

Exploring the Site of Vijnote: Its Present Condition and Antiquities.

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Abstract: *The Vijnote is an archaeological site, present at the distance of 10 km in the southeast of the Reti town in Taluka Daharki, District Ghotki, Sindh. The site was first discovered during the British period. The comprehensive documentary evidences of the site can be traced in the Antiquity of Sindh with an historical outline by Henry Cousens. Furthermore, stone beads, animal and human figurines, variety of the coins, the bricks and pottery scattered and other cultural material are found from the surface of the site. Cousens marked that there is resemblance of this site with the site of Al-Mansurah, at Shahdadpur, District Sanghar, Sindh, (Cousens, 1929). Current study will explore the mounds and cultural material present on the surface of site to comprehend the origin and development of this large settlement of the glorious past of the Sindh. The current study also examines the existing conditions of the historical ruins and their significant in the Archaeological history of Sindh.*

Keywords: *Archaeology, Vijnote, Pottery, Human figurines, Stone Beads, Bricks.*

Introduction

The Vijnote is an archaeological site; present at the distance of 10 km in the southeast of the Reti town in Taluka Daharki, District Ghotki, Sindh and about 73 km the East-North of Rohri. The site is covered with huge cultural material including bricks which is similar to the material found at Al-Mansurah. The place is totally deserted. In the South-West of the ruins a freshly made graveyard, named Shaheed Jangi Mir Allahyar Shar is present. Local people are using the site for the graves, which is causing the damage to the heritage. Furthermore, most of the site is destroyed for the agriculture (see figure 1). The settlement was first discovered during the British period. The comprehensive documentary evidences of the site can be traced in *the Antiquity of Sindh* with an historical outline by Henry Cousens. Therefore, fall back upon colonel Branfill's account as given in the Indian Antiquary for January 1882. He and Mr. F. E. Robertson, of the Indus valley state railway, whom he quotes, appear to have spent some time in their examination of the ruins. However, on examination a considerable portion of the brick fragment is seen tomb composed of semi-vitrified brick of a dark color. An entire brick, or a large piece of one is not to be seen on the surface of any of the undisturbed mounds, the whole having been reduced to small sharp-edged irregular fragments, apparently by the action of the salt present recent excavations were made to provide metal ballasting for the Indus valley state railway, but the old site has probably been a quarry, for centuries, for anyone who wanted a few stones or burnt bricks, in the part of the country. Bricks of the Vijnote pattern are to be seen on Muslim graves for many miles around and far into the desert to the south-east. The bricks in the foundations underground are in perfect preservation when first taken out, and measure usually 15 inches long, 10 inches wide, and 2 inches thick; but a few were found as large as 18"x12"x4". They are roughly molded but well burnt generally and of a good deep red color. The bricks seem

to have been well laid and bonded in mud; and no lime was noticed unless in the form of whitewash on the walls and pillars when first unearthed.

Literature Review

The archaeological research started in Sindh in the 19th century CE during the British period. *The Gazetteer of Sindh* is earliest archaeological information tool which was published from about 1876. This document gave comprehensive information about several archaeological site of this region. However, the recent scientific research by archaeologists and historians have set out the general chronology of Sindh from Palaeolithic age to the late historic periods. Most important and fundamental reference samples for this research study are;

Sapnish, Arabs and Persian travellers had written the detailed historical account of Sindh from 9th century CE to 13th century CE. Chachnama gives the detailed information political and historical events of 7th and 8th century CE. Later on, this was translated from Persian into English by Mirza Kaleech Baig.

The archaeological excavations and exploration in Sindh was carried out in 19th century. In 1854, F. A. Bellasis British-India civil servant excavated the Mansurah. According to him [Bellasis] the site of Mansurah belongs to Hindu period. Furthermore, Alexander Cunningham recognized some Hindu period cities of Sindh from the Huan Tswang's accounts, the site of Mansurah is one of them. Moreover, Bellasis published the results of the excavation under title *an account of the ancient and ruined city of Brahmanabad in Sindh: situated on a branch of the old bed of Indus*.

