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TAXILA

The Gateway to the Ancient Gandhara Kingdom

Taxila is situated about 32 kilometers northwest of Islamabad, along the historic Grand Trunk Road, a sub-district of Rawalpindi is considered one of the only ancient cities in the world, which has been resurrected as a living town in the wake of archeological excavations in the 20th century. Today, it is a sprawling urban center with bustling bazaars and multi-story plazas. It is an internationally known industrial hub of heavy machines and ordnance factories, as well as a center of a small cottage and household industries of stoneware and pottery. The Buddhist archeological sites and monuments, spread over 20 square kilometers in Taxila were accepted by UNESCO to be placed on the World Heritage List in 1980.

Excavations at Taxila

Based on the travel records of ancient Chinese travelers to India, in particular, that of Xuanzang, the 7th-century Buddhist monk, Alexander Cunningham, the first director-general of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) identified the lost city of Taxila, at the present site, then called Shah Dheri. The earliest archaeological excavations and research were carried out between the years 1913 and 1934 by Sir John Marshall, the then director-general of ASI, assisted by Ahmad Din Siddiqui. Sir Mortimer Wheeler, the last director-general of ASI excavated it in 1944. After independence, Pakistani archeologists like Dr. Muhammad Sharif, M.A. Hallim, Gulzar Muhammad Khan, and Mr. Muhammad Bahadur Khan, Ahmad Hasan Dani and Saif ur Rehman Dar unraveled the hitherto unknown antiquity of this city through their fresh excavations and publications.

Another distinguished visitor was the neo-Pythagorean sage Apollonius of Tyana (3 BCE–97 AD), whose biographer Philostratus described Taxila as a fortified city that was laid out on a symmetrical plan and compared it in size to Nineveh (ancient city of the Assyrian empire). There are even Christian legends that Thomas the Apostle, who was sent by Jesus Christ on a divine mission to spread Christianity in India, also visited Taxila during the Parthian period.

The Teachers of Takshasila University

The intellectual and political history of ancient India stems from Taxila, given the world-renowned center of learning, the Takshasila University, which dominated the intellectual scene for close to millennia from the 5th century BCE to the 6th century CE. Panini, the great Sanskrit grammarian and the author of a famous book on Sanskrit grammar, Ashtadhyayi, lived and taught at the Takshasila University. Charaka, the physician considered the father of Indian medicine, given his contribution to the development of Ayurveda, was also an alumnus of the Takshasila

The greatest kingdom in the ancient history of India – the Mauryan Empire, which spread from India to Afghanistan, had its genesis in Taxila in the form of the tuteloge of the future founder of the Empire, Chandragupta Maurya. Born in Patna (Bihar), Chandragupta was taken by Chanakya to the Takshasila University, where he studied under him for eight years, perfecting the sciences and arts of the day, including military sciences. The rise of Chandragupta Maurya is credited to the training he received at the Takshasila University under Chanakya and he used his acquired knowledge of science and society to lay the foundation of one of the most powerful empires of India, lasting for 150 years. The name of the epic King Ashoka, grandson of Chandragupta, whose imperial symbol Dharmo Chakra adorns the Indian flag is etched deep in the history of Taxila, as Ashoka had an affinity with Taxila, a province in the Mauryan Empire. As a Viceroy of his father Bindusara, he spent decades in Taxila. After his conversion to Buddhism, King Ashoka chose the Dharmarajika stupa at Taxila as one of the earliest sites to house the remains of the Buddha, which is a testimony to the sacred status of Taxila in the annals of Buddhism. Despite the changes in the dynastic rule over the centuries, from Mauryans to Greco-Bactrians Sakas, Parthians and Kushans, Taxila continued to thrive as a center of Buddhist learning, receiving patronage from the Buddhist royal elite for over a millennium. The cities of Taxila in their days of former glory had some of the most impressive architecture in the Buddhist world, inviting pilgrims from all over India, Central Asia, China, and Southeast Asia.

Urban Development of Taxila

The Tourist Archeological Sites in Taxila

1-Taxila Museum

2-Bhir City

The Bhir Mound is situated next to the Taxila Museum. The city was founded before the Muryan period in the 6th-century BCE, and flourished until the 2nd century BCE. Built on a small plateau in the open fields without the fortification walls, the layout of the city is haphazard and irregular. The houses were made of stone rubble with wooden ceilings. Its stone walls, house foundations, and winding streets represent the earliest forms of urbanization in the subcontinent. The city of Bhir was the site where Macedonian King Alexander was received by Raja Ambin in 326 BCE

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Etymology

The oldest rulers of Taxila, the Takshakas, their modern descendants being Taka tribe, whose name originated from their worship of Takila, i.e. serpents, have given rise to the name of the city, Taxila, correctly Taksha-sila, i.e. the hill capital of the Takshakas, the exact Persian translation of which is Margalla, correctly Mar (serpent) Qila (fort).

