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Paap, Iken

The Pottery of Khyinga-Khalun, Mustang District, Nepal.

in: Franke-Vogt, Ute – Weisshaar, H.-J (Hrsg.), South Asian archaeology 2003: proceedings of the Seventeenth International Conference of the European Association of South Asian Archaeologists, 7–11 July 2003, Bonn 271–276.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34780/mvc3-3u6b>

Herausgebende Institution / Publisher:

Deutsches Archäologisches Institut

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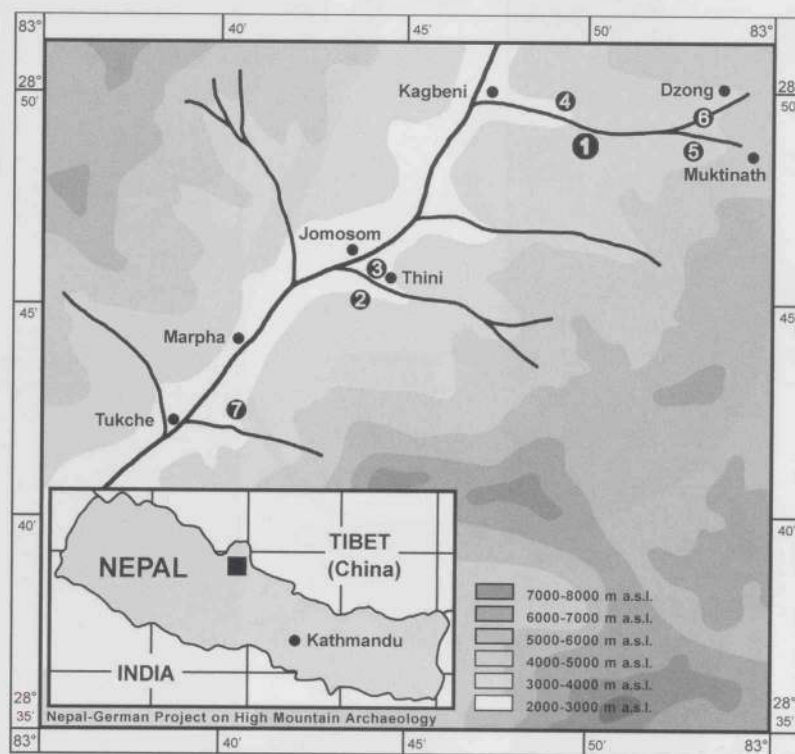
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I. Paap

The Pottery of Khyinga-Khalun, Mustang District, Nepal

Fig. 1. Mustang District, Nepal. Excavated archaeological sites: 1 Khyinga-Khalun, 2 Garab Dzung, 3 Bumche-Khang, 4 Phudzeling, 5 Dzarkot, 6 Mebrak, 7 Chokhopani (adapted from Simons/Schön 1998, fig. 1).



Scattered archaeological evidence from India and Asia indicates cultural exchange and cultural links across the Himalayas since prehistoric time. But only little is known about the early settlement history within the Himalayas. From 1991 on, the interdisciplinary Nepal-German Project on High Mountain Archaeology undertook the first regular archaeological excavations in the Nepal High Himalayas. Work concentrated on some sites in the Kali Gandaki and Muktinath (Dzong Chu) valleys of Lower Mustang District.

Excavations in an abandoned settlement, Khyinga Khalun, in the Muktinath Valley (Mustang District, Nepal), revealed a sequence of several occupation periods starting around 300 BC.

The tell-like settlement mound of Khyinga Khalun is situated just east of the present day village of Khyinga in the Upper Muktinath Valley

at 3,365 m a.s.l. (fig. 1). Here the excavations of the German Institute of Archaeology and HMG Department of Archaeology, covering a total area of 600 m², revealed an up to 8 m thick, man-made stratification. Based on stratigraphy and building sequences and supported by 29 ¹⁴C- and import data, Hüttel (1994; 1997a; Hüttel/Paap 1998) could distinguish three main occupational periods (Khyinga I through Khyinga III).

The oldest occupation period (Khyinga I) is characterized by a rubble masonry construction of high walls with loopholes, interpreted to be the remnants of a palatial manor or castle. Finds from a mass burial from the very beginning of this period proof a strong Central Asian impact. The most important object pointing to Central Asia is a bronze plaque, showing the shape of a horse-like animal in an abstract style, resembling the



Fig. 2. Khyinga Group 1 pottery (scale 1:3).

