

CHAPTER I

TOPOGRAPHICAL

SITUATION OF TAKSHAŚILĀ (TAXILA) ON THREE
GREAT TRADE-ROUTES

THE city of Takshaśilā or Taxila,¹ as it has more familiarly been known to Europeans ever since Alexander the Great's invasion of India, was situated at the head of the Sind Sāgar Doāb between the Indus and Jhelum rivers and in the shadow of the Murree hills where they die down into the western plain. To be more precise, it was a little over 20 miles north-west of the modern city of Rāwalpindi and close beside the railway junction of Taxila, where the main line of the North-Western Railway is joined by a branch line from Havelian in the Hāripur valley. Here also, in ancient days, was the meeting-place of three great trade-routes:² one, from Hindustān and Eastern India, which was to become the 'royal highway' described by Megasthenes as running from Pāṭaliputra to the north-west of the Maurya empire; the second from Western Asia through Bactria, Kāpiśī and Pushkalāvati and so across the Indus at Ohind to Taxila; and the third from Kashmīr and Central Asia by way of the Śrīnagar valley and Bāramula to Mānsehra and so down the Hāripur valley. These three trade-routes, which carried the bulk of the traffic passing by land between India and Central and Western Asia, played an all-important part in the history of Taxila, for it was mainly to them that the city owed its initial existence as well as its subsequent prosperity and greatness;

¹ The correct name of the city was Takshaśilā in Sanskrit, or Takhaśilā in the vernacular. The termination -śilā is also found in Chaḍaśilā, the ancient name of the Kālawān *saṅghārāma* described in ch. 14. Taxila was the abbreviated form used by Greeks and Romans, and from them commonly adopted by European writers.

² Today the Grand Trunk Road between Lahore and Peshāwar crosses the Mārgala spur at approximately the same spot as the old royal road, but then sweeps a little westward to cross the Indus at Attock instead of Ohind, and the Hazāra Trunk Road from Kashmīr through the Hāripur valley joins it at Hasan Abdāl, seven miles from Taxila, instead of at Taxila itself.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-61544-1 - A Guide to Taxila: Fourth Edition

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and it was due to their diversion or decline, when trade contacts with foreign countries were interrupted, that Taxila sank eventually into insignificance.

SIGNIFICANCE OF TRADE-ROUTES FOR
EARLY HISTORY OF TAXILA

This matter of trade-routes has an intimate bearing on the question of the date of Taxila's foundation. In the prehistoric days of the Indus civilisation, before roads and vehicular traffic had been developed, the urban population of the Panjāb was almost wholly dependent for its transport and communication on the navigable rivers, which flow generally in a direction from north-east to south-west, and it was only on the banks of those rivers that human settlements of any considerable size could be sustained. Not until wheeled traffic had come into common use and highways had been constructed across the broad doābs between the rivers, was it possible for a city like Taxila, which was reckoned by ancient writers to be three days' march from the Indus, to come into existence. When precisely this development took place we do not know, but it could hardly have been until well on in the second millennium B.C., when the Indo-Āryan conquerors had had time to settle down with the subject peoples, and a new and more advanced state of society had emerged from the union; and it may not have been until after the Achaemenid conquest, when the Panjāb was linked up with the great Persian empire, in which a far-reaching system of highways was indispensable to the administration. Ox-drawn wagons were no doubt as familiar in the Chalcolithic as horse-drawn battle chariots were in the Rigvedic period, but there is no evidence in either period of highways for trade and commerce having been built to supplement or take the place of the navigable waterways, nor is there anything in Rigvedic literature to suggest even that Indo-Āryan civilisation had reached a stage when such development would have been possible. There is no reason, of course, why a village settlement of the early Āryan or pre-Āryan age should not have existed on the site of Taxila, though up to the present no trace of it has been found.

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NATURAL ADVANTAGES OF ITS POSITION

Apart from the debt which Taxila owed to its position on these trade-routes, the city enjoyed many natural advantages referred to by ancient writers. Arrian speaks of it as a great and flourishing city in the time of Alexander the Great—‘the greatest of all the cities between the Indus and the Jhelum (Hydaspes)’. Strabo says that the country round about was thickly populated and extremely fertile, as the mountains here begin to subside into the plain, and Plutarch also remarks on the richness of the soil. Hsüan Tsang writes in a similar strain of the land’s fertility, of its rich harvests, flowing streams and fountains, abundant flowers and fruits and agreeable climate. These eulogies were not exaggerated. This corner of the Panjāb, with the adjoining district of Hazāra, is today no less famous for its fruit gardens and crops than for its green, well-watered valleys, its impressive landscapes and invigorating climate.

