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The Archaeology of Taxila in as Written for Local People

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Abstract

Archaeological writings in local South Asian languages are rarely available. A search in this respect enables us to trace some works back into the latter nineteenth century. The twentieth century, however, saw a sheer realization of communicating archaeological contents to the native peoples. The results, though not encouraging, should still be brought to the fore. This study focuses on vernacular literature concerning the archaeology of Taxila valley in Pakistan.

A number of books, both in translation and in original, have been explored by this author. These include, amongst others, *Gandhara* (Urdu) by Muhammad Waliullah Khan, *Taxila* (Punjabi) by Saifur Rahman Dar, *Taxila* in verse by Pandit Devi Dayal, *Taxila ka tehzibi safar naama* (Urdu) by Agha Abdul Ghafoor, *Urus-ul-Bilad Taxila* (Urdu) by Jaleel Quraishi, *Punjab ke aasar-i-qadeemah* (Urdu) by Muhammad Iqbal Bhutta and so on.

In order to set a scholarly background, this paper first gives an outline summary of the various published works in Urdu and Punjabi. Next, summaries of works about Taxilan archaeology are given. It is followed by a discussion being made around some important points.

Keywords: Taxila, Archaeology, Urdu, Punjabi, Gandhara

Introduction

The creation and broader dissemination of knowledge is a deep rooted practice in the western world. In South Asia, however, rare examples of this activity can be found.¹ The vitality and benefits of this practice cannot be overestimated. Any knowledge which does not aim to reach the wider population is considered nowadays a futile pursuit. The engagement of people in relation to archaeological practice benefits scholars in interpreting their material on the one hand and ensuring projection of heritage on the other.² Since archaeology largely depends upon their taxes and donations, their economic embeddedness to the discipline and archaeological practice is also crucial. People can be accessed via different media. Publishing archaeological material in vernaculars is one of the ways to attract people.³ One of the archaeological niches in Pakistan, which bulk large in this skimpily available literature, is the worldwide famous Taxila. In Urdu books, but also rarely in Punjabi works, the deep history and archaeology of Taxila garner distinction.

This paper brings to the fore this literature about Taxila. It first sets a general background. Next, the books and chapters are discussed. Finally, a critical discussion is made with a focus on some issues in the works reviewed and the general usefulness of vernacularization of archaeology. Various libraries were visited and searched for archaeological literature in local languages. Some

¹ Ifqut Shaheen, Vernacularizing Knowledge in Pakistan: Archaeological Literature in the Punjabi Language, *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review*, 2022, 6 (3), pp. 589–594, ([https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2022\(6-III\)51](https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2022(6-III)51)).

² K. Paddayya, *Indian Archaeology and Heritage Education: Historiographical and Sociological Dimensions*, New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2018, pp. 368–375.

³ Rafiullah Khan and Ifqut Shaheen, ‘The Vulgus is no Bad Judge’: Sir Mortimer Wheeler and the Popularization of Indo-Pakistani Archaeology, *Journal of Pakistan Historical Society*, LXVI (1–2), 2018, pp. 175–203.

individuals also provided some books from their personal collections. The literature was carefully studied so as not only to prepared summaries but also to identify crucial issues for discussion. Two appendices, Outline of *Raahnuma-i-Taxila* and Books in English, have been added at the end of the article.

A General Background

A few books on archaeology in Urdu, Punjabi and Pashtu⁴ can be listed; however, a bibliographic note on such works in Sindhi can be substantially long. On the other hand, archaeological literature in English, produced by scholars from across the world, dominates the scene of Pakistani archaeology. Let us mention here some general works dealing with the subject in local languages here.

The Muslim thinker of the nineteenth century, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, published his book *Aasaarus-Sanaadeed* in Urdu. it has frequently been reprinted since then. The book deals with the Muslim monuments in the Delhi area.⁵ One of the very first publications in Pakistan is *Waadi-i-Sindh ki tehzeeb* (Urdu) (The Indus Valley Civilization) authored by Muhammad Idris Siddiqui. It was first published in 1959 with subsequent reprints. Siddiqui discusses all the aspects of the Harappan civilization and the text is appended with illustrations from the Indus archaeological objects (fig. 1).⁶ About Gandhara civilization a seminal book, entitled *Gandhara*, saw the light of day after a

⁴ The Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan, published a few pamphlets in Pashtu and one of them dealt with the antiquity and monuments of ancient Swabi.