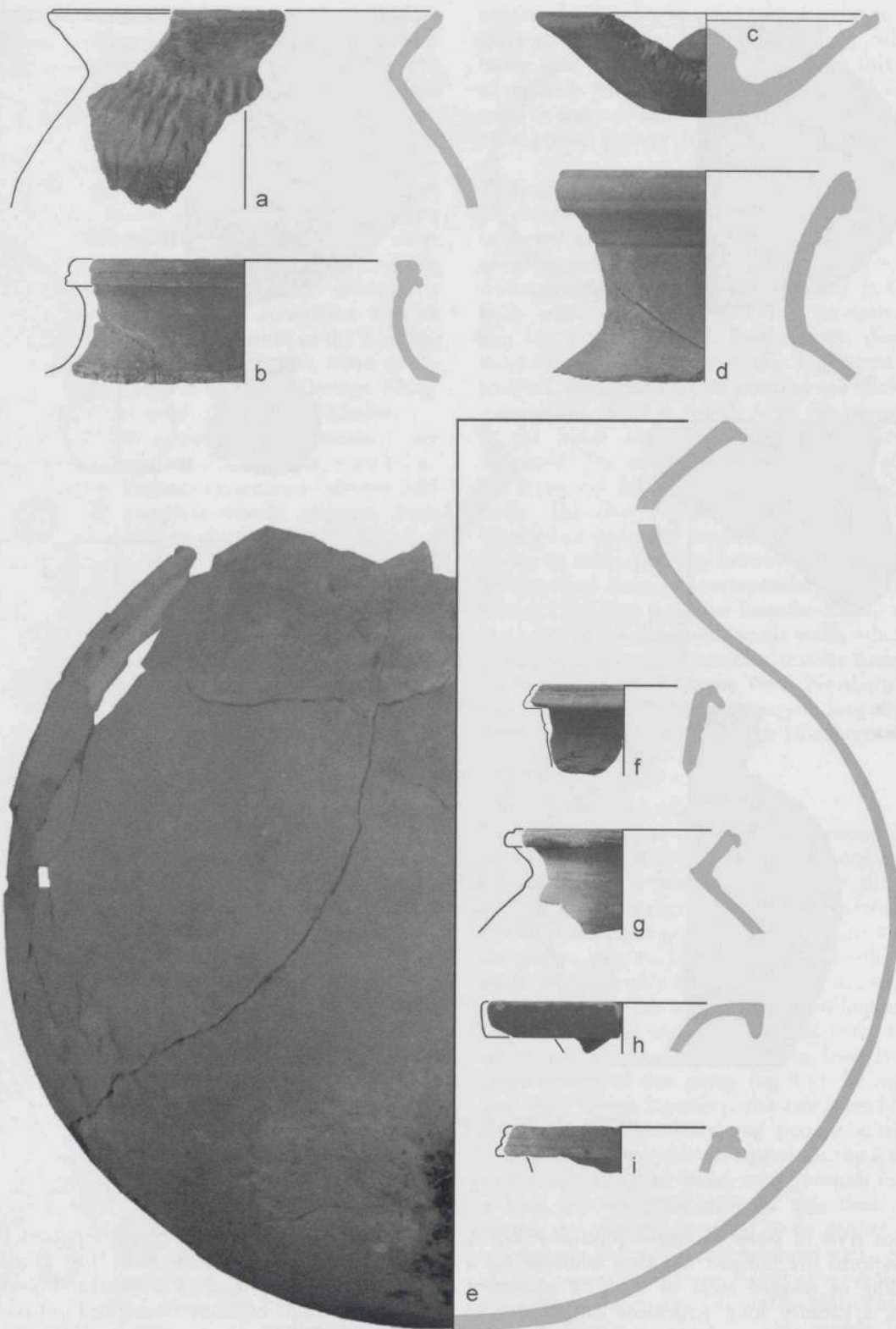


Fig. 3. Khyinga Group 2 pottery (scale 1:3).



Fig. 4. Khyinga Group 3 pottery (scale 1:3).

Ordos style of Inner Mongolia (Hüttel 1999). A widespread fire horizon and clear evidence for a refilling of ravaged areas of the first settlement mark a century long settlement gap in the 3rd century AD.

The following occupation period (Khyinga II) is again characterized by monumental building activities, represented in a grid-foundation (rubble masonry set in beds of mud mortar like in period I) measuring about 17 m by 17 m, each grid measuring 1.7 by 1.7 m. This might have been the foundation of an assembling hall of a Buddhist

monastery or temple. Apart from the pottery (Paap 2002), the strongest indications for a cultural influence from the south (i. e. Nepal and Northern India) are finds of coins from the Licchavi-time (Hüttel 1997b).

Stratigraphical evidence and the recovered architecture lead to the conclusion that at the beginning of the third occupation period (Khyinga III) the settlement was in total a new foundation with its complex layout well planned. The structural remains of the preexisting settlement were pulled down or backfilled and then

completely levelled for the construction of a fortified rural village around a new monastery with Tibetan Buddhist remains dating from the 11th century on. The construction is a typical Tibetan one with rubble masonry in combination with *terre pisée* walling. The material culture (pottery, jewellery, etc.) shows general Tibetan traits with only few imports from the south and an overall tendency to a poorer inventory. Radiocarbon data from the Khyinga III period indicate a short settlement gap within this period whereas building stratigraphy and pottery sequence advocate a double-phase but continuous occupation without significant breaks. The occupation of the Khyinga Khalun site ended in the 15th c. AD, when settlement activities shifted to the later Khyinga 'Nang' site, some 300 m south of Khyinga Khalun.