Taxila in the Pre-historic Period

Fanning out in the foothills of Margalla, Taxila as an archeological city contains discovered remains of the recorded history of more than four thousand years. Originating with the Neolithic period communities in 3500 BCE leading to Harappan cities (3100-2500 BCE), though the Taxila was eventually abandoned after the collapse of the Indus Valley Civilization. The cultural assemblages of the early Harappan phase in the Taxila Valley demonstrate remarkable conformity in stone tool technology and ceramic art with those of contemporary sites distributed across the vast area from the Gomol Valley to Sindh Province. The later ogicultural settlements were found in Taxila Valley at Sarai Khola, and Hathial, which was first occupied between the late 4th and early 3rd millennium BCE. There were deposits of polished stone celts, chert blades, and a distinctive type of highly burnished pottery.

Cultural History of Taxila

History of Taxila is the stuff that legends are made of. From the composition and recitation of Mahabharata – the greatest Hindu epic at Taxila in the early historic period to the preeminence of the ancient center of Buddhist learning, the Takshasila University – the legend of Taxila has always inspired the imagination of people from diverse lands and since time immemorial. Once strategically located at the junction of caravan routes that linked Southern, Western and Central Asia regions to the West, Taxila was a melting pot of various civilizations, which include Achaemenid, Hellenistic, Mauryan, Greco-Bactrian, Kushan, Gupta, Huns and eventually, the Muslims.

University. The most influential of Taxila University teachers was Acharya Chanakya, also known as Kautilya, who was the legendary political philosopher, thinker, and royal advisor. Long before Machiavelli's book, The Prince became a classic in political sociology, Chanakya's book on statecraft, the Arthashastra, remained influential as a textbook for Indian princes in the art of political governance for centuries. It enlists the duties of the ruler, the associates, and the advisor: discusses intricate matters such as the art of diplomacy, the rules of unleashing and defending wars, the duties of the state during peacetime: domestic governance affairs like taxation, commerce, law, municipal affairs; social norms and customs; and, artisan work, agriculture, medicine, and census.

The role of Taxila in the making of the first Indian Empire

important archaeological sites in Asia. The archeological sites of Taxila falls into two main categories: urban centers and monastic architecture. First there are four major cities, each belonging to a distinct period in history which reveal the pattern of urban evolution in the Indus valley through more than five centuries. Second there are a large number of monasteries and stupas, from the period between 2nd and 5th century CE, which is evidenced from the types of masonry used in these buildings, fully developed unitary type of monastic establishments, coin finds, and sculpture

The oldest of the Taxila cities is Bhir Mound, which dates from the 6th BCE. The second city of Taxila is located at Sirkap and was built by Greco-Bactrian kings in the 2nd century BCE. The third and last city of Taxila is at Sirsukh and relates to the Kushan kings founded in the 1st century CE. In addition to the archeological remains of the urban centers, Buddhist monasteries and stupas proliferated in Taxila. The excavated material exhibited at the Taxila Museum has added valuable information to our knowledge of the arts, crafts, social and economic system, customs, creeds rituals, and architecture of the area from the 6th century BCE to the 5th century CE. Buddhist monuments erected throughout the Taxila valley transformed it into a religious heartland and a destination for pilgrims from as far afield as Central Asia and China.

Timings:

09:00 am to 04:00 pm
(Mon - Fri)

Entry Fee:

Children: Rs. 10/-
Local: Rs. 20/-
Foreign: Rs. 500/-

Address:

Khanpur Road,
Taxila,
Rawalpindi.

Closed on 1st Monday of every month

3- Sirkap City

Sirkap is situated at a distance of 2 kilometers from Taxila Museum. The very name of the city is part of North Indian folklore, the legends of Raja Rasala, wherein the story the Sirkap was a demon which was killed by Raja of Sakala (modern Sialkot). The city of Sirkap was founded around 180 BCE, and rebuilt by successive rulers of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom. The archaeological remains of temples, palaces, or theatres as well as the urban planning models, factors of flat ground, the grid pattern of streets, and geographical location with natural defenses on all sides testify to its Greek origin. The streets of the cities were more regular than those at Bhir, and the houses were mostly made of coarse stone. There were temples, houses, shrines, and stupas all along the main north-south street. On the eastern side of the street are several notable structures, such as the shrine of the Double-Headed Eagle, the Apisidal temple, and a palace at the south end of the street. Next to the Apisidal temple is a votive stupa. A large number of specimens of pottery, metalware, jewelry, coins, and inscriptions were discovered from Sirkap, which are showcased in the Taxila Museum.

