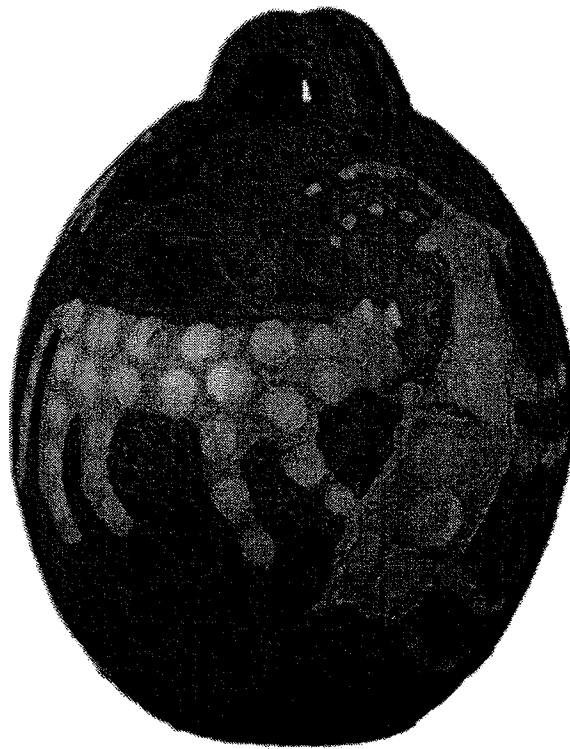


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Sir Aurel Stein's Papers on the Survey of Ghaggar-Hakra River, 1940-1942

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During 1940-42, Sir Aurel Stein carried out an archaeological survey of the Ghaggar-Hakra River, which in ancient times drained the desert tract of northern Rajasthan (India) and Bahawalpur (Pakistan). In Pakistan's territory, Stein started his explorations from Bahawalpur on February 14 and continued until March 11. In winter months of the same year, he came back to Cholistan and excavated at three sites namely, Sandhanawala Ther, Kalepar and Ahmadwala Ther. Traveling on Alexander's tract in southern Balochistan between January and March 1943, he arrived at Kabul where he died at an age of 81 on October 26, 1943 and was buried in Kabul.

Stein wrote a report on his surveys entitled, *An Archaeological Tour along the Ghaggar-Hakra River, 1940-42* (1943). A summary account of his findings was published in 1942 but full report remained unpublished. In 1955, the typed manuscript of his report was microfilmed by Henry Field at New Delhi and a copy of it was placed in the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. The manuscript has no maps, drawings or photographs to illustrate the text. Therefore, mere description does not help to verify cultural association of all the sites independently. A reader has to rely on Stein's statements only. There are several sites, which are difficult to identify because instead of giving description of individual sites, Stein has made comparisons with the evidence of a single site of questionable or unknown date. For example, he compared a number of sites with a site called Kalepar whereas the cultural association of it was not possible to ascertain without illustrations. It was by comparing the notes of Stein and Henry Field that Kalepar was found to be another name of "Bhoot", an Early Harappan site dated

between 3200 and 2600 BC. Stein correctly identified some sites belonging to "Harappa Culture" but the remaining sites could not be placed within a known time frame on the basis of mere description. Stein's illustrations accompanying his report are still not traceable anywhere in India or Europe. Only the text of report is what is left of that great Asian explorer of the 20th century that incidentally, has remained unpublished in original form. The text of his report reproduced some years ago, gives no explanations or additional information. Therefore, its usefulness remains as limited as Stein's manuscript copy.

A. Ghosh re-visited the Ghaggar-Hakra region in Bikaner, India, in early 1950's and added more sites to the known list but full information was never published. The other Indian explorers and excavators who have since worked in or near the area of our interest are Katy F. Dalal, B.K. Thapar, B.B. Lal, K.N. Dikshit, J.P. Joshi and R.S. Bisht. On Pakistan's side, the area was briefly visited by Henry Field (1959) but first ever major and comprehensive survey of Cholistan was launched in 1974. It continued for four cold seasons until 1977 along an old course of Hakra River running through former State of Bahawalpur. More than 424 sites were documented at that time and later on, 37 sites were added in 1990's while working for the World Bank. This number includes almost all the unpublished sites recorded by Stein. The publication of results of explorations (Mughal 1997), have highlighted several significant aspects of the Harappan Civilization including the following:

(a) A continuous sequence of the Indus civilization from the 4th to 2nd millennia BC was revealed.

