

CHAPTER II

OLD SITES IN THE SALT RANGE AND SHĀHPUR DISTRICT

SECTION I—SIMHAPURA REVISITED

AFTER concluding the investigations relating to Alexander's campaign, it was my intention to utilize such time as might remain available before the official arrangements for my tour in Persian Balūchistān were completed, for visits to sites of archaeological interest in the neighbouring parts of the Salt Range and of the plain south of it. To the former I was particularly attracted by the fact that the vicinity of Ketās had as long ago as 1889 seen my first antiquarian field work. A renewed visit to that ground would offer an opportunity also of seeing something of the routes which, as previously mentioned, cross the Salt Range to the Jhēlum west of the road past Āra and Nandana.

On December 2nd we started from Āra, where inquiries in the village had produced several Indo-Scythian and later Kuṣana and Shāhi coins, evidence of the locality having been occupied in pre-Muhammadan periods. Moving westwards between the two more or less parallel hill chains of the Salt Range over ground well wooded in places we passed, in the small basin of Pāthak, an interesting small ruin of Muhammadan times. It is a domed tomb built with carefully dressed slabs of sandstone, which, in spite of much damage, still rises to a height of about 20 feet over a cella of 14 feet 6 inches square. Judging from certain features, showing a mixture of Hindu and Saracenic architecture, the structure can scarcely be much later than the sixteenth century.

Continuing across partly cultivated plateaux divided by gently sloping heights we passed, at the village of Umbrīla, the point where the road diverges to Chakwāl and thence on towards Rawalpindi and Taxila. The day's march ended at the large village of Bishārat, situated at an elevation of nearly 3,000 feet. Here, as throughout the Salt Range, it was interesting to observe how large a proportion of the able-bodied men had served in the Indian army and were drawing reserve pay or pension. There is good reason to believe that this tract with its barren hills and limited arable land has all through historical times bred a martial population just as now, when it forms a chief recruiting ground of