

The Green Ruins of Taxila

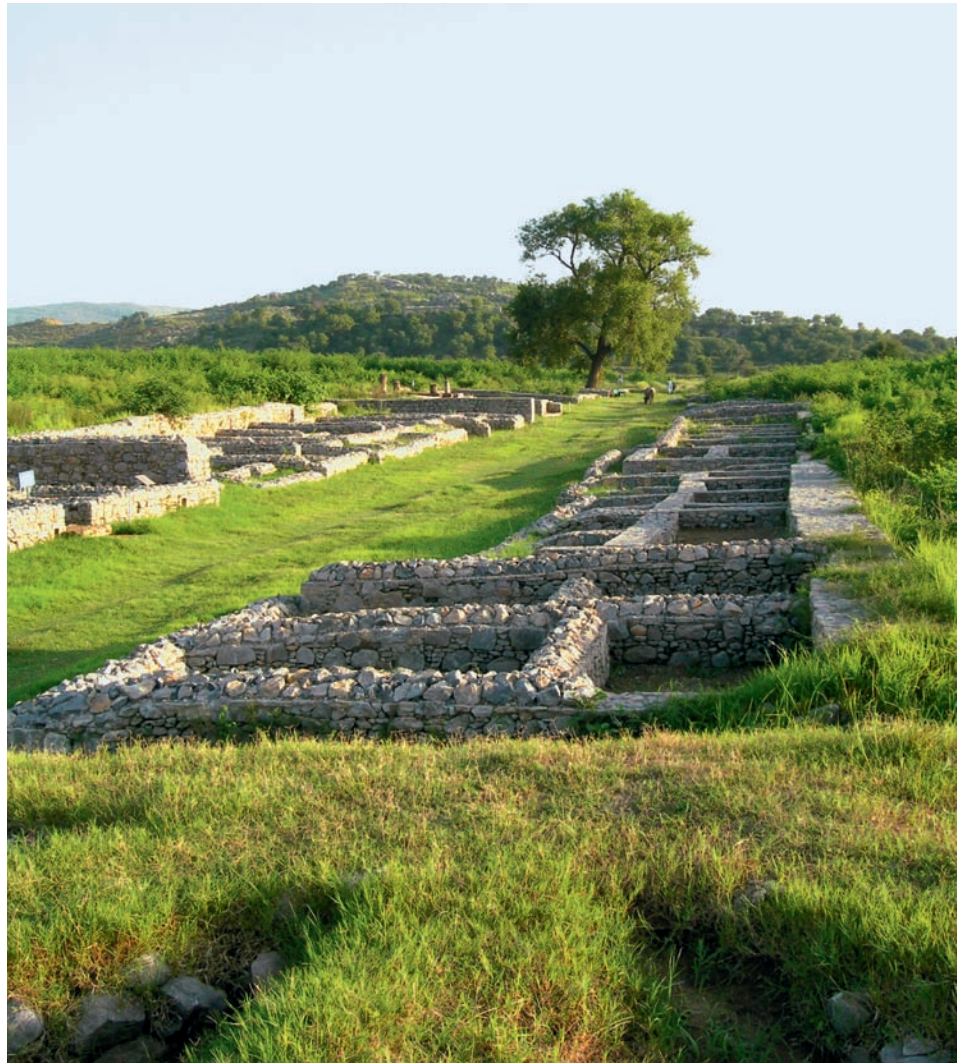
Pakistan's oldest archaeological site

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Taxila, a unique archaeological site, listed by UNESCO as a world heritage, is located just thirty kilometers to the west of Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan. Takshakas ruled Taxila in the Bronze Age as evidenced by some finds from this site. They called it 'Takshasila' which in Sanskrit implies "State of King Taksha". Taxila was also known as "The city of cut stones" and occupied a holy place in Buddhism. On account of its antiquity, Taxilla has been mentioned in many languages with slight phonetic differences. It was known as 'Taxila' to the Greeks.

The existence of Taxila during the Mesolithic and Neolithic cultural periods has been established by the respective characteristic archeological finds like stone cutwork, grinding stones, bone needles, articles of terracotta and coinage.

