

FASCINATING DISCOVERIES FROM BUDDHIST SANCTUARY OF BADALPUR, DISTRICT HARIPUR, TAXILA VALLEY

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Coordinates: Longitude 52° 30' 15" E

Latitude 46° 50' 35" N

The first season's excavation at the Buddhist sanctuary of Badalpur in District Haripur were taken in hand from 11th of June to 22nd August, 2005, by a team from Exploration and Excavation Branch of the Department of Archaeology and Museum, Government of Pakistan. The site of Badalpur stupa and monastery is a protected archaeological site since 1930 and owned by the Government. It covers a total area of 2.9 acres. It is situated near Behra Village in the open valley of Haro River, about ten KM north east of Taxila Museum and 2.5 KM North West of Julian Village. The site has a big stupa on the west and a monastic complex on the east. The monastery measures 81 metres north – south by 78 metres east – west while the Stupa complex proper measures 71 metres north – south and 60 metres east- west. Ancient Takshasila is one of the most important centres of cultural diffusion. The innumerable ancient remains scattered all over the area testimony of its greatness. From the historical and cultural point of view Taxila is one of the famous regions in the Buddhist world. During the period of the Mauryan king Asoka (272 BC - 232 BC) Buddhism was flourished in this region and reached to its climax during the Kushan king of Kanishka (2nd century AD), the real founder of the great Kushana empire and a great patron of Buddhism. Greek historians and Chinese Travellers like Arrian, Strabo, Plutarch and Hsien Tsang have well described Taxila.

Status

The Archaeological Remains at Taxila have been inscribed on the World Heritage List, which confirms the universal value of the cultural sites, deserves protection for the benefit of all humanity.

Previous Investigations

Before the first excavation of 1916 - 17 in the Stupa Court conducted by V. Natesa Aiyar, the then Superintendent, Frontier Circle during the period of Sir John Marshall as Director General, Archaeological Survey of India, the site was mentioned by Sir Alexander Cunningham in his 1863-64 Report. He narrated that the stupa was totally denuded of its facing stone and nothing has been left. He discovered ten copper coins, 43 sealing and pottery from the stupa court area. He exposed the Stupa remains from all sides and unearthed the chapels on north and south of the Stupa. The rectangular stupa measured 81 feet 9 inches by 74 feet 3 inches at the base.

The masonry of the stupa is laid in lime stone in the semi ashlar and semi diaper styles with kanjur let in for mouldings and pilasters. According to him, at a height of about 20 feet above the base of the plinth rises the drum of the stupa. Traces of procession path were also found around the drum paved with lime concrete. The dome is missing. The cells/chapels were badly damaged. The remarkable feature of the Stupa was the great size of some of the stone blocks used in the facing of the base. The block at the North West corner measured 4 feet by 11 inches by 11 inches. The date assigned by him to the monument was late part of 3rd century AD.

Purpose of Present Excavation

- To retrieve whatever has been left, keeping in view the large scale vandalisms in the form of illegal diggings in Taxila valley and its surroundings in search of priceless objects of

Gandharan sculptures, which have resulted in destruction of a large number of splendid Buddhist sanctuaries.

- To recheck and confirm or otherwise the earlier results achieved by Sir John Marshall in the light of improved scientific methods of stratigraphical excavation at relatively wider scale.
- To reconstruct the forgotten pattern of human society, religious practices in particular environments, with special emphasis on life and practices within monasteries..
- To enrich our museums with new finds.
- To preserve the cultural heritage in term of moveable and immovable antiquities for future generations.
- To determine the extension and archaeological potentials of historic site of Badalpur.
- To develop a new archaeological site for potential visitors to Buddhist Gandharan sites.
- To promote cultural tourism.
- To provide fresh food for thoughts for scholars and researchers with a view to widen horizons of researches on Gandharan Buddhist sites with special emphasis on Monasteries.
- To train students of archaeology of different universities of Pakistan in excavation techniques and handling of antiquities unearthed from excavations.

