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# PREHISTORIC BALUCHISTAN

(With Excavation Report on Said Qala Tepe)



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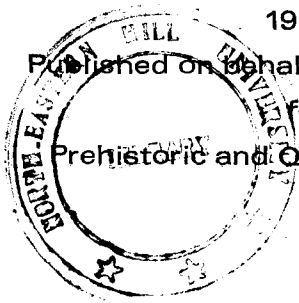
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To Charles A. and Virginia V. Shaffer who made  
it all possible; and to Diane A. Lichtenstein  
who helped it happen.

## GENERAL EDITORS' NOTE

The Indo-Pakistan borderlands, mainly Baluchistan, is a veritable heaven for the archaeologists' spade to turn out artifacts and propound theories on the origin and development of the Harappan culture. This area has been traversed time and again by explorers, almost from the second quarter of this century and is still a happy hunting ground for many more to come. From Sir Aurel Stein to our present author, intensive work had been carried out here. Apart from the pioneers, De-Cardi, Fairservis, Dales, Gordon, Casal, Dani are a few who have helped understanding the manifold 'local cultures' of the region. Yet no serious attempt to collate the regional variations to form an integrated whole has been successfully attempted. Piggott, who was the first to see some clarity from the chaos, falls short of our present day expectations. Fairservis, Jarrige and Mughal too, have attempted to see light through the dim darkness.

Here, in this book, Shaffer, with his anthropological background, besides presenting original data from his excavations at Said Qala Tepe, has made an excellent study of the ceramics of the region. His 'Interpretations and Conclusions' is based on a 'Systematic Model' involving the study of 'Adaptive areas', 'Traditions'-artifactual and material culture-and 'Interaction Spheres', where trade and religion play an important role. This approach is very much welcome.

The Indian Society for Prehistoric and Quaternary Studies is very happy to present Shaffer's findings to the world of archaeologists. The Society is beholden to him. Grateful thanks are due to the publishers, B R. Publishing Corporation, and Mudran Kala Sansthan, the Printers. Thanks are also due to Shri M.S. Mani for the illustrations.

1st January, 1978  
National Museum,  
Janpath,  
New Delhi

S. P. GUPTA  
K.S. RAMACHANDRAN

## FOREWORD

The prehistory of the Indo-Iranian Borderlands is obviously of seminal importance to any understanding of the origin of the Harappan civilization and indeed of the advent of civilization itself on the subcontinent. It is therefore something of a pity that little intensive, ongoing archaeological research has gone on there over the past thirty years. Any effort to synthesize the late prehistoric evidence known for the region must largely rely on the fieldwork of the pioneers in the field whose efforts in terms of modern methodologies are often frustratingly inadequate. To give examples: Stein, Hargreaves, and Majumdar tended to run horizontal trenches into sites, thus stratigraphic position was too often lost; Brigadier Ross at Rana Ghundai dutifully plucked potsherds out of the site in vertical order but left no sense of occupational context; de Cardi with limited means went much beyond Ross in this regard but could nowhere extend her excavations to reveal in detail the broader occupational features. Casal at Mundigak had both the means and the time to complete his excavations and thus provides us with the more reliable body of evidence, but this too is qualified by selective techniques.

As to my own work in the Borderlands, something I hope which is not yet terminated, there is much and there is little that can be said. My use of seriation as we then understood it has again and again been put under critical fire. Piggott, for example, rejected it entirely; Dales misunderstood it; and I have yet to see where a single Indian or Pakistani archaeologist has made any real effort to develop a quantitative technique against which to measure the validity of the results one in consequence obtains. In 1950-1951 we were faced with the immense task of bringing some viable order to a vast body of seemingly unrelated material evidence. Only one serious attempt to do this had been made, that by Piggott, and much of this was based on apparent parallelisms in style as represented by the decoration of potsherds found in one context or another from region to region. The merit of Piggott's work lay in the thoroughness with which he handled

the available material; its faults lay in part in the inadequacy of the material itself. The way we tried to remedy the latter situation is part of the history of archaeology of the Borderlands. The merit of our work rests on the comprehensiveness of our treatment of the ceramic corpus in particular, its faults lay in the incompleteness of the study. We were not prepared, for example, to handle the details of the history of vessel forms; we had no palaeo-botanist; and certainly we were not in a position to clear an occupational level in its entirety. We were often confined to sinking those sondages which are supposed to provide stratigraphic answers and which graduate students and others delight in arranging on charts, but which are generally unreliable for what they are supposed to do and certainly worthless for any real effort to resolve the culture history of a site, let alone a region. I am certain that others beside myself would say in common "if only we had been permitted to complete what we started".

