

RECENT ARCHÆOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES IN INDIA

BY COLONEL A. E. MAHON, D.S.O.

THE Annual Report of the Archæological Survey of India for 1927-28 which is now available contains an account of the excavations that were carried out, during the period under review, at Mohenjodaro and Jhukar in Sind, Harappa and Taxila in the Punjab, Sarnāth in the United Provinces, Nālandā in Bihār, Paharpur in Bengal, Nāgārjunakonda in the Madras Presidency and at Pagan and Hmawza in Burma. The accounts show that the excavations have generally yielded results of great archæological interest.

It is pointed out that, with the exception of the researches of Major Mockler in Makrān over fifty years ago and those of Mr. Hargreaves in Sarawān and Jhalāwān in 1926, Central and Southern Baluchistān had remained, from the archæological point of view, an entirely unexplored region. Between November 1927 and April 1928, Sir Aurel Stein toured extensively in the Sarawān, Jhalāwān, Khārān and Makrān divisions of the Kalāt State. During this period he surveyed sixty-five sites and at fifteen of these carried out trial excavations. These explorations have resulted in the discovery of remains dating from early chalcolithic to historic times and reveal the former existence in these regions of a very widespread chalcolithic civilization.

Sir John Marshall reports the discovery of a stronghold at Giri, Taxila, dating from the 5th century A.D., and surmises that it was intended as a place of refuge in times of need, and that it was built especially for the protection of the large bodies of Buddhist monks living at the Dharmarājika and neighbouring monasteries. He states that the whole body of monks in the environs of Taxila must have run into many thousands and that towards the close of the fifth century they must have been hard put to it to escape the fury of the White Huns, and he regards this stronghold as affording most interesting evidence of the imminent dangers to which they were exposed.

Sir John Marshall also reports the discovery of two considerable groups of Buddhist stūpas and monasteries at Giri. A large number of plaster reliefs were found lying at the foot of one of these stūpas. Among them was a colossal head of a Buddha image.

One of the monasteries dates back to the Early Kushān times, when the monks were accustomed to beg and eat their food in the city, and when no kitchen accommodation was, therefore, provided.

Among the antiquities recovered from this monastery is a relief of grey Gandhāra stone which ranks among the best of the Gandhāra sculptures found at Taxila.

The coins recovered in this monastery bring out very clearly the fact that at the time of the destruction of the monastery, an extraordinary variety of coins issued several centuries before must have been still current in this part of India.

With reference to excavations at Sirkap, Sir John Marshall says he is inclined to think that six or seven layers of buildings will be found in the greater part of the lower city and that the period of its occupation will have to be pushed back to a date considerably earlier than that which he had previously inferred. Of the periods to which the three uppermost strata belong, the first appertains to the Early Kushāns before the reign of Kanishka, the second and third to the Scytho-Parthians who preceded them. It is surmised that the fourth and possibly the fifth date from the time of the Greek occupation, while the sixth and anything below it are pre-Greek.

Among other objects found in the structures uncovered near the foot of Hathial was another of the curious stone discs of which three examples had previously been found on the Bhir Mound and one at Kosam. It is of polished sandstone adorned on the upper surface with concentric bands of cross and cable patterns and with four nude female figures alternating with honey-suckle designs engraved in relief around the central hole. The nude figures appear to represent a goddess of Fertility.

Excavations were carried out in two areas at Mohenjodaro during the season 1927-28 by Mr. Mackay. Several important buildings were brought to light, in some of which there are staircases that once led to rooms above. In one block a most interesting group of chambers was found, comprising two rows of bathrooms separated by a narrow passage, along which runs a drain. Each room has a very narrow doorway, through which a small channel runs into the drain in the passage. Not a single bathroom lacks its stairway, but what this was for is not yet apparent. It is surmised that possibly priests were quartered in cells above, from which they descended to bathe.

An interesting point about this building is the precautions that have been taken in the construction to ensure absolute privacy, none of the doorways face each other, and owing to their narrowness and thickness of their door jambs it is practically impossible to see into the rooms.

In the period under review the first pottery kiln to be found at Mohenjodaro was discovered. It has been ascertained that the fuel used was wood and not charcoal.

During the same period some excavations were made at Jhukar, about 16 miles north of Mohenjodaro, by Mr. Majumdar. These excavations revealed traces of three different strata representing three periods of occupation. The latest settlement is estimated to have taken place during the Gupta period (not earlier than the 5th century A.D.). In the middle and third strata prehistoric antiquities were discovered which are mostly identical with those from the sites of Mohenjodaro and Harappa and represent the chalcolithic stage of culture.

