

Historical Note & Archaeology

Identification of Debal, and Banbhore on the bases of Historical Texts, and the Study of Excavations of 1957-63



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Abstract:

The Port town of Debal looms very high in the historic narratives in early centuries of Islam in South Asia. Its identification with the site of Banbhore, in lower Indus delta is presently very strong and well rooted presumption. The site of Banbhore was excavated by the Department of Archaeology, Pakistan from 1957 to 1963, the excavators assigned the site the period of active occupation from first century BCE to thirteenth century CE. It confirms to the historic account of the destruction of Debal by frustrated Khwarzemshah, in the earlier part of the 13th C. The writer of this paper re-studied the excavated pottery, compared it with the pottery from other destinations connected through Indian Ocean maritime trade, the pottery which was proudly traded. The study brought very interesting results, confirming to the research carried out in the nearby deltaic ancient remains, and brought back the conclusion of possibility of the Banbhore being abandoned in the early 12th C, and coming to prominence another port, which later received the attention of the Khwarzemshah, who after his failure to allure the local chiefs to raise a big army to fight the Mongols, sacked the Port town, which in succession to Debal continued to be called Debal; as all other subsequent ports continued to be called, and labelled on the maps until very late, despite their original strong identification, as was the case of Lahori Bunder.

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Keywords: *Debal, Banbhore, Glazed Pottery, Maritime links, trade, Khwarzemshah*

Introduction

The interest in the site of Banbhore goes back to several decades, in the year 1990, an exploratory project named *In Quest of Debal* was launched by Sindh Exploration & Adventure Society (SEAS); it was designed to have physical survey of the western extremities of lower Indus Delta. During the next three years many ancient settlements were spotted, where the high tide reaches, and wash away the potshards twice every day.

The known and unknown sites were explored, surface material and the physical remains were studied, it led to an assessment of the area, and the timeframe relevant to these.

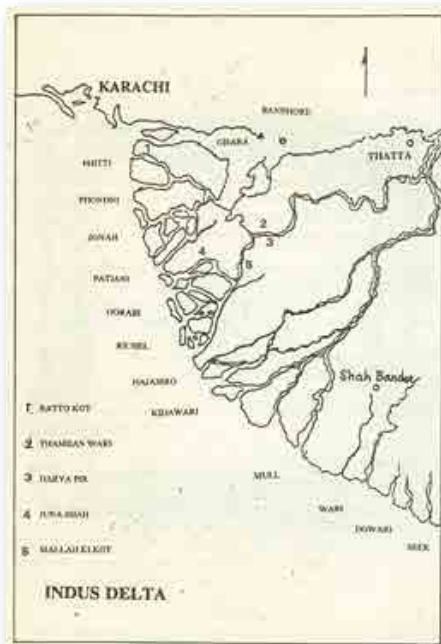


Illustration 1. The position of various ancient sites in the lower Indus Delta

One of the new found sites *Jam Jaskaran's Goth* was especially of immense interest as its material led to make some far-reaching conclusions. But it was not possible to be certain about many things related to the site, which was visibly part of the maritime system, spread over to Indian Ocean, possibly beyond (Ibrahim, Asma & Lashari, Kaleem, 'Recent Archaeological Discoveries in Indus Delta,' in *Journal of Pakistan Archaeologists' Forum*, vol. 2 (I, II), 1993, pp.1-44).

The region during the early Islamic period had an extensive network of the trade, dependent on a loosely woven fabric of socio-economic relationship, constantly being shaped by the dynamics of political aspirations of major actors with in the region [Rashid ad-Din, *Jami' at-twarikh*,].

The most durable material available from the surface and more precisely unearthed in the scientific

excavations is the pottery, and the contemporaneous towns, having undergone the archaeological investigations were Siraf, Susa, Suhur, Samarra, Nishapur, Rayy, Lashkari Bazar, Mansuara, Sehwan etc. and all these sites revealed a range of the pottery that has much in common. The early Islamic period pottery is rightly labeled as diagnostic, as the processes of its production and its development through the centuries are well understood by the scholars.

The opportunity to study the pottery from this vast region came very handy when the present writer had occasion to carry out the post doctoral studies at Islamic Arts Museum, Berlin.

The wide range of glazed pottery from the pre-Islamic and early Islamic period has an intriguing range and variety, it is captivating for any attentive onlooker as well as scholars interested to see deeper. A good range of literature has also been produced, documenting the studies during last two and a half decades specifically.

Once back from Germany it was felt important to have the look at the pottery excavated from Banbhore. The site museum at Banbhore has a representative collection, but it was considered necessary to have wider sample size. Thus the Department of Archaeology was approached for access to the stores at Banbhore, where the excavated material was kept.

