



## Setting out to Explore: Archaeological Research in Baluchistan

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As in Sindh, preliminary discoveries and knowledge-gathering in Baluchistan date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a time when foremost British officers or adventures travelling through Las Bela and Jhalawan on the route from Karachi to Quetta, Kandahar and Kabul, or to Makran and Iran kept detailed diaries of their journeys and undertakings. Many sites important today (Fig. 4.1) were first probed then. The magnitude of these undertakings and their often fast publication with plans, photographs and drawings cannot be overestimated, particularly paying tribute to the means and facilities available then.

With the excavations in Harappa and Mohenjo Daro and the ensuing surveys in Sindh and Baluchistan more directed archaeological investigations began, which drew the westerly regions into view as well. After traversing the north, Sir A. Stein explored southern Baluchistan and southeastern Iran. He conducted the so far regionally most expansive explorations, which have often remained nothing less than the only basis of our knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Stein's route led him from eastern Makran to Kolwa and through the Mashkai and Nal Valleys to Khuzdar and Wadh. His excavations in Shahi Tump, Kulli and Mehi shed light on new 'cultures,' and laid the foundations for later research. He discovered numerous sites that yielded Nal and Kulli pottery, foremost in Nundara and Mashkai. In 1927/28 he merely reached Wadh and Drakalo east of the Mashkai

River. It was only during his last journey in 1943, intended to clarify the retreat route of Alexander the Great's army, that Stein first arrived in Las Bela. There, among other sites, he discovered Niai Buthi, the most important prehistoric site in the Las Bela Plain. His search for historical sites, however, remained unsuccessful.

Stein's surveys for the first time demonstrated the density of settlement in the isolated, rugged terrain of Baluchistan and the wide regional distribution of find categories indicating the presence of far-reaching cultural contacts that already existed around 3000 BCE. Stein already recognised regional differences in the distribution of the two most prominent pottery complexes in the south, Nal and Kulli, the chronological sequence of which was evidenced in his trial trenches at Niai Buthi. Due to his death in October 1943 in Kabul the archaeological part of this research remained unpublished.

Sir J. Marshall, Director at the Archaeology Survey of India, recognised the importance of the transitional zones between the highlands and the Indus Plain. He contracted N. G. Majumdar, who worked together with H. Hargreaves in Mohenjo Daro, to carry out a survey in western Sindh. On the east side of the Kirthar mountains he discovered numerous sites with a type of pottery known from Marshall's earlier publication and Hargreaves' excavations at Sohr Damb/Nal in 1925, as well as a new type which he named 'Amri' after the principal site in Sindh.<sup>2</sup> His soundings at Amri revealed that this pottery

<sup>1</sup> Stein 1929; 1931; 1937; 1943a. In the meantime he had carried out a survey in the Ghaggar-Hakra area (Stein 1943b).

<sup>2</sup> Majumdar 1934; Marshall 1904-5; Hargreaves 1929.





Fig. 4.1  
Map with important  
archaeological sites in  
central and southern  
Baluchistan



Fig. 4.2  
Nal vessel found  
c. 1907 at  
Sohr Damb/Nal  
(Institute of  
Archaeology, London)

lay under the stratigraphic layers assigned to the Indus Valley Culture and thus must be older than the mature Indus occupation. This was the first evidence of settlement predating the Indus Valley cities, the discovery of which had just pushed back history by almost 2000 years. Since this cultural horizon extended along the Kirthar Range and at some sites overlapped with Nal pottery (Fig. 4.2) from Baluchistan<sup>3</sup>, it became also apparent that

<sup>3</sup> Deva / McCown 1949.

close contacts must already have existed between the highlands and the Indus Plain.

At the same time other ventures took place in northern Baluchistan, among the earliest the ones by F. Noetling, who worked in northern Baluchistan in 1898.<sup>4</sup> Others to be mentioned here are the survey by S. Piggott (1947), which led to the discovery of Quetta ceramics, and the excavations by E. J. Ross (1946) and D. H. Gordon (1954-55) in Periano Ghundai, Moghul Ghundai, Sur Jangal, Rana Ghundai and Dabar Kot.

The partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 opened up a new era in the history of research. The search for a new identity, but also the rivalry between the two countries had an intensifying effect upon archaeological research, marked by the implementation of new methodological approaches at this time. Particularly important were stratigraphy-oriented excavations, which use the observation of sequences of deposits to

<sup>4</sup> Pedde 1993.



Fig. 4.3  
Stratigraphic  
Sequence at  
Sohr Damb/Nal,  
Tr. IV, periods I to III

establish a chronological sequence. Combined with the development of comparative charts of types and styles, continuity and change of certain features could be recognised and dated (Fig. 4.3).

At this time the leading figure in the archaeology of the Subcontinent was Sir M. Wheeler, who established Schools of Archaeology and trained archaeologists in both Pakistan and India. Excavations were re-opened at Harappa (1946) and Mohenjo Daro (1950) by Wheeler and G. F. Dales (1964), and started at Kot Diji by F. A. Khan (1955, 1957) and at Amri (1959–1962) by J.-M. Casal.

