

DEBAL AND MANSURA

The Historical Cities of the Early Islamic Period

In the first century of the Hijrah there began a chapter of Indo-Arab relations. After their conquest of Iran, the Arab turned their attention towards Sind. With the possession of Makran and Baluchistan, the Muslim Empire reached the frontiers of Sind. The fact that the western sea-coast of India was a resort of pirates obliged the Arabs to look for means of protecting their trade. The history of the Arab conquest of Sind under Muhammad b. Qasim is too well-known to need repetition. It brought the Indian sub-continent definitely within the orbit of Muslim political aspirations and prepared the ground for the later conquests by way of the North-western Frontier.

In Sind, the Buddhists extended their hands in friendship to the Muslims. They weighed the Muslims against the Hindus and found the former more trustworthy. They might have been influenced by the kind treatment meted out to their co-religionists by Muslims in Afghanistan and Turkistan, and perhaps they were also impressed by the rapidity with which the peoples of these countries had embraced Islam.

In the year 133 A.H./750, a new political trend appeared in the history of the Arab Government. The Umayyads were superseded by the Abbasids, the 'Iraq' became the chief province instead of Syria, and the capital was shifted from Damascus to Baghdad. This revolution brought India very near to the centre of the Muslim Empire. In 140 A. H./756, Hisham came as Governor to Sind, and sent one of his officers to Gujrat with a fleet of ships. After harrying the coast the latter came back. Later Hisham himself with a fleet captured GANDHAR near BHARUCH and erected a mosque there in memory of his victory. These were the first footsteps of Islam on the soil of Gujrat and this was the first mosque in India, if Sind is excluded. With the decline of the Abbasid Caliphate, the connections between the Muslim Empire and its Indian possessions were broken. At the end, only two Arab principalities remained in Sind, one in Mansurah and the other in Multan.

I. DEBAL

Deeply interesting old local chronicle, known as the *Tarikh-i-Hind-wa-Sind*, and also *Chach Nama*, contains an account of the earliest conquests of the Arabs on the Sind Frontier, and their ultimate conquest of all the territory between the mouth of the Indus and Multan. It is a Persian version of an Arabic original made in the early part of the 13th century, by one Ali b. Hamid, a native of Kufa, who had emigrated from his country and settled at Uchh. The *Chach Nama* remains a work of great value as a translation of one of the earliest histories by an Arab writer as a record of the first Arab conquest in the sub-continent.¹ From *Chach-Nama* we learn that in the sixth century A.D., the port of the Indus delta was called Debal, the Arabic modification of the word Dewal, a temple, for the place contained a temple which enjoyed great celebrity.²

Another reference is found in the work entitled *Kitab Futuh-ul-Buldan* ('Book of the Conquests of Countries') written by Ahmad, son of Yahya, surnamed *al-Baladhuri* (279 A.H./892 A.D.) in the second half of the ninth century A.D. A chapter in this work, headed *Futuh al-Sind* (Conquest of Sind) is devoted to a narrative of the various invasions into Sind led by the Arab chiefs who were in command on its western Frontiers, of the final conquest of the country, and of the events which occurred there under the governors appointed by the caliphs down to the period when *Al-Baladhuri* wrote.

According to the Arab Geographers of the tenth century, Debal was situated in the western delta³ : but they are not very precise in their description as to its situation. In a map of Sind in the book *Ashkal al-Bilad*, of *Ibn Hawqal* (331-305 A.H./942-995 A.D.) as well as in the book of *Al-Istakhri* (340 A.H./951 A.D.), Debal is shown as lying to the west of the Indus and on the sea-shore. But no town could possibly exist in a situation where it would be exposed to destruction during the stormy season, and where fresh water would have to be brought from long distances, to say nothing of the impossibility of a port being established on the open delta coast.

All the delta ports had been well inland at distances of fifteen to twenty miles. Debal was no mere ordinary delta port with a few or no solid buildings, and consisting of a collection of huts intended for habitation only during the shipping season. At the time of its capture by the Arabs, Debal was a port of some size and respectably fortified.⁴ Its temple was large enough to offer a last refuge for many of the besieged. *Al-Baladhuri* (279 A.H./892 A.D.) says, 'When the Arab

commander got possession of Debal he garrisoned with 4000 men'. A town of this size and importance would be situated for enough inland to be beyond the reach of tidal waves and floods, and as far up the channel on which it lay as could be conveniently reached by foreign vessels trading with Sind. It would also be in a position having easy communication by land with the interior and would not, therefore, be in the network of channels far down in the delta.

Among the sites of ruined towns in the delta there is one on the right bank of the Gharo Creek, at a spot about twenty miles south-west of Thatta, which in all probability seems to represent the remains of ancient Debal.⁵ Authentic history of the ruins of this town there is none, but according to the evidence of cultural material unearthed here during the course of recent archaeological excavations, they are the remains of a once flourishing port, the residence of a large trading community and of state officials. The present name of the ancient township is Banbhore. This name may likely be a changed one. Very many townships and their names are of great antiquity. In ancient times quite often towns succumbed to the violence of man or to natural calamity : they disappeared and re-appeared with their original or changed names.

