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# BANBHORE



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DEPARTMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGY IN PAKISTAN



# BANBHORE





# BANBHORE

A Preliminary Report on the Recent Archaeological  
Excavations at Banbhore

By  
Dr. F. A. Khan, T.Pk.

DEPARTMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND MUSEUMS  
Ministry of Education & Information  
Government of Pakistan



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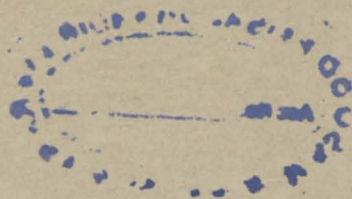
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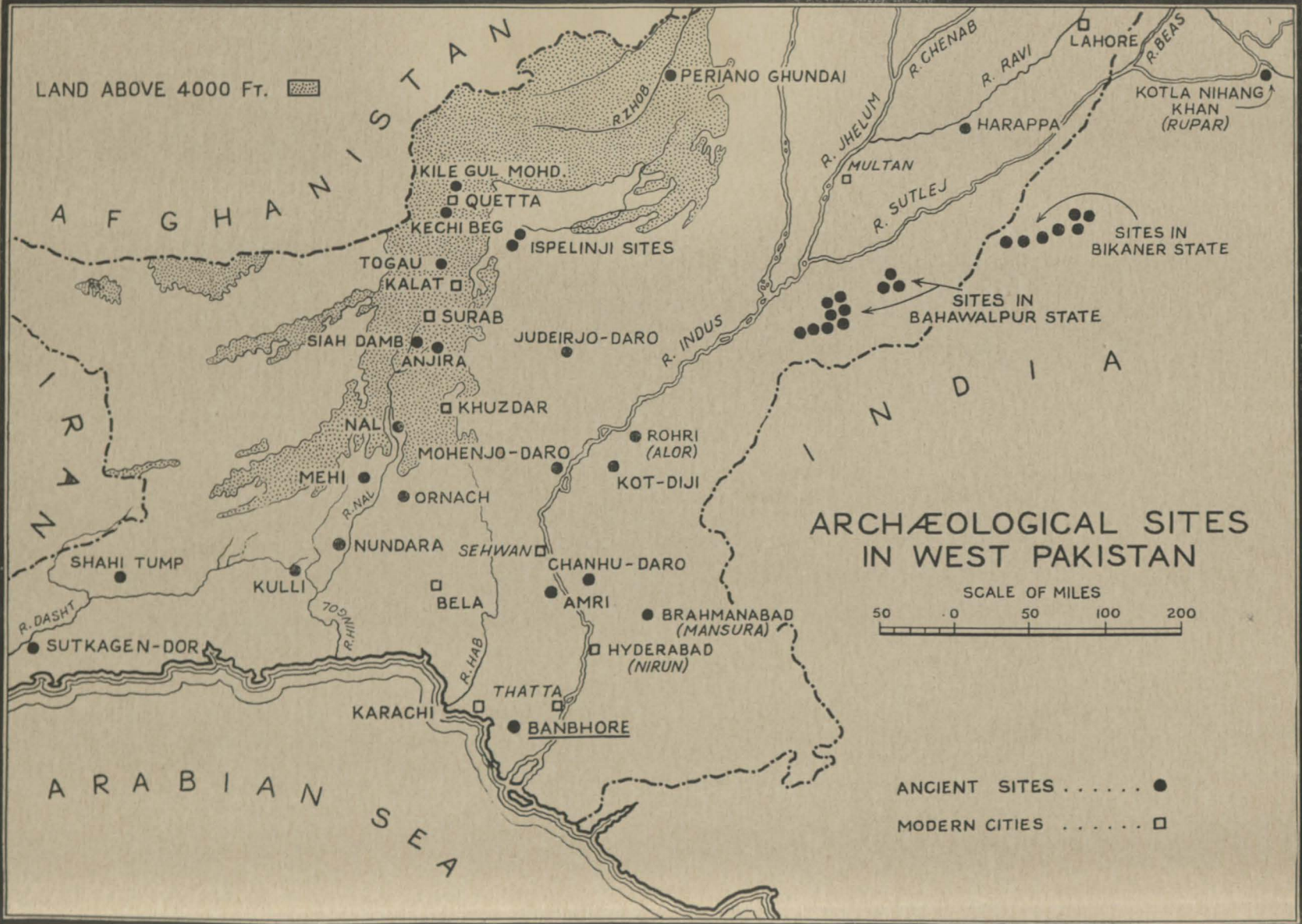
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LAND ABOVE 4000 FT. 

A F G H A N I S T A N

R. CHENAB  
R. RAVI  
R. BEAS  
LAHORE  
KOTLA NIHANG KHAN (RUPAR)  
HARAPPA  
MULTAN  
R. SUTLEJ

PERIANO GHUNDAI  
KILE GUL MOHD.  
QUETTA  
KECHI BEG  
ISPELINJI SITES  
TOGAU

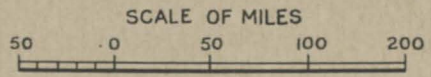
SITES IN BIKANER STATE

KALAT  
SURAB  
SIAH DAMB  
ANJIRA  
JUDEIRJO-DARO

SITES IN BAHAWALPUR STATE

NAL  
MEHI  
ORNACH  
MOHENJO-DARO  
KHUZDAR  
ROHRI (ALOR)  
KOT-DIJI

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES IN WEST PAKISTAN



SHAHI TUMP  
KULLI  
NUNDARA  
SEHWAN  
CHANHU-DARO  
AMRI  
BRAHMANABAD (MANSURA)  
HYDERABAD (NIRUN)

ANCIENT SITES . . . . . ●  
MODERN CITIES . . . . . □

A R A B I A N S E A

KARACHI  
THATTA  
BANBHORE





THE site of Banbhore\* is situated on the northern bank of the Gharo Creek, about 40 miles east of Karachi on the highway to Hyderabad. Excavation work started here in March, 1958. Since then, it has been resumed yearly for about four months in each winter and is likely to continue for a number of years before a complete picture of the ancient settlement may be revealed.

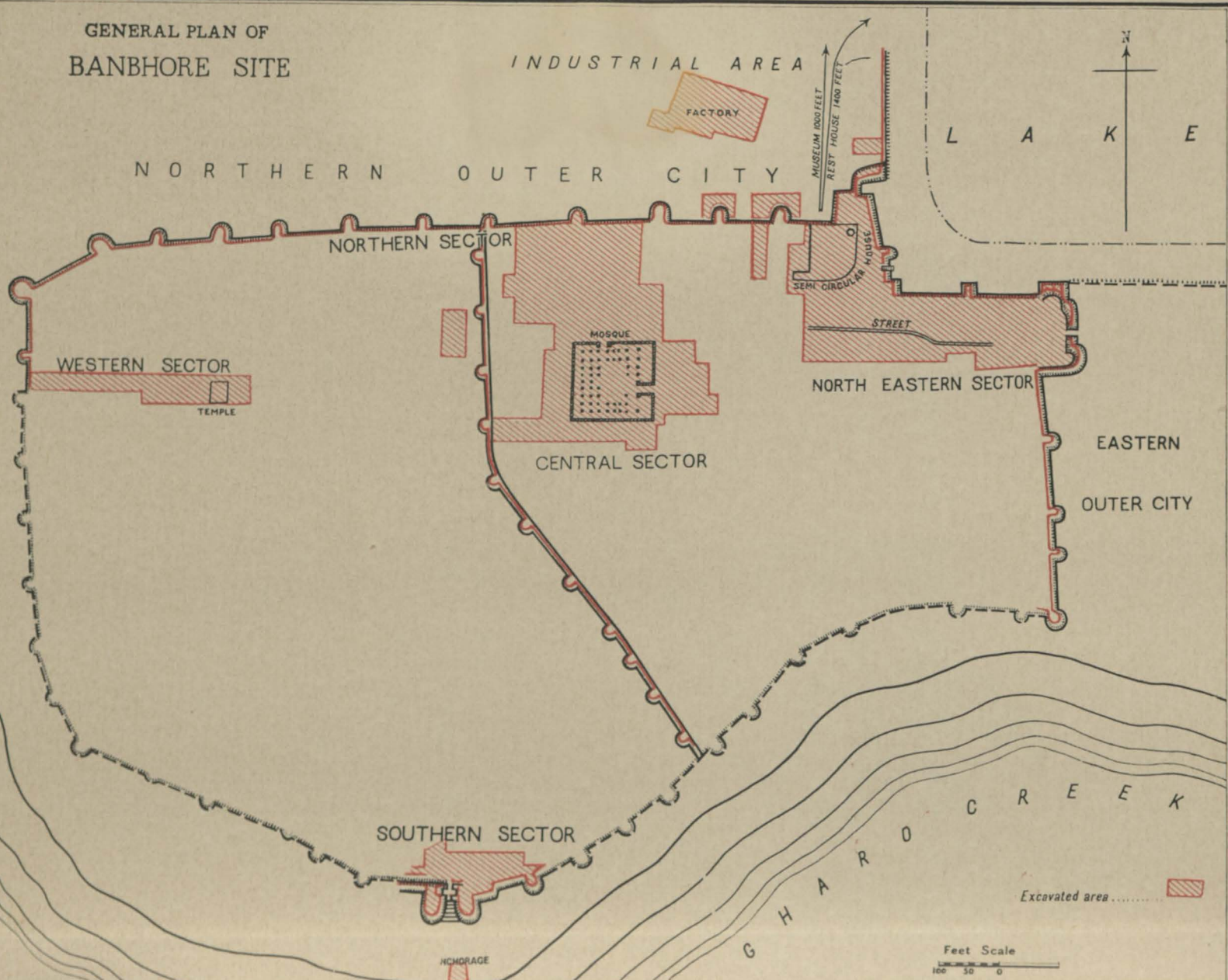
The site conceals the remains of a settlement of considerable size. It is divided into two parts: a well-fortified citadel area measuring over 2000 feet from east to west and 1200 feet from north to south, and an outer un-walled city extending over a large area on the north and east round an ancient lake. This latter part includes an industrial area and an ancient graveyard on its outskirts.