(b) A new cultural component belonging to the earliest phase or beginning of the Indus Civilization was

discovered. It was represented by the sites of Hakra Wares which are dated to the 4th millennium BC, at least one thousand years before the Mature Harappan times.

(c) For the first time in South Asia, various functional categories of the Harappan sites were identified on the basis of material evidence such as, industrial sites as distinct from habitation, multifunctional and nomadic sites.

(d) Based on size, four-tiered hierarchy of settlements (defined as cities, towns, villages and nomadic sites) emerged throughout the lifetime of the Indus Civilization in this region where original settlement patterns have remained undisturbed.

(e) All the sites were securely dated by comparison with the known sites in the Greater Indus Valley.

(f) The data from Cholistan pointed to new directions for future research and generated several new fieldwork programs in Pakistan and India.

The new discoveries had significant implications for the Harappan Civilization. It, therefore, was imperative to resurrect Stein's manuscript and have it published with all necessary illustrations of relevant materials collected by him and those by his successors in Pakistan and India from the same sites. It was also considered essential that the old materials are re-studied to present a fresh interpretation of the sites in the light of new information that has been made available to us in Pakistan and India since Stein's work more than half a century ago.

All unpublished materials collected by Stein from Pakistani and Indian territories of the Ghaggar-Hakra River were in New Delhi, India. However, during my surveys of Cholistan between 1974-77, large and representative samples from all the sites were collected which compensated for absence of archaeological materials in Pakistan from Stein's survey. All these collections were stored at one place in Lahore Fort. In 1999, a project proposal to edit Sir Aurel Stein's unpublished papers was submitted to the British Academy for funding when I was at the University of Cambridge as Visiting Fellow of Churchill College. The request was favorably received and funds to start the work were made available to me during spring 2000 from Stein-Arnold Fund. Thanks to the support given to the project proposal by Dr. Raymond and Bridget Allchin, Dr. David Phillipson, Beatrice de Cardi and Dr. Robert J. Knox.

Regardless of the hot weather, the work was started at Lahore in July last year. All the collections from Cholistan were placed at my disposal through the courtesy of Saeedur Rahman, Director General of the Department of Archaeology and Saleemul Haq, Director of Archaeology then at Lahore. Two young archaeologists of the Department of Archaeology namely, Muhammad Hassan, Assistant Director and Muhammad Afzal Khan, Curator, Lahore Fort Museum were associated with the project on my request. Both of them had worked with me in the field during 1990's. The team included two graduates of the Punjab University, Aneela Til and Naila Shabnam, four to six draftsmen, a photographer and necessary support staff hired on daily wages.

For making a selection of materials from the sites visited by Stein, hundreds of pottery bags and wooden cases containing relevant materials had to be taken out from the underground chambers of Lahore Fort and then to arrange all the collections for examination. It was easy to select the sites visited by Stein because the site names had not been changed since his visit with few exceptions. Two large halls of Pakistan Institute of Archaeological Training and Research at Lahore Fort were placed at my disposal to facilitate work of sorting, selecting, cataloguing, drawing and photography. In all, materials from 44 selected sites were studied, selected and catalogued. Measured drawings (to scale) of 1235 specimens of pottery were prepared, inked and transferred on large film sheets. In addition, 1045 antiquities of various categories were cataloged and photographed with conventional methods.

