

jhelum

CITY OF THE VITASTA

Salman Rashid



SANG-E-MEEL PUBLICATIONS

25, SHAHRAH-E-PAKISTAN (LOWER MALL) LAHORE.

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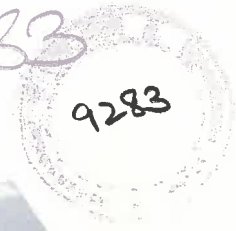


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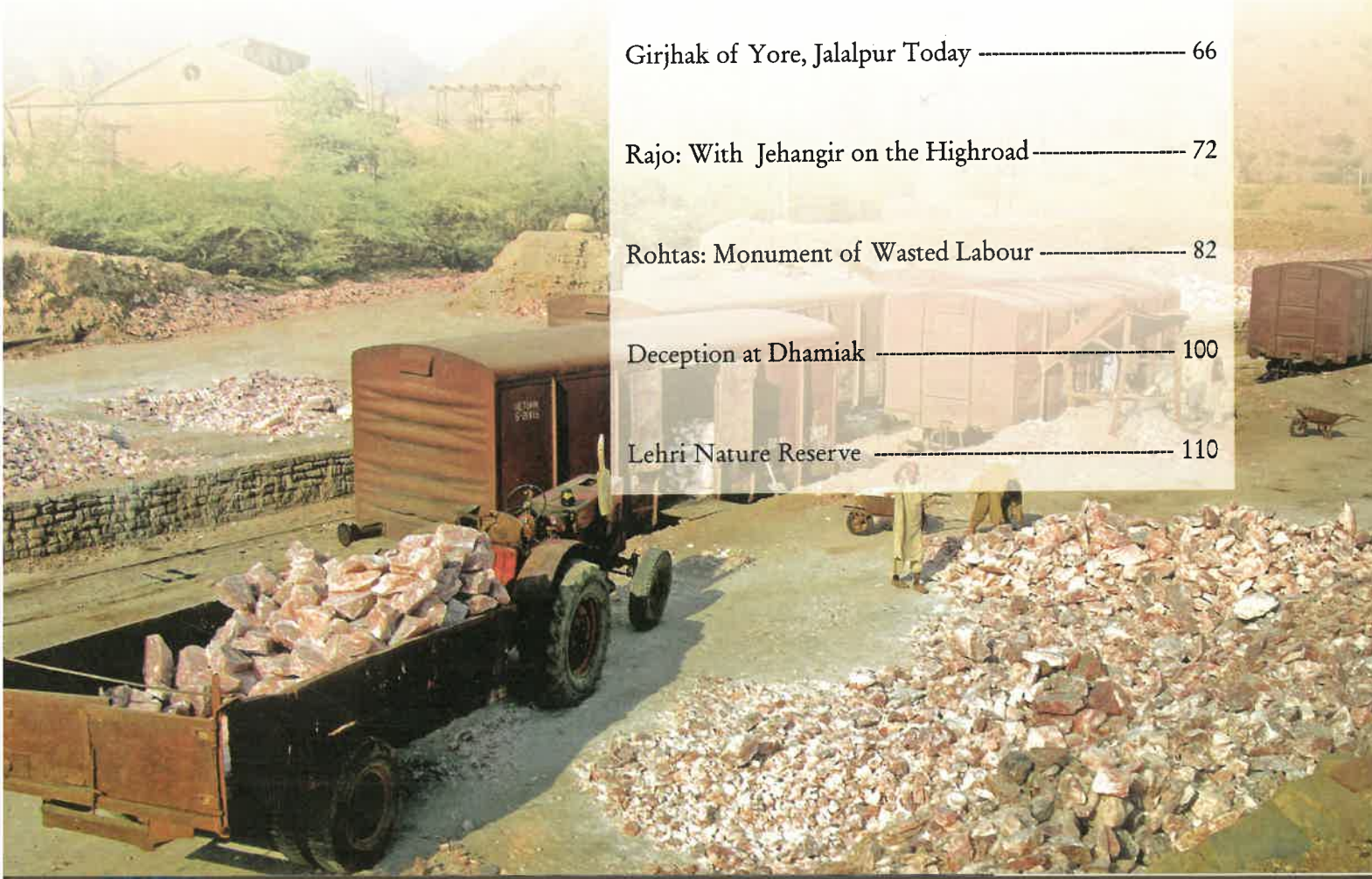
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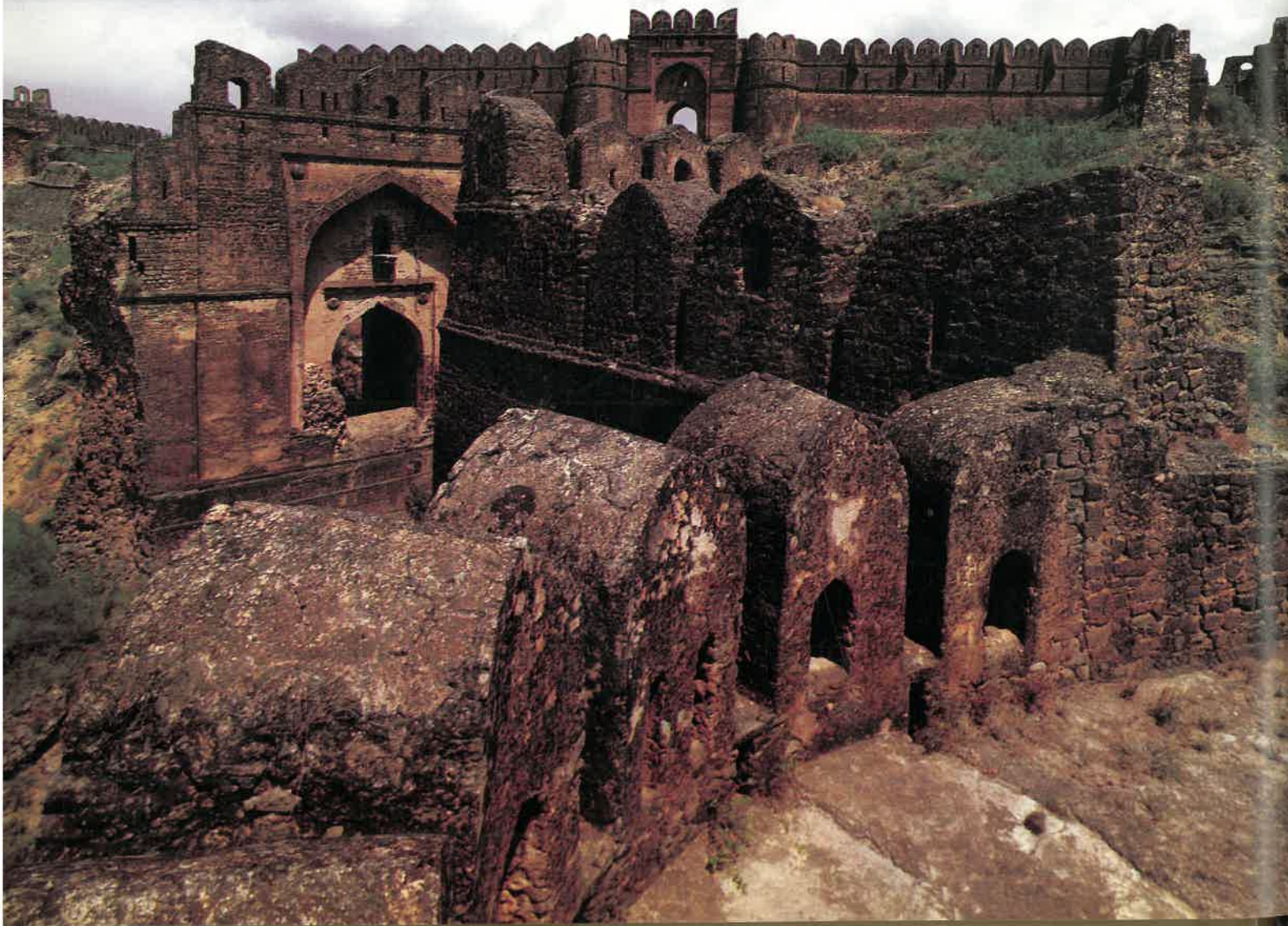
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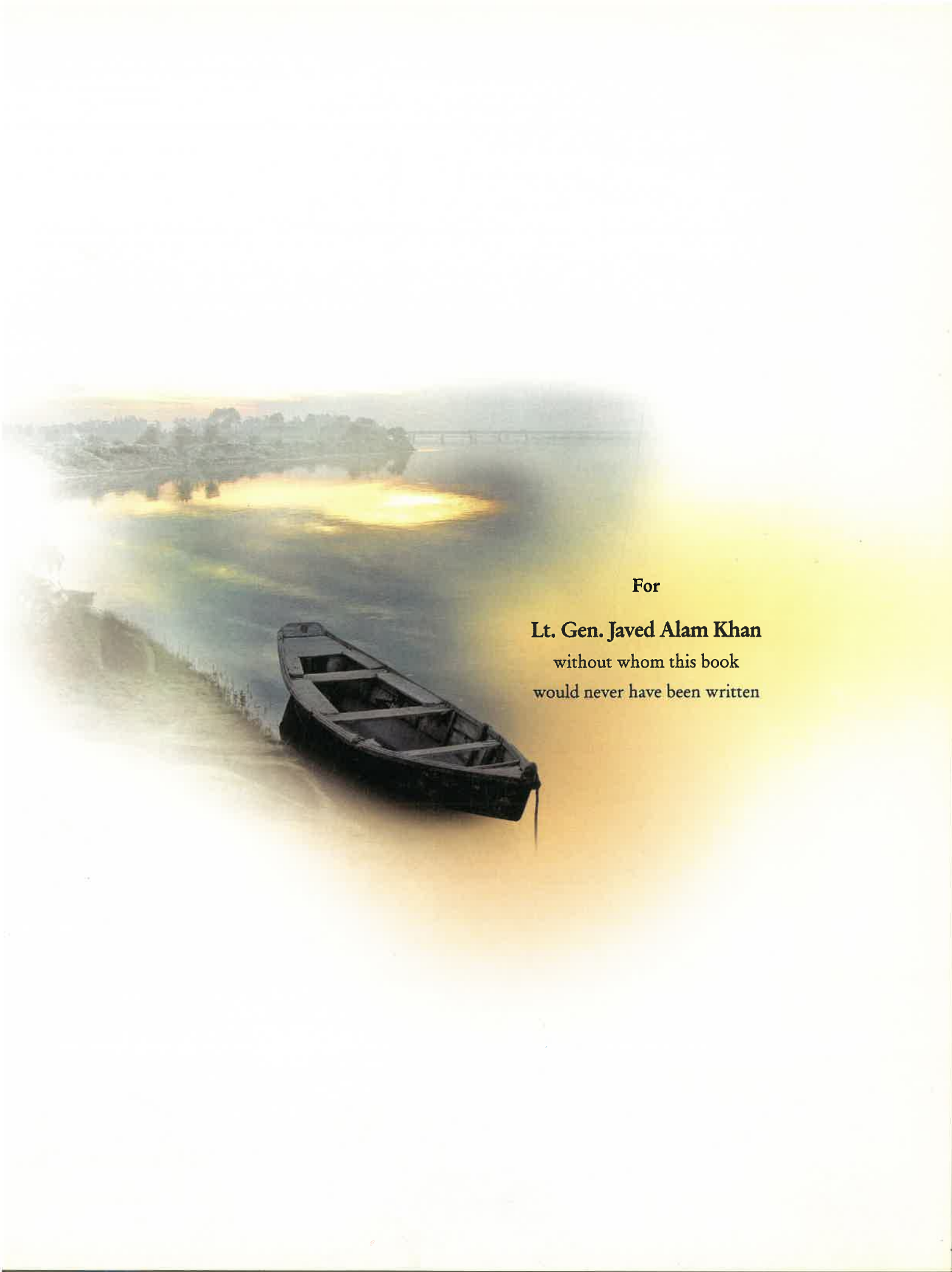
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Nadeem Khawar





For

Lt. Gen. Javed Alam Khan

without whom this book
would never have been written



Preface

In April 2004 I was put in touch with Farrukh Altaf Chaudry by my friend and mentor Lt Gen Javed Alam Khan. Farrukh was the District Nazim, Jhelum who I knew only as the son of the late Altaf Hussain Chaudry. The senior Mr Chaudry had served two terms as governor Punjab in the 1990s and, although I had never had the pleasure of meeting him, I knew of him as a great reader of books. The reading habit, increasingly rare in Pakistan, had rubbed off on to the son.

Farrukh wanted a book on Jhelum district. Having written *The Salt Range and the Potohar Plateau* only a few years earlier, I felt this would be almost a repeat. Farrukh insisted and I eventually succumbed. That was just as well, because Jhelum district too has a few good tales to tell.

In Jhelum as in all other places, local 'historians' were assiduously applied to the task of inventing history. Sometime since the first European historian did his researches in the area and the present, 'Jhelum' had become the name of Alexander's horse. I was surprised to discover locally printed histories carrying on and on about the famous horse that died at Jhelum and gave the town its name. All of these so-called histories have been printed in the last thirty or so years which implies that this industry of pseudo-history became fashionable in the very recent past.

There were other stories about the name as well. The stories were so far-fetched that I became obsessed with reaching some sort of conclusion on the name of Jhelum. I did discover a few truths, but, I must concede, it was impossible to unravel where the word Jhelum originates. Surely this is the much-corrupted form of an original word.

This was a multi-media venture: besides this book, our team also produced a thirty-minute documentary on the district. In the course of the fieldwork, our team was provided logistic and administrative support by the district government for which a very special thanks goes out to Farrukh Altaf. Thanks is also due to Manzar Shah, the District Sports Officer, Jhelum who was always at hand to sort things out for us. Despite his failing health, Professor Chaudry Fazal Hussain was very kind to spend an entire morning with me to share his memories of Jhelum town in the decade preceding independence. Thanks also to Tariq Masood and Talib Hussain of the Punjab Archeology Department for pointing me in the right direction whenever I called in.

Thanks is also due to Mr Niaz Ahmad of Sang e Meel Publications for his support. Naseer Baloch of Topical and his team designed this book in record time. I am grateful to him, and especially to Aamir Ali, for this eye-catching design in such a short time.

Last of all, but most importantly, the district government under Farrukh Altaf Chaudry needs to be commended for financing and supporting this venture. In Pakistan where intellectual undertakings rarely, if ever, receive official sanction, this book and the television documentary are a singular first: since their advent four years ago, no other district government in the entire country could come up with such an idea. I had known such support coming from enlightened bureaucrats in the past. This was the first time ever that an educated, well-read politician had taken interest in such activity.

All the bridges that Farrukh has built and all the roads he has improved are one thing. Decades from now when those roads and bridges are redone, the plaques that they currently bear will be rewritten and Farrukh's good work might be forgotten. But as long as this book remains in print, it will be acknowledged that Farrukh Altaf Chaudry was a man of rare substance to have thought of supporting this venture. Moreover, with all the stories that he can tell of his native Jhelum, he needs be acknowledged as the keeper of lore.

Salman Rashid

January 2005

odysseus@beaconet.net

PUNJAB.

Map of the Old Jhelum District

(No. 3).

Scale—1 Inch = 5 Miles.

10 5 0 5 10 Miles.



REFERENCES

Head-quarters of DistrictJHELMUM
 Head-quarters of TahsilCHAKWAL
 Head-quarters of ThanaDOMELI
 Census Towns over 20,000
 Census Towns over 10,000
 Others
 Villages
 District and Tahsil Boundary
 Railways
 Metalled Road
 Unmetalled Road
 River
 Police Out-postsNila

Schools { Anglo-Vernacular A.V.
 Vernacular V.
 High H.
 Middle M.
 Primary Pr.
 Dispensaries
 Post OfficesP.
 Telegraph=

REST HOUSES

District
 PoliceP
 Public Works DepartmentI
 Salt (Customs)S

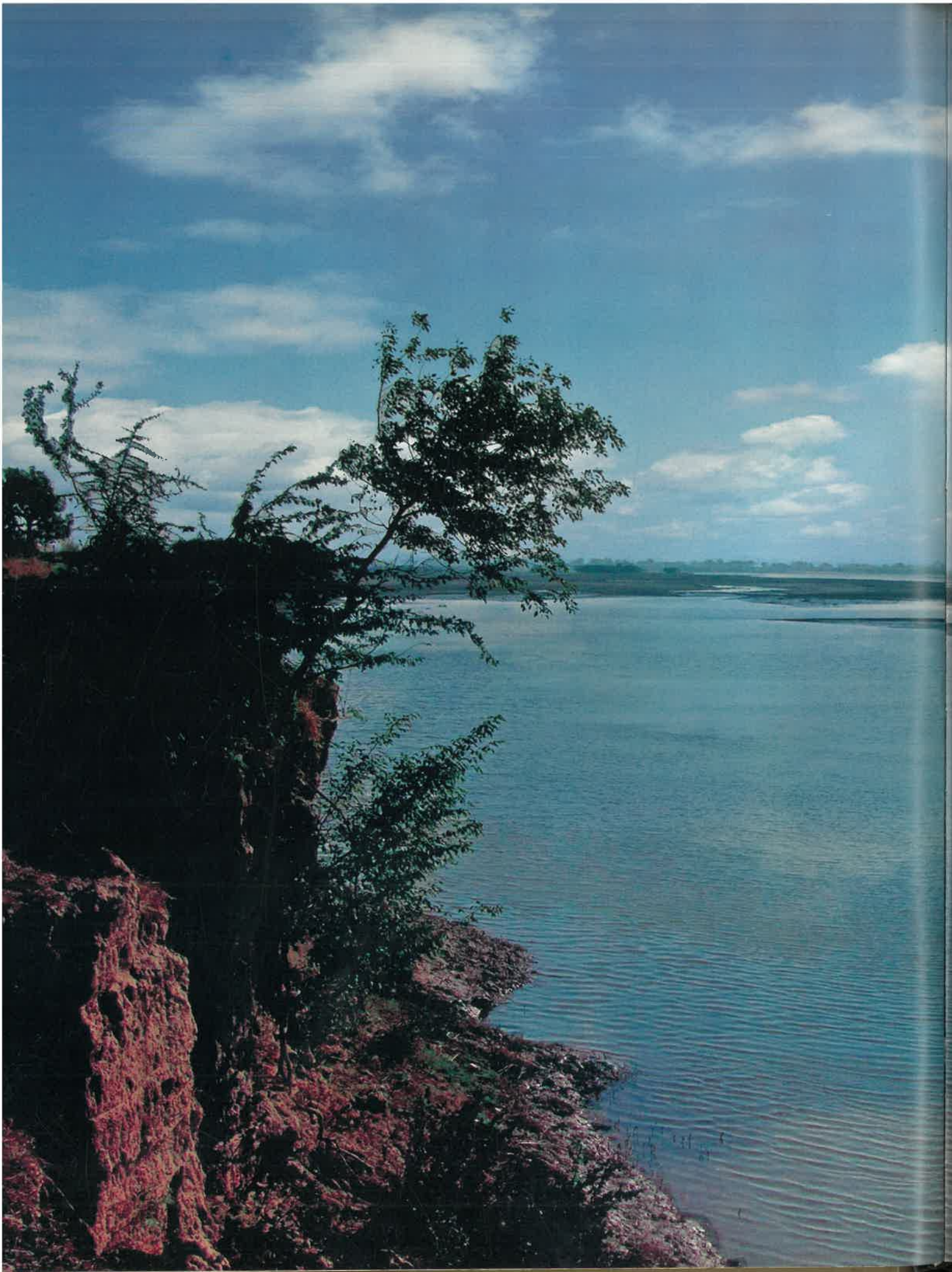


Jhelum: City of the Vitasta

The sons of Jhelum tell stories regarding the name of their town and the river that give their district its name. The favourite among these, and also the most widely believed, is that Jhelum was the name of a horse owned by that most celebrated of all classical warrior kings, Alexander of Macedonia. Jhelum was the horse, it is said, that had carried the young king across the world on his enviable career of conquest and glory. According to this legend, the horse's fortune ran out when it was either killed in battle or died of natural causes on the site where the city of Jhelum now stands. The devastated Alexander immortalised his steed by giving its name to the city where it died.

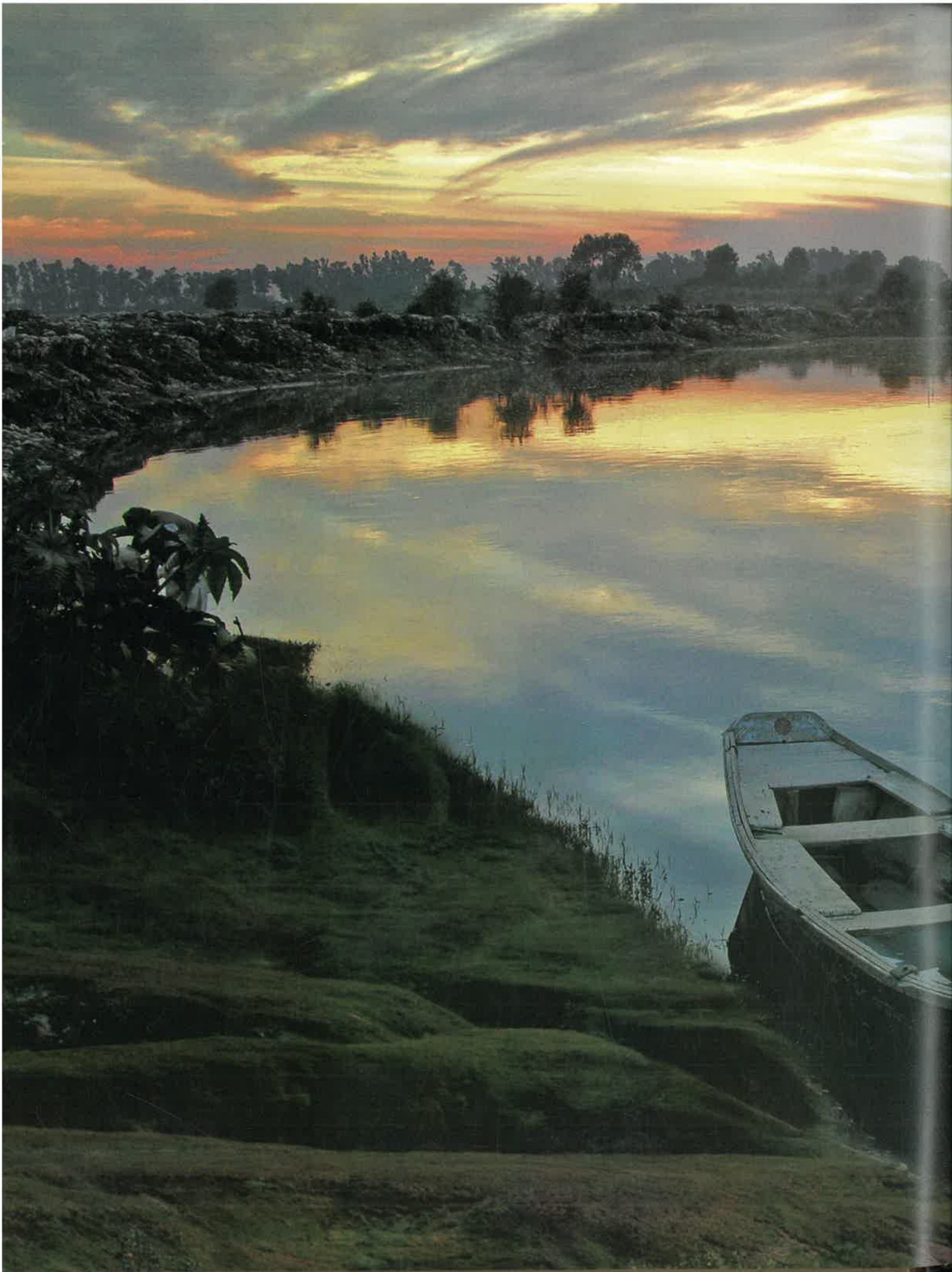
Then again, local self-assigned intellectuals tell, with great gravity of countenance, that Jhelum is a compound of two Greek words: Jul and Hum. The former meaning 'water' and the latter 'cool.' That is, the Greeks, given as they were to drinking the water of frigid mountain streams and not finding any in the land of the Sindhu River, were so taken in by the coolness of this river that they gave it a Greek name. Needless to say that these Greeks are said to be none other than Alexander and his great horde. The last, in this list of mindless stories is that the word Jhelum signifies 'hoof mark' in Greek and is so called because Alexander's trusted charger left a mark on the soft ground at this spot.

