

Pakistan Pottery Update

I had not been to Pakistan for 4 years so was looking forward to catching up with old friends and maybe meet some potters. It was a brief visit of a week, with a medical conference in Karachi and a whistle stop lecture tour of Lahore, Peshawar, Murree and Rawalpindi.

In Karachi I visited the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture where I had taught when we lived there in 1992. I went to the ceramics department and was delighted to find the head of department was Sadia Salim who had been one of my students. It was interesting to find out what she had been doing since graduating. There was a faculty exhibition taking place so I was able to see some of her work. She showed me around the department and we discussed the problems she has there.



In Lahore I contacted Kaif Gazanevi with whom I had exhibited in Delhi the previous year. We only had time for a chat over tea and a visit to a gallery to see an exhibition she was setting up. Studio ceramics is not well established in Pakistan and both potters wanted me to return for workshops and exhibitions.

In Peshawar a doctor had remembered my interest and had kindly arranged for a visit to a pottery village. It did not seem that we had time as there were lectures early morning and in the afternoon so I was not hopeful. However, unusually all went on time and after a lecture at the hospital we set off down a muddy track to the village of Musazac outside Peshawar. We crossed a wide river with a brick kiln on the bank belching smoke. We drove through fields of wheat to a village of high walled compounds made of mudbrick in the traditional way. We were met by the village elders who showed us around. We walked through narrow lanes passing women in burkas and were shown into several compounds, with each one specializing in different wares.



The compounds were bustling with family life as well as cows, goats, chickens, piles of clay, a kiln, pottery wheels and numerous fired and unfired pots. As soon as we entered the courtyard the women would disappear into the living quarters and the many children stared wide eyed.



Chairs were brought so we could watch the potters at work under a shady canopy. The wheels were direct kick wheels sunk into a pit so the potter was sitting at ground level. Small pots were thrown off the hump and larger ones started in a shallow mould and built up with large coils which were then thrown.

One pottery made huge tandori ovens with the potters making long flat coils of clay and then walking round the pots to join and smooth each layer. These ovens fire themselves when they are used to cook naan bread.

The kilns were simple updraught ones with a perforated floor and firebox



underneath. The pile of pots would be covered with large pottery shards and fired with a type of fluffy cotton waste in about three hours. One of the old potters had a strange squeaky voice

which he said was the result of breathing in the firing material.

I was invited to go into the simple living quarters to meet the women. Possessions were stored in tin trunks, precious dowry china on a high shelf, an old gun on the wall and a swaddled baby or two on the bed.

We were invited for tea at the house of the village elder. A delicious homemade spread greeted us, made by his wife who did not join us. We were touched and humbled that these very poor people were so generous in their hospitality.

Jane Gibson

ANOTHER VIEW

We all find it fascinating meeting traditional potters but working with clay is not always enjoyable.

This woman in Pakistan has to make hundreds of bricks a day while taking care of her three children