Sir John Marshall, the Director General of the Archaeological Survey of British India excavated this site from 1913 to 1925. He afterwards designed and laid the foundation of the Taxila museum in 1918 at the site. This museum was inaugurated in 1928 and contains a valuable collection of unique statues, coins, pottery, stuccowork and many other articles - not only a tourist attraction but relics of great religious importance, especially for Buddhists, Jains and Hindus. This museum extends an opportunity to perceive the past with an unsurpassed and clearer vision. Sir Mortimer Wheeler and Pakistani archaeologists also contributed towards its further exploration.▶



Foundations

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Darius I, the Achaemenid emperor belonging to the Persian Dynasty of kings, conquered Gandhara in 6c. B.C. and founded Taxila city as its provincial capital In c.518 B.C. But Darius was overthrown by Alexander The Great in 326 B.C. He offered sacrifice here prior to launching the famous war against Porus known in history on account of the defeat of Porus caused by a stampede of his own retreating elephants. The Greek era came to end in 317 B.C. and was followed by the rule of Asoka belonging to the Maurian Dynasty.

It was under his rule that Taxilla flourished to a great extent. To introduce Buddhism, Asoka built the first stupa. Asoka was also known as 'Dharma raja-the religious Raja/Ruler' therefore the earliest Buddhist complex of Taxila was named after him as "Dharmrajika". After the death of Asoka the Bactrian Greeks conquered and destroyed Taxila city and shifted it from the

old Bhirmound site to the "Sirkap" Site. Aryans also ruled Taxila and named the region "Gandhara", the land of fragrance (from the Hindi word "Gandh", meaning fragrance. In fact a characteristic fragrance is still prevalent in and around Taxila, upto the margala hills and Hazara District. It is said that another name of Buddha was "Hazara" and the current District Hazara of Pakistan was named after him. Articles of Gandhara art are displayed by almost all the famous museums of the world including the British Museum, where some coins from Taxila belonging to the Bronze Age and Gandhara civilization have been preserved. Most of the articles in the Taxila museum belong to the Gandhara cultural period. The world famous statue of "Ascetic Buddha" was also recovered from Taxila and has been preserved in the museum of Lahore, the capital of the Punjab Province of Pakistan. Owing to its stunning dexterity and inspiring impact,▶



Stupa/ Sirkap

ستوپا



Details from a wall

تفاصيل من جدار

replicas of this sculpture have been displayed by many other museums.

The purpose of the stupas, the sculpture and the stuccowork therein was to propagate the teachings of Buddha and to present highlights of Buddha's life in the form of writings and figures both human and animal. Being located at the strategic juncture of the silk route connecting China, Taxila became a seat of learning and many Hindu, Jain and Buddhist scholars spread knowledge in different disciplines including religious, linguistic and scientific studies. The Sanskrit grammar was written by a resident scholar of Taxila.

The Taxila excavation is spread over a vast area and comprises of three important sites (old cities); Bhirmound, Sirkap and Dharmarajika. Bhirmound is the earliest and the least planned city as indicated by the layout. Sir Kap (colossal) appears well planned comparatively and comprises of many temples and monasteries. Located at about two kilometers from the aforementioned cities, Dharmarajika is the



Stupa base at Sirkap decorated with Hindu, Buddhist and Greek temple fronts
ستوبا في سركاب وعليها تأثيرات المعابد الهندوسية والبوذية واليونانية



Foundation of Stupa

أسس ستوبا



Apsidal temple

معبد

latest and the most impressive of the three and contains a large stupa. Simplicity and arrangement seem to be a common factor in the construction of all the structures. The cubicles in monasteries were provided with shelves for lamps and the most irregularly shaped stones were arranged into perfectly regular and geometrical structures. In the very beginning, limestone and pebbles were used but later on Kanjur stone was used in "Rubble Masonry" where irregular stones are dexterously arranged by filling the gaps with compatible filler stones without compacting them. The rubble masonry is still used in the suburbs of Taxila, Islamabad and Peshawer. Today Taxila is an important city of Pakistan, known for its Engineering University and Heavy Mechanical Complex. Taxila and Wah are twin cities; the later is renowned for its Ordinance Factories with the capability of producing tanks and aircrafts. We sometimes use the expression "It's all history now!" Taxila is all history but not in that sense! It is all ruins which are still green! The excavation appears like a pattern on a green carpet. Invasive plant species like hemp, white top congress grass or paper mulberry may endanger this antique and valuable site and it's perhaps the right time to consider culling the invasive species to save this heritage for future generations. ■



Walls

جدران



Remains of rooms

بقايا غرف