The horse would have left not just one hoof mark at Jhelum, it surely must have left its autograph in a few million spots across the Asiatic landmass from the moment Alexander set out of Macedonia on his remarkable career of military excellence. If one were to believe this story, it would be natural to ask of the special quality of this one hoof mark for it to have become the name of a town where those millions of others failed. But the truth is that as Jhelum does not resemble the Greek words for cool water, so too does it get nowhere near the Greek for hoof mark. Then again, neither is the water of the Jhelum at this latitude exceptionally chilled to have inspired such a name.





*Despite being
tamed by Mangla
Dam, the Jhelum
River, though a far
cry from the Wide-
Spreading River of
the Vedas, is still a
formidable
waterway. At the
best of times it is
now about a
kilometre and a
half wide.*





*Sunset on the
Jhelum. The span
seen in the
background is the
road bridge opened
in August 1968.
Above the bridge to
the right of the
picture, the outline
of Tilla Jogian is
visible against a
reddish gash in the
overcast sky.*

It is altogether another thing that Pundit Kalhana, the author of the 12th century masterpiece, *Rajatarangini* (Chronicle of Kings), which tells the story of medieval Kashmirian rulers does indeed notice the coolness of the Vitasta's water. In his ode to Srinagar, the Pundit goes, 'Where else do the inhabitants on a hot summer day find before their houses water like that of the Vitasta [cooled] by large lumps of snow?' (Book III, Para 362). However, long before the chilled water could reach the balmy climes of Jhelum town, the cooling snow would have melted and the water turned warm.

Lastly, Alexander did not ever own a horse called Jhelum and it boggles the mind how the fiction was ever invented. Alexander's favourite charger was the dark stallion that he called Bucephalus. This was that spirited horse that a dealer had brought to the court of King Philip, Alexander's father. The snorting, kicking and highly energetic horse refused to permit anyone to mount it. When the best equestrian experts had failed at so much as calming the nervous horse let alone riding it, Philip was incensed. He ordered the horse and the owner to be removed from his presence. Alexander who was standing by, so history records, commented on the loss of a great horse only because royal grooms either could not or did not know how to handle it.

An angry Philip rebuked his son for the insolence. But Alexander returned that he could handle the horse if only he were permitted. And so father and son settled a wager: if Alexander could not control the horse, he was to pay the price of the animal, but if he succeeded, the horse would be Philip's gift to him. The court in attendance burst out in laughter: the king's most skilled horsemen had fallen well short of mastering that feisty stallion, and here was this stripling of a boy wanting to give it a shot. What presumptuousness!

Taking the reins from the handler, Alexander turned the horse's face to the sun and, as if by magic, the horse calmed. It was only then realised that with its back to the sun, the horse was being spooked by its own shadow. Stroking its broad forehead, Alexander sprang lithely onto its back and there in full view of the multitude, raced the handsome animal around the carnival ground. It is perhaps apocryphal that as Alexander finally drew rein and came up to his father, Philip said, 'My boy, you must find a kingdom big enough for your ambitions. Macedonia is too small for you.'

But it is history that Alexander mastered the horse. It is also history that Philip acquired the horse for his son and that the boy named it Bucephalus, a compound of the Greek words for 'ox' and 'brow.' The name was chosen because of the horse's broad forehead that Alexander likened to that of an ox. By another account, this breed of horses from Thessaly were branded on the shoulder with the sign of an ox's head, a practice that gave the breed its name. Be that as it may, from then on, it was Bucephalus alone that carried Alexander and Alexander was the only one to ever mount the horse.

In the brief period when his parents were estranged and he as a teenager was in exile in Epirus with his mother Olympias, he would have ridden Bucephalus in the wooded glens hunting deer and wild boar, fighting imaginary foes and dreaming great dreams. Only a few years later, this horse carried him to the Illyrian campaigns in Europe, then across Turkey, Palestine, Egypt and back into Mesopotamia. Alexander rode Bucephalus into the last battle against the cowardly Darius of Persia and into Central Asia, Afghanistan and so to the banks of the Jhelum River. The horse did indeed die on the Jhelum River in the district that shares its name with the river. But for that story, we will wait until we get to the spot where the death took place.

The assiduity of the creators of these farcical legends is remarkable. It is as amazing as is their contempt for reading real history and their remoteness from books and learning. In the absence of erudition, these men of pretence parade such pseudo-wisdom. Equally remarkable is the fascination with Alexander and things Greek: the horse's name (it is ironically not that of Raja Paurava's horse), the words for hoof mark

and cool water are all contrived to come from the Greek and are connected with Alexander. All these concoctions are very recent, however. They do not belong to the body of ancient folklore. Indeed, these stories were unknown as little as a hundred years ago and became fashionable after 19th century European researches into the Macedonian conqueror's march through the district.

None of these fanciful stories, however, unravel the chicken-and-egg conundrum regarding which came first: the name of the river or that of the city? In an attempt to solve the riddle, first the river. Its earliest recorded name is Vitasta given it by the singers of the Vedic hymns some four thousand years ago. Until more of the prehistoric Indus Valley script is discovered and deciphered and we learn the ancient names of the various rivers that paid tribute to the mighty Sindhu, Vitasta, therefore, remains the earliest known title for the Jhelum River.

The Rig Veda, a collection of arguably the most beautiful poetry ever contrived by the human mind, celebrates among other things the rivers of the subcontinent. Having come from their home on the windy, largely tree-less steppes of Central Asia, the horse-riding speakers of Aryan languages had seen only rivers restricted in narrow channels; rivers whose output varied only slightly from winter to summer. They were unacquainted with rivers that could spread more than three or four kilometres during the spring and summer floods. And in monsoon floods three or four times even more. Four thousand years after the Aryan arrival in the land of the Sindhu River, an English explorer of the 19th century was to record, for example, that this river, swelled by summer thaws, flooded the plain between Shikarpur and its bed at Rohri. That is, some thirty-eight kilometres of flat farmland and forest.

As for the Jhelum, we hear from reliable sources of the variation between its summer and winter spread. In the month of January 1836, Baron Carl von Hugel, an Austrian traveller, who journeyed from Kashmir to Punjab, crossed the river at Jhelum town. This was the time of year when our rivers are naturally at their lowest. The boat-bridge, so the Baron records, comprised of twenty large boats. Though he does not comment on the breadth of the channel, such a boat-bridge would have spanned a hundred and fifty to two hundred metres of river. William Moorcroft, a most remarkable veterinary doctor who worked for the East India Company, crossed at the same spot in October (some fifteen years before von Hugel) and found the river to be 'a hundred and fifty yards' wide. A decade even earlier, it was Mountstuart Elphinstone who crossed at Jalalpur during the floods of July. The river was then 'one mile, one furlong and thirty-five perches,' that is, just over two kilometres wide.

The name Vitasta, as given it by the singers of Vedic hymns, shows that those ancient people first became acquainted with the river during the summer floods. The name, based on an ancient unit of linear measure called *vitasti*, very likely signified Wide Spread. For those ancient poets, the Jhelum was the river that flowed across a wide floodplain. One particular hymn of the Rig Veda very eloquently praises this river as well as several others, with special reverence for the Sindhu. The terms of the hymn are so flattering that they show how deeply the sight of these wide, fast-flowing streams had moved the newcomers. And so the river whose old pre-Aryan name, for want of decipherment of the Indus Valley script, will perhaps not be known for many years to come, is first introduced to us as the Vitasta – the Wide-Spreading River.

It will not be out of order to record here the ancient Vedic legend concerning the origin of the Vitasta River. After Kashmir had been created, so the story goes, the *rishi* Kashyapa (whose name Kashmir is believed to carry) requested Shiva to purify the land. Shiva therefore prevailed upon his wife Parvati to appear in the form of a river so that the land may be cleansed. And so, deep inside the underworld, Parvati took the shape of a pristine river that Shiva released by striking the ground with his trident. The gash made by his *trishul* measured one *vitasti* in width. Through this cleft did Parvati burst forth in her river manifestation. The land of Kashyapa was purified and the river was thenceforth known as the Vitasta and to this day remains the holiest of all the rivers of Kashmir.

That then was how this river was known for the next roughly one millennium and a half. Next on the scene to affect this name were the Greeks. So far as extant historical record shows, the first among these Europeans to venture into this land was Skylax. A native of Caryanda (a Greek town on the southwest coast of Turkey), he was an able sea captain in the service of the Persian king Darius the Great*. In the year 512 BCE, following royal decree, Skylax sailed down the Kabul River from present day Charsadda district to its junction with the Sindhu at Kund. Thereafter he navigated the great river all the way to the ocean in order to map its course. The report that this explorer submitted to Darius is lost, however. It is only preserved in fragment by Herodotus who wrote his nine-volume opus *The Histories*. Written in the middle of the 5th century BCE, the work earned Herodotus the title of Father of History.

The surviving Skylax fragment in *The Histories* does not mention the Vitasta River, but there is no doubt that the original survey report would have contained mention of some of the various tributaries of the great Sindhu River that Skylax would have included in his map. Consequently, we do not know what exactly the name Vitasta would have been rendered on Skylax's tongue, but it could not have been very different from what the Greeks were eventually to call it. Two centuries later we learn from the writers who accompanied Alexander the Macedonian that the Vitasta of the Vedas became the Hydaspes, the name having been corrupted according to Greek usage. All subsequent Greek writers, save Ptolemy, retain this spelling. A native of Alexandria, Ptolemy, an accomplished musician, mathematician, astronomer and geographer lived about the middle of the 2nd century CE and wrote an extensive geography of the world. In his account of India, he is the first writer of the classical period to mention the Jhelum not as the Hydaspes but the Bidaspes – a name phonetically closer to Vitasta than the Hydaspes of the others.

Still later, the Vitasta or the Hydaspes is called the Viyatta or Biyatta. This name is first used by Abu Rehan Al Beruni in his masterful *Kitab al Hind* (Book of India) that he wrote after his prolonged sojourn in the subcontinent in the second and third decades of the 11th century. It is this remarkable man who clarifies in wholly unequivocal terms another vital issue. On the river Biyatta, Al Beruni writes that it was also 'known as Jhelum, from the city of this name on its western banks....' He leaves scant room for doubt concerning the identity of Biyatta when he goes on to tell us that this river meets with the Chenab many miles south of the city that gives it its name and that the united stream then passes to the west of Multan.

Maulana Minhaj ud Din Siraj, the author of the *Tabakat e Nasiri* (completed 1260), also calls it the Jhelum. But we subsequently learn that the name Biyatta was also commonly used during the Middle Ages, that is, in common parlance the river went by both names. Babur, the founder of the Mughal empire in India, mentions the river by this name. Only the span of five hundred years between Al Beruni and Babur simplifies the name to read Behat. Concerning the name Biyatta or Behat, we get another clue from Al Beruni. In his delineation of the route from Kanauj to Ghazni, he mentions the 'river Jhelum, west of the river Biyatta...' Although scholars believe that Behat and its variations are all corruptions of Vitasta, this one statement by Al Beruni makes one wonder if at some obscure point in time, one minor tributary of the Jhelum in Kashmir, then known as the Biyatta or Behat, gave its name to the river. In the absence of research, this point remains highly debateable, however.

Historical record shows that the name Jhelum for the river was confined to Punjab only. It was altogether unknown in Kashmir even as late as the latter Middle Ages. There it was still celebrated as the holy Vitasta or Behat. Although the name Jhelum is now widely used in Kashmir, it is believed to have been taken thence by Europeans and other foreigners. Passing through Punjab and becoming acquainted with this name, these travellers peddled it around in Kashmir where it eventually became common usage.

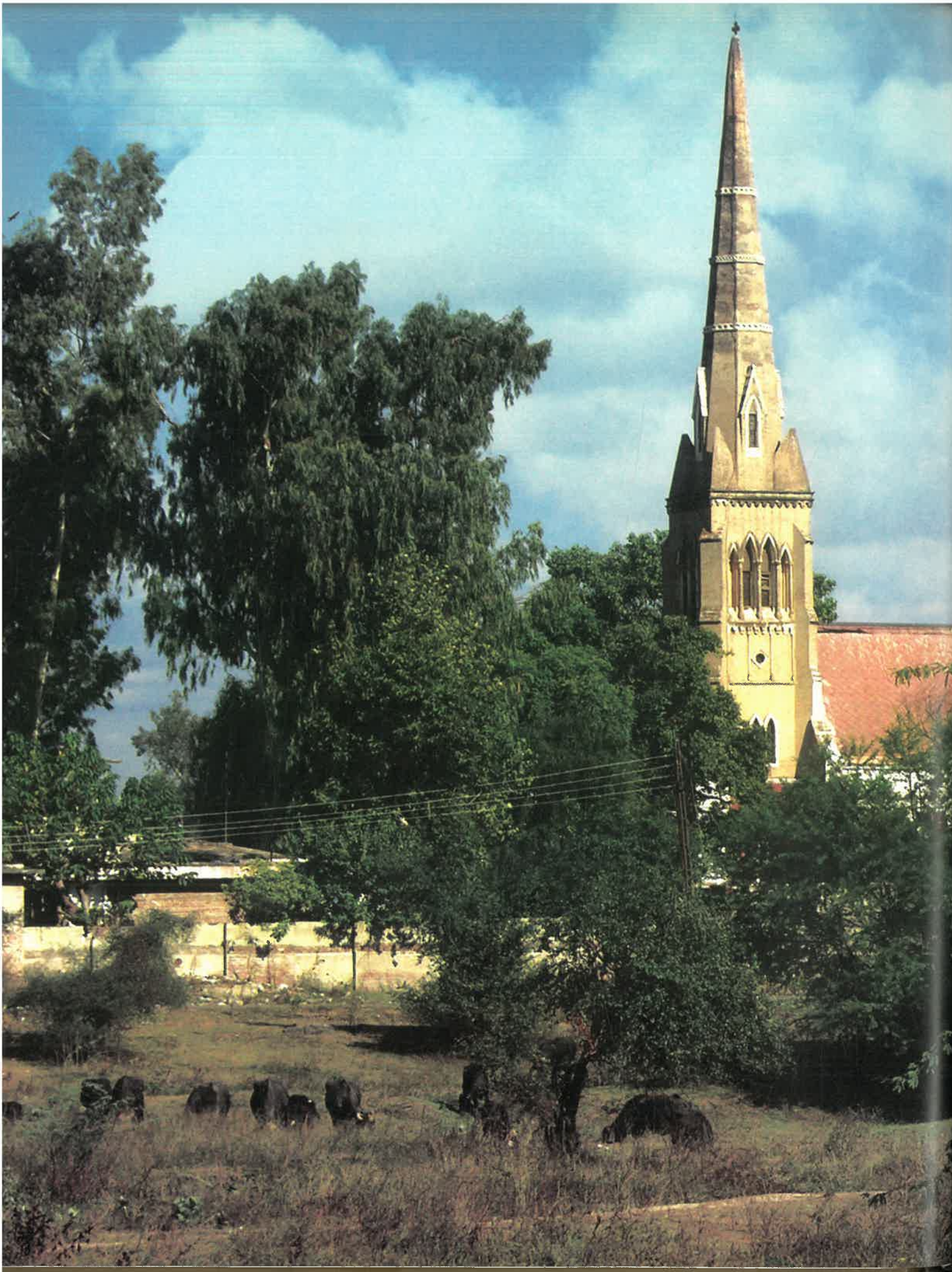
* Not to be confused with the a later king of the same name who fought against Alexander.



Bird's eye view of the main commercial area of Jhelum city.

The acquaintance of early European cartographers with this river is not devoid of interest. The oldest known map of the Indian subcontinent was that of Ptolemy from the middle of the 2nd century CE. Maps of India produced in Europe during the late Middle Ages were all copied from this and some of these copies were fabulously inaccurate. But because the original came from the Greek-speaking Ptolemy, the name of the river when it was mentioned was Hydaspes. Obviously the cartographers had read other classical writers and did not follow Ptolemy in calling the river Bidaspes. The Italian mapmaker Girolamo Ruscelli appears to have been the first one to give a fair depiction of the Bidaspes in his map of 1561. This carried on down to the early years of the 18th century when, following a century and a half of the incursions of several explorers and travellers, geographical knowledge increased significantly. Thereafter all three names, Hydaspes, Behat and Jhelum (spelled Jilam), were commonly used on maps either separately or in tandem. It was only in the beginning of the 19th century that the other names were dropped in favour of Jhelum. Whereas earlier maps depicted Rohtas, at about this time the town of Jhelum makes an appearance.

So much then of the river that takes its name from the city. We have seen above that the city of Jhelum existed as early as 1017, the year Al Beruni passed either through or near it. In the year 1246 when the bloodthirsty Mongols under Chengez Khan had set the heart of the Delhi sultanate (under Sultan Nasir ud Din the son of Iyaltimish) aquiver, the emperor sent out the doughty Ulugh Khan e Azam at the head of a large army to punish the Khokhars of the Koh e Jud, as the hills of the Salt Range were known to medieval geographers. It is recorded that the Khan made short work of large numbers of this mainly Muslim tribe and that he ravaged large parts of the Salt Range. Ulugh Khan also sacked the town of Jhelum, so the *Tabakat e Nasiri* tells us.





*St. John's Church.
Open again to
worshippers after a
closure of several
years. Once it was
situated in an open
meadow and
presented a very
picture of European
rural idyll.*



Commemorative plaque inside the church.



Now the Khokhars, a Rajput tribe of free-spirited warriors, inhabiting the Salt Range had converted to Islam some decades earlier. But many of the ostensibly more faithful believers, especially the ruling class in Delhi, believed the Khokhars' conversion was cosmetic and that they were still heathens at heart and therefore appropriate candidates to be dispatched to hell. Consequently, this visitation upon the Salt Range Khokhars was in order to chastise them for acting as guides to the invading Mongols the previous year. Their farmlands and villages in the Salt Range were laid waste. The *Tabakat e Nasiri* also records that the population was driven out to the banks of the Sindhu River – a manifest exaggeration meant to underscore the force of the emperor's arms. The city of Jhelum suffered, not because many Khokhars would have lived here. It was punished because being on the ferry, it would have been the nearest trading centre that those people would have resorted to for their various needs. And that needed disruption, so imperial forces would have reasoned.



Older residents of Jhelum recall how the town's gentry, mostly Hindus, mobbed the waterfront on summer evenings. For the richer class of sophisticated business families the sandy, tree-lined stretch was a regular picnic area. Here the men played cards; chess or the indigenous chausar while the women did their needlework.

Situated as Jhelum city was on the ford upon a major route, it should have benefited from the passage of travellers and traders. It must be remembered that such towns earned considerable revenue from octroi and custom levies. The riches thus garnered, quite naturally led to brisk commercial activity upon which cities thrived. Strangely, however, we hear no fabulous accounts of the natural trappings of a flourishing city: rich bazaars trading in merchandise from distant marts, bustling caravanserais and colleges humming with the diligence of their students. The only clue to the trivial significance of Jhelum in the 13th century is the one-line notice in the *Tabakat e Nasiri* of Ulugh Khan's sacking of it.

Two things seem evident. One, that Jhelum never matured as a trading town, that whatever scant merchandise could be seen in its bazaars was the leavings of the limited trade transiting through here. Secondly, in the presence of the busier ferries of Jalalpur, Haranpur and, even despite its bitter ground water, Pind Dadan Khan, Jhelum was the less preferred crossing point. Indeed, at the time of annexation in 1849 by the British, the town contained only five hundred houses. That is, its population was not much above three thousand souls. A far cry from a rich and prosperous town.

Maps from as late as the 17th century fail to show a town on the ferry at the geographical coordinates where Jhelum now sits. Clearly, these maps follow the description of William Finch's journey through here*. This itinerant English merchant landed at the seaport of Surat (Gujarat, India) in 1608 and over

the next three years worked his way up and around the country. Finch left an interesting account of his travels in the subcontinent. Among other things, he details the route between Lahore and Kabul in which he mentions 'Eminbade' (Eminabad near Gujranwala), 'Guzurat', 'Howaspore' (Khawaspur, on the left bank of the Bhimber River twelve kilometres north of Lala Musa) and 'Rotas.'

This itinerary would imply that en route between the Khawaspur hostelry and Rohtas, Finch crossed the river by the Jhelum city ford and would naturally have passed through the town. Whereas settlements like Eminabad and Khawaspur, much less significant today, received mention only because of the overnight facility they offered, Jhelum was ignored. After the slow and protracted river crossing, Finch would surely have paused here for refreshments and might even have sought overnight lodging. But then he may have been told of the better facility near Rohtas. He moved on, failing even to make a note of Jhelum town.



Plaques seen on the bridge

commemorating the year of commissioning and the fabricator's name. Though the

material was imported from Birkenhead in

Britain, it was put

together at the

Railway Bridge

Workshop, Jhelum.

Sprawling over many acres, this was one of

two such workshops

in pre-partition India

and now the only one in Pakistan.



thirsting for ever more accurate geographical information to update their maps that were, until then, still based on Ptolemy's prototype of the 2nd century CE, were quick to lap up such accounts. The Dutch cartographers Johannes and Cornelis Blaeu incorporated, though rather inaccurately, much of Finch's information in their 1646 map of the Mughal Empire. Others were to follow and by 1657, Nicolas

* Finch of course was not the only traveller to add to cartographers' knowledge. Other names include Edward Terry, Thomas Coryat, Ralph Fitch and William Hawkins, to name a few.