⁵ C. M. Naim, Syed Ahmad and His Two Books Called 'Asar-al-Sanadid', *Modern Asian Studies*, 45 (3), 2011, pp. 669–708.

⁶ M. Idris Siddiqui, *Waad-i-Sindh ki tehzeeb*, Lahore: Fiction House, 2003.

considerable. It was written Muhammad Waliullah Khan (fig. 2), who was earlier an employee of the Archaeological Survey of India and after the partition joined Pakistan's Department of Archaeology. Khan's *Gandhara* covers prominent aspects of Gandharan archaeology.⁷ S. R. Dar, another senior officer of the Department, rendered its English translation on the request of Lok Virsa, Islamabad. However, its publication remains suspended. In the series of Urdu books, we cannot ignore *Raavi ke kinaare ke Harappayi busthian* (2005) authored by Zubair S. Ghauri. Ghauri was not a trained archaeologist but, as Saifur Rahman Dar calls him, a bureaucrat-turned archaeologist. His works, however, are taken very seriously by scholars. His other Urdu books are entitled *Multan* and *Uch Sharif*.⁸ Multan and Uch Sharif are two important cities in the Pakistani Punjab and are widely venerated for their Muslim shrine geography. To this list should be added Saifur Rahman Dar's *Harappa* (ہرپپا) (Punjabi) which deals with the archaeological site of Harappa.⁹

Taxilan Archaeology in Urdu and Punjabi

When it comes to Taxila, we find works dominantly in Urdu and rarely in Punjabi. In the latter language, two titles were published in the later 1970s by S. A. Dar about Pakistani archaeology. We have already referred to his *Harappa*. His other book directly relates to our topic. It is about the archaeological history of Taxila and is titled as *Taxila*. Dar's *Taxila* comprises 8 chapters,

⁷ M. Waliullah Khan, *Gandhara*, Islamabad: Lok Virsa, 1988.

⁸ S. R. Dar, Tribute to a Bureaucrat-Turned-Archaeologist Called Zubair Shafi Ghauri, *Asaar: Majallah Baraay-i-Asaaryati, Tarikhi Mutali'a*, 2 (1), 2021, pp. 18–26.

⁹ S. R. Dar, *Harappa*, Lahore: Pakistan Punjabi Adabi Board, 1980.

covering issues such as the etymology of Taxila, its archaeological sites and antiquities, dynastic developments, the Taxila museum and so on.¹⁰

A plethora of literature is available about the history and archaeology of Taxila; however, it is dominantly in English. In relation to works in Urdu, two earliest titles come to mind, one by M. Hameed Khan Quraishi, who served as superintendent in the Archaeological Survey of India, and Pandit Devi Dayal. Quraishi translated Sir John Marshall's *A Guide to Taxila* (fig. 3). It was published in 1939 under the title *Raahnuma-i-Taxila*. This seems to be the translation of the 1936 edition of the *Guide* and faithfully follows the original text with full consideration given to its different sections. Marshall's *Guide* first appeared in 1918 which was reprinted in 1936. Its enlarged edition came out in 1960 from the Cambridge University Press. Even until now, the *Guide* is considered the most useful work about Taxilan archaeology.¹¹

Two other books in Urdu on Taxila are Agha Abdul Ghafoor's *Taxila ka tehzeebi safarnamah* (*The cultural journey of Taxila*) and Jaleel Quraishi's *Urus-ul-Bilaad Taxila* (fig. 4). The former was published in 1984 while the latter appeared in 2003. Both are equally interesting books.

In addition, there are some chapters in various books assigned to ancient Taxila and its archaeology. Now I turn to discuss them.

Dais Punjab is written by Akbar Malik.¹² The writer highlights the history and importance of Taxila. He traces the history of settlements in the area to the Vedic age. He also discusses the

¹⁰ S. R. Dar, *Taxila*, Lahore: Pakistan Punjabi Adabi Board, 1977; see also, Shaheen, Vernacularizing Knowledge in Pakistan.

¹¹ Personal communication with S. R. Dar.

¹² Akbar Malik, *Dais Punjab*, Lahore: Qaumi Kutab Khana,

importance of Buddhism based on the Taxilan archaeological landscape. The nomenclature has also been debated. Malik also focuses on ancient records as left behind by the Greeks, Chinese and others.

