

Discovery of the Remains of the Mughal Period Bridge on the Zinda'i Stream: the Provenance of the So-called Bāra Bridge Inscription

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Connecting the two capital cities Peshāwar and Lāhore, the medieval Grand Trunk Road had been constructed to the south and parallel to the modern one. The gate of the Peshāwar city where it took start for Lāhore subsequently came to be known as Lahori Gate (Dani 1969: 11; Das 1874:142). Passing close by the Chamkanī village in the south-east of the city, it crossed the Bāra and Zinda'i streams respectively. The medieval crossing on the former brook lay upstream to the south of the modern bridge, near Nuclear Institute for Food and Agriculture (NIFA) at Tarnāb. Archaeological investigations in the Peshāwar and Nowshera districts conducted during the last decade of the 20th century have successfully probed fragments of the medieval Grand Trunk Road once running parallel to the south of the modern one. As a result, remains of a good number of *bāolīs* (stepped wells at Chamkanī, Tarnāb, Pabbi, Azākhel, Nowshera, Akoṛa and Jahāngīra), bridges and traces of caravan *sarā'īs*—all signifying a road—were explored that continued across the river Indus at Attock.

A Persian inscription, now lying preserved in the Peshāwar Museum (Shakur 1946: 34-37; Jaffar 1946: 114-115), is reported to have originally been picked up from the ruins of a bridge on the river Bāra about five kilometres east of Peshāwar city (Wasi 1908-09: 201-204). The bridge, recorded in the inscription, has been frequently referred to by scholars but all conniving at actually locating it. Seeking solution to the problem, it is significant to summarise the history of its publication as follows:

It was first reported by Miān Wasiuddin, then the Curator of the Peshāwar Museum, in the *Archaeological Survey of India, Annual Report 1908-09* (pp. 201-204) wherein he, basing his information on the oral statement of a *peš-imam* of the mosque (behind the Qiṣṣa-khāwanī bāzār), records that "...it was acquired from the ruins of a bridge over the Bāra stream on the Grand Trunk Road about three miles east of Peshawar city, and fixed up in its present position by his [i.e., the *peš imām*'s] grandfather who built the mosque about fifty years ago". From numeral computation, the inscription appears to have been moved in the early years of the later half of 19th century. The illustration on the title page of his article portraying the bridge on the river Bāra near Chū'ā Gūjar (Chamkanī) implies to Wasiuddin's taking it to be the provenance of the inscription (Pl. 1).

The inscription was subsequently mentioned by S.M. Ja'far (1946: 114-115) and M.A. Shakur (1946: 34-37)—both highlighting its archaeo-historical value. Reconsidering once again, M.A. Chaghatai got it published in *Ancient Pakistan* (Vol. II, 1965: 13-16) with an elaborate scholastic discussion whereby throwing ample light on the personages mentioned therein. Regarding its provenance, he appears to have had himself content with Wasiuddin's report.

In 1993, an archaeological survey of District Peshāwar was conducted under the leadership of Prof. (Dr.) 'Abdur Rahman, then the Chairman of the Department of Archaeology, University of Peshāwar. The learned Professor very kindly included the author in the survey team as research student. The team had been fortunate in exploring the remains of the three bridges of antiquity in the peripheral area of Chamkanī.

The first bridge, constructed on the river Bāra and still functional, is located on the link road connecting Phandu Road and the Kohāt bypass near Chū'ā Gūjar (Chamkanī). Its north-western

column still houses a white marble slab inscription (90x45 cm) badly disfigured by pelting stones on it by miscreants over the past few decades (Pl. 1).

The second bridge, smaller in size, on the same stream was built on the Kohāt bypass not far to the south of the modern Grand Trunk Road (Pl. 2).

The third bridge, now completely in ruins and hitherto unknown to the scholarly sphere, was built on the Zinda'i stream to the east of the Chū'ā Gūjar bridge on the Phandu-Urmar Road (Pl. 3).

Prof. (Dr.) Taj 'Ali of the Department of Archaeology, University of Peshāwar, later conducted a short survey of both the districts to trace the medieval Grand Trunk Road with the help of its essential appurtenances, now in ruins. Adding to the previously explored monuments, he located a number of *sara'is*, *bāolīs* and bridges and published them in *Ancient Pakistan* (Vol. XIII, 1999-2000: 69-108). He hesitatingly put forward that the Mughal period Persian inscription of Peshāwar Museum might belong to the Chū'ā Gūjar bridge (that is the No. 1 in our series), for, the survey could not "...trace even the foundation of any other bridge and the local traditions are also silent about some other bridge on the Bāra River" ('Ali 1999-2000: 84). The bridge, he further proceeds, might have originally been constructed during the Mughal rule and subsequently 'repaired' in the late Mughal times (*Ibid.*). However, people in Chamkanī believe that both the Chū'ā Gūjar bridge and the one near the modern Grand Trunk Road (that is the first and second of our series) were constructed by the Sethis, a mercantile community of the Peshāwar city. Physical analysis of both the bridges, in the present condition, does not permit to stretch their antiquity back to the Mughal period. Moreover, the surviving architectural remains of the Chū'ā Gūjar bridge do not corroborate its being in ruined condition sometime about one and a half century ago as asserted by Miān Wasiuddin in 1908 (Wasi 1908-09: 201-204). Yet the most modern bridge on the Grand Trunk Road at Tarnāb near NIFA is out of context here.