DESCRIPTION OF VALLEY

The particular valley in which Taxila stood is about 11 miles long by 5 miles wide at its mouth. Its average elevation above sea-level is between 1700 and 1800 ft. At its eastern end it is bounded by the Murree hills, which reach some 8000 ft. in height; on its north and south, by two spurs from the Murree hills, namely, the Sarḍa (3985 ft.) on the north, and the somewhat lower Mārgala spur on the south. Between these two spurs is a third and shorter one called Hathiāl—a rocky precipitous ridge of hard limestone formation, which divides the valley into two unequal parts, the larger on the north, the smaller on the south. The northern part is nowadays very rich in crops, being watered by the Haro river and several small streams which flow into it, as well as by numerous artificial canals taken off from its higher reaches. The southern part is less fertile, since it is intersected by deep ravines and broken by bare stony knolls, on many of which are the ruins of old-time stūpas and monasteries. Through this part of the valley and skirting the western foot of the Hathiāl hill runs the Tamrā or Tabrā nālā, a small tributary of the Haro, which is no doubt identical with the stream variously called Tiberonabo, Tiberoboam

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-61544-1 - A Guide to Taxila: Fourth Edition

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or Tiberio-potamos in classical authors. Through the northern part of the valley, at its western end, flows the Luṇḍī nālā, another small stream which joins the Tamrā nālā before it reaches the Haro. The springs in the Mārgala spur which used to feed the Tamrā are said to have been closed by the Dharamśāla earthquake of 1905, since when its deep-cut bed has carried relatively little water except in the rainy seasons.

THE BHIṚ MOUND CITY

Near the western end of this valley and within $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles of one another are three separate city sites with several strata of remains in each. Each site has a distinctive character of its own. The oldest stands on a small plateau, known locally as the Bhiṛ Mound, between the railway junction and the Tamrā nālā, above the bed of which it rises to a height of between 60 and 70 ft. From north to south the mound measures about 1200 yards, and from east to west, at its widest point, about 730 yards. On its western and southern sides its edges have a fairly regular line, but on the east and north they follow the bays and bluffs above the Tamrā nālā, and in some of these bays, where the soil has been much eroded, it is no longer possible to trace the original position of the city's defences. The walls themselves were built of unbaked brick or mud supplemented by timber, which has now perished. The layout of the city was haphazard, the streets for the most part being narrow and tortuous, and the house plans very irregular. According to local tradition, the Bhiṛ Mound was the most ancient of all the sites at Taxila, and this tradition has been fully confirmed by excavations, which show that this city had already been thrice destroyed and thrice rebuilt at higher levels before the Bactrian Greeks transferred it to the area now known as Sirkap on the east side of the Tamrā nālā. Of the four successive settlements on the Bhiṛ Mound, the uppermost dates from the autonomous period, the second from the Maurya period, the third from the fourth century B.C., and the fourth from the fifth to the sixth century B.C. or earlier. As the Bhiṛ Mound city stood at the entrance to the southern part of the valley, it was natural that the Dharmarājikā Stūpā, the earliest of all the Buddhist monuments at Taxila, should be erected in this part of

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the valley and that many other Buddhist monasteries and stūpas should afterwards arise in the same area, which thus became peculiarly consecrated to Buddhism.

SIRKAP

The Sirkap city, built by the Bactrian Greeks in the opening years of the second century B.C., occupies the extreme western spur of the Hathiāl ridge together with the small well-defined plateau on their northern side, and included in its northern suburbs the area called Kacchā Koṭ—from the fact that it was defended by earthen ramparts only, a section of which may still be seen enclosed within a bend of the Tamrā nālā. Excluding this suburb, the city's walls were nearly $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles long—a third again as long as those of the older city, and were built of solid, coursed stone rubble instead of mud brick. In accordance with Hellenistic principles of defence, they included within their perimeter a considerable area of hilly ground as well as an isolated acropolis, and in other respects the city was laid out on the typically Greek chess-board pattern, with streets cutting one another at right-angles and regularly aligned blocks of buildings. Notwithstanding that the city was several times destroyed and rebuilt and that many transformations were made in individual buildings, this Greek layout was on the whole well preserved down to the latest days of the city's occupation.¹

SIRSUKH

The third city, now called Sirsukh, is situated still further to the north-east, on the northern side of the Luṇḍi nālā. It dates from early Kushān times and is laid out in the traditional manner of Central Asian cities of that period with which the Kushāns were familiar. Its plan, that is to say, is roughly a parallelogram with a perimeter of about 3 miles, and it is set well out in the open plain away from the hills. Like Sirkap, it is defended by massive stone walls, but the walls are faced with 'diaper' masonry (which came into fashion at Taxila in the middle of the first century A.D.) instead of coursed rubble, and strengthened on the outside by semicircular instead of rectangular bastions. Like Sirkap, also, it

¹ See p. 61, n. 1.

