



Zoroastrian Monuments in Balochistan

Jahanzeb Khan

Assistant Professor, Area Study Center, University of Balochistan, Quetta.

Imran Shabir

Lecturer, Archaeology Dpt. University of Balochistan, Quetta.

Abstract:

Balochistan has been one of the ancient regions of subcontinent in terms of cultural development. Here the birth of culture had been with the dawn of Neolithic Revolution in Bolan Pass at Mehrgarh around 7000 BCE. Balochistan has gone through cultural developments for thousands of years and it has seen several cultures. Balochistan is a gateway of many civilizations and it has witnessed several expeditions and migrations. Archaeology, in this respect, has played a vital role to sort out the ancient cultures and civilizations to the picture of the people. This study is mainly focused on the Zoroastrian Monuments and remains, found in areas like Makran, Kharan, Rakhani, Kohalu, Bharkan and Quetta. The Zoroastrian remains in Balochistan, which have been unearthed, show to the rest of the world that the Zoroastrian Religion existed in Balochistan and the followers of this religion are still present to the day. However, this study will be based on the remains of the Zoroastrianism scattered throughout province.

Keywords: Zoroastrian, Balochistan, cultural, development, expeditions



Zoroastrian Monuments in Balochistan

Introduction to the 'Good Religion' of Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrianism is called the 'Good Religion' owing to its emphasis on goodness and righteousness in thought and behavior like many other religions as that of Buddhism, Jainism and Islam. Zoroastrianism is among one of the oldest religions of the world; it arose in Ancient Persia about thirty-five hundred years ago. At that time the prophet Zarathustra, Zoroaster as Greeks called him, started teaching his message. Zarathushtra, considered to be a priest of existing Iranian religion of his time, is considered to be of highly original thinker and a bold reformer. His teachings may seem straightforward today, but in his time they were truly revolutionary (Hartz 2008). Furthermore, Zarathustra rejected many of the beliefs and practices of the existing religions. In a time of many gods, he preached about one great and supreme God, Ahura Mazda. In a time when most of the people were of the view that worship consisted mainly of elaborate rituals to satisfy angry deities, he preached a religion of personal ethics in which people's actions and activities were more important than that of the ritual and sacrifice. The preaching and teaching of Zarathustra laid the foundation of one of the most influential and long-lasting religions of the world. His message is preserved in the Avesta, the Zoroastrian scripture (Hart 2008).

