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Ancient Peoples and Places

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EARLY INDIA AND PAKISTAN

TO ASHOKA

Sir Mortimer Wheeler, C.I.E.

57 PHOTOGRAPHS
25 LINE DRAWINGS
AND 7 MAPS







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Ancient Peoples and Places

EARLY INDIA AND PAKISTAN

General Editor

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To my Colleagues of the old Archaeological Survey of India



THIS BOOK is a tentative sketch of a large and growing subject. Much of its material is, in the present stage of research, fragmentary and disjointed; in fact, the archaeology of the subcontinent is passing through that phase of increasing complexity which inevitably precedes a more comprehensive synthesis. The examples here presented are chosen mainly as representative of the cultural trends in the arterial valleys and on the great plains and plateaux, where the major developments took place. Apart from incidental references, no attempt is made to describe the static communities which still, in the highlands and backwoods, occupy an appreciable part of India and often preserve their tribal usages and techniques surprisingly intact in a closing world. There is much about these remote peoples that the archaeologist would like to know but does not. His turn will come; meanwhile the anthropologist holds the field.

I have ended my survey with Ashoka for the good reason that it is thereby possible to anchor Indian prehistory to the first firmly documented epoch of Indian history. The common division of the study of human cultures into 'prehistoric' and 'historic' categories is an unhappy one; often enough, the interrelationships and vagaries which are intelligible enough on the historic scene are useful reminders in the interpretation of undocumented material and help to bring it to much-needed life. Ashoka's era seems to me, in that fashion, to illumine much that went before it.

No logical system has here been followed in the transcription of Indian names. Since 1947 a number of them have been corrected from the sort of Hobson-Jobson into which time and the British had corrupted them. In some instances this

revision has perhaps been tinged with pedantry, in others a blundered or Anglicized spelling has merely been corrected. I have pursued a middle course which will please no one. Thus for Yamunā and Gangā I have retained the more widely familiar Jumna and Ganges. On the other hand, I have used the more seemly spelling of Mathurā for Muttra. In the case of the old Benares I have gone so far as to adopt Banaras but have shrunk from the archaistic Vārāṇasī. My aim has been to retain sufficient affinity between old and new to ensure recognition by the English reader, for whom this book is primarily intended.

References in an outline of this kind are necessarily reduced to a minimum, but the list at the end is sufficient to enable the

persistent student to verify and extend the text.

My indebtedness to others is necessarily extensive. In particular, I have received every possible assistance from Shri A. Ghosh, Director General of Archaeology in India, and his colleagues, especially Shri B. B. Lal; from Dr. F. A. Khan, Director of Archaeology in Pakistan; from Dr. H. D. Sankalia, Director of the Deccan College Research Institute at Poona; from Professor B. Subbarao, Head of the Department of Archaeology at the M.S. University of Baroda; and from Shri G. R. Sharma, Head of the Department of Ancient History, Culture and Archaeology, at Allahābād University. Apart from personal contacts, I have drawn widely upon the periodical reports and studies issued by the Indian Department of Archaeology, which sets a pattern of punctual and systematic publication.

R. E. M. W.

CHAPTER I The Scene

IF TO FAR INDIA'S COAST WE SAIL, we encounter today insistent barriers which have nothing to do with a study of the subcontinent's ancient past. Variant uniforms and graces meet us at the gates of West and East Pakistan and of the thousand miles of the new India that divide them. Adam's Bridge has long ceased to offer the most tenuous and symbolic link with Ceylon. The antique fortress of Goa still wears the alien flag of Portugal. At Kātmāndu the traveller, who may now indeed arrive by air, is confronted by the guardians of Nepal, if less obdurately than of old. The Afghan sentry leans warily upon the closed gate at the head of the Khyber Pass, though little heeded by the nomads who were already passing that way from season to season long before his advent. In no sense, ancient or modern, does the term 'India' nominally contain this vast and changing amalgam. At the outset our artificial usage of the word in the context of this book must therefore be defined.

India was the land of the great river Sindhu or Indus which, paradoxically, flows mostly within the modern state of Pakistan. The name or its substance was anciently extended, however vaguely, to the whole subcontinent, and even across the present Khyber barrier to the range of the Hindu Kush, north of Kābul. In that enlarged geographical connotation it will on occasion be used in these pages, without reference to the modern political map. It will relate to the whole subcontinent south of the Himālayas and the Hindu Kush, east of the Helmand Desert, and west of the Chin Hills. No doubt so cavalier a disregard of barbed wire will be resented, and resentment is readily intelligible. But even the clumsy carpet-bag term 'Indo-Pakistan subcontinent' fails to meet the case, and there is

indeed no practical alternative to the retention and even the expansion of the traditional name. As one with good friends in Pakistan, India and Afghanistan, I can only beg forgiveness for crossing and recrossing so many proud frontiers without passport. I must plead that my sole concern is with prehistoric and protohistoric geography prior to the 2nd century B.C.

Within that vast territory of some two million square miles the familiar outlines may usefully be recalled. At first sight, the formidable mountain ranges of the north give the subcontinent an aspect of exclusiveness which it does not in fact possess. For example, there are routes from China to the Brahmaputra in Assam; through Sikkim it is possible to reach the Tibetan plateau; farther west a number of feasible if arduous routes enter Kashmir from Turkestan. The most notable of these routes uses the famous Karakoram Pass, a desolate highway, if such it can be called, from High Asia into trans/Indus Kashmir. But neither this nor any other of these northern approaches has played any dominant rôle in the formation of Indian civilization. Their importance lay rather in the reverse direction, in that they were among the chosen channels for the diffusion of Buddhism and certain aspects of Buddhistic art from India into central Asia and China during the early centuries A.D.

On the north-western frontier of India and thence southward to the Arabian Sea the picture is a very different one. Here the approaches to the subcontinent, though not always easy, are still frequented, with a preference for two or three main routes. They may be grouped into two series: a northern and a southern. The northern group links north Iran and the Oxus region with Kābul and the central reaches of the Indus; the southern group links central and south Iran alternatively with Kandahār, north Baluchistan and the more southerly regions of the Indus, or with Makrān and the Indus delta. These two groups are