

Pir Shah Jurio at Risk: A Coastal Harappan Site on the Bank of Hub River

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Abstract

The civilisation of the Indus Valley is spread across several naturally resource-rich areas, a reason for internal and external trade. Connectivity from one area to another should be the reason why the thousand settlements support each other from different perspectives. The Karachi region, located in an important geographical position between the mountain belt to the north and west and the plains to the east, its maritime environment should be an important source of seafood at the time. Unfortunately, many of the sites prior to detailed studies have been little studied or even are now at risk from building and industrial expansion. One very important site is Pir Shah Jurio, strategically located on the eastern bank of the Hub River and only 5 kilometres north of the sea in the Karachi region.

Keywords: Coastal sites, Indus valley civilization, Karachi, Sindh.

1. Introduction

The Indus Valley civilisation at its peak covered an area of 3,133,886 square kilometres between Afghanistan, Pakistan and India (Coningham 2015). Within this geography, the region of present-day Sindh stands out in importance (Chakrabarti 2014). The Khirthar foothills area, dissected by streams descending from this bastion-shaped hill system between Sindh and Baluchistan, is a fascinating area of occupation due to its open valleys, low hills and hot springs. In the Khirthar foothills area, agriculture depends on dams built to control the flow of streams from the hills. Some of these streams are also perennial, being fed by springs. Local routes between Sindh and Baluchistan are also found in this area. Its Harappan sites are related to such routes and agriculturally suitable spots. The sites of Amiliano, Orangi and Allahdino are oriented towards Karachi (Chakrabarti 2014). Lahiri (1992) published a detailed inventory of the raw materials and finished products, mostly identified from the excavations of the Mature Harappan sites till the late 1980s. Mohenjo-Daro and Chanhu-Daro yielded the largest number of items and the composite list was found to comprise the following: steatite, alabaster, shell, ivory, carnelian, agate, jasper, jade, lapis lazuli, copper-bronze, gold, silver, lead, semi-precious stones and ordinary stones. The last two categories included, in their turn, serpentine, turquoise, amazonite, onyx, topaz, haematite, bloodstone, amethyst, plasma, feldspar, chalcedony, chert, limestone, slate, flint, sandstone, milky quartz, basalt, Jaisalmer stone, tachylite, calcite,

diorite etc. To understand the Harappan internal trade in its proper historical context one has to focus on the network of routes linking different small regions of its distribution zone (Chakrabarti 2014).



Fig. 1 - General views of the mounds, A (left), B (right), looking northwest corner (Cortesy MAHI).

The region of Karachi and its friendly environment, flat intervening valley and low parallel ridges, watered by perennial and semi-perennial streams, springs, and its maritime environment should be very favourable for being itself the home of indigenous cultures, and must have played an important role in the progress of different human cultures from the pre-historic times (Khan, 1968). As rich in the archaeological record of different stone age periods (Biagi 2004, 2008), the number of Harappan settlements as well are reported by different researcher (Majumdar 1934, Fairservis 1982, Khan 1968), some of the well-known are Pir Shah Jurio, Amiliano, Allahdino, Hasan Wali, Hab Chauki, and Ghazkar or Ghazkal.

Pir Shah Jurio the name by a grave of Sufi saint correctly Pir Shah Jerio written on the slab of his grave and locally famous, geographically the site is locating 24 55 61 44 66 44 49 68 on the tip of a conglomerate terrace about 50 feet above the sea level (Khan, 1968), on the eastern bank of Hub River. The site consists of two small mounds; mound A with the circumference of 330 metres, and mound B with circumference of 40 metres which both nowadays partly covered by a cemetery.

The site was documented by a team of the Geology Department from University of Karachi during the geological and geomorphological survey of the region (Khan, 1964, 1979a). During the survey, the geological team also documented the presence of archaeological material: plain, painted and perforated pottery sherds, broken frame pieces of the toy carts, chert blades and scrapers, polished weight, copper pieces, terracotta and shell bangles, and triangular clay tablets. Furthermore, the geological survey helped to understand the strategic location of the site, and its potential role as an ancient port-site. The site would

have been important to the other coastal sites of Sutkagen Dor, Sokta Koh, and Kot Bala.