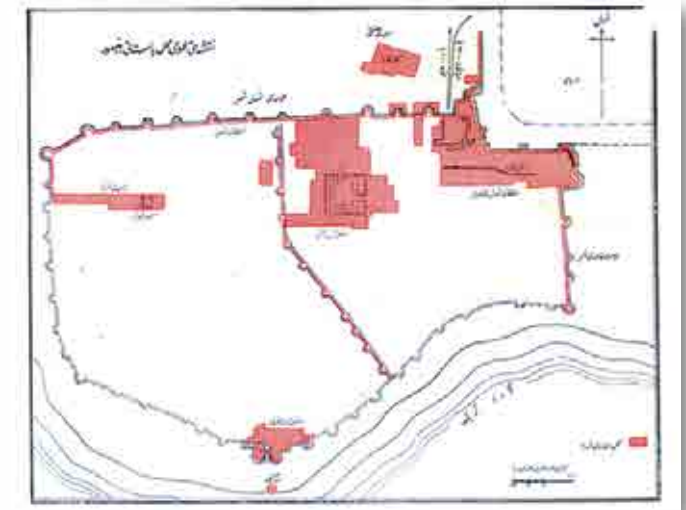


Illustration 2. The large scale excavation carried out at Banbhore 1957-1963, the excavation area is shown in color

It was good luck to have not only the access granted; additionally the team of Exploration Branch assisted the process. The condition there was not such that the pottery could be seen. We came upon the virtual dump of the pottery bags, forming a heap resembling a hill of the pottery bags, these were in tatters and were so fused together that it was not physically possible to differentiate the potshards coming out of one or the other bag.



Illustration 3.
one of the heaps
of pottery bags
lying in the stores
at Banbhore, seen during the exercise in the year 2004

It was a labor of five months that the systematic picking, cleaning and separating the potshards supposedly belonging to one or the other bag, as many of the shards were not numbered. Thus the bags were prepared anew, numbered and placed on the newly installed shelves, having lists attached to each shelf.

It was the summer of the year 2004, when this job was completed, and the study began. The interest deepened and the need was felt to have access to more material from the other Islamic sites. At that moment the grant of Fulbright Scholarship for Post Doc Fellowship in USA brought a long awaited chance. It opened the way for study reserve collections in the Metropolitan Museum, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; University of Pennsylvania Museum, Philadelphia etc.

The study of the Banbhore Pottery was undertaken, the information base by now made it very clear that the site of Banbhore and the newly found site near Jam Jaskaran's Goth have to be viewed much differently than what one conventionally think about the old ports' sites in the lower Indus Delta.

The findings are presented in this paper, it shall comprise of two parts, the part one shall make a narrative of facts, and discuss these to reveal the new understanding of the problem and the answer to the question of the identity of two major sites, awaiting to be named.

The Facts

The port town of *Debal* was famously associated with Sindh [Ibn e Khurdadhbih, '*Kitab al Masalik wal Mumalik*' VI, *Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum*, ed. M. J. de Goeje; Baladhri, *Futuhul Baldan*; Al Masudi, *Marvaji u Dahab*; Abu Ishaq, *Kitab u Aqalim*; Ibn e Hauqal, *Ashkal al Bilad* etc.]; so much so that some of the Arabic sources even called it Deval e Sind. Despite it 'the history of this otherwise famous and historical port is most obscure' (Baloch, N A, 1996, p. 55).

Its identity has posed difficulties for the historians and also for the archaeologists, who had been keenly following the historical narratives, and had tried their hand at identifying the port named *Debal* on ground. The earlier references to it are found in a historical account named *Fatehnama e Sind* [Baloch, N A, *Fatehnama e Sind*], while referring to the extent of the realm of Rai Sahasi described the southern most limits as far as "the seacoast and *Debal*" (Daudpota, U M, 'Fatehnama e Sind,' *Dairat al Maarif*, Hyderabad Deccan, p.15).

It is quite interesting to note that the Indian Ocean Maritime trade, barring few exceptions, was a regular seafaring route that also linked the Arab-Persian World in early historic period to Indian sub-continent. Many ports and inland trading towns were connected throughout, and the artifacts were exchanged with frequency.

Periplus of The Erythraean Sea [Periplus of The Erythraean Sea, Wilfred H Schoff (ed.), pp.37, 39] a Roman source described some of the maritime routes, busy in moving items eagerly traded; one of the ports resembling description of the present day Banbhore, was present among the elaborate list.

An easterly port of call Barygazais identified with modern day Broach, in Gujarat, while another port Barbaricon/Barbaricom is described, which is supposedly situated near, where the present day Banbhore, a famous ruined fortress in Thatta district stands.

The Arab geographers and chroniclers had mentioned the port of Debal frequently; the references are spread over to the larger period, and are not really giving exact geographic reference points. The area and region as discerned is the same locality that is the lower Indus Delta and situation of the port is on the western most arm of Indus [Al Baladhuri, *Futuh al Buldan*, p.91; Al Yaqubi, II, p.407; Al Suyuti, *tarikh al Khulfa*, Cairo, pp.246-7; Ibn Khurdazbeh, *al masalik walmamalik*, ; Ibn Hauqal, *Ashkal al Bilad*; *Mujam al Buldan*, Lipzig, III/357-8; Al Idrisi, ; Raverty, p.224; Al Samani, *Ansabal Sarb*; *Tabqat e Nasiri*, Raverty (ed.) p.294; *Jamiaul Hikayat*, London, p.1929; Haig, p. 46n, 64, 79;]

Some of the scholars have fondly described *Banbhore* as the port of *Debal*, related to the Arab conquest (Aka Patel, 'The Mosque in South Asia,' in *Piety and Politics in the Early Indian Mosque* (ed.) Finbarr Barry Flood, Oxford, 2008, p.8, & Plate 17). The main force behind such assertion was Dr. F. A. Khan, of the Department of Pakistan, when the results of the excavations were discussed ('Excavations of Banbhore 1957-63,' in *Pakistan Archaeology* No 1, 1964).