4- Sirsukh City



One of the last of the great ancient cities of Taxila, the city of Sirsukh is situated at a distance of 4 kilometers from Taxila Museum, on the Khanpur road. Based on the stone masonry, rectangular planning, and other features of architectural remains such as fortification walls in ashlar masonry, it is attributed to the Kushan King Kanishka in Taxila in 1st century CE. However, Sirsukh is also one of the least excavated sites, and only a small part of the fortification wall of the city survives. The wall is 18 feet thick and built of rough rubble faced with neatly fitting limestone masonry. It is a roughly rectangular city which is in the open plain with no natural defenses but with solidly built limestone fortifications having round towers at regular intervals.



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6- Mohra Muradu



Mohra Muradu monastic complex is situated near a village of the same name at the edge of a glen surrounded by hills covered with shrubs. It comprises a stupa and a monastery. It was constructed in the 2nd century CE. The stupa stands on a rectangular surface and is decorated with stucco reliefs depicting scenes of Buddha and Bodhisattvas in various poses. The monastery was a double-story building consisting of 54 courts of cells for monks built around a courtyard with a pool. The large square-shaped pool contained water for rituals and was about half a meter deep. Stairs to the pool were present on all sides. The monastery also contained a kitchen and a well for water. Six niches in this monastery consist of the remains of Buddha sculptures in varying poses.



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9-Jinna Wali Dheri

Jinna Wali Dheri translated as the mound of demons is an archaeological site on the left bank of the Haro River near Taxila, dating to the 5th century CE. It is one of the best-preserved Buddhist monastic complexes in the Taxila. The complex includes the main stupa, relatively smaller in size, votive stupas, and a monastery with cells and a central hall. The fragments of murals, depicting scenes from Jataka tales were found on the walls of the corridor of a monastery leading to the main stupa.



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and storeroom. The monastic structures are built-in coarse diaper masonry, with semi ashler and roughly squared stones, using lime mortar, mud, lime and river gravel. The floor of stupas is covered with concrete and lime plaster. Kanjur blocks with mud are used in the figural decoration of Buddha.



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14-Bhallar

The Bhallar Stupa occupies a commanding position on the last spur of the Sarda hill, which bounds the Haro valley on the north, and is situated at the side of the Havelian Railway track, approximately 3 kilometers from Taxila Museum. The stupa stands on a lofty oblong base, ascending on its eastern side by a broad flight of steps. The body of the superstructure above this base consisted, as usual, of a drum and dome surmounted by one or more umbrellas. The drum, which is strikingly high in proportion to the diameter of the monument, was divided into six or seven tiers, diminishing in size from the bottom upwards and decorated with rows of decadent Corinthian pilasters, friezes and dentil cornices. The northern half of the stupa has entirely

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17-Giri

The Giri fortress houses a stupa and a monastery which is remotely located 8 km north-east of Taxila, at the foot of Margallah. It is approached through a rough torrent bed near two villages named Khurram Gujar and Khurram Paracha. The fortress was built in the 5th century to accommodate the large body of Buddhist monks who were then fleeing from the monasteries from the Taxila valley seeking protection from invading hordes of Hun. The Buddhist constructions fall into two groups- the eastern and the western. The eastern group, which stands just above the spring, consists of a stupa in the north and monastery in the south. The western group consists of a stupa of square shape in the north and a monastery on the east.



18-Kunala

Kunala is a site for a Kushan-era stupa and monastery to the south-east of Taxila, date to the 2nd century CE. It is located on a hill overlooking the ancient Indo-Greek city of Sirkap. Its name came from the story of prince Kunala, who was the favorite son of King Ashoka and the legitimate heir to the throne. He was blinded treacherously by one of Ashoka's queens, Tishyaksha. After years of wandering, Kunala reunited with his father Ashoka and was treated by a doctor from Taxila. Buddhist pilgrims with eye impairment came to the stupa with the hope of being cured according to their beliefs.

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19-Gandhara Cultural Center Pakistan

Gandhara Cultural Center Pakistan has been established by the Center for Culture and Development, to create public awareness of heritage and promote Gandhara heritage tourism in Pakistan. While serving as a tourist facilitation center, with lodging and camping facilities, it houses a unique souvenir shop, showcasing Gandhara-inspired local arts and crafts. Gandhara Center also offers short courses in drawing, paintings, calligraphy and sculpture, in addition to research and documentation services.



