



RESEARCH PAPER

Tracing Theoretical Trends in Pakistani Archaeology

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Abstract

This article attempts to bring to the fore an important issue in relation to the history and practice of archaeology in Pakistan. It deals with theory in archaeology. Theoretical considerations in archaeology the world over nowadays are considered crucial for the growth of the discipline. In Pakistan, however, there is a sheer lack of tendency in terms of theoretical archaeology. There was, nevertheless, one exception, Professor Ahmad Hasan Dani. Dani was a famous Pakistani archaeologist and historian of the later twentieth century. His political concerns along with his training in the field of archaeology during the last few years of British India made him inclined to models of migrations and diffusion. In this sense, he used the culture-historical archaeology paradigm in his research and scholarly works. This study explains theory in archaeology which is followed by an illustration of Dani as being a culture-historical archaeologist.

Key Words Central Asia, Culture-Historical Archaeology, Dani, Diffusion, Migration

Introduction

Theory in South Asian archaeology has rarely been welcomed. S. C. Malik for the first time made a case for this. Later on, the Deccan College, Pune, started using processual approach in their investigations. Paddayya may particularly be mentioned in this regard. However, we still need to debate the issue of absence or presence of theoretical considerations in South Asian archaeology. In this regard, Pakistan is one of the archaeologically significant regions and archaeological work started here in the early nineteenth century. The area assumed more and more importance with the passage of time and its culmination in the colonial period may be seen in the discovery of the Bronze Age Harappan civilization in the early 1920s. With the partition of the subcontinent, archaeology and its officials also went to one or the other side. The Archaeological Survey of India's personnel, with the exception of few, mostly remained in India. One of the exceptions was Ahmad Hasan Dani (1920–2009). Just before the division, he was inducted into the Survey. He decided to shift to Pakistan and the initial period of his service was spent in Dhaka, East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).

Dani is the most popular doyen of archaeology in Pakistan. He became professor of archaeology in the University of Peshawar in 1962. For a decade, he made surveys and excavations in the Khyber Pukhtunkhwa province (previously called the North-West Frontier Province). Notable among them are excavations at Gumla (D.I. Khan), Shaikhan Dheri (Charsada), Balambat, Chatpat and Andhan Dheri in Dir and Sangao Cave in Mardan. In the 1980s, Dani worked in collaboration with German scholars in Gilgit-Baltistan. This may be termed his major archaeological fieldwork since he had shifted to Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, in the early 1970s. His other activities from his base in Islamabad include his work on the civilizations of Central Asia in the framework of Unesco's programme for human heritage and civilizations as well as missions along the Silk Road (Khan and Shaheen 2015, 2017).

Keeping in view all this, one can ask what sort of theoretical approach(es) Dani did use in his archaeological and historical works? Answering this question can be a strenuous job. It is made double difficult by the fact that he was 'a scholar capable of embracing vast areas of history and archaeology and of combining a scientific approach with an interest in popularization . . .' (Olivieri 2009: 379). However, we can still confidently determine as to what sort of theoretical orientation Dani advertently or inadvertently was associated. In the first place, a theoretical setting is made here. Second, Dani's approach is demonstrated from his writings. It is followed by some concluding remarks.

Theory in Archaeology

The practice of archaeology, right from its emergence in the nineteenth century, has always been influenced by political and social developments. Owing to this fact, Trigger, a well-known archaeologist, differentiates between nationalist, colonialist, Marxist and imperialist archaeologies (Trigger 1984). European thought has certainly affected the discipline to a greater extent. It is clear from evolutionary, culture-historical, processual, post-processual, critical, feminist and post-modernist archaeologies (Trigger 1989/2010).

The nineteenth century, which was basically obsessed with the idea of progress, was largely dominated by an evolutionary approach to archaeology. It was closer to natural sciences especially geology, a fact which paved the way for the development of the 'concept of age or epoch' based on the 'Three-Age System' devised by C. J. Thomsen (1788-1865). Thomsen was Curator of the Danish National Museum. By the end of the nineteenth century, the surfacing of a variety of archaeological data having regional variations could not easily and convincingly be explained in the framework of evolution and advancement. Archaeologists were thus in search for a new idea in order to make sense of this variety and diversity. The problem was overcome by recourse to human geography and cultural anthropology, something which brought archaeology closer to geology and other natural sciences. As a result, culture emerged as a 'new concept' which substituted the 'concept of stage or epoch' (see for details Trigger 1989/2010; Fagan 1991).