The excavations of the Department of Archaeology, spread over to eight years produced a very brief and crisp report, which does not specifically cite reasons for the *Banbhore* to be Debal but helped carry that feeling (Khan, F. A., *Banbhore*, Karachi, 1969).

Such impression has been further deepened when every other paper, not necessarily based on concrete investigations, conveniently felt like towing the line taken by late Dr. F. A. Khan. Despite the fact that the early reports of Archaeological Survey of India did not readily subscribe to the idea [Cousens, Henry. 1929, *The Antiquities Of Sind*, Oxford, p.80]

There are numerous references to the port of Sindh as *Deval e Sind*, constantly appearing in the sources oriental as well as occidental, as late as seventeenth century. The important European maps too have identified the lower deltaic port as *Deval/Debal*. Even the Ain e Akbari is describing the port of *Debal* still in existence, much later than its early 13th century destruction, appearing in authentic historical accounts [Masumi, p.6; Ain e Akbari, p.556; Qan'i, *Tuhfatu Kiram III*, p.245, 247, 252, 253-4;]

This matter is shrouded in the mist of history, but at least it proves one thing that some of these references to the *Deval e sind* are not necessarily to the town of Debal that was taken over by the Arab Invaders in 8th century; Debal remained chief port of Sindh during the next few centuries, and according to the historic sources was destroyed by Jalaluddin Khwarzem Shah, subsequent to his arrival in Sindh sometimes around 1223 (Boyle, John Andrew, 'Jalal al Din Khwarzem Shah in Indus Valley,' *Sindh Through Centuries* (ed.) Hameeda Khuhro, Karachi 1981, p.125).

If Debal was destroyed in earlier part of 13th century, then any reference to it in subsequent centuries is not called for.

The emergence of another port famous in Sindh is again testified in the historical accounts, which became famous as *Lahori/Lahri Bunder*. The texts explain that new port was established in the lower delta of Sindh in 14th century, but *Al Biruni* has already mentioned it in 11th Century CE.

The European references to *Deval e Sind* in fifteenth and sixteenth century are most probably to this *Lahri Bunder* and not to the Debal, as it was specifically mentioned in the historical accounts that Jalaluddin Khwarzem Shah destroyed it. 'Subsequent references are either referring to the information earlier available or pertain to the name *Debal*, which was subsequently transferred to new ports of the Indus Delta' [Baloch, p.76n(26)].

The identification of Banbhore with the old port town

Debal is quite convenient, for many to follow, when Dr. F A Khan declares that the site of Banbhore came to an end in the earlier part of 13th century.

It looks very straight forward and quite logical, if Debal was destroyed in early 13th century, and the site of Banbhore came to extinction at the same time then there is no difficulty in presuming that both are in fact one and the same site.

It was a sufficient reason for anyone to just go back and relax, a historical riddle solved.

But it was difficult to buy this idea, when the material, specifically the pottery that could be seen in the site museum of *Banbhore* was examined; it pointed out to some anomalies.

Let it be explained that the pottery that is proudly displayed in the museum comprises the most widely circulated glazed pottery, during the early Islamic period, comprising of a wide variety. The pottery is of much interest for the students of archaeology and history. Excavated in all the early Islamic period sites throughout the region (Indian Ocean linked/associated sites).

This pottery comprises of the blue glazed heavy jars, the lusterware, the opaque ware, the sgraffiato, the moulded and stamped pottery, and the famous black on white underglazed pottery.

The introduction of the Lusterware in Persian Gulf and application of luster tiles in North Africa have an established provenance. It has been associated with Samarra ensemble along with the early opaque ware [By Friedrich Sarre, 1925, *Die Keramik von Samarra, Berlin*].

This and other such glazed wares, having a distinct glaze, and some of these having inscriptions on these, have been termed by this writer as *luxury pottery*. Most probably these were neither used in kitchen nor were used on table/board.

The so-called luxury pottery was a precious item, as can be ascertained from so many of the shards having postproduction holes in these. The presence of these carefully drilled holes around the broken edges, clearly indicate at the efforts undertaken to repair pottery, when those got broken. It may be taken as the preciousness, and may also point out to the scarcity of such pottery, at any given period. Its importance for the owner is clearly demonstrated, and also it testifies to the fact that these repairs couldn't make these useable for drinking/eating or cooking. Thus any other use could be considered for such items. The fact that it has been repaired with the thread / wire passed through the holes / apertures made in post-production period, is a clear indication that it

Type of Pottery	From early Islamic context (other sites)	Coming from Banbhore Excavation 1957 - 63	Period assigned
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EARTHENWARE			
UNGLAZED WARE			IRAN 9TH C.
SLIP PAINTED			
OPAQUE WHITE GLAZED			10 - 11TH C.
SGRAFFIATO			IRAN 10TH C.
OPAQUE WHITE GLAZED			IRAN 9TH C.
SLIP WARE			IRAN 11TH C.
LUSTER WARE			IRAQ 10TH C.
LUSTER WARE			IRAQ 9TH C.
OPAQUE WHITE GLAZED			IRAN 9TH-10TH C.
SPLASHED SGRAFFIATO			IRAN 10TH C.
SPLASHED			IRAN 10TH C.
WHITE SLIP WITH BALCK SLIP			IRAN 10TH C.
WHITE SLIP PAINTED			IRAN 9TH C.
WHITE SLIP PAINTED			SYRIRA 9TH C.

was precious for the holder.

