

PRELIMINARY REPORT OF SECTOR IV EXCAVATION AT MANṢŪRA: 1986–87

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EXCAVATION WORK AT MANṢŪRA

The ruins of Manṣūra are located about 19 km south–east of Shāhdādpūr in the Sānghar District. It is the first capital city founded by ‘Arab Muslims who, after setting their feet on a career of conquest in South Asia, laid the foundation of Islāmic rule in Sindh. The ruins are scattered over an area of about 6 square km more or less in an oblong form measuring 2.743 x 1.37 km & 10.66 m.

Manṣūra at places has been excavated several times; Thus, on a limited scale excavations were undertaken here by Messrs Bellasis, Richardson and Cousens in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Since 1966 large scale excavations have been started by the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan, under the supervision of various eminent archaeologists and officers. As a result of these excavation fresh materials having immense artistic and archaeological value for this site have come up. Among these are four door knockers¹ which have received a lot of scholarly attention in recent years. Since the door knockers were found by the present writer in Room–I of what may be called a state building, it would be interesting to give a preliminary account of the excavation of this area.

In addition to the great wealth of early Islamic relics and other cultural evidences, thirteen years of digging at Manṣūra have brought to light many public building of secular and religious nature such as streets, houses, a fortification wall with elaborate gate way and countless objects of daily use. A great number of ceramics of plain, painted and glazed types, metal objects of copper, iron and bronze, beautifully carved ivory, a variety of stone objects and a large number of glass objects, belonging to the early Muslim period, have been recovered.

Discovery of an elegant building–most probably ‘State Assembly Complex’ (Pl.–Ia) comprising of an audience hall, two brick paved elevated terraces, brick–on–edge ramp, an impressive flight of steps and a guard room attached to the left side of the entrance–required continuation of spade work to unfold the hidden structural components of the great complex. Keeping this in view, work was carried out on the southern and south–western side of the mosque which had already been partly exposed in previous excavations, in two squares measuring 36.57m x 6,096m & 30.48 x 6.069m in east–west direction covering the following trenches.

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|-------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| 1. ASXXX/24 | 4. ASXXX/21 | 7. ATXXX/4 | 10. ATXXX/1 |
| 2. ASXXX/23 | 5. ASXXX/25 | 8. ATXXX/3 | 11. ATXXX/5 |
| 3. ASXXX/22 | 6. ASXXX/24 | 9. ATXXX/2 | |

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1. Irshad Hussain, ‘Manṣūra – The first capital of Muslims in Sindh’, *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society*, Karachi, Vol–XXXII, PT–III, 1989, P–293–303; A.N. Khan, *Al–Manṣūra – A Forgotten Arab Metropolis in Pakistan*, 1990, Karachi; Taj Ali, ‘The so called Bronze “Door–Knockers” From Al–Manṣūra – An early Arab Metropolis in Sind (Pakistan)’, *Lahore Musuem Bulletin*, Vol. VI, No. 1 and 2, Jan. – Dec. 1993.

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In this season horizontal digging was preferred except in the trenches ASXXX/21, ATXXX/3, ATXXX/2 where the level of digging was taken down to the depth of 2.69m, 3.27m, 2.87m respectively. Most of the structural remains brought to light in the course of the excavation were in a disturbed state, due most probably to destruction caused by antiquity robbers, and provided scanty information to meet the objectives of the present excavation. However, a few architectural remains, viz, the quadrangular brick pillars in trench ASXXX/21 (Pl.-IIa) a massive wall in trench ATXXX/3, a door way in trench ASXXX/21 (Pl.-IIIa) and the partial plan of a room hereafter to be known as 'Room-I' trench ASXXX/22-23 (Pl.-IIb), marked the presence of an impressive state building.

Pillar-1:

It was located in the north-west corner of the trench ASXXX/24 at a depth of 50 cm from the top surface. Its south south-eastern face, 1.62m in depth, was partially uncovered. Pillar-1 had a definite association with another pillar brought to light during previous excavations in trench ASXXX/19. This evidence clearly speaks of the existence of a door way flanked by massive columns.

Pillar-2:

Excavations in the south-west portion of trench ASXXX/24 exposed a square pillar measuring 1.54m x 1.54m. Its upper face indicated a rather rough masonry of brick bats and mortar but its south-eastern face revealed 11 regular courses of complete bricks.

Pillar-3:

It is square in shape measuring 1.52m x 1.52m and is located in the centre of trench ASXXX/23 at a depth of 1.27m from the top surface. Its north north-western face revealed 13 courses measuring 73 cm in height.

