BETWEEN THE EMPIRES

Society in India 300 BCE to 400 CE

Edited by

PATRICK OLIVELLE

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS
2006

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New Perspectives on the Mauryan and Kushana Periods

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INTRODUCTION

As an archaeologist who has focused primarily on the first urbanism of the Indus valley, my interest in the Mauryan and Kushana periods arises from a need to understand what happened in the greater Indus valley after the decline and transformation of the Indus cities. I have never been satisfied with models that argued for a Dark Age lasting over one thousand years from around 1300 BCE to 300 BCE, ending with the rise of the Mauryan Empire. Over the past several decades, excavations and surveys in northern India and throughout Pakistan have begun to reveal the presence of substantial settlements that date to this interim period, demonstrating that in fact there was no Dark Age (Kenoyer 1995). Considerable surveys and limited excavations of Late Harappan (1900–1000 BCE) and Painted Grey Ware culture (1200–800 BCE) settlements have demonstrated that significantly large populations continued to occupy both the Indus and the Ganga Doab region (Joshi 1978; Shaffer 1993; Lal 1997). Early Northern Black Polished Ware (800–300 BCE) (Erdosy 1995b; Erdosy 1995a) and contemporaneous cultures have also been documented throughout these same regions, but since most sites of this period have remained occupied up until the present, it has not been possible to undertake proper settlement surveys.

Unfortunately, these discoveries do not seem to have made any impact on the well-entrenched models that attribute the second period of urbanism to the late Northern Black Polished Ware period (300–100 BCE) corresponding with the emergence of the Mauryan Empire (Allchin 1995a). The origin or stimulus for this urbanism is either attributed to Achaemenid influence from the west or from socio-economic and political developments in the middle and lower Ganga (Erdosy 1995a). There is little or no discussion of any contribution to this process from communities already present in the Punjab or the northern Indus valley regions. Similarly, the Kushana Empire is thought to have its stimulus from contact with the west and north, Iran and Central Asia, as well as the far-off Mediterranean with only minimal contributions from indigenous processes.

Recent discoveries from excavations and surveys in the northwestern regions of the Indus valley, as well as in the Punjab and Sindh, suggest that these earlier models of the Mauryan and Kushana urbanism need to be reexamined and possibly revised.

The well-known literary evidence for the presence of indigenous polities, as well as earlier archaeological evidence for the presence of substantial settlements and local cultural traditions also need to be reevaluated. For the purposes of this chapter, the main geographic focus will be on the Indus valley, and therefore I will limit my discussion to recent surveys and excavations conducted in Pakistan with the intention of expanding the scope of this study to the Doab region in the future.

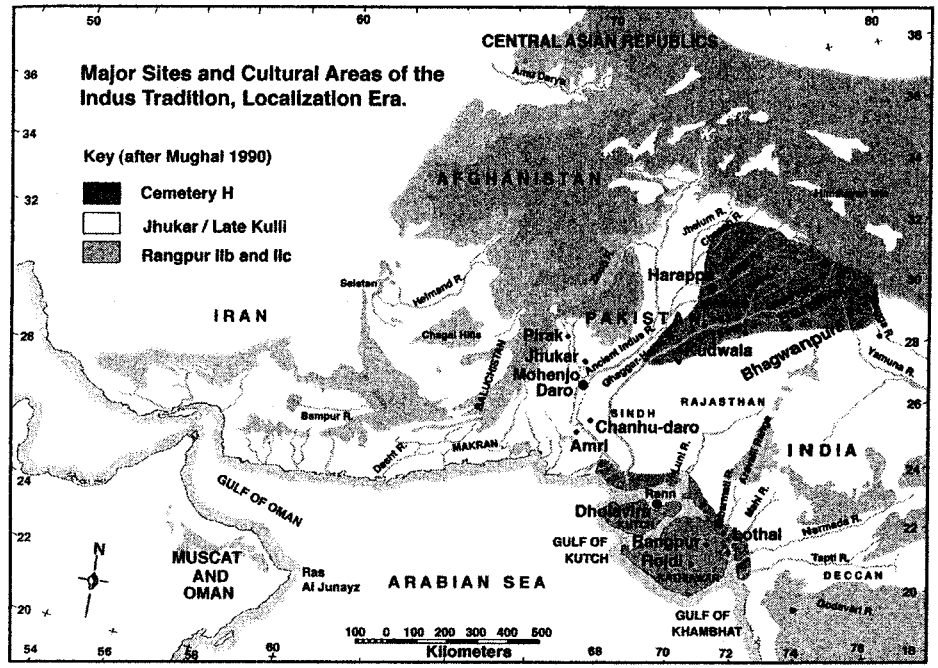
BACKGROUND

Urbanism and state development in the subcontinent of South Asia has traditionally been divided into two distinct phases that are linked by continuities in human populations, material culture, socioeconomic, ideological, and political factors. The initial phase of urbanism had its roots in the early Neolithic communities of Baluchistan and the Indus valley (circa 7000 BCE) and culminated in the rise of the Indus cities (circa 2600–1900 BCE). This long-term process has been referred to as the Indus Valley Tradition "persistent configurations of basic technologies and cultural systems within the context of temporal and geographical continuity" (Shaffer 1992). The extensive trade networks of the Indus urban centers linked the northwestern subcontinent with peninsular India, Central Asia, the Arabian Gulf region, and far-off Mesopotamia.