All sorts of glazed pottery continued to be made and traded in the region, through out the later Islamic period(12th, 13th, 14th and 15th centuries) also.

The 14th and 15th century ceramics are found frequently from site presently known as Juna Shah Bunder, the supposed site of Lahri Bunder.

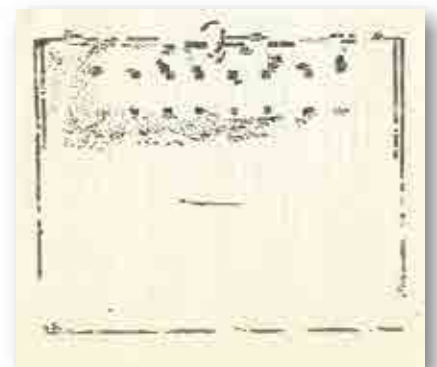
The pottery from 12th century and the 13th century is missing from *Banbhore*. This ominous absence is very hard to explain, if we are to believe Dr. Khan, according to him the site existed up to the earlier quarter of 13th century CE(1223-6, the years assigned to JalaluddinKhwarzemshah's frustration at failing to raise an army from the Debal and its environ).

Type of Pottery	From early Islamic context (other sites)	Coming from Banbhore Excavation 1957 - 63	Period assigned
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UNDER GLAZE PAINTED			SYRIA 12 - 13TH C.
IRANIAN LUSTRE			SYRIA 12 - 13TH C.
UNGLAZED EARTHEN			IRAN 12 - 13TH C.
MOULDED EARTHEN			SYRIA 12 - 13TH C.
IRANIAN FRITWARE			IRAN 12 - 13TH C.
IRANIAN LUSTRE			1200 - 20 C.
MINAI			IRAN 12 - 13TH C.

Another issue is that the *Banbhore* didn't have the remains of the Jamia Mosqure, which Jalaluddin Khwarzem Shah built at Debal.

Illustration 4. The remains of the Large congregation mosque, possibly the one contributed by Khwarzem Shah



How to explain this clear assertion, when the Jamia Mosque at Banbhore is much older mosque, and having its multiple inscriptions, clearly demonstrates its being older and had undergone various repairs, caused by earlier sponsors. It is especially interesting to note that the 12th 13th centuries follow the tradition of remarkable range of commemorative mural epigraphy, employing graceful and decorative calligraphy. Khwarzem shah's association with the Ghazna, Gaur and his Central Asian holdings, posses a rich tradition, where an enormous range of inscriptions are found from the period in question.

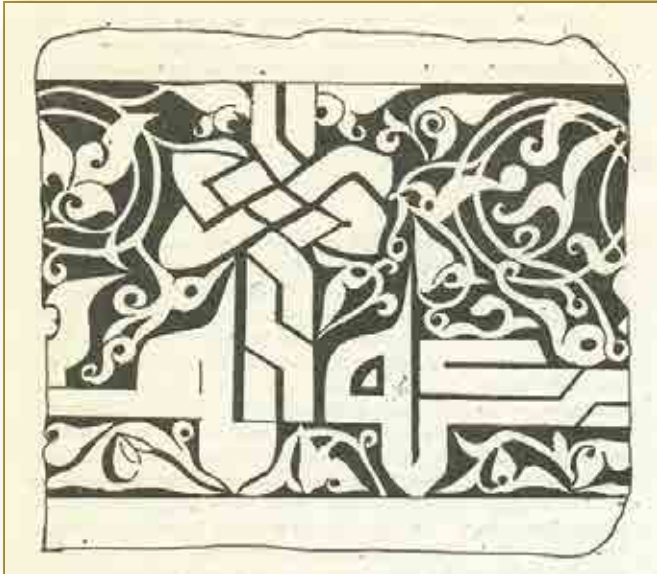


Illustration 5. The large terracotta tablet, part of a larger frieze decorating the interior as well exterior of monumental buildings, from late 11th to late 13th centuries, coming from the large mosque near Jam Jaskaran's Goth

With such a proud gift presented to the area, of a large congregation Mosque, Jalaluddin was clearly aiming at striking awe in the hearts of inhabitants of the region; he couldn't have failed to cause any such inscription to demonstrate his cultural enrichment, his capability and resourcefulness.

