

OCCASIONAL PUBLICATION 8

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Ancient Gandhara Then and Now

by

Dr B.R. Mani

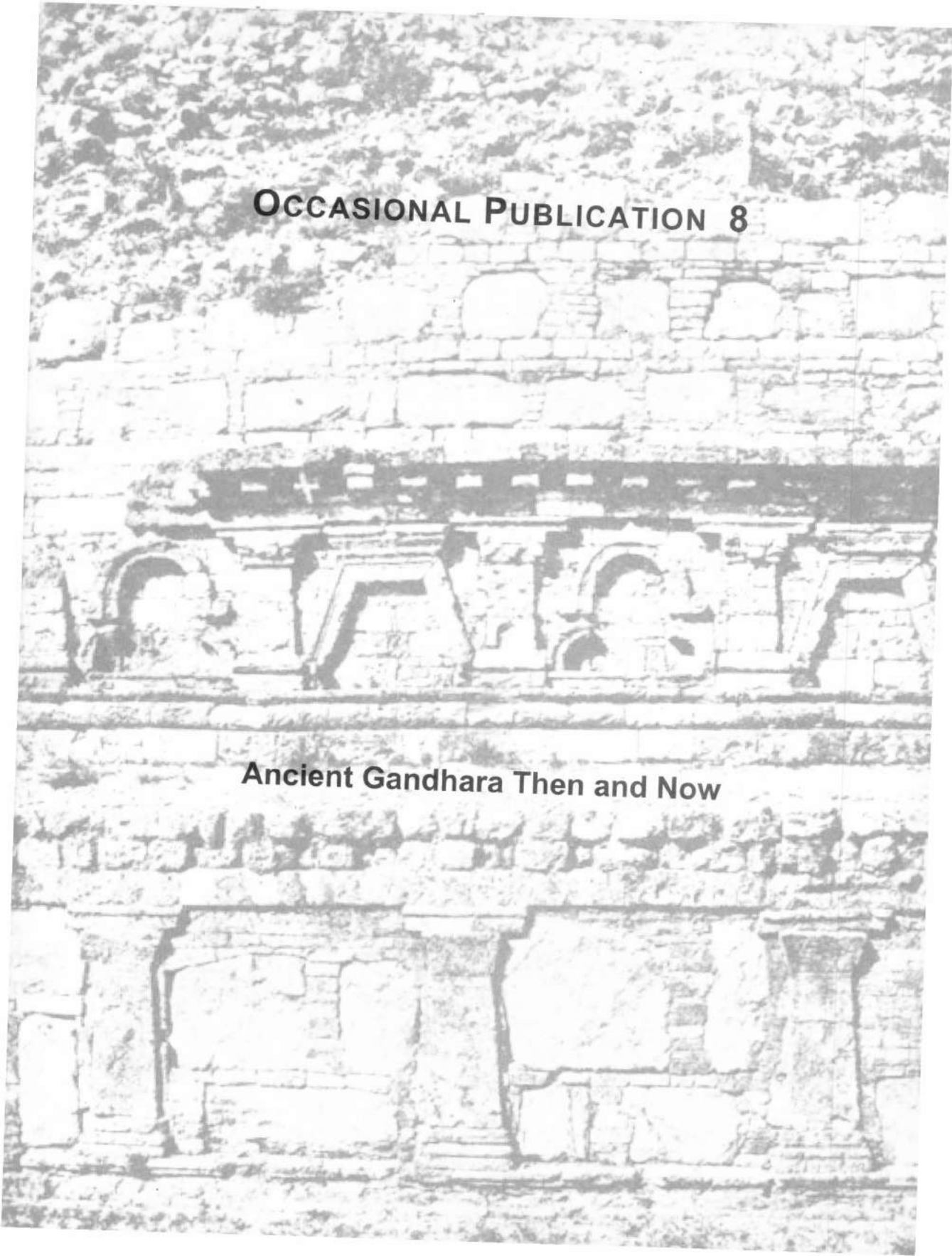
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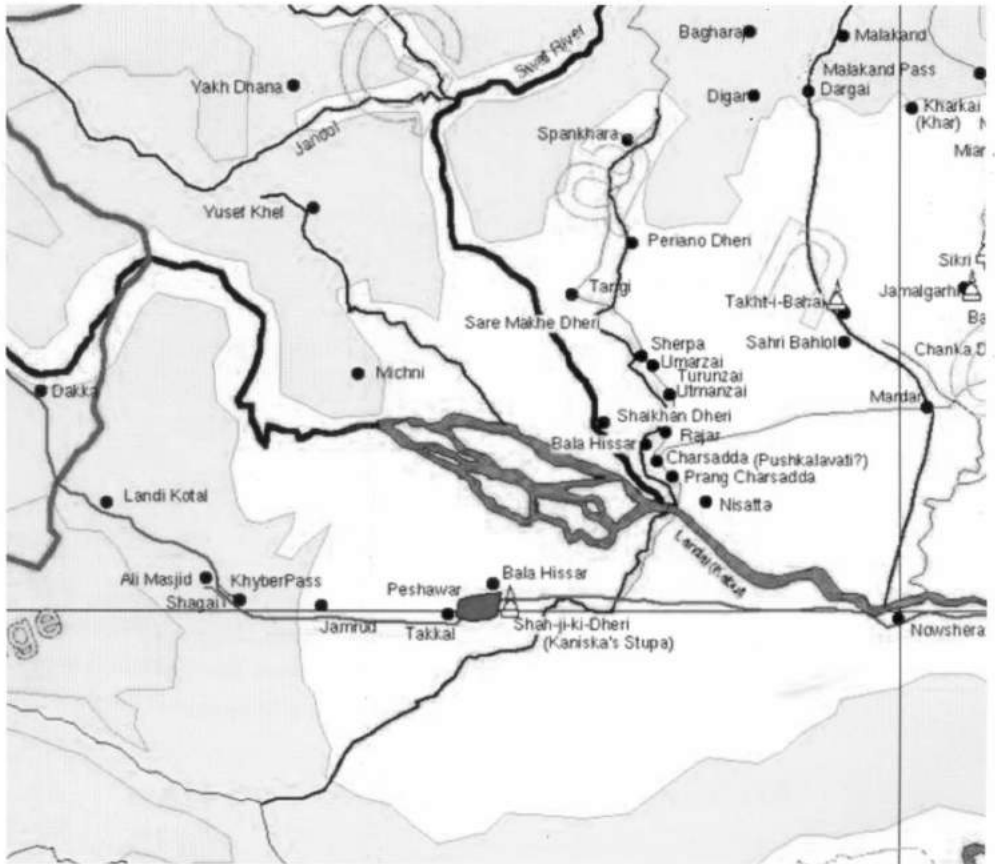
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A black and white photograph of an ancient Gandhara stone relief. The relief is carved into a wall and features a series of architectural elements. At the top, there are two circular niches. Below them is a horizontal band with a central decorative motif. The main part of the relief consists of a row of five niches. The first and fifth niches are arched, while the second, third, and fourth are trapezoidal. Each niche contains a seated figure, likely a deity or a royal figure, in a meditative or seated posture. The figures are flanked by decorative elements, possibly representing architectural columns or pilasters. The entire relief is set against a background of rough-hewn stone blocks.