Scholars initially assumed that the decline of Indus urban centers resulted in a "Dark Age" with an absence of urban centers and complex sociopolitical organization throughout the Indus and upper Gangetic region (Wheeler 1968; Allchin and Allchin 1982). A careful reevaluation of earlier work on the protohistoric settlements of the Indus valley, combined with new excavations and surveys, is beginning to provide evidence for the continued existence of fairly large settlements and important legacies of the earlier Indus urbanism (Jarrige and Enault 1976; Shaffer 1993; Allchin 1995a; Kenoyer 1995; Mughal et al. 1996; Kenoyer 2003). Instead of a decline of urbanism, it might be better to characterize the change as a "localization" of socioeconomic and political interaction (Shaffer 1992; Kenoyer 1998; Kenoyer 2005) (figure 2.1).

The complex process of change after the Harappan period begins with the Late Harappan to Painted Grey Ware transition (1900–800 BCE) during which the social and political order of the Indus cities was transformed but clearly not obliterated. There is no evidence to suggest that the Indus cities were integrated through militarism, as was the case in Egypt and Mesopotamia, and they were not destroyed by military conquest. Multiple factors contributing to their transformation include changing river patterns and periodic floods that disrupted the agricultural base as well as an overextension of economic and political networks. Perhaps the most significant change is seen in the disappearance of key ideological symbols that indicate a breakdown of the major ideological framework that helped to integrate the diverse populations (Kenoyer 1998; Kenoyer 2005).

FIGURE 2.1. INDUS TRADITION: LOCALIZATION ERA



It is during this transition that we see the emergence of Vedic cultural traditions, characterized by a distinctive ideology and language. Based on the literary records such as the Vedas, along with the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyana* epics, the Punjab and northern Indus valley continued to be inhabited by numerous competing polities that have been variously identified as tribes, republics, or monarchies (Prakash 1994). Early attempts at connecting the literary references to actual sites were made by surveys and test excavations conducted by Cunningham (Cunningham 1924) and Banerji (Banerji 1984). Excavations at sites with Early Historic occupations and monuments such as Mohenjo-daro (Marshall 1931; Banerji 1984) and Harappa (Vats 1940) clearly demonstrated the extension of Kushana and later Gupta cultures into the core areas of the Punjab and Sindh. However, these discoveries were soon eclipsed by the discoveries at Taxila (Marshall 1951) and other sites in the Ganga region and south India. The study of Early Historic sites of the Indus valley was pushed even further into the background by a shift in the focus of research to the Proto-historic period and changes in national priorities. Although there continues to be an academic interest in understanding the history of the early Hindu and Buddhist rulers of this region by archaeologists in Pakistani universities, the focus of Pakistan's federal Department of Archaeology and Museums has shifted to sites that would help to reconstruct the introduction of Islam into this region. In the exploration and excavations of Aror, Bambhore, and Al Mansoora little interest was paid to the early levels that dated to the pre-Muslim period. Except for the occasional salvage excavation of Buddhist