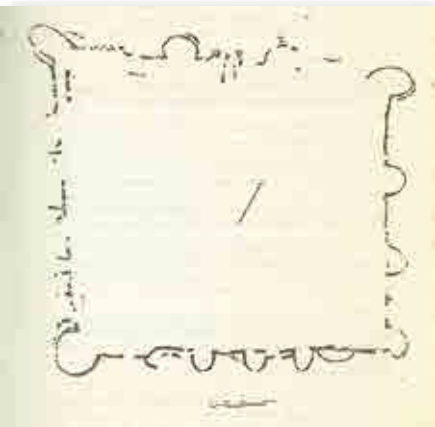


Illustration 6. The fortress has semi-circular as well as the pear shaped bastions, it seems to have been rehabilitated more than once; probably is older than the large Mosque, Jam Jaskaran's Goth

Excavators' carefulness is demonstrated at finding even small-scale inscriptions from the site, thus we cannot

term it as their failure to find anything of Khwarzem shah, who undertook some great works at Debal. There has to be some other explanation to it.

The riddle is not very hard to explain, Jalaluddin didn't come to Banbhore; the Debal, which was dealt by Jalaluddin was somewhere else. The Debal where he built his mosque is to be found. And when any mosque is found in the context of lower Indus Delta, it must be a structure confirming to the architectural practices of that period; it can not possibly be the one which is extensively excavated and yet doesn't show any sign of the presence of a mosque that could cater for the congregation of one thousand prayer goers.

With in the Delta, in the southwest of *Banbhore* there are remains of an old stone structures, it was earlier reported by Carter, and also in detail by Henry Cousens, as Thumanwari, or *ThumbanWari Masjid*; on closer observation one can find a small square room, with visible marks of four columns, on which the roof stood. Out of these, two carved shafts were available, and the remains of other columns were missing. The carving of these shafts was so rich and balanced that both the writers were so got carried with the aesthetic balance of these that they declared these to be brought from an old temple, and utilized there.

They couldn't notice other parts of the building, which were so balanced, and beautifully worked. In any case at the distance of more than one kilometer there are more remains, which were never before noticed, reason being that the area gets submerged under the tidal waves at the high tide, daily.

These submerged remains on closer scrutiny reveal extended structures; out of these one good-sized fortress and one large mosque couldn't be missed.

The whole site is littered with brick butts, potsherds, stone pieces and the surface indicate presence of many graves built over by using cut bricks.

The most significant find from the remains of the large mosque was a large cut brick, having the knotted Kufic letters of monumental size, interspersed with the decorated vines moving through the writing. Beneath the script it has a band with decorative freeze, possessing specific stylistic nature.

This large terracotta slab is certainly part of an inscription that was cut, carved and prepared over so many of such sized slabs, and must have decorated façade, or interior of a large room or hall, in the same manner as are found on many of the 12th and 13th century buildings, in the areas where the Ghourid and later Khwarzemshah operated. The very pertinent

examples can be the Victory Tower at FirozKoh, the Qutub, and the Iltutmash's tomb, to name a few.

The Kufic has an ascertainable march in its stylistic evolution, and it is also a fact that its employment as an architectural decoration has remained universal practice. The decorative calligraphy has shown a smooth march, along the highway of time, and the scholars have gainfully assigned nearly accurate timeline to its various stylistic characters.

The Persia, Seljuk centers, the African and the Spanish architectural decorative members are amply demonstrating this interesting evolution of the Kufic script.

The dating of the style of the knotted Kufic has a definite belonging to the late 12th early 13th century context, which has been popularly used in the front of the buildings, and also in the interior *musalla/suffa* halls, or in the funeral chambers. The sanctity of holy script is well suited to public as well as religious buildings. The knotted Kufic decorative inscription coming out of the context of the large mosque is a point to reckon, whose mosque it is?

The Khwarzem Shah's mosque was definitely built in the earlier part of 13th century at Debal, as testified by the historical references. This find is remarkably a closest shot at the identity of the site.

Preliminary Discussion

Banbhore because of its rich material remains has so often been called / labeled as Debal. But none of the material finds from it has definitely given its identity as Sindh's Debal. However it is given this status due to the fact that there is no other site of its magnitude to qualify to be labeled as Debal.

The excavations at Banbhore have clearly pointed out to the cessation of site not later than the earlier part of 12th century. Absence of evidence of widescale destruction at the site may be pointing to the slow, deliberate shift of the population, be it silting or any other such reason. No decorated, glazed luxury pottery of 12th century is found from the context. It is therefore safe to say that the port of Sindh was shifted further south to any other viable site, which might have been developed to cater for the needs of maritime trade based economy.

The new site near Thunbhanwari has remains of multiple structures, comprising of modest sized fortress, a large sized mosque, small mosque very clearly coming from the post destruction period, kiln and ruins of other auxiliary buildings and a large number of the later period baked brick built graves show an ensemble of

interesting and complex nature.

The fortress is not just a storage is more for the reasons of the customs rather than to cater for the defenses, as the geo-political situation in the 12th century might have demanded.

The typical condition of the lower Indus Delta has been long recognized, like many of such regions where the shift in the course of the rivers have augmented the desertion of famous and large cities. Seaports had to be located at the mouths of rivers or river channels. Here the ships could take refuge and find protection against the tide and bad weather, often at some distance from the open sea [Andre Wink, 2004, *Ai-Hind, Making of the indo-Islamic World*, p.9].

