

## A Fortified Complex at Pir Manakrai, Haripur: A Brief Introduction

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The archaeological site of Pir Manakrai is situated about 5 km east of Haripur city in the Hazara region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Pakistan between  $33^{\circ} 59' 40''$  N and  $72^{\circ} 58' 29''$  E (Fig. I). It lies on the right bank of a hill stream called *Dorr*, which comes from the snowy peaks of the 'gulliat' region of Abbotabad and debouches into the reservoir of Tarbela approximately 8 km to the north-west of the site. The mound is about 32 km north of the city of *Takshasila* (modern Taxila), and can be approached either from the village of Pir

Manakrai, off-Chappar road from the north side, or by crossing the *Dorr* River at Ali Khan or Sarai Saleh villages on the Karakoram Highway to the south. The cultural deposit of the site lies scattered on three lower promontories named locally as *Mathian*, *Sathian* and *Kathian*, which cover an area of roughly 1.5 km. The meaning to these names is as obscured as the name of Pir Manakrai itself. Based on topography, the site can conveniently be divided into six units, which have been referred to as A, B, C, D, E and F (Fig. II).

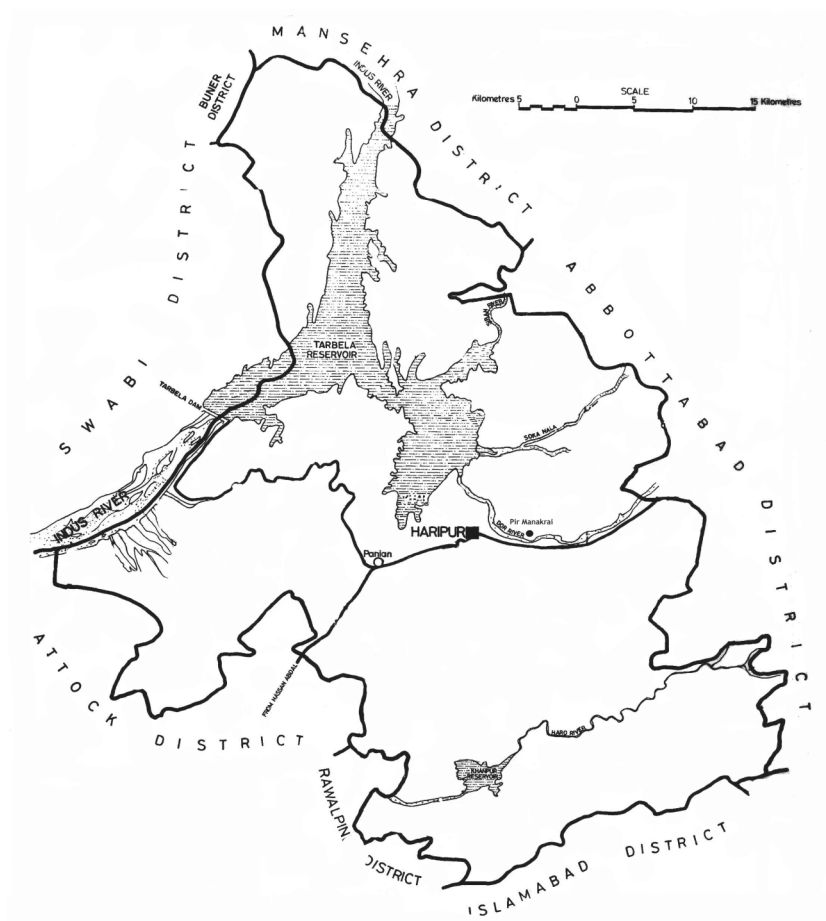


Fig. I: Location map of Haripur and Pir Manakrai



Fig. II. Location map of Pir Manakrai site and its units

Archaeological excavations were conducted at the south-eastern fringes of Pir Manakrai (unit F) in 1988 and 1989 by the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan, and this area was referred to as *Garr Morya* or '*Garh Mauryan*' or 'fort of the Mauryans' by the excavator (Qamar 1990, 95-154). The archaeology of the uppermost mound remained unexplored. It was discovered accidentally in January 1994 when the inhabitants of Pir Manakrai village were preparing ground to celebrate the death anniversary of a local *faqir* named as *Sain Sardar Baba*, who died three years earlier and was buried at south-western corner of the site (Durrani 1997a). While levelling the ground (unit A) with bulldozer, a bronze jar (coin hoard) full of about two thousand silver coins of Indo-Greek rulers was discovered, and the