This new approach was instrumental in the origination of culture-archaeology marked by two fundamental principles, e.g. the inductive research approach and, as Lewis Binford (Khan and Shaheen 2016: 26) termed, the 'normative view of culture'. To all this Gordon Childe added the perspective of space, time and historical links. Franz Boas' concept of analogy also makes a major characteristic of the culture-historical approach. In this way, the study of individual cultures and relationships between archaeological cultures started and prevailed (Trigger 1989/2010: 211ff.). From now onward, the problem of cultural change and regional variations in archaeological data began to be addressed with a focus of human beings, their ideas and their histories. Models such as migration, invasion and diffusion were adopted in the explanations of cultural change and differences or similarities in data (Khan and Shaheen 2016). According to Trigger, 'Although some culture-historical archaeologists traced the prehistoric development of technology . . . and art styles . . ., most continued to try to identify ethnic groups in the archaeological record and attributed changes in material culture to diffusion and migration' (Trigger 1989/2010: 310).

All this resulted in the study of archaeological cultures and the relationships between these cultures were seen in spatio-temporal and historical framework. Focus on the relationship of traits in data, rather than the functional relationships between them, bulks large in this paradigm. In other words, it tells us only about the 'historical origin' and 'diffusion' of artifacts and objects.

Dani as a Culture-Historical Archaeologist

On the death of Ahmad Hasan Dani in January 2009, people from different walks of life paid homage to him and wrote obituaries. One of the detailed and well-written obituaries was published by Olivieri, an Italian archaeologist who is heading the Italian Archaeological Mission to Pakistan in Swat. At one place he writes:

The interest in Central Asia also underlines a geopolitical conception on which many of Dani's historical reconstructions are based. In this conception, both in the past and in the present, the focus of the cultural, strategic and commercial interests of the lands south of the Karakorum-Himalaya, from the Harappan civilization to modern Pakistan, was always Central Asia (Olivieri 2009: 382-383).

This interest in Central Asia must be seen in the geographical, and hence cultural, background of Pakistan which it shares with the former. Dani sees Pakistan as a melting-pot of peoples and cultures. He opines, 'The geographical locale of Pakistan has determined the movements of peoples along with whom their cultures have followed. It is in the inner capacity of the Indus valley which has absorbed both of them and it is out of this ethnic intermixture and cultural intermingling that a new Indus pattern has developed' (Dani 2008: 23). For Dani, the Indus land has been, in terms of socio-cultural and historical developments, different from the Gangetic world. He maintains that 'the two geographic zones [are] far different from each other' (Dani 2008: 2). In the historic period, Dani traces the cultural and political links between Pakistan and Central Asian areas right from the Achaemenid Iranians to the arrival of the Muslims (Dani 2008). In order to better illustrate the point, a long passage may be reproduced as follows:

Thus in this long period of history several political changes took place and brought in foreign rulers who exercised outside influences. The period began with the rule of the Achaemenians; followed by that of Alexander the Great, and with a short break of the Mauryan rule, there came about the long period of the Bactrian Greeks, the Scythians, the Parthians, the Kushans, the Huns and finally Turki Shahis and Hindu Shahis. All of them exerted great cultural influences which have left unforgettable legacy to present Pakistan. They helped in the creation of the Golden Age of Gandhara and they gave a new basis to the development of Buddhism into a new type called Mahayana Buddhism. Towards the closing years this was replaced by Hinduism, which has left behind many Hindu temples all over the region. In some parts of Baluchistan and Northern Areas of Pakistan Zoroastrianism was followed and it left deep influence behind in the ritual practices, shrines and rock carvings, which all became dormant and gradually forgotten in human memory with the coming of Islam' (Dani 2008).

These reconstructions of the cultural history, in the context of the theoretical orientation of culture-historical archaeology, of the Indus valley speak volume of Dani's political representations and scholarly inclinations.

Another example of Dani's culture-historical approach in the interpretation of his data is found in his work of the popular Gandhara Grave Culture. He excavated the protohistoric Balambat site in Dir, Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, Pakistan, in the early 1960s. His description and explanation mainly consist of an analysis of the spatial, temporal and historical contexts of the data.