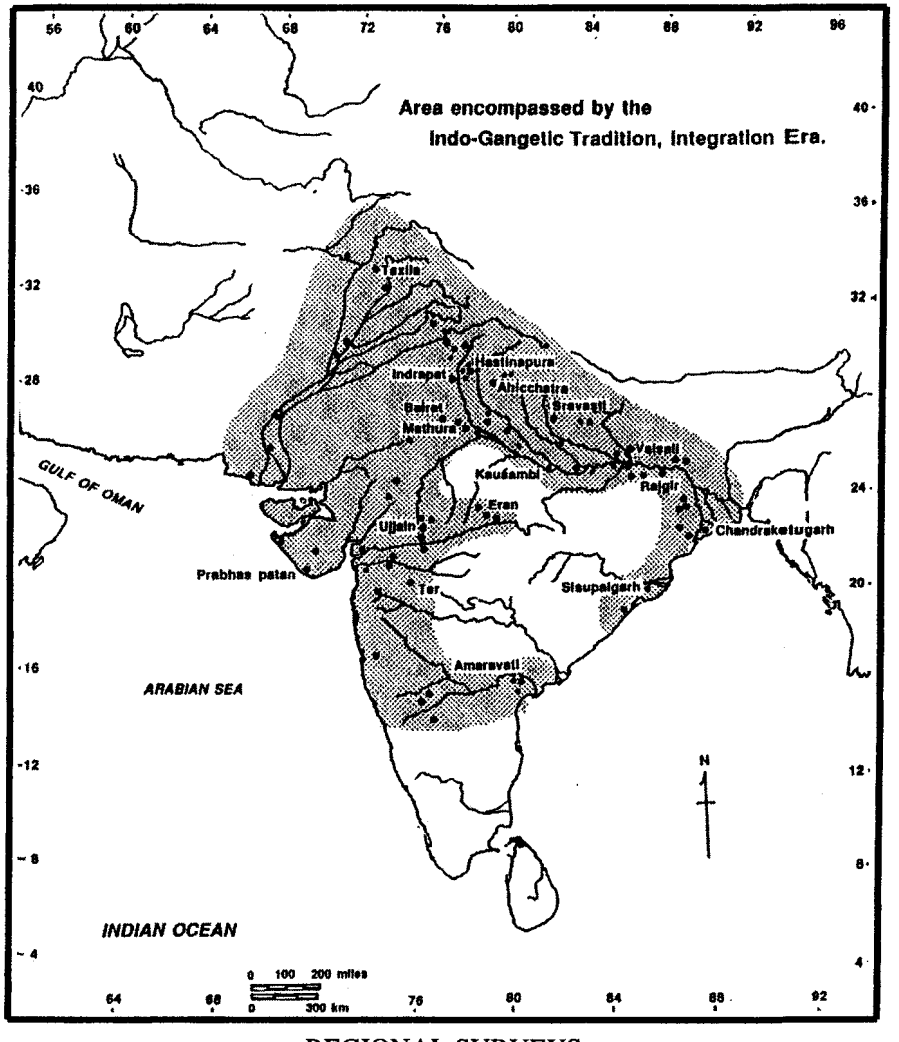
monasteries and *stūpas* to recover sculptures, there has been no serious work on the urban centers of the Early Historic period until the recent work (see below) at Akra, Bannu District (Khan et al. 2000), Charsada (Ali 1994), Gor Khutree-Peshawar (Durrani et al. 1997) and Hund, Attock district, by the Department of Archaeology, Peshawar University.

Unfortunately these recent efforts are not reflected in the most recent summaries of the Early Historic period (Allchin 1995b), where maps of northern India and Pakistan do not report any sites between Mathura and Taxila in the north, and no Early Historic sites are indicated in the regions of the Punjab and Sindh.

Even though many scholars have come to accept the importance of general continuities between the Indus cities and the Early Historic cities, in settlement planning, subsistence systems, technology, and even ideologies (Kenoyer 1995; Possehl 2002), there are no excavated settlements that provide a direct cultural link between the Late Harappan and Early Historic periods. However, such settlements probably do exist and remain buried beneath historical cities such as Lahore, Multan, Aror, and Sehwan. Even without trying, archaeologists have discovered important evidence for the interim period from excavations at sites such as Pirak in Sibi district (Jarrige and Enault 1976), as well as from burials in Quetta and Mehrgarh (Jarrige 1988; Jarrige and Hassan 1989). These sites and others to be discussed below indicate that large towns ruled by elites with considerable wealth continued to exist in this region, but the socioeconomic and political organization of the greater Indus valley region for this period remains to be fully understood.

In contrast, numerous excavations at sites in the Ganga valley provide continuities between the Late Harappan and Painted Grey Ware cultures, with subsequent occupations of the Northern Black Polished Ware culture (Roy 1983; Allchin 1995a; Dhavalikar 1999). Some of the archaeological evidence can be convincingly linked to cities and regions mentioned the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyana* epics as well as accounts in the Buddhist literature (Lal 1981; Lal 2002). If the serious imbalance in archaeological research between the Indus and the Ganga regions and the literary record itself is ignored, it is easy to conclude that there was a *dramatic* shift in the socioeconomic and political center from the Indus river valley to the Doab of the Ganga-Yamuna river valley during the period between 1900 and 800 BCE. It is this incomplete record that has led to the general assumption that there is in fact a second urbanism during the Mauryan period that is disconnected and unique from the earlier urbanism of the Indus. In the following section I will present evidence from regional surveys of archaeological sites in the Punjab and Sindh, followed by more detailed discussion of excavations at Taxila, Charsada, Peshawar, and Akra, that suggest we need to reevaluate this model.