Lying on the mouth of an old channel of the mighty Indus, the site is ideally situated to have been an inland port of some importance. Some archaeological scholars and historians have suggested its identification with DEBAL, the famous port which fell to the young Arab General Muhammad-bin-Qasim in 712 A.C. The incident which led to this first conquest of Islam in the sub-continent is this:

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\*Though the site is more familiarly known as Bhambore, the Department prefers to retain its correct Sindhi name as introduced by Shah Abdul Latif.

GENERAL PLAN OF  
BANBHORE SITE

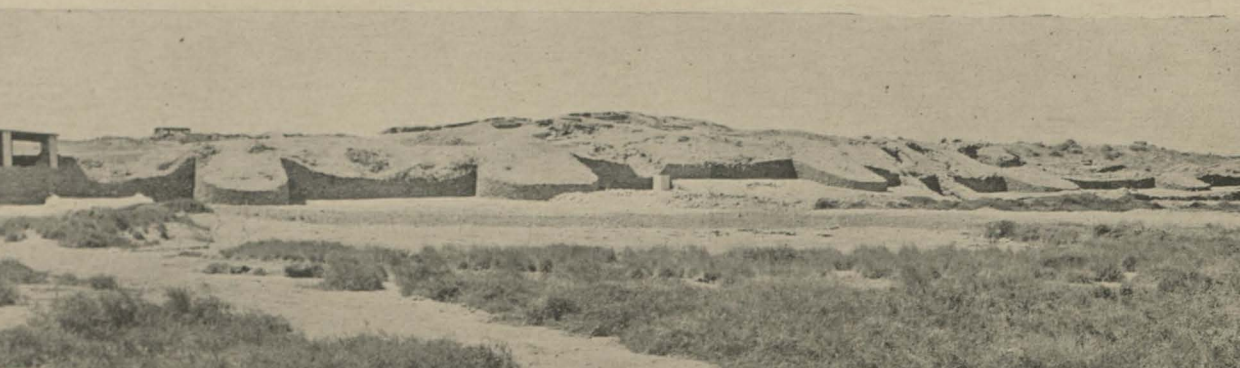


A few Arab ships carrying Muslim ladies and also some presents from the King of Ceylon to the Caliph were robbed while anchored at Debal. Similar incidents occurred before, and Arab shipping in the coastal area was very much disturbed by the local pirates. Failing to get any redress for such outrages from the ruling king Dahir, Hajjaj-bin-Yusuf, the Governor of the Eastern provinces of the Umayyad Caliphate, sent two small punitive expeditions which were not successful. The third one under Muhammad bin-Qasim entered Dahir's Kingdom after crossing the Hab river, and gave a shattering blow to his power at Debal in 712 A.C. Within three years the whole country of Sind was conquered and Muslim rule was firmly established here. New Arab cities like *Nirun*, *Alor*, *Sehwan*, *Mansura*, *Mahfuza* etc., grew up, all of which have been identified except Debal.

The primary purpose of the present investigations at this site has been to determine the origin of the settlement as well as to reveal something of the life and culture of the early Muslim settlers who arrived in Sind in the beginning of the 8th century A.C. The results achieved during the last five seasons digging here from 1958 to 1962 are significant and interesting.

The excavations have revealed the plan of a well-fortified harbour-town of considerable size with some details of art, architecture and a wealth of material objects of early-Islamic period. The large pottery collection in particular has enabled the excavators to study and classify for the first time the early-Islamic pottery of the sub-continent which is expected to serve as a dependable basis for further investigations in this field. Deep diggings at half a dozen points have provided an almost complete cross-section of the mound from top to bottom, revealing the remains of three distinct periods—the Scytho-Parthian, Hindu-Buddhist and early-Islamic—datable from the 1st Century B.C.—to 13th century A.C.

*General view of the Citadel Defences*





*Deep Diggings*

### **Origin of the Settlement**

The site of Banbhore was known to the archaeologists for a long time and was visited by a few of them who collected surface finds from it. Attempts had been made first in 1930 by the late Mr. N.G. Majumdar and again in 1951 by Mr. Leslie Alcock to determine the origin of the settlement. Mr. Majumdar, who dug a few trial trenches in different parts of the site, was of the opinion that the settlement was substantially of one period and that there was no evidence of any pre-Muslim occupation there. Mr. Alcock, who was an officer in the Department of Archaeology in Pakistan, undertook preliminary excavations on the mound in 1951. His investigations showed that the town which flourished at this spot in ancient times was of Arab origin and that there was nothing to identify it with Debal. The antiquities which he recovered from the excavations were of Islamic character, and no cultural

material of Hindu-Buddhist origin was observed even in the lowest levels to suggest that there had ever been any settlement at this place before the advent of the Muslims. Earlier still, Henry Cousens had visited the site and collected some coins, pieces of glazed pottery and other objects from the surface, but he too did not find any trace of Hindu-Buddhist culture there.

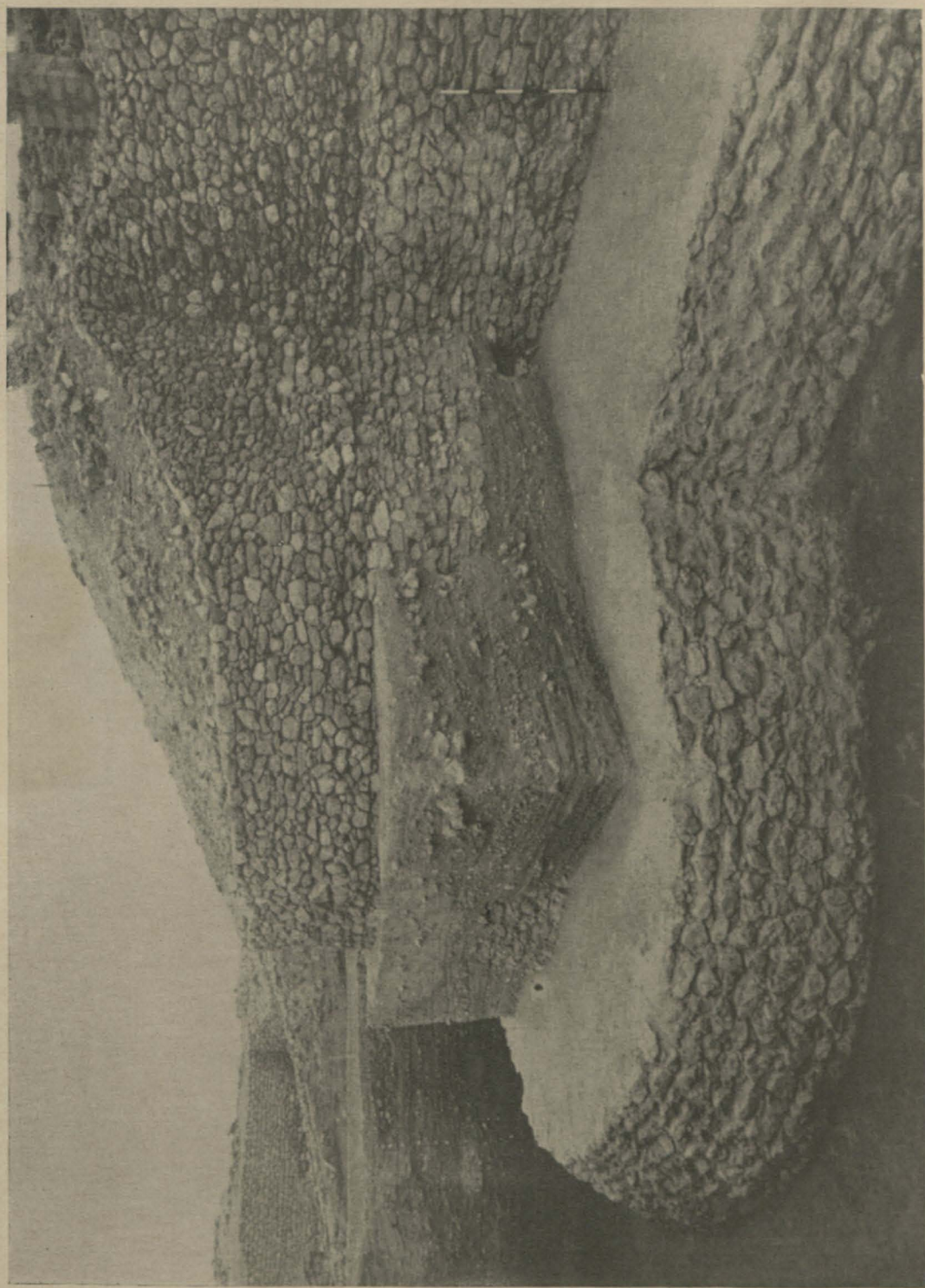
In the face of such formidable evidence against the identification, a re-examination of the site was undertaken by the present excavator only on the conviction that the previous investigations were incomplete and limited in nature and that a thorough and systematic investigation is necessary before giving any final verdict on it. Fortunately, the results have been extremely rewarding.

### ISLAMIC PERIOD

In the present excavations, extensive remains of the Muslim period have been unearthed in different parts of the site in the upper levels of occupation, which appear to have lasted from the 8th to 13th centuries A.C. Though there is no cultural break during this long period, four distinct phases corresponding roughly with the four building periods of the city

*Diggings outside the Mosque*





*A Bastion in the Citadel Fortifications*

defences are clearly traceable. On the basis of ceramic studies and datable evidence, they may reasonably be assigned to the following periods:—

- i. The Umayyad period (661 A.C.—750 A.C.), during which the stone-built fortification wall was originally built. It is associated with decorated White Paste Pottery and Sasanian-type heavy blue-green glazed ware.
- ii. The Abbasid period (750 A.C.—1258 A.C.) associated with a major repair of the fortifications and continuing only upto 10th century A.C. A variety of splashed, mottled, slip-painted and inscribed lead glazed wares were introduced during this period.
- iii. The Sultanate period (998 A.C.—1524 A.C.), in which the fortification wall was rebuilt on a slightly reduced scale. It is distinguished by the introduction of Sgraffiato glazed wares and imported Chinese porcelain and celadons.
- iv. The last phase is represented by the scanty remains of the top-most settlement of 13th century A.C., confined only to the eastern half of the mound by a weak and shoddy defence wall. The large harbour town appears to have declined and been reduced to a small military outpost by that time.

### **Fortification Wall**

Of the Islamic period building remains, the most impressive is the fortification wall which girdles round the citadel mound. Its existing height is 19 feet. Excavations on its outer face have revealed four building periods and repair intervals.