Ibn Khurdadhbah (250 A.H./864 A.D.) says 'from Debal to the junction of the river Mihran with the sea is two parasangs'; and *al-Masudi* (303 A.H./915 A. D.) writes : 'the mouth of the Mihran is about two days journey from the town of Debal'. This inconsistency be explained by the supposition that the former writer wrote parasangs when he meant days.⁶

From what has been stated about, it is evident that Debal could not have been at a short distance from the sea, and in any case *al-Masudi* who had himself travelled in Sind, would be the better authority on such a point. But when he says 'two days journey', we must understand a distance by river equal to two days journey, roughly forty miles, as no body would travel between the two points by land; crossing deep channels and creeks on the way. Lastly, we have distance between Debal and Nirun, the site of which is said to be that of the present Hyderabad Fort. Nirun was four days from Debal, meaning of course, by the direct route and by that way Banbhore is about 80 miles from Hyderabad. We thus have statements of distance by the different observers which go to support the proposed identification.

For these reasons then, we are led to think that Banbhore is the site of ancient Debal, and that the Archaeological evidence is against the

identification of the famous Debal town with Karachi, Lari Bandar or Thatta each of which has had its confident supporters.

Elliot, who placed the Debal temple on the headland of Mansura would at once have abandoned the Karachi identification if he had been aware that the place is, by the shortest route 110 miles from Nirun, while he held that the distance could not be more than seventy-five miles. As to Lari Bandar, as *Cunningham* thinks it was Debal, it need only be said that its situation among tidal channels, isolating it from the country inland would render it unsuitable for a well built town. The river distance too, from the sea is about 15 miles, while according to *al-Masudi* Debal was at least two days distance from the sea. The Thatta site is still more out of the question. Its distance from the sea, and the difficulty of navigation by keeled ships of such a river as the Indus have been overlooked by those who are certain that it was once a port for sea going vessels.

And if Banbhore is Debal, how we are to explain the disappearance of its former celebrated name and its replacement by one utterly different. It seems probable that the name Debal was changed into Banbhore after abandonment in the middle of thirteenth century in sequence of the Gharo Creek's increasing shoaling preventing the access of sea-going vessels to the port and the invasion of Khwarrazm Shah.

Debal, besides being a commercial port was also a rendezvous of pirates. It was the capture and plundering of these sea-rovers of certain subjects of the Umayyad caliph, and the refusal of redress by Dahir, that led to the invasion of Sind. The destruction of the temple and the surrender of the fortified town left Debal a mere wreck. Yet it survived and in time recovered considerable degree of prosperity.

Recent Excavations

It was to examine the question of its identification with Debal as well as to reveal something of the life and culture of early Islamic Sind that the Department of Archaeology undertook large-scale excavations at Banbhore in 1958; the work continued for several seasons. During this period a considerable portion of the site has been excavated and a number of important buildings have been uncovered.⁷ The site has long been known to archaeologists and was briefly examined by Henry Cousens, N. G. Majumdar, and lastly by Leslie Alcock who undertook useful preliminary excavations here in 1951 on behalf of the Archaeological Department.

The substantive excavations since 1958 have revealed the plan of a well-fortified harbour town, with some details of art and architecture

and a wealth of material objects of early Islamic date. Deep digging at half a dozen points has provided an almost complete cross-section of the site from top to bottom, revealing the remains of four distinct periods: the Scytho-Parthian, Sassanian, Hindu and Islamic, datable from the second-first century B.C. to the thirteenth century A.D.

Four: Islamic Periods

Of the Islamic period from the eighth to the thirteenth century, four distinct phases, corresponding with four building periods, are clearly traceable. The earliest phase is assignable, on the basis of cultural material, to the Umayyad period. The imposing defence system of the citadel owes its origin to this period. The contemporary stone buildings are characterized by massive solidity and strength.

The second phase is assignable to the Abbasid period, covering the eighth to ninth centuries A.D. It is represented by mud-brick houses of less solid character, built on stone foundations, associated with a variety of slip-painted glazed wares and a few imported Chinese celadon, porcelain and stone wares.

The third phase, which continued to the beginning of the thirteenth century, corresponds with the introduction of Sgraffiato glazed wares which almost totally replaced other types of painted pottery. The major part of the excavated remains belongs to this period; the town was well planned with network of streets and narrow lines between blocks of houses, mostly of mud-bricks.

The last Islamic phase is represented by the topmost defence wall of weak and shoddy character, encircling the eastern half of the citadel only, the western half being abandoned for good after some upheaval towards the middle of the thirteenth century A.D.

Of the Islamic buildings uncovered during the first two seasons, the most remarkable is a palatial stone building of semicircular shape which was provided with lime-plastered floors, an imposing stepped entrance and a large stone-lined circular well. The well-to-do people constructed their houses with square burnt bricks and plastered the floors and walls with lime.

Defence Wall

The solidly built 19 feet high defence wall, which girdles the citadel is the most impressive structure of the site. It was originally built with large and heavy blocks of semi-dressed and undressed stones set in mud mortar, strengthened by heavy semi-circular bastions at regular intervals, and supported by solid stone revetment at the base.