FIGURE 2.2. IMPORTANT SITES MENTIONED IN TEXT



REGIONAL SURVEYS

Over the past fifty-five years the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan, has been active in excavations and surveys in an attempt to document sites from all periods of history and prehistory. Most recently, a systematic survey of monuments in Punjab (Mughal et al. 1996) and Sindh has successfully identified large numbers of sites that fall within the time period addressed in this chapter. In summarizing their finds they have lumped sites of the Hindu-Buddhist period together with dates ranging from the fifth century BCE to the seventh century CE. For this time period there are 226 newly discovered and recorded sites in the Punjab

alone (Mughal et al. 1996). Some districts have more sites from this period than others, and future surveys are planned in order to make more intensive collections, and eventually excavations will be undertaken at key sites.

With excavation, the history of these settlements may be pushed back even earlier, since it is difficult to use surface collections of pottery to accurately date an occupation. For example, at Charsada (Wheeler 1962) and Taxila (Marshall 1951), excavations have shown the long use of specific diagnostic types of pottery, beginning as early as 550 BCE (or possibly 900 BCE; see discussion below) during the pre-Mauryan period and continuing as late as the end of the Mauryan period, circa 100 BCE. Furthermore, based on the recent discoveries at sites such as Akra, it is possible that some of the pottery which has previously been attributed to the pre-Mauryan period may in fact be much earlier, dating to around 900–790 BCE (Khan et al. 2000).

This early dating of the pottery is extremely important when evaluating the results of the recent surveys in the southern Punjab. In the area between the Chenab and Ravi, numerous sites have been discovered dating to the period between the second century BCE and the third century CE (Mughal et al. 1996 and Nasir 2001). One site that has been known for quite some time is Shorkot, Jhang district (figure 2.2) that is made up of numerous mounds and an impressive citadel covering an area that extends for over twenty hectares. The actual ancient settlement is probably much larger and extends beneath the modern town that surrounds the citadel. This site is reported as dating to the second century BCE and later (Mughal et al. 1996: 251 and Nasir 2001). Considerable collections of pottery and beads have been collected from Shorkot by local scholars such as Mr. Jamil Bhatti. Based on my personal examination of these artifacts and general comparisons with pottery and beads from Taxila as well as Kausambi, I would argue that the site dates to around 600 BCE if not earlier. Some of the pottery collected by Mr. Bhatti is also very similar to Late Harappan ceramics at Harappa and though he could not confirm where these sherds were discovered, it is possible that a Late Harappan settlement is present somewhere in the vicinity of the ancient city.

Another site that adds to the general picture is Bawani, situated some twelve kilometers north of Harappa (figure 2.2), and southeast of Shorkot on the southern bank of the Ravi. Informal study of pottery and beads from Bawani reveal strong similarities to those found from the early levels of Shorkot, with later styles indicating occupation through the Kushana and early medieval periods. The presence of numerous other ruined mounds roughly dated to the second century BCE (or earlier, as noted above) suggests the presence of fairly large populations in the Punjab as early as 600 BCE and on through the Mauryan and Kushana periods.

The revised chronology for Shorkot presented above is admittedly based on cursory examination and needs to be followed by systematic survey and excavation. However, I am confident that evidence for continuous occupation of this region from the Late Harappan through to the Kushana period will be discovered, confirming the descriptions presented in the literary record.

EXCAVATIONS AT TAXILA

The most significant recent excavations relating to the Early Historic period in Pakistan have been conducted in the Northwest Provinces and Taxila, which falls in the northern Punjab province. While some of these sites had been excavated in the past, others represent new explorations, and together they provide important new evidence for the communities living in this region just prior to and after the Mauryan period.

The site of Taxila, near Islamabad (figure 2.2) is one of the most important early cities in northern South Asia, with a substantial occupation beginning in the pre-Mauryan and Achaemenid periods, and continuing through the Kushana period and later (Marshall 1951). The earliest evidence for urbanism at Taxila was originally documented in the course of excavations of Bhir Mound. The lowest levels of this mound were been dated to around 400 BCE based on pottery and other artifact styles. This early occupation was thought to correspond to the end of the Achaemenid period, but there is very little evidence for Achaemenid cultural influence in the layout of the site or the pottery. Marshall's excavations of Bhir Mound defined four levels, with level IV being the oldest. It is in these levels that the earliest evidence for a *black burnished ware*, thought to be a local version of the Northern Black Polished ware, was discovered alongside local *red burnished ware pottery*. Discoveries of gray and black burnished pottery near Islamabad have been identified as Painted Gray Ware by Salim (Salim 1991), but personal examination suggests that they are not related to PGW and are more like the burnished black wares of Period IV at Bhir Mound. If this association can be confirmed, it would suggest that the earliest levels of Bhir mound represent a regional center with outlying smaller settlements. According to Marshall, evidence for Achaemenid influence at Bhir mound is seen in the presence of scaraboid beads (Marshall 1960) and silver bar coins with stamped designs. On the other hand, Allchin argues that the punchmarked coins from the early levels of Bhir Mound were developed locally (Allchin 1995b). He also argues that the presence of molded figurines and other features of material culture clearly point to Gangetic influence in the early establishment and continuing occupation of the Bhir Mound settlement at Taxila, which would correspond to epic traditions attributing the foundation of Taxila and Puskalavati to Bharata and the conquest of Taxila by Janamejaya (Allchin 1995b). An earlier critical study of pottery traditions from sites such as Charsada and Taxila as well as sites in the Swat valley also concluded that prior to the Achaemenid period, Gandhara was influenced by developments in the Gangetic region to the east (Vogelsang 1988). While there is no doubt about the important connections between Gandhara and the Gangetic polities further to the east as well as the Achaemenid polities to the west, I feel that both of these approaches ignore the importance of the Indus valley region itself.