Having ruled out the possibility of the first two bridges as the provenance of the inscription—referring to the construction of a bridge in Peshāwar in 1629 in the reign of Shah Jahan in the time of his governor Lashkar Khān Abū al-Ḥasan Mashhadī (Shah 2003: in the Press), we are left with the only alternative of the third one with magnificent architectural remains, which invite attention of scholars to complement the lost chapter in the history of Peshāwar. Moreover, recording involvement and interest of the emperor himself as well as the provincial governor in completing the project enhances the historical importance of the inscription. It seems that possessing immense trade and military importance, the provincial governor had to construct the bridge under the imperial commandment to ensure smooth flow of traffic on the medieval Grand Trunk Road—connecting India with Peshāwar, Kabul and the Central and Western Asiatic countries. The dimensions of the inscribed stele also bespeak of its fixing in a stupendous undertaking. Despite the discovery of the remains of such a gigantic bridge constructed in the Mughal fashion (Pl. 4), we yet have some arguments to support our claim.

Surprisingly, the inscription nowhere mentions the name of the stream or river over which the bridge under discussion was constructed. The only source of our information in this regard is the statement of the *pesh imām*, who seems to have never visited the find-spot nor got it verified from his ancestors. After destruction of the bridge, displacement of the inscribed slab from its actual provenance is not an unusual phenomenon. History is replete with such incidents. Furthermore, a period of half a century appears to have elapsed between the *pesh imām* received and passed on the information verbally. It, therefore, makes the authenticity of the information doubtful. Discrepancy and distortion in the oral information over such a long period of time is very much probable. Following blindly misinterpretation, recorded even unintentionally or unknowingly, further preponderates over our view. For instance, the first-ever report reads that the inscribed slab was acquired by the "grandfather" of the *pesh imām* (Wasi 1908-09: 202); while later writers refer

to "father" instead of "grandfather" (Jaffar 1946: 114; Chaghatai 1965-66:16). Similarly, the veracity and authenticity of the information of the *pesh imām* in relation to the name of the provenance as "Bāra" may also be doubted.

In the light of the above discussion, we strongly believe that the stone slab inscription actually belonged to the ruined bridge of the Mughal period built on the Zinda'i stream adjacent eastwards to the Afghan Refugees Camp. The surviving remnants of the bridge under discussion lie almost parallel to the north of the modern unpretentious one on the road linking Urmar with the Peshāwar city. Its tall massive piers, building materials and the epigraphic evidence recording the name of the emperor, the provincial governor and the management staff—signifying the utmost importance of the bridge—all connote to the fact that the bridge referred to in the inscription is not any other than this. Consequently, the inscription should be re-labelled as the "Zinda'i Bridge Inscription" rather than the "Bara Bridge Inscription".

Description of the Surviving Architectural Remains of the Bridge

Once constructed on the medieval Grand Trunk Road, the architectural spoil of the Mughal period bridge on the Zind'ai stream is lying downstream to the north of modern Peshāwar-Urmar Road. Before reducing it to black and white, the author once again visited the ruined bridge for detail critical observation. Out of the remains of eight piers located on the spot six are still freely standing in poor state of preservation and subjected to disfiguring at the hands of nearby encamped Afghan refugees. Since changing its course eastwards, the stream has inflicted gradual decay on the piers and, as a result, two of them have fallen down in the streambed (Pl. 5). The local people use the fallen piers as platforms for washing, mainly, clothes. Due to erosion at the foundation level, the easternmost standing pier has developed a wide vertical fissure forcing it recline and about to fall (Pl. 6). Like that of the Chū'ā Gūjar bridge, the piers here too must collectively have formed a huge arcade for passage of water underneath. Since the superstructure and arches are no longer traceable, even hypothetical reconstruction of the bridge and its constituent architectural elements at the present stage is not possible. However, the massive and majestic masonry of its standing piers does speak of its bygone splendour.

Architecturally, all the piers share uniformity in their mode of construction, dimensions and building materials. Each pier is 5.2 metre wide (including the projecting flanks) and 2.2 metre thick. In one case the maximum surviving height of a pier is 3.7 metre from above its plinth level. The piers apparently constructed at a regular interval of 4.2 metre suggest the span of each arch of the bridge. To split the flow of water, the piers are provided with angular projections on the south (i.e. upstream side. Pl. 7), while semicircular ones on the north (i.e. downstream side. Pls. 4, 5) to carry an additional thrust at the time of high floods. The technique applied at this bridge seems more advanced than that at the Chū'ā Gūjar bridge, where both sides of the pillars are provided with semicircular towers that become cylindrical when raise above the surface of the bridge (Pl. 1).