Gateways

Three gateways of the citadel have been uncovered. The southern gateway on the bank of Gharo Creek connects the principal street of the town with the anchorage outside. This impressing and well-guarded town entrance is flanked by two large and solidly built semi-circular bastions. Behind the gate lies an entrance hall. The anchorage, which now lies half submerged in water in front of the gateway has deep foundations and a broad terrace-like waterfront in which were set long and heavy stone blocks with grooved and rounded heads were used as bollards for holding the cargo-laden boats.

The Grand Mosque

The third excavation season at Banbhore was marked by a number of significant discoveries, the most important being the great mosque at the centre of the citadel. Two of the dated Kufic inscriptions found inside the mosque area make it the earliest known mosque of the sub-continent. It was built roughly on square plan, measuring 128 by 122 feet with a well preserved 3 to 4 feet wide outer wall of dressed stone blocks, and a fine block laid courtyard in the centre, which measures 75 by 58 feet. It contained covered cloisters and corridors on three sides, supported on double rows of pillars; and on the fourth side, *i.e.*, western side, there is a spacious prayer chamber the roof of which was also supported on thirty-three pillars arranged in three rows. The stone bases of these pillars have been found in situ; some of them show carved ornamentation. No *mihrab* is traceable in the western wall. A similar omission of *mihrab* occurs in other early mosques, such as those of Kufa and Wasit, dated A.D. 670 and 710 (A.H. 50 and 92) respectively. At this early period of Islam, the *mihrab* was not regarded as indispensable.

Kufic Inscriptions

Of the objects recovered from the mosque area, the most important are the Kufic inscriptions carved on dressed stone slabs, fourteen of which have been found. Two of them are dated 109 Hijra, (A.D. 727) and 294 Hijra, (A.D. 907). It is significant that the date of the conquest of Debal is not far behind from that of the earlier inscription. Both inscriptions mention the names of the reigning Amirs.

Siva Temple

The other interesting building uncovered during the third season represents a Siva Temple. Excavations in the lower levels had already revealed unmistakable evidence of Hindu-Sassanian occupation below

the Islamic period. While digging in deeper occupation levels in the western part of the site, this temple with several coats of fine red paint on lime plaster and other architectural decoration was exposed. An attached lime plastered platform for a large deity, and two Siva lingams, one complete with yoni, recovered from the area of this building strongly suggest its character as a Siva Temple. It is the first Hindu building discovered in the pre-Islamic levels of Banbhore.

Scytho-Parthian Period

From the water-logged deeper levels of the citadel at a depth of about 25 to 30 feet from the upper surface, cultural material of Scytho-Parthian date has been recovered. It consists of finely polished red burnished pottery with bright-red and dark-brown smooth surface. Similar pottery was unearthed in 1912 by Sir John Marshall in the second-first century B. C. levels at Taxila.

Briefly, as a result of several seasons' diggings we have been able to classify pottery from the earliest levels of the second-first-century B. C. to the upper most levels of the Muslim period occupation assignable to the middle of the thirteenth century A.D.

Islamic Period Pottery

The Islamic Pottery consists of a large variety of plain, painted, glazed, stamped and incised wares. In the early levels, thin and light white paste pottery with finely executed floral and geometric patterns in relief, applied or incised, showed Syrian origin. Of particular interest is a small handled cup bearing a Kufic couplet. A similar cup recovered from Susa in south-west Iran is exhibited in the Museum Guimet in Paris.

Large thick textured jars of deep blue-green glaze, showing relief patterns on the exterior, are of Sassanian origin. The Iranian influence persisted in the later period also, as several of these jars occur in the upper levels.

The unglazed thin textured polychrome pottery, painted in black and red colour on dull-red or cream slip with friezes of stylized ducks, water fawn, fishes, peacocks with elaborate hachured tails, the rising sun, and other related motifs, appears to be a continuation of the Sassanian tradition with addition of camel motif.

Coins and Other Finds

Of the miscellaneous objects from the excavations, the coins are the most important. They include a few thousands of copper coins

and about fifty silver, almost entirely of the Islamic period, and one gold coin of the ninth Abbasid Caliph, Wasiq Billah (A.D. 842-7). The coins have yielded significant information regarding the chronology of the site and corroborate the evidence of the inscriptions. Two of the dated silver coins belong to the Caliph Hisham bin Abdul Malik (105-125 A.H./724-793 A.D.), another to Mamun (A.D. 813), while some copper coins belong to Hisham b. Amir, the governor of the second Abbasid Caliph, Mansur (A.D. 754). There are three silver coins of the Sassanian kings. Interesting finds from pre-Islamic levels are several pieces of plain pottery bearing proto-Nagri inscriptions written on the body of pots with black ink, recording measurements of weight; terracotta female heads executed in a naturalistic manner; animal figurines, and a few pieces of greenish grey stone statuettes.