Since Piggott's day a number of syntheses have been attempted. Most of these are repetitive, varying only in discussions regarding the relative placement of given potsherds, and a number of which struggle to connect India with Mesopotamia via those same potsheres! However, a few efforts, such as R. Mughal's unpublished thesis, even though he takes me to task for this or that, does make an effort to present the total assemblage of artifacts, and thus his hypothesizing greater Harappan has methodological merit. In turn, I believe that the period definition which I have argued for in a number of publications also has merit in its holistic approach. Nevertheless the flaws in all these synthesizing efforts are primarily caused by the limited reliability of the primary sources.

Where then does this new effort by Jim Shaffer, and which he has given me the privilege of writing a foreword to, fit in the history of Indo-Iranian Borderland archaeology? It seems to me that its importance is three-fold: the first, of course, lies in the presentation of new material evidence from the Borderlands, i.e. the results of the excavations of Said Qala; the second is the author's holistic approach particularly to the ceramics: he is, at this writing, practically peerless in his knowledge of the ceramics of the Indo-Pakistan region; the third, is his theoretical approach which is evolved directly out of his anthropological training. For the first two the importance is self-evident. One should not be uncritical of his ceramic types: I am not, for example, in com-

lete agreement that some of the types of the Kandahar area are identical with those of Quetta, but that is a cavil. What is the most important contribution is the third aspect. Here we have a much-needed coming to grips with older ideas as to diffusion and local integration. How inadequate those ideas are in the face of our real understanding as to cultural process in time! Shaffer's detailed accounting of what we mean by diffusion and what we actually have to show to prove it is substantive and ought to be read by all South Asian archaeologists.

I am in hopes that Shaffer's thoughtful review of Borderland prehistoric archaeology, his handling of the primary evidence he himself has obtained, and his vision of what approaches we need to take will meet with the fruitful response they deserve. This is another step in the study of this vitally important region and it is a big one.

Walter A. Fairservis, Jr.  
Sharon, Connecticut  
June, 1977.

## PREFACE

This publication is a revised edition of the author's doctoral dissertation at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Six years have passed since the original research was completed. During that period new information has become available which necessitated some major and minor changes, although the interpretative framework remains basically unaltered. Unfortunately it still remains impossible at this time to present a complete and detailed report on all aspects of the excavations. In spite of this difficulty, the author hopes the data and theory presented here will be of use to concerned scholars.

The research here is the result of sincere efforts on the parts of many people besides the author. To Dr. Chester S. Chard, who assumed the major responsibility for the author's graduate training, a great deal of thanks must be extended. The opportunity to conduct research in Afghanistan was provided by Dr. Louis Dupree of The American Universities Field Staff. Without the help and encouragement provided by Dr. Dupree, and his wife Nancy, none of this research would have been possible. My close friend, and colleague, Dr. Michael A. Hoffman gave freely of his time, skill and knowledge, and without his assistance much of the data could not have been assembled. Of course a researcher in a foreign country is dependent upon the hospitality of the host government. In the process of conducting this research the author came into contact with many officials of the Afghanistan government who gave most freely and graciously of their time. Among these a special thanks is due to the Ministry of Information and Culture and especially to the Afghan Institute of Archaeology and its then Director Dr. S. Mustamindi.

Additional thanks must go to Professor George F. Dales who kindly consented to read and comment on the original manuscript. This research has also profited from the advice of Professor John T. Hitchcock who provided much assistance throughout the author's time at the University of Wisconsin. Thanks must also be extended to the Heintz Archaeological Foundation which in-part some of the research.