In 1861 when *Archaeological Survey of India* was established, a series of standard works in the archaeology of this region were started. R. C. Majumdar started excavation at Banbhore in 1928, Alcock in 1951, F. A. Khan from 1958 to 1965, and recently, Italian have confirmed the Pre-Muslim foundations of the city Banbhore. An excavation report was published in 1963 by Khan titled *Banbhore: A Preliminary Report on the recent archaeological excavations* which gives a brief account for the chronological and cultural profile of Sindh. Lambrick (1973) in his work *Sindh Before Muslim Conquest*; discussed the Buddhist Rai and Brahmin dynasties before Muslim period.

The first note on Vijnote was given by Henry Cousens (1929) in his book entitled "The Antiquities of Sindh". According to him the site was consisted of heaps, mounds bricks scattered on surface. Site was discovered during the survey for Railway line and site is located in vicinity of Raiti Railway station(Cousens, 1929)

Research Methodology

In this research, the site of Vijnote is selected to examine its archaeological importance and to know its chronology. For the study of the site two steps have been set (a) Data Acquisition and (b) Processing and Analysis of Data. Data Acquisition further comprises three steps, (i) Determine the location of site (ii) systemic surface of Artefacts (iii) Photography of site and the Artefacts. While the processing and analysis of data again contains three steps, (i) The classification of artefacts (ii) The catalogue of artefacts (iii) The relating of the material with known sites.

The Site

Water is the main source of living. It is said that most of the civilization developed in the banks of rivers as Mesopotamia in between Euphrates and Tigris, the Indus Valley Civilization is on the River Indus, the Egyptian civilization is on the River Nile, and Yellow River had Chinese Civilization and so on. Sindh is the region where one can find the human settlements from early Stone Age (Palaeolithic) to the late historic period. The Rohri hills are living evidences of Stone Age in Sindh. The archaeological sites of different periods from Pre-Historic to the Historic period are spread in the Sindh. The site of Vijnote is an historic period site. It contains two complex Buddhist and Hindu periods. The site is spread in the more than 100 Acre of land. Officially, it covered the area of 120 Acres. Unfortunately, now a days, it is about 30 to 35 Acres of land. Most the land is used for the agriculture purpose (see figure 1). The ruins of Vijnote are in great danger to disappear. The site is located in the barren plans of the Indus River. The area of the site is contains bricks, pottery sherds, beads made of both terracotta and precious and semi-precious stones, coins and other cultural material. The traces of architecture are visible everywhere in the site. The size of the bricks and the cultural material found at Vijnote is very similar to the site of Al-Mansurah (Cousens, 1929). Scattered variety of the cultural material on the Surface paid attraction to the archaeologist to explore the site in depth to know its chronology and the cultural and economical importance.

I have paid the several field visits to the site to understand the nature of the site and the cultural links of the ruins with another contemporary cities (if exist). Unfortunately, owing to the negligence of the academic attention on the site it is still not clear that who had build this glorious city, and what was their cultural and social position. Therefore, I have selected this site as a case study in the light of already studied cultures that were existed before the advent of Islam across Sindh.



Figure 1: A view of the site showing small mounds of dumped soil took out by the local for agriculture purpose (looking south)



Figure2: Another general view of the site showing surface brick scatters

The context of the site and present condition

Unfortunately, large portion of the Vijnote has been disappeared from the surface. The land grabbers have dug the site with heavy excavating machines to take the land for agriculture.

Moreover, the treasure hunters and antiquity smugglers are continuously disturbing the site from few decades. Whenever rain falls the local people find the antiquity to sell it to the antiquity smugglers. I have reported the antiquity in this research from the local people which was illegally collected. This kind of the activity at the site is disturbing to understand the context of artefacts and the site.

While the visit at the site, deep ditches dug by treasure hunter and antiquity smugglers have been reported, the ditches had destroyed the structures of the site. Very sadly speaking, that structures were roughly troubled and removed out from their in-situ positions and bricks were spread recently and just out from those ditches (see figure 2 & 3). Unfortunately, the works and services department government of Sindh has recently started construction of road from Reti-Berota link road to the village Rafique Mangrio. The road is crossing from the middle of the site. It starts from the East to the West. Most of the Northern part of the site has damaged due the excavator machine and the digging the site to use the soil for the construction of the road.