Conclusions

Debal appears to have come to an end by the middle of the thirteenth century, partly due to the silting of the Gharo Creek and partly due to some violent disturbance which is evidenced everywhere by damaged buildings, fallen materials, ashes and human skeletons associated with arrow-heads and sword blades. The last recorded event is invasion of Jalaluddin Khawarrzm Shah in 1223 A.D. This is the latest notice of Debal as still existing and inhabited. A century later in 1333/34 A.D., when Ibn Battutah was in the delta, Debal was no more as no mention of it occurs in the traveller's account.⁸

The large scale excavations carried out for several seasons, laid bare the topography of the fortified port town of Banbhore. These researches not only supplement and complement the statements of Arab Geographers but also provide solid ground for settling the knotty problem of site identification. We may accordingly summarize our conclusions as follows:

- (i) The port of the Indus delta by the name of Debal or Banbhore is not known during the Scytho-Parthian. The name Debal figures for the first time in supplanted by the Hindu Brahmin dynasty which established here seat of a governor, developed the port further and build a temple there.
- (ii) Debal was a fortified river port. It was in a barren and hilly tract; it thrived on trade and commerce. The sea-water touched its citadel walls.
- (iii) A mosque was built in the early eighth century A.D. after the capture of town by the Arabs. The Hindu period town wall was pulled down, and the Arabs rebuilt the town fortifications in

solid stone masonry. The annals of the Rai Dynasty as recorded in *Fatahnama* (*Chachnamah*). This dynasty was contemporary with the Sassanids.

- (iv) The history of the Indus delta ports and their rise and fall mentioned by various authorities prove that Debal was the sole Indus delta port which seems to have risen into prominence with a different name in the second-first-century B.C. during the Scytho-Parthian rule in Sind, and it ceased to exist in the thirteenth century A.D. In the light of archaeological evidence we may conclude that Debal and Banbhore are one and the same.⁹

II. MANSURA

The conquest of Sind by the Arabs is one of the most glorious chapters of Muslim history, and is a favourite subject with the historians. Sind became a province under the Umayyad and the Abbasids, and was administered by their governors. For two centuries and half, 'Sind' as an Arab state was distinguished by the Muslim writers from 'Hind', the other part of India. The new governors were great administrators. They organized the finances, encouraged commerce, enriched the language, spread education and built mosques.

In Sind, the first Arab capital, Mansura, 'the place of victory', was built in the neighbourhood of Brahmanabad; the outlying parts of the country were ruled by the Hindu princes, who paid tribute to the Arab governors.

Today, the ancient Mansura, 43 miles north-east of Hyderabad, is a deserted and ruined city of brickbats and potsherds, with fragments of burnt brick structures and remains of city defences. Six miles to the north-east at a site called Depar Ghangro, lie the remains of a stupa built of mud bricks within a shell of burnt bricks.

Previously on the main site number of rusted copper coins, some of the Eastern caliphs and some of local Amirs were found on the surface, and fragments of carved brick work, shell and ivory, stone beads, and much plain and painted pottery made a chaotic collection of finds.

Mansura in its palmy days had been a large fortified city, built entirely of burnt bricks. Its present state of preservation is one vast mass of ruins, forming irregular mounds, varying in size according to the size of the original buildings, of which these ruins are now the humble representations. Some idea may be formed of the extent of the ancient city, when it is stated that its circumference is about four miles.

Early History: Arab Writers

No ancient Islamic period site in the subcontinent has created so much difference of opinion among the writers regarding its identification as Mansura. What is known of its origin has been gathered from the writings of Arab historians and geographers. Besides those who personally came to India, there are many writers who have given description of India without having visited this country. Among them is Ibn Khurdadhbeh (250 A.H./864 A.D.). The oldest, Arabic geography book, which throws light on India, '*Al-Masalik wal-Mamalik*' is by this great geographer. He wrote his book in elucidation of the ancient routes leading from Baghdad to various lands.

The main towns mentioned by Ibn Khurdadhbeh under the heading of 'Sind' show that the Arabs knew the whole tract between Baluchistan and Gujarat by the name Sind. He has mentioned several towns of Sind including Debal and Mansura. He says 'Mansuriyah which they call Sindiya, is a city of Sind, about a mile long and a mile broad, and is surrounded by a branch of the Mihran. It is like an island. The people of Mansuriyah are Kureshis, the decendents of Habbar, son of Al-Aswad.

Al-Baladhuri (279 A.H./892 A.D.), who also personally did not come to India, says in his *Futuh al-Buldan*, that the Governor Hakim son of Awana al-Kalbi built a town on the side of the lake facing Hind, and called it Mahfuzah, the 'Secure', Amr, son of Muhammad bin Qasim, worked with Hakam, and the latter trusted him with important matters, and sent him to Mahfuzah on an expedition. Amr was victorious in his commission and made an Amir. He founded a city which he called Mansuriyah.¹⁰ Al-Baladhuri further states 'Mansuriyah was founded on the side of the lake facing Hind, and Mahfuzah on the opposite side'. From his account it appears that Mahfuzah was built before Mansuriyah.