A very special thank you is extended to Dr. S. P. Gupta (National Museum, New Delhi) who has made possible this presentation of data now long overdue. Indeed, his energy and enthusiasm for Central and South Asian archaeology has been a prime motivation in the production of this revised edition. A very special thank you must be extended to my wife, Dr. Diane A. Lichtenstein, who has endured long periods of separation and has provided critical comments without which this, and other, research would have been impossible.

Jim G. Shaffer  
Indo-American Research Fellow (1976-77)  
Department of Anthropology  
University of Delhi  
and  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Anthropology  
Case Western Reserve University  
Cleveland, Ohio (U.S.A.)

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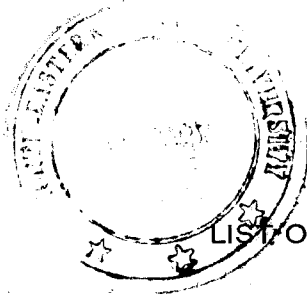
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## CHAPTER I

### BACKGROUND AND PROBLEMS

There is so little known about the prehistoric archaeology of Afghanistan that little theoretical justification is needed to initiate research in that country. Similarly, there are increasing indications that cultural developments in the south and south-eastern (Baluchistan) areas of Afghanistan are vital to understanding developments in regions as disparate as Soviet Central Asia and the Indus Valley. That some type of interaction was being maintained between these and other regions during pre- and protohistoric periods is becoming increasingly evident. Therefore, investigations in Baluchistan and southeastern Afghanistan should provide important information about such interactions. Current interpretations concerning the nature and extent of these interactions and developments form an important background for understanding the Said Qala Tepe material and a brief discussion is presented here.

Traditional archaeological research in South and Southwest Asia has focused on cultural developments as they occurred in Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley. Mesopotamian archaeology has a long history of development extending back to the mid-19th century. The impressive archaeological remains coupled with the fact that Western scholars see in Mesopotamia the roots of "Western Civilization" has promoted this long history of research. In contrast, archaeological research in the Indus Valley has been confined essentially to the last fifty years. Despite its recent development archaeological research here has delineated the outlines of one of most interesting and complex protohistoric cultures ever found—the Harappan. This culture with its large well planned urban centres, unique script, seemingly "standardized" material culture, and extensive distribution (from the Oxus River in the northwest, to Haryana in northeast, and the Indian Ocean in the south) has been the central focus of South Asian archaeology.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ENVIRONMENTAL FACTOR

#### Introduction

Said Qala Tepe is located in a geographical area generally referred to as Baluchistan. The area of Baluchistan as it will be defined here incorporates that area south of the Hindu Kush Mountains, east of the Zagros Mountains, north of the Indian Ocean and west of the Indus River Valley. In essence it is inclusive of the entire Iranian Plateau southeastern corner. Fisher (1968: 7), however, has argued that this area is not a part of the Iranian Plateau proper. He maintains that the eastern Plateau boundary coincides with the eastern uplands of modern Iran. This definition is, he admits, one based upon political considerations more so than geographical ones which he considers justifiable on the basis that the former are more important than the latter in the modern world. The most unfortunate result of this definition has been to exclude Baluchistan from most regional Middle East geographies (see Fisher 1957), producing a void in readily accessible geographic information.

Baluchistan, like the rest of the Iranian Plateau, is generally referred to as a semi-arid zone. It is an area of hills and mountains beginning at almost sea level on the plains of the Indus River and reaching 2000 meters in altitude where it merges into the Hindu Kush Mountains. These mountains and hills are separated by rivers, many of which are perennial in flow. Like the Iranian Plateau proper it also has a large interior desert basin, the Dasht-i Margo. However, unlike the rest of the Plateau, which receives most of its precipitation in winter, Baluchistan also receives significant precipitation in the summer, which is attributable to effects of the Indian monsoons. This large area demonstrates a high degree of geographical diversification which facilitates its division into sub-regions (see Figure 1).

