



## Beyond Prehistory

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At about 1800/1700 BCE, the area of the Indus Valley Civilization began to dissolve into various cultural entities with regional characteristics. This localisation process<sup>1</sup> is reflected by heterogeneous archaeological assemblages continuing some traits of the Indus Valley Culture while others have become (more) distinct. This process is not yet well understood, but the gradual disappearance of the Indus script and seals, the standardised weight system, the Indus-style ceramics and terracotta figurines indicate that this change was associated with a decline of the political, social, economic, and probably ideological background of the urban system of the Indus Valley Civilization. This view is supported by the fact that continuity was then predominantly expressed in craft technology and basic elements of style, whereas urbanity, large-scale mass production, standardisation, and far-ranging distribution were no longer maintained. In some regions this process was gradual. Excavations at Harappa have shown that the localisation era did not begin long before Period 5 (Cemetery H, upper levels), dated to c. 1700 BCE, while in Period 4, associated with Cemetery H pottery from the lower levels, Indus seals and the weight system as well as some typical stylistic features were still in use.<sup>2</sup>

The reasons for this development are still unclear, but generally attributed to multi-causal factors. Changes within the hydraulic system in the alluvial plain of the Indus, in particular the draining of the Ghaggar-Hakra river system, a possible relocation of the Indus River, the diminishing far-distance trade,

and an increasing expansion and exploitation of the organisational and economic system probably had an impact on this development. A markedly more arid climate is not attested for the period concerned.<sup>3</sup>

Comparable evidence is available from Nausharo, located near Mehrgarh and Sibri in the Kachhi Plain, where in the post-urban Period IV (c. 2000 BCE) Indus features continued to be present on a limited scale alongside local elements, which are now becoming more and more frequent.<sup>4</sup> However, at nearby Pirak, a flourishing farming community developed in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE, whose economy was based on large-scale rice cultivation and a distinctive local tradition, which continued into the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE.<sup>5</sup> In central and southern Baluchistan, the western 'periphery' (seen from the Indus Valley proper), wide regions were abandoned between c. 1900/1800 to 500 BCE, as surveys conducted by the French and German-Pakistani teams have shown.<sup>6</sup>

The oldest historical references to southern Baluchistan date back to the Achaemenid king Darius, who subjected the area in 518/519 BCE and made it a Persian satrapy. A royal inscription lists Maka among the conquered lands and describes

<sup>1</sup> Shaffer 1992.

<sup>2</sup> Kenoyer 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Most recently discussed in detail by Wright 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Jarrige et al. 2011a.

<sup>5</sup> Jarrige et al. 1979; Jarrige 1997; see also box feature B13.

<sup>6</sup> Stein (1929; 1931; 1937), de Cardi (1951; 1959; 1965; 1983), Casal (1966; 1968), Dales (Dales / Lipo 1992), Fairservis (1956; 1959; 1975), Raikes (1968) and, more recently, Besenval / Sanlaville (1990); Besenval 1997b; Besenval / Didier 2004, and the Joint German-Pakistani Archaeological Mission to Kalat (Franke-Vogt et al. 2000; Franke-Vogt 2000; Franke-Vogt / ul-Haq 2008).



Fig. 13.1  
Landscape  
north of Bela

the people as a branch of the Saka. According to the Greek historian Strabo, Gedrosia is located south of Arachosia, in southeastern Afghanistan. The people who settled along the coast of Makran up to the Hub River are called *Ichthyophagoi* ('fish eaters'), and the Hub River is identified with the river *Arabius*. Arrian<sup>7</sup>, who accompanied Alexander the Great on his march to India, reports on the retreat of the army using the land route through southern Baluchistan. He describes that the *Arabius* formed the border between the independent tribes of the *Arabitai* and the *Oretai* further west, where, behind a desert, the land of the *Horitae* (*Oretai*) was located. After Alexander had crossed the *Arabius*, he passed a desert and reached the land of the *Horitae* (*Oretai*). Moving inland from the coast, the army plundered the local people and made rich booty. Finally, Alexander arrived at the largest settlement in the region that belonged to the *Oretai*, *Rambakia*. For the Greeks, however, it was not much more than a village.<sup>8</sup> Hephaestion was appointed to stay behind

and build a city. Alexander's troops proceeded west and were met by the *Oretai* and Gedrosians at a pass between their territories. However, when the Greek army approached, they fled and the Greeks did not meet any further resistance on their march through Makran. Moreover, the historian Curtius mentions a third people, the *Cedrosoi*, who settled east of the *Arabius*, which would already be in Sindh.<sup>9</sup>

