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The Role and Importance of Pottery in The Ustrushana Craft

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Abstract

The study of pottery investigates the evolution of pottery throughout history in the Ustrushana region, showcasing ceramic production as microcosm of the advancement of technologies and lifestyles from the neolithic to the early middle-ages. While there has been considerable research done on pottery in Central Asia more broadly, investigation into the way Ustrushana's local ceramic traditions functioned amongst surrounding cultural influences is absent. Using comparative archaeology, this research studies different vessel types (khums, cauldrons, water jugs, bowls, saucers, lamps and ritual isirigdons) with typological classification and ethnographic interpretation. How they were shaped, their purpose, how they were made, the cultural contexts from which they came were the items these were analyse at major archaeological sites. The results indicate that pottery met basic needs such as cooking, food storage, water transport and lighting and at the same time, reflects innovation and cultural diffusion. The characteristic forms, whether raised jug handles or bowls influenced by Greek shapes, reflect robust local craftsmanship and, also, production under external influences. According to the study, the pottery of Ustrushana is one of the most important sources of economic life, the structure of settlements, and technological evolution in this region. It emphasizes the role of pottery as a fundamental source for reconstructing cultural history and enhancing our understanding of early societies in Central Asia.

Keywords: pottery craft, glazing and painting techniques, pots, cauldrons, water jugs, saucer, bowls, Isirigdons, Kaltaminor culture, Nurtepa culture.

1. Introduction

Pottery is one of the oldest crafts that plays an important role in human cultural and economic development; thus, it is a mirror of technology, quotidian life, and social organization during any historical era. In areas with a deep archaeological past, like Ustrushana in Central Asia, pottery is one of the most secure types of material culture and so information chain for reconstructing past communities. Previous research has concentrated on large horizons of the past ranging from Neolithic hand-made ceramics to Bronze Age technical innovations or even early medieval formative systems [1]. The works illustrate the introduction of the pottery wheel, glazing, firing techniques, and types of vessels. Nonetheless, whereas the spatial-temporal framework for ceramic regional studies has made significant inroads, the exact

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developments of pottery traditions regarding subsistence organization, site hierarchy, habitational networks and inter-community interaction within Ustrushana are relatively little examined.

While earlier works offer valuable typologies and inter-cultural influences, there is much work to do in discerning how Ustrushana which lies geographically between places in Sughd, Fergana, and Achaemenid cultural spheres actually developed its ceramic forms [2]. While the appearance of distinctive vessel forms, specialized domestic ceramics, and ritual pottery are frequently noted in previous research, few have systematically explored their technological attributes, and fewer still have contextualised changes in pottery composition within broader soci-economic trajectories. Here we fill this gap by comparing pottery from major archaeological sites using different types of pottery in different groups based on features such as khums, cauldrons, jugs, bowls, and ritual objects, including ethnographic interpretations.

The research then uses this approach to reveal patterns in technological continuity and outside influence and cultural change. Early results suggest pottery manufacture in Ustrushana embodies a complex relationship between local practices and wider regional developments [3]. They advance our understanding of economic activity, quotidian household practices, and cultural identity formation in the ancient and early medieval past [4]. Thus, this work has meaningful contribution to the reconstruction of historical development in Central Asia and emphasized the potential of ceramic analysis in interpreting long-term cultural processes.

2. Research Method

As a type of mass large ceramic vessel widespread in the studied periods, it is possible to note the kilns. In the warehouses of central cities, in the utility rooms of large and small rural settlements (towns, fortresses, rabots), during the winter season and when the political situation in the country was stable, and military operations were expected or taking place, as in all cultural oases of Central Asia, in the Ustrushona villages, as in all cultural oases, khums were mainly used to store daily and seasonal food supplies in the largest possible volume [5]. The monuments of Jizzakh, in particular Pardaqultepa, are no exception; khums recorded in the fortress were mainly found at the roof level of each house. They are sometimes found buried [6][7].

Cauldrons are vessels associated with the preparation of hot food (boiling, frying, stewing). This activity mainly affected the “dough” and shape of the vessels. Because through the quality and shape characteristics, the fire resistance of the pots, the ease of installation in the furnace, the uniform impact of the fire on the bottom and side surfaces of the pot, and their easy removal from the furnace were guaranteed. Two properties of the pots, namely fire resistance and inertness even when the fire level changes sharply, determined their quality level.