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Map (Not to scale) of Archeological Sites in Gandhara, around Peshawar

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Ancient Gandhara Then and Now

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Gandhara is mentioned in the *Rigveda* in the context of producing quality wool. It is further mentioned in the *Atharvaveda*, *Sutra* literature and many of the Sanskrit and Pali texts of later times. It was one of the Sixteen Great States mentioned in the *Anguttara Nikaya*. Tradition records that the name of Gandhara was derived from the name of Druhyu King Gandhara, the son of Angara.¹

The core area of Gandhara seems to be the region with Lamghan and Jalalabad to the west, the hills of Swat and Buner to the north, the Indus to the east and the hills of Kala Bagh to the south.² Pushkalavati (Charsadda) and Takshasila (Taxila) were the capitals of Gandhara, in its western and eastern parts respectively.

Pali literature often mentions Gandhara together with Kassamira (Kashmir) although amongst the Sixteen Great States, Gandhara is mentioned along with Kamboja and Madra. Madra (ka), Sindhu, Sauvira and Mahishaka seem to have covered the greater Gandhara region beyond its core area

* Text of illustrated talk presented at India International Centre on 18 November 2008







Coins from Pipalmandi, Peshawar, mostly issued by the Kushan rulers. A new type of gold coin of Vima Kadphises showing the king in ratha (no. 9, 10, 11 facing page) has also been found. The Siva depicted on the reverse of the coins (viz., no. 2 on facing page) is clearly a new type of Siva with three heads, with the legend 'Bacilius Oemo Takto Kushano Shao'.



Kasmir Smast (above) is a great isolated cave some 1,135 m above sea level, located 50 km northeast of Mardan in NWFP of Pakistan. The name seems to have been derived from 'Kashmira-matha', which was the earliest known Saivite monastic establishment in Gandhara.

(*Mahabharata*, 8.44, 43-47). The Gandharan art tradition, influenced by the Hellenistic style, remained confined to the core area of the region with more closeness to Udyana or Swat. The interactions of Gandharan art with Madra and Kashmir regions have been traced in recent excavations at Ambaran³ (Akhnur) and Kanispur⁴ (Kanishkapura) in Jammu and Kashmir.