Renewed excavations at Bhir Mound, Taxila, have revealed more information on site planning and urban facilities, specifically the nature of sewerage systems during the Mauryan and early Kushana periods (Khattak and Khan 2001). These new excavations reveal the presence of wells for drawing water and covered drains that run under houses and streets to remove sewerage water. These discoveries indicate that Marshall's observation of no wells in the city and no connected drains needs to be revised. Wells and drains are not a feature of early Chalcolithic sites in the Ganga

region, and are not present in the Achaemenid settlements of Afghanistan and Iran. The fact that wells and drains and drains to remove polluting water feature prominently in earlier Indus settlements would suggest that their continued presence in the northwest is the the result of long-term continuities in indigenous urban architectural traditions.

There is no question that the material evidence from Bhir Mound shows evidence for interaction with Achaemenid and Gangetic cultures. However, it is unlikely that the Achaemenid Empire or the early states of the Ganga-Yamuna Doab would have had much interest in this region if it were not already a productive urban society with considerable wealth and economic power. It is quite probable that this settlement was already an important regional center and that its urban character does not derive from either the west or the east but rather is the result of indigenous processes. The closest parallels are therefore with the earlier Indus cities, and even though we have no evidence for Harappan period urban settlements in the Taxila valley at this time, we do have evidence for Kot Dijian settlements at Hathial and Sarai Khola, that may have continued to be inhabited into the Harappan period.

EARLY HARAPPAN AND IRON AGES SETTLEMENTS

Not far from Bhir Mound, Taxila, is the site of Sarai Khola (figure 2.2), which was first established in the late Neolithic/Chalcolithic period around 3360 with occupation continuing on into the Early Harappan (Kot Dijian) period (circa 2460 to 2090 BCE). The site is chronologically contemporaneous with the Harappan period at Harappa (2600–1900 BCE). In the course of surface surveys adjacent to Bhir Mound, another Kot Dijian site was located in the 1980s on a small ridge called Hathial, dating to 2550–2288 BCE (Allchin 1995b). More recently three additional Kot Diji period sites have been discovered in the valley (Amanullah and Ghafoor 2001), bringing the total number of Kot Dijian sites to five.

No Harappan or Late Harappan sites have been discovered in the Taxila valley as a whole, but this can be explained in two ways. On the one hand it is possible that Kot Dijian period occupations in Taxila valley continued on into the Harappan period as is well documented at the site of Rehman Dheri (Durrani 1986; Durrani et al. 1991) in the Gomal plain. The well-planned settlement at Rehman Dheri had many features that were similar to those seen at Harappan urban centers, including massive mud brick walls and well laid-out streets oriented in the cardinal directions. The limited excavations did not locate any wells or drains, but brick drains have been found in the Kot Diji period site of Kalibangan in Haryana to the east (Lal 1979).

On the other hand, we do have evidence for the unexcavated Harappan site of Hisham Dheri near Rehman Dheri. This site indicates that Kot Dijian and Harappan communities actually lived side by side in some regions, and it is not unlikely that other Harappan period sites could be discovered in the course of systematic surveys in the Taxila valley. Such a pattern would not be surprising given the presence of Harappan settlers as far north as Shortughai, in Badakshan (Francfort 1989).

Settlements such as Sarai Kola and Hathial were strategically located along the north-south and east-west trade routes. The presence of numerous settlements and burials of the Gandhara grave culture (circa late second to first millennium BCE) (Stacul

1989; Stacul 2001) in the valleys of Swat and Chitral and the Iron Age burials at Sarai Khola (circa 1000 BCE?) (Halim 1970–71), indicate that the Taxila valley continued to be an important route connecting the Indus valley with regions to the north-south and east-west.