3. Result

In terms of their appearance, the pots are in some cases similar to jugs, and this type of ceramic vessel can be distinguished by the width of their rim. They were mainly used in everyday life to store dairy products. According to ethnographic data provided by Y.M. Peshereva, “dairy farming”, consisting of several processes such as milking and curdling, was the main reason for the emergence of several types of dates [8].

The increase in the prestige of pastoral peoples in the early Middle Ages, and the increase in the production and consumption of livestock products, in particular milk, can be seen from the widespread use of khums and khumchas and the existence of their relatively rich species.

In the climatic conditions of Central Asia, the demand for drinking water and its positive

solution were one of the urgent problems of life. The shortage of drinking water, coupled with its high consumption, created the task of ensuring a constant and uninterrupted water supply. In order to save water and use it effectively, various special jugs were made by master potters for transporting, storing, and using water. Water was probably stored in large and bulky jars, transported in medium-sized jars (obdasta), used for use in small jars (attoba), and boiled in single-handled jars. Jars are divided into categories based on their shape, size, and use in everyday life.

According to Y. Yakubov's ethnographic data, jugs called "ob kuza" and "suvkuza" were also common. The neck of the water jugs is narrow, the neck is long, the neck and body are sharply separated from each other, the rim is straight, turned outward, and the rim has a blunt, rounded tip. Among all the types of jugs under consideration, there are simple ones, that is, 9 copies made on a pottery wheel. The bowls are directly kitchen utensils and are related to the family's communal dining activities [9]. We can observe that the bowls are divided into 4 categories depending on their use, shape and size.

One of the necessary items for everyday life is bowls, the origin and evolution of which are certainly inextricably linked with bowls. Because the shape of the bowls in most cases is exactly the same as the bowls themselves or their miniature copies. As the researcher I. Isamiddinov noted, the Uzbek name for the bowl later came from the Greek bowl phiala, which means that the production of dishes of this shape arose under the influence of Greek pottery [10].

Another product necessary for everyday life, the saucer, is recorded in only one copy, and in terms of shape it is exactly the same as the porcelain dishes called the current plate. The saucer was made by hand from medium-quality yellowish clay, with sand and crushed stone, and fragments of pottery added to the clay.

Pans used for human needs were vessels with a low rim and a base diameter of almost the same size. Although their shape is somewhat similar to a saucer, they differ sharply in size, steeply rising side walls, a straight pointed rim, and a base that is separated from the side walls. These vessels were painted with reddish-brown enamel after being made by hand.

Bowls were not widespread, if we draw conclusions based on historical and ethnographic data, bowls were used for washing clothes and washing hair. In addition, bowls were also used for kneading dough.

In everyday life, lamps served to illuminate the rooms of the house. These handmade vessels were recorded in 5 copies and are divided into 2 categories.

Isirigdons were used in religious ceremonies. Isirigdons consist of a tubular, hollow body, a base that is curved and branched when holding the body, and a "cup" placed on top of the body.

Therefore, the pottery of medieval craftsmen serves as a valuable material for studying the history, economy and culture of ancient and medieval states, and the classification of pottery products according to the features of their production is considered an important element of this study. Chronological classification is even more important, since pottery is sometimes the only familiar material for a particular archaeological complex. Therefore, it is very necessary to study the production technology, the technological features of pottery at different stages of its development.

It has been about 7-8 thousand years since the discovery of pottery by the Neolithic communities of Central Asia. Initially, extremely simple, primitive, handmade pottery vessels were found in the settlements of sedentary peasant communities of the Joitun culture of Southern Turkmenistan (Nayzatepa, Bali, Cho'pontepa). The walls of the one-room houses made of mud were plastered with straw, and on all four sides of the rooms there was a raised platform, which served as a resting place and a place to sleep. In the center of some rooms there was a sandalwood stove, and a hearth was built on the wall. The beginning of the use of ceramic vessels for household purposes, while most of the tools were still made of stone, was considered a major socio-economic event [11].

It was during this period that Neolithic communities specializing in hunting, gathering and animal husbandry spread in the central and northern regions of Central Asia. Samples of

material culture belonging to these communities were first discovered and studied by S. P. Tolstov in the lands of ancient Khorezm, in the lower basin of the Amu Darya, and the author included these monuments in science under the title “Kaltaminor culture”. As it turned out, the owners of the Kaltaminor culture were active at the same time as the Joytuns.