Figure 3 Photo showing a ditch (by treasure and antiquity looters) and exposed structure

The Antiquity

The antiquity which is used as primary source of the data for this study is of two types; first is collected by me throughout several visits, and second is integrated the same those artefacts which I have reported from the locals. Locals did not devolve the artefacts, but only they allowed me to take pictures of the material. Therefore, I have prioritized the artefacts for this study that I have collected by myself. However, here I will use the pictures of artefacts from locals as reference sample.

The artefacts are included stone and terracotta beads, ceramics, metal objects. However, the ceramics are included pottery, and figurines, in metal the copper coins, are included, shell bangles are also included in the collection.

The pottery is included black and red ware among which variety of the sherds was selected for this study to comprehend the periodisation of the site. The rim sherds types (see Plate 1) are closely similar to the rim sherds of Muslim periods found at the site Kath Banbhan (Shaikh, 2018).

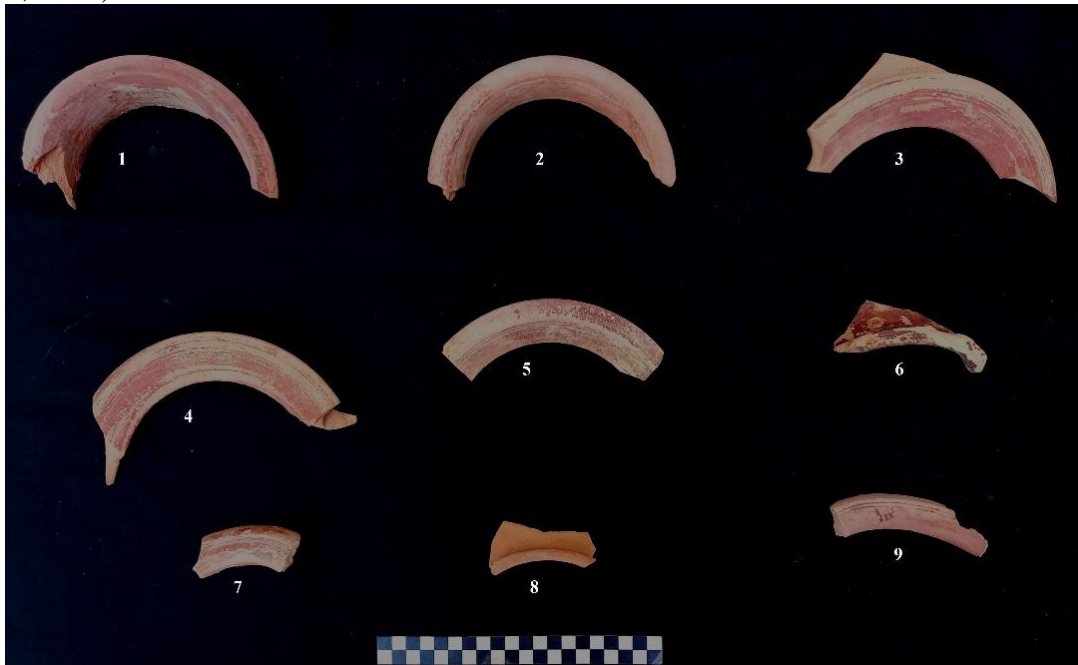


Plate 1: Potsherds



Plate 2: potsherds



Plate 3: Potsherds

The fragments of shell bangles are very important, in the regionalization era the craft of shell bangles was found (Dales and Kenoyer, 1977). A shell workshop was discovered at the costal site of lower Indus basin Balakot (Dales, 1974, Kenoyer, 1984, Koneyer, 2017) made clear that the people of Indus Valley Civilization had learned the making things from seashells since early 4th millennium BC. In this regard, the three fragments of shell bangles have been found from Vihnote at the surface exposed by rainwater (see table 4, object 1).