Present Excavation

The present excavations were confined to the monastic remains which had never been excavated before. Realizing the importance of the site, the Director General of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan, assigned the task to the Exploration and Excavation Branch to undertake the job. The excavation have been suspended temporarily after the available resources of the Exploration and Excavation Branch for both financial years i.e. 2004-05 and 2005-06 exhausted. The Director General of Archaeology has already identified sources to the Administrative Ministry. Hopefully, these excavations will be resumed shortly on availability of funds.

Amongst the most important discoveries from this first season's excavation include the unearthing of a unique and rare gold coin of the Early Kushan Period. five complete chhatras (Umbrellas) of votive Stupas, big iron pan with 1 meter Dia, hoards of 188 copper coins, hoards of 128 sealing, a ritual copper pot, a surgical instrument, copper plates, irons objects (nails, clamps, hinges, a saw, door bosses, stands, strips with nails), copper pendants, a copper bell, copper strainers and a large number of potteries including storage jars, pots , bowels , terracotta oil lamps and a heart shape schist stone lamp. In addition structural remains of eight monk's cells/rooms and main entrance on the west were exposed. The walls still retain mud plasters both on interior and exterior surfaces, which are in very good state of preservation (Plates "A", "B", "C"). Sir John Marshall excavated majors religious and settlement sites in the Taxila Valley during 1913-1934. He indicated that no mud plaster has survived in the monasteries at Taxila (Marshall, 1960, p.117). In this background, the mud plaster covering most parts of the standing walls of the rooms at the Badalpur Monastic complex is not only amazing but also unique. It is, however, more important to save this in the present good state of preservation for posterity. On our part we are making efforts to preserve every important at the site including the structures and the precious mud plaster.

Due to financial constraints, complete plan or layout of monastic complex could not be exposed. Only eight rooms, main entrance in the west, verandas in front of these rooms were uncovered. We restrict our discourse only to those cells, which yielded important finds. Amongst such cells include Cell-V1, where we have dug upto 234 cm so far from top of the walls. The room is 307 cm east - west by 316 cm north- south and the door is 110 cm wide. On both sides of the doorway 30 to 37 cm projections are found reducing width of the entrance. It has yielded most important objects including the Gold coin (Plate "D") found in the hoard of 160 copper coins (Plate "E" "F"), besides five copper chhattres of a miniature votive Stupa, one Decapitator (surgical instrument) of solid copper hook sharply beveled to a cutting edge on the inside and the handle has round shaft ending in a disk head. (Similar surgical instrument has also been recovered from Sirkap, Marshall, 1951, V-11, p. 600), one iron saw (Sk. No. 22 .V-11, p.554. Marshall, 1951), one copper bell, a pair of "Tongs" possibly used by a goldsmith or silversmith (dated 1st century AD as given by Marshall, to a similar object (Taxila, 1951, V-11, p-554, recovered from Bhamala). Two niches for lamps are noticed one each in western and northern walls, but the windows near the roof have all disappeared. It clearly suggests that this was one of the most important cells. The exact use of this room at this stage could be misleading hypothesis. We are studying it in relation to other cells/rooms and the objects unearthed from them to give a rationale and convincing view. All the objects were unearthed on the floor are associated with layer 5 i.e. the layer at the lowest level. Above the floor 37 cm thick debris consisting of ashes, charred timbers and a lot of charcoal were unearthed. A fire place/hearth was also found above this deposit. At this level alongwith northern wall a terracotta pot in situ and charred timber were also recovered. There are evidences of charred timbers mixed with clay deposits. The masonry of the cells is in diaper.