The original fortification wall was built with large and heavy blocks of semi-dressed and undressed lime stone set in mud mortar and strengthened by large semi-circular bastions at regular intervals. It was supported by a solid stone revetment at the base. This early wall, characterized by massive solidity and strength, undoubtedly suggests a period of consolidation and prosperity.

The defence wall underwent a major repair in the early-Abbasid period, but there was no change in its shape and size. The stones used in the solid filling of the core were, however, replaced by mud-bricks. Subsequently, at



*The Southern Gate*

the end of about 10th century A.C., the fortifications were rebuilt on the same plan, but on a slightly reduced scale, at the back of the original wall. It is less-massive and less-solid in character, and has two faces lined with smaller stone blocks set in mud mortar. The core was filled up with mud bricks or more often with hard and compact gritty soil only. At places, this later period wall was pierced through by narrow lanes, and residential houses were also built against it, which must have reduced its defensive character.

The last period wall which encircles the eastern half of the mound only, has two stone-lined thin faces, the core being filled up with grey or sandy soil. It has very shallow foundations and is characterized by weak and shoddy character. It appears to have been raised hastily in a period of disturbance after the decline of the city in the 13th century A.C. to serve the purpose of a small military outpost only. By that time the river had already shifted its course.



## City Gates

So far, three gateways of the citadel have been uncovered. The Eastern Gateway overlooking the lower city and connecting the citadel with the ancient lake on its north-eastern corner by a flight of badly preserved broad steps, appears to have been used mainly for the supply of drinking water to the city reservoir which lies just beside it. Its broad steps indicate the probable use of pack animals for water carrying purposes.

The other two gateways with flights of finely dressed large stone blocks are well-preserved and impressive. The North-eastern Corner Gateway connects a palatial house of semi-circular shape with the lake, probably for the exclusive use of the inmates of that house. Its breadth is 10 feet. In later times this entrance was blocked by stone and earth filling. The front of this gateway was paved with large, thin stone slabs, at the foot of which lies the stone embankment, pierced by a well-preserved staircase with 17 treads of dressed lime stone blocks descending down to the lake-bed. They show much wear and tear.

The Southern Gateway overlooking the Creek is an imposing structure. It is flanked by two solidly built semi-circular bastions, and at its back lies an entrance hall of extra-ordinarily solid and massive character. Its entrance

*The North-eastern Gate*



is 8 feet wide and its broad steps of well-dressed stones are exceptionally well-preserved. They lead down to the anchorage on the bank of the Creek which once carried the waters of the Indus. This well-guarded entrance appears to have been the main gate of the port. It is connected with the centre of the city by a wide street flanked by warehouses.

#### **Anchorage**

The structure which now lies half-submerged in water on the bank of the Creek in front of the Southern Gate, has solid and deep stone foundations and a broad terrace-like water front. In this terrace were set a few long stone blocks with grooved and rounded heads which look like bollards. These might have been used for berthing cargo-laden river boats or small sea crafts. The structure is therefore presumed to have been an anchorage. Unfortunately, it has been very badly damaged by the tidal Creek which makes it difficult to examine its character more closely.

#### **Lake and embankment**

At the foot of the citadel mound on the north-eastern corner lies an ancient lake of considerable size, which has silted up gradually during these long centuries. It used to collect drinking water from the rain water channels. Excavations have revealed a solidly built stone embankment along its banks, and also at the foot of the early fortification wall, built for the purpose of strengthening and protecting them from the depredations of water and floods. More than 450 feet of this embankment has been cleared so far.

*Lake and Citadel*



The embankment appears to have served also as the perimeter wall of the outer city. There are traces of repairs and rebuildings, as indicated by the use of larger rough stone blocks in the lower courses and smaller semi-dressed stone blocks in the upper courses of this structure. There are also some traces of offsets and landing stages at places which, at the water front, could have served as bathing 'ghats'.

### Outer City

The unwallled outer city which centered round the lake extended far beyond. Traces of ancient remains have been observed more than a mile away from it on the northern and eastern sides. Though it was not possible to trace the limits of the settlement by excavations, the deep trench dug during the course of laying the Greater Karachi Water Supply Pipe Line was incidentally helpful.

Excavations in the eastern outer city at the foot of the citadel mound were limited to the areas of a long barrier-like wall and a few large circular wells lined with solidly-constructed stone masonry. These wells presumably occupy the sites of ancient sweet water springs, on which the settlement must have depended for drinking water when the lake water occasionally failed. A few such springs with traces of ancient structures have been discovered on the outskirts of the settlement. They are in use even now. The ancient graves lie scattered on the top and base of the eastern low mounds in this sector.



### **Industrial Area**

Limited excavations in the northern part of the outer city just outside the citadel defences have revealed interesting structural remains and significant evidences. They strongly indicate that the settlement had an industrial area quite ideally located here on the bank of the lake under the shadow of the fortification wall, and yet free from its restrictions. The remains include a partially uncovered establishment with a large hall and a spacious corner room, arranged systematically with rows of heavy-textured large earthenware troughs with pointed base fixed on the floor, and a row of small rooms in the front. It appears to have been connected with some sort of industry. In one of the front rooms with intensely burnt and blackened lime-plastered floor and walls, there are traces to indicate that something liquid used to be prepared here in pots with intense heat. Three such pots with effects of fire are still now preserved in three corners of the room. The plan of this large factory has been partially cleared.

Similar rows of earthenware troughs have been uncovered just outside the fortification wall, and large concentrations of them have been observed at a number of places in this outer area, which suggest that it was a popular industry here. Incidentally, Debal was known to have flourishing dyeing factories. Were these remains connected with such an industry? We do not know yet.

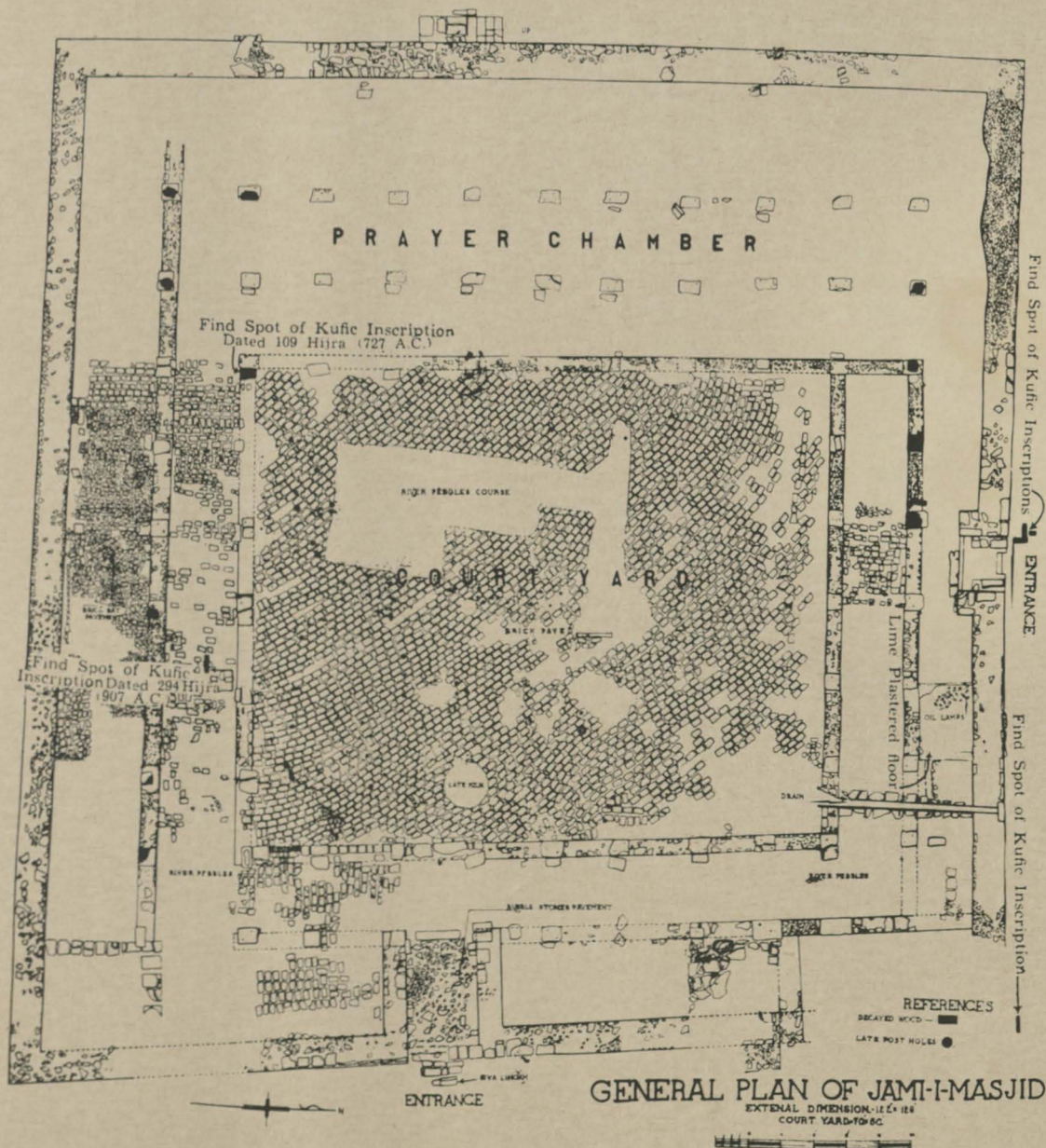
Another partially uncovered large building at the foot of the north eastern corner bastion has revealed traces of kilns, crucible fragments, ashes and charcoal pieces, kiln slag, iron slag, iron bearing heavy black stone pieces, and a variety of iron objects. It appears to have been a black-smith's workshop. A small mound further north of it with a concentration of ashes, charcoal, kiln slag and glass pieces appears to indicate the site of an ancient glass factory.

### **THE GRAND MOSQUE**

The most important and significant building discovered inside the fortified citadel is the Grand Mosque, which lies at the centre of the ancient settlement. Two of the dated inscriptions found inside this structure make it the earliest known mosque of the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent.

It was built on a more or less square plan measuring 120 feet by 122 feet, with a comparatively well-preserved outer wall of solid stone masonry, 3 to 4 feet wide. Finely dressed lime stone blocks were used in the construction of the walls. A brick-laid open courtyard in the centre measures 75 feet by 58 feet.

