



KALEEM LASHARI

A Study of Stone Carved Graves

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These pieces of art must not have been possible to grow abruptly out of the desolate landscape. There must have been some cultural roots making it possible. The design of the graves is unique and the decoration applied on these is a special feature. Visitors crowd the sites of such graveyards and the bewitching beauty captivates all and sundry, but their questions remain unanswered.

There was a need to study these structures comprehensively, and this book takes into account all major aspects of the subject, with a clear picture of traditional society, as a backdrop. Hundreds of drawings and pictures will help in understanding the structural development and evolution in decorative motifs. A long list of graveyards and many genealogical charts are valuable aid to research scholars, who may find good reasons to probe further in to the tribal history. There was an increasing demand for such a work. *The Archaeological Review* decided to publish this book as an Special Issue of the Journal. The readers will appreciate the results of the research of many years and will also find it an engrossing reading.



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DEDICATION

In appreciation of the help and unfailing assistance rendered, throughout these long and trying years of extensive field work, I dedicate this study to Ms. Asma Ibrahim. This humble effort is in no way a match to her enthusiasm, which made this work possible.

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Foreword

Emergence of funeral architecture of unusual beauty, in *Kohistan* of Sindh and Baluchistan, is termed as a strange event. The arid region, with scanty resources have compelled its dwellers to resort to a nomadic way of life. Away from the urban settlements, where empires rose and fell, princes came and went, various trends altered to suit the changing political scenario, the conditions with the tribal people remained, more or less, same.

With the local Summas at throne, these tribes maintained minimum contact. The pride of belonging to royal stock, more nearer to the legendary Jam Jadam, than the Summas, and having pastures to themselves, they preferred to live away from the circumstances which may make them to obey others.

Subsequent political changes estranged these tribes even more from the power centres. Arghun/Turkhan came to occupy Sindh in place of Summas, and Mughuls later replaced them. Political upheavels and material changes went on taking place, new trends came and were followed by others, but the *Kohistan* remained least effected. No benefits of development or enrichment of civilization could fell to their lot. The peculiar terrain, which even today is difficult to traverse, hepled them

adjacent areas, even though belonging to similar historic phases/ periods.

There is no denying the fact that the burying dead has always been a religious ritual and it is also true that the religions are persistently conformists in all such practices. Then what made these people to breakaway from the general prevalent trend, and construct graves, which are in separate class of their own?

These peices of art must not have been possible to grow abruptly out of the desolate landscape. There must have been some cultural roots making it possible.

Years ago I fell in love with these finely sculpted graves and that spell prompted present study. I tried to learn about the mysterious circumstances under which these graves were constructed. It was clear to me that in this world of cause and effect it was simply not possible for any people to decide all of a sudden, with out any reason, to bury their dead under such strange structures, about which nothing was heard before. What possibly were the events behind this abrupt change?

Absence of written sources made the inroads in local history very difficult. Oral traditions current among the tribes suffered by the unsystematic mode of preservation. It distorted very base on which any event rested, as no time frame or even a vague reference to it was given. It became difficult to identify similar event told at another place, nor it was easy to defferenciate between the similar names of the persons living several generations apart.

It is a curious fact that the design of the graves is unique by all measures. Alongwith it the decoration applied on these graves is a special feature. Although the tradition of stone carving is very strong in adjoining eastern states of Gujrat, but the combination of patterns practiced here is in no way usual.

There is no doubt that the Summa period in Sindh shows dominance of stone as major medium of construction. Its developed form, and the specimen from regions of Cutch point to the possibility that pre Summa period in Sindh also had produced some good structures made out of stone.

But it is unfortunate that we have not many dated specimens of that era available to us, to have profound understanding of the methodology of the master builder.

The historical records show that *Kohistan* people had trade links with nearby Sehwan and Thatta, but did this contact ever was enlarged to bigger dimensions to have some impact upon physical culture?

Mazhar-e-Shahjehani, a history of Mughul period leaves very little room for doubt about the minimum contact established through barter of live stock and bare necessities, coarse cloth etc.