Until this mile-long rail bridge was commissioned in 1876, crossing the river could only be made by the ferry that entailed as much as three hours during the summer spates when the river was at its widest. British authorities engaged in the imperial struggle with Russia, forever worried about the inaccessibility of Peshawar and the northwest and the possibility

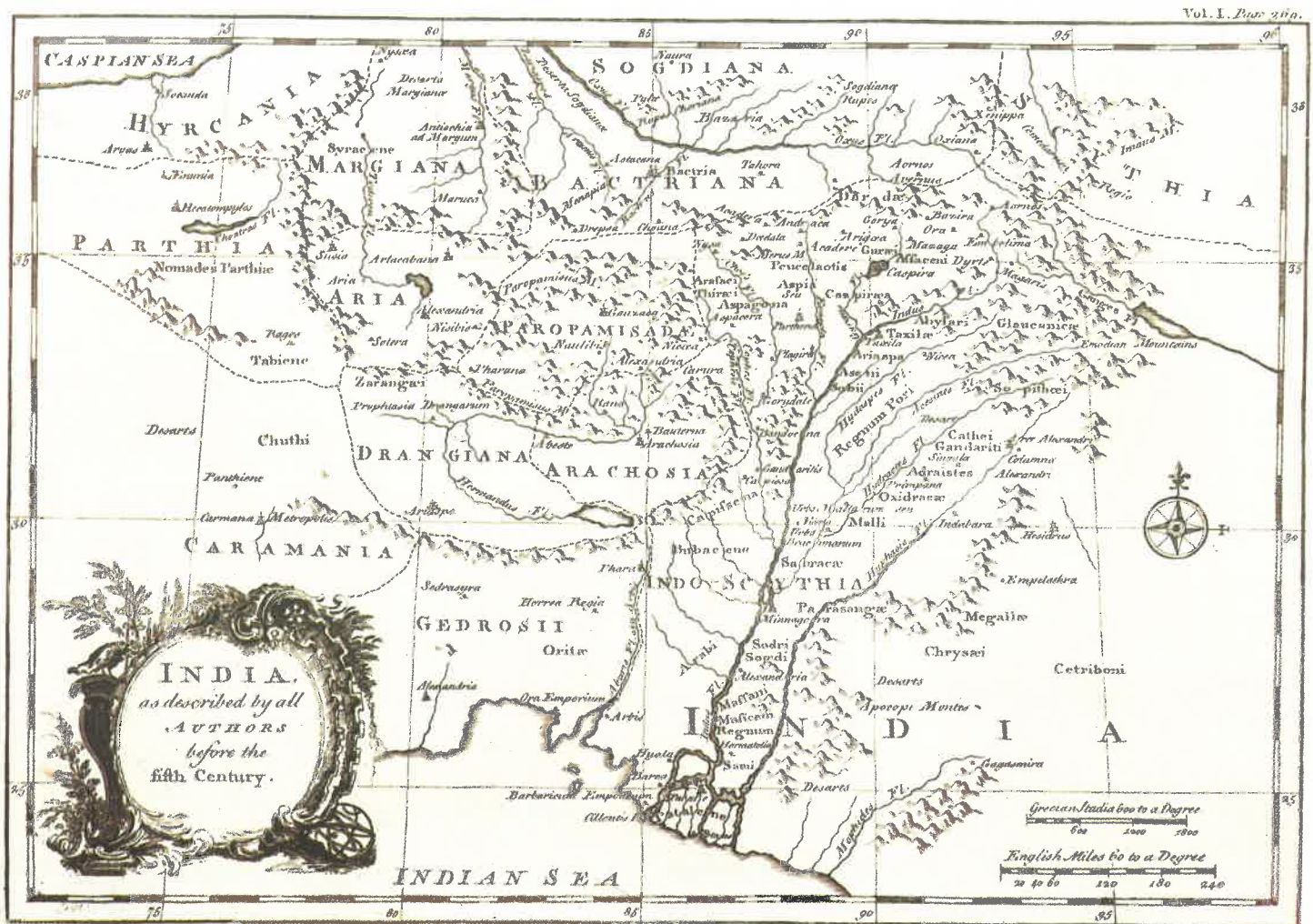
of Russia sneaking in, would have heaved a sigh of relief with the opening of this bridge. In the short hiatus between the opening of this bridge and the line's extension to Rawalpindi, Jhelum was the terminus of the Punjab Northern State Railway.

Sanson, the French mapmaker, had refined Finch's itinerary in his map. As Finch had made no reference to it, a place called Jhelum of course found no mention in any map of that age. This omission continued until the 1820s when the first depiction of Jhelum town appears on maps produced by British cartographers.

The prolonged discussion above does not unravel the riddle of the name Jhelum. It could mean anything, either in ancient Sanskrit, or an even older language. But usage over the centuries appears to have mutilated the word beyond recognition. Or it could simply have been the name of some swashbuckler who went this way sometime about the period Jhelum appears to have risen, perhaps around the beginning of the current era. But the truth is that the meaning or origin of the name is not known at this point in time. All the fables concerning the horse, its hoof mark or refreshingly cool water are just that: fables. Their greatest fault is that they have been invented by people with stilted imaginations and absolutely no learning.

The Turkish tradition of periodically plundering the subcontinent set in motion by the freebooter Mahmud in the early 11th century was faithfully followed by all other Turks, save Babur. But of him at another stage. Nadir Shah was no exception*. On his way to the plains he would have crossed the ford of Jhelum. His successor Ahmad Shah certainly did and the district of Jhelum like so many others in Punjab would have known the same half century of unrest. In 1768 a Sikh sardar named Charrat Singh of the Sukerchakia *misl* removed Pakhtun influence from Jhelum. This man was the grandfather of Ranjit Singh, who was to shortly become the most remarkable Punjabi ruler since Raja Paurava. Though the Sukerchakias together with the Bhangis of Gujrat spread their influence as far away as Rawalpindi, Afghan incursions did not halt and the country continued to see conflict and disorder.

* Erroneously believed to be a Pakhtun, Nadir Kuli (styled Shah), of humble background, was in reality a Turk of the clan Kirklu.



Shahnaz & F. S. Aijazuddin Collection.

Published in the middle of the 18th century, this map was a then modern representation of the charts and writings of classical geographers and authors. It bears all the place and tribal names that we read of in the works of the historians Arrian or Plutarch and the geographer Ptolemy. Though the geography is somewhat askew, Jhelum River is clearly marked as Hydaspes Fl.



Shahnaz & F. S. Aijazuddin Collection.

The geography of northern Punjab is clearly influenced by the information of early British travellers in the subcontinent. Whereas, 'Rotas' is seen west of 'R. Behut', we find no mention of Jhelum in this map prepared in the early years of the 19th century.

Peace returned only after 1799 when the Sikhs under Ranjit Singh routed Shah Zaman, the successor of Ahmad Shah, on the ford of Rasulnagar (on the Chenab in Gujranwala district). Punjab then became the empire of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the pathetic rulers following Ahmad Shah in Afghanistan were no longer a threat. By 1809 the Sikhs had overrun the Salt Range and the Potohar region and were controlling Rawalpindi. But while Chakwal, Kusak and Malot in the heart of the Salt Range caught the attention of Sikh imperialists and ended up in their histories, there was hardly notice on Jhelum town.

Jhelum town came of age during the British Raj. The *Gazetteer of the Jhelum District* of 1904 makes one interesting observation that puts the preceding discussion in perspective. It says that when the district of Jhelum was constituted on 23 March 1849, the town of Jhelum was 'an ordinary village.' And this is the first word we get on the inconsequence of Jhelum through the latter Middle Ages down to the 19th century. The town, then part of Rohtas tehsil (sub-division), itself became a tehsil the following year. The district headquarter initially located at Pind Dadan Khan was moved to Jhelum in 1850. At the same time, the divisional headquarter located at Jhelum until this year was transferred to Rawalpindi.

Within the year a cantonment was established a kilometre and a half south of the town. This was a purely 'native' garrison supervised by a handful of European officers, but without any European soldiers. The first residents of Jhelum Cantt (as we like to call our cantonments) were one battery of artillery and the 14th and 39th battalions of Native Infantry. A few uneventful years passed. Then, as the civil officers of the revenue and ancillary departments went about their humdrum assignments, things began hotting up on the faraway banks of the Jumna River. The summer of 1857 saw the outbreak that we call the War of Independence and which the British know as the Mutiny.

News from the east was disconcerting. 'Natives' were in open rebellion in distant Delhi, Meerut and Kanpur and fighting was taking a heavy toll of British soldiers, women and children equally. And here in Jhelum, the only army comprised entirely of 'natives' who could not be trusted in the event of an uprising. Naturally, the alarm amongst the Europeans stationed at Jhelum was 'considerable'. With great ingenuity it was planned to split the garrison. The artillery battery was hurried off to Lahore where it was unceremoniously disarmed. The 39th Native Infantry was marched off, without magazines, that is, with effectively useless firearms, to Dera Ismail Khan via Shahpur, then the headquarter controlling what is today Khushab, Sargodha and parts of Mianwali districts. All that remained was the 14th Native Infantry which the panic-stricken Chief Commissioner wanted disarmed despite the Commanding Officer's assurances that in all circumstances they would remain loyal to the East India Company.

On the orders of the Commissioner this remaining battalion too was split, two companies being sent off to Rawalpindi. That left a little more than two companies, that is, about five hundred men, at Jhelum. Of these a good number were Sikhs who were known to have remained steadfastly loyal to Company Bahadur. But if the authorities knew of the brewing trouble, the grapevine that carried news to the common soldier was even more efficient and there was no dearth of wild and fanciful rumours among the remaining troops of the 14th. Early in the morning of the seventh day of July as a force comprising of British troops with field guns arrived at Jhelum from Rawalpindi, the Sikhs of 14th Native Infantry quickly went over.

Seeing the combined force headed in their direction, the rest of the 14th took up positions in their lines, but not before they had first given their own officers their money's worth by firing several salvos at them. The combined British-Sikh force took over six hours to dislodge the mutineers (or freedom fighters) from their position, the action costing one captain's and several soldiers' lives while seriously

wounding the commanding officer. The rebels withdrew to a village just outside Jhelum cantonment where the British field artillery was useless in the densely packed mud house-lined streets. Meanwhile, rebel rifle fire from the rooftops cut down British troops and horses in considerable numbers. With ammunition running short, British buglers sounded the retreat. The first round at Jhelum garrison was carried by the natives.

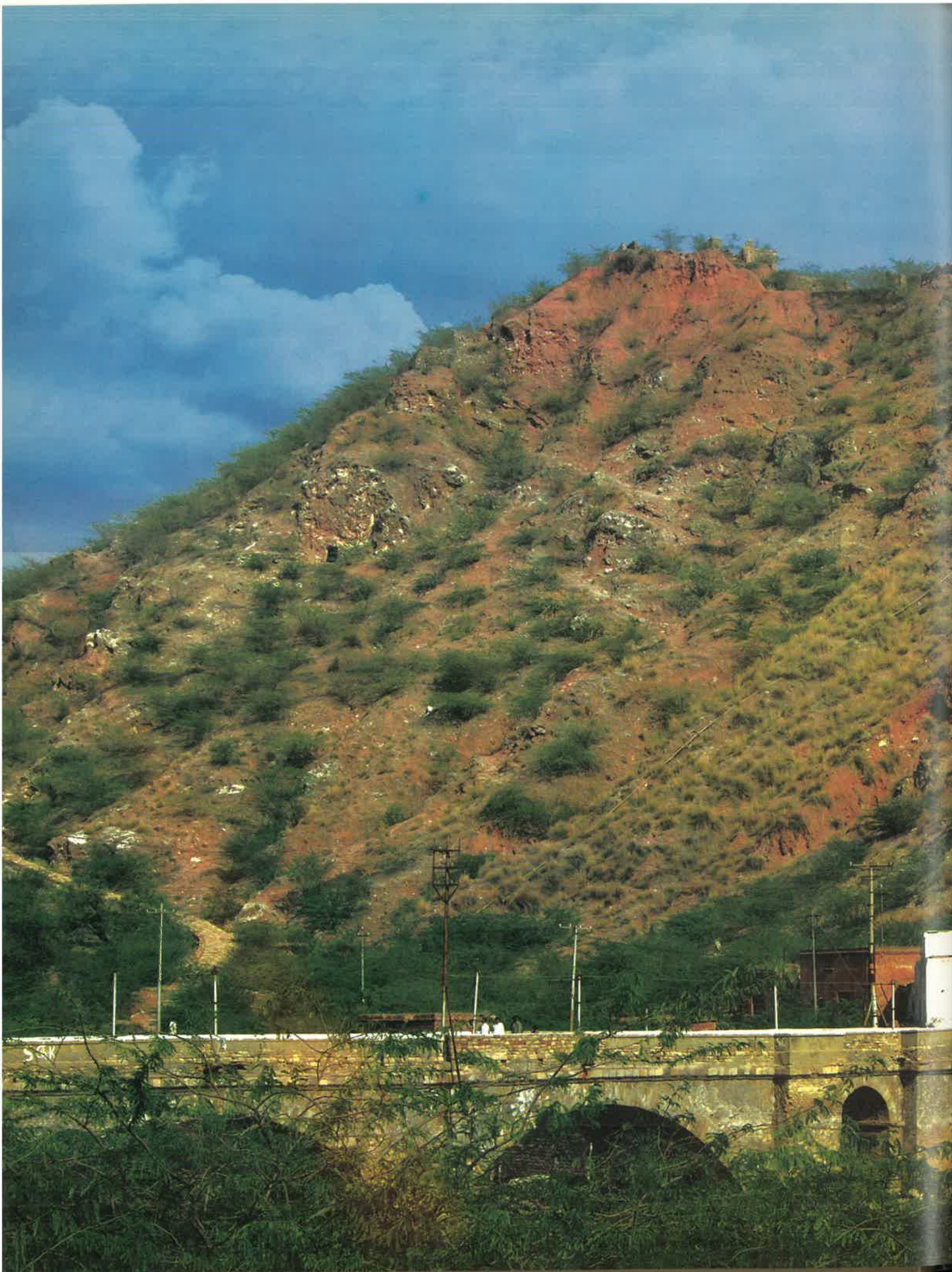
Night fell and the warring sides bivouacked at their respective positions. When the new day broke, the British were surprised to find the rebels gone. The *Punjab Mutiny Report* records that while most fled to Kashmir, a large number of stragglers was captured and many drowned in their attempt to go across the Jhelum River. One wonders if some of these drownings were forced by British troops. But dead men tell no tales and the living filed no record of such malevolence. As British troops took over the cantonment area, the battlefield of the day before revealed one hundred and forty-four rebel dead.

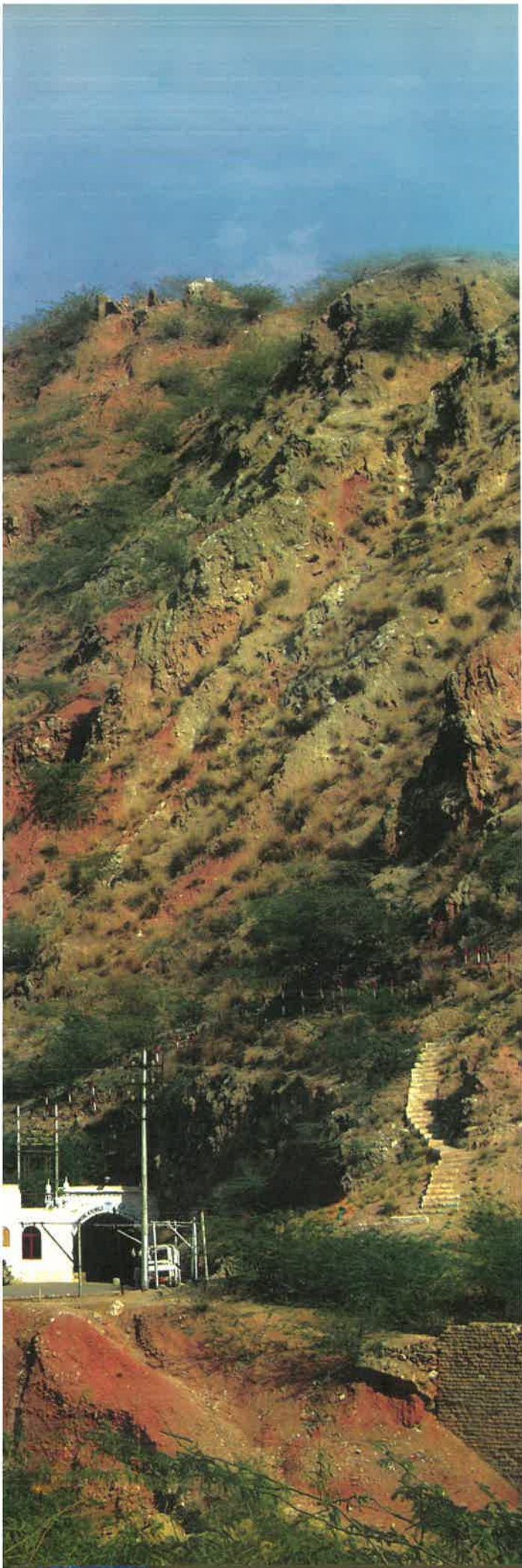
The ‘usual precautions’ that the *Gazetteer* says were taken are chillingly similar to current practice in the country. Ferries were closed (road blocks today), letters opened (phones, email intercepted) and vagrants examined (impromptu checking of mostly young men). The trouble was eventually quelled and peace returned to Jhelum. Not long afterwards some leading men were given rewards to buy their loyalty, that is, to act as official snitches. And so Jhelum settled into orderly routine.

We have learned above from Al Beruni that the town of Jhelum lay on the ‘western banks’ of the river. However, there is one curiously variant view to Al Beruni’s. The *Gazetteer* of 1904 notes, ‘The old town of Jhelum was at the left bank of the river and parts of it still exist. About the year 1532 AD some boatmen from old Jhelum established themselves on the right bank for the better management of the ferry and thus founded the modern town.’ Now, left would be the east bank, but as the author of this statement quotes no authority, the statement seems doubtful and perhaps based on hearsay. On the other hand, Al Beruni is a very reliable reporter and one would be tempted to follow him rather than the author of the *Gazetteer*. It is probable, however, that there was a satellite hamlet facing Jhelum in the Middle Ages the same way as Serai Alamgir does today. The other town may or may not have borne the same name as Jhelum but it was evidently the boatmen’s colony that served the ferry.

At the time of annexation in 1849, the old town of Jhelum (which we know contained some five hundred houses) was strung out northward along the river from the point where the railway bridge later abutted on the west bank. The length of the town was no more than a kilometre and a half while its breadth was about half as much. Northwest of the town was a low mound strewn with pottery shards to remind local people that ‘divine wrath’ had laid low an earlier habitation. It was this mound that gave up coins of the Scythians (1st century BCE), Hindu Shahyas and Kashmirian kings (5th to 10th century CE). Most houses were single-storeyed mud and wattle constructions. The grandest among all this was the small fort built during the Sikh period of which nothing remains. Lined along the river, these khaki houses would have presented a pretty picture to a traveller coming across from the east bank.

The river at Jhelum was over two kilometres broad with the west bank somewhat higher than the east. On the far side across the river there would have been a stretch of waterlogged land beyond which lay the ferry’s starting point. The *Gazetteer* records that the river formed a single broad channel during summers and two narrower ones in winter. Crossing these consumed, respectively, three hours and one hour. The boat-bridge was a winter arrangement that had to be removed when the flow became quicker in April to be re-installed sometime in October. In summer, crossing was made only by the common flat-bottomed river craft. In the event of very severe monsoon floods, even these had to be taken off and





*The opening to the
mineshaft at Khewra.
Though locals love to brag
about the mines having been
known to Alexander, the first
historical mention of the
Khewra salt mines is found
in the reign of Akbar the
Great. Khewra is the second
largest salt working in the
world (second to one in
Poland) that produces first-
class rock salt.*

there could be days on end when the Jhelum could just not be crossed. It should be of interest to the reader that the total number of ferries in those days before the web of tarmac highroads, bridges and intercity transport, was thirteen on the Jhelum River in its course through the district as we know it today.

Having recovered from the rebellion, British authorities quickly settled into the routine of empire building. The cantonment where earlier the native army was housed, were enlarged to hold European infantry and cavalry units, duly separated from native infantry lines by a couple of hundred metres of open space. Those acquainted with present day Jhelum cantonment and a map of the first one laid out post-1857, can readily see that despite substantial expansion the basic layout has scarcely changed. The biggest transformation having been brought about by the road bridge that took a year in the building and was declared open on 21 August 1968.



The old REPCO (Rawalpindi Electric Power Company) building that once housed the oil-powered generating sets to supply Jhelum town with electricity. REPCO was founded in 1932 and this establishment in Jhelum came up shortly thereafter. The generators were functioning until the 1970s when REPCO was taken over by WAPDA. Part of this building now serves as the office of the WAPDA Sub-Divisional Officer and his staff while the main hall where the generators stood (behind the big gray sliding doors) is a garage.





*The generators may well be gone,
but the office of the SDO keeps an
old safe from the early days of the
REPCO powerhouse. The safe still
bears this very interesting insignia of
the makers, W. Leslie and Company
that worked out of Calcutta, a major
centre of the steel industry in pre-
partition India. The double-jackal
symbol with the inscription 'Jackal'
between their legs is of interest.*

Earlier, the railway bridge with the rails running parallel to the tarmac also served all other wheeled traffic. But as the volume of road traffic increased, the narrow single lane, two-way tarmac made for traffic snarls and long delays. Such recurrent problems warranted the construction of the new road bridge. On the west bank, the approach road to this new crossing cut across the northeast corner of the cantonment, separating the quaint St John's church from the main military area.

The history of St John's church as preserved in an unofficial two-page hand written note is interesting, if somewhat unhappy – especially in the post-independence era. After some eight years in the building, the church was consecrated in 1857 as an Anglican house of worship. Its management was under the Cantonment Board, Jhelum. All went well until shortly after independence and the retirement of the priest in-charge. With no one left to mind it, the church was taken over by the British Station Commander of Jhelum garrison.

Petty factional differences cropped up with one party wishing to turn the church into a dancing hall, the other to convert it from the Church of England to the United Presbyterian Church. By the mid to late 1950s the last remnants of the British officers were gone, but church management, now in the hands of Pakistanis, barely limped along for the next three decades. Things came to head with the church being shut down for nearly fifteen years until it was reopened for worship in 1999. Situated in the midst of an open plain by the riverside, it was once surely the most fetching sight in all Jhelum city, particularly as one came in from across the river by train or car. In the uncluttered landscape the setting was idyllic: amidst spreading trees, its steeple rising gracefully into the blue sky, it seemed to come straight out of some English countryside. Construction around it in recent years has taken much away from the rural English idyll.