Akbar Malik pays attention to the issue of decline of the Taxilan urban culture. He holds the Huns' invasions responsible for it. Mehr Gul, the chief of the Huna people, has been discussed and dubbed as a very cruel person. It is said that when he cried, the Sky turned red and too much thunderstorm took place. Pious people, thus, said about him: "he slaughtered many innocent Buddhist people and he broken the Buddhist Law. That is why now he is in hell." The author briefly describes all Buddhist sites in the Taxila valley.

Aziz Malik has published a book entitled *Pothohaar*.¹³ He brings into his discussion the different meaning of the name of Taxila. The origin of urban settlement has been traced back to Iranian people (understandably the Achaemenid dynasty). Aziz Malik also highlights the importance of Buddhism at Taxila. He mentions some important sites of Taxila and also provides a geographical description of the valley. Through all this, the historical importance of Taxila is brought to the fore. Jewelry and other archaeological object discovered from Taxila have been made part of the work.

Kunal Kundal has been used for the famous Kunala site with details of the Kunala myth and the present-day eye hospital at Taxila related to it.

¹³ Aziz Malik, *Pothohaar*, Islamabad: Lok Virsa, 2010.

Pakistan ke Asaar-i-qadeemah is written by Raja Muhammad Arif Minhas, a book which assigns one chapter to Taxila under the same heading.¹⁴ In this work the writer tries to describe the overall history of Taxila. Although he explains the importance of Taxila; still, there are some issues in his research work. He mainly focuses on words Gandhara and Taxila in his text. Difficult terminologies being used become a problem for laypersons to understand his work, even an archaeologist or historian might get confused owing to incoherence, repetitions etc. He does not use any references, notes etc.

Sheikh Naveed Aslam also writes his book under the same title, *Pakistan ke Asaar-i-Qadeemah*.¹⁵ He provides an overview on the archaeological heritage of Pakistan which also includes the ancient history and archaeological remains of Taxila. Historical perspectives of the ancient city, along with the discussion of the cultural and religious values and importance of the city as being a hub of learning, have been given. This book contains all basic details about the city of Taxila, such as its location, geography, political and dynastic history, ancient sites and many more. The significance of all these things in the making of Taxila being important in the present times have been demonstrated.

Discussion and Conclusion

It is highly important to subject archaeological literature in vernacular languages to a critical evaluation. Keeping this in view, I will share my opinion on these works. Akbar Malik uses very simple language. However, the work does not follow rules of academic writings. Malik also does

¹⁴ Raja M. Arif Minhas, *Pakistan ke Asaar-i-Qadeemah*, Islamabad, 1997.

¹⁵ Sheikh Naveed Aslam, *Pakistan ke Asaar-i-Qadeemah*, Lahore: Book Home, 2008.

not properly explain technical terms and difficult concepts (such as Bhikshu, stupa etc.). The famous General Ventura is mentioned but not introduced in a critical way. Similarly, Aziz Malik discusses that how different scholars have highlighted the importance of Taxila. However, the scholars themselves have not been brought under discussion. No academic style such as research methodology and coherence in writing. He does not explain difficult terms. Sheikh Aslam's work is to be mentioned with respect to structure-related problems and issues regarding contents. It affects layperson's understanding. Firstly, there is lack of proper sequence in it as the narrative jumps from one topic or time period to another without any proper closure of the previous one. This unclear structure of the article makes it difficult to follow the timeline of Taxila accordingly and creates confusion.

Secondly, Shaikh Aslam makes several repetitions of information such as the author explains the history and significance of Taxila several times in the book that unnecessarily lengthens the book. Furthermore, the lack of specifics is noticeable such as when the author talks about how Taxila went into decline he doesn't provide any basic reasons or analysis behind its decline which leaves the reader with an incomplete understanding. However, apart from these gaps, the author provides the historical significance of the ancient city, Taxila by using easy language successfully. A more structured approach and thorough analysis would improve the quality of the book and would provide a better understanding of Taxila's history.