Simultaneously with these expeditions intensive research was carried out in the central highlands of Baluchistan (Fig. 4.4), reaching its peak between 1948 and 1960, a time when some regions were still partly independent kingdoms (e.g. Kalat). In an effort to expand the work of Stein farther to Jhalawan and Sarawan, B. de Cardi conducted two surveys in Baluchistan (1948, 1957) as well as excavations in Anjira and Siah Damb (Surab). In northern Baluchistan W. A. Fairservis was at work

at about the same time. His surveys in Loralai and the Zhob and Quetta Valleys and soundings in Kili Ghul Mohammad and Damb Sadaat provided the basis for the chronology of and culture-historical development in this area, for the most part valid until today.<sup>5</sup> While Fairservis made a crucial contribution to the knowledge of ceramic styles and provided a chronological framework for the northern parts of Baluchistan, de Cardi extended this research towards the south. She was able to identify the wide distribution of pottery types known from the north and its overlap with the sub-regional styles. Her sequence of the Togau style is still a valid tool for dating this pottery.<sup>6</sup>

His work led him to Ornach, where R. Raikes (1968) conducted archaeological research in the frame of his duties as irrigation engineer in 1955–1961. He collected information on sites in Las Bela and southern Jhalawan, and discovered Balakot, a

<sup>5</sup> Fairservis 1956, 1959.

<sup>6</sup> de Cardi 1951; 1959; 1965; 1983; see chapter 7.





Fig. 4.4  
Road leading  
from Nal  
towards Sarawan

site with an early and Harappan occupation that was later excavated by Dales. Upon completion of his work in the northern parts, Fairservis became interested also in Las Bela. In 1959/60 he undertook a survey in Welpat, the area north of Bela (Fig. 4.5), during which he discovered some 500 sites of the 'Edith-Shahr complex' (see Fig. 3.15).<sup>7</sup> Characterised by their massive stone architecture, these sites were dated by Fairservis to the late 3<sup>rd</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE (Complex A) and the late 2<sup>nd</sup>/1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE (Complex B). Fairservis' later follow-up investigation in Niai Buthi, published only in summary form, was of importance for the chronology of southern Baluchistan, as he could prove that the Nal Horizon was superimposed by layers of the Kulli Culture.

Casal, who at that time already directed excavations at the crucial sites of Mundigak and Amri, was likewise interested in the area of southern Baluchistan. After a survey (1961–1962) that led him along the Kud River, amongst other places, he carried out three excavation campaigns (1962–1965) in Nindowari in Ornach.<sup>8</sup> Casal was able to prove that the Kulli Culture was at least partly coeval with the Indus Valley Culture. In 1960 the last, more encompassing survey took Dales along the coast of Makran.<sup>9</sup> Searching for Harappan sea ports, he discovered Sutka Koh near Pasni and dug trial trenches at Sutkagen Dor.<sup>10</sup> Besides Miri Qalat near Turbat, Balakot in Las Bela and Bakkar Buthi in the Kanrach Valley, these

<sup>8</sup> Jarrige et al. 2011a.

<sup>9</sup> The survey by H. Field from the American Museum of Natural History was principally directed towards anthropology.

<sup>10</sup> Dales / Lipo 1992.

<sup>7</sup> Raikes 1968; Fairservis 1975.



Fig. 4.5  
Landscape north of  
Bela, near platform-  
house sites



Fig. 4.6  
Means of  
transportation

are among the few Harappan sites west of the Hub River. Further explorations in different parts of Baluchistan were carried out before 1962 by the Department of Archaeology.

This impressive account of archaeological research resulted in the first relatively chronological framework for Baluchistan and the Indus Valley, put studies on the Indus archaeology on a broader basis, and brought along reference collections from sites never visited again. Based on this work R. M. Mughal published the first synopsis of the data, particularly for northern Baluchistan, in 1970.

In the mid-1960s, when the political situation has become increasingly difficult since the early 1960s, and on the outbreak of the Indo-Pakistani War in 1965, archaeological fieldwork in the interior of Baluchistan came to a halt. Later, Baluchistan remained closed for foreigners and research was possible only in a few areas, e.g. in the lowland of Las Bela. There, R. Khan (1973) from the Institute of Geography in Karachi carried out a small survey, while Dales opened excavations at Balakot (1973–1976).<sup>11</sup>

The next period in the history of research is marked foremost by new lines of thought and methodical approaches. Conceptual and geographical spheres were expanded through investigations in southeastern Iran, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. The protagonists, often working across borders, as e.g. W. A. Fairservis, J. F. Dales,

<sup>11</sup> Dales 1979; Franke-Vogt 2002.

J.-M. Casal, G. Possehl, R. Allchin and B. Allchin, maintained a close exchange of ideas with colleagues such as M. Tosi and C. C. Lamberg-Karlovsky, generating the development of new models and motivating new directions in research. These archaeologists and their team members, for Baluchistan especially J.-F. Jarrige, C. Jarrige, J. Shaffer, R. Mughal and R. H. Meadow, were instrumental in applying these ideas to the research on the Indus Valley cultural tradition. The outcome was a large number of synoptic reviews in the form of monographs and stimulating cross-cultural papers.