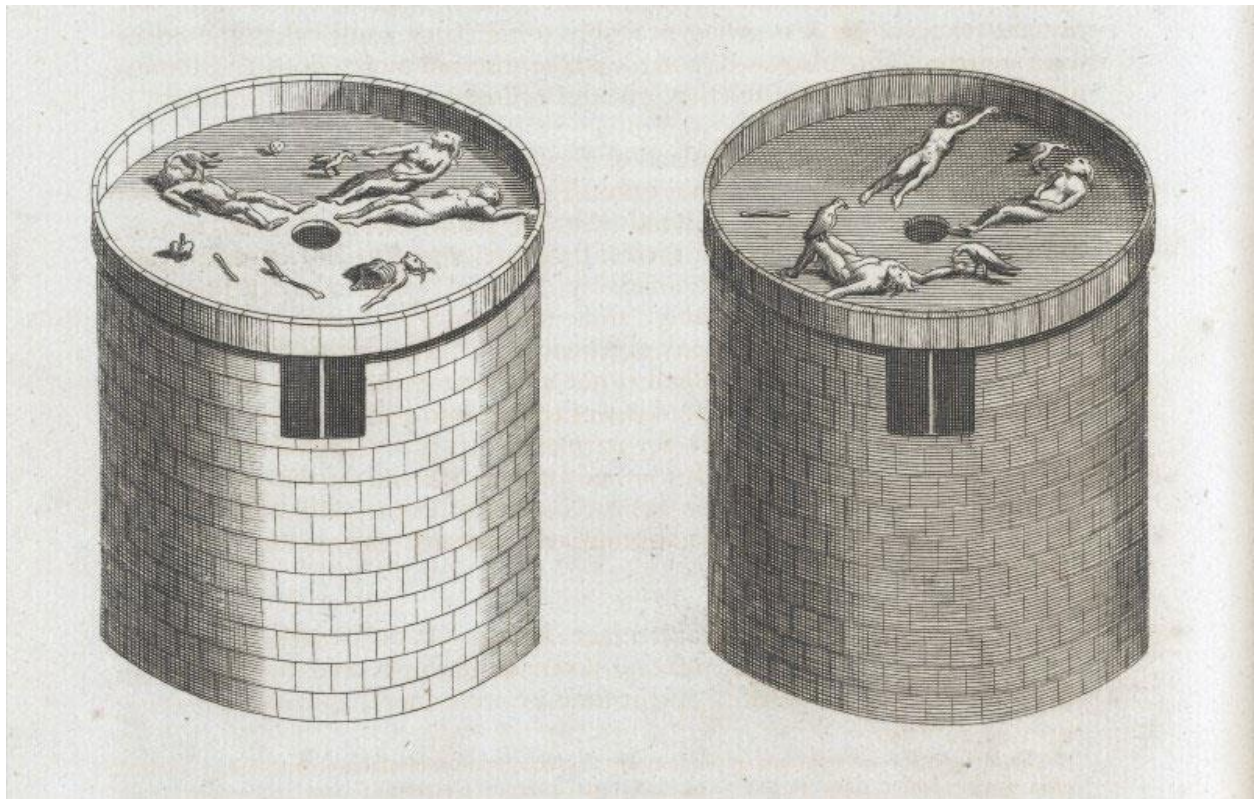
Towers of Silence

One the important features of Zoroastrian religion, is thought of that of the Tower of Silence. The process of cremation or burial practice is conducted in a typical architectural feature made by the Zoroastrians called Tower of Silence. This is of true value while conducting a cremation course of deceased by the Zoroastrians. Zoroastrianism generally perceives death as a transitory triumph of evil on good wisdom – running into the body, owing to the cadaver evil spirit that defiles all that it interacts with.

The epidermis of a dead body are so impure which can contaminate everything; in this respect, an arrangement of principles ought be made with a specific end goal to discard the dead body as securely as would be possible – as the common components of earth, air and water are consecrated. Similarly, the bodies were not to be tossed upon the water or entombed.

Cremation was prohibited, as fire is the direct-purest-transmission of the holiness (Boyce 1979). In this way, a sort of intricate custom was produced in which the body remains would be left for flying creatures of prey as final demonstration of philanthropy. Like an act of humanism – with no class or color differences, the division of class and riches vanished, for all expired would be dealt equally (Boyce 1979).

A sort of legitimate structural typology was designed specifically determined for burial ritual—they transported in the desert by nasellars (traditionally Zoroastrian pallbearers), the assemblages of the deceased were then carted onto sandstone, disallowing slopes, to be in the eventual disposed which is arranged on round and hollow developments called Towers of Silence. A Tower of Silence, or Dakhmeh, is a typical structure lying on the highest point of a slope, comprising of concentric sections encompassing a focal pit. The bodies are organized onto four concentric rings: men, furthest, than ladies and kids. Regardless of the fact that the birds of prey required not exactly one hour to leave nothing but bones. the remaining parts of the dead were left blanching on the upper circles no less than a year prior to the nasellars could come and push the skeletons onto the basic ossuary pit. Going through sand and coal channels, the fragmented bones were in the long run washed away in the ocean (Mistree 1982).



Courtesy: <http://socks-studio.com/2012/02/09/towers-of-silence-zoroastrian-architectures-for-the-ritual-of-death/> (Accessed 08/12/2014).

Zoroastrian Monuments in Balochistan

Zoroastrian Presence in Balochistan

The current study, however, focuses on the Zoroastrian Monuments in Balochistan. By keeping in view the geographical setup of Balochistan, it could be generally assumed that Zoroastrian presence is possible in Balochistan. It could be assumed with view of the fact that the land of Balochistan shares its borders with Iran and Afghanistan. In its western part, the areas connecting the Pakistani Balochistan and the Irani Sistan-o-Balochistan, it could be quite pertinent to note the Zoroastrian presence. The Parsee people of Zoroastrian are regarded to be found in the areas what is now known as Iran (Persia). Similarly, important is the fact that the archaeologist and researchers have unearthed the Zoroastrian remains in the areas of Turbat (Kech-Makran), it is very near to the Irani Balochistan; the areas of Punjgoor it also connects with Iranian Borders of Sarawan whereas the Zoroastrian presence in District Kharan is quite problematic. A Tomb is found in District Kharan, seems to be a Muslim Tomb but the presence of several skeletons and bones and their burial systems resemble with that of the Zoroastrian ones (Hasan 1990). Particularly, there are several remains of Zoroastrian Monuments which evidently show the Zoroastrian presence in Pakistani Province of Balochistan. Not only the archaeological remains and monuments signify their existence but the Zoroastrian community living in some of the particular areas is evident to their existence. On the contrary, the matching boundaries of Irani and Pakistani Balochistan could be another factor of their presence. The Pakistani Balochistan shares its borders, in west, in Kech-Makran, Punjgoor and Kharan, with Iran; Iran is the place where the 'Good Religion' of Zoroastrianism originated and the people migrated settled in Pakistani Balochistan.