Massive Wall (Pl.-IVa)

It is 2.43m wide and 3.96m long and is located in the centre of trench ATXXX/3 extending from south-west to north-east direction. It revealed 37 courses surviving to the height of 2.28m. Its upper most course was encountered at the depth of 30 cm whereas the base was yet to be ascertained.

In the construction of the wall, large sized complete bricks have been used on the outer faces whereas the core is made up of brick bats. The same process was applied to the construction of room No. 1 in trench ASXXX/23-24 (Pl.-IVa).

Doorway (Pl.-IIIa-b).

The remains of a doorway were partially traced out in the south eastern portion of trench ASXXX/21 at the depth of 8 feet from the top surface. It was provided with two pillars (northern and southern) and a step consisting of a single course of brick masonry.

NORTHERN PILLAR:

It was cleared to a depth of 60 cm comprising of a courses of brick masonry.

SOUTHERN PILLAR:

The upper course of this pillar was encountered at a depth of 2m from the top surface. It revealed 21 courses measuring 1.52m in height.

The opening of the door is 1.62m in width whereas its associated floor consisting of square bricks measuring 35.56cm x 35.56cm was encountered at the depth of 2.69m in the north east and south-west portions of the trench (Pl.-IV).

Room-I (Pl.-Iib)

The remains of this room were partially uncovered in trench ASXXX/22-23. It is oblong in shape measuring 5.10m x 3.04m (inside) with 1.09m wide door which opens in the east. The door was strengthened by two pillars measuring 1.49m x 0.96m bonded with their respective walls. The northern pillar was exposed to a depth of 1.39m revealing 22 regular courses. Whereas the southern pillar rose to a height of 43cm showing 6 courses.

The northern pillar, bonded with the northern wall, was uncovered at a depth of 43cm from the top of the baulk in the west and extended in west-south-west to a north-east direction. After running 1.60m from the baulk in the west, the wall was found robbed by brick hunters. It is 1.49m wide and has been cleared to a depth of 1.37m showing as many as twenty courses of brick masonry. The use of complete bricks on the other faces and brick bats in the core was observed.

Fragmentary remains of a southern wall were located in the south eastern portion of the trench. It was running parallel to the northern wall and bonded with the southern pillar. It revealed 156 courses in a depth of 91cm from its top. The western portion of this wall had thoroughly been robbed by antiquity robbers. In the south west corner of the square were uncovered the remains of a western wall. It was found in a fragmentary state showing 11 courses to a height of 76cm. It was found bonded with the northern wall in the south-west portion of the square.

The building material used for these structures was burnt bricks of various sizes fixed in mud mortar. However, concentration of large size complete bricks measuring 43cm x 26cm x 5cm in the northern wall is noticeable.

The inside area of the room is 5.10m x 3.04m. It was apparently partitioned into two halves separated by a 26cm wide brick wall consisting of three courses. The top surface to this partition wall was plastered by lime/gypsum. The east north-east half of the square measuring 3.20m x 3.04m revealed two successive brick paved floor levels designated as floor-I and floor-II. The west south-west half measuring 1.90m x 3.64m was slightly raised from the west of the square. A step consisting of a single brick was provided for easy access to this portion. This portion of the room invited special attention of field researchers as it yielded the four metal door knockers of a unique type. Remains of lime/gypsum plaster adjacent to the southern face of the northern wall have also been observed in this half of the square. Worth mentioning in this square are lines of horizontally laid square bricks indicating the existence of a pillar like structure, one face of which was measured 1.62m.

Floor-I

It was unveiled at a depth of 1.25m from the surface and 1.14m from the top of the northern pillar in the eastern and south eastern portion of the square. Besides complete bricks, brick bats were also used to level this floor. Because of the load of debris it has sunk at different places.

Floor-II

It was partly exposed on the north and north eastern side at a depth of 2.13m. It appeared to be a regular floor laid with complete bricks and brick bats. The size of the complete bricks used for paving this floor is 41cm x 25cm (Pl.-II).

Due to restricted excavation and despoliation of associated structural remains, very little could be ascertained regarding the accurate relationship between 'Room 1' and the door knockers. This aspect yet remains to be explored. Nevertheless, it is very obvious that 'Room 1' marks the site of a state building.

In fact the unusually heavy door knockers are indicative of a large and a magnificent edifice such as a gateway. Further the name of the sovereign found on the door knockers is in itself a sufficient piece of evidence to show that 'Room 1' was at least part of a state building. Historical and archaeological records show that the city of Maṣṣūra was properly laidout, divided into different blocks and provided with a system of interconnected streets and lanes. This gives sufficient support to the belief that the builders of Maṣṣūra were skilled engineers. There is no doubt in the proposition that they had devised the wagon vaulted drains and other vaulted structures with the sound knowledge of the advantage of vaulted roofs. Similarly a fragmentary hold-fast found in the ruins suggests the concept of vaulted roofs.