The mosque had covered-cloisters and corridors on three sides with roofs supported on double rows of wooden pillars. Excavated remains indicate that these cloisters were divided into small rooms with the



average measurement of 11 feet by 9 feet each. On the fourth side, that is western side, there is a spacious prayer chamber, the roof being supported on 33 pillars arranged in three rows. The stone bases of these pillars both in the prayer chamber and in the cloisters and corridors are in good condition. They were found covered with decayed and charred remains of wood which, together with the clay impressions of carved wood observed in the area, strongly support the view that these pillars were actually of carved wooden columns.

Some of the stone bases show interesting carved ornamentation. A number of such carved stone blocks were found re-used in different parts of the mosque walls as well as in other structures. They seem to have come from some important pre-Muslim building.

Interesting features inside the mosque include a thick lime-plastered ablution platform near the north-eastern corner. It appears to have been used in the last period as a store room for earthenware oil lamps, a heap of which are still now lying on the floor. A solidly constructed large stone drain near this platform was apparently meant for ablution purposes as well as for draining out the rain water from the open courtyard. A number of fragmentary ablution pots have been recovered from this drain.

The mosque had two main entrances on the eastern and northern sides and one minor entrance on the western side, connected with a small descending stair-case outside. The eastern entrance appears to have been the principal one, but unfortunately, it is in a bad state of preservation. It is  $5\frac{1}{2}$  feet wide and was provided with an entrance porch and a flight of three steps. Near this entrance, inside the mosque, were found pieces of a large inscription in ornamental Kufic script.

*A re-used carved stone piece*





A re-used carved stone base in the Mosque

The northern entrance is comparatively better-preserved. It was originally seven feet wide and was also provided with a flight of steps. On the inner side of this gate, there are clear traces of a wooden door-frame and threshold with iron nails fixed in position on pieces of decayed wood. A large number of finely carved and inscribed stone slabs were found lying on both sides of the entrance. They definitely once embellished the front wall.

No *Mehrab* is traceable in the western wall which was found in broken and damaged condition. The ground plan of the mosque without this feature strongly resembles those of the Jami Masjid of Kufa and Wasit dated 670 A.C. and 702 A.C. respectively. Like those instances, this feature was probably not yet introduced in this mosque architecture also. Borrowed from Byzantine architecture, this innovation is known to have been introduced for the first time in the rebuilding of the Prophet's Mosque at Medina in 707—709 A.C. during the Caliphate of Walid I.

Deep diggings in the streets along the boundary wall of the mosque revealed four clear periods of building of the mosque, corresponding with the four successive floor levels inside and street levels outside. The earliest

structure, an extraordinarily solid and well-built one, is assignable to the 8th century A.C. on the basis of stratigraphical evidence. The last period is datable to 13th century A.C.

### KUFIC INSCRIPTIONS

Of the discoveries made inside the mosque area, the most important and significant are the Kufic inscriptions carved on dressed stone slabs, 13 of which have so far been recovered. Two of them are dated 109 A.H. (727 A.C.) and 294 A.H. (907 A.C.) respectively. It is significant to point out that the date of the conquest of Debal is not very far from the date of the construction of the mosque as indicated by the first inscription. Unfortunately, the dated portion of the inscription is in a bad state of preservation and the reading is not absolutely certain. The second inscription in three slabs in floriated Kufic is a masterpiece of calligraphy. Its date of 294 A.H. probably does not indicate the last rebuilding of the mosque. Some of these inscriptions mention the names of the reigning Caliphs and their local governors, and there are other informations of great historical significance too. They are still under study. The text of the two larger inscriptions is given below with translation :—

(i)

(i) بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

(ii) مِمَّا اَمْرَبَهُ الْاَمِیْرُ مَرْوٰنُ (؟) بِنِ مُحَمَّدِ مَوْلٰی اَمِیْرِ الْمُؤْمِنِیْنَ اَعَزَّهُ (vi) اللّٰهُ عَلٰی

یَدِیْ عَلِیِّ بْنِ مُوسٰی (؟) مَوْلٰی اَمِیْرِ (v) الْمُؤْمِنِیْنَ اَكْرَمَهُ اللّٰهُ سَنَهٗ "تَسْعَ وِ مِائَتِهِ" (؟)

#### Translation

In the name of Allah, the Benevolent, the Merciful. What *Amir Marwan (?) ibn-Muhammad Mawla Amirul Muminin*, may Allah make him glorious, ordered about it's (erection) through the agency of *Ali ibn-Musa (?) Mawla Amirul Muminin*, may Allah make him illustrious, in the year 109 A.H. i.e. 727—28 A.C. (?)

(ii)

(i) بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ لَا اِلٰهَ اِلَّا اللّٰهُ (وَحْدَهُ) وَاِنَّ مُحَمَّدًا رَسُوْلُهُ وَعِبْدُهُ (ii) اِنَّمَا

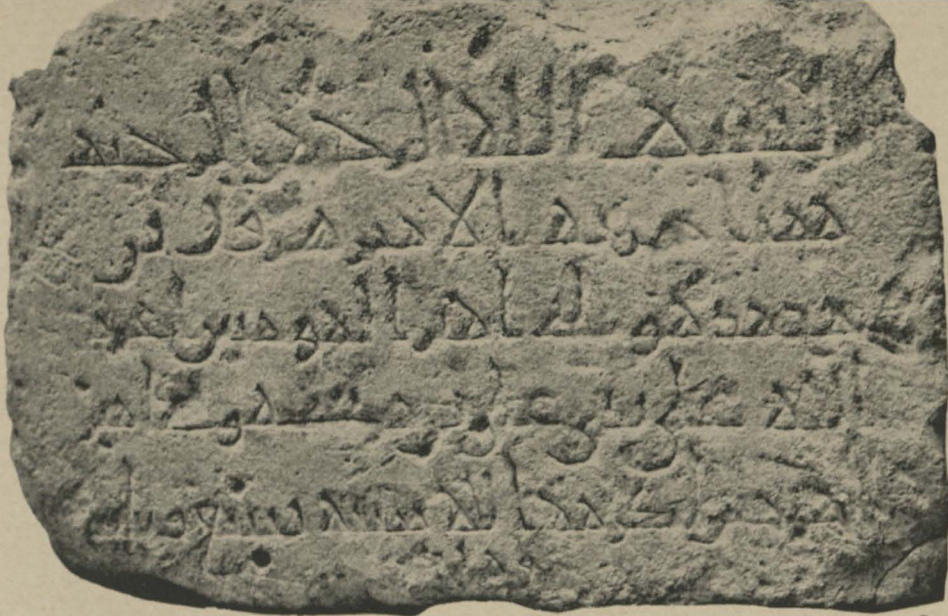
یَعْمُرُ مَسَاجِدَ اللّٰهِ مِنْ اَمْنٍ بِاللّٰهِ وَ الْیَوْمِ الْاٰخِرِ وَاَقَامَ (الصَّلٰوَةَ وَاَتَى الْا) لِرِزْقَاةِ

وَلَمْ یَخْشَ اِلَّا اللّٰهُ فَعَسَا (اَوْلٰئِكَ)

(iii) اِنْ یَكُوْنُوْا مِنْ الْمُهْتَدِیْنَ هٰذَا مِمَّا اَمْرًا بِتَنْصِبِهِ الْاَمِیْرُ مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ عَبْدِ الرَّ (فی ذی)

الْقَعْدَةِ (؟) سَهٗ اَرْبَعٍ وَ تَسْعِیْنِ وَ مِائَتَیْنِ





*Kufic inscription (i)*

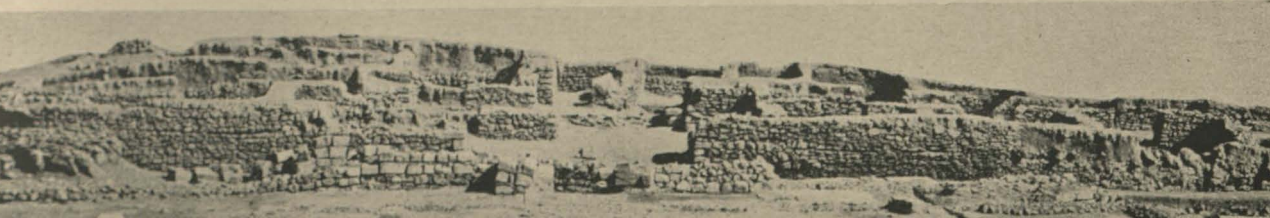
### Translation

In the name of Allah, the most Gracious, the most Merciful. There is no God but Allah alone and verily Muhammad is His Messenger and Servant. He only inhabits Mosques of Allah who believes in Allah, offers prayers and pays *Zakat* and fears none but Allah; so it may be that they are the followers of right path. This is what *Amir Muhammad ibn-Abdu(?)* has ordered about its erection in (*Dhu'l Qadah?*) in the year 294 A.H. i.e., 906 A.C.

### Public Buildings

On the north side of the Grand Mosque, an imposing building of very large size is thought to be either the attached Maktab (College) or an important administrative building. It has an impressive gateway and entrance hall facing the northern gate of the Mosque and a number of long and broad inner corridors with rows of rooms formally arranged on both sides of them. It also has deep stone foundations and thick mud-brick super structures, coated with greyish mud plaster. A similarly large mud brick house of 'E' shape on the eastern side of the Mosque might have been the attached *Sarai*. Very few household objects were found in these buildings.

*The Northern House*



*Baked-brick House*



A remarkable structure in the north-eastern corner of the citadel is the stone built palatial building of semi-circular shape which was provided with solid massive walls, lime plastered floors, a fine stepped entrance, a large circular well with an attached drain inside, and a number of covered soak pits outside. It is connected with the lake by a fine gateway. Significant datable evidence of early-Muslim occupation has come from this building. Another massive mud-brick house in the northern sector with unusually thick walls and deep stone foundations also belongs to this early period.

Baked brick houses are rare. Only one large house in the northern sector has been uncovered so far. It has a thick lime plastered floor on which a gold coin of Abbasid Caliph Wasiq Billah (842 A.C.—847 A.C.) was discovered. A number of soak pits in the back yard are associated with it.