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Excavations were also carried out at Harappa by Mr. Madho Sarup Vats, and several interesting finds were made in the shape of seals, vases, etc., skeletal remains were also discovered between 10 and 11 feet below the surface. In one place a find of eleven burial jars was made and in another seven more were disclosed.

Many interesting objects were found. Among male figures, one carries a duck, another is nude and a third is in the attitude of adoration. Two women have flowery head-dresses and a third has tresses over the shoulders and then doubled and tied behind the head.

Many objects were also recovered that appear to be cult objects of phallic worship.

Excavations at Sarnāth, in the United Provinces, by Rai Bahadur Ramaprasad Chanda in February and March, 1928, disclosed some coins, one of these is assignable to the 1st century A.D., another is a copper coin of Huvishka, and some square cast coins probably belonging to the Śuṅga period. Among antiquities found were a terracotta female head, which must have been modelled at a time when Mauryan art was at its zenith, and figures with Mauryan polish.

Mr. Page made further excavations on the site of the Buddhist monastery-city at Nālandā in Bihār, and numerous antiquities were recovered principally from the Devapāla level.

Excavations were continued at Paharpur by Mr. Dikshit, a number of stucco heads were recovered which are the first specimens of this branch of plastic art to be discovered in Bengal. A considerable number of small antiquities was recovered, the richest hoard so far found at Paharpur.

It is estimated that there must have been at least two hundred cells occupying a quadrangle of about 900 yards square and providing accommodation for about a thousand monks. No single monastery of such dimensions has yet come to light in India and the appellation *mahāvihāra* 'Great Monastery' as designating the place appears to be entirely appropriate.

It is assumed that Paharpur must have been one of the principal among the 'hundred Deva temples in the country of Puṇḍravardhana' noticed by the Chinese traveller, Hsüan-Tsang, 'where secretaries of different schools congregate, the naked Nigranthas being the most numerous'.

Mr. Longhurst made some interesting excavations at Nāgārjunakonda, in Madras, the site of one of the largest and most important Buddhist settlements in Southern India. Inscriptions that were found here have thrown considerable light on the history of the site.

Chief among the relics recently found at Nāgārjunakonda is the fragment of a bone of Buddha's body. It was enshrined in a minute round box together with some gold flowers. The box also contained garnets, pearls, and crystal pieces. This relic was presented to the Mahabodhi Society by the Director-General of Archaeology, on behalf of the Viceroy, before a distinguished gathering of

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Buddhists from Japan, Tibet, Ceylon, India, and Burma, on the occasion of the first anniversary of the opening of Mulagandhakuti Vihāra at Sarnāth, Benares, in December last. The relic has been placed within the temple at the Vihāra.

With regard to the sculptures that have been discovered Mr. Longhurst says that some of them possess a unique value, being unlike anything of the kind found elsewhere in India. The main theme of the sculptures is taken from the life and previous births of Buddha.

It is estimated that Nāgārjunakonda flourished during the 2nd and 3rd centuries A.D.

In Burma excavations were continued at Pagan and Hmawza by Mons. Duroiselle. A temple belonging to the 12th century A.D., was explored at Pagan, and the lower portion of a Buddha and many fragments of terracotta votive tablets, bearing an image of Buddha seated on a lotus, were recovered.

Most of the mounds recently dug into showed traces of having been rifled, at some remote period, by treasure-hunters, and the finds were, therefore, on the whole disappointing.

Twenty-three mounds were opened at Hmawza but the excavations yielded very poor results.

It is to be hoped that Sir Aurel Stein's explorations in Central and Southern Baluchistān will be followed by prolonged systematic excavations, and that still more light may be obtained from this intensely interesting field.

Simultaneously with the above explorations interesting discoveries were made in Afghanistān by J. J. Barthoux of the Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistān. Barthoux unearthed 531 buildings of various kinds all dating from about the same time, viz. about the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D.

From the beginning of the Christian era, when an Indo-Scythian dynasty, the Kushān, ruled over Afghanistān, until after the time of the statues recently recovered, it was predominantly Scythian. Obviously, however, the classical Greek artistic traditions retained their vigour, and until the death of Diocletian the Mediterranean and the Orient were still in touch with each other. The development of sacred and ecclesiastical art as a direct derivative from the æsthetic of Hellas is more trenchantly illustrated in the statues found by Barthoux than perhaps in any other examples, for so Occidental is the entire atmosphere they exude that they seem violently opposed to the Orient where they are found.

As there are yet countless sites in India still awaiting excavation, more than the Archæological Department could possibly cope with, it is to be hoped that facilities will be afforded to non-official agencies to enable them to co-operate with Government in their exploration.