Nearly 50,000 pottery sherds, mostly from floor layers, fillings and debris layers, were examined during the Khyinga excavations between 1991 and 1999. 48 complete vessels originate from deposits and graves inside the settlement.

The main goal of Khyinga pottery analysis was to provide a systematic framework and pottery sequence for the area, based on the excavation of at least 1600 years of settlement stratigraphy in one place (Hüttel/Paap 1998; Paap 2002). A statistical analysis, showing changing ratios of associated features of pottery fabrics, shapes and decorations in the respective stratigraphic units provided the basis with which to define the relative pottery chronology. Thus, three well defined groups or assemblages could be distinguished. These three 'Khyinga Pottery Groups' have then been tested successfully against Hüttel's periodization of the Khyinga settlement history, which is based primarily on architectural stratigraphy and small finds (see above).

Khyinga Group 1 (fig. 2):

Pottery from the earliest Khyinga Group came from the lowest levels of the settlement. However, the main body of this pottery was revealed in a mass burial that underlies the distinctive Period I walls with loopholes. Characteristic for this group are hand-formed grey or leather-brown wares, whose carefully smoothed surface with characteristic incised geometric decorations is sometimes supplemented by red painting (fig. 2 a. b). In addition, there are greyish-brown vessels, roughly sand-tempered with geometric incised or padded decorations (fig. 2 c. e. f) and small reddish pots with cord impressions (fig. 2 d). There is no wheel-thrown pottery at all within this assemblage. Group 1 pottery is known from other sites in the Muktinath Valley (excavation by A. Simons and W. Schön, Cologne University: Simons 1996; Simons/Schön 1998), where it could roughly be dated to the same era, and from Bumche-Khang in the Kali Gandaki Valley (Pohl 1997). A NAA analysis by H. Mommsen (Bonn) showed that the

origin of this pottery might be sought at some distance from the Muktinath Valley, without being able to substantiate its origin at this stage of research. Single vessels from Tibet show similar traits in shape or decoration, as does Iron-Age and Han period pottery from Xinjiang.

Khyinga Group 2 (fig. 3):

In contrast, Group 2 pottery mainly consists of imported ceramics with distinctive southern traits as shown in the fabric, shape and decoration. Most distinguishable are reddish fine quality jars, partially wheel-thrown and polished or coated red (fig. 3 b. c. d. f. g. h. i). Furthermore, there are hand-formed globular pots (fig. 3 e), some with padded, stamped or struck patterns and thick cord impressions (fig. 3 a), which from the perspective of the NAA analysis are also to be rated as imported. The whole corpus of Group 2 pottery can be clearly defined statistically and stratigraphically. The clear division between Group 1 and Group 2 assemblages supports Hüttel's idea of a hiatus or settlement gap between Period I and II in Khyinga. Pottery corresponding to Khyinga Group 2 has been found in Bumche-Khang and in the caves of Chokhopani (south wall), where the graves revealed some complete vessels. Basic similarities to pottery from the Terai, Northern India and Pakistan of the same era suggest long distance contact and trade into the High Himalayas during Khyinga Period II.

Khyinga Group 3 (fig. 4):

There is a complete change in the pottery inventory between Group 2 and 3, corresponding to a settlement hiatus that could be clearly discerned in the building stratigraphy. Most characteristic for the third and latest group are globular jars without decoration (fig. 4 a. b). They represent the main body of the pottery finds. There are also globular jars of a harder fabric, with fine cord impressions (fig. 4 c). Storage and water vessels with narrow necks, often with a hole near the base are also characteristic of this group (fig. 4 d). In comparison with Group 2 pottery, this late assemblage is altogether less diversified and poor in quality.

Finds of kilns with associated Group 3 sherds in the Kali Gandaki Valley near Jomsom indicate a local pottery production at this time. Some shapes and decorations seem to be (rather poor) attempts to imitate general southern traits. Simple graffiti on some jars show Buddhist symbols, thus underlining the general Tibetan/Buddhist character of late Khyinga, which is also visible in the Period III architectural layout and in the small finds from the late settlement layers.

In the Muktinath Valley Group 3 pottery is also known from the caves and the settlement of Mebrak (Simons/Schön 1998). Cord impressed jars of the same fabric and shape as revealed at Khyinga have been observed far into Northern Mustang.

The fact that they do not occur in 15th century Garab-Dzong (Pohl 1997) gives a terminus for the end of Khyinga shortly after 1400.

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