Gandhara has always attracted the attention of scholars, particularly in view of its rich archaeological material and art pieces as well as the ancient tradition and connections with epics, especially with its two capitals established in the names of princes Pushkala and Taksha. The Persian and Hellenistic influences on the art styles in the early historical period paved the way for the existence of a typical art tradition called Gandhara School. Many Indian and Western scholars studied the material from the region in the





Discoveries at Kashmir Smast can be considered as landmarks in the political, cultural and religious history of Gandharan archaeology.

nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. But after the separation of the region from India in 1947, it has become very difficult to have first-hand information about the latest discoveries



and their analytical interpretations. The published material from Pakistan is not readily available to the scholars in India, but in recent times the situation is seen to be improving. The objective of my paper is therefore a two pronged: first, to highlight some of the latest archaeological investigations in Gandhara, and second, to share my reflections after my recent visit to Gandhara, particularly to Peshawar and Taxila, in August 2008. With these objectives, my presentation of at the India International Centre, pointed to the status of preservation of many significant structures of the World Heritage Site of Taxila. I expressed



Some icons and lingas from Kashmir Smast.



my mixed feelings towards the good conservation work carried out there as well as noting the need for further care required for some of the structures.

So far as the recent trends in the Gandharan studies are concerned, it can be mentioned that attention to investigation and to the study of the early historic period has been given in recent times and more Pakistani scholars such as A.H. Dani, Farid Khan, Abdur Rahman, Z. Sehrai, F.A. Durrani, Muhammed Farooq Swati, Nasim Khan and others have been involved in such investigative research.



The gradual shift from proto-historic investigations to the early-historic period in recent years has no doubt been solidly

inspired by the discoveries along the Karakorum Highway. German-Pakistani expeditions conducted expeditions between 1979 to 1984 leading to discoveries of thousands of rock-carvings, engravings and inscriptions at Chilas, Hunza, Thalpan Bridge, Thalpan-Ziyarat, Hodar, Thak-Gah, Shatial Bridge, Gilgit and Chitral. The teams were headed by Karl Jettmar, A.H. Dani, Volker Thewalt and Herald Hauptmann.



Smast: Metal plaques, above, of Radha-Krishna and Kinnari, and, right, two Siva masks.



Scholars have also paid more attention to the publication of the results of significant discoveries and research. Besides being published in journals like *Ancient Pakistan*, *Pakistan Archaeology* and *Journal of Central Asia*, the results of investigations have also been published in separate monographs and international journals. Art historians and archaeologists in Pakistan initiated new journals like the *Punjab Journal of Archaeology and History* in 1997, *Athariyyat* in 1997 and *Gandharan Studies* in 2007 which have brought to light the significant results of investigative studies in recent years.



Kashmir Smast: Inscribed water pots (top) and bronze bowls (below).

Scholars in recent years are trying to unravel the mystery of an ancient writing system found engraved mostly on stone slabs of schist, granite or marble and located in situ or lying in different museums and private collections. The inscriptions have been found in the areas of Dir, Swat, Buner and in Peshwar valley, particularly in the Kohistan Swat region and due to the peculiar features this script is called Kohi script.⁵ It seems that M. Senart and Sir Thomas Holdich first made reference to this strange script in 1910 while referring to a large number of such strange inscriptions collected by Col. Deane in the area of Swat.⁶ Interestingly, in the area of Dasht-i-Nawur in Afghanistan a Kharoshthi inscription was discovered in





Kashmir Smast Inscriptions: Copper plate inscription, above; Sarada inscription on schist, below, and Conch shell inscription on schist (below right).



1974 by G. Fussman on a boulder and on the same boulder another engraved inscription was found having the same characteristics as the Kohi script.⁷ Comparison is being made between the Kohi script and the ancient Indian scripts like Kharoshthi, Brahmi and Harappan (Indus) scripts.⁸ In view of the fact that the Kohi symbols and letters have an affinity with these scripts, it may prove to be very significant in the decipherment of the still unknown script of the Harappans.

A new hoard of four thousand coins, mostly issued by the Kushan rulers, have surfaced recently at Pipalmandi in Peshawar. The discovery has been published by Osmund Bopearachchi in the *Journal Des Savants* from Paris in its January-June 2008 issue. A new type

of gold coin of Vima Kadphises showing the king in *ratha* or chariot has been found. In the reverse side of one of the gold coins, with the legend *Bacilius Oemo Takto Kushano Shao*, a standing Siva is depicted with three heads. Oemo Takto is apparently Wima Taktoo mentioned in the





Kashmir Smast: Bronze seal of Lajja-Gauri

Rabatak inscription of Kanishka as his grandfather. The discovery of Kashmir Smast is considered a landmark in the political, cultural and religious history of Gandharan archaeology. To me, the word seems to have been derived from 'Kashmira-Matha', which was the earliest known Saivite monastic establishment in Gandhara.

Kashmir Smast is a great isolated cave, some 1,135 m above sea-level, located 50 km north-east of Mardan in the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan. The results of recent investigations have been published by Nasim Khan in *Treasures from Kashmir Smast* from Peshawar in 2006.