Subsequent populations in this valley began using a distinctive red burnished pottery that has been documented from the uppermost levels of Hathial, covering an area of approximately thirteen hectares. The size of the settlement is quite substantial and though we do not know much about the settlement plan or architecture, it has been possible to date the pottery to between 1000–400 BCE (calibrated) (Allchin 1995b). This is the crucial time period between the Late Harappan of the Indus valley and the Early Historic period, and hopefully excavations will soon be undertaken at Hathial to reveal the nature of this settlement. Until that happens however, there is evidence from other sites that can assist in our investigations.

CHARSADA REVISITED

The closest site with red burnished pottery is Charsada (Puskalavati) (Wheeler 1962), located on the northern route from Taxila to the upper Indus valley and the more isolated valleys of Swat and Chitral (figure 2.2). Wheeler dated the earliest levels of Charsada to around 550 BCE on the basis of relative stratigraphy and chronological comparisons with the famous Northern Black Polished Wares found in at Taxila and sites in the Ganga. One of the pottery types that he dated to around 550–300 BCE and labeled "soapy red ware" (Wheeler 1962) is the same type of pottery that Allchin has reported from Hathial and called "red burnished ware" (Allchin 1995b). If we use Allchin's dates for the red burnished ware, it would date the early levels of Charsada to around 1000–400 BCE instead of 550 BCE.

If this earlier date for Charsada can be confirmed through further excavations and radiocarbon dates, it would indicate that two important settlements—Charsada and Hathial—had become established along the important trade routes in this northwestern region long before the Achaemenid period. There is no evidence to suggest that the initial foundation of these settlements was influenced by cultural developments to the west (e.g., Kandahar, Afghanistan) (Allchin 1995b) or for that matter to the east in the Ganga-Yamuna Doab. Because of the fact that both sites eventually emerge as major urban centers during the subsequent Achaemenid and Mauryan periods, it is not unlikely that they were significant political and trade centers during their initial occupation. However, without extensive horizontal excavation and further regional exploration, it is not possible to determine if these two sites were simply prosperous towns or if they were in fact urban centers. If the later can be demonstrated, it would require a major revision of the current "accepted wisdom" that the Mauryan period represents a second emergence of urbanism.

Surveys conducted in the region around Charsada by Ihsan Ali from Peshawar University (Ali 1994) focus on the later Kushana period, but they do provide us some clues for directing future research. He notes that surface surveys did not reveal the presence of any prehistoric and protohistoric sites, but he also does not report any sites with "soapy red ware" (aka "red burnished pottery"), which is well documented in the

deep excavations of the Bala Hisar at Charsada (Wheeler 1962). He goes on to note that regions with high concentrations of Buddhist and Early Historic sites are still the most populated regions today due to the fertility of the soil and the presence of water sources. This suggests that most later settlements have been established on top of earlier settlements and, by extension, even earlier settlements with "soapy red ware" (1000–400 BCE) or Kot Dijian pottery (3000–2000 BCE) may be found buried under Buddhist period sites.

Although we do not have enough evidence to reconstruct regional settlement patterns for the initial phase of Charsada (or Hathial), Ihsan Ali's survey does provide a glimpse of the urban networks of the Early Historic period. He has divided the sites identified in his survey into two overlapping categories that are relevant to this chapter. Buddhist sites are identified by the presence of architectural and sculptural fragments derived from *stūpas* and monasteries and can be dated to between the first and fifth centuries CE. The site of Bala Hisar-Charsada-Puskalavati is lumped with this group, though it in fact begins earlier (possibly as early as 1000–400 BCE) and continues much later.

During the Buddhist period he identified four or five tiers of settlement hierarchy based on surface surveys of site size.

TABLE 2.1: SETTLEMENT SIZE, BUDDHIST PERIOD

Settlement Size	Number of Settlements
1. ≥ 40 ha	1 site - Bala Hisar - Charsada (40.45 ha for the mounded area, but the site is probably much larger)
2. 25 ha	2 sites
3. 10-12 ha	3 sites
4. 5-6 ha	4 sites
5. < 5 ha	61 sites (includes Shaikan Dherai)

Early Historic sites from the Kushana to the Hindus Shahis are lumped together and date from around first to eighth centuries CE. Although the settlement hierarchies of the Early Historic period are less clear due to an overlap with the Buddhist period, Ali notes that there is a clear decline in the number of settlements after the fifth century, which he attributes to the Huna invasions of this region.