It has not yet been possible to match the archaeological remains with the historical records. No traces of a site that would qualify for *Rambakia* have been found so far, and the only evidence from the Seleuco-Parthian period are some sherds from Miri Qalat VI<sup>10</sup> and, possibly, a dam.<sup>11</sup>

On his last trip, Sir A. Stein followed the tracks of Alexander the Great in Las Bela.<sup>12</sup> While it was previously assumed that Alexander took the

9 Curtius, *Historiae*, 8, x, 5–7. A similar account was written by Diodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 27, civ, 5sq. For a review of the historical evidence see also Lari (1994).

10 Besenval 1993, Fig.15.

11 Fiorani-Piacentini / Besenval 1990.

12 Stein 1943a.

7 Arrian, *Anabasis*, 6, XXI,5.

8 Arrian, *Anabasis*, 6, XXI,5.



Fig. 13.2  
Carinated  
Londo beaker  
(cat. no. 753)

southern route over the Hala Pass<sup>13</sup>, Stein believed that he proceeded on the main route via Bela (Fig. 13.1) and turned then west.

Unfortunately, *Rambakia*, the settlement mentioned by Arrian, has not yet been identified. T. H. Holdich had located it at Kohira Kot, an archaeological site near Uthal, but Stein (1943a) and the German-Pakistani Archaeological Mission found only early Islamic and imported South Asian pottery there. Stein<sup>14</sup> thus believed that *Rambakia* was located near Bela or in Welpat. He might have been right: although no Greek remains were found in Las Bela, two sites near Bela have provided <sup>14</sup>C-Dates from the last centuries BCE. One site is Kariya Pir, the other one Budi Buthi, a larger mound with so-called Londo pottery. Londo pottery is typical for certain types of sites in central and in southern Baluchistan and is also attested in the collection from Baluchistan.

13 Holdich (1894) quoted in Stein (1943a, 200) and in Minchin (1907, 20).

14 Stein 1943a, 215.

Londo Ware was first found by Stein (1931) in Gedrosia. He described it, among other types, as Late Prehistoric ware. It received its name from B. de Cardi (1951), who discovered several Londo sites in Jhalawan and conducted small-scale excavations at Alizai.<sup>15</sup> W. Fairservis collected only two Londo sherds in northern Baluchistan (Quetta Miri)<sup>16</sup>. Subsequently, Londo pottery was excavated at Nindowari (Area KD), where it was found in a boulder-built fortification with towers and bastions.<sup>17</sup> The French Mission in Makran discovered Londo pottery at only four sites, which they dated between the 2<sup>nd</sup>/1<sup>st</sup> century BCE and the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE (Miri Period VI).<sup>18</sup> To date, about 70 sites are known, with clusters in central and southern Baluchistan<sup>19</sup> and a general temporal frame between

15 de Cardi 1983, 13, 29.

16 Fairservis 1956, 337.

17 Casal 1968, 17s.

18 Besenval / Sanlaville 1990, 89. See for a review of the archaeological assemblages of this time (e.g. Appliqué, Incised, and Londo Pottery) and the related sites, such as mounds, cairns and platform sites, across a wider region Franke-Vogt 2001. See for Nindowari Jarrige et al. 2011a, 38.

19 Franke-Vogt 2001, Fig. 2.



Fig. 13.3  
Painted jug  
with painted and  
appliqué pattern  
(cat. no. 752)



Fig. 13.4  
Pot with figurative  
motif (cat. no. 755)

the 5<sup>th</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> century BCE and the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, proposed on the bases of comparative evidence and radiocarbon dates, is now generally applied.