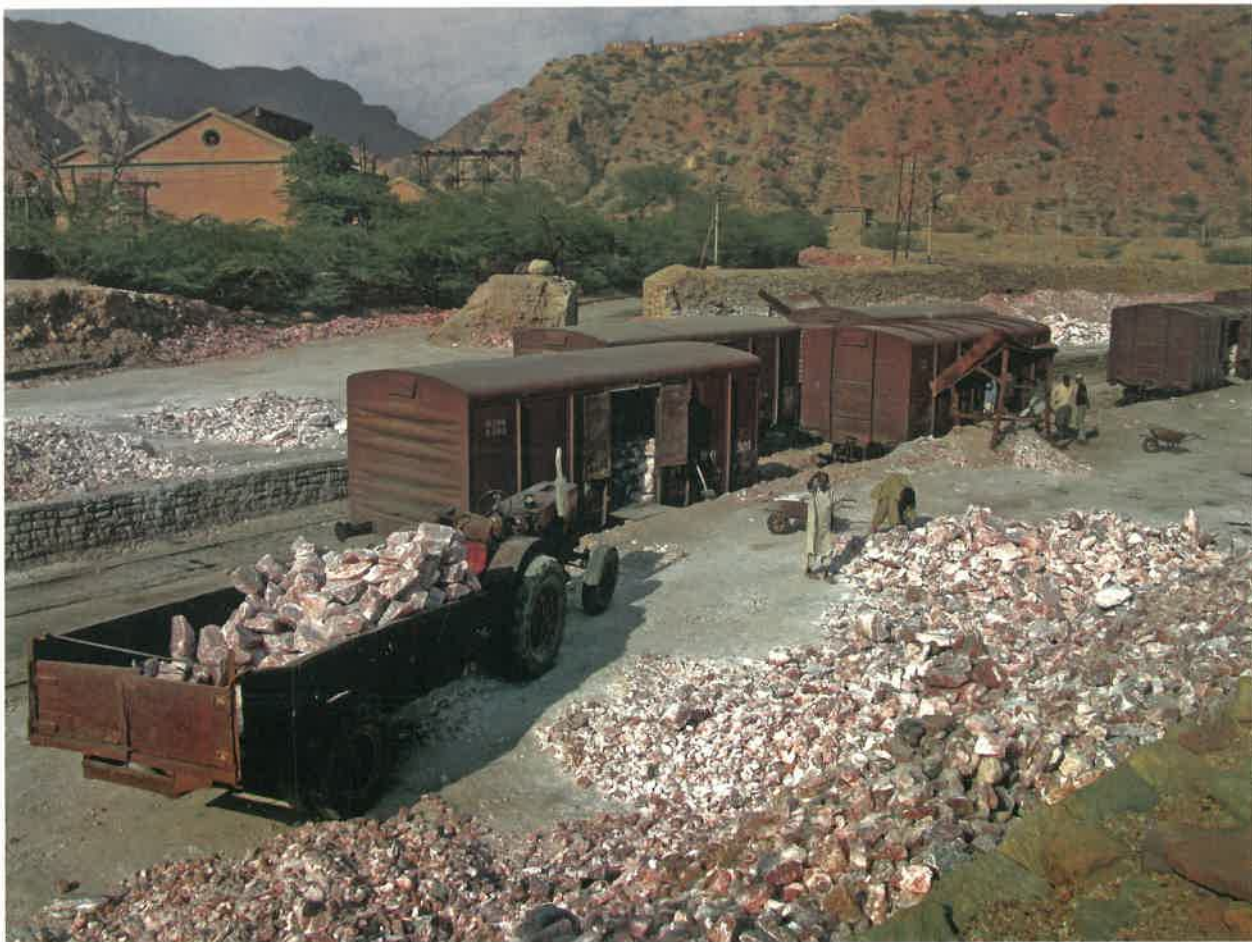
Diagonally across from the cantonment, north of the old city of Jhelum, the British laid out the civil lines together with the ancillary public offices. In a few short years after the 1857 turmoil, Jhelum was a respectable little place with all the trappings necessary for life in the 19th century. Here were functioning courts, a post office, a jail and even a public garden. Trade grew and with it the celebrated mercantile



The seemingly endless tunnels and series of cavernous chambers filled with brine in which a person could never drown make for a fabulous tourist attraction. Of late, Pakistan Mineral Development Corporation (PMDC) that manages the Khewra salt works has spruced up the interior with structures of salt bricks lit up by electric bulbs. This mosque in a tunnel is just one of several structures.

class of the subcontinent, the Parsis, came to Jhelum. They brought with them a style that was until then unknown here. The drab, mud-plastered houses began to give way to brick and masonry buildings, most of which rose through two or even three floors. Some had the distinct style of European bungalows. The local educated classes and better-off traders followed suit and before the 19th century was over, the riverfront was prime location that flaunted the best town houses.

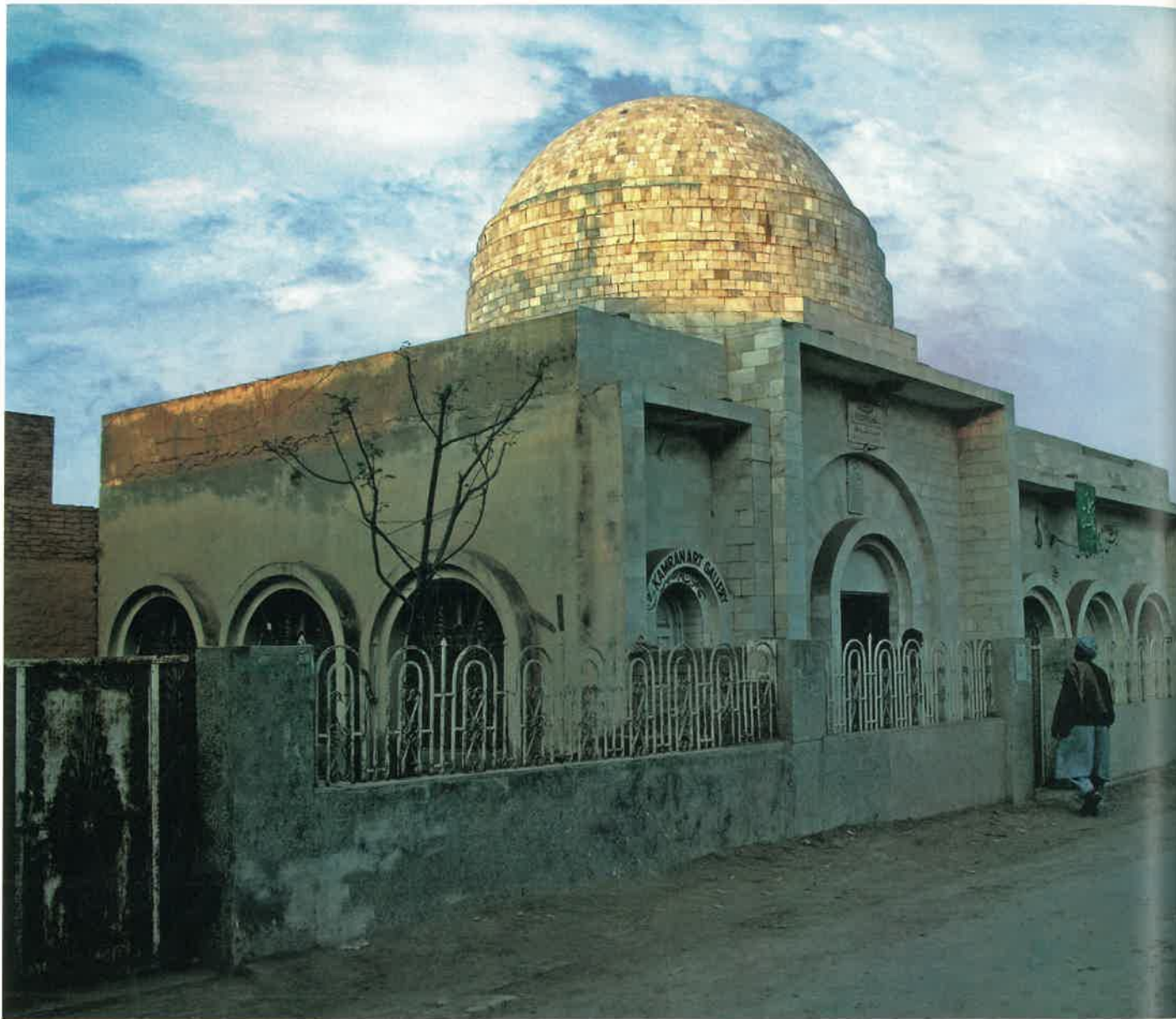
At the time of annexation, Jhelum town was singularly devoid of gardens and orchards. In the tradition they had kept wherever they had influence in India, the British established yet another 'Company Bagh.' Lying hard by the Deputy Commissioner's office and court, it would have, in its original form, spread over an estimated eight acres or so. Richly planted with fruit trees of different varieties it would have been a cool haven for man and bird alike. After independence the garden began to be eaten away



Once this salt was carted down by camel to the Pind Dadan Khan waterfront only a few kilometres away. From there it was ferried up to Jhelum in the north and Khushab in the south for further distribution. Following the spanning of the Jhelum River by the Victoria Bridge at Haranpur in 1887, the railway line was extended virtually to the mouth of the Khewra salt mines and now caters to much of the salt traffic.

by encroachments – not by lawless citizens, but by the government itself. The biggest setback was the giving over of a goodly chunk of this garden for the building of several quarters for government servants. The tall and vastly crowned mango and a couple of magnificent *sumbul* trees that still survive are the last reminders of a once beautiful garden. Today there is scant interest in the upkeep of the garden and it seems that more of it will eventually give way to construction.

Independence brought the next great upheaval in the life of Jhelum city. Her Hindu and Sikh children fled the home they had known for generations. In their stead came Muslim refugees from different parts of India. The complexion of Jhelum changed. Not many years after independence even her Parsi businessmen moved away for better prospects. From being a rather cosmopolitan place in the early 20th century, Jhelum turned somewhat parochial and an almost one hundred percent Muslim town.



The humble tomb of Dadan Khan, who founded the Pind (village) that carries his name. Dadan Khan, a chief of the Khokhar clan, was apparently a minor chieftain who does not feature in the histories of Jehangir or Shah Jehan whose contemporary he was. He founded this town about 1625, perhaps with the view that it would thrive on the salt trade. It appears to have flourished because when the British took control of Punjab they made Pind Dadan Khan the divisional headquarter. But it quickly declined in status. The culprit: brackish ground water that could not sustain growth.

Until about a hundred and twenty years ago there were two famous products from Pind Dadan Khan: embroidered lungies and good quality copper and brassware. Coupled with the trade of oil seeds, grain and ghee, these exports produced a reasonably well-off merchant class that maintained agents in marts as far away as Rohri, Multan and Peshawar. The Gazetteer of 1904 notes that trade suffered with the opening of the railway line and shifting of business to Lilla on one side and Haranpur on the other because those two markets did not have 'octroi restrictions.' This haveli, one of the last few remaining, recalls the riches garnered from the former economic activity. In recent years, Pind Dadan Khan's richer class has moved away and most of the old mansions have been pulled down.

Even the most ardent opponent of British Raj cannot but admire the railway network laid out by those wonderful, dedicated men who slaved over theodolite and plane-table during harsh Punjabi summers to plot the course of the railway line. True that like most lines in the rest of India this was not a purely commercial undertaking. This branch of what was then known as the Punjab Northern State Railway (PNSR) was more a military requirement to fight the great struggle between the imperial powers of Britain and Russia. And so it was that PNSR entered Jhelum on the sixth day of September 1876. The hours of being paddled across by ferry were a thing of the past. Even if one were not riding the train, one could now walk into Jhelum town from the east bank of the river in under fifteen minutes.

The bridge site was selected and design put forward at the end of 1870. The first trial well (for bridge piers) was sunk in the bed of the Jhelum River in the following January. The onset of summer and rise in water level brought about the interregnum that was the pattern thereafter. In October 1871, work resumed and proceeded apace through the winter until the river's rising water level in

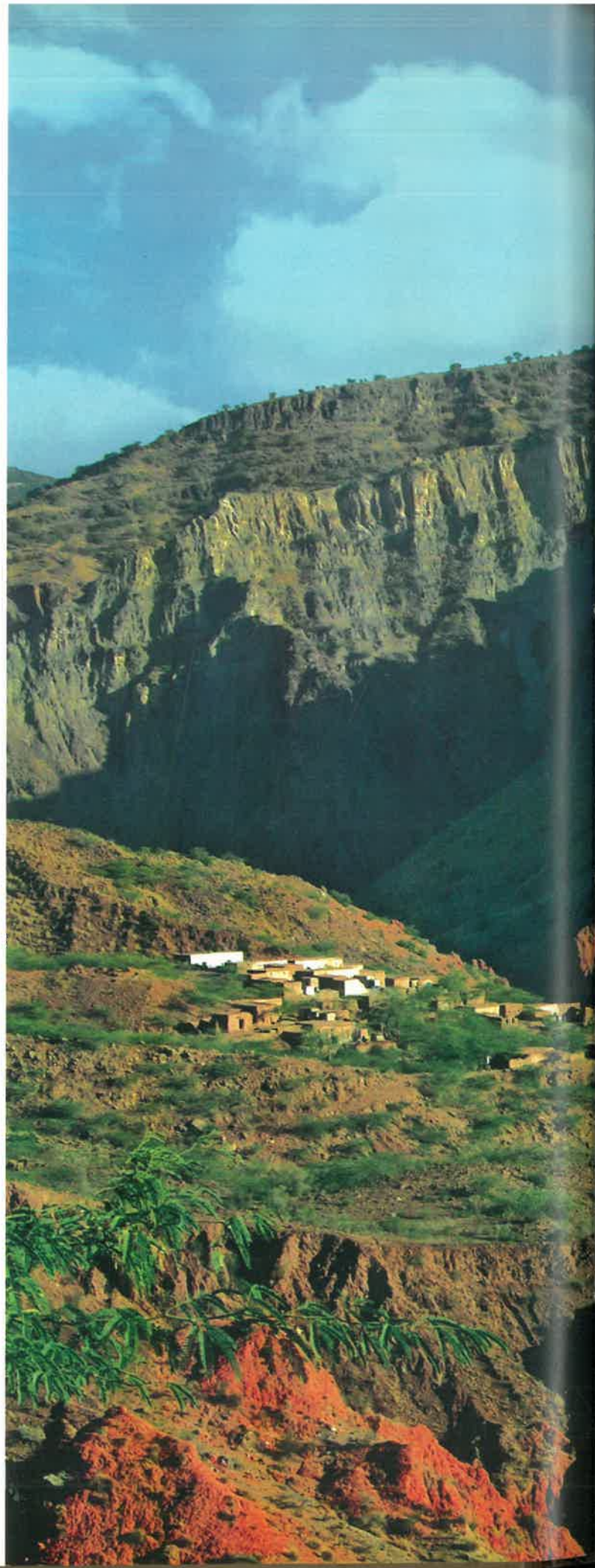


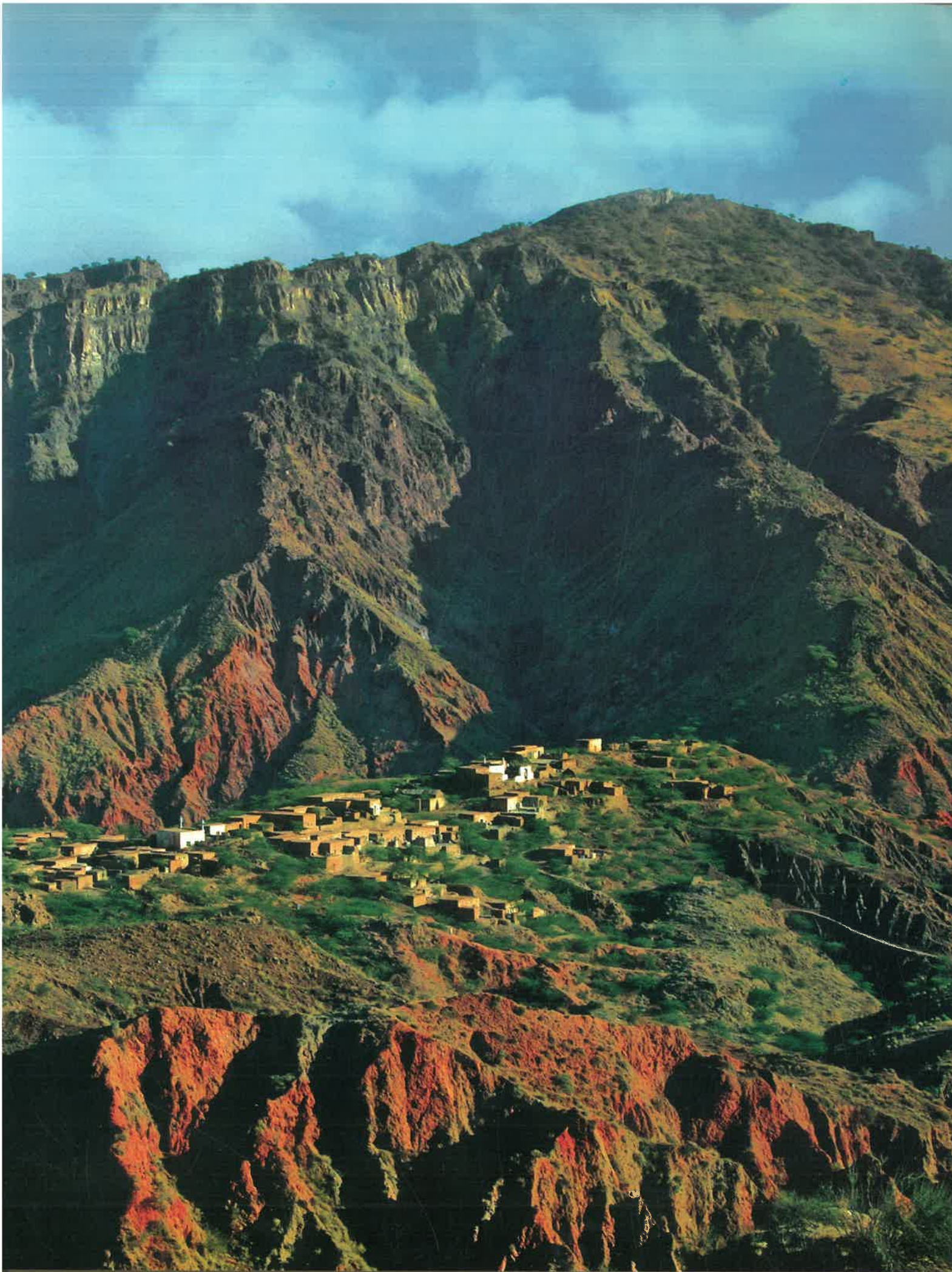
*Subsoil salt tinges the ground
red around village Sahwal just
above Khewra. With no
agriculture or any other trade
to support them, the men of
this village work either at the
salt mines or join the army.*

mid-April called for suspension of building activity. The last well was sunk two years and seven months later, in April 1874. Considering the compulsory yearly summer break, this was, by all standards pretty quick work. By March 1875 the piers were all ready to take the girderwork.

Meanwhile, as the piers were nearing completion, the girders were being prepared on the Serai Alamgir side. There, beyond the danger of floodwater, they lay in one long line to be placed across the piers in succession. Girdering work began in April 1875 and the last of the fifty spans was riveted into place on 23 August 1876. Fourteen days later (6 September), subsequent to necessary inspections, the bridge was declared fit for rail traffic. And so, the first PNSR train to roll into Jhelum railway station was a metre-gauge train of thirty loaded wagons to test the bridge.

Regular train service began a few days later. Not long afterwards, work began on upgrading the original metre-gauge (3 feet, 3 inches) line to broad gauge (5 feet, 6 inches). Once again, work was completed in double quick time and the first broad gauge train steamed into Jhelum on 6 October 1878. The line pushed on to Rawalpindi and eventually Peshawar and Landi Kotal. Over time, Punjab Northern State Railway graduated to become the





North Western Railway (NWR) network connecting Jhelum with the rest of the subcontinent. Several years after independence, the name was altered to Pakistan Western Railway (PWR) and eventually, subsequent to the creation of Bangladesh, to Pakistan Railway.

The Jhelum rail bridge has long been known as the mile-long bridge. At the time of this writing, it has been in service for one hundred and twenty-nine years. It has withstood a few good floods when the water all but washed over its rails, it has ferried an unknown, undocumented number of travellers and untold tons of freight across the muddy brown eddies of the Jhelum and yet it has undergone – besides the change of gauge, only three major repair and up-gradation jobs. The first, begun in 1893 and completed in two years, just fifteen years after the line was upgraded to broad gauge. This was warranted when it was seen that additional girderwork was required to take the load of heavier broad gauge locomotives.

The second, a similar job, was taken in hand in 1927 and completed by March 1929. Each one of the fifty spans was dismantled one after the other and fitted with a third reinforcing girder to take heavier loads than before. For the more technically involved, Paul Berridge details this work in his very readable book *Couplings to the Khyber*. For the rest, suffice it to note that traffic was not suspended during the course of this up-gradation work! It is also of interest that the work was carried out by the Railway Bridge Workshop – the only one then in the whole of northern India and now Pakistan. The workshop functions to this day adjacent to the Jhelum Railway Station.

No sooner had the bridge been upgraded in 1929 than an August rainstorm swelled up the Jhelum to unprecedented levels. As railway engineers and the rest of the city's populace watched with bated breath, the swirling water rose slowly up the massive brick piers until it washed the red girders 'to a depth of two feet.' Berridge goes on to tell us that though the structure suffered no damage at that time, but in order to avert such an eventuality in the future, the bridge was raised 'from end to end by four feet.' As before the traffic kept going while work proceed.

Though the annals of the North Western Railway do not record any damage from the flood of 1929 or after, folklore has another story to tell. Embellished by years of re-telling, the story of the 1929 flood has a different angle. Traditionally timber, duly marked with each dealer's insignia, was floated down from the Kashmir highlands to be retrieved here in the plains by the dealers' agents. In that stormy August, it is narrated, timber riding the roiling flood hit it with such force that the bridge was smashed to smithereens and had to be completely rebuilt. As no such catastrophe took place, railway records preserve no memory of it, but the story of timber running down the river belongs to the realm of the city's history.

Shortly after annexation by the British, Jhelum became the biggest timber market in northwest Punjab. Indeed, in all undivided India, the timber business of Jhelum was rivalled only by that of Allahabad on the Ganga-Yamuna confluence. Great logs of first-class pine harvested in the Kashmir highlands, duly branded with the mark of the various merchants, were floated down the river. At Jhelum, teams from each merchant's establishment waited by the riverside to haul out the logs bearing their company's sign. This trade, the major commercial activity at Jhelum, continued well past independence. In the early 1960s the river was dammed up at Mangla, not far north of Jhelum town, and the traffic was disrupted once and for all. Today the only reminder of this all but forgotten trade are the three *mohallas* named Machine Mohalla One, Two and Three. In that not so distant past when the timber trade flourished, sawmills (machine in common parlance) operating in these areas gave them the name.

The only other trade from which Jhelum town profited was that of salt from the mines at Khewra coming up the river from Pind Dadan Khan to be distributed not only to towns in northern Punjab, but to Kashmir as well. The laying of the Sind Sagar Railway that skirted the salt hills from Malakwal to Pind Dadan Khan, Khushab and Mianwali put paid to the river-borne salt traffic. If the mile-long bridge put Jhelum on the railway map, this line took much away from the town's meagre economic activity because not everyone could be a timber merchant. With no canal-irrigated farmland to boast of and a largely sub-montane region dependent on rain to sustain cultivation; the district also does not have a thriving agricultural backbone. No surprise then, that with the coming of the British Raj, Jhelum became one of the 'martial' districts of northern Punjab noted for an endless supply of able-bodied men to serve the army. This tradition continues to this day.

Jhelum, the city and the district, claims no place in the sun. Once largely comprising of the red salt hills, Jhelum was much truncated in 1983 with the carving out of Chakwal from it. Today the district is confined between the fringes of the highlands in the west and the Jhelum River in the east. The story of the district of Jhelum is best told in the perspective of history as it unfolded here.