TABLE 2.2: SETTLEMENT SIZE, EARLY HISTORIC PERIOD

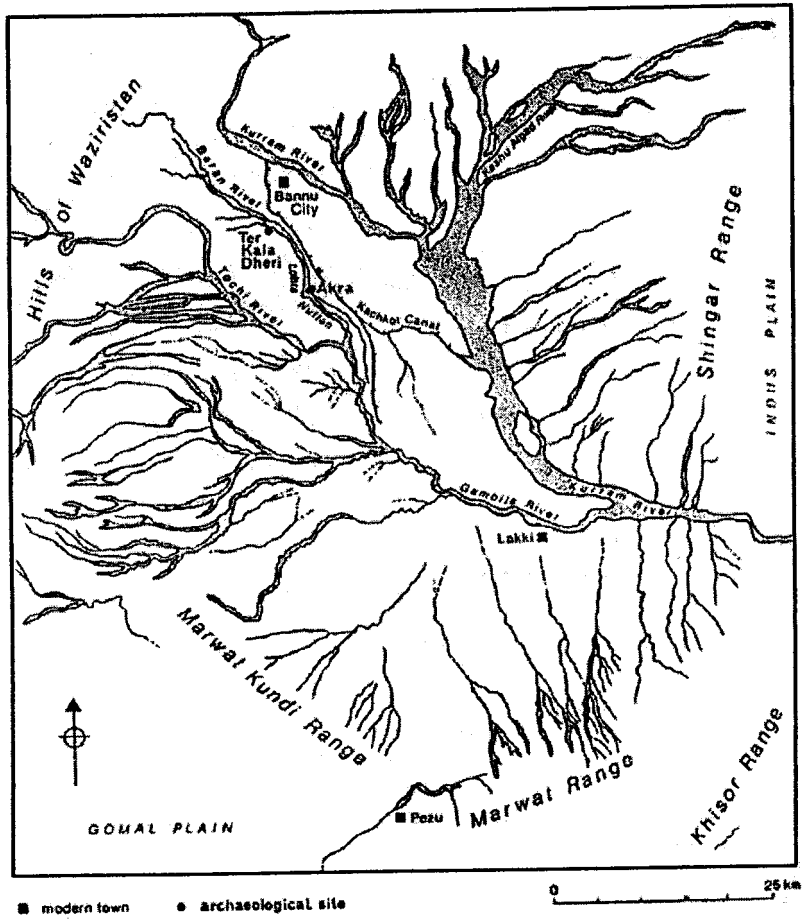
Settlement Size	Number of Settlements
1. 11-16 ha	3 sites
2. 5-10 ha	3 sites
3. < 5 ha	22 sites

The decrease in large settlements in this area may also relate to the emergence of Peshawar as a powerful fortified urban center. Ongoing surveys by Ali and his team in the Peshawar valley promise to expand the work that he began in the Charsada region, and will undoubtedly result in further refinement of current models.

PESHAWAR

The city of Peshawar is one of the largest and most well-known cities of the Northwest Frontier Province, with a rich history that can be traced back to the Early Historic period on the basis of inscriptions and other textual evidence. However, the archaeological confirmation of its early history has only recently begun. The late Dr. F. A. Durrani and his team from Peshawar University began excavations in Gor Khutree, one of the highest and most promising localities of the city, in 1992–93 and again in 1995–96 (Durrani et al. 1997). This area was selected as an optimal place for large-scale excavations that would also be able to reach the earliest levels of the city. Gor Khutree is thought to have been the place where the Buddha's alms bowl was kept, and others have identified it with the Vihara of the Kushana ruler Kanishka. During Mughal times the area was converted into a sarai and during the Sikh period it was turned into a residence and official headquarters of the governor. After many years of complex negotiations, the area inside the sarai was finally turned over to the Department of Archaeology, North West Frontier Province, for excavation and establishment of a museum. The initial excavations were able to reach the lowest levels (layers 18–20) of occupation dating to the last phase of the Achaemenid rule and the Mauryan occupation, dating to around the fourth century BCE. (Durrani et al. 1997). Due to the great depth of deposit, only a small area of the earliest levels was exposed, and it is possible that other parts of the city date to even earlier periods. Furthermore, the current dating for these early levels is based primarily on the pottery comparisons with sites such as Charsada and Taxila. In view of the discussions presented above, it is possible that the Peshawar site

FIGURE 2.3. BANNU DISTRICT AND EARLY HISTORIC SITES (KHAN ET AL. 2000)



actually dates much earlier, to the pre-Achaemenid period. If this can be confirmed through future excavations it would add one more piece to the growing evidence for indigenous urban centers in the northwest prior to the Mauryan period.

EARLY HISTORIC BANNU

Another recently excavated city that is relevant to this discussion is the site of Akra, Bannu Division, North West Frontier Province (figures 2.2 and 2.3). Artifacts purportedly collected from the surface of this site and currently housed in the British Museum include cylindrical seals dating to the second millennium BCE and pottery that indicates a continuous occupation until around 1000 CE, at the time of the

Ghaznavid invasion of this area (Khan et al. 2000).

