

A STUDY OF

STONE CARVED GRAVES

KALEEMULLAH LASHARI



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 into the tribal history. There was an increasing demand for such a work. The readers will appreciate the results of the research of many years and will also find it an engrossing reading.



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SINDH ARCHIVES

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ISBN: 978-969-9310-06-5

Second Edition: February 2012

First Edition: 1996

Composing &

Proofreading: Aamir Raz Soomro

Layout: Piar Graphics & Printing, Karachi

Published by: Sindh Archives

Information & Archives Department,
Government of Sindh

ST 26-A, Block-5, Scheme-5, Main Clifton,
Karachi.

Printed by: Kachho Publication, Karachi. 0300-2879794

Price: Rs. 600

DEDICATION

In appreciation of the help and unfailing assistance rendered, throughout these long and tiring years of extensive field work, I dedicate this study to Dr. Asma Ibrahim. This humble effort is 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 Balochistan is termed as a strange event. The arid region, with scanty resources, has 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, the 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; later, Mughals replaced them. Political upheavals 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 civilisation could fell to their lot. The peculiar terrain, which even today is difficult to traverse, helped them to shy away from undesired aliens and unwanted changes. Their isolation was complete.

The funeral structure of these tribal people are strange and wear a novel look, from all other graves present in the adjacent areas, even though belonging to similar historic phase/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 break away from the general prevalent trend, and construct graves, which are in separate class of their own.

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.

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 for any person to decide all of a sudden without 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 present among the tribes, suffered 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 differentiate 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. Along with 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, yet the combination of patterns practiced here is no way usual.

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

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

The historical records show that people of *Kohistan* had trade links with nearby cities of 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 Mughal period leaves very little room for doubt about the minimum contact established through barter of livestock and bare necessities, coarse cloth, etc. The mutual distrust and continuous raids by the nomads on settled population, for any feeling of unjust dealing is ample indicator to judge the extent of relationship, which was necessarily limited to bare minimum.

Whatever might have 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.

To study the structure itself and variations occurring in its 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 the 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 patronize and help create this unique structure.

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

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

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 have been many articles regarding these graves, still the subject matter was long overdue 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, Dr 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 general demand. I could do nothing but agree.

Thus, it is appearing as a *Special Issue* of the Journal.

Acknowledgement

The 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 Mohammad Ibrahim Kalmati of Dhabeji remained attached, till he was incapacitated by an unfortunate illness. Master Mohammad Hussain Jokhio was also of immense help and an eager supporter of the cause. His keen interest in the tribal history of the Jokhias was the main source of his active participation in the field tours, despite his old age. Mr Hamza Khan himself, a student of Kalmati history remained involve in search of clues to the tribal traditions. He always was ready to join the exploratory tours and exchange the information. Mr Pir Mohammad 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 cooperate.

Mr Faiz Mohammad Kalmati, Haji Mohammad Sodho Baghiar, Mr Mohammad 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 Asdar Ali, Mir Gul Hameed Ghanchi and Mr Yousuf Moulvi were at the forefront in offering any possible assistance, whether be it 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 designs appearing on page 18 and 19 are taken from Mohammad Raza Hunervar's (رسم المشرق تدهيب اسلمى) and the *Illumination Models*, and the photograph used on page 34 is of Smithsonian Institute, the drawing of the grave of Subuktagin, appearing on page 129 is drawn by the author, after S. Flury's Ghazni.

This book has since long been out of print, and it is acknowledged that the Sindh Archives considered brining its second edition. The gracious consideration of Advocate Muhammad Rafiq Engineer and care of Mr Roshan Ali Kanastro, Director, Sindh Archives is brought on record.