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possessed a suburb on its western side, which is protected by a line of earthworks now called Treḍi Ghār. Inside the city are three modern villages—Mirpur, Tofkiāñ and Piṇḍ Gākhrā—built on the remains of ancient ruins, which can still be seen peeping out from under their houses.

MONUMENTS OUTSIDE THE CITIES: THE DHARMARĀJIKĀ, CHIR TOPE A, B, C AND D, KĀLAWĀN AND GIRI

Besides the remains of these three cities—the Bhiṛ Mound, Sirkap and Sirsukh—there are large numbers of isolated monuments, mainly Buddhist stūpas and monasteries, scattered about over the face of the surrounding country. The Buddhist remains are specially numerous in the southern half of the valley, where they occupy many of the barren knolls beside the Tamrā nālā, the oldest and most conspicuous of them being, as already noted, the imposing Dharmarājikā Stūpa,¹ known locally as the ‘Chir’ or ‘Split’ Tope from the great cleft which former explorers drove through its centre. Among other Buddhist remains excavated in this part of the valley is a group of four monasteries situated a little to the south-east of the Dharmarājikā, and designated respectively ‘Chir Tope A, B, C and D’, B being also known locally as Akhaurī and D as Khādeṛ Mohṛā.² Then, on the northern slopes of the Mārgala spur on the other side of the valley, there is the very important settlement at Kālawān³ (ancient Chaḍaśilā), the largest, after the Dharmarājikā, of all the Buddhist foundations at Taxila; and 2 miles along the same spur to the east is a big group of monasteries and stūpas hidden in a secluded glen at Giri⁴ behind the villages of Khurram Prāchā and Khurram Gujar. At the same spot, also, is a small rocky fortress, which the Buddhists seem to have constructed as a refuge for the various communities of monks who were living in outlying settlements, where they were liable to be cut off by hostile raiders from the protection of the city. Both of these spots in the Mārgala spur were admirably chosen—as, indeed, were the sites of nearly all the Buddhist settlements round about Taxila; for, like the Christian monks of medieval Europe,

¹ See map, sq. 3 C.

² *Ibid.* sq. 4 D.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.* sq. 4 E.

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the Buddhists had an unerring eye for practical amenities and natural beauty in selecting their sites, and one by one they possessed themselves of all the best spots—at first, within begging range of the city, but later, when begging had fallen out of fashion, at increasingly greater distances from it.

KUNĀLA AND GHAI STŪPAS

Of their many settlements among the rocky hills of the Hathial spur, all the most important were founded after the city of Sirsukh had taken the place of Sirkap. Two of them, indeed, which date from the third or fourth century A.D., were actually erected above the ruined fortifications of the old Sirkap city. These are the imposing stūpa and its attached monastery, which I have tentatively identified with the Kunāla Stūpa¹ described by Hsüan Tsang, and the subsidiary one on the hill at Ghai² immediately above it, close by the south-east corner of the fortifications.

MOHṚĀ MORĀDU, PIPPALA AND JAULIĀÑ

North-east from these, at a distance of between 2 and 3 miles, are the remarkably well-preserved monasteries of Mohṛā Morādu, Pippala³ and Jauliāñ,⁴ the first-named set in a cool and shady glen between the hills, the second in a retired spot at the northern foot of the spur, and Jauliāñ on an isolated hill-top half a mile or so beyond it. All three of these were within easy distance of Sirsukh and were first built not long after that city's foundation, but were extensively reconstructed and renovated during the Buddhist revival of the fourth to fifth centuries.

BHAMĀLA

Still further to the north-east, beyond the modern village of Khānpur and at a distance of over 9 miles from Sirsukh, is the hardly less interesting monastery of Bhamāla,⁵ which is set amid the most impressive surroundings of them all, with hills girdling it on every side and the swift flowing Haro river at its foot. As we

¹ *Ibid.* sq. 2 B.

³ *Ibid.* sq. 2 D.

⁵ Not included in the map.

² *Ibid.* sq. 3 B.

⁴ *Ibid.* sq. 2 E.

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should naturally expect, this stūpa and monastery were not erected until the early medieval period, when proximity to the city was no longer a necessity.