In the early 1960s, the employees of the Mohandaryo expedition led by Y. Gulomov studied monuments belonging to the Kaltaminor culture from the shores of the Khaydarkul-Tuzkon lake network in the north-western regions of Ustrushona and from the Mirzachul region. Among the mentioned samples of material culture, fragments of ceramic vessels with patterns resembling the needle-like leaves of juniper were also found, which are dated to the 5th-4th millennia of the Neolithic era [12]. Thus, the emergence of the ceramic culture, an invention related to the history of the primitive communities of Central Asia, and its use in the daily life of tribal communities, took place in the lifestyle of the herders of the present-day Jizzakh oasis and its surroundings.

It is known from official history that the Stone Age - the Paleolithic stage, which lasted several hundred thousand years in the history of the ancient peoples of Central Asia, ended, and in the 4th-3rd millennium BC it was replaced by the Eneolithic (copper - stone) and Bronze Age, the era of the first metals. As experts admit, the Eneolithic period did not begin in all regions of the world at the same time, but began at different times, depending on the natural resources and ecological conditions of each region, in particular, it was introduced into the life of clans and communities earlier in the ancient agricultural regions of Africa and Asia, and relatively later in other geographical latitudes, in particular in Central Asia [13].

The monuments of the Eneolithic period have been relatively well studied in the southern part of Central Asia, in particular in Turkmenistan, and in the central part of the region, on the example of the Sarazm monument complex in the upper reaches of the Zarafshan River, which is considered one of the first agricultural areas of Samarkand-Sugd. The total area of this monument, found in the village of Sarazm, Panjikent district of the Republic of Tajikistan, is about 90 hectares, and its life span is represented by 4 construction phases. This monument, which operated near the southern borders of ancient Ustrushona, was one of the first agricultural centers of ancient Sughd, and its architectural structures were similar to cities. In general, the Sarazm monument dates back to the Eneolithic and Bronze Ages (IV-III millennia BC), and in its complex of finds, along with stone beads, copper beads, and stone tools, there were found samples of colorful ceramic vessels painted with red and brown paints, although they were made by hand, but almost symmetrical in shape [14].

Initially, metallurgists of ancient times, who were familiar with the semi-precious colored copper metal, discovered the possibility of obtaining bronze - brass by mixing tin with copper in the last part of the Eneolithic period. Bronze Age monuments of the Kairakkum culture have been recorded in the eastern regions of ancient Ustrushon, and of the Andronova culture in the north-western regions. Bronze bracelets, ceramic dates and jugs have been found in the Laylak Uya region of Zamin, Sharillok, Jilli Gulli mountain and foothill areas of Jizzakh. The finds from the Stork Uya region are dated to the beginning of the 3rd millennium BC based on radiocarbon analysis, and the remaining finds to the middle of the 2nd millennium BC. It should be noted that the ceramic vessels found around the city of Jizzakh were recorded in box-shaped stone tombs and in earthen burials.

The first city-like, large settlement surrounded by defensive walls in ancient Ustrushon is Nurtepa (18 ha), which is located in the central part of the country in the upper reaches of the Nizhonisay, 12 km west of Uratepa, on the border of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The main research was conducted in the 80s of the last century, and it was noted that this was a millenary of the Syr Darya Sak tribes in the early Iron Age. It was established as a result of their settlement in the 8th-7th centuries BC. Later, part of the Nurtepa culture moved to the lower reaches of the Nizhonisay River and founded the settlements of Khontep, Saganaktepa I, II on the hills near the village of Savat [15].

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

The samples of ceramic vessels found in these settlements are unique, the handles of some jugs rise sharply above the body and connect with the rim of the vessel, the “ears” of the pots are in the shape of a bell, and in appearance these handles give the impression that the body of the vessel was removed from itself. In fact, they were made separately and skillfully attached to the “shoulder” of the pots before cooking in the oven. Such pottery vessels, found at the Nurtepa and Saganaqtepa I monuments, were found in large numbers in the Achaemenid settlements of Iran. Accordingly, the ancient Ustrushon country was also conquered by the Achaemenids of Iran at one time and was part of it. Therefore, during this period, the Ustrushon pottery craft continued to develop mainly through local traditions and methods characteristic of the Nurtepa culture. Also, the ancient Fergana.

Thus, the pottery craft of Ancient Ustrushona, like that of neighboring regions (Sugd, Fergana, Shosh-Ilok), had its own historical stages of development, and the period of antiquity and the early Middle Ages under study were of particular importance.

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