### **Residential Quarters**

Extensive remains of residential buildings of the Muslim period have been exposed in different parts of the mound. From a study of the excavated remains it is evident that the city was well-planned. The houses were arranged formally round central courtyards and the residential sectors were divided into blocks, separated by well-oriented streets and lanes. Well-to-do people constructed their houses with semi-dressed stone blocks

and occasionally also with square-sized burnt bricks, and plastered the walls and floors with lime. Ordinary houses were built of mud bricks on stone foundations and the walls were coated with fine mud plaster. But lime plaster was also used. There are traces to indicate that large sized thin brick-tiles and long wooden beams were used in the construction of roofs. The average height of the buildings, judging from the fallen material and thickness of walls, were 10-12 feet. There are clear indications of extensive re-use of earlier materials, particularly of finely dressed and carved stones, throughout the Muslim period.

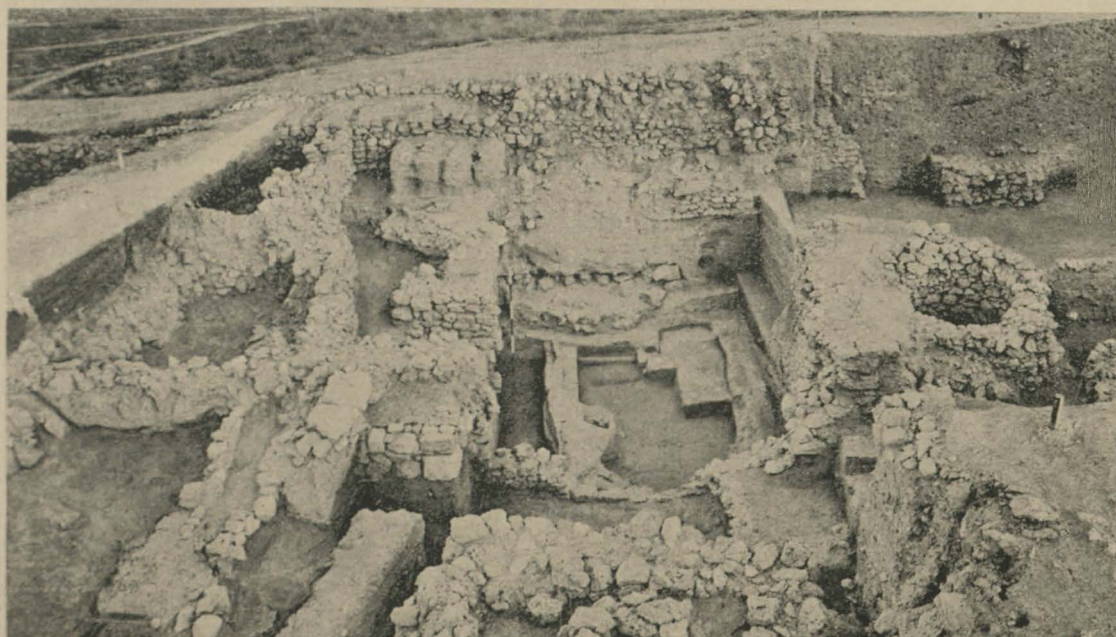
### HINDU-BUDDHIST PERIOD

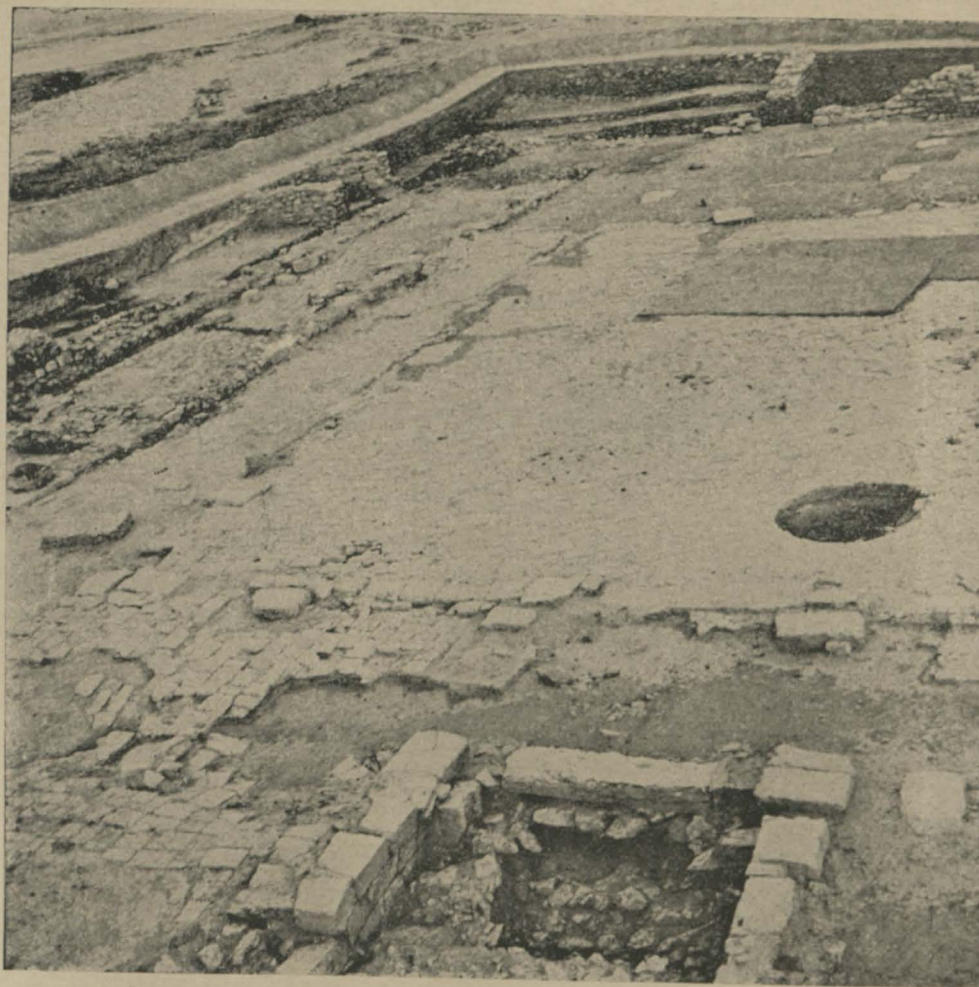
Immediately below the Islamic period levels, the present excavations have revealed unmistakable evidence of pre-Muslim occupations which includes structural remains and cultural material of great interest and significance. The cultural break at this level is a sudden and almost complete one, and no material of undoubted Islamic origin was observed below, though Hindu-Buddhist material continued to exist in the later period also.

#### The Temple

The most interesting building uncovered in the Pre-Muslim levels is a Siva Temple in the western part of the citadel. It has thick mud-brick walls covered with several coats of red paint on lime plaster, an ornamental

*Excavations in the Temple area.*





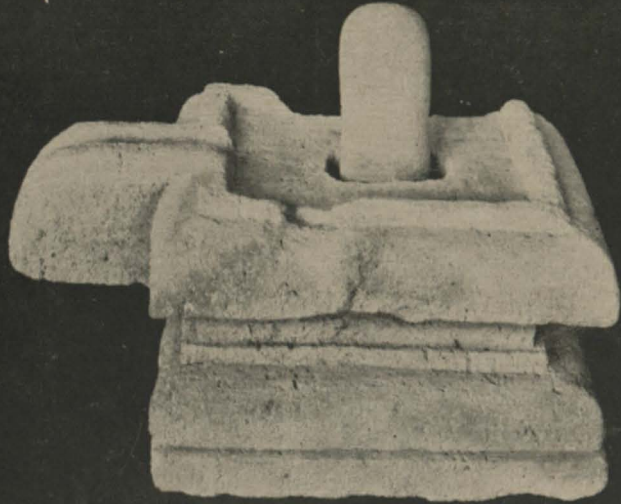
The Grand Mosque





Kufic inscription (ii)





Votive Siva Lingam  
with yuni and Pedestal



1



2

pedestal, also thickly coated with lime plaster, and other architectural decorations. A considerable area round the temple is covered by a fine concrete floor decorated with sea-shell. The plan of the temple is yet to be cleared fully after removing the superimposed building remains of later period from the area.

Near the pedestal, which was probably meant for a large deity, two votive Siva Lingams—one complete with *Yuni* and pedestal—were found lying on the floor. This is an unmistakable evidence of Hindu occupation of the site. It may be mentioned here that a number of large monolithic Siva Lingams have been recovered from other parts of the site as well, and this cult appears to have been popular in the period immediately before the advent of the Muslims.



3



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### Pre-Muslim Cultural Material

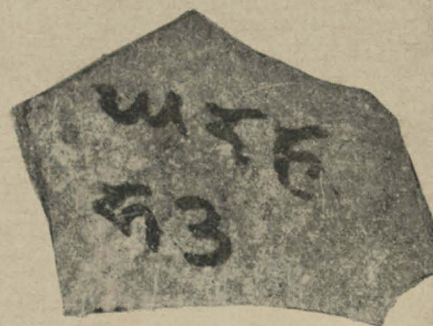
A variety of interesting objects have been recovered from these pre-Muslim levels which include terracotta figurines, both human and animal, fragments of stone sculpture, and fine ceramic specimens. A moulded terracotta female head with well-developed features and peculiar head-dress is interesting; it stands out as a class by itself in superiority of technique and execution.

A large collection of plain, painted, stamped and moulded pottery has been made from these stratified levels. It includes pieces of storage jars bearing short inscriptions in proto-Nagari style of 8th century A.C. They record measurements of weight, now difficult to identify. The inscriptions were written on the body of the pot by hand with ordinary writing ink, thus indicating its local character.

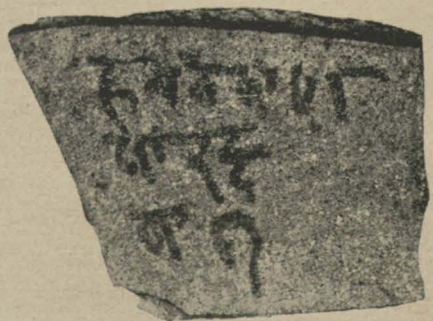
- 1—2. *Terracotta female heads*
- 3—4. *Moulded potsherds*
- 5—6. *Stone sculpture fragments*
- 7. *Pottery mould*
- 8. *Moulded potsherd*
- 9—11. *Inscribed pottery*



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Other interesting finds include a large number of pottery moulds with geometric-cum-floral patterns and human or animal representations. One mould depicts a dancing couple in typical pre-Muslim style, while another depicts a frieze of elephants with sun-flower. Mention must also be made of the Sassanian type of decorated wares with friezes of relief birds and animals within dotted circles, recovered from levels just below the early-Muslim settlements.