Just across the road from the District Nazim's Office was a curved culvert known as Dingi Pulli – Crooked Culvert. In 2003 when the District Government widened the road, and with it the bridge, this plaque was removed to the Nazim's Office for safe keeping. At that time it had adorned the old bridge for a full one



hundred and thirty-six years. The caption reads: BUILT IN DEPY. COMMISSIONERSHIP OF LIEUT. COL. J.W. BRISTOW BY LABH SINGH MISTREE COMMENCED IN MAY 1867 & FINISHED IN OCT. SAME YEAR.

The last all but unreadable line commends Bristow in Persian .



Situated between the village of Jalalpur and the hill of Mungal Deo, this misguided monument commemorates Alexander's passage through the area. A prouder people would have celebrated their own king, Raja Paurava, for his courage in battle and magnificent conduct in defeat. Like all ill-advised projects, this one too, partially complete, lies abandoned several years after a good deal of money was squandered on its construction.

Alexander on the Hydaspes

After taking Taxila and tarrying there some two weeks, Alexander headed for the kingdom of Raja Paurava*. The Hydaspes River formed the border between the realms of Raja Ambhi of Taxila and that of Raja Paurava in the Chaj doab – the belt between the Chenab and the Jhelum. The question of the route that Alexander took from Taxila to his crossing point of the Hydaspes and the site of the epic battle with Raja Paurava is an interesting one that has long been debated by scholars.

From very ancient times, Punjab was criss-crossed by a web of roads. The most famous and widely used was the Rajapatha or the King's Road (Shahi Sarak, as the road has also been known, is a translation of the Sanskrit Rajapatha) that stretched from Patna in the east to Kabul in the west. This was the precursor of the Grand Trunk Road that we so love to attribute to Sher Shah Suri – as if before this great Pakhtun king the road simply did not exist.

* A dynastic name, not that of an individual, it was pronounced Pora by the common man and duly corrupted to Porus by the Greeks.

For the road to have been labelled the Rajapatha, it must have enjoyed royal sanction. And this is what we hear even as early as the 4th century BCE. Word on this road comes to us from Megasthenes, a Greek diplomat who attended upon Chandragupta Maurya as the ambassador of Seleucus Nikator, the Greek king of Syria. Megasthenes arrived at the Mauryan court at Patna in the year 300 BCE and spent the next fifteen years in the subcontinent. His diplomatic duties took him travelling and he acquired extensive first-hand as well as anecdotal knowledge about the country. Consequently, the *Indika* that he wrote upon returning home became a fairly reliable source of information on things Indian. Among other things Megasthenes tells us of the Royal Road.

Megasthenes' work is partially lost and comes down to us in fragments. It, therefore, does not tell us which alignment the Royal Road followed through the present district of Jhelum. The works of other travellers, however, show that there were at least two branches of the road leading westward to Taxila en route to Kabul. One branch crossed the Jhelum River at the site where we were to later build our Rasul Barrage. This branch climbed up into the red-tinged hills of the Salt Range through the Nandna Pass, crossed the Jhangar Valley (now in Chakwal district) to Kallar Kahar and then went north to Taxila.

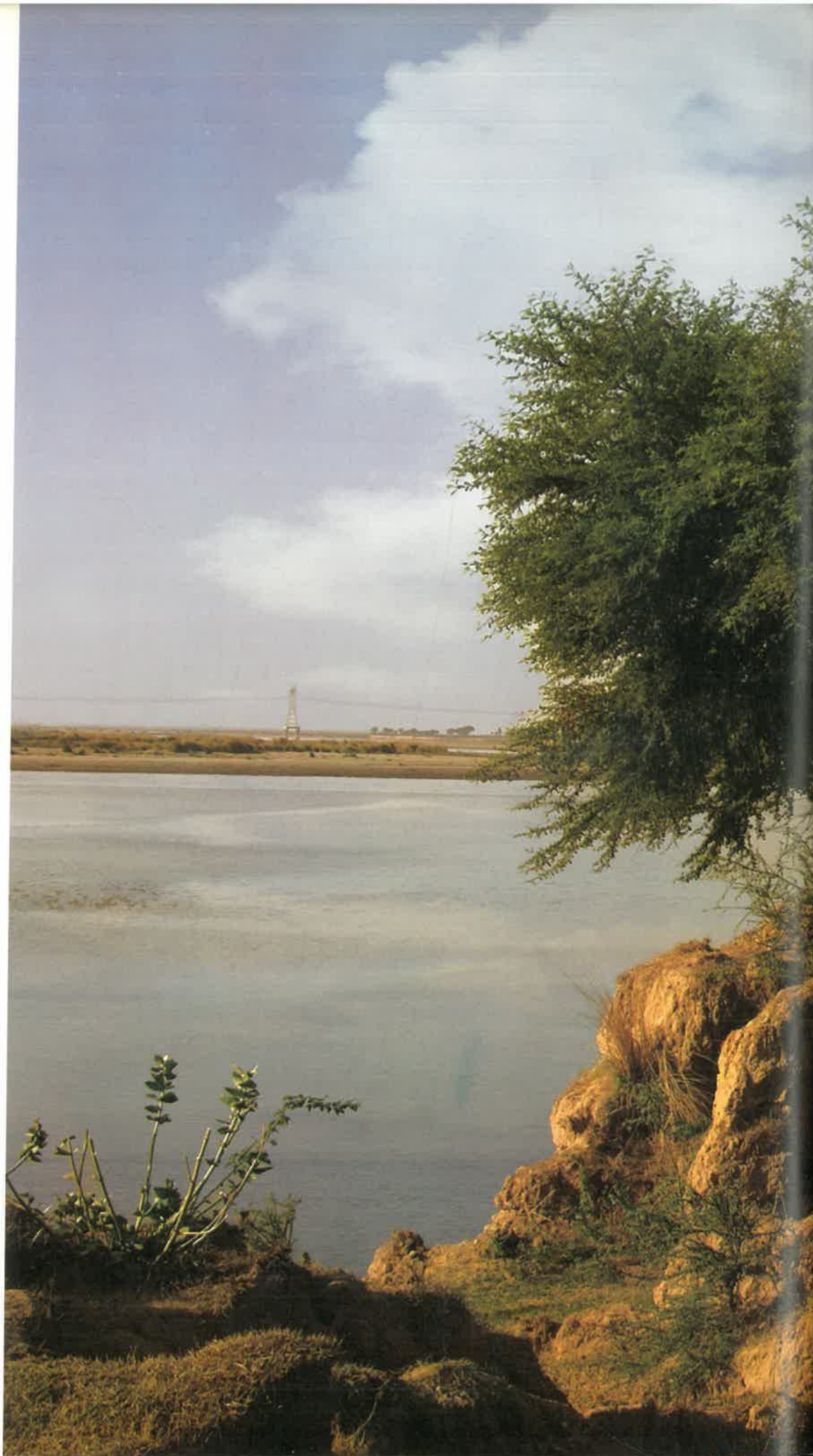
The other branch of the road crossed the river where the city of Jhelum stands. This branch roughly followed the alignment of the present Grand Trunk Road from Jhelum through Rewat to Rawalpindi and farther west. The only difference was that the old alignment ran some distance east of the present highway: it left the modern road at the village of Bhakrala near the Sohawa Pass and ran to Karonta, past Dhamiak, Hathya and Pacca Serai to reach Rewat. Before attempting to unravel the secret of the route Alexander followed, it would be worthwhile to know what his historians tell us of the events of that long ago time.

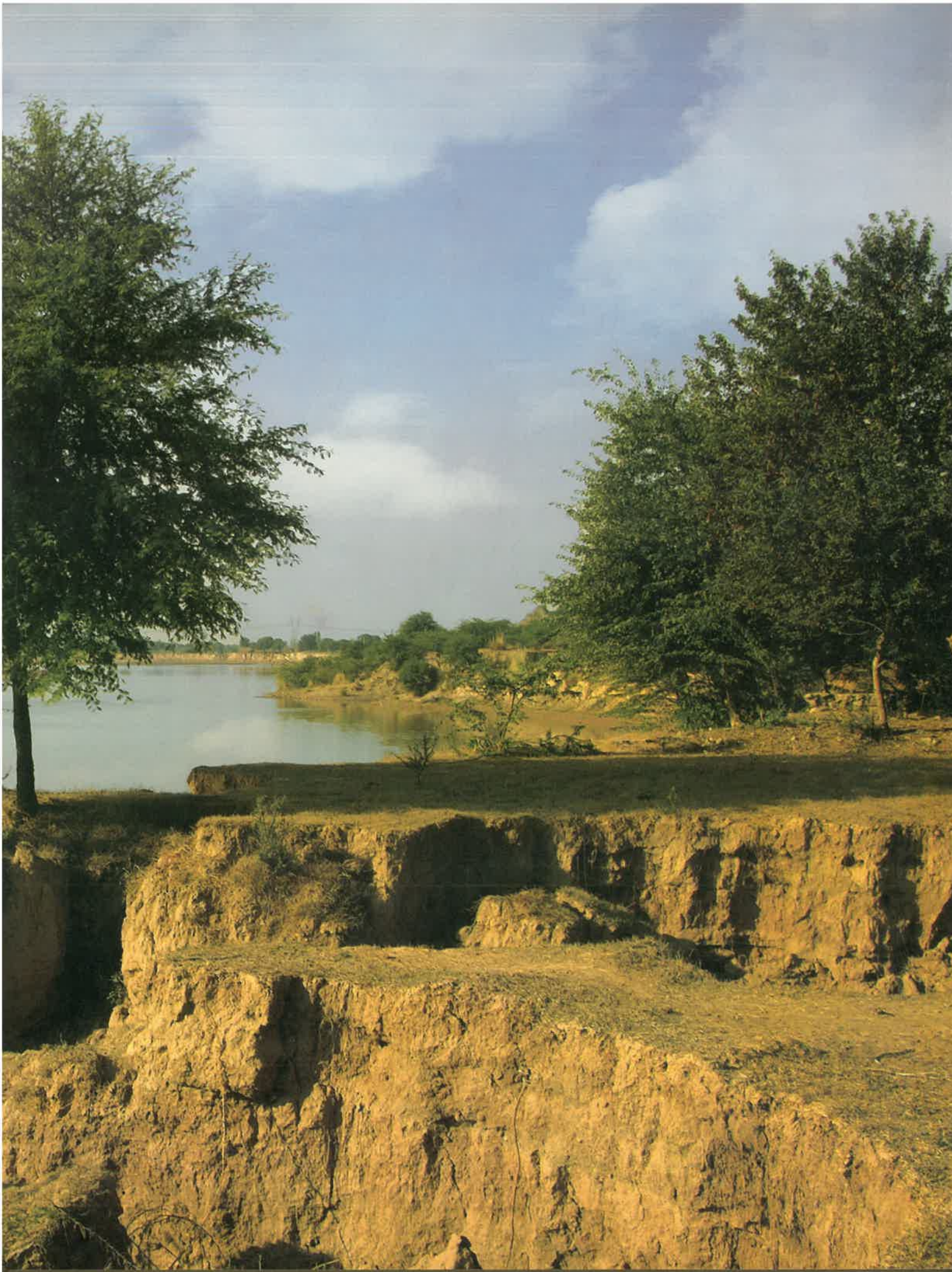
Our most reliable source on Alexander is Arrian. Born of Greek parents about 85 CE, that is, four hundred years after the death of Alexander, Arrian grew up to join the Roman imperial service and rose to high rank and favour of the emperor. His book *The Campaigns of Alexander*, written when Arrian was in his middle years, is our best source on the military achievements of the Macedonian king. Arrian sources were varied. The letters that Alexander wrote to his mother or to his tutor Aristotle and the books or diaries written by Alexander's colleagues and aides made the basis of Arrian's book. It was just as well that a man like him was preserving history for us because very little of the original sources survives to this day.

Besides Arrian other classical writers most quoted on Alexander are the Greek philosopher Plutarch and the Roman historian Quintus Curtius, both of whom lived in the first century CE. None of these three historians give us any clue of the route Alexander traversed from Taxila to the Jhelum River. Consequently, 19th century European scholars offered different theories on this aspect, the arguments going in favour of either branch of the Rajapatha, that is the one that passed through the heart of the Salt Range or the one that took the alignment of the present-day Grand Trunk Road. In order to understand which route Alexander followed, we must work backward from the activities he pursued once he had reached the west bank of the Hydaspes River.

None of the available histories have anything to say on the march from Taxila to the Hydaspes. One moment we see him leaving Taxila and the next we are told (by Arrian) that from his position on the bank of the river, Alexander could see Paurava on the far side across the swirling brown eddies of the river. In magnificent battle array, with his chariots and cavalry fanning out on either side and his infantry shielded by squadrons of beautifully caparisoned elephants, Paurava was ready at the centre to deny the

*The wooded
promontory and
the island that
provided
Alexander's army
the much-needed
cover as they
prepared for the
night crossing of
the Hydaspes
River, have long
since been eaten
away by a river
prone to periodic
flooding –
especially before it
was tamed by the
dam at Mangla.
This tiny outcrop
just outside
Jalalpur is a
reminder of the
headland that
existed long ago.*









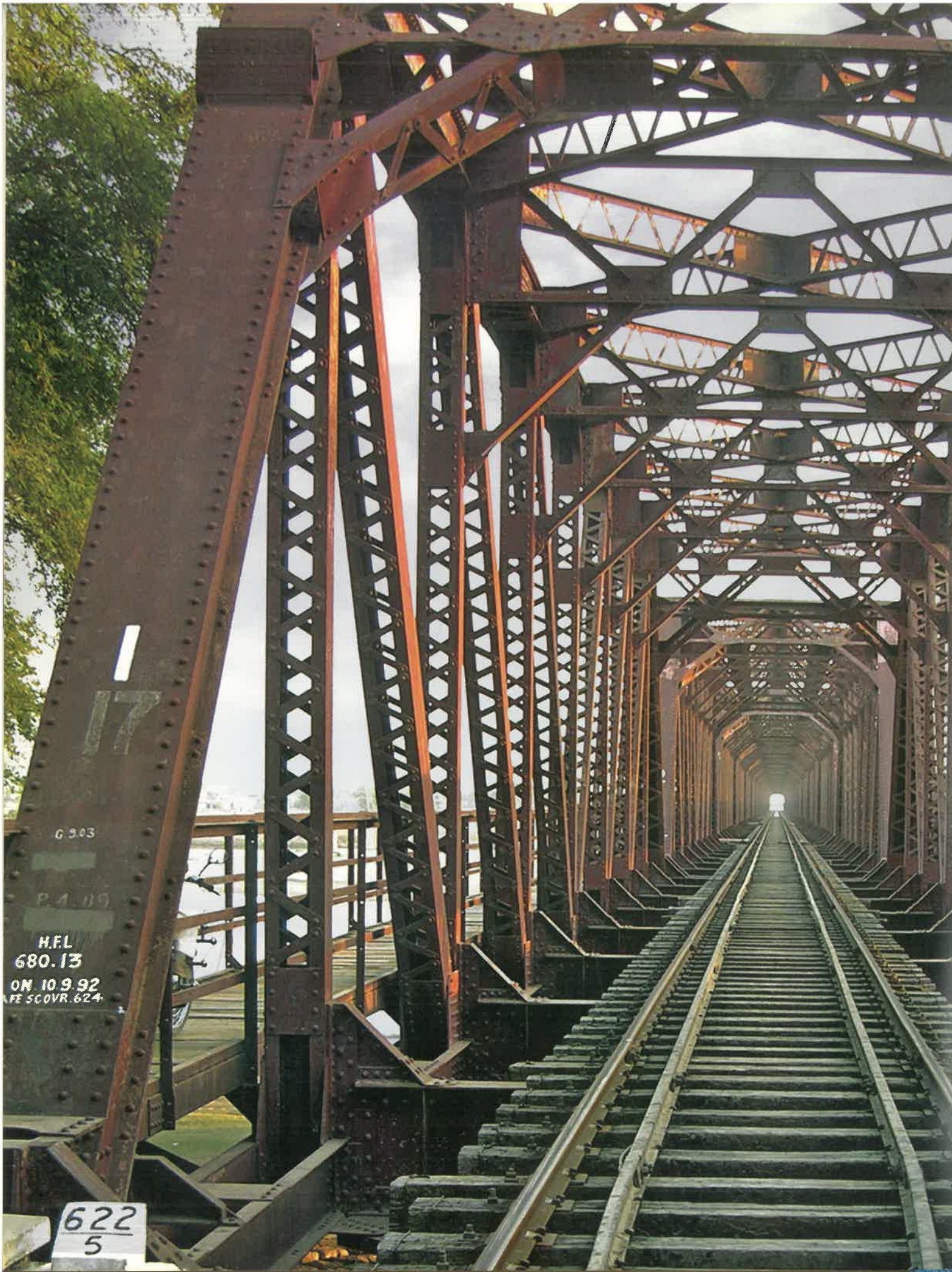
Chalisa is a junction station because the line having come across the Jhelum River by Victoria Bridge divides to go either to Gharibwal, Khewra or south to Khushab. The showpiece here, of particular interest for railway buffs, is the signal box. This architecture is seen in no other signal box anywhere in Pakistan.

Greeks a crossing. Sending out scouts to reconnoitre the river both upstream and down of his position, Alexander learned that all other crossing points were covered by officer-led detachments of the Raja's army.

Splitting his forces into several groups Alexander began a long series of ploys. In order to keep the Punjabis guessing, his officers were under order to keep up overt non-stop movement now in this direction, now in that while small boats and rafts manned by Greek soldiers were plied up and down the river well out of Punjabi bowshot. For added confusion about their dispositions, the Greeks kept up the movement and din even at night. Feints were mounted several times every night. On the far side, the Punjabis made corresponding moves to prevent passage.

Greek troops engaged in making hay-filled rafts in full view of the listening posts on the far side gave them the impression that a crossing was imminent. Simultaneously, confusion was greatly added to when Alexander also made it openly known that the river being in spate, he intended to wait until after the summer when the water would recede. Supplies of food being brought in from the country were stored in full view of the Punjabi scouts on the far side in order to show that the Greeks intended a long bivouac.

The crossing, Alexander knew, would be difficult. The mood in the Punjabi court and army was well known to Alexander even before



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Alexander's main position was where the village of Haranpur today stands. The monument here is of a different nature, however: the magnificent girderwork of Victoria Bridge that spans the Jhelum between Malakwal and Haranpur. Opened on 16 May 1887, this was no less strategically important than the mile-long bridge at Jhelum city. This bridge afforded the shortest connection between the Raj heartland and the frontier outpost of Dera Ismail Khan by way of Mianwali and Kundian. The line was once considerably busier as it also connects Malakwal with the salt mines at Khewra. Faster road traffic has had an adverse effect on passenger service on this line in recent years, however. A tradition preserved in the Settlement Record of 1880 tells of a local landlord hunting a deer and presenting it to Jehangir. The king was so pleased with the gift that he called the locality Haranpur or Place of Deer.

he had set out of Taxila. His envoy to Paurava asking the Raja to come to the crossing point with tribute had returned with a bold response: Paurava would indeed come to the meeting, but his tribute would only be armed men and a hard battle. Also, Greek horses had never experienced elephants in combat. As they attempted to land, they were likely to be spooked by the loud trumpeting of the elephants and throw off their riders. Consequently, there was no doubt in Alexander's mind that the crossing would have to be effected by stratagem. Reconnaissance showed that by a sharp bend in the river, thickly covered with trees, there was a sandy spit sticking out into the water. Just off this headland lay an uninhabited and thickly wooded island. With the thickets concealing movement both on the shore and when the crossing was underway, this was the point where the manoeuvre had to be made. This point, Arrian writes, was 'some eighteen miles from [the] main position....'

Let us now go back to the route that Alexander took from Taxila. The one theory that was favoured by no less than three 18th century researchers was that the Greek army followed the Rawalpindi-Sohawa alignment of the highway and camped at the site of Jhelum city. Then, following Arrian's narration, the place where he crossed the river to do battle was variously placed at some distance upstream of Jhelum town. But Arrian was unequivocal about the distance between Alexander's main position and the crossing point being no less than eighteen miles. The historians were thus hard put to point out an appropriate battleground on the east bank at that point above the city of Jhelum.

It was Aurel Stein who unravelled this teaser. Having already made a great impression on the world with his archaeological investigations in Chinese Tartary at the beginning of the century, Stein travelled in the Salt Range in the 1930s. His work on Alexander's trail through this area is now accepted as the most likely analysis of that long ago event. From Taxila Alexander travelled south to Chakwal and Kallar Kahar to descend from the Salt Range via the Nandna Pass, wrote Stein. Thereafter he turned southwest (downstream) along the river to establish his main camp at Haranpur, now the site of a fabulous rail bridge. Across the river stood the defiant Raja Paurava at the head of his host.

The wooded promontory, Stein postulated, was at Jalalpur – a full eighteen miles from the main position at Haranpur. From Arrian we know that the night that Alexander chose for the crossing turned stormy. Sheet lightning tore across the sky; a steady downpour slanting under a stiff wind and claps of thunder muted the noise of the Greeks as they made ready the assault craft. A couple of hours before daybreak the Greeks went across in the darkness. But that is another story; all that we should know is that this event took place in late May of the year 326 BCE.

One wonders if Alexander remembered the crossing of the Tigris River in Mesopotamia barely five years earlier. Across that river on the dusty plain outside the city of Gaugamela (east of present-day Mosul in Iraq) waited the much larger army of Darius, king of Persia – Darius who had, until then, fled in shameless cowardice from every confrontation with Alexander. As Alexander waited and contemplated the crossing of the river, his general Parmenio advised a night attack. Alexander was not overly pleased with the suggestion and is reported to have said, 'I will not demean myself by stealing victory like a thief, Alexander must defeat his enemies openly and honestly.'

Here on the Jhelum he was confronted by a considerably smaller army, yet when the time came, Alexander who despised stolen victories chose to attack in the dark of a stormy night. One wonders if he tried to reconcile the defiance of Gaugamela with this 'theft' on the Hydaspes and if anyone of his diarists noted his views. If anything of the sort happened, that record is lost.

A momentous event took place at the site of the river crossing: the death of Bucephalus, Alexander's

much loved horse. Again there are two views right from classical times. Plutarch tells us that the horse died after the battle with Paurava. That it was injured during the conflict and was being treated for its wounds, but it succumbed to old age and fatigue. Arrian, on the other hand, though agreeing on the age of the animal, is categorical that the death was natural and not because of battle wounds. Much grieved by the loss of his trusted charger, Alexander ordered an impressive funeral that he led himself before laying the horse in the grave.

Whether the horse died of wounds or old age, history tells us that Alexander ordered the establishment of a town at the site of the grave. The town was called Bucephala after the horse buried in its precincts. Thereafter Alexander moved on to other conquests and to the revolt on the Beas River. Giving in to the wishes of his soldiers and perhaps his own fear of the powerful Nanda empire of the east, Alexander returned again to the kingdom of Raja Paurava (with whom peace had been made after the battle) to embark upon a southward river journey. It was late in the year 326 BCE, the monsoon floods had long since ended leaving the Punjabi landscape dotted with shimmering lakes. Alexander was much dismayed to find the town of Bucephala heavily damaged by the floods. The greater grief was, however, the loss of his horse's tomb, which had been washed away without a trace.