Moreover, different kinds of beads have been collected which includes Cornelian, Lips, Marjan and Terracotta. Some broken beads have been traced this shows that the beads might be manufactured here. In Indus Valley Civilization the beads made of some precious and semi-precious stones were used as principal material in the jewelry, and were exported to Ur city of Iraq, Dilmun and other Mesopotamian cities and Egypt. The beads reported from Vijnote, possibly suggesting an earlier phase.

In addition to the above artefacts, I have found some molded potsherds bearing floral patterns, and animal figures especially elephant which are similar to those found from the Pre-Muslim levels at Banbhore, related to the Sassanian period (Khan, 1964, Khan, 1969). Meanwhile, the same has been reported from the Pre-Muslim levels at Sehwan Sharif and Al-Mansurah, this similarity in ceramic tradition is signifying the cultural, social and economic relations among the sites of Vijnote, Banbhore, Sehwan Sharif (Kervan, 2001), and Al-Mansurah as Cousens noticed the similarity between the Vijnote and Al-Mansurah (Cousens, 1929).

Furthermore, the human and animal figurines were reported from the site, in which elephant figure (see plate 4) is significant to study the period of the site. This suggests existence of Pre-Muslim phase at the site. The elephant has crucial importance in Hindu and Buddhism. The birth of Buddha began from an elephant. The mother of Buddha dreamed that a white elephant with six tusks entered her from right. The dream meant that she would give birth to a child who would become a Buddha (an enlightened one). The elephant figure was used extensively in Buddhist art and architecture. This was the sacred symbol in Buddhism. Meanwhile, the elephant in Hinduism represents the Lord Ganesha.

Therefore, these elephant figurines are probably suggesting the Hindu and Buddhist influence on the site which indicates that the site of Vijnote had passed from second Urban phase of Civilization. However, it can be left behind a theory until any substantive excavations begin at the site.



Plate

4:




Different animal figurines




Plate 5: human figurines


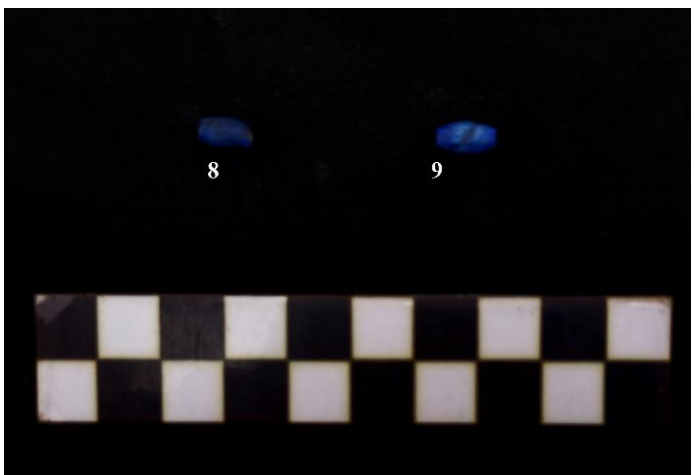
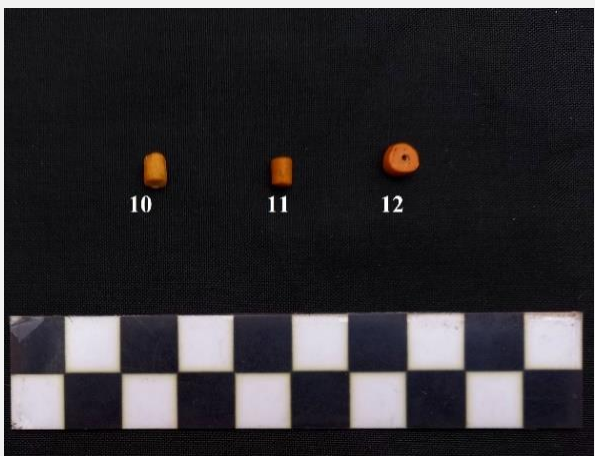
Moreover, the very attractive thing which is central to discuss here is the traces of comparable Pre-Muslim period cultural material. Such as alike moulded potsherds, a votive Shiva Langham, animal figurines can be considered as the representator of the Sassanian, Hindu-Buddhist, and probably Scytho-Parthian periods. Furthermore, speaking on the votive Shiva Langham (see table 4 object 13) which perhaps reminds the votive Shiva Langham reported from Banbhore (Khan, 1969).