Was that enough to instill preferity behaviour with regard to the things higher than the ordinary? The mutual distrust and contineous raids by the nomads on settled population, for any feeling of unjust dealing, are ample indicator to judge the extent of relationship, which was necessarily limited to bare minimum.

What ever might had happened at the urban centres and at the places where power was based, it surely had a very little influence on the hinterlands, occupied by the semi-nomadic tribes.

Thus the search for the possible force behind these graves was not made easy through the available sources of information.

The structure itself was thought to lead out of this enigma and to some positive conclusions.

It was therefore decided:

to read and record the names and allied information inscribed on the graves;

to collect the oral traditions and try to sift and put these to some sequence, in order to be able to suggest possible course of events;

to construct genealogical trees of major families, with the help of oral traditions and the information received through inscriptions;

shape for the understanding of its evolution:

to read the decorative patterns and its various combinations, and study their relationship with the progress of time;

and to look for any mark, left by the masons, for possible cross check, with the dated structures.

It was expected that the information collected in this manner may help not only in forming the idea of popular social trends, but can also help to measure the possible under currents mobilising the vigorous tribesmen to actively patronise and help create this unique structure.

To achieve the laid out objectives, it was required to carryout extensive field work. As the area was vast, conditions uninviting, and not much information was available about overwhelming number of graveyards, it took years of sheer hardwork to make this study a possibility.

The reader is neither burdened with the long discussion of technical issues, nor unrequired details are thrown in.

The study is divided into various chapters, dealing with distinct aspects separately. It is expected to open new avenues of understanding and will help begin an era of research over the interesting history and rich traditions of these semi-nomadic tribes.

There has been many articles regarding these graves, still the subject matter was long over due for a comprehensive treatment. No study was available which had dealt the multifaceted topic at length. There existed demand for such publication among serious readership as well as tourists, who so often find themselves bewitched with the beauty of the stone carved graves, but find no answers to their searching queries.

In view of these facts Ms. Asma Ibrahim, co-editor of *The Archaeological Review*, considered it appropriate to publish it as monograph in one of the issues of the Journal, for the benefit not only of our regular readers but also to meet the

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study was spread to a fairly long period and still larger area, thus the author came in contact with many persons of various tribes, some of them associated themselves with the work to the extent that they seemed to form a part of field staff. Late Haji Mohammed Ibrahim Kalmati of Dhabaji remained attached, till he was incapacitated by an unfortunate illness. Master Mohammed Hassan Jokhio was also of immense help and an eager supporter of the cause. His keen interest in the tribal history of Jokhias was the main source of his active participation in the field tours, despite his old age. Mr. Humza Khan himself a student of Kalmati history remained involved in search of clues to the tribal traditions. He always was ready to join the exploratory tours and exchange the information. Mr. Pir Mohammed Kalmati undertook long tours to Mekran in search of tribal traditions and poetry. His knowledge of the genealogy of some clans of Kalmati remained available for this study. Many Kalmati elders, including the present Malik, Malik Luqman, co-operated as and when asked. Similarly the Jam of Jokhia Jam Murad Ali always was ready to co-operate.

Mr. Faiz Mohammed Kalmati, Haji Mohammed Sodho Boghlar, Mr. Mohammed Ishaq Kalmati were also always keen to help. Many of the personal friends of the author rendered helping hand at one time or the other. Appreciating the enthusiastic involvement of the author, they made offers of co-operation in every possible way. The charting of survey results, the means of cataloguing the publication of results of the work..... no matter whatever was the aspect, they were all eager to support. Mr. Adnan Asder Ali, Mr. Gul Hameed Chanchi and Mr. Yousuf Moulvi were at the forefront in offering any possible assistance, whether it be physical help or financial undertaking.

It is not possible to name them all. The author feels that each one of them made a positive contribution to this study, in one way or the other, their co-operation is acknowledged herewith.

The photograph used on page 34 is from the collection of Smithsonian Institute, the drawing of the grave of Subuktagin, appearing on page no. 129 is drawn by the author, after S. Flury's Ghazni.