majority of these were sold in the market and later became reknowned as the 'Sarai Saleh Hoard' (Bopearachchi and Aman-ur-Rahman 1995). The site also attracted the attention of a team of archaeologists from the National Heritage Foundation (hereafter NHF) and the University of Peshawar who were working at the site of Panian (also known as Manakrai Dheri), located off the Panian-Sarikot road, and about 10 km west of Pir Manakrai (Durrani et al 1997, 213-226; Qamar and Khan 1998, 59-83; Khan 2004, 85).

Formal archaeological excavations began in 1997, and continued in 1998-99 and 2002 under the direction of the late Farzand Ali Durrani, who was then the president of the NHF. As a result of continuous fieldwork at Pir Manakrai, under the field direction of Saifur Rahman Dar

and Shah Nazar Khan, a good amount of well-preserved structures of different periods were exposed; many coins, vessels, beads, figurines and inscriptions on pottery were unearthed; chronological profile of the ancient city was established (Dar 2002 & 2002-03) and above all a unique fortified complex was cleared, which is preserved up to a greater extent. It has been declared 'the first such castle, ever excavated in Hazara Division' (Durrani, 1997b) and a 'Hindu period fort' (Khan 2004, 85). This paper aims to throw light on the architectural remains of this complex.

### **The Fortified Complex**

About 100 meter to the east of unit A, where a coin hoard was discovered earlier, is unit C. Here traces of a small fortress like structure with four walls having round bastions at the corners and remnants of a grand staircase on the west side, overlooking the site, have been exposed. At the time of the excavations, local people made it clear that there had been a large structure on top of this unit, which they had demolished in order to construct a poultry farm. Before excavations commenced, nothing was visible on the surface, except heaps of debris in the form of pebbles, *kanjur* blocks and lime mixed with soil. Oriented in an east-west

direction, the external walls of the fortified complex measure 48 x 33 m while the internal walls measure 47 x 30 m with walls ranging from 1.10 to 1.70 m in thickness (fig. III, Pl. 1, 2 & 3). Slightly tapering semi-circular bastions are located on all four corners of the complex (Pl. 4). The western bastions are slightly larger (2.5 m radius) than the eastern ones (2m radius). Embedded in the north-eastern bastion were three blocks of stones decorated with a *trisula* (trident) carved in relief, and ears of wheat made of small slices of stone set obliquely in a mosaic of (Pl. 4 & 5). The walls of the fortress and the bastions were constructed in solid stone masonry and finished on the exterior with beautiful diaper patterns of true Gandharan fashion that is very well known from sites such as Sirsukh, Jaulian, Mohra Murado, and Badalpur in the Taxila and dated to the Kushan period.

The fortress, at first glance, appears to have been a military structure, as are so common in ancient times, but this interpretation is unlikely given the overall small size, relatively straight walls, lack of a ramp, and the presence of a platform in the centre. On the basis of the remains discovered inside the fortification, the military purpose is also doubtful.