### SCYTHO—PARTHIAN PERIOD

A major development in the search for the origin of Banbhore site has been an unexpected discovery, which takes the history of the settlement right down to the beginning of the Christian era, and possibly much earlier. Diggings in the water-logged lower levels at a depth of 25 to 30 feet from surface have revealed cultural material of the Scytho-Parthian period datable from 1st century B.C. to 2nd century A.C. It consists of a type of finely polished and burnished pottery with bright red or dark brown smooth surface which undoubtedly represents an imitation of the Greek pottery. Its principal forms consist of delicate vessels (*kuzas*) with vertically pierced narrow neck and perforated chin-spouts, and large goblets. Similar high-necked vessels with chin-spouts have been unearthed by Sir John Marshall from the 1st century B.C.—A.C. levels of Bhir Mound at Taxila. There are abundant comparable materials from sites in India such as *Rang Mahal* in Bikaner State and *Pitalkhora* in Aurangabad District and many other sites in north-western Pakistan and Afghanistan, which make it possible to fix the date of these levels on sound basis.

The Scythians or Sakas—as they are more familiarly known—came from Persia and overran all the Greek principalities including the territories of

Scytho—Parthian Pottery





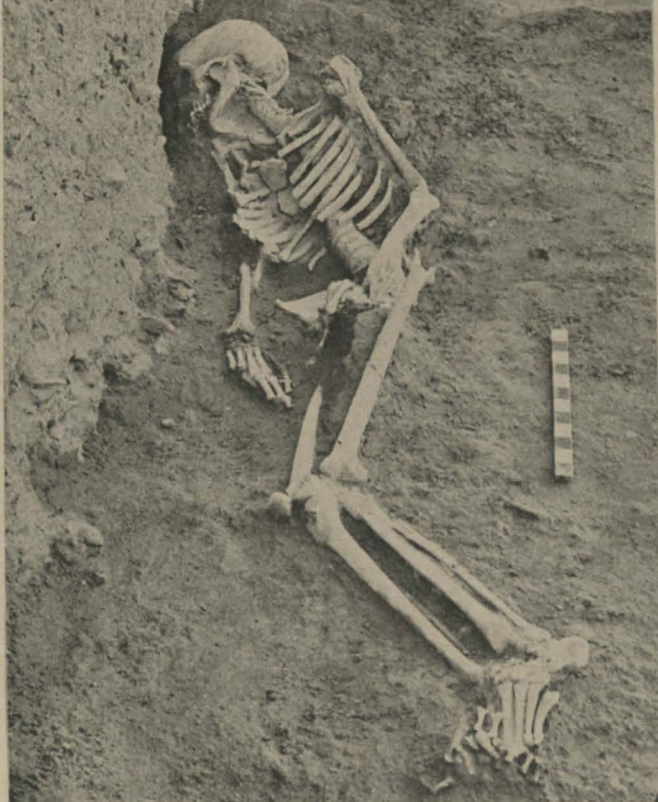
southern Afghanistan and north-western frontier regions of Pakistan in the 1st century B.C. They however retained the Greek system of administration. They were supplanted in the 1st century A.C. by the Parthians whose empire embraced southern parts of Afghanistan, the fertile green valleys of Peshawar, Swat and Dir, and the territories of the Punjab, Sind and Seistan. The Scytho-Parthians appear to have adopted Buddhism as their religion, but in art and culture they were strikingly Hellenistic.

The discovery of Scytho-Parthian cultural remains at Banbhore, therefore, opens a new chapter in our ancient history. Because, this is the first time that archaeological evidence of this culture has come to light near the Arabian sea coast. And who knows that below these levels under the sub-soil water, *Alexander's Harbour* itself may not be lying hidden. The great warrior is said to have divided his forces there for the final homeward journey. At present it is difficult to investigate these under-water levels with success.

#### THE END OF BANBHORE

The settlements at Banbhore appear to have come to an end in the 12th or 13th century A.C. partly due to the shifting of the river and partly on account of a violent disturbance which has left its mark all over the site. In different parts of the excavations, a large number of human skeletons have been unearthed, lying scattered inside the houses or on the streets in a disorderly manner, some with iron arrow-heads embedded in them. The floors on which they lie are thickly covered with ashes and charcoal. The intensely





*Human Skeleton  
(13th Century A.C.)*

burnt bricks and stones fallen from the original structures also strongly suggest a great disturbance. They were evidently set on fire and scorched red, probably by some invaders during an invasion or a civil war. Otherwise, it is difficult to believe that dead bodies were buried inside residential quarters and on the street in peace time when there was a regular burial ground, not very far.

In this context, it may be interesting to mention here that Jalaluddin Khwarezm Shah is known to have invaded Sind and conquered a number of important towns in the coastal area in the middle of 13th century A.C. He is said to have caused the final destruction of Debal.

### **POTTERY**

During the last five years' excavations at Banbhore, enormous quantities of pottery have been recovered from the 1st century B.C. levels of the Scytho-Parthian period to the 13th century A.C. levels of the Muslim period. Major portion of this collection belongs to this last period. It has provided an

opportunity for study and classification, for the first time, of Islamic pottery of this sub-continent. It consists of a large variety of plain, painted, stamped, incised and moulded pottery and a fine collection of early Islamic glazed wares.

### Umayyad Pottery

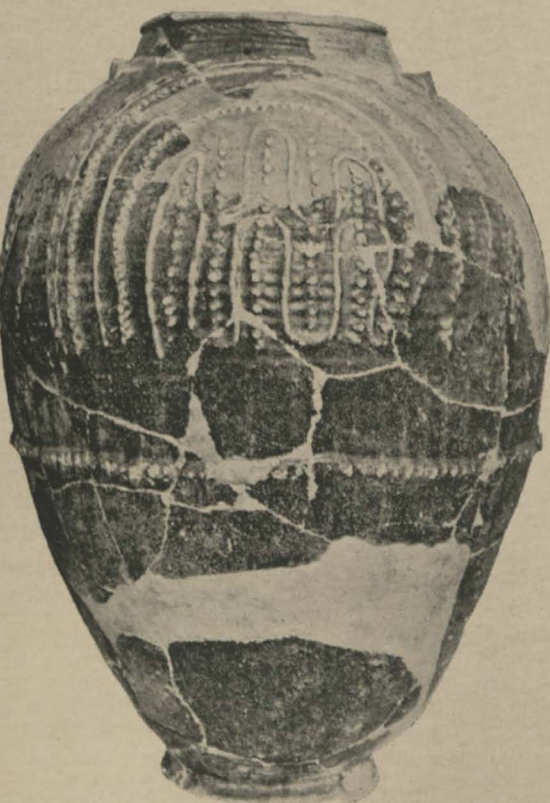
From the early-Muslim occupation levels comes a very distinct type of light and thin-textured moulded pottery with finely executed floral-cum-geometric patterns and Kufic inscriptions in relief, often with additional applied or incised decorations. It is an unglazed ware made of a whitish paste, not observed in this country before the Arab invasion. It was apparently imported from Syria where it is known to have been made during the Umayyad times.

The collection of this ware includes a number of fine specimens. Of particular interest is a small handled cup bearing a Kufic couplet. A similar specimen was recovered from the excavations at Susa in south-western Iran, now preserved in the Louvre Museum, Paris.

Glazed pottery vessels recovered from the early levels show strong Persian influence. Large heavy-textured alkaline glazed Jars coated with a thick glass like blue-green glaze and decorated with floral patterns, bunches of grapes, creepers, and a combination of horizontal and curved lines and bands in high relief on the body, are of Sassanian origin. An identical early-Islamic specimen showing the typical characteristics was recovered from Susa and is now preserved in Paris. This type persisted to the later periods also and several of them were found in the upper levels. But the glaze became gradually less thick and less bright, and its glass like transparency was lost.

*Inscribed handled cup:  
White-paste Pottery*





Blue-green glazed jar

### Abbasid And Later Pottery

The Persian influence in the culture of Banbhore became predominant during the Abbasid and later periods. This feature is most markedly manifest in the ceramic products. Glazed pottery of this period in particular closely resembles Persian material of the 9th to 11th centuries A. C. It includes specimens of slip-painted, splashed and mottled lead glazed vessels as well as delicately painted tin glazed and lustre glazed wares of 9th to 11th century. Some of them bear Arabic inscriptions in different decorative styles. Resemblance with the 9th-10th century specimens from Nishapur is quite striking.

But from the 11th to 13th centuries A.C., these glazed types were almost entirely replaced by a new one called *Sgraffiato*. Its decoration consists of under-glazed scratched ornamentations roughly resembling stylized Kufic script. There are abundant comparable material in Persia for fixing its date more or less absolutely. The archaeological value of this ware is therefore, significant. Its common forms are dishes, cups and bowls.

1—3. Inscribed glazed pottery

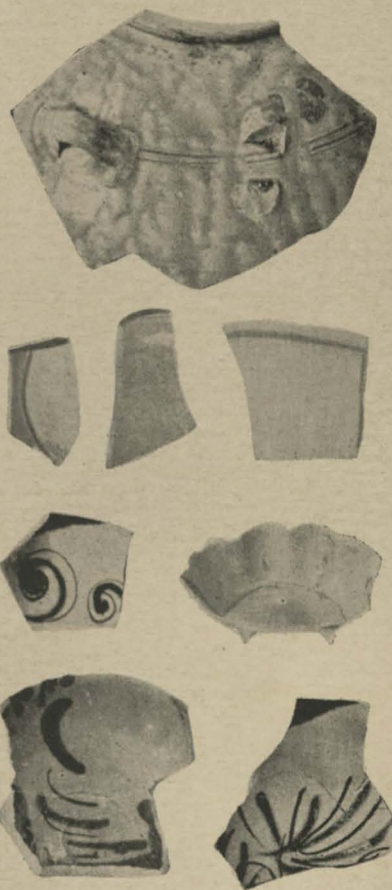


### Chinese Pottery

Imported Chinese Porcelain, Celadon and Stoneware vessels of T'ang period were introduced during the Abbasid times which continued upto the last days of the settlement. The specimens recovered from the excavations, though few in number, include some distinct types which offer an interesting study of their development. Among them a large stoneware storage jar with a Chinese letter on the shoulder, a few early type celadon pieces, and some finely painted stoneware bowls are worth mentioning.