Extensive deposits from the Iron Age have been exposed in the course of recent excavations, with artifacts such as etched carnelian beads and black-painted red ware pottery called "Bannu Black-on Red ware," that represent a unique local ceramic tradition. These levels have been dated to around 900–790 BCE (calibrated) (Khan et al. 2000) and provide concrete evidence that the site was an important regional center long before the period of Achaemenid invasion. A deep series of floor levels, pits, hearths, and other domestic debris was uncovered along with an impressive curving stone wall made of layers of large river cobbles. This stone wall was constructed above a lower, earlier wall made of carefully placed yellow mud lumps cemented together with a darker mud mortar. According to the excavators, these architectural features indicate that Akra was a major settlement of at least proto-urban standard, but that further excavations and surveys are needed to determine the nature of the regional settlement pattern during its initial phase. The absence of diagnostic Achaemenid artifacts in later levels and in the Bannu region in general has led the excavators to suggest that the city remained relatively independent even after the Achaemenid rulers extended their control into Gandhara (Khan et al. 2000).

Excavations at the nearby site of Ter Kala Dheri confirms the widespread use of the local ceramic type which has been called "Bannu Black-on-Red" and provides additional dates of 780–400 BCE and 1000–760 BCE (Khan et al. 2000). According to the excavators (Khan et al. 2000), the Bannu Black-on-Red ware pottery may have parallels with the occupations at Charsada and Hathial, where burnished red ware ceramics have been recovered dating to approximately the same time period (Allchin 1995b).

No major architectural features were discovered at this site, but the limited excavations did reveal distinct floors and pits as well as "a tiny fragment of what might be glass" (Khan et al. 2000). Upper disturbed levels contain pottery and figurines that are similar to the assemblages from Taxila (Sirkap) dating from the first century BCE to the second century CE as well as later periods.

Many important trade routes from the west run through Bannu to the Indus. and it is not surprising that there are early settlements that grow to be major urban centers in later periods (Khan et al. 2000). Even though there is no clear evidence for an Achaemenid political presence, traders would have moved through this region during the Persian hegemony of the northwest subcontinent. In fact, the earliest coin from the site dates to before the period of Alexander and indicates economic contacts with Achaemenid commercial centers in northern Pakistan and Afghanistan (Khan et al. 2000). Coins provide evidence for the continued importance of this region as a trade route, through the Mauryan (300–180 BCE), Indo-Greek (2nd century BCE), Indo-Scythian (80 BCE–50 CE) and Kushana times (10–360 CE) (Khan, et al. 2000). Kushano-Sasanian coins (circa 230–370 CE) from Afghanistan and northern Pakistan are also found at Akra. There is very little evidence of Buddhist influence in the Bannu Division, and though travelers such as Xuan Zang and Fa Hien report the presence of ruined monasteries and priests (Khan et al. 2000), only one possible stūpa was reported by Stein (Khan et al. 2000). The post-Kushana period in Bannu is not well known, but it is thought that since the region is lacking Buddhist monuments, it must have been dominated by Hindu rulers. Unfortunately, there is only one possible Hindu

monument preserved, and further excavations and surveys are needed to understand this period of its history (Khan et al. 2000).

CONCLUSION

In this brief and somewhat disconnected discussion of recent surveys and excavations in Pakistan, I have tried to present the case for a critical review of current models relating to the emergence and character of the second phase of urbanism in the northern subcontinent. Although the evidence is admittedly sparse and inconclusive, I feel that too much emphasis has been put on the Achaemenid expansion and the impact of Gangetic polities on the cultural developments in the Indus valley as a whole, and the northern cities in particular. On the basis of the evidence presented above I would argue for the presence of major polities in the Indus valley continuing from the Late Harappan right through to the Mauryan periods. Furthermore, given the important legacies of the Indus valley cities, I feel that we need to revise the way we look at the material culture and architectural traditions of the northern Indus valley. Instead of attributing everything to either the Gangetic region to the east or the Achaemenids to the west, we should assume that they emerge from indigenouse processes and are only later modified by contact with these other regions. If this model of localized development in the northwest can be confirmed through future excavations and research, it calls into question many of the time-honored models for the emergence of "Indian" culture as being derived from a Gangetic homeland. A more complex model with multiple centers of influence may turn out to be more appropriate. Originally I had hoped to expand this critique to the discussion of the Kushana cities and the third phase of urban growth, but will save that discussion for a future paper.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the organizers of the conference and volume for allowing me to contribute this paper even though I was unable to attend and participate in the discussions due to scheduling problems. Special thanks to my colleagues in Pakistan, Dr. Farid Khan and Dr. Ihsan Ali of Peshawar University, and Dr. Ashraf, curator Taxila Museum, Bahadur Khan, and all the members of the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Taxila excavation team who have provided me with their recent publications and updated me on their excavations.

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