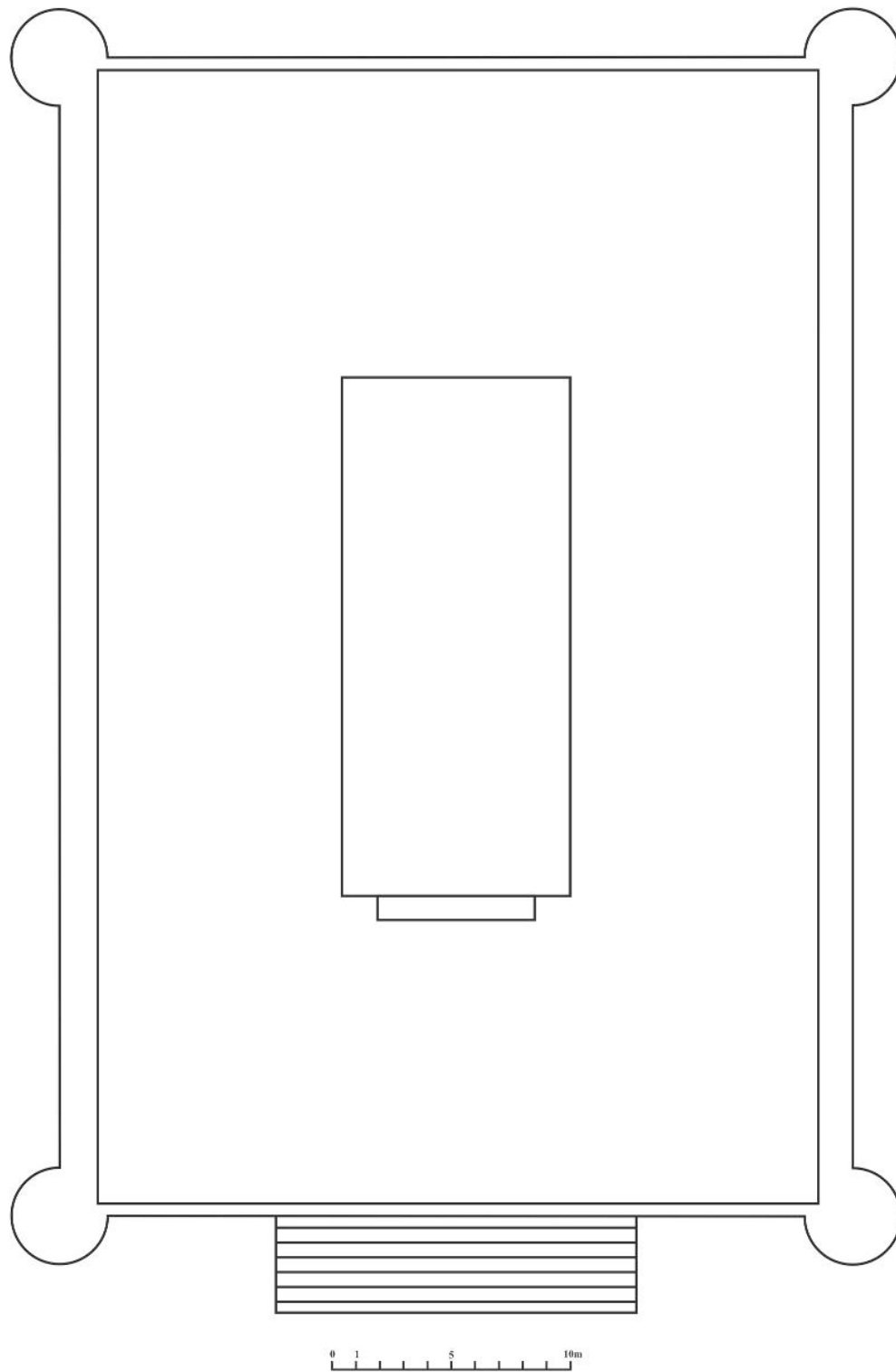


Fig. III: Pir Manakrai, plan of the fortified complex





Plate 1: Pir Manakrai, Haripur, general view of the fortified complex with river in the background

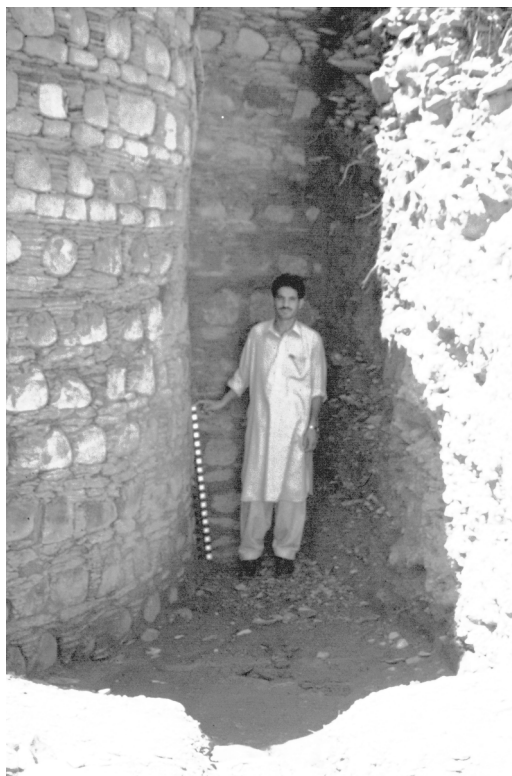


Plate 2: Pir Manakrai, Haripur, a view of the south-western bastion



Plate 3: Pir Manakrai, Haripur, general view of the ramp, staircase and attached rooms outside