There were more than one ports in the Delta of Indus, and these were mentioned in not very clear terms by the chroniclers of that time and of subsequent period. We have few such mentioned in the maps attached by the geographers [see map of IbnHawqal].

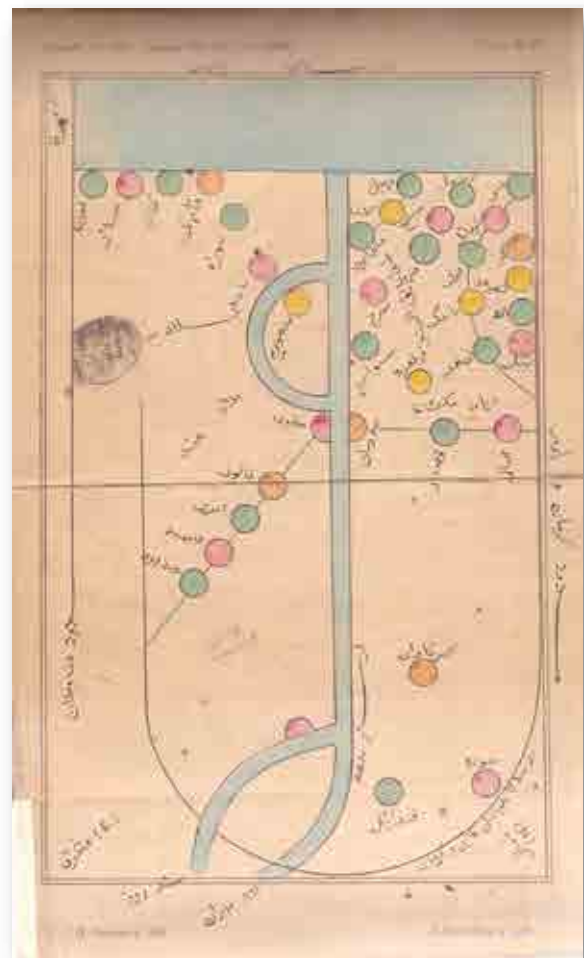


Illustration 7. The famous map by ibn Hawqal reproduced by Ravelrty in *Mehran of Sindh* .

There is no doubt that *Lahri* (or *Loharani*) Bunder co-existed with Debal, as mentioned by Albiruni, writing in 11th century CE [p.101, 102, 124]. The distance between the Debal and the *Lahri*, according to

Albiruni was 12 *farsakh*; we don't know at the time of Albiruni how many English miles were to a *farsakh*, but it is established that in the late eighteenth century the conversion was 3 miles [the *farsakh* comes from an ancient Persian unit, the *parasang*, in principle the distance a horse would walk in an hour, about 3 miles = 12,000 cubits. In mid 19th century, the Persian *farsakh* was approximately 6.23 kilometers; the Arab *farsakh* was shorter, approximately 5.76 kilometers, Mar 14, 2018]. The geographers were not very clear about the specific location of the towns in South Asia, during the early period, and the on ground realities were not with in the narratives; if the distances given by the Khurdazbe, or Ibn e Hauqal between the identified and unidentified places are considered then one can start looking for Debal, the port attacked by Bin Qasim, more nearer to Sonmianee, rather than Banbhore [Usman, Brig. Muhammad served in the provincial government in Baluchistan during eighties, in various positions, he authored several books on the physical heritage of Baluchistan, *Baluchistan: A Reportage*, was famous among these, comparing the distances given by the old chroniclers he believed that there is more likelihood of Sonmianee to be the Debal than any other site in Sindh].

Majority of the prominent structures in Banbhore are from the Ummayyed Period, for instance the robust fortification, the large congregation Mosque, the so called Darul Amara, etc. So it might have been any other port prior to the Arab period works.

Once Banbhore port was abandoned in late eleventh or 12th century, probably due to silting of the channel, the business shifted to other ports, and one of these might have become the major port, thus to be labeled as the 'port of Sindh.' As the Diul, or Deval or Debal had became very famous name, there was every likelihood that the word had become synonymous with the 'port / Diul e Sindh.' There is a possibility it shifted more towards southwest of it, and to the west of to the site of Lahri Bunder, but the identity in the eyes of the World remained as the Port of Sindh, rather than its localized name.

This new port could be considered the one which Khwarzem Shah visited, and inhabited for sometimes, and later on devastated, when he failed to muster the required local support.

What could be the possibility of this site to be identified as the site visited by Khwarzem Shah, is the major question. The fact that the site has the remains of a huge Mosque, with its extra-ordinary dimensions resembles the narrative that the Khwarzem Shah built a Jama Mosque, which could hold one thousand persons. The second thing that confirms it to be an important port is the remains of other structures there. The settlement seemed to have existed for a very short period confirms the supposition that that it might have been the alternate port, which catered to the needs of region, once

Banbhore was abandoned; and met its end at the hands of Khwarzem Shah. The timeframe is confirmed by the part of inscription that was found from the site, which can be from the late 11th to 13th century CE.

There is no doubt that the typical Ghurid mosques built in India confirmed to the typical plan, and had the decorative theme, which employed the calligraphy and the traditional Arabsque, associated with it. There was strong practice, as discussed in detail in work compiled by Flood (Flood, 2008, xlvii-lv, *Piety & Politics*), of the work commissioned in the name of Sultan was undertaken actively by any of the Amirs, or generals, or any other Turk elite, and the design emanating from the Turkic regions, thus showing an affinity in design.