The Zoroastrian presences in various places of Balochistan are discussed here.

Turbat (Kech-Makran)

Turbat being very near to Iran has witnessed Zoroastrian remains in its western parts. Cairns made of stones and muds have been noticed. The treasure hunters, in search of treasure, attempted to destroy these structures so as to find something new or some sort of treasure in these stone structures but could not find anything special which could be of their worth and value (Hasan 1990). Several stories are there regarding these structures and remains; one of them is mentioned in District Gazetteer which illustrates that during the time of Prophet David, so as to run away from the constant recurring of famines people committed suicide by entombing themselves in these small cairns; these cairns are locally called Dambis or Dambis. Moreover, these cairns currently are not found. They have been bulldozed or destroyed and new hutments and houses have been encroached. The

account of Alexander through Balochistan has also given about the customs of the people who lived here then by Arrianus and Diodorus are quite revealing. It appears that in 326 B.C. the plains of Lasbella and their interior country was occupied by "Oritions" whose dialect and dress differed from rest of the Indians. Their customs regarding the disposal of the dead was unique. The bodies of the dead were carried out by their relatives who stripped themselves naked and carried spears. They placed the dead bodies on the mountain slopes of the thickets. They removed the clothing of the dead to be preyed by wild beasts. It is quite pertinent from the above facts that their costumes resembled with that of the Iranian Tribes and are also resemblances of Zoroastrian practices (Hasan 1990).

Furthermore, the Karezes in the Turbat (Kech-Makran) are many in number. These also show some sort of resemblances with that of the Zoroastrian presence in the area. In the Zoroastrian belief, water and earth are regarded to be sacred or they of worth. The Karezes also show some sort of resemblances with that of the Tower of Silence of the Zoroastrian Religion. A person name Ashfaq from Quetta is regarded to be of Zoroastrian belief stated that the Karezes in Kech are built by their forefathers. From the above information it could be articulated that Zoroastrians existed in Turbat City of Kech-Makran.

Kohalu and Bharakan:

The presence of Zoroastrians in Kahalu and Bharkan areas, have been noticed by Brigadier (Rtd) M. Usman Hasan during his travel between these two areas. Small cairns have been observed. They are regarded to be very old and appeared to have been made with stones and lined with mud plaster. Locals of the area are of the view that these old ruins that fantastic tales are famous among them. It is said that a large number of "Kafila" was destructed during the reign of Mahmood of Ghazni (Hasan 1990).

Tower of Silence in Rakhani

The stone platforms which are 100 in number are located 40 miles away from Rakhani on Rakhani Beakker Road (Fig 1). These platforms are about 7 ft. high, 6 ft. long and 5 ft. 9 inches wide (Fig 2) (Kakar 1990). They have been built by placing slabs of stones one over the other. The exact purpose of these platforms could not be determined, but judging from the masonry that these queer platforms probably be the "The Tower of Silence" of the Zoroastrians. Many of these platforms are partly destroyed owing to the rock having crumbled away, a sign of the long period that must have elapsed since they were used for burial practices. On these platforms the fire-worshippers used to out their dead bodies for probably hawks,