On the foothill below the Great Cave, in the open plain there is an impressive establishment, locally called Bakhai. More sites and water

Kashmir Smast: Bronze seal of Sri Bhimaya





Kashmir Smast: Bronze seals of Lajja-Gauri, Sri Bhimaya Guhavasinya (top) and Vibhidaya (right).



reservoirs are also located in the area in the valley. Xuanzang in the seventh century mentioned the settlement of the area, which is represented, besides the Great Cave, by Safari, Khar Darwaza, Bare Ubah, Bakhai, Dulai Smast, Pajja and Gaz Dara Complex. The establishment continued to exist from fourth-fifth centuries AD onwards.

The Great Cave is mentioned in a copper plate inscription found there during excavation. It is called 'Sita-Maha-Kandara' where lives goddess Lajja Gauri, called Bhima, who is also mentioned by Xuangzang who saw her figure in the mountains north-east of Po-lu-sha (Peshawar), which is the area of Kashmir Smast.

Xuanzang also mentions the temple of Mahesvara-deva in the area which can be identified with the house of the Vardhmanesvara mentioned in the copper plate inscription.⁹

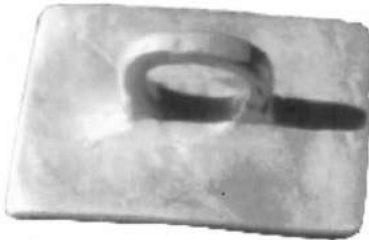
Kashmir Smast: Bronze seals of Sri Dijirada (left and center), and seal of a human face (right).



At least three monasteries existed at the Bakhai settlement:

- The *Kshayani-matha*, mentioned in the copper plate inscription which was located in the central complex.
- The *Ahani-matha*, mentioned in a painted water-pot inscription which was located inside the cave.
- The *Para-matha*, mentioned in the copper plate inscription which was located to the north of Kshayani-matha.

Besides, remains of five Saiva temples have also been found.¹⁰ Stone sculptures of Vishnu, Ganesa, lingas including *ekamukha* linga and others have been found. The



excav

ations have brought to light several metal plaques of which those depicting Radha-Krishna and Kinnari in silver and bronze are excellent pieces of art besides silver masks of Siva, bronze decorated bowls, many inscribed water pots,

inscriptions in Brahmi and Sarada. Shell scripts on copper plates, on schist and on other material have been found. Some of the bronze seals depict Lajja Gauri and a few of them are inscribed with legends such as 'Sri Bhimaya', 'Sri Bhimaya Guha vasinya', 'Sri Dijirada' and 'Vibhidaya', etc. An interesting gold seal with



Gold seals of Sri Sitarama (this page).





Kashmir Smast: Gold ornaments



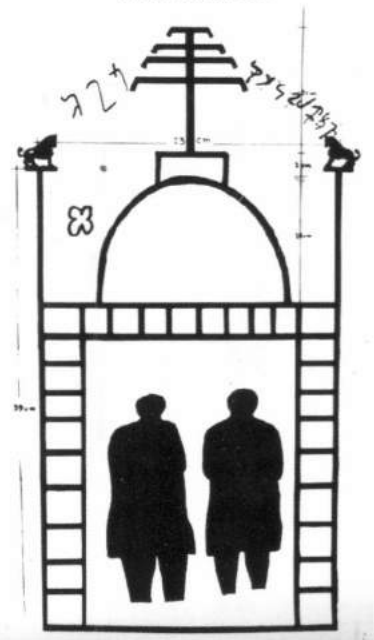
a nail-headed Brahmi legend, 'Sri Sitarama', was also found. Excavations also revealed the finds of gold ornaments, some of which are studded with precious stones.

The discovery of rock paintings at Kala Tassa Cave recently has opened a new chapter in the study of artistic activities near Mansehra.¹¹ The cave represents the site of the most conspicuous Buddhist paintings of the Kushan period. Various paintings, including those having inspiration from primitive ones and others with Buddhist subjects including *Jataka* stories, decorate the caves. One interesting painting depicts the figure of Kanishka rendering homage to the stupa with another companion (see below right). It also has a painted Kharoshthi inscription and the stupa has two pillars on either side with lion capitals which remind one of the terracotta tablets depicting such stupas with two lion capital pillars from Harwan in Kashmir.

Rock paintings have also been discovered in Gandhara, in the Peshawar Valley, Mardan and Swabi from where primitive ones have been noticed at Natian, Torai Gatai and Svarai Gatai.¹² Besides Kala Tassa early Buddhist rock paintings have also been discovered at the rock shelters of Parlai Dab, Kafir Kot, Marano Tangai, Shamo and Hinduano Hatai in the Thana valley.¹³ Rock paintings and painted inscriptions in Brahmi



a. Harwan tablet



b. Rock paintings in Kala Tassa Cave. The cave site, Kala Tassa, near Mansehra, represents the site of the most conspicuous paintings of the Kushan period.