The Debal of Khwarzem Shah's times cannot be Banbhore, as it has no such material, which can establish this fact that the site remained active up to the period when he visited Debal, in the earlier part of 13th century, when he was defeated by Genghiz Khan; on the other hand there is a possibility that the site, which today is identified as the one near *Jam Jaskiran's Goth* was the one that was visited by Khwarzem Shah.

The country blessed with a seacoast is always looking for the places, which can offer safe landing to the seafaring vessels. If the hinterland has the potential market for the goods produced abroad, the maritime trade always finds such markets, for which any nearest safe estuary can be utilized as port.

The deltas formed by the rivers and the major creeks in the floodplains can serve the purpose of communication and commerce. The lower Indus Delta could be an ideal region, which was supposed to cater for the needs of the vast hinterlands and a huge market abroad. On the one hand it is accessible by sea, and on the other hand connected by the river with the upcountry. The imports to the region were brought, and in turn the local productions were to be taken out mostly by Arab mariners, being the best among the seafaring people during the early Islamic period. Later this role was taken over by the European nations.

The traders were the first people to open any route, and frequent it; their dealings with any region were based on the marketing traditions. It was seldom that the kings and princes were brought in to the mercantile matters.

How they identified the country, and what names they gave to the landmarks, towns and ports was not through a formal or authenticated system, it explains the sort of confusion that exists, with respects to the names of many of the towns, and the geographical regions. The matter in respect with the timeframe, which is under focus, the absence of any contemporary local account is the major contributor to this situation.

Thus the continuations of the name Debal, the

Arabicized form of *Diul*, about the port of Sindh, in the accounts and maps can be explained.

The local accounts available to us are of much later period, and these are mostly following the Arab chroniclers; Masumi is the first local historian that attempts at writing the history of Sindh. He had personal knowledge of Sindh, and was extensively involved in assisting Abdur Rahim Khane Khanan in his expedition in southern Sindh. Before him another Mughal scholar of high caliber Abul Fazal has also written about Southern Sindh. He was totally in control of all the information as he did hold the Akbar's archives intact.

The scholarship during the Akbar's period was fully cognizant with the facts on ground, and there seems to have been understanding that the shifting port sites in the lower reaches of Indus river did not qualify to be considered as confusing, as they considered it to be established fact that the port, whichever it was, it was catering the needs of region, and thus was managed as such by the users, and managers/administrators.

Mir Masum while describing the Arab takeover and the subsequent events uses the word Thatta, thus in his view it matters little whether the changing landscape was quickly uprooting one settlement after the other, in his view it was the continuation of the activity and the usage to which every subsequent site was catering. Thus for him and other scholars Thatta was the successor of Debal. Similar narrative is found in *Ain e Akbari*.

If this fact is very true for the Akbar's time it may be considered that it was applicable to the earlier scholars, for them it mattered much less to pin point to the actual location of the site abandoned, rather they were happy to narrate the continuation of the port, which actually was handling the same business for Sindh, and above all in the same vicinity.

Note

The next part shall discuss the material archaeological, and other relevant evidence, to address the longstanding enigma of Debal, the prime port of Sindh and its changing positions.



Illustration 7. Decorated with the inscription and vine frieze, note the style of Kufic, and the typical vine, it is very much popular during the 11th & 12th Centuries CE