Zoroastrian Monuments in Balochistan

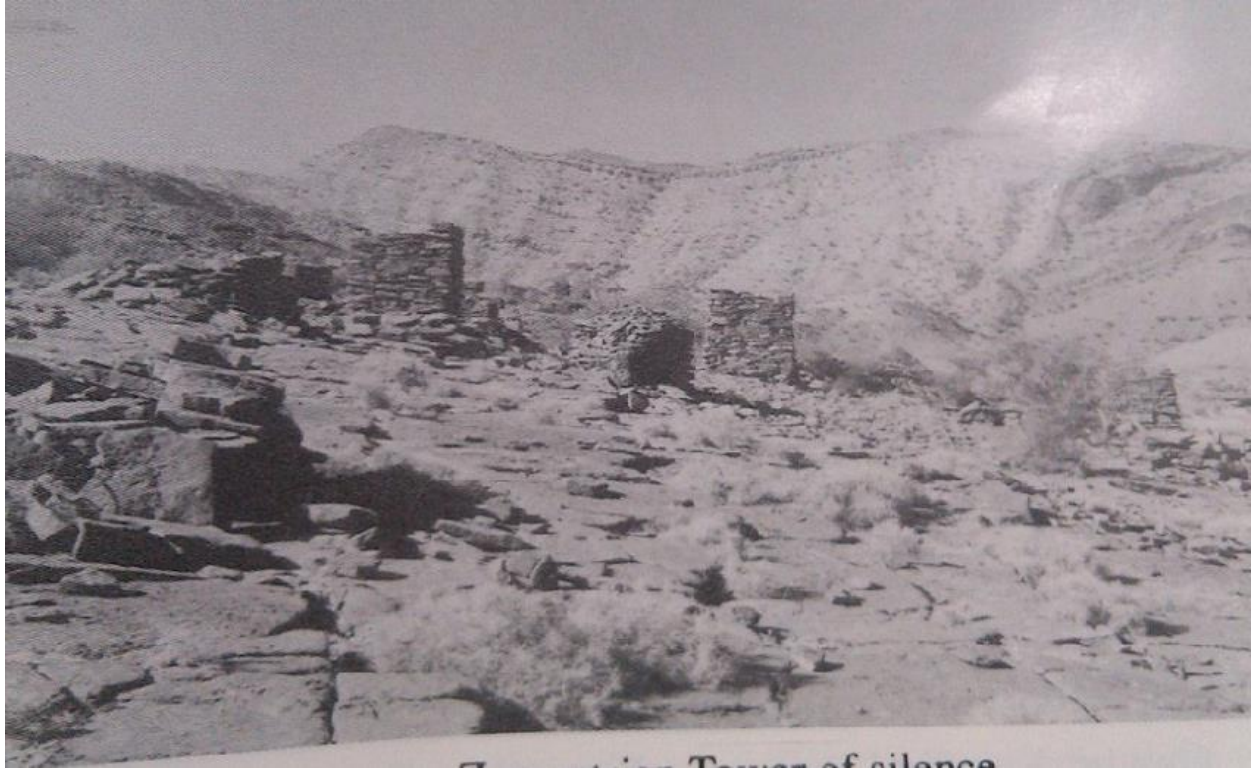
crows and other to feed upon. The bones left over thrown into a well dug for this purpose. In Iran the structures of the Tower of Silence is different. They build separate towers for men, women and children; however, no deposit of the bones in this area was found (Kakar 1990).

Fig 1: Zoroastrian Tower of Silence



Courtesy: (Kakar 1990).

Fig 2: Zoroastrian Tower of Silence



Courtesy: (Kakar 1990).

Kharan

Kharan, the dome of the Mausolea Tomb, built of burnt bricks, is akin to ordinary Iranian tombs in shape i.e. a square chamber surmounted by a dome. There are numerous gimbals found scattered in the district.

Another set of remarkable archaeological remains are the “Gabarbands” or Zoroastrian Dambis, which are found in considerable number at Raskoh, Gorr and Siahn Ranges. They bear evidence of different physical conditions than those prevalent today (Kharan 2011).

The present inhabitants of Kharan attribute the construction of Gabarbands to the fire worshippers. These dams are terraced fields and legend says that the inhabitants who built them brought all the soil in bags, which they carried on their backs from the desert in the south. These Gabarbands were built to contain the rainwater in the terraced plots and the deposition of fertile alluvium on the otherwise rocky soil. This wonderful old system is also seen at Quetta, Kalat and Karachi highway. The great archeological explorer Sir Aurel Stein has described the Gabarbands as master-pieces for conservation and utilization of rain or snow water (Kharan 2011).

Zoroastrian Monuments in Balochistan

However, the **Tomb** found in Kharan seems to be a Muslims Tombs but it appears from the burial remains that there might also lived the Zoroastrian People or it could be a changing pattern of **their** faith. (Fig 3, 4 and 5).