Al-Masudi (303 A.H./915 A.D.), who was a first-rate historian, geographer and traveller, visited Mansura in Sind and mentions several persons living there.¹¹

Ibn Hawqal (331-385 A.H./942 A.D.), a native of Baghdad who travelled extensively, has prepared a map of Sind, the first geographical map of India ever made. He is the first geographer to give the length and breadth of India. Ibn Hawqal shows Mansura on an island encircled by the river Indus. He writes 'Mansurah was surrounded by a branch of the Mihran, and that it was on the west of this branch and east of Mihran itself. He then describes the climate and fruits, and says 'lemons, mangoes and sugarcanes are grown there.'¹² He further says 'Mansurah was named after Al-Mansur, the second Abbasid caliph (137 A.H./754

A.D.), who gave his name to four cities, namely Baghdad, Masisa on the Syrian coast, one near Khiva in Central Asia and one in Sind. Mansura in Sind is great, populous, rich and commercial. Its environs are fertile. The buildings are constructed of bricks, tiles and plaster. It is a place of recreation and pleasure. Trade flourishes. The bazars are filled with people, and well stocked with goods. The lower classes wear the Iranian costumes, but princes wear tunics and allow their hair to grow long.¹³

Al-Idrisi (560 A.H./1165 A.D.), the Arab geographer of Sicily, says 'Mansuriyah was founded in the beginning of the reign of Al-Mansur, the Abbasid caliph, some sixteen years after the time of Hakam and Amr, and some four years after the overthrow of the last Umayyad governor, Mansur bin Jamhur (132 A.H./750 A.D.)

Zakariyya Qazwini (682 A.H./1283 A.D.), the author of *Athar al-Bilad*, says 'Mansuriyah, so called after the second Abbasid caliph, is also styled the second Mansuriyah and a branch of Mihran encircles it. It is very hot, but it is a place of considerable size and has good sweet water.

Abul-Fida (732 A.H./1331 A.D.), who wrote *Taqwimal-Buldan* in the first half of the fourteenth century, says 'the city of Mansura was in ruins.' From the account of this writer it appears that the Indus changed its course sometime between the middle of the thirteenth and early years of the fourteenth century and caused the ruin of Mansura¹⁴.

According to Al-Baladhuri Mansura was founded by Amr, son of the conqueror of Sind, and apparently about 112-123 A.H./730-740 A.D. But any son of Muhammad bin Qasim, who had hardly arrived at mans' estate when he was put to death, about 715/16, must have been very young even at the end of the above decade, and it is perhaps more probable that Al-Masudi, Al-Idrisi and other writers are correct in saying that the Arab capital in Sind was built in the beginning of the reign of Abbasid Caliph Al-Mansur who succeeded in 754 A.D.

A number of writers seem to have got rather mixed up with the sites of Brahmanabad and Mansura.

Modern Writers

Elliot writes 'when we consider the space which is always covered by the sites of old Indian towns, we are authorized to conclude that a large portion of Brahmanabad was included in Mansura, and that, in point of fact, the two sites are identicle.¹⁵ In another place, he considers Mansura to be represented by Hyderabad.¹⁶

Cunningham, identifies the great ruined site which he calls Bambhra-

ka-Thul, with Mansura, while Brahmanabad must therefore be looked for in the neighbourhood of the ruined mound called Dilura (Mahfuzah), which is only one and a half miles distant from the large mound.¹⁷ He also says that Mansura must have been founded on the site of Brahmanabad.¹⁸

In the mid-nineteenth century, limited digging was done in a haphazard manner by Messrs Bellasis and Richardson. They butchered the site and collected a rich harvest of curious articles. They also found carved stone slabs buried very deep in the ruins.¹⁹

Cousens, who visited the site in 1895, excavated it in an unscientific way in 1896-97 and reported that the remains represented the site of Brahmanabad and Mansura. His work was of a summary nature.²⁰ Along one street, and upon the surface, Cousens cleared the foundations of three mosques with their *mihhrabs*. Their plan showed three walls forming three sides of a rectangle, the fourth side or entrance, being open towards the east. Digging at a short distance to the west of the Thul,²¹ he revealed the foundations of a very large mosque. Being at a much lower level than the three found on the top surface, the fourth one was a much older mosque, and possibly the first one constructed by the Arabs in Mansura city. This mosque measuring 114 feet by 73 feet yielded two basketfuls of potsherds of large vessels with short Arabic legends written upon them, in black ink covering both the outsides and the insides of the fragments. The writing consisted of short names repeated over and over again, and like talismanic cups used at present, may have been intended to contain water rendered efficacious as a healing agent.

The foundations of the early period mosque were found considerably below the ruined building remains upon the surface, but they were themselves built upon earlier period ruins. Unearthed in the lower levels were several Hindu objects, such as an image of Ganapati, another of Siva and Parvati, and a head of Surya.

In the upper ruins, Cousens, found loose objects consisting of pottery of various kinds, clay balls, terracotta toys, shell bangles, ivory objects, stone and glass beads, glass ware in fragments, coins and coin moulds in baked clay, rusted iron objects, and other odds and ends.²²

These early diggers of Mansura site were not familiar with the principles of stratigraphy and chronology. To them deep digging meant revealing two periods of occupation. In the upper levels they found the foundations of structures built of burnt bricks of the small size generally associated with the Islamic period. In some cases they found the small bricks mixed up with large Hindu period bricks as were in use before the advent of the Arabs in Sind. But in the deeper levels, after cutting

through a thick deposit of sand and silt, they found building remains of the large bricks.

This was their method of working out different periods represented in the site. Walls built upon walls, crossing one another in different directions, showed evidence of two or more successive occupations. That was the spirit of gambling, as each digger hoped to be successful where previous one had failed.