Late Buddhist Rock Paintings. Rock paintings and painted inscriptions in Brahmi, datable to c. 4th to 6th centuries AD have been discovered at Patvano Gatai, Bubujai, Kashmir Smast, Barai Uba, Rawanrai (Buner) and at Butkara I (Swat). Rock Painting: Patvano Gatai



Rock Painting: Butkara I



datable to circa fourth to sixth centuries AD have been discovered¹⁴ at Patvano Gatai, Bubujai, Kashmir Smast, Barai Uba, Ramanrai (Buner) and at Butkara I (Swat). It is regretted that in spite of a number of international institutions working in Gandhara, no serious attempt has been made to document and preserve the Buddhist paintings and the eager eyes of antique dealers has led to merciless destruction, some time back, of evidences of Patvano Gatai and Mian Barangula carvings in Dir.¹⁵

In the absence of implementation of strict and stringent rules for preservation of sites and antiquities and also for excavations, a large number of sites not only in Gandhara, but in the entire country are being destroyed by antiquity-hunters through illegal diggings. The Archaeologists in both government and academic institutions are lamenting this occurrence. Nasim Khan¹⁶ has cited an example.



A Buddhist rock carving at Mian Baragula (Dir) under threat. No serious attempt seems to have been made to preserve the Buddhist rock carvings and paintings.

A set of Kharoshthi inscribed copper plates from Rani Dab at Orakzai Agency (East of Peshawar) was brought for identification to the University of Peshawar by an antiques digger who immediately took them back, once they were identified, and never returned. The eight leaves of copper plates, fused together and bound by rings, were the lengthiest available Kharoshthi inscriptions in such form, issued by one Kshatrapa Yudamuni around the first century BC.





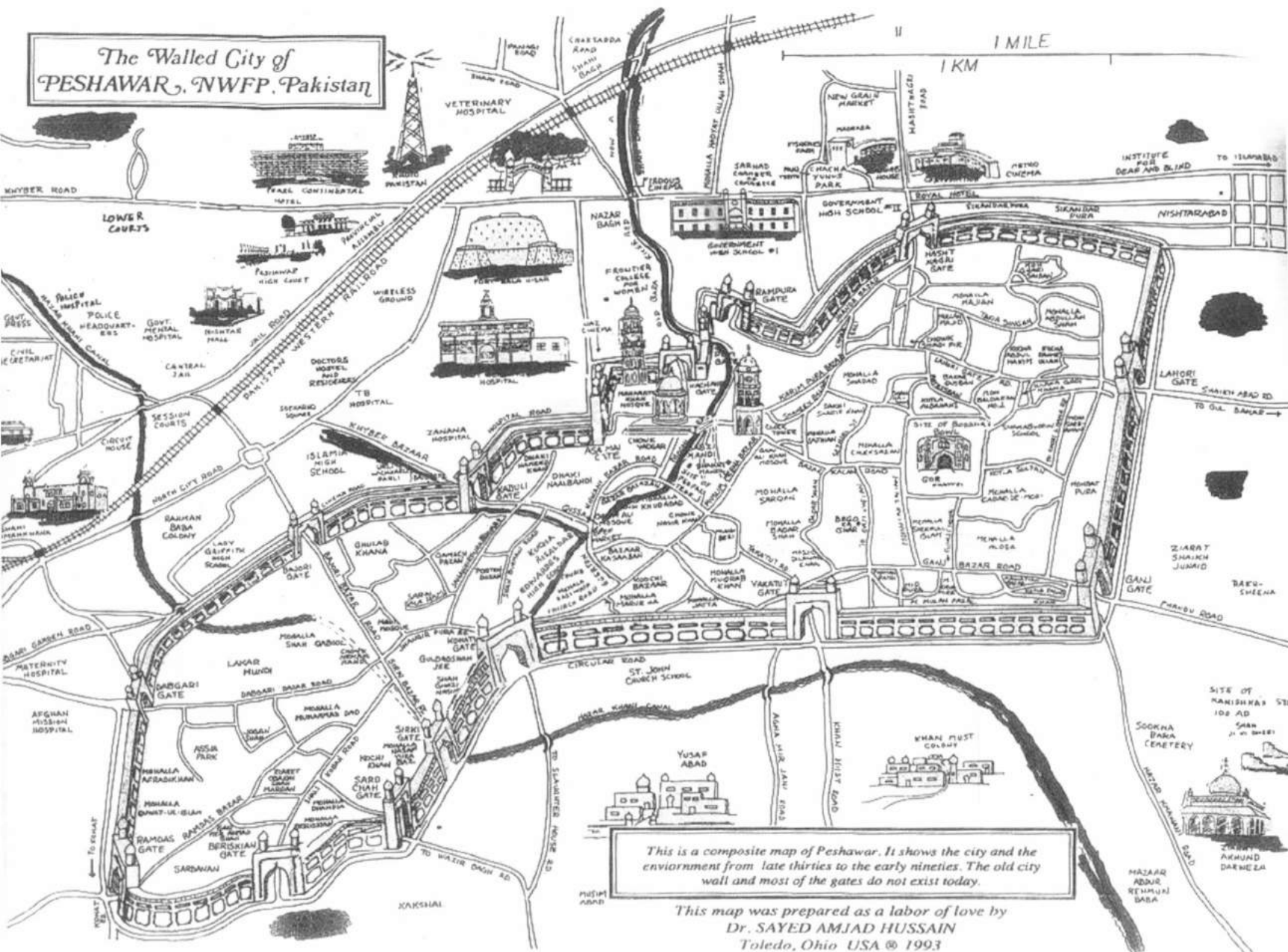
Excavations were done at Manek Raj Dheri, Haripur Valley.