Due to the political developments and current research topics, the focus of archaeological research shifted from central Baluchistan to North-Western Frontier Province (NWFP, today: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), Sindh and Punjab. Yet, major discoveries were still to be made in the transitional zone between the eastern fringe of Baluchistan and Sindh. Casal, who could not return to Nindowari, decided to excavate a site in the Kachhi Plain near Sibi at the foot of the Bolan River coming from Quetta, where Raikes had discovered pottery of assumedly large age at Pirak. Although the excavations (1968–1974) proved this assumption to be wrong, this decision led to the discovery of Mehrgarh and Nausharo (Fig. 4.7) and revolutionised Pakistan's cultural history.

The work in the Kachhi Plain, which lasted from 1975 to 2002, once again pushed back Pakistan's history for thousands of years to the





Fig. 4.7  
View of Nausharo  
in the Kachhi Plain

transition of early men from hunters and gatherers to the beginning of a settled farming economy, led to the discovery of a Harappan site far from the urban centres, attested the extension of the ancient Bactrian Civilization from Central Asia to Quetta and beyond, proved that at Pirak a rice-based farming community developed after the decline of the Indus Civilization (1800–700 BCE), and established a chronological and cultural sequence from 8000 to 400 BCE. The work not only revealed a long and continuous development, incorporating changes in subsistence economy, climate and environment, social organisation, craft technologies and far-distance relations, but also provided 'tools' for dating these stages by comparisons with other sites, the backbone of presently used chronological frameworks. This information thus made possible the inclusion of old collections, which are often without context, and a correlation with more recent research, thereby gradually expanding the still patchy map of past cultural landscapes and their developments through time.

Missions working on other regions also contributed to this reconstruction by continuously extending the regional and cultural range, and by optimising the quality of the available information: the Pakistani-British Mission for the Bannu Basin, the Pakistani excavations and surveys in the Gomal Plain in Punjab (Sarai Khola, Jalilpur, Cholestan) and Sindh.<sup>12</sup> Particularly the more recent work at Harappa brought forth a wealth of new information on chronological as well as cultural-historic aspects, shedding light on the development of the antecedents of the Indus cities and their relations with their neighbours.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The number of missions is too extensive to be dealt with here in detail, see e.g. Allchin et al. 1986; Dani 1971; Durrani 1988; Mughal 1997; Petrie 2010. While M. Jansen directed the Mohenjo Daro Documentation Project from 1979 to 1986, archaeological work at Harappa was taken up again in 1986 by G. F. Dales, M. Kenoyer, R. Meadow and R. Wright.

<sup>13</sup> While M. Jansen directed the Documentation Project at Mohenjo Daro, a site still under excavation ban, from 1979 to 1986, a comprehensive archaeological project could be carried out at Harappa since 1986, directed by G. F. Dales, M. Kenoyer, R. Meadow and R. Wright.

With the increase of knowledge about the neighbouring regions and research concepts becoming more interdisciplinary and contextual, the lack of adequate archaeological research in Baluchistan was badly felt. It had become obvious that the Indo-Iranian borderland, of which Baluchistan is a major part, was no isolated barrier, but a crucial link between cultural zones.

It was only in 1987 that archaeological work in Central Baluchistan was possible again. After first conducting a survey on the coast of Makran and in the Kech Valley, R. Besenval, Director of the newly founded French Archaeological Mission to Makran, started excavations in Miri Qalat near Turbat in 1994. Later, he returned to Shahi Tump, a site already tested by A. Stein, which he excavated until 2006.<sup>14</sup>

The second mission that obtained a research permission was the Joint German-Pakistani Archaeological Mission to Kalat. Between 1996 and 1999 surveys, excavations and trial trenches were carried out in the southeastern parts of the Kalat Division and as far as Lake Manchhar in order to connect this research area with Sindh Kohistan, where Ghazi Shah is the only site re-excavated in the Kirthar Region (Fig. 4.8).<sup>15</sup>

In 2001, the mission resumed excavations in Sohr Damb/Nal, the site first excavated by Hargreaves in 1925. Both the German and French Mission had to stop their work in 2007 as a result of a renewed phase of political instability.

This summary, although brief, may nevertheless reveal the extent of the conducted work and the amount of information procured. At the same time, the narrow frames and limitations of attempts to weave together the available information into a more consistent and overall pattern are badly encountered in such an attempt – too large the region, too overwhelming the magnitude

<sup>14</sup> The program and its results are outlined in chapter 11 of this volume by A. Didier and B. Mutin.

<sup>15</sup> Flam 1992; 1998.



Fig. 4.8  
Archaeological site  
near the Bhit Range



Fig. 4.9  
Exploring  
coastal Makran



Fig. 4.10  
Sunset over  
a river oasis

of the challenge. Nevertheless, although the archaeological map of Baluchistan has still too many and too large blanks, the advances are immense. It is hoped that in future archaeological research in Baluchistan will be possible again, supported by the government and involving the local population, in order to continue this search for the past.