

Content

Prefaces

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1	Lost and Found – From Baluchistan to the National Museum Pakistan, Karachi	1	10	Central Baluchistan from c. 3000 to 2500 BCE: A Patterned Landscape	267
	<i>Muhammad Shah Bukhari and Ejaz Elahi</i>			<i>Ute Franke</i>	
2	Prehistoric Pottery Treasures from Baluchistan	3		Catalogue (630–671)	283
	<i>Ute Franke</i>				
	About this Book	9	11	The Kech-Makran Region in Protohistoric Times	297
3	Natural Landscape, Population and Economy	11		<i>Aurore Didier and Benjamin Mutin</i>	
	<i>Ute Franke</i>			Catalogue (672–713)	319
4	Setting out to Explore: Archaeological Research in Baluchistan	33	12	Baluchistan and the Indus Civilization	335
	<i>Ute Franke</i>			<i>Ute Franke and Elisa Cortesi</i>	
5	The Cultural Landscape Through Time	41		Catalogue (714–751)	351
	<i>Ute Franke</i>		13	Beyond Prehistory	363
6	The Beginning of a Tradition	47		<i>Ute Franke</i>	
	<i>Ute Franke</i>			Catalogue (752–755)	370
7	Central Baluchistan in the 4th Millennium BCE	59	14	Forging the Past: The Examples in the National Museum Pakistan	373
	<i>Ute Franke</i>			<i>Elisa Cortesi</i>	
	Catalogue (1–291)	81		Catalogue (756–765)	375
8	Southeastern Baluchistan until the Mid-3rd Millennium BCE	149		Bibliography	380
	<i>Ute Franke</i>			Acknowledgements	389
9	The Nal Horizon	165		Photo and Figure Credits	393
	<i>Elisa Cortesi</i>			Imprint	394
	Catalogue (292–629)	185			

Preface by the Special Assistant to the Chief Minister Sindh, Minister for Culture & Tourism, Government of Sindh

Sharmila Faruqui

Pakistan is a great country, hosting the amazing heritage of the past two million years, unique and, at the same time, so diverse: Mohenjo Daro, Makli Hills, Banbhore, and Ranikot Fort, to name just a few. This heritage is testimony to the presence of many different people, such as Greeks, Kushan, Arabs, Persians, and Turks, and the legacy of dynasties such as the Ghaznavids, Soomros, and Mughals.

These cultural assets are increasingly threatened by an ever expanding illegal antiquity market. During the past decades, the National Museum of Pakistan, Karachi, has received a number of assignments that were confiscated by the customs and police. However, the ensemble encompassing 800 prehistoric vessels and about 400 Gandharan objects, which was seized by the authorities in the port of Karachi in 2005, is certainly the most important collection that ever came to the museum. This remarkable recovery clearly conveys the message that this heritage needs to be protected by the governments and the international community.

After a careful documentation and conservation, the German team, with Dr. Ute Franke, Elisa Cortesi and Carmen Guetschow, has now completed the project in close collaboration with the staff of the National Museum Pakistan, Karachi, in particular Muhammad Shah Bukhari and Ejaz Elahi as curator in charge. I am delighted that this book provides scholars and the interested public alike an insight into this magnificent collection, and the environmental and cultural context it came from.

It is my great pleasure that about 100 vessels from this collection will be presented in a special exhibition at the National Museum of Pakistan, Karachi, celebrating the recovery of this almost lost treasure. And it is my hope that scholars from all over take the chance to record the remaining priceless antiquities in similar detail.

Preface by the German Consul-General in Karachi, Pakistan

Rainer Schmiedchen

When thinking of civilizations in the ancient world, of course, the famous Indus Valley Civilization, a highly developed urban culture in the Bronze Age during the 3rd and 2nd millennia BCE, immediately comes to mind. At the same time one is also reminded of the World Heritage site of Mohenjo Daro and other archaeological places such as Chanhu Daro in Sindh, Harappa in Punjab, or Sutkagen Dor in Baluchistan. The pre-urban cultures of Amri and Kot Diji in Sindh and of Mehrgarh, Nal, and Quetta in Baluchistan and their connections with the later urban civilization of the Indus Valley, however, have always been somewhat enigmatic. At least that is what I was taught some 30 years ago, as a student of South Asian Studies at Humboldt University in Berlin, in courses on ancient history. Although specialising on modern history and economics, I was so fascinated with the prehistory and early history of the Indian Subcontinent that I chose to take one of my major final exams in ancient history.

As the German Consul-General, I am particularly pleased that Baluchistan – together with Sindh – belongs to the consular area of the Consulate-General in Karachi and that an extraordinary treasure trove of pottery from prehistoric Baluchistan will be on display in Karachi, at the National Museum of Pakistan. This exhibition, a Pakistani-German cooperation, organised in collaboration with Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, illustrates the important role Baluchistan once played as one of the cradles of civilization on the Indian Subcontinent.

The exhibits have occasionally taken strange routes to Karachi, as they are part of the collection that was confiscated by the Pakistani customs in the city port. I would like to join the curators of this exhibition in their appeal to the public – in Pakistan as well as abroad – to protect the rich cultural heritage of this region and to preserve it as much intact as possible. For archaeological and historical research, the value of antiquities does not, in the first place, consist in their undeniable beauty, but in the information they provide about the people who produced them, information that can only be derived from the original find spots of the artefacts.

Lost and Found

From Baluchistan to the National Museum Pakistan, Karachi

Muhammad Shah Bukhari and Ejaz Elahi



The collection was seized on June 11th, 2005 in the customs building of the Karachi sea port. In cases like that, the custom officers fill in a form requesting the examination of the artefacts by a competent authority who will receive this consignment. The museum usually sends the curator in charge, followed in the procedures by a photographer. Thus, the seizing officer Mr. S. A. Haleem handed over the objects to Mr. Aqleem, assistant curator of the Archaeological Section in the National Museum of Pakistan in Karachi.

In the custom buildings Mr. Aqleem carried out documentation work on the collection as follows: measurement, photos, detailed study of the artefacts, and counting of the items. Subsequently, Mr. F. Arbab took pictures of all the artefacts.

After these procedures the authorities decided to confiscate all the antiquities: along with the pottery, a large number of sculptures and wooden artefacts were confiscated and placed in 64 boxes. Later the collection was transferred to the National Museum of Pakistan. Mr. M. Hussain, the curator in charge at that time, took the collection into his custody. Since March 24th, 2009 Mr. E. Elahi has been curator of the archaeological section and consequently the person in charge of the seized collection.

The collection represents a very important success for both customs and museum authorities, as such a huge amount of artefacts was never seized before. Moreover, as archaeological excavations have come to a halt in Baluchistan, the opportunity to document previously unknown pottery shapes and motifs is very significant. As demonstrated by the comprehensive excavated collections kept in the Exploration Branch of the Department of Antiquities and Museums in Karachi, the region of Baluchistan is very rich in pottery traditions and numerous sites still await proper study.

Unfortunately, the law-and-order situation in Baluchistan prevents a continuation of archaeological work, leaving the large number of sites unguarded and exposed to looters. As a consequence, many other consignments from the custom authorities arrived at the National Museum of Pakistan in Karachi, like for example a collection of Gandhara sculptures. However, many of these objects are regarded as fakes: Looters not only have free access to the sites of excavation, but are also trained to work in illegal laboratories that fabricate fake artefacts, following accurate descriptions and images in scientific publications.

Fortunately, the collection in this volume was seized and brought back to its original owners, where it can be studied. Every artefact will receive an accession number and be added to the permanent collections of the National Museum of Pakistan.