Fig 3: Tomb in Kharan



Courtesy: Zoroastrianism in Balochistan/Who Built This Structure In Pakistan -
General Images & Media Forum - Pakistani Defence Forum.htm (Accessed
5/12/2014).

Fig 4: Burials



Fig 5: Closer view of the Tomb in Kharan



Zoroastrian Monuments in Balochistan

Zoroastrian Graves in Quetta Valley: the changing pattern of burials.

It is very interesting to note here that the Zoroastrian practices have changed with passage of the time and they vary from area to area. The burial graves found in Quetta Valley are quite appealing be noticed. The Zoroastrians in Quetta use graveyard to bury their dead bodies. Mr. Rizwan, a Zoroastrian from Quetta, said that they engrave their dead bodies. He knows this fact ever since he was alive. However, these graves represent some sort of changing patterns in their burial systems. It could be that because they live with Muslims or the majority of the people they live with are Muslims that could be the reason why they have also changed their burial system with view of cultural diffusion. (Fig 6, 7 and 8).

Fig 6: Zoroastrian Graves of Quetta Valley:



Courtesy Manzoor Ahmed

Fig 7:



Fig 8:



Courtesy Manzoor Ahmed

Zoroastrian Monuments in Balochistan

Conclusion

It could be assumed with view of the fact that the land of Balochistan shares its borders with Iran and Afghanistan. In its western part, the areas connecting the Pakistani Balochistan and the Irani Sistan-o-Balochistan, it could be quite pertinent to note the presence of Zoroastrian presence. The Parsee people of Zoroastrian are regarded to be found in the areas what is now known as Iran (Persia). Similarly, important is the fact that the archaeologist and researchers have unearthed the Zoroastrian remains in the areas of Turbat (Kech-Makran), it is very near to the Irani Balochistan; the areas of Punjgoor, also connect with Iranian Borders of Sarawan whereas the Zoroastrian presence in District Kharan is quite problematic. A Tomb is found in District Kharan, seems to be a Muslim Tomb but the presence of several skeletons and bones and their burial systems resemble with that of the Zoroastrian ones.

There is no doubt that Balochistan has been an ancient cradle of Zoroastrian civilization and religion. The several remains, burial structures and the Tower of Silence of the Zoroastrian Religion present in various areas of Balochistan are the salient features that have revealed Zoroastrian presence in Balochistan.

Keeping in consideration the above aspects of a case study of Zoroastrianism; Balochistan is considered to be significant in the field of Archaeology. There is a great potential for more researches and excavations in various parts of Balochistan. This study, however, may draw the attention of the archaeologists and researches to conduct more extensive studies in order to bring to light the archaeology of Balochistan to the world and to propose more researches in the regions of the South Asia's ancient settlement – Mehrgarh.

References

1. Boyce, Mary. *Zoroastrians: their religious beliefs and practices*. Landon: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. 1979.
2. *District Development Profile. District Area Profile, Quetta: Planning & Development Department Government of Balochistan in Collaboration with UNICEF .2011.*
3. Hartz, Paula R. *World Religion: Zoroastrianism*. New Delhi: Viva Book Pvt. Ltd. 2008
4. Hinnells, John R.. *Persian Mythology*. Hong Kong: Chancellor Press. 1985
5. Hasan, Brigadier (Rtd) M. Usman. *Ancient Dukmas in Baluchistan*. *Journal of Central Asia* xiii, no. 2, December: 133-121.1990
6. Kakar, Fazal Dad. *Exploration of Arhcaeological Sites in Northern Balochistan and their Cultural Relationship with the Adjacent Regions*. Edited by Dr. Ahmed Nabi Khan. *Pakistan Archaeology (The Department of Archaeology and Museums Ministry of Culture and Sports Govt. of Pakistan)*: 124-125.1990.
7. *Pakistan Census. POPULATION BY MOTHER TONGUE, using data from the most recent census of 1998, 1998b, <http://www.census.gov.pk/MotherTongue.htm> (accessed February 5, 2012).*
8. Mistree, Kh. P. *Zoroastrianism: an Ethnic Perspective*, Bombay.1982.
9. *Quetta District Gazetteer. Quetta: Balochistan Archives department 2004.*
10. Yusufzai, Rahimullah. *Let Us Build Pakistan . March 23. Zoroastrianism in Balochistan/The tragedy of Balochistan's minorities , 2011-by Rahimullah Yusufzai.htm (accessed Dec 5, 2014).*