Plate 4: Pir Manakrai, Haripur, general view of the north-eastern bastion



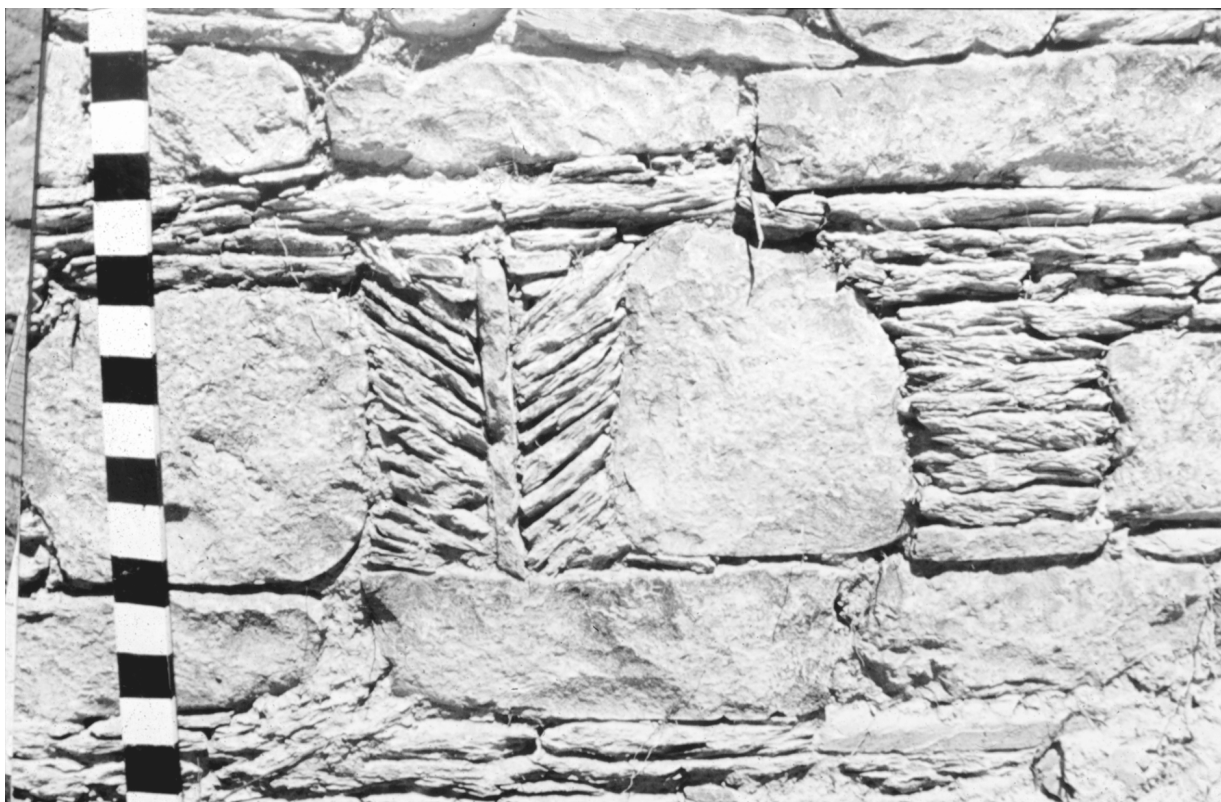


Plate 5: Pir Manakrai, Haripur, close view of the design in northeastern bastion

### A Central Shrine?

Inside the centre of the fortress there is a platform, measuring 21.50 x 9.50 m (Fig. II), and it is possible that it may have been topped by a temple or shrine that is now vanished completely. According to some local inhabitants, the walls of the central structure (temple/shrine) were intact up to a considerable height until relatively recently when they pulled it down. The remaining platform has a height of 3 m at the north-eastern corner and extends from east to west (Pl. 6 & 7). There is an entrance/approach from the west through a receding staircase of the type usually found on one side of the square bases of Buddhist *stupas*. The excavations here revealed that the central

platform was constructed directly on the natural rock, with medium sized stone slabs being used for the initial levelling, which were later on overlaying with dressed *kanjur* stones (Dar 2002). The now missing superstructure appears to have been completely built of squarely cut dressed *kanjur* stones, as many such blocks were lying scattered in the surrounding debris (Pl. 8). The uneven surface inside the fortress, which was undoubtedly originally quite steep, was filled and levelled with soil and stones. However, in order to relieve comparatively the thin walls of the fortress from the pressure of the fill, a number of enclosing walls were constructed, running parallel to both the sides of the central platform and the four walls of the fortress (Pl. 9).