It is pertinent to mention a few important new excavations carried out or being carried out, in the recent past in the Gandhara area of Pakistan which bring to light the early history of the region. One of these is the work carried out for two reasons, till 1999, by the Department of Archaeology at Manek Rai Dheri in the Haripur Valley where a cultural sequence of two periods, Scytho-Parthian and Kushan, was found.¹⁷ The pottery from the site represents the typical ceramic tradition of Gandhara in the early centuries of the Common Era. A toilet tray of whitish soap stone showing



Toilet tray showing Dionysos with attendant representative of a cultural sequence of two periods, Scytho-Parthian and Kushan.

The Walled City of
PESHAWAR, NWFP, Pakistan



This is a composite map of Peshawar. It shows the city and the environment from late thirties to the early nineties. The old city wall and most of the gates do not exist today.

This map was prepared as a labor of love by
Dr. SAYED AMJAD HUSSAIN
Toledo, Ohio USA @ 1993



Gor Khutree site, in the centre of the fortified city of Peshawar and identified with the site of the stupa of the Buddha's alms-bowl, has been subjected to excavations. A medieval Siva temple exists at the site.

Previous page: Map of the walled city of Peshawar (Ancient Purushapura), capital city of the Kushans. The famous excavated city of Shah-ji ki Dheri, just outside the Gunj Gate of Peshawar city, is today overrun by modern buildings with no trace of the Kushan Buddhist settlement. Kanishka's relic casket is in the Peshawar museum.



Dionysos with attendants is an artistic find from the site. Kushan coins, ivory bangles and terracotta figurines were also found.

Peshawar or ancient Purushapura was the capital city of the Kushans. The Bala Hissar fort occupied by the army has archaeological potential. However, it is regretted that the famous excavated site called Shahji-Ki-dheri, from where Kanishka's relic casket (now in Peshawar museum) was found, and the remains of the stupa and Buddhist settlement just outside the Gunj gate of the walled city of Peshawar, been occupied by modern buildings and market. However, archaeologists have taken new initiatives and the Gor Khuttree site at the centre of the fortified city, which has been identified with the site of the stupa of the Buddha's alms-bowl, has been subjected to excavations.

Scholars such as Abdur Rahman connect it with Gorakh Nath, an early medieval siddha-saint. A medieval Siva temple exists at the site in the midst of a Mughal sarai. Since 1992 the site is continuously under excavation by the Department of Archaeology. It has yielded a continued cultural sequence from circa fourth to third centuries BC to the present times.¹⁸ Beautiful terracottas of Indo-Greek and Kushan times have been found at the site.

It has been noticed that in recent years due attention has been given by field archaeologists to the Gandhara region in Pakistan in order to reveal more information from archaeological sites such as Charsadda, Taxila, Shaikhani Dheri, Hund, Andan Dheri, Kashmir Smast, Gor Khuttree and Manek Rai Dheri.

The World Heritage Site of Taxila, which was a centre of learning in ancient India, and which was put to large-scale excavations by Sir John Marshall as Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India between 1913 to 1934, has many excavated sites, some of which have also been excavated successively by Pakistani archaeologists. I have mixed feeling about the state of



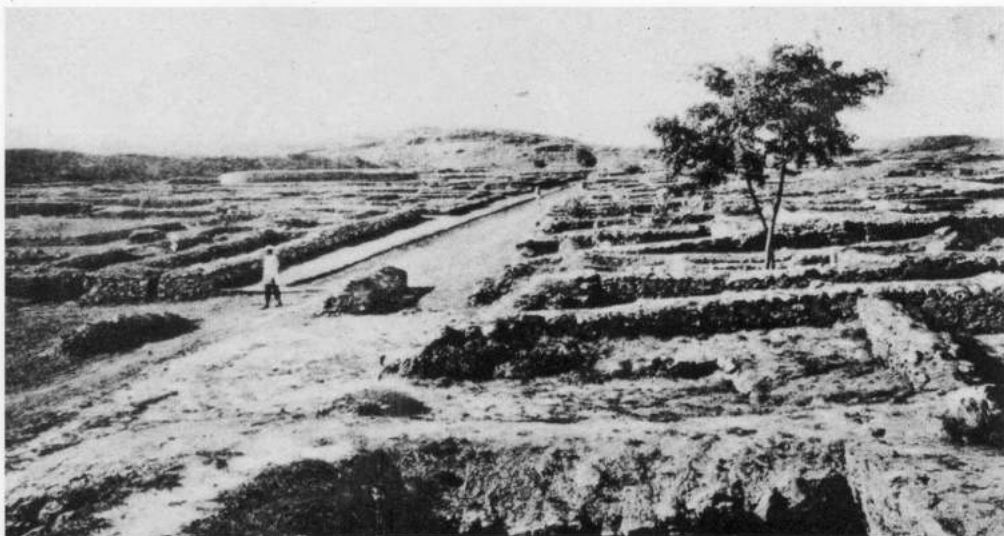
Excavations at Gor Khutree have yielded a continued cultural sequence from c. 4th-3rd centuries BC to the present. Since 1992 the site is continuously under excavation by the Department of Archaeology of Pakistan