Historians had long pondered over the location of Bucephala. But because classical writers say nothing regarding which bank of the river it lay on, there were stories and stories. The wildest among these favoured Phalia (in the district of Mandi Bahauddin on the east bank of the Jhelum). Proponents of this theory were carried away by the name Phalia matching the last part of Bucephala, sometimes also written by classical writers as Bucephalia. It is, however, now believed that the place celebrating the conqueror's horse was also the site of the river crossing: Jalalpur, some fifty kilometres downstream from Jhelum town.

The flood-stricken town was repaired by royal decree and then Alexander made ready to sail down the river. History records an armada of two thousand river craft of various descriptions. Here were flat-bottomed barges for the horses, thirty-oared galleys and triremes (galleys with rowers in three banks) and grain lighters as well as other craft. Just before the fleet set sail Alexander offered up his customary sacrifice to his gods. A special offering of a libation from a golden bowl was also made to the rivers Hydaspes and Acesines (Chenab) in order that the journey may be safe and uneventful.

At this point, Alexander's army together with followers, soldiers' wives and children, comprised about one hundred and twenty thousand persons. While some, mostly officers and their wives, went on the barges, the rest of the army was divided in two, each group led by a general to march along either bank of the river. So great was the panoply, so wondrous the order of the tramp-tramp-tramp of a hundred thousand marching feet and the rhythm of martial songs, and so hypnotic the cadence of the coxswains' calls from the galleys that all those who heard came running to watch in awe the passage of the Greeks. Many of them followed the departing fleet, running for miles alongside singing wild and tumultuous tunes. The singing evidently was pretty melodious for Alexander's diarists noted that the people were an 'extremely musical race' who had long loved song and dance.

And so, escorted by local people, Alexander exited from the present day Jhelum district in the vicinity of Pind Dadan Khan. He left behind a profound and far-reaching memory and even today self-styled local historians in every little hamlet love to tell how Alexander tarried six months in their village. Little do they realise that with such a timetable of long delays, he could never have completed his 'Indian Campaigns' in less than two years, the time he actually took for this enterprise.

Hill of the Jogis

On a clear evening the setting sun, as seen from the Jhelum bridge or Rohtas fort, appears to be going behind the purple loom of a solitary hill. On the fringe of the Salt Range highlands and detached from it by several kilometres, this is Tilla Jogian – Hill of the Jogis. Rising one thousand metres above the sea, richly wooded with wild olive, *phulai* (*Acacia modesta*), a species of wild pistachio, some *sumbal* (*Bombax malabaricum*) and, on the very peak, a few *chir* (*Pinus longifolia*), Tilla Jogian has long been hallowed ground.

According to Alexander Cunningham, the 19th century British archaeologist, the hill was dedicated to the sun god Balnath and therefore known as Tilla Balnath. Over time, it came to be known as Tilla Goraknath so named, according to Cunningham, after another form of Shiva. He also noted that the latter name was of a fairly recent origin. It was perhaps following Cunningham that the *Glossary of Tribes, Castes and Clans* of Ibbetson, MacLagan and Rose tells us that Goraknath lived in the 15th century of this era. Inferential evidence shows otherwise, however.

The ballad of Puran Bhagat, the prince of Sialkot, however places Goraknath squarely in the 1st century BCE. Puran, first-born to King Salvahan and his queen Ichhran, was a prince with a philosophical bent of the mind. When barely twelve years of age he was wrongfully accused of lustful advances by his calumnious stepmother Luna. Without so much as an investigation into the matter, Salvahan ordered his son's limbs to be amputated and his body to be dumped in a well outside town. There the hapless prince struggled between life and death for a period that storytellers' license turns into twelve years. Twelve long years Puran, the prince of Sialkot, lay in his watery dungeon not yet dead and scarcely alive.

One day, so the ballad goes, fate brought the great Guru Goraknath, founder of the sect of Kunphatta jogis, to the well where Puran lay dying. When he was discovered in the watery depth, the guru had his limp and all but lifeless body pulled out to hear his sorry tale. Upon discovering that misfortune had befallen him for repelling the amorous overtures of his libidinous stepmother, the guru was overcome with compassion. He ran his hands over the mangled body of Puran and miraculously restoring him to fullness ordered the prince to return to his father and tell him the truth of the matter. But the prince refused. He joined, instead, the guru's train and went to attend his college at Tilla. There Puran himself attained greatness as an accomplished jogi.

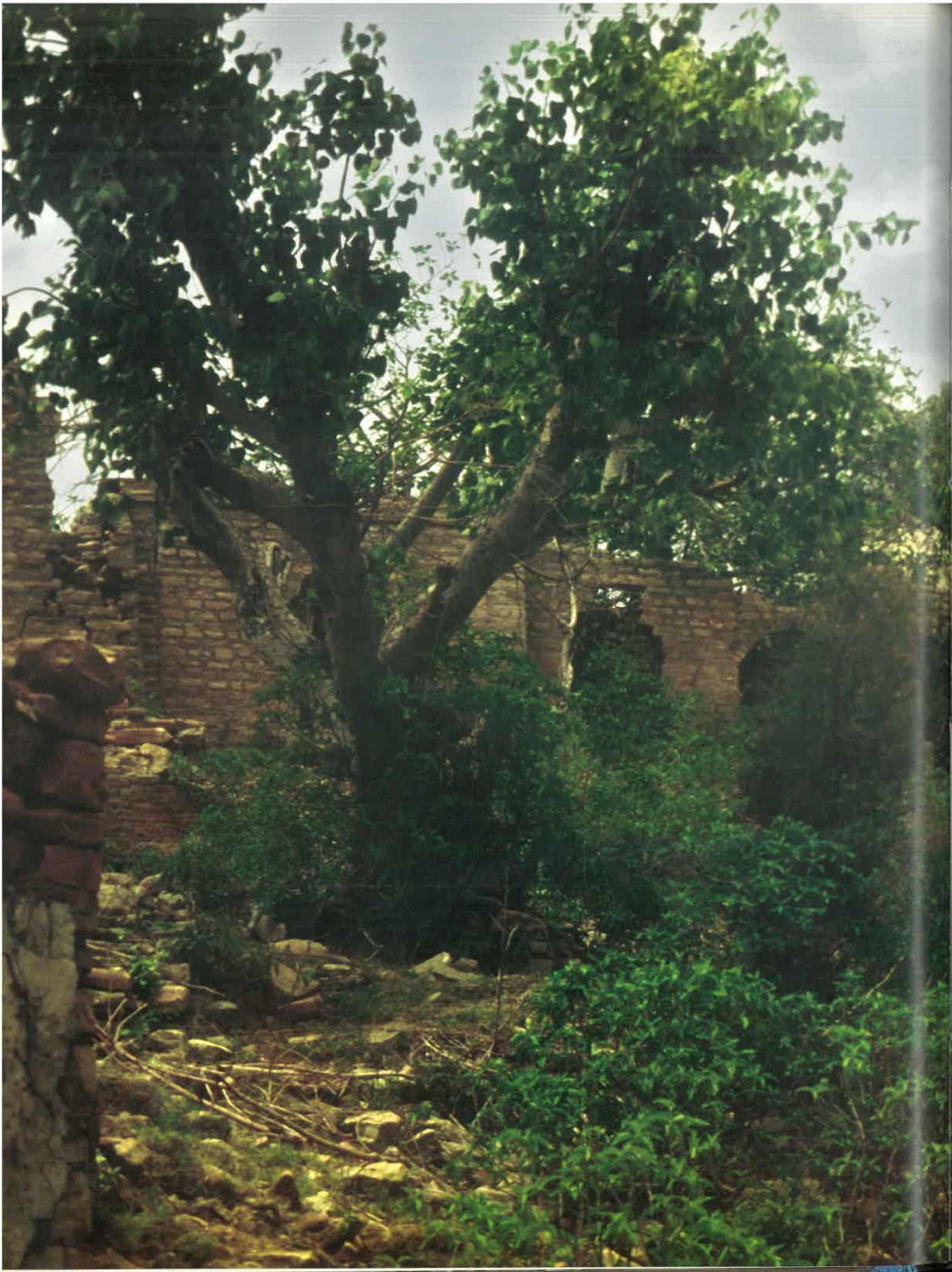
The annals of Ujjain (Rajasthan) record the repudiation of the crown by Raja Bhartari in favour of his younger brother Vikramaditya. Bhartari, it is related, took up the itinerant life of a jogi and eventually fetched up at the monastery of Guru Goraknath. In order to place these individuals and the events concerning them in a proper frame of time, it must be known that Salvahan is accredited with having rebuilt the ruinous fort and city of Sialkot and ruled over it in the 1st century BCE. Vikramaditya, on the other hand, is the great hero of Indian history who made a gallant and victorious stand against the Scythians in the year 57 BCE – the year that marks the beginning of the Vikrami era.

Now, Guru Goraknath was the founder of the Kunphatta sect of jogis – jogis who pierced their earlobes





The Mughal water tank at Tilla Jogian. Seemingly intrigued by the Cynic philosophy of the Kunphatta jogis of Tilla, Akbar visited the monastery twice; the first time in 1581 and then again four years later. On both occasions he held discussions with the sages of Tilla. Those were perhaps years of drought conditions and the jogis having petitioned the king for a water tank were gifted with this large reservoir. It was fed with run-off from surrounding higher ground by subterranean conduits. More than half a century of disuse has choked up the channels and the tank has not known water for many years.



Another view of the main temple complex.





Sitting upon the extreme northwest edge of the hill, this small domed cubicle marks the site where Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, did his penance. Sometime after March 2004 it was badly damaged by vandals as seen in the photo. It may simply fall to pieces if immediate restoration is not carried out.

to adorn them with rings. He was of no mean fame in the past, nor indeed is he wanting in celebrity today for he is still renowned across the subcontinent. For the princes Puran and Bhartari to have partaken directly of the wisdom of this great teacher, would mean that he established his monastery sometime in the 1st century BCE.

At some point in the early Middle Ages, the name of Goraknath was supplanted by that of Balnath. Though there is no direct evidence, written or oral, it appears from Emperor Akbar's chronicles that Balnath was another guru of a later period. For his name to have replaced that of the founding father Goraknath's, would mean that even Balnath was of no mean learning and stature. And so from a remote time the hill was known by either of three names: Tilla Goraknath, Tilla Balnath or Tilla Jogian.

Such was the celebrity of this place in the Middle Ages that it was commonly used as a reference point. Having chased Humayun out of the country, Sher Shah Suri sent surveyors out to select a suitable site for his garrison on the frontier of the turbulent Gakkhars. The place chosen by the surveyors for the

Pakhtun king's fort later to be known as Rohtas was, so history records, 'in the vicinity of Tilla Balnath.' Thirty-two years later Akbar the Great visited the 'shrine of Balnath' as recorded by Abul Fazal, one of his 'nine jewels' and author of the voluminous *Akbarnama*. An interesting observation by Abul Fazal concerns the age of the monastery. He writes that even at the time of the emperor's visit it was 'so old that its beginning is not known.'

Although the chronicler does not say who Balnath was, he does tell us that this man having turned to the ascetic way of life chose this hill as his place of penance in order to overcome his worldly passions. He also records that even during that time in the late 16th century, Tilla Balnath was held in high esteem by the people of India who visited it from distant corners of the land. It is clear that even then the great age of the monastery of jogis with pierced ears was marked with wonder. Strange then that the trio of compilers of the *Glossary of Tribes* were misled in the early 20th century to believe that Tilla Jogian was a fairly recent phenomenon.

In April 1607 Jehangir stopped at Tilla Jogian on his way from Lahore to the highlands of Kashmir. For some odd reason, this wonderfully observant writer of diaries makes no interesting observations concerning the hilltop monastery. All he tells us is its distance from Rohtas of 'four kos and three-quarters.' The actual distance from the centre of Rohtas is twenty-two kilometres, somewhat more than Jehangir's estimation. Even though he camped here a couple of nights and would surely have witnessed the jogis' worship and austerities, for once there is no sense of wonder about this tree-shaded collection of temples and hermitages.

Tilla Jogian also features in the ballad of the lovers Heer and Ranjha. Once again this infers that the monastery is of ancient date for the ballad itself dates back to the 15th century (perhaps even earlier). In the face of stiff family resistance, Dhidho of the clan Ranjha could not marry his beloved Heer of the Sials. As Ranjha wrung his impotent hands, Heer was forcibly wedded off amongst the Khehras. And so, the heart-broken Ranjha left home and travelled up the Jhelum River to eventually fetch up at the jogi monastery. Surely this was no accidental arrival. Surely he must have known of Tilla Jogian being the place for those who spurned the world. Here Ranjha did his penance, subjugated his passions and became a jogi of the Kunphatta sect. But that story does not belong in this narrative.

The dawning of the 18th century was the start yet again of misfortune in this part of the subcontinent. The Mughals succumbed to indolence and the vacuum was filled by the influx of plunderers from the west once again. From the 1730s onwards, Nadir Shah and his follower Ahmed Shah repeatedly plundered Punjab. In 1748 Abdali attacked Tilla Jogian and the monastery was looted and sacked. Many jogis were killed, others fled to hide away in the forested slopes of the hill. Savagery was perhaps all the Afghan robbers had in mind for had they been guided by good sense, they would have known that a jogi monastery could not yield any wealth at all.

Slowly the monks began to rebuild the monastery until it was fully functional once again. After the British took over, the early administrators of Jhelum district were much enamoured of the cool, tree-covered height of Tilla. Every year in April, just after the Bisakhi festival, the office and court of the deputy commissioner of Jhelum moved to the mild climes of the hill where it functioned until the end of August. A colonial-style rest house with a high roof and veranda running around three sides once stood on the summit a little way from the monastery to remind of the deputy commissioner's annual stint at Tilla Jogian. This building dating back to about 1880 was pulled down in 1986 to be replaced by the present rest house. Whereas the older building required only extensive repair even after a century of use and disuse, the present building has once already been rebuilt from complete ruin in less than twenty years.



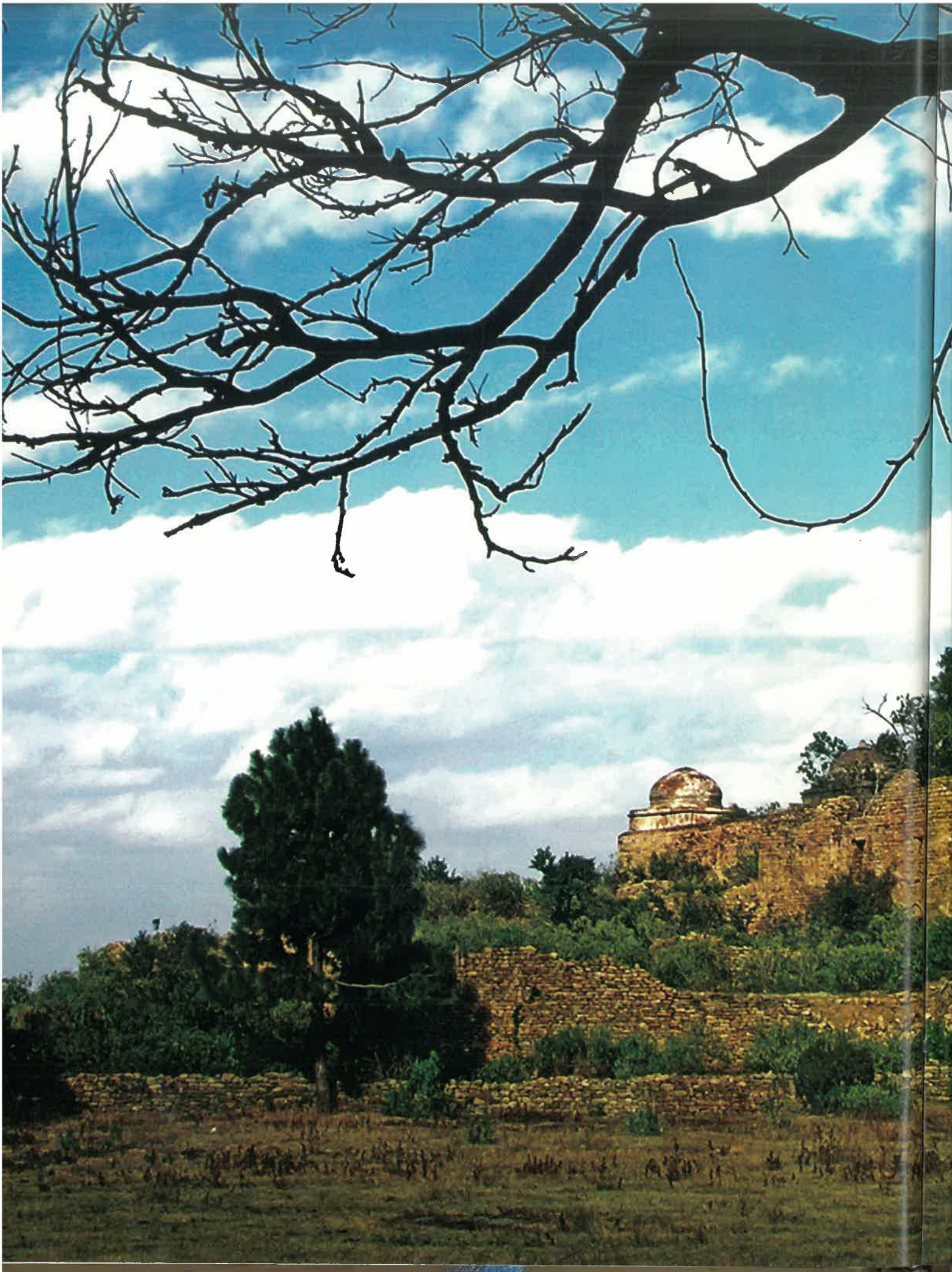
Shaded by a magnificent old olive tree this little cubicle inside the main temple complex has been extensively vandalised and is on the verge of collapse. From October 1974, the first time this writer visited Tilla Jogian, until March 2004 it had seemed immutable. Then the hateful hand of vandals laid it low. This building marks the spot where some nameless but much revered guru, perhaps even Balnath himself, would have done his worship.

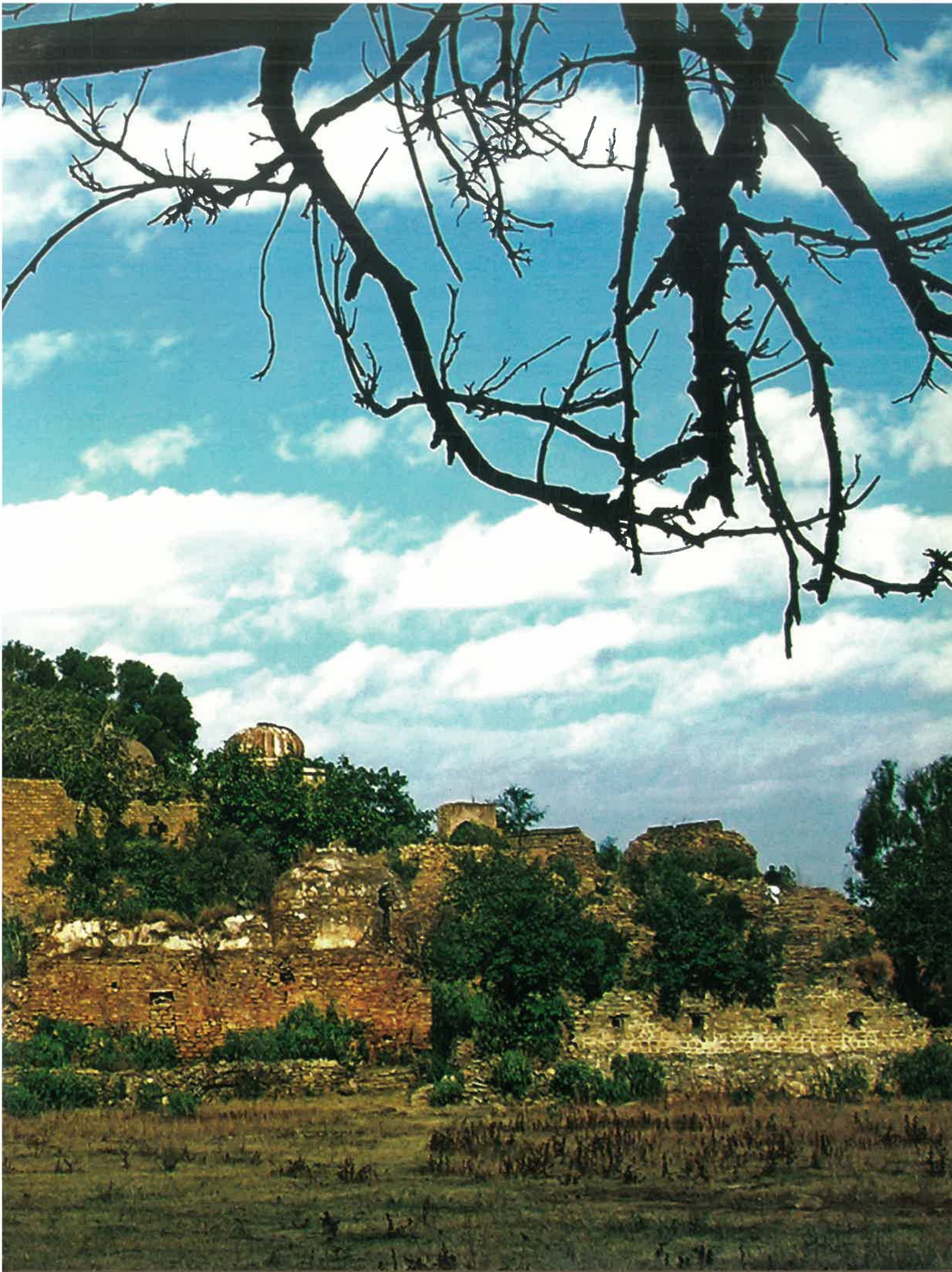
The undoing of the ancient monastery of Tilla Jogian came after the creation of Pakistan. Persecution forced the jogis to flee the new country leaving Tilla Jogian deserted. No longer did the tree-shaded peak resound with the drone of mantras, no longer did those who repudiated the world resort here. Tilla Jogian was no more the haunt of the great gurus of the Kunphatta sect of jogis. The only visitors now are shepherds and woodcutters from the villages around its base. There are, as well, the occasional tourists from the cities.

There is yet another kind of visitor, the one whose heart is filled only with malice and greed. He comes here to seek not nirvana of the spirit, but worldly treasures. Armed with crude digging tools he uproots temple floors, lays low entire buildings, and smashes ancient *smadhis* in his search for non-existent buried treasure. The avarice of this kind of visitor to Tilla Jogian is only matched by his foolishness: how could the last resting place of one who gave up the world to lead the jogi's life contain treasure?.

The main temple in the monastery. This is a complex of several buildings some of which carry traces of fading frescoes. Again, the floors of all these buildings have been dug up by ignorant treasure hunters and ordinary vandals. It is sad that Pakistani Muslims have severed their link with the dharti of their ancestors to forge new and fictitious links either with Central Asia or Arabia. Consequently, they value nothing of this land that dates back to a pre-Islamic past.