Geographically the site is locating on very planned location on the bank of river and the terrace where the site located is surrounded by low height plains currently cultivated by locals can be assumed also used similarly in ancient times. The mounds of the site, importantly the square feature very similar to the stone wall foundation (Fig. 1. Right) on mound B very close to the river and scattered cultural material are suggesting the permanent settlement. The closeness to the sea should be feasibility as a port for the sites that time located in the east of Hub River and close to the site of Pir Shah Jurio.



Fig. 2 - A view of the boundary wall around the site (Photo by Usman Kez).

2. Current visit and condition of the site

Moving forward the current conditions of the site, it was very shocked that someone has grabbed the hill where site located and a boundary wall around the site is built by him (Fig. 2), after getting permission from caretaker to enter, inside the boundary, there were many new buildings including, houses, cattle and poultry forms (Fig. 4). The site needs a quick response of the responsible authorities for the protection, otherwise the total area inside the wall will As mentioned above the site is covered by graves and using as the graveyard by Jokhiasa local Balouch tribe (Fig 1. Left), the graves are simply made of local stone slabs can be measure $2.5 \times 1.2 = 0.8$ m maximum without any identical feature which used to be relative date. According to the locals they are continuously using it, and these graves are two to three hundred years old, if they

are continuously using, hardly the graveyard should be three to four hundred years old because the number of graves is not in much quantity.

On both mounds along with the graves the cultural material specifically the pot sherds, can be classified; painted and plain of the red and grey ware (Fig. 3). The type of red ware were mostly the pieces of dish on stand, small and large storage jars, pots, and bowls. The painted pieces of large globular or near globular jar with a base and beaked shape of rim, painted with deep red glossy slip on the body and a wide black band on the neck from the exterior, unintentionally the splashes of red slip and concentric lines can be also observed very visible from the interior (Fig. 3.E). The pieces of bowl painted with dark red or very similar to the deep brown slip traces on the rim and exterior with beaked shape of rim, further the exterior can be observed crude with some grooved lines and cord mark impression (Figs. 3.A and B).

The pieces of grey ware were observed in two different variants, the black on grey (Figs. 3.C and D) and undecorated grey similar to those already identified by Fairservis from Quetta valley (1956), the pieces of greyware painted with black can be observe a form of plate with beaked shape of rim (Fig. 3.C), further, the pieces of undecorated grey of a cooking pot with short beaked rim and crude surface most probably due to over firing (Fig. 3.D), moreover, along these the numbers of other plain ware in different shapes and form were scattered over the entire surfaces of the site (Fig. 3.F). The discussed painted and plain pot sherds and other on the surface in the shapes and their manufacturing technology were mostly similar to those of Harrapan period observed on many sites (Mackay 1967, Dales and Kenoyer 1986, Fairservis 1956).

3. Chronology of the site

The site of Pir Shah Jurio since its discovery is surveyed by many researchers, and all them have mostly focused on the spatial analysis (Khan 1964, Akhtar and Dhanani 2016, Biagi et al. 2013). After many years, despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that the site is used as a cemetery, there is still much ancient cultural material. As can be seen in Fig. 3, ceramic materials are scattered over the entire surface of the site, even almost complete pieces, such as those of a large painted globular or near-globular vessel (Fig. 3.E). Moreover, the other cultural material, described in above portion is very similar to the Harrapan period. Khan (1968) observed the cultural material including plain, painted and perforated pottery sherds, broken frame pieces of the toy carts, chert blades and scrapers, polished weight, copper pieces, terracotta and shell bangles, and triangular clay tablets, and all those relate by him to the Harappan period of Indus valley civilization, later the similar observation were also made by Akhtar and Dhanani during their survey.



Fig. 3 - Material scattered over the surface of the site (Source MAHI).

The most important attempts were made by Biagi and his team, during the survey of Arabian Sea coastal zone, where they mapped out numbers of the early fisher villages and communities of Neolithic and Bronze age (Biagi et al. 2011, 2014, 2018). The radiocarbon date during the survey of the region, the samples obtained from the site of Pir Shah Jurio, resulted with early half of the 3rd millennium BC (Biagi et al. 2021, 2014).



Fig. 4 - Site inside the modern boundary wall and other architectural building. Yellow; site outer limits, Red; modern boundary wall, Green; Architectural features (Source Google earth).



Fig. 5 - Aerial imagery of the Alladino site; A, Feb 2019 and B, Jan 2020 with the modern construction of a water tank on the site (Source Google earth).

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