The classical Londo pottery is characterised by a gritty fabric. The vessels are usually hand- but sometimes also wheelmade. The outer surfaces often carry tan, bright or purplish red or brownish slips. Often, they are highly burnished, providing the sherds with a distinctive glossy shine. The paint was usually applied in black on a red and in brown on a buff or tan ground. While on the former type white is used for infills, the latter also shows polychrome patterns with red, brown, and violet or maroon as additional colours (Fig. 13.2).

The designs include many geometric motifs, in particular triangles, stylised foliage, mainly scrolls

and star-like flowers, and naturalistic subjects such as ducks, swans, turtles, frogs, fish, horses, and horsemen, which are shown at various stages of stylisation. The motifs are arranged in horizontal bands and metopes, bordered by multiple bands and various geometric patterns, creating a filigreed surface appearance. Other vessels are decorated more sparingly: the buff slipped vessels in particular carry broad black bands, occasionally with additional borders of lines or dots. Diagnostic shapes include necked jars, closed pots, S-shaped carinated bowls and beakers with everted rims, and footed beakers. Appliqué decoration as attested for cat. no. 752 (Fig. 13.3; title image) is exceptional, while, judged by its shape, colour scheme and style, cat. no. 755 (Fig. 13.4) does not belong to the Londo type.

Pirak · Elisa Cortesi

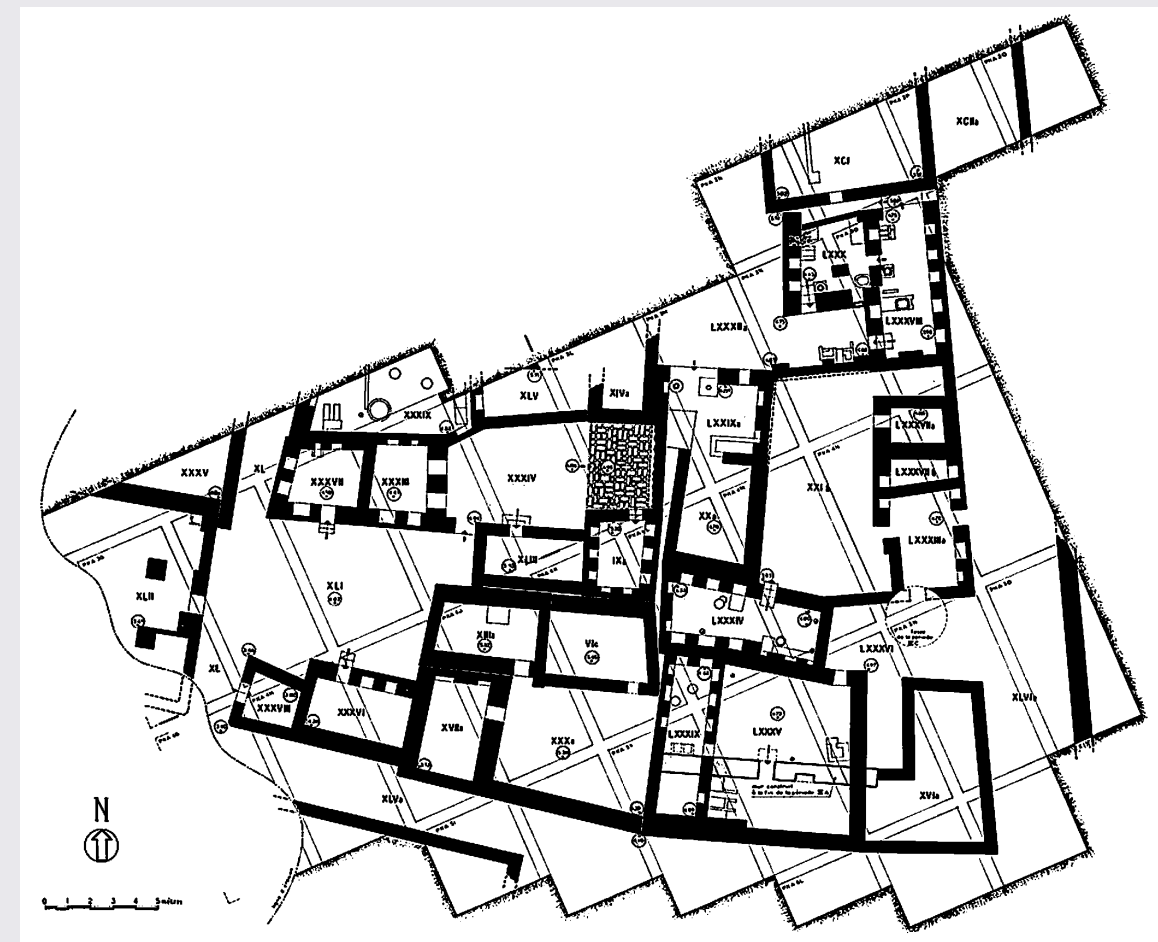


Fig. B.13.1  
The site of Pirak

In 1956, on his journey back from Quetta to Karachi, R. L. Raikes discovered the site of Pirak (Fig. B13.1). The settlement is located on the way between Sibi and Jacobabad, on the west bank of the Nari River in the Kachhi Plain. It covers a surface of around 10 hectares.

Raikes returned to the place later and published a surface collection of painted pottery. These



Fig. B13.2  
Bichrome pottery  
discovered at Pirak

potsherds are handmade and thick-walled with red- and black-painted surfaces. The designs show a strong preference for geometric, not curvilinear patterns, like diamonds, triangles, zig-zag lines and rectangles, resembling earlier bichrome and polychrome traditions of the 4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> millennia (Fig. B13.2). Apart from these new ceramic finds, stone implements and terracotta seals were recovered from the mound. Raikes compared the Pirak Bichrome Ware with potsherds excavated in Samarra (Raikes 1963, 61). On the basis of these stylistic comparisons he proposed to date the settlement to the 6<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE.