Archaeological literature and classical literary works in colonial South Asia had a strong tradition of publication in European languages, especially English, German and French. However, we can find stray instances of producing such works, or works based on the European rediscovery of South Asian history, archaeology and literature, in various local languages since, particularly, the mid-

nineteenth century. The early twentieth century saw more conscious efforts in this respect. Motivations behind it may vary. The general motive, however, was the same. Publications in vernaculars meant at reaching out to the local peoples so as to make archaeological heritage and public relevant to each other. Marshall's Guide is its best example. In the post-partition era, the need of people's relevance vis-à-vis history and heritage was felt. Sir Mortimer Wheeler, who was serving as Archaeological Advisor to the Government of Pakistan between 1949 and 1951, diverted attention to the benefits of this activity in 1949. In his address to the audience on the occasion of the inauguration of the Museums Association of Pakistan at Peshawar, he said that amongst other such activities, people should be accessed through publications in local languages.¹⁶ waliullah Khan's volume, *Gandhara*, and Dar's *Taxila* and *Harappa* should be understood in this historical and conceptual context. In India, publications in some local languages by the veteran scholar, H. D. Sankalia, indicate a more serious consideration rendered to vernacularization of archaeology and ancient history. The concepts of community and public archaeology dominate archaeological practice in many parts of the world nowadays. They have practical results in the process of both the production of knowledge and preservation of heritage. Indian scholar, K. Paddayya has made advocacy for this through his concept of 'the other archaeologist'.¹⁷ His work has inspired some recent historical studies in Pakistan.¹⁸ And many scholars are sure about the collective good of representing archaeology and heritage for the wider public. This is especially

¹⁶ Khan and Shaheen, 'The Vulgus is No Bad Judge', p. 184.

¹⁷ Paddayya, *Indian Archaeology and Heritage Education*.

¹⁸ Ifqut Shaheen, *The Other Archaeologists: The Ignorant Villagers and the Colonial Archaeology of Taxila in the Late Nineteenth Century*, *South Asian Studies*, 38 (2), pp. 231–241.

required in the face of the ongoing violent politics centred on archaeology and history in South Asia.

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Appendix 1: Outline of *Raahnuma-i-Taxila*

The book consists of the following nine chapters:

1. Geographical Condition

A detailed description of the geographical conditions.

2. Historical Condition

it discusses the historical conditions from Iranian period to Huns and the final destruction of Taxila (including many famous events).

3. Trade

Trade during the times of Iranian, Mauryan, Saka, Greeks, Pahlavi, Qandhari and Greek has been discussed.

4. Dharmarajika Stupa

A detailed description of this Buddhist establishment has been given.

5. Garhi ke Daray main Budhmat ke Asaar

It narrates the area's ruins.

6. Kunal Stupa

It is the story of the Kunal stupa and monastery.

7. Sirkap

The pioneer analytical narrative of the worldwide popular Sirkap is presented.

8. Jandial

It is the fascinating story of the Jandial temple.

9. Sirsukh , Lalchak , Badalpur

It discusses the geography of Sirsukh along with other details. The remains at Lal Chak (Buddhist Monastery and Stupa No. 1 and 2) and Badalpur have been discussed.

Appendix 2: Books in English

In 2000 *A Short Guide to Taxila* was published by Dr. A.H. Dani. But unfortunately he does not say a single word about several later discoveries - especially discoveries made at Sarai Khola and Hathial. Fortunately some six years before Dr. Dani, the lamented M. A. Hakim had already covered these new discoveries in his small but comprehensive *TAXILA MUSEUM - A GUIDE*, published by Department of Archaeology in 1994. In 2000 again, Muhammad Ilyas Bhatti, also published his profusely illustrated booklet with the title: *TAXILA -AN ANCIENT METROPOLIS OF GANDHARA*. It was a private publication. A revised and deluxe edition of this book was republished in 2006.

Another small but quite comprehensive booklet entitled, *TAXILA STORY IN STONE* by one A. Waheed Jan from Rawalpindi in 2001, was published by W. J. Classic, Rawalpindi. To this list may be add another book by Ihsan H. Nadiem entitled *Taxila and Buddhist Gandhara*. As it is clear from the title, the contents are confined to Gandhrara and does not say anything about new discoveries even the fresh excavations at Jinnan

Wali Dheri. We must not forget the "preliminary Report of archaeological excavations at *Jinnan Wali Dheri - Taxila (4th-8th Century AD) - (Buddhist Monastic Complex)* by Dr. Fazal Dad Kakar and Muhammad Bahadur Khan, Islamabad, 2008. Dr. Ashraf Khan later on added several more reports on Jinnan Wali Dheri. Our old colleague Mr. Bahadur Khan, along with four other colleagues has at its credit an excavation report entitled, *BHIR MOUND- the First city of Taxila*. It was published in 2002. To this list must be added a small but very significant paper by Dr. Muhammad Abdullah Chaghatai. It is entitled, *Taxila Re-Visited - A Missing Link of Indo-Muslim History*, published in 1973.