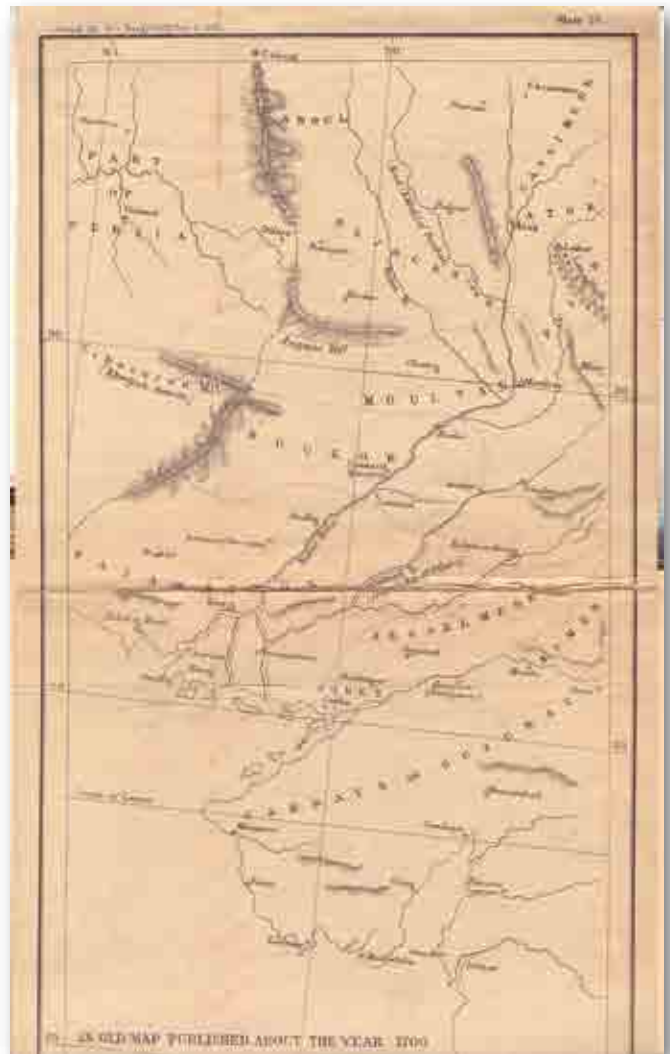
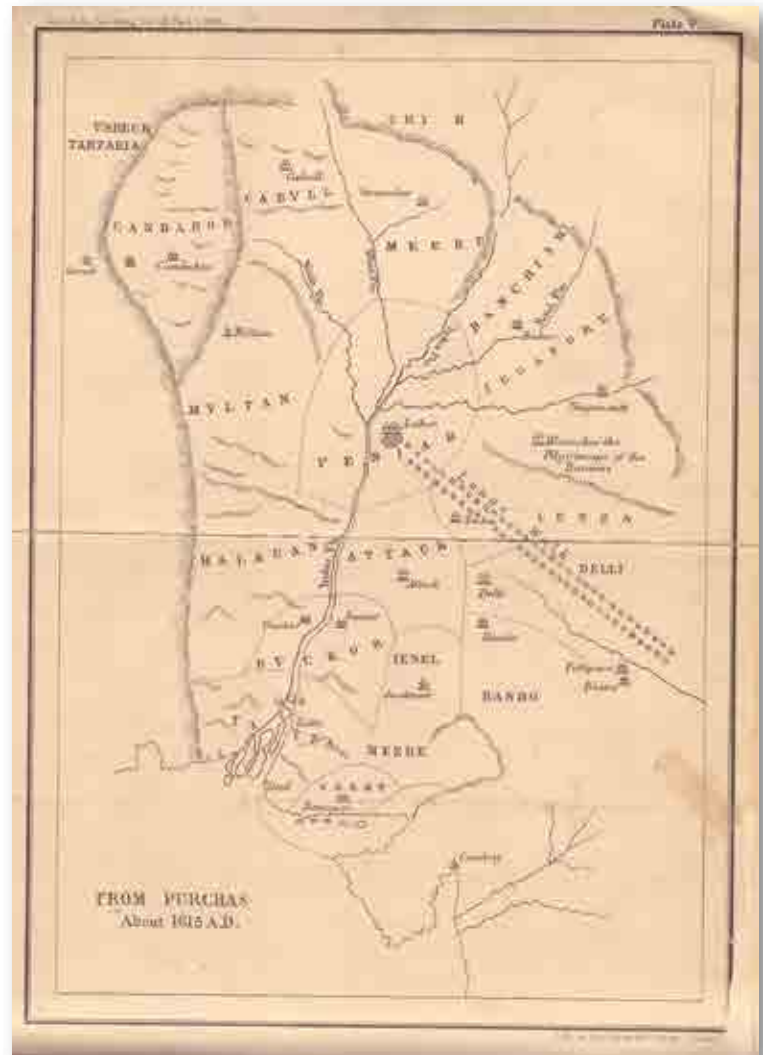


Illustration 8. The map of early 18th century that shall show the port of DIUL (DEBAL), along with the LAHRI BUNDAR, on east of it



Illustration 9. Maps taken from the one that was produced some two hundred fifty years ago

Illustration 9. A map published in Europe in early 17th century that show the port of Debal, but it shows it on the eastern arm of Indus, the situation doesn't resemble the one available in the historic sources



Provisional References

Destruction of Debal:

Yaqut Hamvi (d.1229) wrote *Mua'jamulBaldan*, he has described Sind.

Juwaini (1225-1293) wrote *Tarikh e Jahan Gushan*, he describes the Jalaluddin's escape and march on Debal; Chanesar Soomro's flight and sacking of Debal by Khwarezm Shah.

Tabaqat e Nasiri states the flight of Khwarzem Shah to Sindh and his stay there for a few months.

Destruction of Debal and sack of Pari Nagar by Sultan Khwarezm Shah is certain in 1226.

TajulMuasir states that the NizamulMulk, Vizier of Altutmash took over the areas of Somroo (1228) and took him to Delhi to make him pay his respects to the Sultan.

Tabqat e Nasiri also confirms the fact, there is a bit of confusion regarding the name of the local Somroo chief.

The Sindh was quite weak due to the expeditions of Khwarezm Shah and Uktae, thus the general of Altutmash was successful in subduing it in 1228.

Shams Sabzwari's coming to Sindh, he was deputed by Imam Qasim Ali Shah, 29th Nizari Imam in 1310-11, and his preaching for so many years is mentioned, he is said to have converted many thousand persons at Debal.

Zakariya Kazwini died in the year 1284/683; he wrote *AsarulBiladwaAkhbarulBilad*, a work that describe the

towns of Multan, Mansurah, Debal and their local conditions. Jalaluddin al Sayuti, author of *TarikhulKhulfa* was born in 1445; he mentions about the earthquake at Debal.

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