It is obvious that the results of excavations are not limited simply to potsherds, beads and coins once used by the former inhabitants of an area. If the collecting of artifacts and the satisfying of curiosity were the primary objectives of excavation, then there would be no distinction between the scientific digger and the treasure hunter or vandal, who collects for personal gain or private pleasure. The archaeologist digs in order to learn as much as possible about the culture and life of ancient times, and the way in which he digs, and the completeness of his recording of the evidence of human activity which are uncovered by his tools will be the measure of his high purpose as a student of the past. The scientific excavator can never forget that every site, and every object and feature contained in it, is unique and that an object once extracted from its buried position can never be seen again in its original context.

Today, the site is a wilderness of rolling mounds of brickbats and potsherds, with fragments of walling and remains of city defences. Copper corroded coins, both of the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphs and their governor in Sind are found on the surface, and fragments of shell and ivory objects, beads of all types, and much pottery including Chinese celadon ware constitute a chaotic assemblage of finds. *In fact, the great Arab city of Mansura has remained virtually unexplored on scientific lines.*

Recent Excavations

As pointed out earlier, in the mid and late of nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, limited digging were carried out at the Mansura site by Bellasis, Richardson and Cousens, but the origin of the great Arab city site remained undetermined. In order to solve this important problem, as well as to confirm the information already obtained at Banbhore in respect of early Islamic period in Pakistan, the Department of Archaeology, Pakistan, undertook excavations on proper lines.²³

A fairly large trench was laid in the western sector of the site across the fortification wall in east-west direction. The investigations, helped to establish the major phases of occupation, the various building periods of the fortification wall and its associated structural remains. It became evident that after the occupation of the site in the lowest levels in the

pre-Islamic period, and its subsequent desertion, the site remained abandoned for a long time till it was reoccupied in the middle of eighth century by the Arabs.

The stratigraphy and study of finds from the Islamic levels, revealed a continuous occupation divided into four phases marked by an overlap of some pottery types.

The most abundant material left by the Arabs at Mansura consists of pottery which has always been considered as the firm foundation of Archaeology. Except in rare cases of imports, the pottery is generally manufactured on the site and gives a local touch to the life of the period; whereas other objects are liable to be taken away by invaders or rifled by the treasure hunters of later date, pottery fragments generally remain where they are, proving safe and sure indicators of their makers. This is true not only of Mansura but of all other ancient sites in Sind and elsewhere.

Excavations in the pre-Islamic occupation levels have so far remained restricted to a small area at the bottom of the trench. The pottery discovered from the lower, mostly of dull red or pale-red colour, consisted of externally-necked vessels. Long, biconvex net sinkers and discoid beads of terracotta and iron slags were the sole collection of finds. The pre-Islamic occupation showed no association with the upper levels of the Islamic period since it was isolated from latter by a deposit of silt and sand fifteen feet thick.

Islamic Period

(a) *Four distinct periods.* The stratigraphy has clearly indicated that the first building period of Mansura site by the Muslims commenced above the thick sterile sandy deposit, and their subsequent occupation of the site continued for centuries. There are four major building periods, each being distinguished by its pottery types.

The first Islamic period yielded fine bichrome painted pottery of pale-red colour and thin texture. The designs are printed in black on a distinctive cream or reddish slip, and these consist of ducks, tiny flying birds, long-petalled flowers, rayed-sun, circles and other geometric patterns. A secondary red colour was used to emphasise the designs.

The second Islamic occupation phase is characterised by pottery with moulded designs with a sprinkle of mica on the external surface.

Among the ceramic unearthed from the third occupation are the thin bodied small bowls with knife sharp-edge rim, decorated with moulded designs in low relief.

The fourth and the last period of occupation produced grey-polished, luster-glazed and stamped ware. The most interesting feature of this period is the profusion of painted pottery depicting ducks, deer and camels in dotted registers on mostly thin-bodied vessels.

(b) *City planning.* The excavated structural remains reveal that during the Islamic occupation the city of Mansura was well-planned. The residential sectors were divided into spacious blocks separated by well-oriented streets and lanes. The houses of the city-elites were built of burnt bricks, with walls and floors lime plastered.

In order to study the architectural characteristics of the residential buildings, remains of some of the houses were partially exposed. In the north-western sector a large size house was uncovered containing eighteen large and small rooms, varying in size from 29' x 10' to 10' x 12'. Within these rooms, as many as three well-preserved brick-laid floors at different levels clearly indicated different building phases. One of the rooms yielded a hoard containing nearly 4,000 die-struck small copper coins.

Another fairly large size house, measuring more than 60 feet across with complete plan of 8 rooms was brought to light. The width of its walls varied from 15 to 26 inches. Number of door-ways were cleared with openings varying in width from 3½ feet to 5 feet, but the main entrance on the south, measured 6 feet wide. Important evidence of the use of arch was observed in one of the door-ways. Still another interesting feature was the discovery of square pillars built with 18 inches square tiles.

(c) *Fortification wall.* One of the impressive structural remains at Mansura is the burnt brick fortification wall which runs round the city. Owing its origin to the Islamic period, the wall is assignable to three periods.