In 1968 J.-M. Casal, Director of the French Mission to Pakistan, received the permission to excavate the site and started his fieldwork. What the French archaeologists unearthed at Pirak was a much unexpected cultural sequence, which changed the original view on the site (Jarrige et al. 1979). The

excavations demonstrated that the Pirak culture, in fact, represents the last occupation in the long stratigraphic sequence excavated in Baluchistan, from Mehrgarh to Nausharo and Sibi. The Pirak cultural horizon is dated from 1800 to 700 BCE. It covers a gap between the Indus Valley Civilization and the first centuries before the Historic Era. Its traces extend mainly into the upper Kachhi Bolan region and prove that no invasions involving destructions took place there, but rather a gradual transformation of the subsistence patterns.

Fieldwork at the site revealed that a real agricultural revolution occurred after the urban phase of the Indus Valley Civilization with the introduction of intensive exploitation of winter and summer crops such as rice, which requires irrigation, and new cereals (Costantini 1981). A similar agricultural system is still predominant in the area, and it is safe to say that its foundations were laid during the Pirak Horizon. Another very important change associated with this cultural phase is the first appearance of domesticated horses, donkeys and the Bactrian camel. Their presence is also attested by terracotta figurines excavated at the sites, representing not only the animals but also riders. Such archaeological record at Pirak is particularly noteworthy, because it represents the first attested domestication of horses on the Indian Subcontinent. Moreover, it clearly implies better possibilities of transport over long and short distances.

A particularly important feature of the Pirak Culture is the architecture, denoting a striking change compared to the past (Fig. B13.3). The houses had several rooms, and a distinctive characteristic is the presence of evenly spaced aligned niches along the insides of the walls (Fig. B13.4). Nowadays, similar architectural features are present in the dwellings near Pirak (Jarrige 1995, Fig. 21), witnessing a long cultural tradition. A deep change is also observed in the material culture and especially in the production of seals, which show strong differences to the Indus seals: the terracotta and bronze seals from Pirak are square and circular with compartments, revealing parallels with the post-Harappan phase (Kenoyer 1998, 178).



Fig. B.13.3  
Architectural remains  
excavated at Pirak



Fig. B.13.4  
Houses with niches

Thus, the Pirak cultural horizon represents a time of great change that marked the beginning of a new occupation after the end of the urban phase in the Indus Valley.

The occurrence of stylistic patterns linked to the ceramic traditions points to a reappearance of older local styles after the decline of the Indus Valley Civilization in the region.