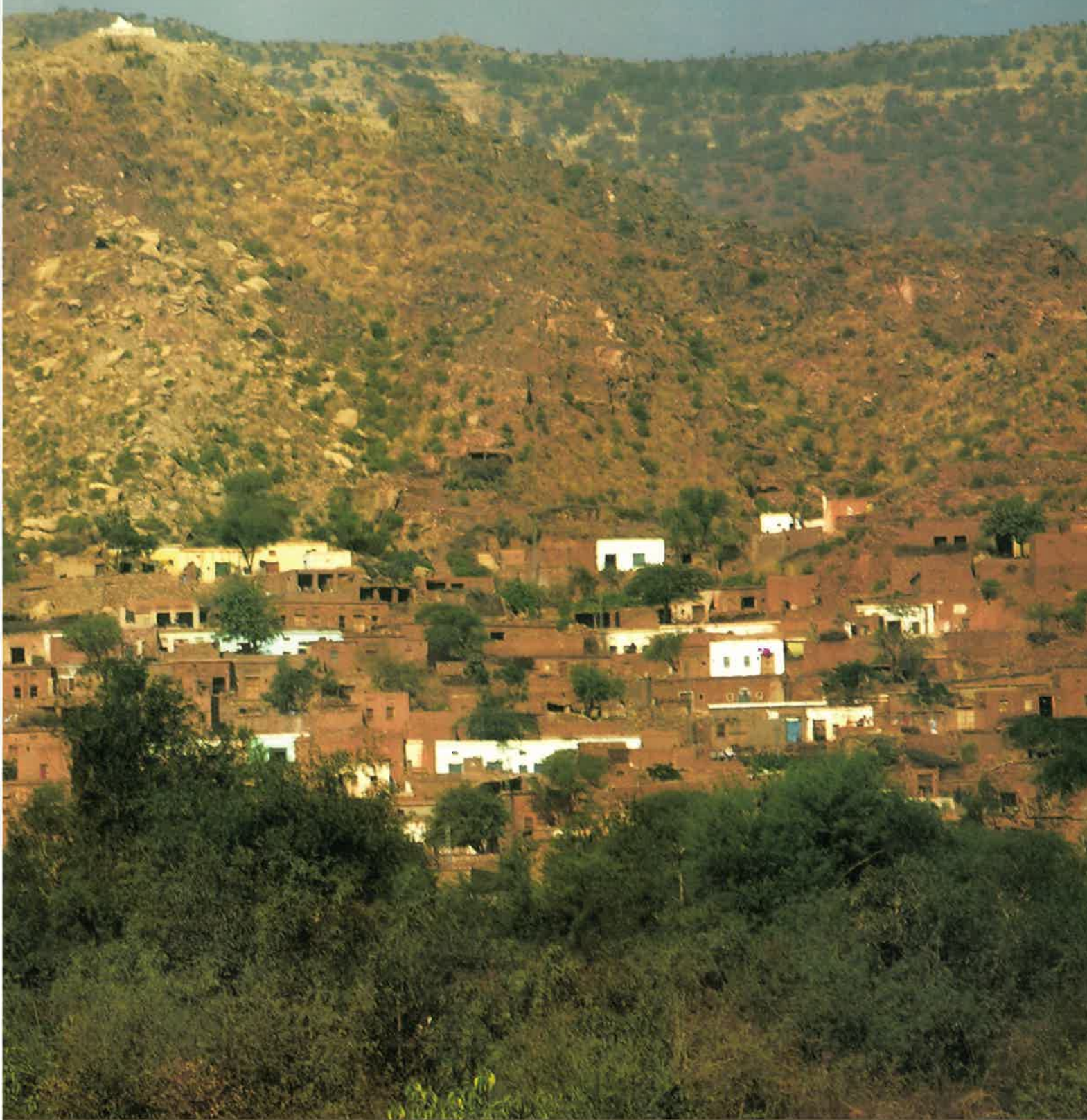








Climbing up the low hill in gentle steps, Baghanwala presents a pleasing sight. The hills in the background once teemed with urial, blue bull, wild ass and ravine deer that Mughal kings so loved to slaughter wholesale. Illegal hunting continues to this day turning these hills into an environmentalist's nightmare.





Emperor Akbar was here. All that remains of the garden that was laid out on the emperor's orders is this ruined hulk of the gateway. The perimeter wall, the trees and even the memory of the garden have faded away.

Baghanwala: Place of Gardens

Kamil Khan Mumtaz, the noted architect and architectural historian, calls Baghanwala 'a poor man's Fatehpur Sikri.' While that fabulous ghost town of Akbar the Great bedazzles with red sandstone buildings splendidly curved as if stone was but puttee in the hands of the masons, the tiny village of Baghanwala too boasts a few houses with lintels and mock pilasters of similar sandstone. Of course, this is not the famous Jodhpur sandstone, but the somewhat more porous one quarried locally in the Salt Range.

The town itself, placed in tiers upon a hillside, has a pleasing appearance as one approaches it from the east. At closer quarters it is not very different from most Salt Range hill villages with neat flagstoned streets and houses constructed mostly from dressed grey and red sandstone. Brick construction is only now catching up. But it is not the architecture of Baghanwala that drew the attention of kings and adventurers in the past and today that of the tourist and student of history. Great events unfolded right outside this village.

The beginning of the 11th century saw the outbreak of Turkish attacks from the west. Ostensibly in the service of Islam, these were in reality plundering raids to enrich the impoverished kingdoms of Turkish warlords in Afghanistan. Mahmud of Ghazni was the champion of these raids who plundered

the Muslim principalities of Central Asia in summers and Vedic India in winters. In the year 1013 CE, on another one of his several raids, Mahmud came down upon the fortified temple and university complex of Nandna.

Nandna, the histories tell us, was held by Niddar Bhim – Bhim the Dauntless, a governor under the Pal kings of Lahore and Peshawar. Though the tale of the taking of Nandna falls outside this book for Nandna that towers above the orchards of Baghanwala lies in the neighbouring district of Chakwal, the actual battle for it was fought outside Baghanwala. Bhim's forces held the pass of Nandna fast, but the Turks worked their way around the surrounding hills and even as Bhim expected a frontal attack, he was one morning surprised to see the oasis of Baghanwala bristling with Turkish arms. But that was only part of Mahmud's army; the rest maintained the siege of Nandna in order to starve the garrison out.

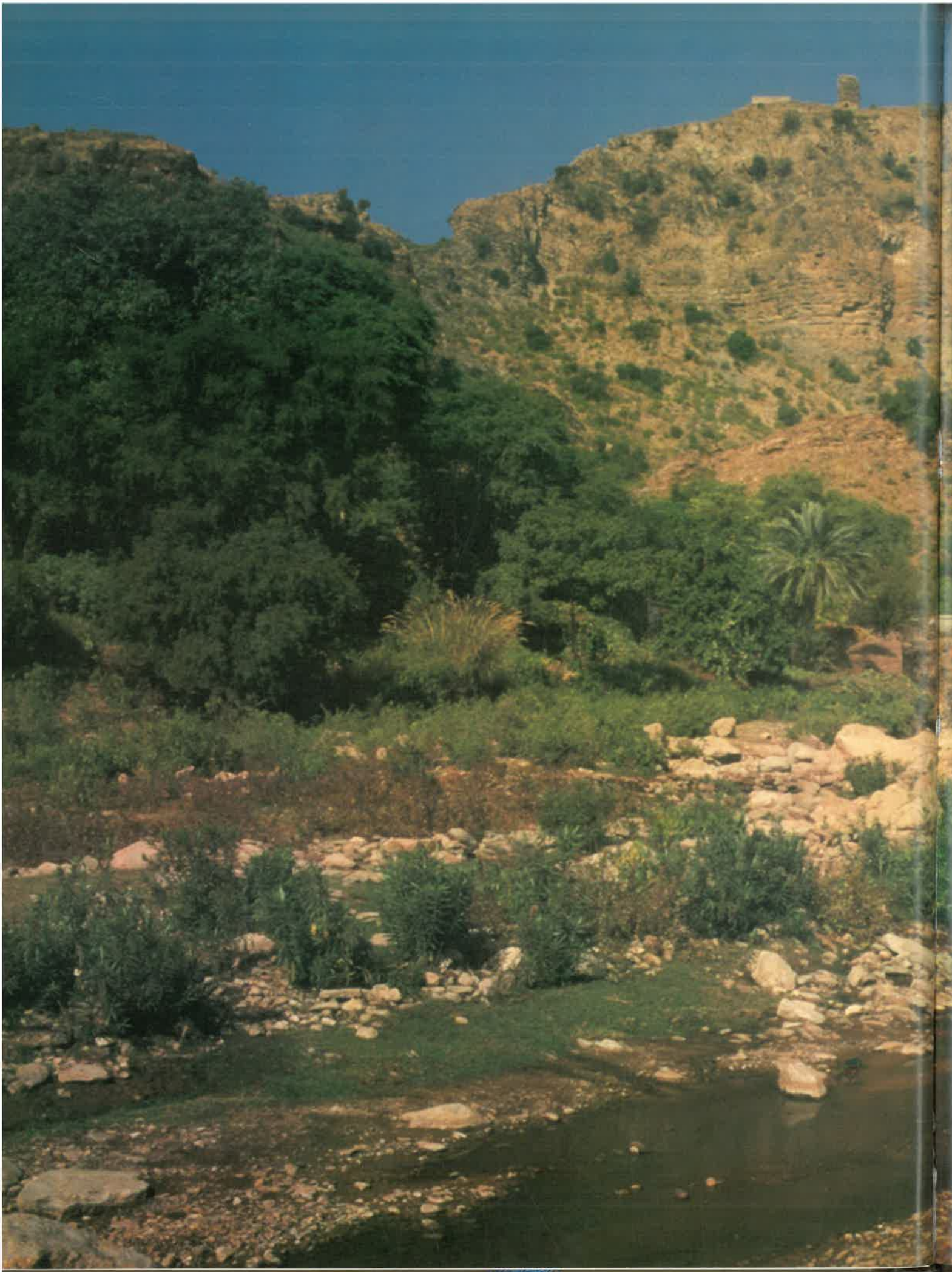
For several days the defenders sent out patrols to harry the Turks in minor skirmishes. Then as reinforcements arrived from the east, they broke out to give battle. The final contest for Nandna between Mahmud's Turks and Bhim's Punjabis was fought where today the orchards of Baghanwala echo with the call of the koel and the sleepy cooing of doves. The defenders fought well, but the Turks bettered them and carried the day. The historian Mohammad Qasim Ferishta tells us the victors were rewarded with 'rich spoils' that were removed to the destitute capital of Ghazni.

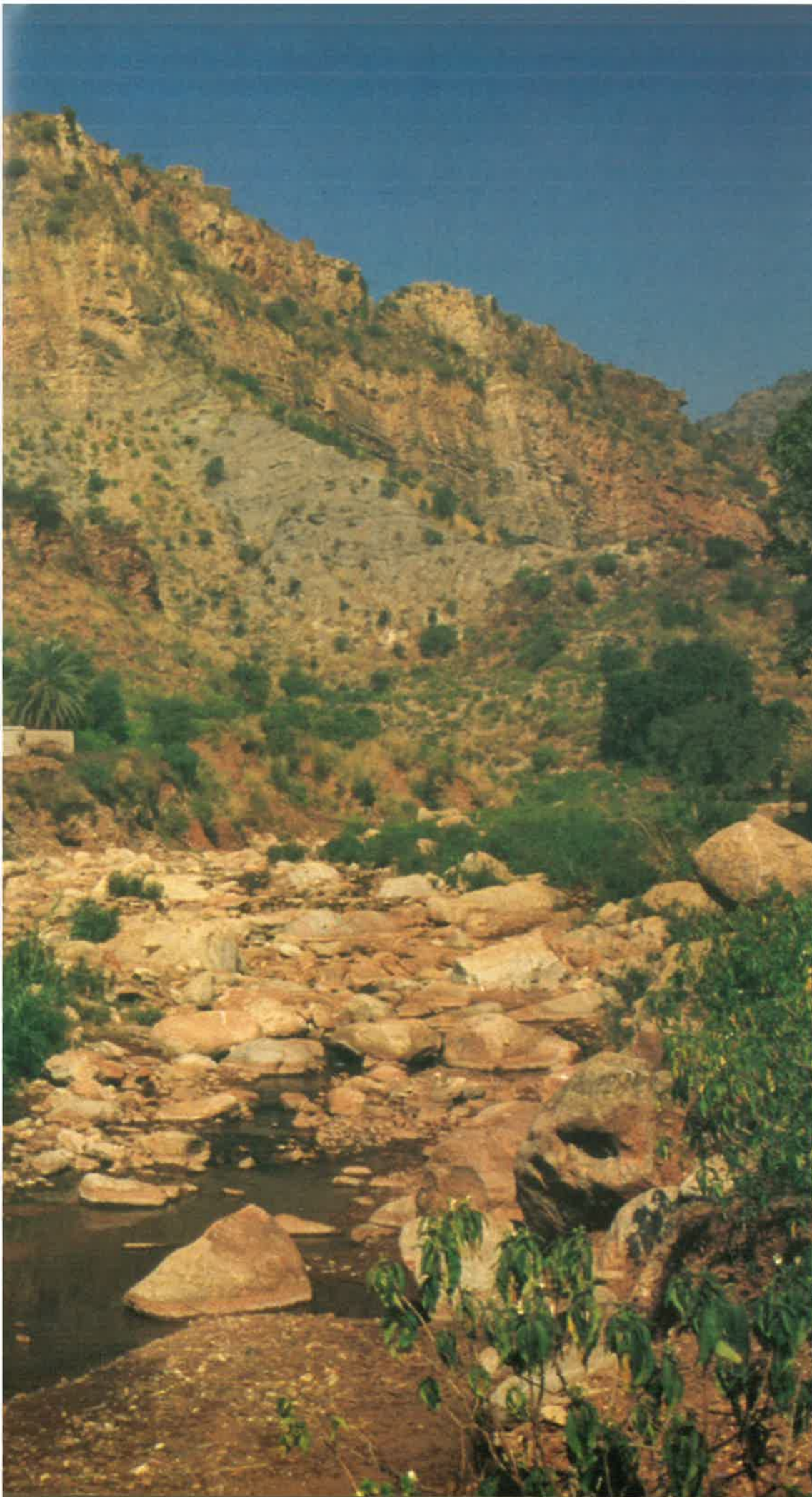
Akbar the Great resorted to the oasis of the great battle to gratify his passion for the chase. Game was plentiful, water from a clear spring copious and untainted and trees grew in a profusion. In the tradition of his illustrious grandfather Babur, Akbar ordered the laying out of a garden. Fruit trees were planted and, though no trace remains of it, a perimeter wall was raised to protect them from wildlife and livestock. A gatehouse with a domed roof and sentries' cubicle afforded entrance to Akbar's garden. Time, the Great Destroyer, laid low this garden, however. All that now remains of this intervention in this quiet corner of Jhelum district is the ruinous gateway of the garden and the name Baghanwala that arose when the garden was laid out by royal decree.

Jehangir followed his father to Baghanwala. His diary for the year 1606 mentions his departure from Lahore to hunt in 'Girjhak and Nandna.' Now Girjhak is the old name for Jalalpur where Alexander crossed the Jhelum to give battle to Raja Paurava while Nandna is the fortified temple complex above Baghanwala. Jehangir goes on to tell us that during the outing he resided for four days in the garden of a certain Ram Das. He does not comment on the garden nor indeed upon whether this Ram Das was a native of Girjhak or of Nandna. It might be that Ram Das was a local zamindar who held the garden that gave Baghanwala its name.

So plentiful was the wildlife in the red-tinged hills around Baghanwala that Jehangir gloats over his bag of a hundred and ten animals. The list includes Punjab urial and ravine deer or chinkara. On the subject of the latter, Jehangir says there were few places in the subcontinent that offered better ravine deer than the gorges of Nandna (or Baghanwala) and Rohtas. Today these hills are an environmentalist's nightmare where wanton and illegal hunting has exterminated the chinkara and very nearly the urial. The only animals that can still be seen in some numbers are wild pigs, some foxes, the elusive *brinda* or leopard cat and perhaps an odd wolf or two. Although leopards are also reported, their presence is doubtful.

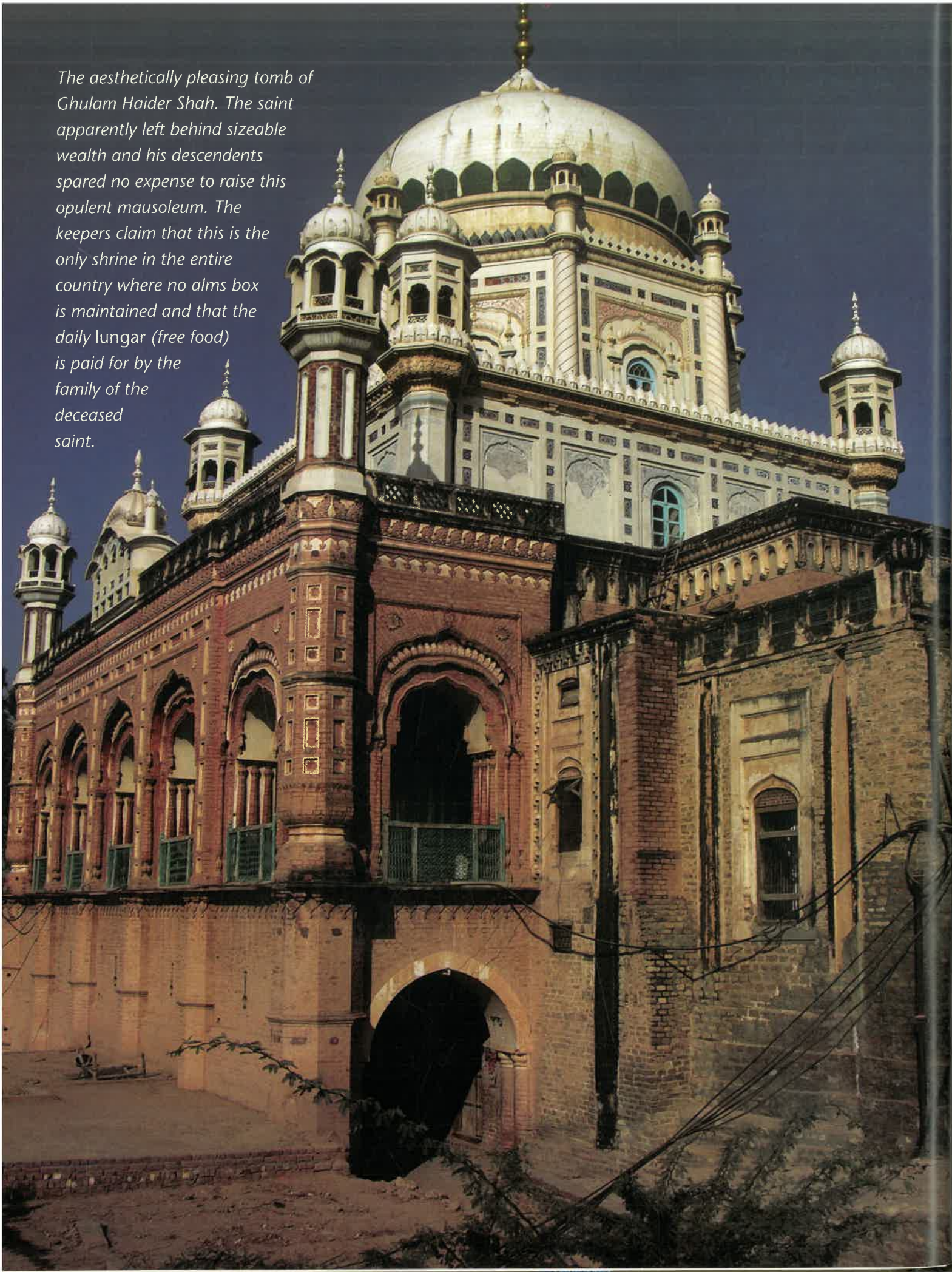
The one redeeming feature of this corner of the Salt Range, once rich with wildlife, is the plentiful birdsong that still rings through the thickets of Baghanwala.





Watered by a copious freshwater spring, the orchards of Baghanwala thrive. In the semi-arid setting of the Salt Range, this is one of those rare spots where the calls of the koel, bulbul and dove give hope that all is yet well with God's earth. Visible on the skyline is the ruined temple of Nandna. In 1017 Abu Rehan Al Beruni sojourned here and with an astrolabe and simple trigonometry measured the circumference of the earth. Though this was not the first such attempt, Al Beruni's calculation was surprisingly correct for his time: he came to within one hundred and twenty kilometres of the exact measurement. The camera looks up at the temple from the spot where the battle between Mahmud and Bhim was fought.

The aesthetically pleasing tomb of Ghulam Haider Shah. The saint apparently left behind sizeable wealth and his descendents spared no expense to raise this opulent mausoleum. The keepers claim that this is the only shrine in the entire country where no alms box is maintained and that the daily lungar (free food) is paid for by the family of the deceased saint.



Girjhak of yore, Jalalpur today

The village that we now call Jalalpur was where Alexander crossed the Hydaspes River in the dark of night in May 326 BCE to give battle to Raja Paurava on the far side. Greek writers do not let on if, prior to this event, there was a village at this site or not. But in the 16th century, two thousand years after Alexander's passage, we read in Abul Fazal's chronicle of Akbar's reign that there was a locality in the doab between the rivers Jhelum and Sindhu called Girjhak*. This, the archaeologist Alexander Cunningham tells us, answers to the same Jalalpur, the latter name harking back to the interest in this area of Emperor Jalal ud Din Mohammad Akbar.

The interest was primarily for the chase and both Akbar and his son Jehangir favoured Girjhak for its chinkara that they call 'red deer.' Though Abul Fazal gives no word of the vast bags of game that Akbar and his retinue would have collected at Girjhak, Jehangir brags. In one hunting trip to Girjhak and Baghanwala (the latter referred to in the *Tuzk e Jehangiri* as Nandna) in March 1607 he killed two hundred and sixty-five animals of which one hundred and fifty-five were taken in Girjhak alone. The bag included antelope, blue bull (nilgai) and wild ass. The last, now extinct in Punjab, was reported as fairly numerous around Pind Dadan Khan, Haranpur and Bhera even as recently as a hundred years ago, could certainly have ranged this far northward. There were also mountain sheep and goats, writes Jehangir. The former, the Punjab urial, can still be seen, albeit very rarely, in the hills of Nandna above Baghanwala.