- (i) The first wall constructed with burnt bricks set in mud-mortar, was 6 feet wide. The bricks measured 16" x 16" x 2½".
- (ii) In the period which followed, the superstructure of the first wall was utilized as the foundation of the second period wall. Its average breadth was 10 feet with variations at some places. It was provided with semicircular bastions, among which two bastions, each 102 feet apart, have been cleared. Each measures 14½ feet in diameter. Fortunately, these bastions have escaped destruction and thus survive with their full dimensions. The wall was provided with a mud embankment against its outer face which was meant to give it additional strength.

(iii) Little has survived of the third period wall, because of human vandalism. It was built with reused bricks. The north-western city gate belongs to this period.

(d) *North-western gateway.* Excavations in the north-western sector brought to light two semicircular bastions and a gateway. Between the bastions was a brick-on-edge floor. It slopes down towards the city. Between the bastions, the floor measures 10 feet in width, but it gradually widens to 19 feet as it proceeds beyond the northern edge of the bastions. The floor was laid over loose occupational debris, and the bricks-on-edge were set in light brown mud mortar. It was intensively used, but the bricks show no sign of wear and tear and their edges are still sharp and complete.

(e) *Soak walls.* Number of soak walls were cleared. They are made of circular rings of pottery, each measuring $1\frac{1}{2}$ feet and $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet in diameter. Their edges were thickened externally so that the rings could be firmly set one above the other. The top was fitted with half built pottery jars with two circular opening; one on top and the other on the shoulder. The opening on the shoulder had a slightly raised edge which received the refuse water through a drain fitted with it. The other opening was left open for the escape of polluted air, since otherwise, the rings could be damaged by the pressure of accumulated gases.

(f) *Human skeletons.* Several human skeletons were exposed associated with the fortification wall. Contrary to the Islamic burial practice, these were uncovered lying close to each other with their legs crossed.

All the skeletons were found near the fortification wall where there was no sign of grave pits. Their position with flexed legs and faces turned downwards or to one side or in an irregular manner indicated that the persons met their death suddenly involved in some violent accident.

(g) *Mansura Jami mosque.* The Department of Archaeology excavating in 1976 and 1977 revealed the remains of a mosque built on grand scale. The mosque has a *mihrab* and a number of stepped gateways in the northern and southern walls. The eastern wall could not be exposed due to the presence of a modern tomb and graves. The open court was paved with bricks. The most significant finds in the mosque were the several fragmentary leafs of the Holy Quran and a number of semicircular clay tablets with seal impressions bearing Arabic inscriptions.

(h) *Minor finds.* Excavations have yield a rewarding collection of copper and silver coins; shell bangles plain, painted and decorated with beautifully cut designs. In addition to stone and terracotta beads,

button seals engraved with birds motif have also been recorded. Among the glass objects, the fragmentary four-footed Syrian perfume bottle is worth mentioning.

So far as they can be deciphered, the Islamic period coins show unmistakable association with Mansura. These coins are of two kinds. One is thin, and is artistically impressed with Arabic legends, part within a central circle and part around the rim. They were, judging from their style and execution, not coined in Sind. The other type, squat and dumpy, and smaller in area. These were minted in Sind; their clumsiness and roughness of execution stamp them as products of unskilled artisans.

The End of Mansura

As to the end of Mansura, very little is known, except what traditions tell, as usual, they are mixed up with the fables: but wanting records, even fables have their value.

According to a popular account, city of Mansura was laid low in ruins by an earthquake theory, a common tradition associated with some ancient sites, was also advocated by Bellasis. He says 'the destruction is too complete to have been the work of time. Had the city been destroyed by an invading army, the destruction would hardly have been so complete. Had the city been regularly destroyed the habitants would surely have carried the valuables with them.'²⁴

Haig's theory of shifting of the Indus river course has its own value. It seems probable that the earthquake that shook the city changed the course of the river which once washed the city-walls.

Cunningham combines the theories, and attributes the destruction to some earthquake before the beginning of the eleventh century, and failure of the river prevented any thought of rebuilding.²⁵

Cousens disagrees with either Bellasis or Haigs.²⁶ The idea of Mansura's destruction by an earthquake or its desertion, on account of the shifting of the river course appeared to him to be untenable. The number of wells all over the site show, that the river, indeed, must have dried up, but there being plenty of water in the subsoil the sinking of wells obviated the necessity of abandoning the city on that account. That the subsoil water did not fail is seen by its presence to the present day in the vicinity of the site. The destruction of the place for this cause would have been a general affair, in which case one would hardly find the coins and other material scattered about the site.

Conclusions

As to the fate of Mansura, it is evident that the great city was sacked by an enemy, and the inhabitants were put to the sword. Amongst the ruins are found great quantities of human bones, in and about the houses, and broken pots and pans and other objects. As to the total and complete destruction of the walls of the houses, the blame could lay at the hands of robbers of brick and woodwork, who threw down the walls in order to get at the doors, windows and roof timbers.