### Unglazed Household Pottery

A large number of complete and semi-complete pots of various shapes and sizes of unglazed plain pottery of this period have been recovered. They also show Persian influence. The un-glazed painted pottery, particularly the thin-textured polychrome pottery, indicates a continuation of pre-Islamic artistic traditions. But it is inferior to the pre-Islamic polychrome wares both in fabric and in decorative technique. The painted designs include friezes of stylized ducks, water-fowls, cranes, fish, snakes, peacocks



Chinese Porcelain, Celadon and Stoneware of T'ang period

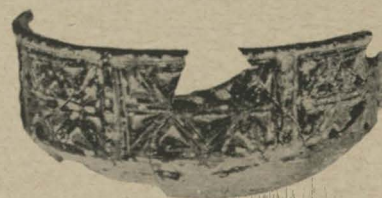
4—5. *Sgraffiato* glazed pottery

6—7. *Lead* glazed pottery

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*Household pottety: Muslim period*

with elaborate hachured tails, and stylized geometric patterns like the rising sun and a host of related motifs in black, red and dark brown colours on cream or dull red slip. The stylized birds are invariably shown against dotted background, and the painted designs were often combined with moulded geometric patterns in relief. The common form of this ware is a medium sized spouted vessel (*Kuza*).

Another interesting type which developed during the Islamic period

*Storage Jars : Muslim period*



is the grey pottery with hard, smooth, well-fired fabric and incised ornamentations. It is mostly represented by globular cooking pots of various sizes, but other forms such as knobbed lids, cups and bowls have also been observed.

### Pre-Islamic Pottery

No glazed pottery was observed below the Islamic levels. The principal types of pre-Islamic pottery consist of (i) a plain pottery of comparatively crude and rough type, (ii) polychrome pottery with finer fabric and ornamentation, (iii) a large variety of stamped and moulded wares, and (iv) the red burnished pottery from the earliest levels. The thin-textured polychrome pottery has been observed to overlap in the early-Islamic levels also. It has polished fabric with delicately painted geometric-cum-floral patterns or stylized bird and animal motifs in black, red, dark brown and yellowish colours over a cream slip. The interesting motifs include sun flower, lotus symbol, rising sun, friezes of peacocks with elongated tails, antelopes and fish.

A large number of stamped and moulded pottery has been recovered from the Hindu-Buddhist levels. The stamped designs are generally confined to geometric patterns only, while the moulded decorations consists of geometric-cum-floral patterns and also human, animal and bird representations in relief.

?  
Sassanian type  
moulded pottery





Muslim period  
painted pottery

A large number of pottery moulds have been recovered along with this pottery. They show a great variety of decorative patterns representing mostly floral designs, but there are other motifs also. A dancing couple and an elephant in naturalistic style deserve special mention.

An interesting class in the moulded group is the Sassanian type of pottery with friezes of relief animals and birds within dotted circles, arranged in a circular repeating pattern and executed in a highly naturalistic style. Its common form is represented by a medium sized spouted vessel (*Kuza*) with a narrow base and wide angular shoulder, on which the decorations were moulded.

?





*Pre-Muslim period painted pottery*

## COINS

Of the minor antiquities, the most important are the coins which have yielded valuable and significant datable evidence. They corroborate the evidence of inscriptions and other cultural material and serve as a basis for the reconstruction of chronological development of the site.

### Wasiq Billah's Gold Coin

A few thousands of coins have been recovered so far from the excavations. But unfortunately most of them are in a bad state of preservation. After chemical treatment some of the better preserved specimens were found decipherable. They include more than a hundred copper and two dozens of silver coins, and also a gold coin in a very good state of preservation. It belongs to the ninth Abbasid Caliph Abu Jaffar Harun-al-Wasiq Billah who ruled in Baghdad from 227 A.H. to 232 A.H. (842 A.C. to 847 A.C.) It was minted in Egypt in 229 A.H. (884 A.C.). This coin was discovered on the lime-plastered floor of a burnt brick house in the northern part of the citadel.

### Silver and Copper Coins

Of the large collection of silver and copper coins, only a small number has been successfully deciphered, the rest being still under study. The Banbhore coins are of two types: one is very thin and beautifully impressed with Arabic writing, partly inside a circle and partly around the rim. These coins belong mostly to the Caliphs of Baghdad or their local governors and were coined in the Caliph's own mints. They found their way to Sind either through trade or official imports for the provincial administration.

The other type, squat and dumpy and very much smaller in size, appears to have been locally produced on a mass scale by unskilled workmen. They are so much corroded and the inscriptions, coarsely and clumsily executed on them, are so fragmentary that it has not yet been possible to decipher them with success.

Preliminary studies of the better preserved and decipherable coins have yielded significant informations. Among them the following important coins deserve a special mention:—

1. Two silver coins of the sixth Umayyad Caliph al-Walid ibn Abd-al-Malik (705 A.C.—715 A.C.). Both of them bear the same date of 95 A.H.



1 cm.

Silver and copper coins

(713/14 A.C.), but two different mint names of *Taimurah* and *Ardashir Khurrah* respectively, in addition to the usual 'Kalima' and Quranic verses. Incidentally, it may be mentioned here that Debal was conquered by the Arabs under Muhammad bin Qasim during the reign of al-Walid I, and only a year earlier than the issue-date of this coin.

2. A silver coin of the tenth Umayyad Caliph Hisham bin Abd al-Malik (724 A.C.—743 A.C.). It is dated 124 A.H. (741/42 A.C.) and was minted from Wasit. The name of the Caliph has not been mentioned in this, and also in the above coins. This is not an unusual practice. In fact, Islamic coins prior to Hajjaj bin-Yusuf's time did not bear the names of the rulers. It became customary from the days of Abbasid rule only, probably as a measure to assert their right to the disputed Caliphate.

3. Three copper coins bearing the name of Hisham bin Amrw, a popular governor of the second Abbasid Caliph al-Mansur (754 A.C.—775 A.C.) in Sind from the year 768 A.C. to 773 A.C. The name of the mint and date is not clear, which initially led to a confusion of mixing up his name with that of the 10th Umayyad Caliph.

4. A silver coin of the seventh Abbasid Caliph al-Mamun (813 A.C.—833 A.C.), dated 196 A.H. (811/12 A.C.) and minted from Samarqand. Below the name of the Caliph, his two titles '*Amirul Muminin* and *al-Fadl*' are given. Since his elder brother al-Amin was assassinated in 198 A.H., he could not have been accepted as the undisputed *Amirul Muminin* before that year. The mention of this title is therefore intriguing. The other title refers to his renown as the possessor of two authorities—the pen and the sword.

5. A silver coin of the fifteenth Abbasid Caliph al-Mutamid Alallah (870 A.C.—892 A.C.). The badly defaced obverse of the coin where the date was given, shows only the last two number . . . 61 A.H. But since the name of the Caliph on the reverse is clear, it seems reasonable to read the date as 261 A.H. (874/75 A.C.). The name of the mint is not clear.

#### Pre-Islamic Coins

6. Only a very limited number of coins have been recovered from the pre-Islamic levels at Banbhore. Among them, the best preserved specimen

represents an Arab-Sassanian coin bearing, on the obverse, the bust of a typical Sassanian ruler and a short legend in Pahlevi, and on the reverse, a fire altar, mint name, and date in Yezdgird era. The mint name has been read as Marv and the date as 21 Y.E. (*Yajvist*) i.e. 32 A.H.

The most interesting fact about this coin is that the Pahlevi legend on the obverse has been superscribed by a Kufic line, 'Bismillah.' It is quite a known fact that Byzantine and Sassanian coins were in circulation throughout the Caliphate before the reign of Abdul Malik ibn-Marwan, sometimes with the insertion of only "Bismillah" or merely "Allah" in Kufic on their usual legends, to indicate the authority of the Arab Empire. Abdul Malik is credited to have started the pure Arab coinage in the year 696 A.C. This Banbhore coin is a fine specimen of the early Arab coinage.

7. Two partially preserved Indo-Sassanian silver coins are interesting. In their present decayed condition, they are without any legend. On their obverse the profile of a face is somewhat recognisable, while on the reverse there is a crude representation of the Persian fire altar. This type of coins is commonly known as *Gadhaiya*, probably because the distorted relief of the facial profile gives roughly the appearance of an ass. Its origin is attributed to the legendary Vikramaditya of Ujjain (441 A.C.). Its period of currency in Gujrat and Rajputana is stated to be from about 750 A.C. to 1100 A.C.

8. A copper coin with a squatting bull on one side and two fish motifs facing opposite directions on the other. Similar coins have been recovered

Inscribed and carved  
stones from the  
Mosque area





*Re-used carved stone pieces 'in situ' marked 'x'*

from the ruins of the ancient city of Montolle in Ceylon. Its date is not known.

9. A fragmentary and defaced copper coin with the lower part of a standing figure wearing a Kushan-type dress within a beaded circle on the obverse, and a standing figure with traces of a squatting bull at his feet on the reverse. The legends are completely obliterated. This could be a late Kushan coin showing the King on one side and Siva with Nandi, the bull, on the other. Its present state of preservation does not allow more positive conclusion about its date and origin.