Dani establishes geographical distribution for the study of Gandhara Grave Culture and thus writes:

The distribution of the graves has to be explained in the context of the then frequented routes. For example, the graves, except those of Chitral, lie in the route followed by Alexander the Great. The northern Bajaur route was a common highway in the past and therefore it is natural that the graves have been found all along that path. It may also be

noted that while in the plains the graves are likely to be destroyed by farmers, in the hill area they are usually preserved. How far south they are spread, cannot be stated definitely. However, it is significant to note that this route connects through the northern hill parts of Afghanistan to Central Asia on the one hand and to North-East Iran on the other, and secondly towards the east it strikes the northern part of Punjab, as the graves have been reported from Sialkot and Jhelum. This geographic perspective focuses on the northern route of *diffusion* [my italics] across the northern hills of Afghanistan and West Pakistan and connects the northern part of the plains of Punjab with the region east of the Caspian Sea. In this wide geographic context we have to understand the meaning of this grave culture (Dani 1978: 43–44).

As such graves had previously been excavated in northeastern Iran, A. H. Dani turned to make a comparative, trait-based study, of his excavation material from Dir. These were related to the Iranian grave data and both were found identical. The introduction of bronze and iron in the Dir graves was also seen to have diffused from the Iranian side. According to Dani, 'It seems that this part of Iran, lying to the east of the Caspian Sea, deserved to be regarded as a nucleus zone for the diffusion of cultures to different directions' (Dani 1978: 52). During the Indus civilization period, third to second millennium BCE, a direct link between North-East Iran and the frontier regions of Pakistan was hard to establish. 'It is in the post-Indus valley period that a new link was established between N.E. Iran and the NW Frontier by the material cultures of the graves. Once this link was established, there was no break in the cultural relations and the continuity has been traced right into the historical period' (Dani 1978: 52).

Conclusion

Ahmad Hasan Dani was trained as an archaeologist in the years just before the partition of India in 1947. He remained at the Taxila Training School along with other first generation Indian-Pakistani archaeologists which was established by Sir Mortimer Wheeler. Wheeler was the last colonial Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India (1944–1948) and presented many new ideas about the future of archaeology in independent India and Pakistan. He was also not unaware of Central Asian influence in the historical developments in northwestern parts of the subcontinent. And he was tactically alert to the political vitality of this deep history (Khan and Shaheen 2018). Dani took ahead many of these ideas. He, like Wheeler, popularized archaeology and history in Pakistan (Khan and Shaheen 2015). And he made the idea of Central Asia more sophisticated in the state and nation building in the newly created Pakistan. But this is the political aspect of his scholarship. The scholarly context of the Central Asian connection vis-à-vis Pakistan is the culture-historical paradigm in the field of archaeology which was just challenged and shaken by the New or processual archaeology movement successfully led by Binford and others in the 1960s and 1970s.

In this light of the above discussion and facts, we can now easily ascertain the theoretical approach of culture-historical archaeology used by Ahmad Hasan Dani in his researches. He looks at all human phenomenon against the backdrop of migration and diffusion. It was, according to him, in two waves that from the same area, viz. Central Asian and Iranian zones, people, to be taken for the so-called Aryans, spread to modern-day Pakistan between the latter second and early first millennium BCE. Similarly, Dani analyses his data in spatial context as he observes: 'A comparative study of the materials found in these graves and those found in the northern part of Iran has opened new avenues of cultural links between two countries and at the same time provided a proper chronological table' (Dani 1967: 9). Furthermore, a chronological order of the grave culture has been established as lying between the latter second millennium and early first millennium BCE. And all this shows that Central Asia, beside the current political considerations of the nation state Pakistan, fitted well in the framework of Dani's

scholarly and intellectual pursuits and approach. However, we should also not miss the view that attributing cultural change to outside factors in the result of migration and diffusion is the much criticized aspect of culture-historical archaeology (Khan and Shaheen 2016: 28). On the other hand, its contributions are also appreciated and Dani's works may be understood in the light of all this. Trigger's following passage better help us to understand Dani's archaeological research in Pakistan:

The enduring value of a culture-historical approach is not its emphasis on ethnicity or on diffusionist and migrationist explanations of culture change but its ability to trace real lineages of the development of material culture in the archaeological record. Culture-historical, not evolutionary, archaeology is the equivalent of palaeontological research in biology. Like palaeontology, culture-historical archaeology's chief asset is its ability to trace historical relations through time and space. Such historical findings are the necessary prerequisites for evolutionary generalizations about the processes of change (Trigger 1989/2010: 313).

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