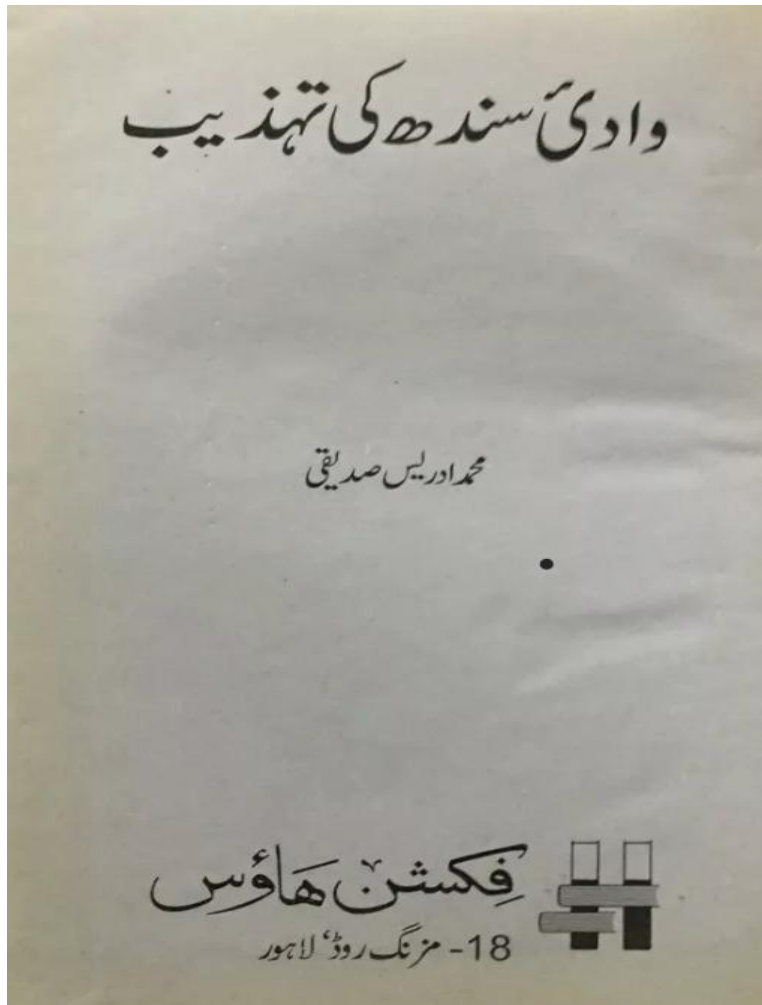


Figure 1 M. Idris Siddiqui, *Waad-i-Sindh ki tehzeeb*

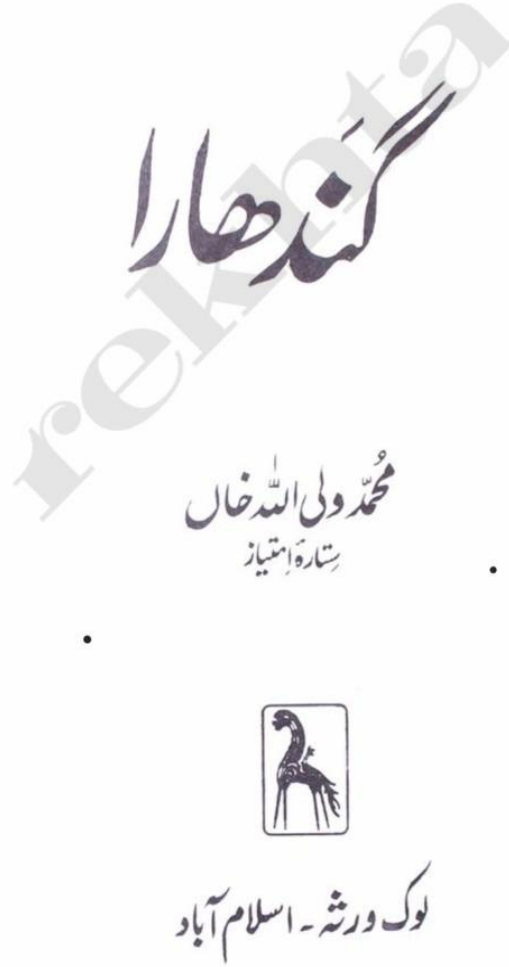