Taxila. Bhira Mound (above) after excavation by John Marshall, Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India between 1913-34, and below, as it stands today. Taxila is a world heritage site and was the centre of learning in ancient India. The excavations revealed the remains of a great city, with Buddhist stupas and monasteries.





Taxila, Sirkap, after excavations (above) and as it stands today (below). Many archaeological sites have been destroyed by antique-hunters through illegal diggings as reflected in articles and research papers. Many of the sites require still better maintenance. Some of the following pictures will show the state of the sites as discovered and as they appear today.





Sirkap (above): The stupa of double-headed eagle after excavations, and below, as it stands today.





Sirkap. Apsidal Temple, after excavations (above) and as it stands today (below).





Physical Map of Ancient Gandhara Region



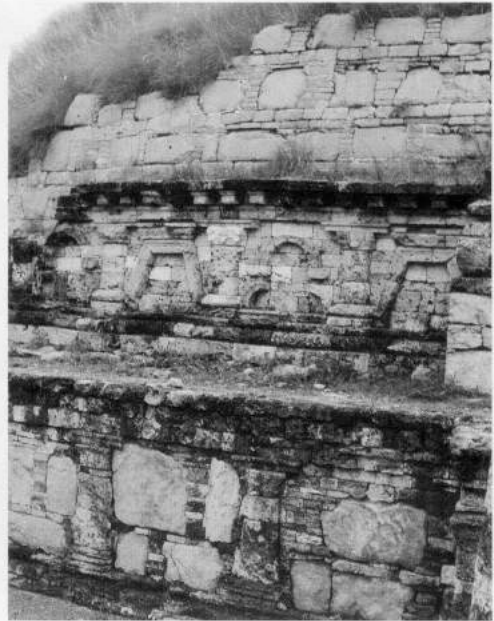
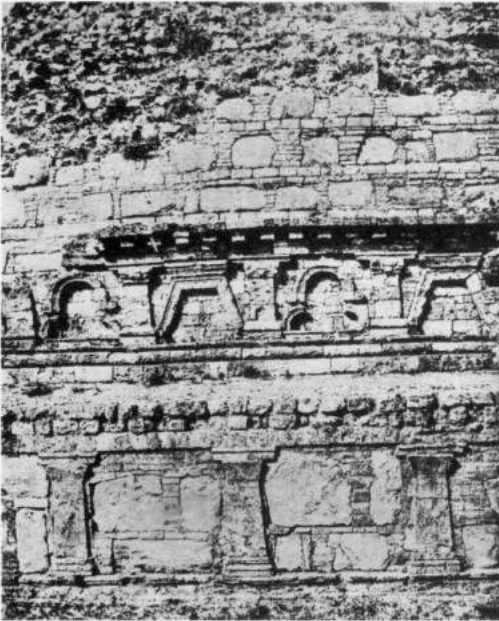