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5- Dharmarajika

The Dharmarajika stupa is located at a one-kilometer distance from Taxila Museum. It is one of the most sacred stupas containing relics of the Lord Buddha deposited by Mauryan king Ashoka in the 3rd century BCE. The site is divided into two parts: the stupa area and the monastic zone. The Dharmarajika stupa has been rebuilt over time, increasing the size of the dome to currently 45 feet. The dome was originally coated with lime plaster and gilding, and there was a seven-tier umbrella stone that once crowned the top. The solid core of the stupa is filled with rubble masonry and the base of the stupa is faced with a band of ornamental stonework. There is a wide ambulatory passage, originally laden with glass tiles, which allows the pilgrimage to circumambulate around the stupa. The monastic zone contains a number of chapels built in the diaper masonry and interiors which were decorated with stone, terracotta, and stucco sculptures. There are a large number of shrines and cells in the monastic zone, built over time to perform various functions.



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7-Pipplan

Pipplan is the ancient Buddhist monastic complex located on the way to Julian monastery in the neighborhood of thick peepal trees. The complex houses two monasteries built in the iconic Gandharan style of architecture during succeeding centuries on the eastern and western sides evidenced by the different styles of wall masonry. It consists of an open quadrangle in the center, with a range of cells on all four sides, a hall of assembly, kitchen, refectory to the south, and a converted stupa to the east.



8- Jandial Temple

Located in Jandial village, about 1.5 kilometers from the north gate of Sirkap, Jandial temple is the only ancient Parsi/Zoroastrian temple found in Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan. Built around 100 BCE. in the Greek architectural style, Jandial temple today is in ruins, with foundation walls and parts of Ionic columns standing. Behind the main shrine is a set of stairs that leads to a platform where a Parthian fire Sanctuary is believed to have existed. The Greek influence is not surprising as Hellenic culture spread through the area in the wake of Alexander's invasion of the Indus valley.

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10-Bhamala

Bhamala archaeological complex is part of the UNESCO world heritage site, located at a distance of 22 kilometers from Taxila Museum at the foothills of Marhi in Haripur District, on the bank of Haro River. The Bhamala complex houses the remains of a cruciform-style stupa, a monastery, chapels, and several votive stupas. The present height of the stupa is 5 meters and is adorned from all four sides. The mouldings and phase of transitions of the stupa have original stucco plaster. The monastery along the stupa is located to the east. It consists of many rooms of different sizes but is built in the same diaper masonry style. One of the most distinguished exhibits on the site is the remains of mahaparinirvana scene of Buddha on a raised platform of kanjur stone masonry.



11-Jaulian

Jaulian is located in Haripur District, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa at a distance of 7 kilometers from Taxila Museum. Perched on a low hilltop, Jaulian monastery was founded in the 2nd century CE and extended in the 5th century CE. It is one of the most well-preserved Buddhist monastic complexes with a number of stupas and rooms of different sizes for housing and living. The main stupa adorned with stucco sculptures reflecting Greek, Persian, and Roman aesthetic influences is surrounded by a number of smaller size votive stupas. The rooms of the monastery with walls built in diaper masonry-style face a central courtyard. Other architectural structures include an assembly hall, kitchen,

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12-Badalpur

The Badalpur stupa and monastery is situated at a distance of 10 kilometers northeast of Taxila Museum, near Behra Village in the open valley of Haro River. Dating back to the 2nd to 5th-century CE., the site houses a 20-feet high stupa on the west and a monastic complex on the east. The masonry of the stupa is laid in limestone in semi ashlar and semi diaper styles with kanjur for mouldings and pilasters. There are traces of a procession path which were also found around the drum paved with lime concrete.



13-Kalawan

Kalawan is situated on the north side of the Margala spur, about seven kilometers from Taxila Museum. From an inscription that was found on the site, it appeared that in ancient days its name was Chadosila, but no trace of this name had been preserved among the surrounding hamlets. Today the place is known as Kalawan or 'the Caves', due to the presence of three small caves in the hillside. Three main types of masonry are represented at Kalawan, namely diaper masonry and attributed to the early Kushan period; a later and rougher type of diaper masonry in which relatively thick stones are freely used; and semi ashlar, which gradually replaced the later kind of diaper masonry.