BUDDHIST REMAINS AT LĀLCHAK AND BĀDALPUR,
 IONIC TEMPLE AND TWO SMALL STŪPAS AT
 JAṆḌĪĀL, AND BHALLAṚ STŪPA

Speaking generally, ancient ruins like the foregoing, which are sheltered among the hills, had a much better chance of preservation than those in the open valleys or plains. That is because the latter are more liable to be demolished to provide materials for near-by villages, or to be washed away by the floods (which at Taxila are at times exceptionally violent), or, if not washed away, to be gradually buried from sight beneath the alluvium which the floods bring down. Even since Sir Alexander Cunningham's day several of the monuments shown in his sketch map¹ have completely disappeared, while others can now only be traced by a few stones or an insignificant mound of earth; and if this has happened in the last few decades, we may be sure that multitudes of them had already vanished in the course of the fourteen centuries and more prior to Cunningham's visit. But, however many there may once have been, not more than half a dozen worthy of notice are now to be seen in the whole wide sweep of valley between the Hathiāl and Sarḍa hills. These are: the small Buddhist monastery and stūpa at Lālchak outside the north-east corner of Sirsukh, and the much more imposing stūpa at Bādālpur a mile due east of it; the fine Ionic temple at Jaṇḍiāl which fronts the northern entrance to the Kacchā Koṭ and Sirkap; two small stūpas,² now almost level with the ground, a couple of furlongs north of the temple; and finally—though this is not in the valley itself—the lofty and far-seen Bhallaṛ Stūpa,³ which occupies a prominent position on the last low spur of the Sarḍa hill beyond the Haro river to the north. Of these surviving monuments, the temple at Jaṇḍiāl was probably Zoroastrian, in any case not Buddhist; the two small stūpas to the north of it may have been either Buddhist or Jaina; the remainder were unquestionably Buddhist.

¹ *C.S.R.* II, Pl. LVII. ² See map, sq. I B. ³ Not included in the map.

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THE KINGDOM OF TAXILA

In concluding this brief introductory chapter it remains to add that the kingdom of Taxila, of which this city was the capital, appears to have been normally coterminous with the Sind Sāgar Doāb, i.e. it was bounded on the north by the mountains of Kashmīr, on the west by the Indus, and on the east by the Jhelum and the lower reaches of the Chenāb, including the Panjnād, though the courses of these rivers were in all probability slightly different from what they are today. Thus the kingdom comprised the modern districts of Rāwalpindi, Jhelum, Miānwāli and Muzaf-fargarh, as well as the lowlands of Hazāra and those parts of Shāhpur and Jhang which lie west of the Jhelum. This seemingly was the extent of the kingdom when Alexander invaded the Panjāb, as it was also the extent of the original satrapy of Philip, son of Machatas, east of the Indus, a satrapy that was later enlarged by the addition of further conquests east of the Chenāb. This, too, in all probability was the extent of the kingdom during the brief period of autonomy following the break-up of the Maurya empire, though it is possible that it was then divided into several more or less independent republics. Under foreign rule its boundaries varied greatly. Thus, under the Bactrian Greeks who made their capital at Taxila, the kingdom embraced at times the Peshāwar and Kābul valleys as far as the Hindu Kush; under the Śakas and Parthians it formed the heart of still larger realms on both sides of the Indus; under the Mauryas and Kushāns it was an integral part of vast and far-flung empires. But throughout its long history the term 'kingdom of Taxila' naturally meant the Sind Sāgar Doāb, and it was in this sense doubtless that it was used by Hsüan Tsang in the seventh century A.D., when it was part of the larger state of Kashmīr.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL

LEGENDARY HISTORY

IN early Indian literature Taxila was given a legendary history which went back to the remotest antiquity. The *Rāmāyaṇa*, which has a glowing account of its wealth and magnificence, tells us that it was founded at the same time as Pushkalāvati in Gandhāra by Bharata, son of Kaikayi and younger brother of Rāma, who installed two of his sons as rulers in the two cities: Taksha in Takshaśilā and Pushkala in Pushkalāvati. The *Mahābhārata* relates that the city was conquered by King Janamejaya of Hāstināpura, who performed there the great snake sacrifice—the whole of the famous epic being recited during the performance.

In Buddhist literature, and particularly in the *Ātthakās*, Taxila is often referred to as a seat of learning and the home of world-famous teachers. According to the *Dīpavamśa*, one of its early kings was Dīpaṅkara, a Kshatriya, who was followed on the throne by twelve sons and grandsons. The *Avadānakalpalatā* also alludes to another of its kings, Kuñjarakarṇa by name.

But it was reserved for the Jains to make the most extravagant claims as to the age of the city. For they relate that millions upon millions of years ago Taxila was visited by Ṛishabha, the first of the Tīrthaṅkaras, and that the footprints of the saint were consecrated by Bāhubalī, who erected over them a throne and ‘wheel of the law’ (*dharmacakra*). The wheel, they say, was several miles in height and circumference.

NO STRUCTURAL REMAINS OF PREHISTORIC
 DATE AT TAXILA

The truth disclosed by the hard facts of excavation is much more sober. The earliest of the remains uncovered on the site go back no further than the sixth century B.C. or thereabouts. If any settlement of the Stone, Copper or Bronze Age ever existed at this spot,