The door knockers are decorated with beautiful *Kūfic* inscriptions besides grotesque figures. The inscriptions in addition to *Bismillāh*, *Kalima Ṭayyiba* and some *verses* from the Holy Qurān also reveal the name of a certain 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umr. From the account of the famous Persian traveller Burzurg b. Shahriyār, it transpires that in A.H. 270/A.D. 884 'Abd Allāh, the son of 'Umr, was the ruler of Maṣṣūra. He was one of the members of the Hubbārīd dynasty.

Numismatic evidence recorded in 1882 from the ruined site of Bhiro, near Shāhdādpūr, includes three coins (one silver and two copper) struck in the name of 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umr al-Hubbārī, the second ruler of the Hubbārīd Dynasty of Sindh. It may further suggest that the Hubbārīs became independent rulers of Sindh, as no mention of the Caliph is made on any of these coins. Ya'qūbī's, statement however shows that even then the approval of *Khalīfa* was taken, which had become merely a formality.

With this evidence at hand the precise date of this state edifice can easily be worked out. The name of 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umr on the door-knockers would lead us to believe that the building they belonged to was constructed under his patronage, when the width of the main passage way was 13'9" (Pl.-Ia). The heavy weight of these objects is a sufficient sign to show that they were affixed to large wooden doors. Now, 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umr was governor of Sindh in 270 A.H./A.D. 833-884. Therefore, the date of the edifice under discussion may also be the same.

The combination of grotesque figures with Qurānic words seems to be astonishing. In this regards we have to wait until the spade comes into action again. It may however, be pointed out that the rulers of Maṣṣūra in historical accounts have been referred to as Qarmathian heretics, inspired by the missionary activities of the Qarmathians of Multān where heretic traditions were still dominant.

The Qarmathian were indeed an off shoot of the Ismā'īlī community which was the second largest group of shī'ite Muslims. They believed in the theory of force and blood shedding of their opponents, even if he was a Muslim.

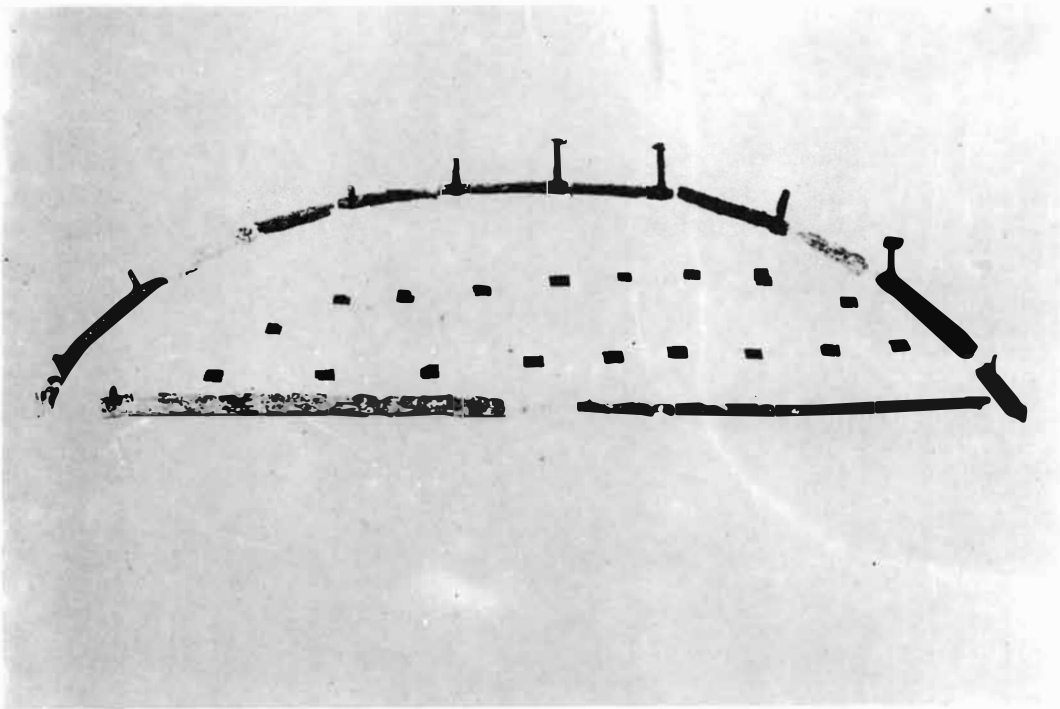
Since the Hubbārī rulers of Mansūra were influenced by the Qarmathians, the same character has been observed among them as well. The hideous and grotesque figures they adopted to adorn their official buildings obviously corroborates their belief in force and blood shed. It, therefore, seems reasonable to state that the fierce and queer faces reflect the might and power of the rulers. From artistic point of view these sculptures are unique and seem to be inspired by the local Hindū art.