Cell # 4 is equally important which yielded a large number of pots (Plate "G", "H"), iron objects, terracotta sealing/seal impressions, a big iron pan with three legs, and copper coins suggesting as if it was workshop or served as store. In all 118 sealing/moulds for seals have so far been found. The quality of the engravings on these sealings is unique, highly sophisticated and professional (Plates "I", "J" "K", "L"), suggesting the expertise of the artists who created them. The possibility of import of some of these tiny but delicately carved seals could not be excluded. Some sealings also depict denuded and sexy scenes. However, the bulk seems to have been made locally at Taxila. The style and technique of the engravings are distinctive of their class and age. The impressions show male and female figures, animal figures, birds, fish etc. Human mask, script/characters are also found, which are being studied. The sealing bearing holes at back for cord. These small seal impressions have been a tradition in Buddhism since its earliest days. Buddhist monks often living in secluded hermitage, made these sealing in order to create merit for them.

Among the copper coins 14 out of 188 have been mechanically cleaned, which are readable and belong to the Kushan Period without any shadow of doubt. From the legible coins one of Vima Kadphises, one coin of Soter Megas, two of Kanishka-1, three of Vesudeva are known.

The walls are constructed of lime stones in mud mortar covered with mud plaster. The structures belong to the same period. The finds from Cell No. 5 include one ritual copper pot with perforations on upper part of the body, above which a lotus flower design is visible. Three loophole are visible in its body. Remnants of iron chain with four links were found attached on the body of the pot and in one of the hooks, which clearly suggest that this copper vessel was provided with iron chains to be hanged through them. Besides, three iron stands, 27 copper coins and a copper plate have also been recovered from this cell. The plate is still in the process of proper cleaning and we intend to perform x-rays of this plate as well, to ascertain as if it contains any inscriptions or figures of Buddha. Just one meter ahead along the eastern wall an iron plate with hole in the middle (broken) most probably over the door-lock was unearthed. A similar plate was found by Marshall at Sirkap, which served similar purpose.

From the huge amount of charred woods mixed earth lying in the cells and verandahs, it could reasonably be deduced that extensive and fierce fire played havoc here. Most of the burnt clay doubtless came from the roof but it is noteworthy that the thickness of the clay deposit was recorded 35 to 45 cm. This further suggests the extensive use of timber in the roofs, pillars, door frames to account for the fierceness of the flames. To judge by the large quantities of ashes, burnt earth, iron nails, piles of burnt timbers and the like found in the debris, the fittings must have been of timber. The clay deposits about 35 to 45 cm thick noticed over the fallen charred timber, charcoal clay mixed debris of the roof on the floor and a large number of fallen stones with hammer cutting face suggest the double storey of the cells.

This was a brief account of the first season's excavations at the important Buddhist sanctuary. While we are studying the material retrieved from the site and finalizing our report to be known to the scholars shortly, we invite all friends specially those interested in Buddhist monastic traditions, practices and life during the peak of Buddhism in the ancient Gandhara region to visit our excavations and offer their suggestions.



Plate A: A view of the exposed cells. Mud plaster in good state of preservation is visible on the walls below the niche levels.



Plate B: Another view of the exposed structures. Mud plaster is clearly visible in very good state of preservation on the front and rear walls.



Plate C: Close-up of eastern wall of Cell # V, showing the mud plaster.



Plate D: Gold Coin recovered from the site IN Cell# VI.



Plate E: Hoard of Copper coins (including the Gold one) found at one place at floor level in Cell # VI.



Plate F: Some of the rusted copper coins retrieved from the site.



Plate "G" – Iron and terracotta pots found in Cell # IV



Plate "H" – Large number of Iron and terracotta pots found in Cell # IV



Plate I: A mud sealing depicting sophisticatedly carved female figure.



Plate J: Another mud sealing showing two horses in running postures pulling a cart or trolley. A rider is shown controlling the two horses



Plate L: A mud sealing showing a muscular woman sitting and probably holding a lotus flower in her right hand.



Plate K: Another mud sealing depicting a woman looking to her left. On her back are perhaps two ribbons fasten to her hair.