Stein frequently referred to "Harappa Culture" and cemetery H type of pottery for identification of the sites. When Stein was writing more than half a century ago, the Early Harappan/ early formative phase of the Indus Civilization was not defined and delineated. Similarly, the meaning of so-called "Post-Harappan" period that was previously associated with the last occupation at Harappa and Cemetery H, has changed as a result of new information. It is now believed that the Harappan culture survived well until the middle of 2nd millennium BC in certain areas of the Greater Indus Valley, and is recognized by distinctive assemblages of the Late Harappan "Cemetery H" and "Jhukar" culture. Another new development in South Asian archaeology has been the definition and dating of Painted Grey Wares (PGW)

associated with the Iron Age, generally assignable to the 1st millennium BC. If today, Stein's identification of archaeological materials is found to be inadequate, the data gathered during 1974-77, provides a reliable basis to revise old conclusions and place the sites in their proper context. Based on the recent study of materials available in Pakistan, some comments may be offered on Stein's manuscript.

Comments

- Amongst 58 sites mentioned by Stein, ten are forts and tombs of early historical (5th century BC to 7th century AD) and Medieval (8th to 18th centuries AD) periods. The remaining sites include 12 small patches of potsherds (camp sites). These sites were not possible to locate on map due to absence of coordinates and adequate description.

- Stein's identification of "Harappa Culture" sites was correct in a general sense. His sites in fact, yielded the Mature and Late Harappan materials, which can be separated on the basis of ceramics.

- Stein's "grooved" pottery of "Kalepar" type has now been identified with the well known and extensively distributed Kot Dijian wares of the Early Harappan period c. 3200-2500 BC. Henry Field called that site as "Bhoot. Stein correctly observed that Kalepar yielded "new" ware and that it compared with ten other sites. It may be pointed out that Kot Dijian assemblages (Khan 1965) are now recognized to be forming an early developmental phase of the Indus Civilization.

- The Hakra Wares sites, named after their discovery and heavy concentration on the Hakra River, belong to the middle of 4th millennium BC. Distinguished by a group of handmade vessels with a coating of mud mixed with grit on the surface, these wares were first identified in 1972 at Jalilpur, about 80 miles southwest of Harappa on the Ravi River (Mughal 1974). These were found to be mixed and overlapping with the Kot Dijian occupation at that site and therefore, marked the first settlement of the Early Harappan times. In 1972, the only comparable evidence was available from Amri IA in southwestern Sindh where handmade, large vessels treated with thick layer of mud and grit applied on the surface were found. Amri IA is now dated at least 3300 BC.

At Sheri Khan Tarakai in Bannu Basin of the North-west Frontier region of Pakistan, pottery precisely identical to the Hakra Wares in vessel shapes and appliqué surface treatment has been found in such contexts that are assignable at least to the beginning of 4th millennium BC (Khan *et al.* 1990). Analogous pottery with surface treated with mud appliqué was found at Mehrgarh in Period III contexts (after the Neolithic) which the excavator would place between late fifth and early 4th millennium BC. The Hakra Wares sites are the oldest known settlements on the Ghaggar-Hakra, representing a common cultural tradition in the Greater Indus Valley that was already established at least by the beginning of 4th millennium BC. It was therefore, no surprise to find the first settlement at Harappa revealing Hakra Wares labelled erroneously and confusingly, as "Ravi phase" by the excavators. Stein found six sites of what is now recognized as the Hakra Wares.

- Stein found what later on came to be known as Painted Grey Wares (PGW) at two sites at least. The appearance of the PGW is traditionally believed to coincide with arrival of the Aryan-speaking people about the beginning of 1st millennium BC. It was also about that time when the Ghaggar-Hakra River had dried up completely and desert conditions similar to the present-day had set in Cholistan. Stein's "stamped" pottery of red color came from the PGW sites, where the gray wares constitute less than 5% of the red wares assemblage.

- Stein's manuscript records a number of nameless "tati" sites marked by a scatter of potsherds. Such sites are semi-permanent nomadic occupations. Now, it has become apparent that camp sites of the nomadic population existed throughout the life history of the Indus Civilization. They effectively utilized the desert environment like the present-day nomads in Cholistan who raise camels, cattle, goats and sheep. Stein has not discussed the implications of the "tati" sites.

Even though the work as far as it relates to Pakistan has been completed, still it is only half the work originally envisaged on unpublished Stein's papers. Now, information from the sites located in the Indian territory has to be studied, catalogued and illustrated for which permission has been received from the Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi but necessary funding is being sought.

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