

SOURCEBOOK FOR THE SHAHI KINGDOMS¹

What Archaeological Evidence is there for the Śāhi Political Center at Hund (Udabhāṇḍapura)?

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The rulers of the Śāhi kingdoms maintained two political centers—the western capital at Kabul (Afghanistan) and eastern political center at Udabhāṇḍapura² (modern Hund, Pakistan).³ The significance of these sites is attested in historical written sources and material remains. But while there is abundant material evidence from the Śāhi periods at Kabul, the remains at Hund are limited. Why would so little exist from this crucial center of Śāhi political authority and economic wealth? This brief inquiry explores the archaeological evidence at Hund.

Hund is strategically positioned on the right bank of the Indus River, at the major crossing⁴ of the river and along one of the main trade routes connecting the western Śāhi capital at Kabul

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² Rehman (1979: 16-17) discusses the etymology and variants of Udabhāṇḍapura as found in literary sources. See Verdon (2021) for discussion of the transliteration of this Sanskrit toponym as ‘Wayhind’ in Arabic and Persian sources.

³ Scholars frequently identify Kabul as the principal Turk Śāhi capital and Udabhāṇḍapura as the winter headquarters (e.g., Rehman 1979: 4). Kuwayama (2002: 263; also 265), referring to the travel account of the 8th-century Korean monk Huichao, notes ‘that the Kabul Valley and Gandhara were ruled by one and the same king who resided in Jibin in summer and in Gandhara, or more properly at Udabhandapura on the north bank of the Indus, in winter’ (see also Inaba 2010: 448). Kuwayama (2002: 263) further states that ‘some thirty years later, Wukong, the vice-ambassador of the Tang Mission to the king of Jibin, arrived at Udabhandapura and clearly explained that this town of Gandhara was the eastern capital of Jibin. The “eastern capital” presupposes the existence of a “western capital.” For Wukong, the Jibin country seems to have denoted a more extensive country in geographical and political terms, and a kingdom including the extensive Kabul Valley and having western and eastern capitals, the latter in Gandhara’ (ibid.; also Lévi and Chavannes 1895: 13). The identification of an eastern and western capital, and perhaps a summer and winter capital, thus appears to have first emerged in these 8th-century records. Considering the vast distance between these sites, an alternative arrangement may have been that Kabul was the primary capital and Udabhāṇḍapura a satellite seat of power until the 9th century when the Hindu Śāhi shifted the main capital to Udabhāṇḍapura due to increasing insecurity in Kabul as a result of repeated Arab incursions (see Inaba 2010: 448). The precise political function and relationship between these capitals merits further study.

⁴ The Indus could be forded at Hund in winter but only traversed by raft in summer when the water level increased due to melting snow and monsoon rains (e.g., Azeem 2001: 227). Numerous accounts suggest that Alexander the Great crossed the Indus at Hund en route to Taxila (e.g., Fussman 1993: 84). However, archaeological evidence does not seem to support this early date (e.g., Meyer et al. 1908-1931, vol. 19: 149; Khan, Durrani, Khan 2012: 78).

to the rest of the northwestern subcontinent and Central Asia.⁵ As such, Hund was a crucial halting point for travelers and entrepôt for trade and cultural exchange.⁶

Evidence of the Hindu Śāhi political center is found on a late 10th-century stone slab said to come from Hund that bears a *śāradā* inscription identifying the town of Udabhāṇḍa north of the Indus ruled by Jayapāladeva (r. c. 964-1002 CE) (Rehman 1979: 128, 309-14; 1978; Hargreaves 1926: 69; Agrawal 1985; Khaw 2016: 119-21). Historical literary sources further confirm the Śāhi presence at Udabhāṇḍa in the 9th-10th century. Notably, the late 10th-century Persian geographical text, the *Hudūd al-‘ālam*, mentions the king Jaypāl at Wayhind (Verdon 2021). In his 12th-century chronicle of the kings of Kashmir, the *Rājataranṅinī*, Kalhaṇa (1900: vol. 1, 206, 352) specifies that Udabhāṇḍa is the capital of the Śāhi kings, through reference to ‘the illustrious Lalliya S’āhi’ (r. c. 880-902 CE).⁷ Other sources record the importance of Udabhāṇḍa but do not explicitly identify the town with the Śāhi rulers, notably the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang in the 7th century,⁸ and the Muslim scholar al-Bīrūnī in the early 11th century.⁹ Following these early sources, archaeological reports and scholarship in the late 19th to 20th centuries generally agree that modern Hund was the eastern Śāhi capital (e.g., Cunningham 1871: 54; Stein 1893; Stein in Kalhaṇa 1900: vol. 2, 336-39; Rehman 1979).