The building materials largely comprise burnt bricks of small size (generally called *waziri* bricks) thick-set in lime mortar. River pebbles of moderate size were also used in the core of the piers in addition to bricks. The piers were covered with a thick coat of yellowish lime plaster, patches of which still survive (Pl. 8).

The brick standard and the ingredients of lime mortar and plaster, in force and finish, are comparable to those of the Mahabat Khan Mosque (Shah 1999: 97-106), the tomb of Nawab Sa'id Khan (Rahman 1988: 555-561), the tomb and mosque of Shaikh Imam al-Din at Palosi Piran (Rahman 1986: 117-127) and the tomb of Qutb ad-Din at Dalazak (Rahman *et al.* 1984: 107-113). The bridge—its heavy piers and the conjectural configuration of arches during its glorious days—can also be compared with small but complete bridge of the Mughal period at Shaikhupura (Mughal *et alii* 1997: 51, Pl. 1-a; cf. Masud 1997: 85-86).

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Pl. 1: Chamkani: Chu'a Gujar Bridge on the Bārā stream.



Pl. 2: Chamkani: A small bridge on the Bārā stream near modern G.T. Road.



Pl. 3: Zinda'i Bridge: View from the south.



Pl. 4: Zinda'i Bridge: View of the bridge from the north with the Zinda'i stream in the foreground.



Pl. 5: Zinda'i Bridge: Fallen pier.



Pl. 6: Zinda'i Bridge: Another pier fallen in the stream water.



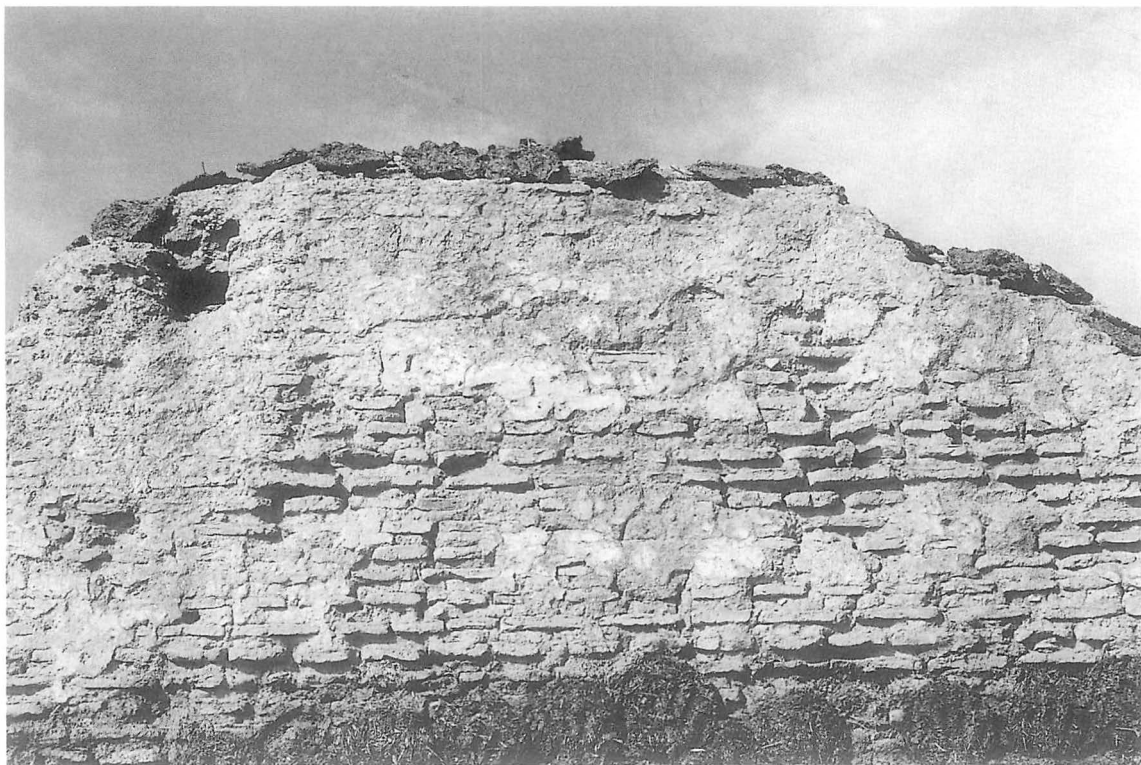
Pl. 7: Zinda'i Bridge: Surviving remains of the bridge.



Pl. 8: Zinda'i Bridge: Close up of the pier which is at the threshold of collapse.



Pl. 9: Zinda'i Bridge: View of the piers from south side showing sharp pointed ends.



Pl. 10: Zinda'i Bridge: Close view of brick masonry and mural plaster of lime of one of the piers.