Google Map of Ancient Gandhara Region

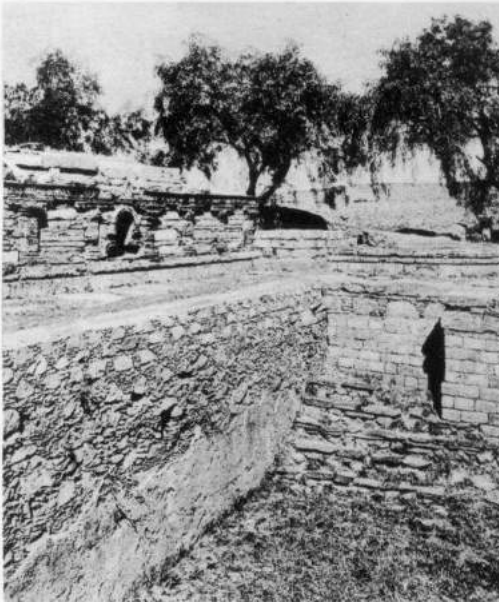


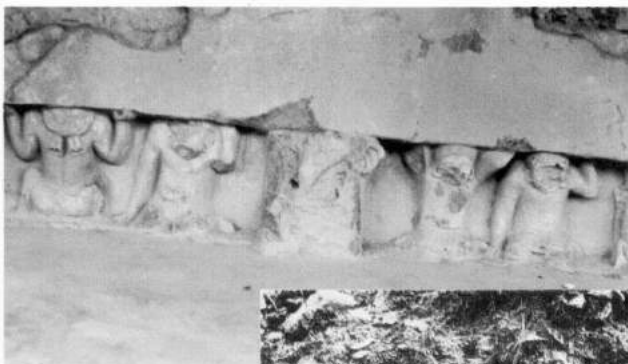
Taxila: Dharmajika Stupa complex, after excavations (above) and its condition today (below).



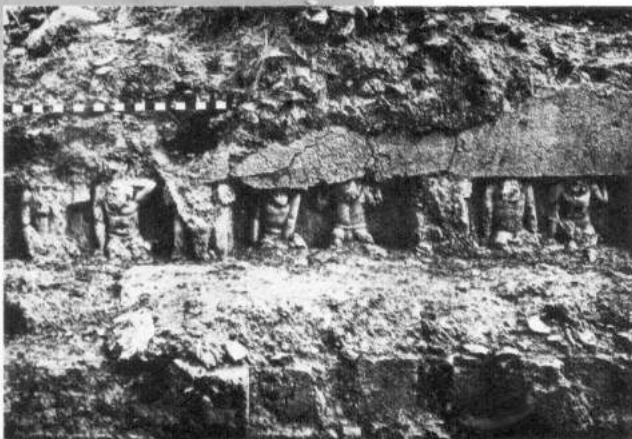


Details of Dharmajika Stupa after excavations (above left), and as it appears today (above right). The Tank in the Stupa complex soon after excavation (below left) and today (below right).





Dharmarajika Stupa Complex.
Stupa J1—upper frieze now
(left) and soon after excavation
(below)



Dharmarajika Stupa Complex.
Stupa J1—lower frieze soon after
excavation (above) and present
conditions (right).





preservation of the site. Sites in Taxila, such as Jaulian, the Dharmarajika stupa complex and to a certain extent Sirkap, have been maintained well, but some others, such as Sirsukh and Bhir, are overgrown with vegetation. Modern constructions have come up very close to the temple at Jandial. I was told that a sports stadium was planned at the site of Bhir mound which is the earliest city site of Taxila, but due to the timely intervention of Pakistani and foreign archaeologists the construction of the stadium was dropped and the site could be saved. The Google image of 2005 (p.21) shows the structural remains still visible and if periodic

Dharmarajika Stupa Complex, Chapel N. 18: stucco image after excavation (above) and now (below).





Taxila: Sirsukh. Perspective of the location of the excavations (top).

Sirsukh today (middle and bottom).





Taxila: Jaulian after excavations (above) and as it stands today (below).





Jaulian Monastery, Taxila, after excavation (above) and as it is today (below). It was constructed during early Kushan period, possibly by Kanishka himself as believed by Marshall.



clearing of vegetation and cleaning of the site continues with maintenance and repairs, the site could be preserved in a better manner and could showcase the professional attitude of the archaeologists and conservators of the country.

Excavations conducted at Sarai Khola in Taxila by Abdul Halim¹⁹ and at Charsadda (Pushkalavati) by Robin Coningham²⁰ take back the antiquity of these traditionally known sites to neolithic (3rd millennium BC) and Gandhara Grave culture (c.1300 BC) periods respectively, which is significant in understanding the origin of the city sites and also the relation between tradition and archaeology.



Taxila: Museum.



Taxila: Jaulian Monastery. This terracotta panel, now shifted to the Taxila museum, can be identified as a representation of Kanishka with his queen as donors.





Notes

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Dr B.R. Mani (b.1955) is a renowned field archaeologist, numismatist and art critic, serving at present as Joint Director-General in the Archaeological Survey of India. He has been a first class ranker throughout his academic career up to his Masters which he did from Banaras Hindu University (BHU) in 1976. His Ph.D. on 'Life in the Kushan Age' was completed in 1980 from BHU.

He taught at BHU and Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies from 1978 till 1984 when he joined the A.S.I. as Deputy Superintending Archaeologist. Since then he has been involved in conservation of monuments in Maharashtra, Goa, Delhi and

Jammu and Kashmir. He has discovered a large number of archaeological sites in these places besides also in Uttar Pradesh and Haryana during his explorations. He has directed more than fourteen excavation projects in the country, some of which are Lal Kot (Delhi), Salimgarh (Delhi), Muhammad Nagar and Harnol (Haryana), Siswania, Sankisa, Ayodhya (UP) and Kanispur and Ambaran (J&K).

Dr. Mani is a member of various national and international organizations in the field and has widely travelled to European and Asian countries for international seminars and conferences. He has four books and about 125 research papers to his credit.



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