

A Study and Analysis of Human Motifs on a Pottery Artifact from Neishabur Baloch Hill

Abstract

The remains of the past human history provide an inadequate picture of the material and spiritual aspects of life. Reconstructing the ideological and belief aspects of ancient societies based on historical remains is relatively a demanding task that requires interpretive approaches, attentiveness to the ideological and intellectual foundations of societies in their own temporal and spatial scale and comprehensive analysis of data related to such issues. From the excavations of the Baluch Neolithic area in the western part of Neishabur plain, a piece of pottery with human motifs was obtained; unique due to its time and place scale. Our information about the Neolithic period in northeastern Iran, especially Khorasan, is scanty. The evidence obtained from Baloch hill is important in the field of ideological thinking and the reconstruction of the intellectual process of Neolithic societies in the archaeological white region of the country, where a not very clear picture of its cultural developments in the prehistoric era is available. On the other hand, this unique motif identified on the mentioned piece of pottery and its analysis in terms of drawing style and aspects of iconography in the Neolithic period are of interest. In the following article, an attempt is made to study the historical-cultural contexts of the Neolithic period in Khorasan, Iran and by analyzing archaeological and ethnological data and a comparative analysis and thematic classification of similar examples of such clay motifs in the Near East, detailed information regarding the material and spiritual aspects of this artwork is obtained.

Research aims:

١. Analytical-comparative study and classification of the human motif of Baloch hill regarding time and place context.
٢. The use of archaeological information and ethnographic data in order to explain the conceptual and ideological meaning of the human motif of Baloch Hill.

Research questions:

١. What are the material and spiritual aspects of these human motifs in the time scale of the Neolithic period?

۲. Do these dance-like human motifs show the continuity of indigenous-local traditions over several thousand years?

Keywords: Nishapur, Baloch Hill, Neolithic, pottery, human motifs.

Introduction

In the course of changes and transformations that have been brought to the structure of human life over thousands of years, pottery, as one of the human creations, has always been affected by social, economic and cultural changes. These variations can be observed in addition to the construction technique, in the various motifs created on the prehistoric pottery works of Iran, including human figures. These human motifs can be interpreted and analyzed in relation to social, economic and religious issues in their temporal and spatial dimensions. The passage of man from the Paleolithic to the Neolithic period, and the economic, social and ideological changes created during this path, created a new attitude in the creation of works. Agriculture and herding led to settlement and homogeneity and a type of economic system and social stability, and under the influence of this, the stability of human thought and spiritual thinking underwent transformation. According to the findings related to human motifs in prehistoric times, it seems that religious and supernatural beliefs were the main focus of human motifs in the older eras (Neolithic and Copper Age), which gradually moved towards everyday issues in newer periods and gradually it has taken on a decorative aspect.

Baluch settlement is an area in the Neyshabur plain in the northeast of Iran, among the pottery data obtained from it, a piece of pottery with a grid pattern of two or three people in brown color in a pea-colored background has been identified, which based on the comparative approach, it is believed to belong to the Neolithic period. According to the available archaeological documents, the above-mentioned motif is one of the rare examples of the Neolithic age, which is very remarkable in terms of the subject design, style of motifs, and iconographic aspects in its time and place context, in the northeast of Iran.

The review of the background of the research indicates that although several works have investigated the human motifs of Nipshabur pottery, so far no independent work with this title has been published. In the current research, it has been sought to rely on the available evidence and with a case study of this motif and its comparison with different cultural areas of Iran and the Near East, the issues related to its possible ideological, social and economic aspects in its time and place context will be answered. It is also important to mention that the lack of complexity and development of the settlements in the northeast of Iran is not a reliable and

valid reason for the non-existence of some such data; rather, more contribution should be given to the lack of coherent archaeological studies and transformative processes in this field.

Conclusion

The presence of human motifs on pottery of the Neolithic period, especially the beginning of this age with pottery, is unique in itself. On the other hand, identifying a Neolithic site in Iran's archeological white area with such complex and ambiguous cultural aspects raises many questions for researchers. As we know, prehistory studies in West Khorasan is at the beginning of its way with little or no information available regarding the Paleolithic period, especially the process of transition from the Paleolithic to the Neolithic. The various cultural aspects of the Neolithic period are not known in this area, and the Baluch settlement is the only identified Neolithic site in Western Khorasan, in which its studies are in its preliminary stage. In the field of studying the cultures of the Stone Age and Bronze Age, coherent and comprehensive information is not available. Thus, it is not possible to understand the evolutionary process of prehistoric cultures in this field and to study and analyze its material and spiritual aspects in its cultural context.

The appearance of human motifs on pottery works became widespread from the fifth millennium BC; with the beginning of the fifth millennium BC, major changes took place in different aspects of human life. These developments in the economic, social and ideological fields have brought about a change of attitude in human opinions and thoughts. The appearance of human motifs in groups performing rhythmic and regular movements (dance) in many sites of the Near East, especially in Iran, is one of the developments of this period (Garfinkel, ۲۰۰۳: ۸۰). According to the conducted studies, during this period, irrigation farming has become popular. This required the creation of groups and unions of farmers in order to create irrigation networks and take care of agricultural products. In this way, it is possible to study the motifs related to collective dance on prehistoric pottery (۵th and ۴th millennia BC) in connection with groups of farmers (Garfinkel, ۲۰۰۳). In this way, the subject commonalities that can be seen in these motifs in the fifth and fourth millennia BC, in different parts of the Iranian plateau, were influenced by the idea and regardless of the distances in different places, they were valued and had a special reputation. In Table No. ۲, some identified examples of human motifs in Iran are classified by mentioning their details.

According to the time scale of the Neolithic period (۸th and ۷th millennium BC) and in comparison with the human motifs of the ۵th millennium, the human figure of Baloch Hill is

an example that should be investigated in its time frame and in the context of the developments of the Neolithic period. What is clear is that the people present in the scene are performing significant and symbolic movements, which, according to the potter artist, were worth reflecting on arts such as pottery. Undoubtedly, some aspects of ritual ceremonies and ideological thoughts of a simple Neolithic society are hidden behind these motifs. The existence of possible ritual and religious structures in this context (a rock structure with two horns of a wild mammal) further consolidates the ideological aspects of Baloch's human role.

Ethnographic data also show a type of local dance of Khorasan with a fast rhythm, along with high mobility and searching, that the shape of the body and the movements of the hands and feet are comparable to the human motifs of the Baloch hills. However, performing mass dances or rituals or... in the Neolithic period shows the emergence of the first social interactions in the structure of a simple society.

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