*Earthenware oil lamps 'in situ' in the Mosque*

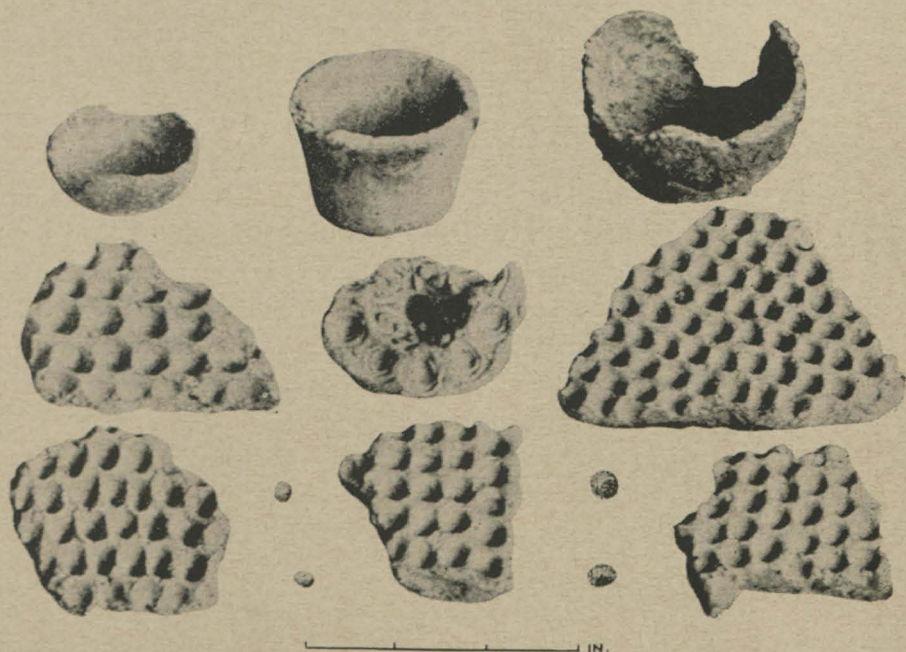


### Terracotta Coin Moulds

In the citadel area, concentration of a peculiar kind of baked honey-combed clay slabs, about half an inch thick and broken into fragments, were observed at places on the surface and also in the upper levels of the excavations. On the upper side of these cakes or slabs 'are impressed rows of little cup-like hollows of different sizes forming a regular honey-comb pattern, while the lower side has been subjected to great heat and is vitrified.' They were variously interpreted by the earlier explorers as a type of terracotta mill for husking corn, flesh-rubbers and crucibles for smelting copper.

There is hardly any doubt now that these slabs were connected with the local coin making device. They were found in association with charcoal and ashes, crucible fragments and copper coins. What is more interesting is that they were found also with little copper pellets which exactly fit into the hollows or cells of these slabs, often with the residue copper bits sticking to them. It appears to have been the easiest and cheapest way of getting pellets of uniform size and weight, from which small sized local coins could be produced subsequently in the dies by a heavy blow from the sledge hammer. The small silver coins of Banbhore, too, were made apparently in the same way. Such coins and coin-moulds have been observed in many other contemporary Islamic sites of the subcontinent and the neighbouring areas.

*Crucibles, terracotta coin moulds and copper pellets*





Glass objects

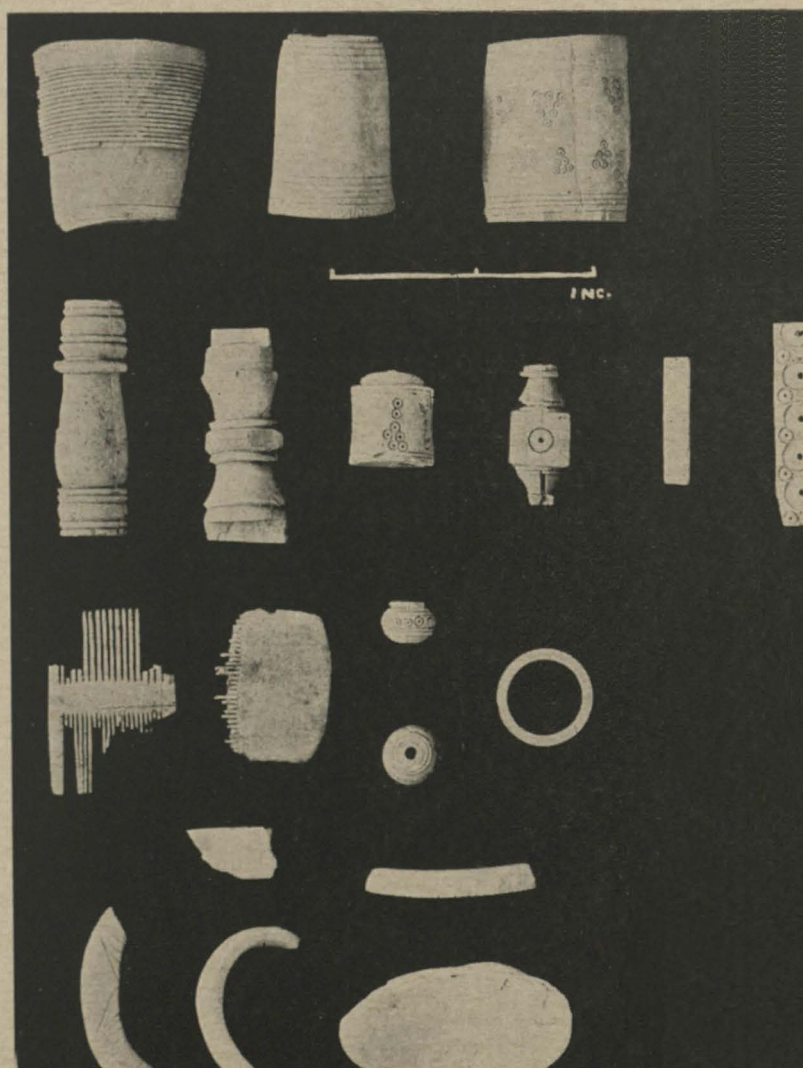
### MINOR ANTIQUITIES

*Glass Objects:* After pottery and coins, the largest number of finds recovered from Banbhore is represented by glass objects. But they are so much broken and decayed that only a few specimens could be preserved. A very small number of complete and semi-complete objects which include miniature scent bottles, delicate candle-stands with decorated stems, vases and bottles with long necks, open mouthed cups and bowls of various shapes and sizes were found in comparatively better condition. Some of the vases have inscribed weight-seals in Kufic on their bases.



Except a decorated bowl piece recovered from the temple, all the glass objects came from the Muslim occupation levels. Most of these objects were undoubtedly produced locally. But some specimens including a few painted pieces show a high quality of craftsmanship and appear to have been imported by the Arabs from the Mediterranean coast.

*Ivory and Bone Objects:* Work in Ivory and Bone objects is more sophisticated and delicate. The pre-Muslim tradition appears to have continued in this craft without any serious disturbance. The better preserved specimens represent mostly handles, rings, bangles, combs and some exquisitely worked ornaments and decorative pieces for household furnishings.



*Shell and Ivory objects*



*Beads and Pendants* of various shapes and sizes and made of terracotta, glass, ivory, shell and semi-precious stones have been recovered in large number. The semi-precious stone beads in particular show fine workmanship. They are made of cornelian, onyx, agate, crystal and similar other stones.

Among other objects, mention must be made of the terracotta crucibles, stone pestles, grinding stones and mills, and shell bangles.

*Iron Objects* represent mostly nails, hinges, rings and hooks. A large number of nails of different shapes and sizes have been recovered from all levels, sometimes found in association with decayed wood, thus indicating their use in wooden fittings. Iron arrow-heads, knife and sword blades and sword hilts are some of the interesting weapons found in the excavations.

*Citadel defences : Northern sector*

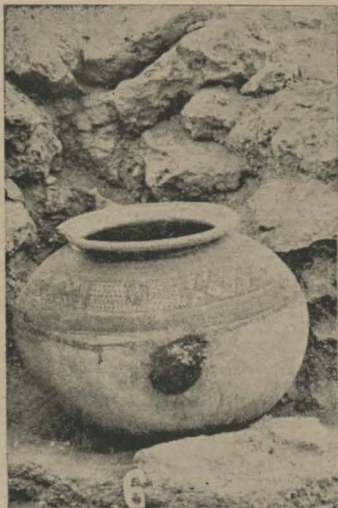


*Copper Objects* include bangles, nails, antimony rods and finger rings—some with semi-precious stones still now fixed in them. They are better preserved than the iron objects.

*Terracotta Objects*: A large number of terracotta animal figurines, mostly crude, but also with some fine glazed specimens, have been recovered from different levels of the Muslim period occupation. A number of terracotta human and animal figurines also came from the pre-Muslim levels. Two fragmentary pieces of statues in green schist stone recovered from the temple area are significant finds.

Copper objects





### CONCLUSION

This large ensemble of objects both artistic and of every-day-use—of art, architecture and industry—has furnished detailed information about cultural and chronological development of early-Islamic Sind. The coins, inscriptions and particularly the pottery have thrown a flood of light on a forgotten but important chapter of our history.

The primary question of identification of Banbhore with Debal has not yet been solved. This must await the completion of our present investigations and the detailed study of the objects. But from the progress made so far, it can be stated with absolute certainty now that the site is of the same Arab period and represents the remains of a city, if not Debal itself, in no way less important or less extensive.



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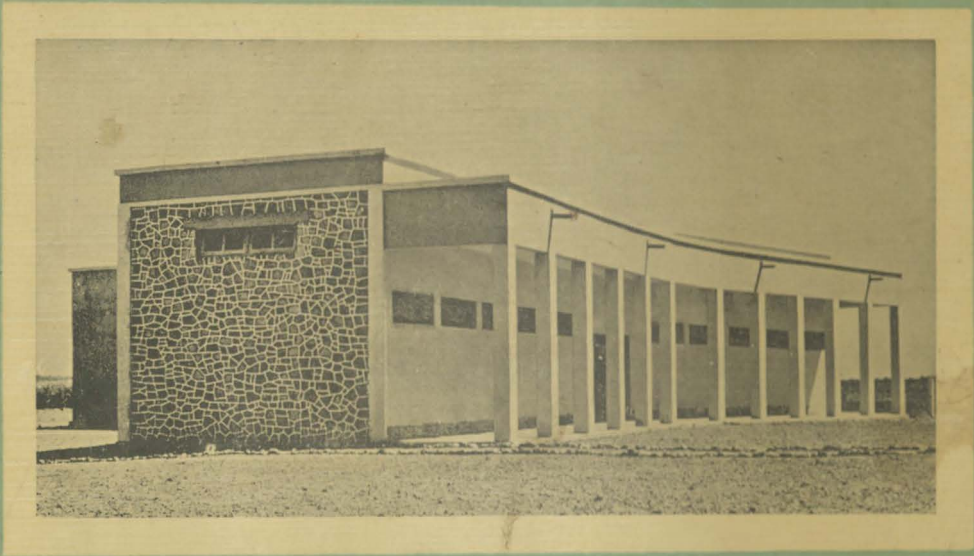
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