### *CHAPTER III*

## **THE SAID QALA TEPE SEQUENCE**

### **Introduction**

Stratigraphy is of course the very basis of archaeological interpretation at almost every site. The possibility of cross-correlation with Deh Morasi Ghundai at Said Qala Tepe made stratigraphy of even more important note. In terms of total volume for the mound, less than 0.5% of the total was sampled. There was nothing in this sample, however, to indicate that it was not a representative sample. Preliminary analysis indicated at least four major occupation periods which were separable into phases (Shaffer 1971a; b). However, subsequent analysis has resulted in not only a refinement of the original periods but also delineation of an additional two periods. The analysis presented below not only supplements the original reports but supersedes them.

### **Units of Excavation**

#### *Introduction*

Said Qala Tepe rose above the surrounding alluvial plain to a height of 7.5 meters and was approximately 210 meters in diameter (Figures 2 and 3). The mound had been subjected to extensive erosion of both natural and human sources (mounds in this area are often exploited as a source for topsoil). Two small pisé structures, whose function was associated with processing of dried fruits, had been constructed into the side of the mound. Directly in front of these structures were large ovens for the preparation of the lime solution for such processing. On top of the mound two large and very level pisé surfaces had been constructed for drying the processed fruits—mainly raisins. In addition a trench had been excavated around the circumference of the mound's base. The latter functioned as a shooting-blind for fowl attracted by the exposed water table surrounding the mound.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **CHRONOLOGY AND COMPARISONS**

#### **Introduction**

In relating the Said Qala Tepe sequence to those of adjacent sites and other regions, it is necessary to stress at the beginning that the primary means of establishing such relationships is by ceramic comparisons. This reliance upon ceramics results from several factors. First, there is the archaeological assumption that ceramics are the most sensitive and reliable indicators of cultural dynamics. A second and more pragmatic factor is that most excavations in Baluchistan to date have been limited to *sondages* and, therefore, have provided little else for comparison. This does not mean, however, that the following discussion will be limited entirely to ceramics. Wherever possible additional cultural material has been utilized, especially in the immediate Said Qala Tepe region.

The importance of making such comparative studies is two-fold. First, it allows for relative placement of new data from Said Qala Tepe with previously excavated sites. Second, and most importantly, establishment of a comparative stratigraphy and absolute chronology for Baluchistan is the basis for an understanding and evaluation of the cultural processes at work. It is with these objectives that the following comparisons, and resultant chronology, is presented for established sequences of Baluchistan, Seistan, and the Indus Valley.

#### **Comparative Stratigraphies**

##### **BALUCHISTAN**

##### **SARAWAN REGION**

##### **Deh Morasi Ghundai**

A high degree of similarity is expected between this site and that of Said Qala Tepe, due to their close proximity in space and

**CHAPTER V**  
**INTERPRETATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

**Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

The previous chapters have presented the partial results of excavations at Said Qala Tepe and related them to other sites. In so doing, a conscious attempt has been made to refrain from offering explanations about the phenomena involved. Most archaeological investigations, like other social sciences, are concerned with identification, classification, description, measuring, and reporting (Brown 1963: 47). Explanation usually enters into the scheme of archaeology only when attempts are made to make such work intelligible or to resolve inconsistencies. Brown has stated the role of explanation in social sciences as:

Explaining away, then, is the removing of an impediment, an impediment either to someone's relationships with other people or to his intellectual understanding. All explanations are attempts to explain away impediments of some kind. They are efforts to deprive puzzles, mysteries, and blockages of their forces, and hence, existence [1963: 41].

Archaeology, as a sub-discipline of anthropology, has been concerned with these "puzzles and mysteries" surrounding man. More specifically, the goal of archaeological explanation has been stated to be:

- 
1. Throughout this chapter the author has used the works of Binford (1965, 1968), Renfrew (1972), Clarke (1968) and Watson, LeBlanc and Redman (1971). Many parts of the various theoretical discussions are summarized from their original work. The author has attempted to carefully document all sources and ideas in every instance. If perchance an oversight has occurred, the reader's indulgence is requested, and apologies are offered to the slighted party. It was necessary, however, to discuss at length these ideas in order to point out their application to the Baluchistan material. The statements and applications concerning Baluchistan are solely the author's responsibility.

APPENDIX  
CERAMIC DATA

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