

rock salt has been worked probably from very early times. Excavations which have produced *inter alia* a vast hall up to 300 feet in height, before the introduction of modern methods of mining, must have proceeded for centuries. But the inquiries made through the obliging superintendent in charge yielded no information about old remains. The salt-mines of the Salt Range are mentioned both by Strabo and Pliny,<sup>1</sup> and as the former distinctly places them in the country of Sōpeithes, whose palace, as we are told by Arrian, lay on the Hydaspes three days' journey below Boukephala and Nikaia,<sup>2</sup> it appears probable that the mines of Khewra, the greatest and best known among them, certainly since medieval times, were worked already in the days of Alexander's invasion.<sup>3</sup> But no doubt salt was then worked at other available spots also, just as it was up to the time of the British annexation. The salt formation marked usually by overlying brick-red gypsum crops out along almost the whole of the southern face of the range.

The object of the tour started after reaching the old town of Bhēra on December 10th, was to gain acquaintance with any old sites to be traced along the Jhēlum as far as its course lies within the Shāhpur District. The tour was subsequently to be extended to the sandy tract of the Thal within the Miānwālī District east of the Indus, where reports of extensive mounds suggested early occupation of ground now abandoned to the desert. The town of Bhēra on the left bank of the Jhēlum, still an important local centre, retains the name of an ancient territory which Fa-hsien, coming from Bannu (*Po-na*) and crossing the Indus about A.D. 401, mentions under the name of *Pi-t'u* (Bhedā).<sup>4</sup> It is known that the present site of the town has been occupied only since the time of the Emperor Shēr Shāh, who about A.D. 1540 moved it there from the right bank of the river, where Bābur on his first invasion of the Panjāb, A.D. 1519, had still found it.<sup>5</sup>

The site of 'Old Bhēra', as it is still locally known, is represented by a large debris-covered mound situated to the north of the village of Ahmadābād close to the hamlet of Sardār-kōt, and about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles across the river from Bhēra.<sup>6</sup> The mound rests on an outcrop of sandstone not far from the right bank of the

<sup>1</sup> See Strabo, *Geographia*, xv. xxx ('in the country of Sōpeithes there is a mountain of salt got by quarrying which could supply all India', a statement perfectly true); regarding Sōpeithes or Sōphytes, see below, note 8. Pliny, *Historia nat.* xxxi. vii, §77, mentions Mount Oromenus in India among the mountains that are formed of native salt.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Anabasis*, vi. ii. 2; iv. 1. About the location of Sōpeithes's palace, see below, p. 60.

<sup>3</sup> For a full account of the Khewra salt-mine and

its working, also of what is known of its history, see Talbot, *Gazetteer of the Jhelum District*, pp. 187 sqq., with references to earlier publications.

<sup>4</sup> See Beal, *Si-yu-ki*, p. xxxiv; Giles, *Travels of Fa-hsien*, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> See *Memoirs of Bābur*, transl. by Mrs. Beveridge, p. 382; also Talbot, *Gazetteer of the Jhelum District*, p. 38.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Cunningham, *Archaeol. Survey Report*, v. p. 96.