Figure 2 Waliullah Khan, *Gandhara*

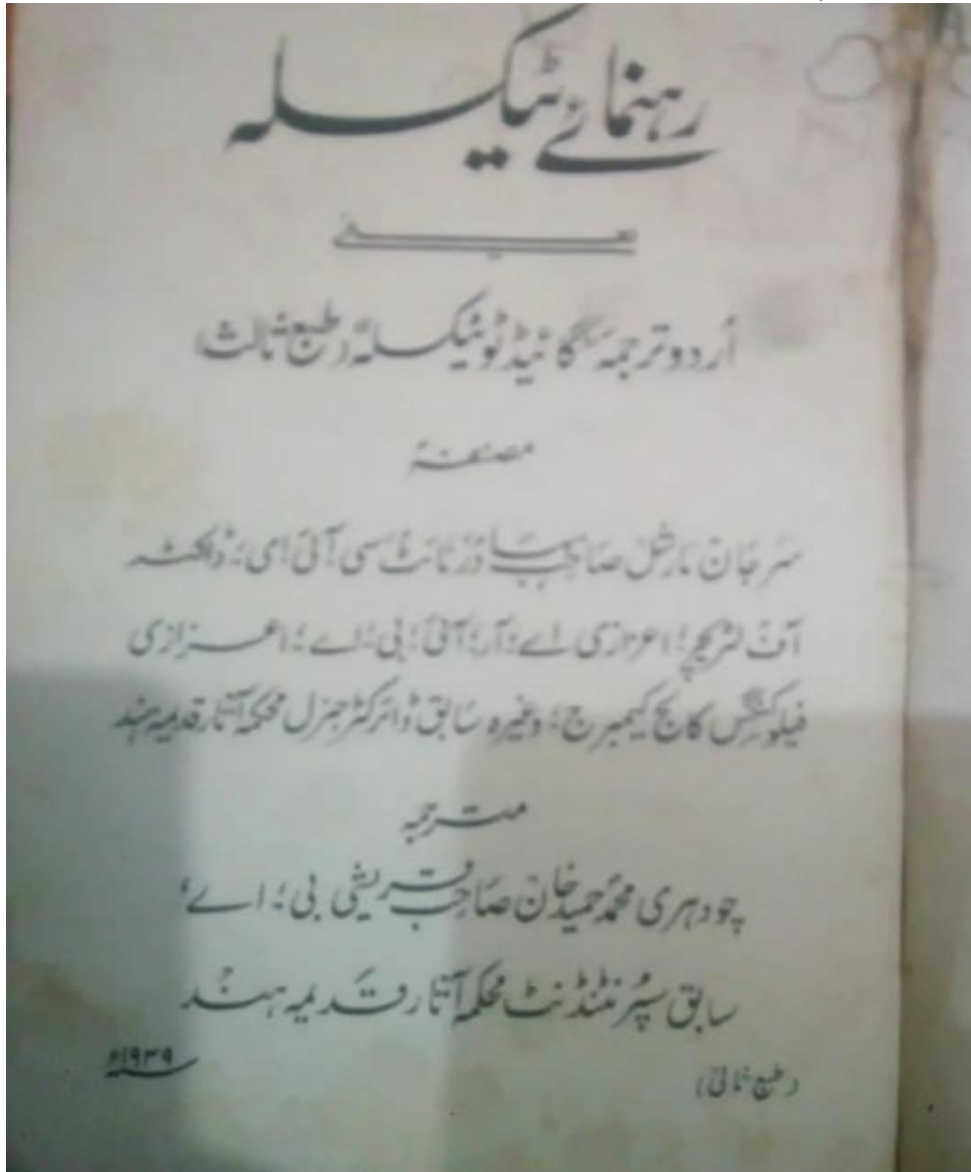


Figure 3 M. Hameed Quraishi, *Raahnumay-i-Taxila*