Plate 6: Pir Manakrai, Haripur, general view of the central platform from the east



Plate 7: Pir Manakrai, Haripur, close view of the lime layer in the debris





Plate 8: Pir Manakrai, Haripur, a Kanjur block (pilaster) from the central platform



Plate 9: Pir Manakrai, Haripur, walls inside the complex



Some traces of rooms inside the fortress are visible, but little of these have survived with the exception of a covered drain and a room (bathroom?) with a floor of stone slabs set in lime, a brick-tiled floor of the last occupation and one or two hearths for cooking. A thick ashy deposit found outside the western face of the fortress walls suggests that regular cooking arrangements were carried out either inside or immediately outside the fortress.

### The Staircase

Although in a very bad state of preservation now, there is a magnificent staircase attached to the western side of the fortified complex and this is the sole approach to the central structure (temple/shrine?) (Pl. 10). This staircase is about

4 meters wide and 15 meters long, and although it would have been used for access to the fortification, it may also have existed before the construction of the fortress itself to provide an approach to the central temple/shrine. A number of other structures have been exposed near the staircase outside the fortress but their precise nature is yet to be ascertained. Adjacent to the south-western bastion a big hall (9.5 x 5 m) was also uncovered, filled with 2m of ashy debris. Its exact function near the fortress wall is not yet clear. A large circular oven with a flat bed of black slate stone, together with ashes and heaps of animal bones, is indicative of the presence of a culinary arrangement near the shrine. This common feature can still be seen in most part of the subcontinent - Muslim or Non-Muslim and is potentially indicative of commercial activity.



Plate 10: Pir Manakrai, Haripur, general view of the staircase from the west

## Discussion

In order to coherently interpret the structures at Pir Manakrai, it is important to assess the construction of the fortress and evaluate its relation to the central platform. A stratigraphic analysis from the excavation at this unit has revealed that the fortress would have been constructed not to serve and station the military but rather with the aim to protect the central structure, which could have been either a temple, shrine or a even a sanctified rock and certainly predates the fortress itself. The stratigraphy further suggests that the presumed temple/shrine was burnt at least three different times, if not more - once prior to the construction of the fortress walls. Interestingly, no object was recovered in association with this temple-platform, so it is not possible to assign the central structure of the temple/shrine to a specific religion or religious cult. The possibility of the Buddhist shrine is perhaps overruled, as there is a complete Buddhist establishment of a stupa and monastery in the '*Garh Maoryan*' (unit F) area, which is close to the south-eastern side of the fortress i.e. unit C (not more than 500 m away).

It is also important to consider the dating of the fortified complex. From the style of masonry, stratigraphy and pottery of the early levels at the fortress, the construction of the central platform appears to have been built in the first century BC, while the fortress itself appears to date to the 2nd-3rd century AD. This dating is supported by the discovery of a sherd inscribed with a few Kharoshti characters. It is clear that the two structures co-existed during the later Kushans, Hindu Shahi and finally through early years of Muslim occupation of the area in the eleventh century. A significant number of painted glazed sherds, fragments of coloured glass, terracotta plugs and several square

terracotta tiles as well as hundreds of ordinary burnt bricks were collected from this unit. It is notable that none of these objects was found in the main residential area of unit A. The most common cultural material from and around the fortified complex is pottery, which is identical to Kushan, late Kushan, Hindu Shahi and early Muslim types. Earlier ceramics like N.B.P Ware, Grey ware and Red Burnished Ware, which were discovered in unit A, are missing here completely. The uppermost level yielded painted glazed, triangular terracotta plugs (as used at Lal Mahra in the Gomal Plain), large square t/c tiles (used in the floors) that are typical of the Islamic period.

This unique fortified complex and the adjacent area certainly need further archaeological excavations and research in order to expose the structure fully and understand its precise nature which will undoubtedly unfold some new aspects of the socio-religious environment of the people in the early historic period of the region.

## Acknowledgment

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