Remains of the Hindu Śāhi period village have been largely buried beneath later structures including the small present-day village, thus presenting an obstacle to excavation work (Hargreaves 1926: 68-70; Rehman 1979: 269-70; Azeem 2001: 227). Portions of the site have been lost due to flooding of the Indus (Ali 1999: 280). Hargreaves (1926: 69-70; also Rehman 1979: 269-70) identified the remnants of the old village fortification wall and structural remains scattered across adjacent fields, along with a 12-foot diameter semi-circular foundation that could be the base of a stupa or temple and two mounds northwest of the village. Excavations initiated by the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and the University of Peshawar Department of Archaeology under the direction of archaeologist Ihsan Ali in the late 1990s and early 2000s yielded evidence of Hindu Śāhi period structures; unfortunately Ali (1999) does not give any details.¹⁰ Hindu Śāhi coins have been collected in the area but without archaeological context (Cunningham 1871: 56; Hargreaves 1926: 69; Khan, Durrani, Khan 2012: 81).¹¹ Buddhist clay votive tablets and miniature stupas found in the area may also date to this period (Ali 1999: 281-82; Khaw and Saidin 2013). Stein (1915: 117) has suggested finds of white marble sculpture fragments amid

⁵ Hargreaves (1926: 70) identified the site as ‘the gateway to India,’ fitting for the only site where the Indus could be forded. Fussman (1993: 84) notes that ‘everywhere farther south, in the plain, you could cross it only by boat, even during the dry season.’ Neelis (2011: 244) echoes these remarks, stating that this was ‘the most important crossing of the Indus River for interregional connections with Taxila and the Punjab.’ Hund is about 25 kilometers east of the intersection of the Kabul and Indus rivers. Notably, Hund and Yār Ḥusain are the only two Śāhi sites with archaeological remains observed by Rehman (1979: 269) that are not situated on hill tops.

⁶ The cosmopolitan character of the town, with its Muslim and Hindu inhabitants and merchants selling precious goods from across Asia, is attested in early records, including the 7th-century account of Xuanzang (Beal 1906: vol. 1, 114) and late 10th-century Persian accounts (see Verdon 2021).

⁷ See Kalhaṇa 1900: vol. 1, 206, v.152-155; vol. 1, 352, vii.1081; and Stein in Kalhaṇa 1900: vol. 2, 336-39.

⁸ Xuanzang identifies the Śāhi capital on the Indus River by the name ‘U-to-kia-han-ch’a,’ stating that ‘the inhabitants are rich and prosperous. Here is amassed a supply of valuable merchandise, and mixed goods from all quarters’ (Beal 1906: vol. 1, 114; also 118, 135; also Beal 1911: 64).

⁹ Al-Bīrūnī considers Wayhind to be the capital of Gandhāra along the Indus (Verdon 2021).

¹⁰ Khan, Durrani, and Khan (2012: 80) noted, however, that none of the excavation work had been published as of 2012. The Hund Archaeological Research Center (HundARC) established in 2000(?) by the University of Peshawar’s Department of Archaeology may also bring results (see Azeem 2001: 230-33); however Luca Maria Olivieri points out that this research initiative has not been active (personal communication, 11 April 2020).

¹¹ I thank Ehsan Shavarebi for also bringing to my attention eight Hindu Śāhi copper coins currently on display in the Hund Museum that are part of an unpublished collection donated to the museum by Rahatullah Khan of Khunda in 2010, which is said to include coins of local provenance.

the ruins of Hindu temples in this Śāhi center. Road construction and illegal excavations have uncovered structural finds, but their attributions require further research.¹²

Thus, while Hund's importance as an economic center (capital?) of the Hindu Śāhi rulers is not disputed, there remains a dearth of contemporaneous archaeological evidence at this site.

¹² Khan, Durrani, and Khan (2012: 80) tentatively attributed two diaper masonry water wells to the Hindu Śāhi. Olivieri does not consider the shape or masonry technique of the wells to be representative of Śāhi construction, though large pit-wells have been documented in Swat and Buner (personal communication, 9 April 2020). Rather he suggests that the monolithic beam identified by Khan, Durrani, and Khan (2012: 81, pl. 5) could have been a door or window lintel comparable to lintels found at Barikot and Amluk-dara from the same period (personal communication, 9 April 2020).

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