The founder of the Hubbārīd dynasty, Hubbār b. al-Aswad, was notorious for his opposition to Islām and scandalous remarks in the poems which he used to compose himself. In view of this statement they should not have used *Kalima Ṭayyiba* after their conversion to Qarmathian hereticism.

The presence of Holy words on these door knockers seems to be based on political reasons. Most probably, they adopted this practice of using grotesque with Qurānic words just to gain favour of the *Khalīfa* and to please the local Hindū inhabitants as well.



Pl. Ia. Manşūra: Public Building — Eastern passage way and general view of the complex, looking west.



Pl. Ib. Manşūra: An iron arch in fragments in Sq. No. ASXXX/24.

Pl. IIa. Mansūra: View from East, showing structural remains after removal of baulks in Sq. No. ASXXX/24-21.



Pl. IIb. Mansūra: View from S.W. showing structural remains in Sq. No. ASXXX/24-21.



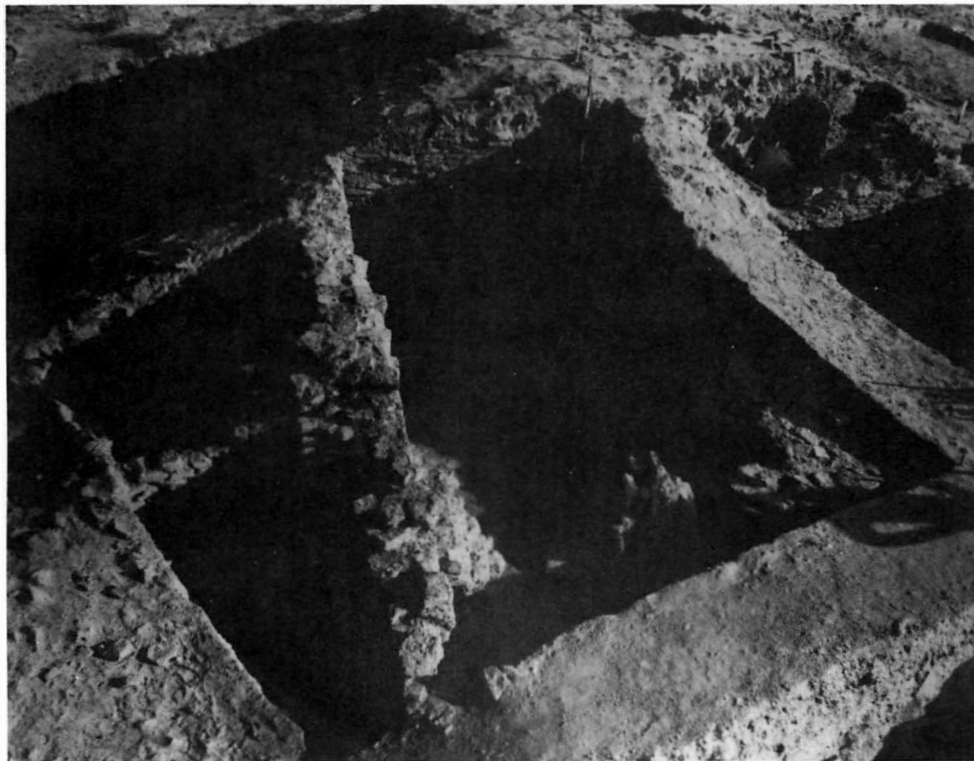
Pl. IIIa. Manṣūra: View from N.N.W. Two periods of brick paved floor in Sq. No. ASXXX/21.



Pl. IIIb. Manṣūra: Close view of the door way opening, steps and drains, lime plaster brick paved floor.



Pl. IVa. Manşūra: View from S.W. showing fragmentary remains of a massive wall in Sq. No. ATXXX/3.



Pl. IVb. Manşūra: View from S.W. showing the partial plan of room, a fallen arch (brick-on-edges) of a doorway. Northern-eastern sector.



Pl. V. Maṣṣūra: Door knockers *in situ*.