The finding of two human figures is also appealing, (see plate 5) figurine has missing head, one arm turned towards back, both arms are broken, this figurine seems to be an older indicator of the Hindu period, perhaps can be traced back in the Vedic times. Furthermore, figurine type 1 (see plate 5) may be indicating the Hindu origins.

Table 1: Photographic catalogue of some identical artifacts

Cat No	Obj No	Photograph	Description
1	1		A broken fragment of a shell bangle with 3cm diameter and 0.6 thickness. The bangle is plain no depiction is present on the surface of bangle. Its rough surface treatment might reflect its manufacturing process.

2	2		<p>Broken fragment of a shell bangle with 3cm diameter having varied thickness, the maximum is 0.9 cm. It is well polished and having bright shiny surface.</p>
3	3		<p>Broken fragment of a shell bangle with 3cm diameter having varied thickness, maximum thickness is 1cm.</p>
4	4 5		<p>Terracotta beads. 4 is disk type, having vertical incised lines, however it is 0.9cm long, 1cm thick, and having 0.2 perforation. No 5 is cylindrical bead having 1.7cm length, 0.9cm thickness, and 0.2cm perforation. Might be these beads were made and used imitating cornelian or semi-precious beads.</p>

<p>5</p>	<p>6 7</p>		<p>Carnelian disk shaped etched beads. No 6 has maximum size 0.9 and 0.3cm thick. No 7 has 1cm size, 0.4 thick. Both have micro perforation.</p>
<p>6</p>	<p>8 9</p>		<p>Lapis lazuli cylindrical beads. No 8 is 10.8m long and 05cm thick, however perforation is 0.2cm. no 9 is 1cm long, 0.4 thick, and have 0.2 perforation.</p>
<p>7</p>	<p>10 11 12</p>		<p>Cylindrical Marjan beads (red coral). All are incomplete, with various size, however the perforation and the thickness is uniform.</p>

8	13		A votive Shivalinga
9	15		Black ware sherd, molded

Conclusion

The site of Vijnote is in North-Eastern part of Sindh. The area is between the Ghaggar-Hakra and Indus River systems. The Area is included in the Indus flood plain, therefore, it is also a potential zone for the ancient settlements. Unfortunately, this area is still not explored and studies yet. The Mughal's explorations (Mughal, 1997) in Punjab region down to the Ghotki have reported hundred of archaeological sites in the region, shaped a complete picture of cultural development. Similarly, the Sukkur and Nawabshah districts were also explored by the team of archaeology department of archaeology Shah Abdul Latif University Khairpur. But the archaeological survey in the district Ghotki is not done yet except a few sites. This study is focused on the site of Vijnote. This study has discussed the geographical touch to understand the origin of the ruins of the Vijnote.

In this research, I have tried to find out the traces to clarify the chronology of the site. The evidences revealed that the settlement is Pre-Muslim in its origin. Some artefacts (discussed above) which I have found are clearly suggesting that site was occupied before the Muslim invasion of Sindh. And in this case the availability of moulded Sassanid period ceramics, and

animal figures lead us to think that the Sassanid settlement at Banbhore site is dated to 1st century BC then it is possible that first occupation at Vijnote site can be the contemporary to that of Banbhore Sassanid period 1st century BC. Furthermore, the animal figures and votive Langham indicates the Hindu period, which was dominant on Sindh before the arrival of Muslims.

Moreover, the Banbhore and Sehwan are the only sites which are excavated and studied stratigraphically. Therefore, these sites have been used to create base for comparative study and relative chronology. From this study, I reached at conclusion that the site of Vijnote is of Pre-Muslim period.

Finally, the site of Vijnote is rich in cultural material dating back to the Pre-Muslim period. Now, the site is in great danger. The government should take some quick steps to save the site. Though, it is a protected site, yet it needs proper demarcation and protection from the land grabbers. The construction of the link road must be stopped. A museum should be established to display the antiquity of the site.

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