The investigations conducted at Mansura by the Department of Archaeology clearly indicate two distinct periods of occupation—Pre-Islamic and Islamic. The former is represented by an occupation which is deeply embedded in the water-logged lower levels. The early occupation, after its desertion, remained sealed for centuries under a thick layer of river deposit. When the Muslims arrived on the scene in search of a suitable place for building their headquarters in the Sind, they found an extensive and vacant site in a fertile tract encircled by the Indus. They selected the spot, built a city, fortified it with a burnt brick wall, and constructed spacious mosques and residential quarters.

It has been firmly established that Mansura flourished under the Abbasids. Cultural relics, such as pottery and coins prove beyond doubt the links with other Muslim Kingdoms on the west, and finally fell into ruins in the thirteenth century. Muslims from all over the Muslim world gathered at Mansura for religious discourses, for trade and commerce. The mosque which served as a nerve centre of city life provides not only a place of worship but a forum for discussing all the problems facing the community. It may be said that Mansura contained the largest number of mosques, so far known, from any early Muslim city.

The stratigraphic evidence, therefore, clearly disapproves the assertion that Mansura was built directly over the remains of a Pre-Islamic site (Brahmanabad).

NOTES

1. A detailed account of the *Chach Nama* is contained in the first volume of Elliot's *History of India*.

2. Elliot, I App. p. 396. In a foot note Elliot remarks that "the temple was contiguous to the town of Debal not within it", and he refers to Al-Baladhuri's as his authority for this statement; but Al-Baladhuri's words are 'bil Daybel' that is in Debal. The *Chach Nama*, however, is clear, using the expression 'Darmiyan-i-Debal', in the midst of Debal.

3. There is reason to believe in the light of recently revealed archaeological evidence at Banbhore, which is situated on the right bank of Gharo Creek, that the Western branch of the Indus explored by Alexander, and from which Nearchus started on his sea-voyage, was that of which the present Gharo Creek formed the lowest portion.

4. The heavy catapults had been brought from Iraq to Debal by sea, but for the navigation of the Indus higher up than Debal the sea going vessels would have been totally unsuited; these must have been left at Debal and ordinary river craft employed in the further operations.

5. Debal was on the west bank of the Gharo Creek and the channel was in full activity and navigable for several miles by large vessels in the beginning of the eight century; that in short nothing had changed during the thousand years which had elapsed since Alexander's expedition, the 'Westing of the river farther inland having been suspended for ten centuries.'

6. The Arab writers quoted speak of the mouth of the 'Mihran', but they need not be held to refer to the main river, but only to that branch of it on which Debal was situated. At the time, according to Ibn Hawqal's *Ashkal ul-Bilad* map, Debal was not on the main stream, though how far from it is impossible to say, the great geographer having had no notion of scale.

7. F. A. Khan, A Preliminary Report on the Archaeological Excavations at Banbhore.

8. It is curious that Al-Biruni, writing in the first half of the eleventh century, does not name Debal, but speaks of Loharani as apparently the delta port of that time.

9. Of the period of the foundation of Debal port nothing is known. The place seem to have been in existence as early as the time of Alexander. Its use as a delta port continued during the rule of Sind under the Scytho-Parthians and Sassanians; the Hindu Rai dynasty fortified the port town and built a Siva temple. It was known to the Chinese navigators in the seventh century. H. Yule in 'Cathy and the way Thither' (I,XXVII) says "Chinese annals of the Thang dynasty of the seventh and eighth centuries, describe the course followed by their junks in voyaging to the Euphrates from Canton. After describing the course as rounding Ceylon and following the Coast northward till they reached *Diu*, he proceeds 'ten days further voyaged carried them past five small kingdoms to another *Diu*, near the great Milan or Sintu. This, of course, was Debal on the Mihran or Indus.

10. Elliot, *History of India*, I, 126.

11. Raverty, *Mihran of Sind*, 189.

12. Elliot, I, 78.

13. Elliot, I, 78,

14. Haig, *Indus Delta Country*, 72.

15. Appendix to the Arabs in Sind, 237 and *History of India*, I, 371.

16. *History of India*, I, 400.

17. Cunningham, *Ancient Geography*, 273.

18. Raverty, *Mihran of Sind*, 202 n.

19. An account of their unscientific diggings of the ruined city of Brahmanabad in Sind was published in the journal of Bombay Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society for the year 1856 (July).

20. A preliminary account of Brahmanabad-Mansura-Mahfuzah site was published in the Progress Report of the Archaeological Survey of India, Western Circle, for the year 1895-96, 1896-97 and 1903-04 and 1908-09.

21. Raverty says the word is not *Thul*, a Tower of bastion, as Bellasis supposed, but the Arabic word *Tall*, a heap, a mound, such as Tall-Asmar in Mesopotamia. The local people know nothing of the origin of this construction, and without doubt, looked upon it as a ruined tower. Moreover the Stupa in Sind was in shape hemispherical heap or mound.

Cunningham writes it both *Thul* and *Tul* (*Ancient Geography*, 173).

22. Cousens, *The Antiquities of Sind*, pp. 48-71.

23. *Pakistan Archaeology*, No. 5.

24. Bellasis, *Journal of the Bombay Branch*, Royal Asiatic Society, 1856, 423.

25. Cunningham, *Ancient Geography*, 276.

26. Cousens, *The Antiquities of Sind*, 70.