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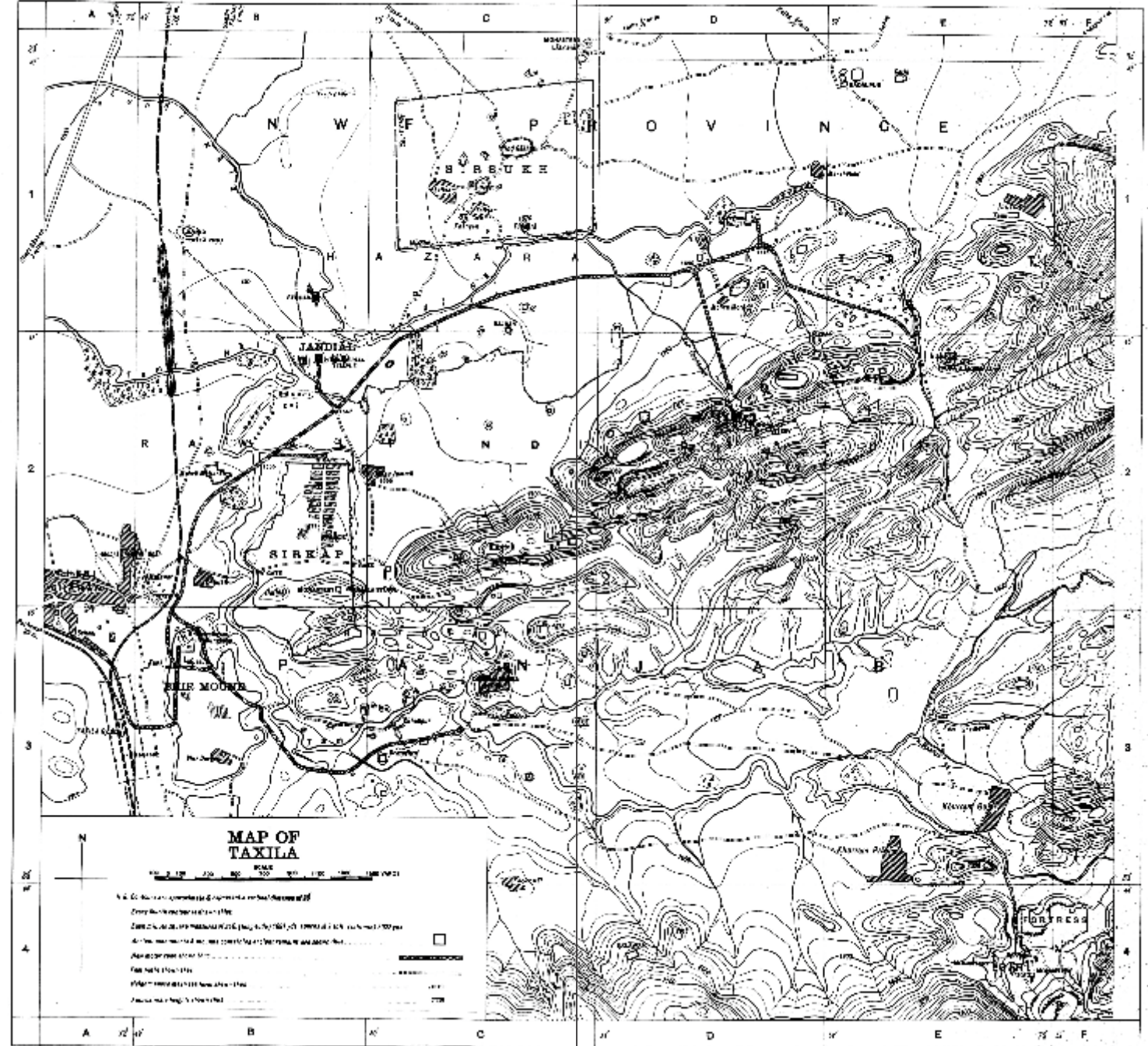
fallen, and on this side, the relic chamber, which was set near the top of the drum, is now exposed to view. In the courtyard of the stupa, numerous chapels and other monuments have been excavated.



15-Lalchak

Lalchak is the local name given to a group of four small mounds between 100 and 200 yards from the northeast corner of Sirsukh, on the pathway to the village of Garhi Sayyadan. These four mounds covered the remains of a small Buddhist settlement containing stupas, and monasteries dating from the 3rd and 4th centuries CE. The best-preserved among them is a little monastery in the northern part of the site, standing to a height of between 7 and 8 ft. The date assigned above to this monastery is based upon the pattern of its semi-ashlar masonry.

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When to Visit

Taxila can be visited all year round in summer and winter. The summer season, from May to September, is hot with temperatures soaring to a maximum of over 40 degrees Celsius. The winter season, from October to April, is delightfully cool and pleasant with temperatures hovering around 5 to 15 degrees Celsius.

Credits

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