1st CE	
TF 0334	Human	519 (2773)	ca. 1st BCE - 1st CE	
TF 0320	Human	519 (2773)	ca. 1st BCE - 1st CE	
No. Catalogue	Typology	Provenience	Period	Area
TF 0062	Animal	519 (2799)	ca. 1st BCE - 1st CE	Waste area: associated with a saddle quern
TF 0187	Animal	519 (2799)	ca. 1st BCE - 1st CE	
TF 0236	Animal	519 (2799)	ca. 1st BCE - 1st CE	
TF 0338	Human	519 (2799)	ca. 1st BCE - 1st CE	
TF 0332	Human	519 (2799)	ca. 1st BCE - 1st CE	
TF 0329	Human	519 (2799)	ca. 1st BCE - 1st CE	
TF 0584	Animal	11 K 1690 (1658)	ca. 1st BCE - 1st CE	Working area: associated with copper crucible
TF 0592	Human	11 K 1690 (1658)	ca. 1st BCE - 1st CE	
TF 0588	Human	11 K 1690 (1658)	ca. 1st BCE - 1st CE	
TF 0457	Human	519 (2713)	1st - 2nd CE	Surface Street 10: waste area with ash
TF 0049	Animal	520 (2762)	1st - 2nd CE	Surface: hallway, Unit G to Street 10
TF 0459	Human	520 (2762)	1st - 2nd CE	
TF 0458	Human	520 (2762)	1st - 2nd CE	
TF 0453	Human	520 (2762)	1st - 2nd CE	
TF 0452	Human	520 (2762)	1st - 2nd CE	

No. Catalogue	Typology	Provenience	Period	Area
TF 0341	Human	411 (1277)	2nd CE	Surface: with fireplaces
TF 0716	Human	412 (740)	2nd CE	Residential area
TF 0343	Human	429 (465)	2nd CE	Surface: with fireplaces
TF 0325	Animal	511 (2608)	2nd CE	Surface: horseshoe-shaped fireplaces and saddle quern
TF 0342	Human	514 (2664)	2nd CE	Surface: external area with pit-well
TF 0284	Human	514 (2697)	2nd CE	Surface: external area with pit-well and horseshoe-shaped fireplaces
TF 0313	Human	517 (2681)	2nd CE	Deposit: with fireplaces
TF 0455	Human	517 (2681)	2nd CE	Deposit: with fireplaces
TF 0060	Animal	519 (2661)	2nd CE	Waste area: associated with a saddle quern
TF 0075	Animal	519 (2661)	2nd CE	
TF 0217	Animal	520 (2722)	2nd CE	Deposit: with fireplaces
TF 0451	Human	521 (2716-2717)	2nd CE	Residential area: undefined strata
TF 0287	Animal	413 (287)	3rd CE (first half)	Deposit: filling = floor 285 with fireplaces

Table 1 – Some association of terracotta figurines with recognized area.

No. Catalogue	Typology	Provenience	Period	Area
TF 0022	Animal	421 (30)	3rd CE (first half)	Surface: with fireplaces
TF 0197	Animal	421 (30)	3rd CE (first half)	
TF 0009	Animal	427 (527)	3rd CE (first half)	Waste area: associated with a saddle quern
TF 0035	Animal	4 (401)	3rd CE (first half)	Kitchen floor: with fireplaces
TF 0499	Animal	11 E 5-6/7-8 K 103 (1263)	3rd CE (first half)	Surface: public court of Temple K
TF 0649	Animal	11 E 5-6/7-8 K 107 (1170)	3rd CE (first half)	
TF 0501	Animal	11 E 5-6/7-8 K 107 (1185)	3rd CE (first half)	Surface: public court of Temple K; material associated to votive offers of shrine [1023]
TF 0502	Animal	11 E 5-6/7-8 K 107 (1200)	3rd CE (first half)	
TF 0500	Animal	11 E 5-6/7-8 K 107 (1208)	3rd CE (first half)	
TF 0200	Animal	11 E 5-6/7-8 K 107 (1208)	3rd CE (first half)	
TF 0201	Animal	11 E 5-6/7-8 K 107 (1208)	3rd CE (first half)	
TF 0202	Animal	11 E 5-6/7-8 K 107 (1208)	3rd CE (first half)	
TF 0498	Animal	11 E 5-6/7-8 K 107 (1211)	3rd CE (first half)	
TF 0092	Animal	430 (340)	3rd CE (second half)	Waste area: associated with a saddle quern
TF 0204	Animal	430 (340)	3rd CE (second half)	