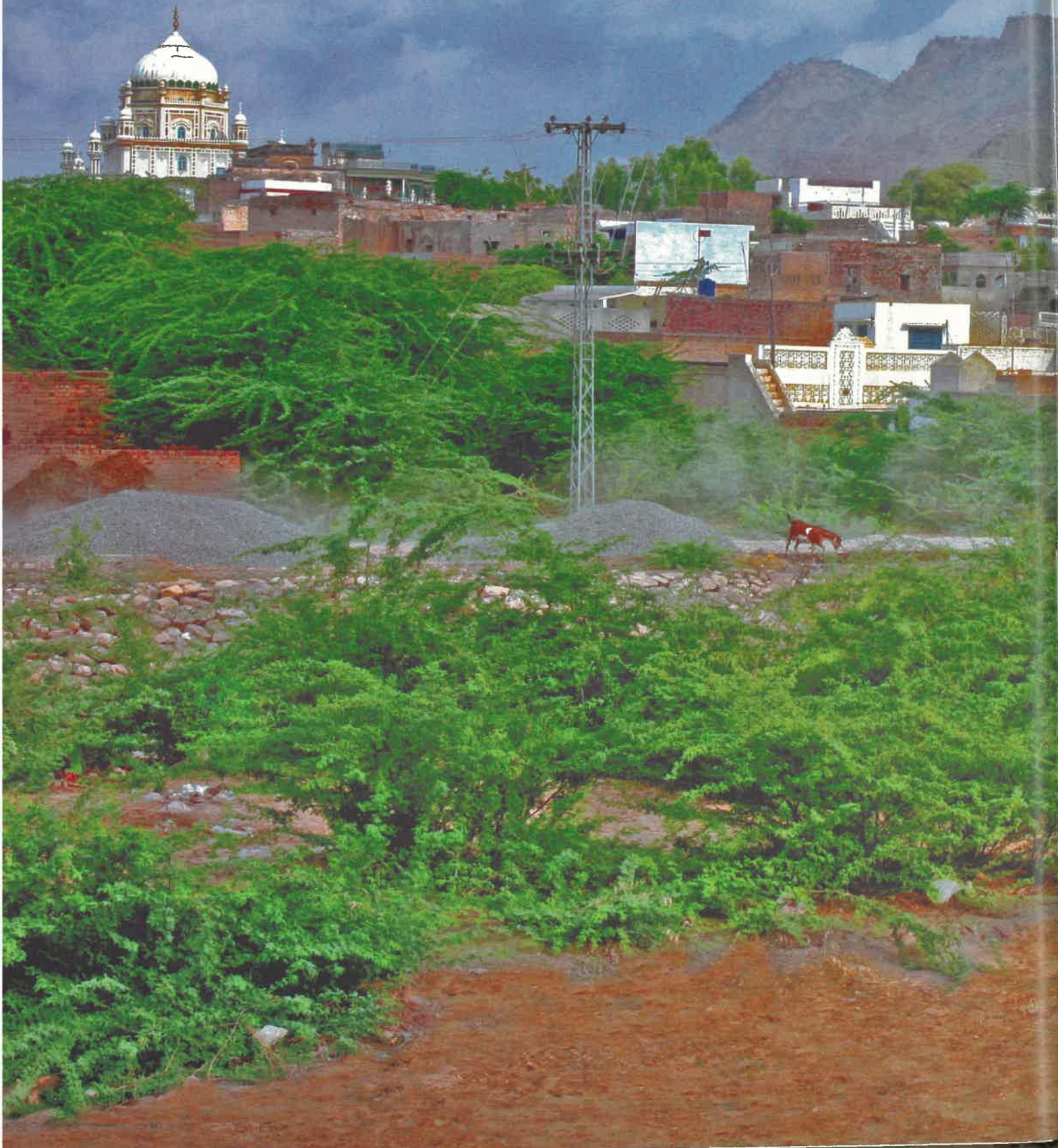
Besides his other qualities, the king could not be credited with environmental gumption. Retuning to hunt again in the spring of 1619 and failing to make the connection between his earlier wanton butchery and the dwindling number of wild animals, Jehangir was sorely disappointed by the paucity of his bag. Accordingly, he returned yet again in February 1622 to slaughter another one hundred and twenty-four urial and chinkara from the hills behind Girjhak. Modern Mughals have continued with this practice and the wild ass is not the only animal driven to extinction from this area.

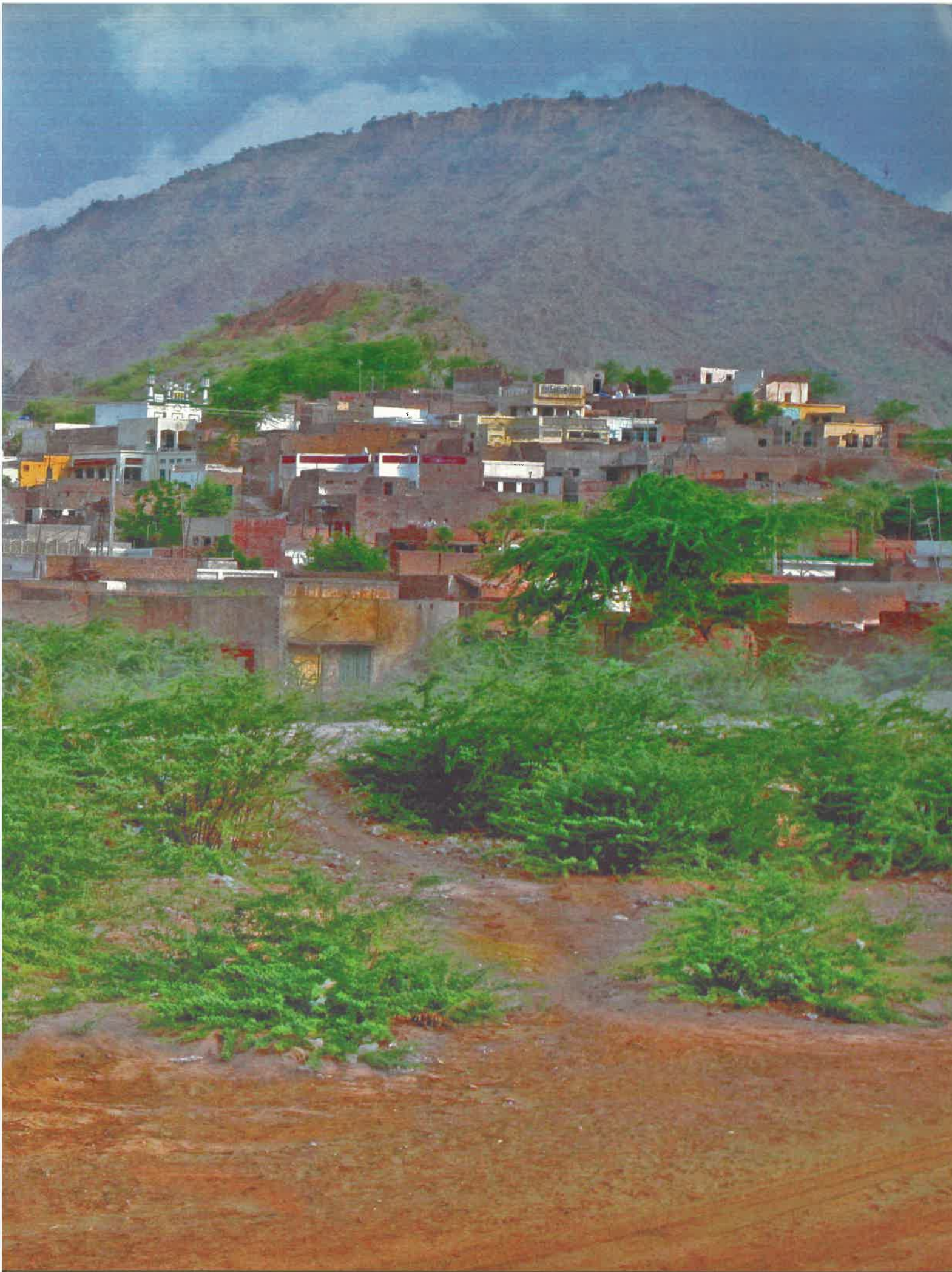
When Cunningham carried out his archaeological surveys in this area about the middle of the 19th century, he learned that Girjhak was the name of the remains of an old Janjua fort on the peak of Mungal Deo which looms above Jalalpur village. (Practically nothing remains of the fort today). He was told that in days of old the village attached to this fort stretched all the way to Baghanwala, a distance of nearly twenty kilometres. This he attributed, and quite rightly, to 'the usual exaggeration of ignorance that is told of all ancient sites.' Cunningham noted, however, that for a considerable distance westward of Jalalpur in the direction of Mungal Deo, the ground was liberally strewn with broken pottery.

Besides the pottery Cunningham was able to turn up some coins dating back to the period of Alexander's successors. He was, however, convinced that Girjhak was even older, situated as it was upon a ferry connecting it with the Punjab heartland on one side, and the direct road into the main Salt Range highlands on the other. Cunningham also postulated that Girjhak was the Girivraja of the *Ramayana* and therefore much older than the latter years of the 4th century BCE when Alexander rallied his forces here.

* There is a village of this same name just outside Model Town in Gujranwala as well.

Girjhak of yore became Jalalpur after Jalal ud Din Mohammed Akbar, the third Mughal king. The tomb of Ghulam Haider Shah is the distinguishing feature in the village. Alexander Cunningham, the archeologist, found evidence of an extensive human habitation between the village and the peak of Mungal Deo in the background. This hill and the ravines around it were rich in wildlife as we learn from the memoirs of Akbar and his son Jehangir. The dry riverbed in the foreground is the Gunder stream. Some like to believe that this name is a corruption of the name Alexander and recalls that distant time when the Macedonian conqueror tarried here briefly to cross the Jhelum River. This of course is an erroneous belief.







Completed in late summer of 2004, the bridge on the Bunha River was a long felt-need of the people. The District Government, Jhelum did well to address this issue. Fed by a large catchment area some sixty-five kilometres to the west in the heart of the Salt Range highlands, the Bunha is generally bone-dry. But the briefest shower of rain in the hills transforms it into a raging torrent that cannot be crossed

No detailed investigation into the past of Girjhak (or Jalalpur) was carried out by Cunningham nor since, and we do not know when its downfall came about. But there is a likely culprit. We know from various accounts that the Jhelum River of old, untamed as it is now by dams, was susceptible to periodic floods of great intensity. The first of these is recorded in the annals of Alexander. His historians tell us of the river sweeping away the tomb of his horse Bucephalus during the monsoon spate of 326 BCE. Then again we hear of the great flood that swept down the river in early August 1640. This one, recorded in the history of Shah Jehan, surely had something to do with the decline of the city of Girjhak. On his way to Srinagar, the king was witness to a deluge of Sawan rain that raged unabated for four days raising the river to a dangerously high level. Kashmirian elders are reported to have told the emperor that they had ‘never either seen nor heard of such tremendous floods.’

The *Shah Jehan Nama* records that ‘considerable injury had accrued ... to most of the districts bordering on the river Behat.’ The damage, we are told, spread to villages situated as much as ‘five or six kos away

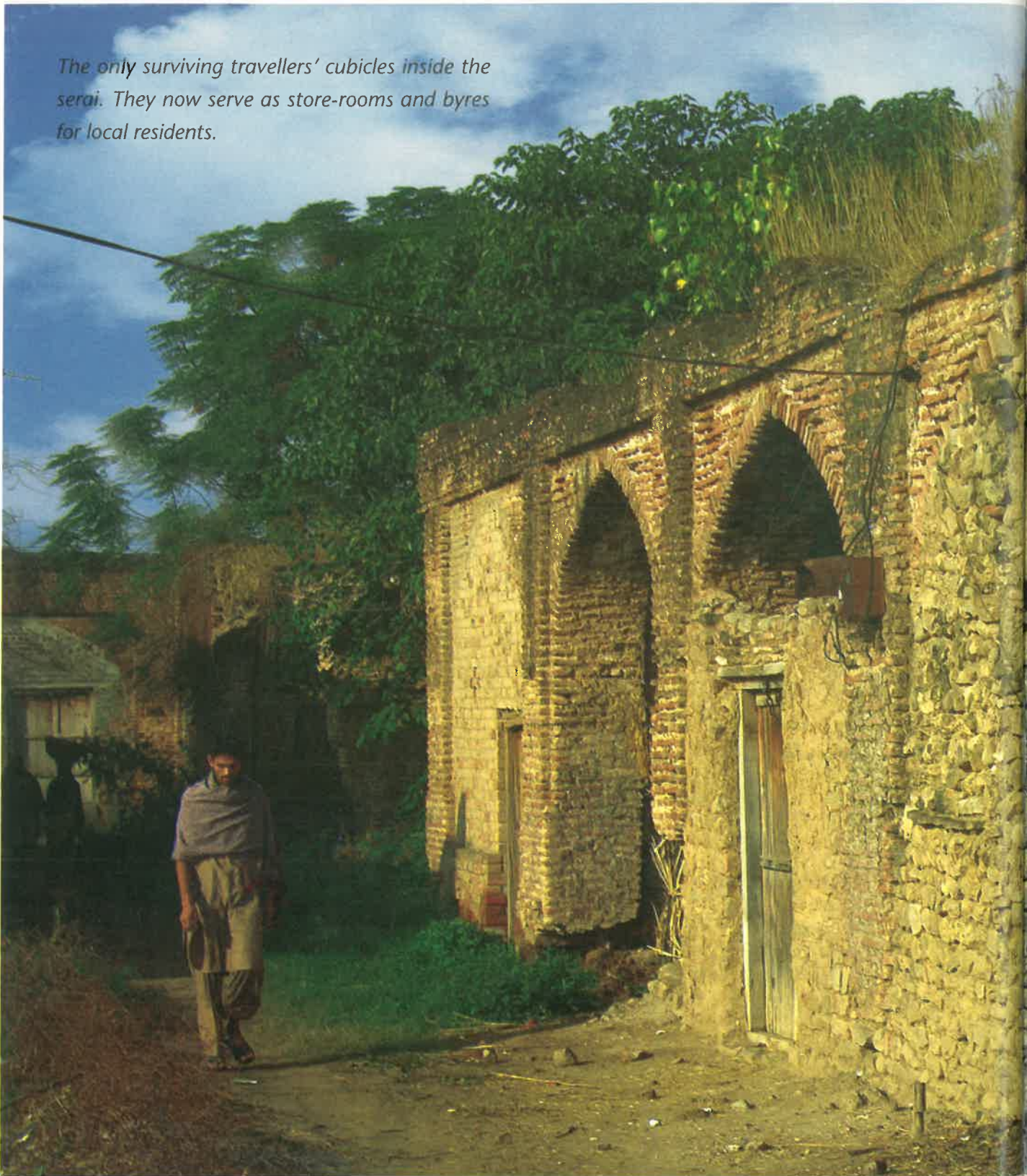


without a bridge. Before the bridge went up, summer monsoons meant frequent cutting off of this main connection between Jhelum and Pind Dadan Khan – sometimes for days on end. Though it has not yet (as of May 2005) been officially inaugurated, the anticipatory commemorative plaque declares its opening by President Pervez Musharraf.

from the Behat.’ Taking the kos to mean about three kilometres, the flooded Jhelum would have spread over some twenty kilometres of forest and farmland! Jalalpur standing smack on the west bank of the river would scarcely have stood a chance. Indeed, there cannot be a habitation today, from Jhelum to Pind Dadan Khan, that would not have been flattened virtually out of existence by the flood of 1640. That this major catastrophe has not been preserved in local lore indicates that it was just another one in a long line of similar disasters – something too commonplace to become part of legend.

Closer to our time Girjhak, having become better known as Jalalpur, is famous for the lofty dome and minarets of the shrine of Ghulam Haider Shah. Miracles are attributed to this 19th century holy man who passed away from this life in 1908. The superstitious resort here in search of their heart’s desire and the keeper is quick to point out that no supplicant has ever been rejected; that the wishes of all comers are granted. This is known for they all return to give thanks afterwards, he says. The man forgets that those whose wishes remain unfulfilled seek other demi-gods elsewhere.

The only surviving travellers' cubicles inside the serai. They now serve as store-rooms and byres for local residents.





With Jehangir on the Highroad

Emperor Jehangir's life was an endless succession of hunting expeditions all over the empire and those yearly trips at the beginning of each summer to escape to Kashmir from the furnace heat of Lahore and the return journey in September. In between were those tedious interludes of ruling the vast empire of India. On one of those trips in mid-April 1607, Jehangir favoured us, by way of his diary, with an account of his passage through present-day Jhelum district.

Having sojourned briefly at Rohtas and then travelled up to Tilla Jogian, he tells us of his journey thence to a place he calls Bhakra which evidently is Bhakrala on the Grand Trunk Road near Sohawa. It is a right light-hearted and delightful account of a king in vernal rapture:

In the Gakkhar tongue bhakra is a jungle. The jungle was composed of clusters of flowers, white and scentless. I came the whole way from Tilla to Bhakra in the middle of the river-bed, which had running water in it, with oleander flowers of the colour of peach blossoms. In Hindustan this plant is always in full bloom. There was much of it on the banks of this river. The horsemen and men on foot who were with me were told to put bunches of the flowers on their heads, and whoever did not do so had his turban taken off; a wonderful flower-bed was produced.

Now, the river that Jehangir followed was, without doubt, the Kahan that laps the walls of Rohtas. As for the white unscented flowers, there appears to be a minor mistake. The only shrub with white flowers that grows here and blooms in such abundance in April as the emperor saw, is the *bhekar* (*Adhatoda vasica*). The normally observant Jehangir probably did not pause to



The steps leading down to the water level in the Khukha baoli. The concrete structure on the upper right corner is the pump room that supplies water to several surrounding villages.

smell the flowers or he would have marvelled at the mildly unpleasant scent the *bhekar* exudes. He might then have commented on how such a disagreeable odour could draw the vast numbers of honey-bees that mob the plant in flower. The oleander apparently grew in good numbers along the Kahan at that time. Today one finds it occurring only occasionally and that also in the vicinity of habitation.

As Jehangir and his retinue descended from the cool heights of Tilla Jogian, they would have crossed the Kahan not many miles to the south of Rohtas. Consequently, although the king does not mention it, he might have paused at the halting place just across the Kahan River from Rohtas. But then again, he may not have because then (1607) the serai may not have existed. This is just another one of those places that history passed by for no travellers' or historical account notices it. Consequently, we do not even know what it must have been called when it was first raised. In the absence of a detailed investigation the theories variously assign this mysterious monument to any period from Akbar's reign right down to the early years of Shah Jehan's.

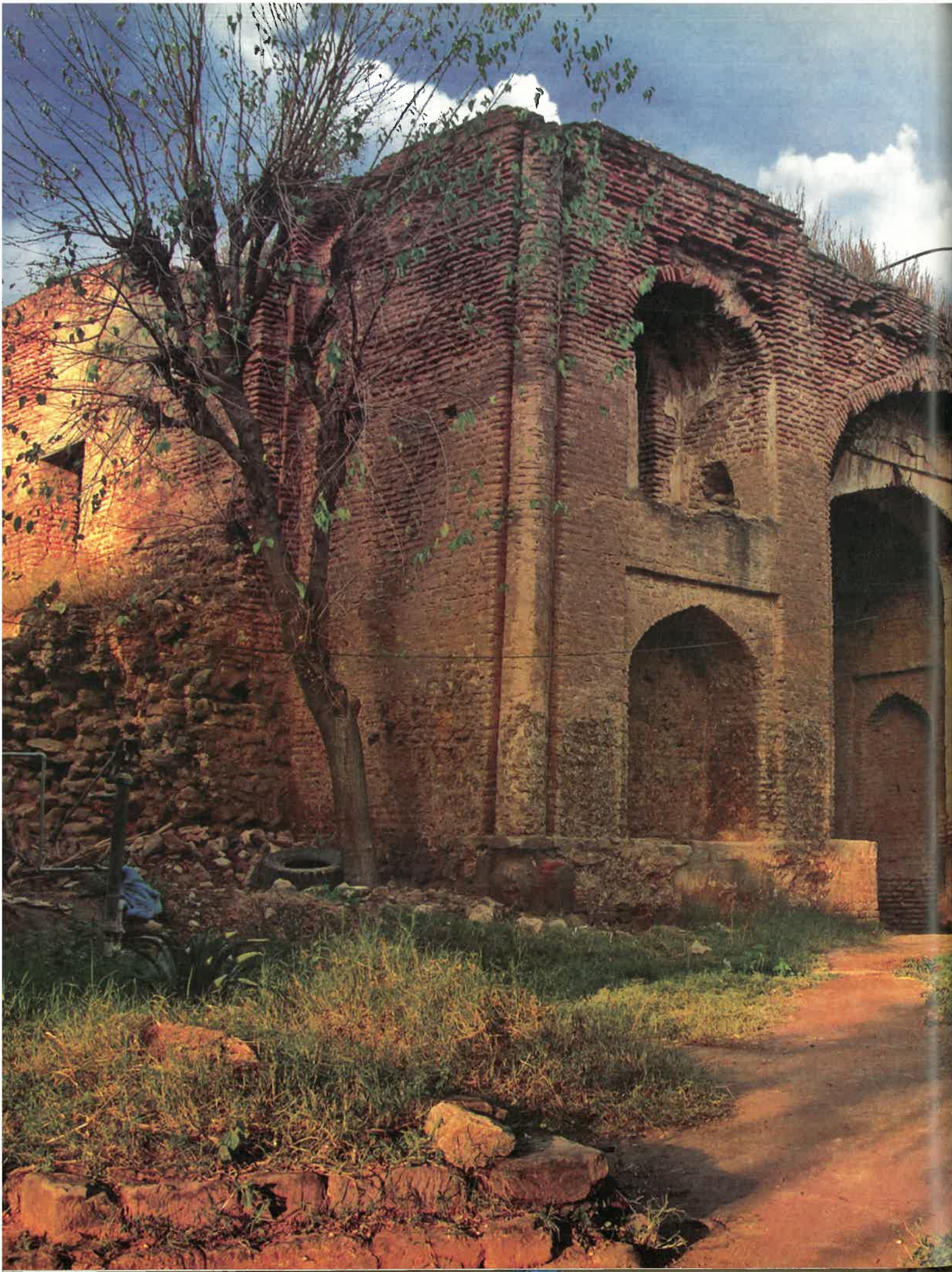
Locals call it Rajo Pind and tell you that its other name is Serai Jhando after a certain Mai Jhando also known as Rajo. Interestingly, the Settlement Record of 1880 alters Rajo's sex and details the man's family tree right down to the village *lumbardar* of the year of the settlement. Consequently, it is easy to discover Rajo Arain's descendents in the village today. The Jhando of legend, it is related, (also an Arain) came from the east country to stake out her claim in this place at some unknown time in the past. All those who live within (owing to growing population now also without) the high walls of what was once a fortified caravanserai*, are said to be her descendents. Other than this vague 'history' nothing else is known of this not so primordial Eve who gave the village its name. The 'intellectuals' among Jhando's purported descendents believe that their village with its high walls was the jail where Sher Shah Suri incarcerated the intractable Gakkhars.

As one approaches from the Kahan, the lofty gate-house affording entrance to the broad enceinte within fortress-like walls appears very impressive. For the untrained eye, this might indeed be the entrance to a jailhouse, just as the surviving cubicles running along the north wall are prison cells. Forlorn and decrepit, the rooms are all but ruined. The flat-domed roofs of only two cells are still holding out. Long ago, travellers pausing for the night would have rented this accommodation. Even the merchant would have slept in one of these rooms on his journey from Lahore to Kabul in 1609 – that is if this serai was then in existence. Although he mentions 'Loure Rotas' as one of the stages on his itinerary, it is obvious that ordinary travellers not being permitted inside the fort, Finch would have sought accommodation in the serai across the Kahan that came to be known after Mai Jhando.

It was perhaps below the station of a king to take notice of a caravanserai that Jehangir omitted mentioning it. This omission gives rise to the notion that the serai may not have existed at that time. Although no detailed study has been carried out, the architecture is characteristic of the early Mughal period and it may be that the omission is because the king skirted the serai by several miles. But as he progressed upstream along the Kahan and before he entered the thickets of *bhekar* and oleander, he would have paused to refresh himself at the *baoli* (stepped well) just outside Khukha village. At about six kilometres from Jhando's caravanserai, this would have been an easy stage meant only for travellers to refresh themselves with a drink of water. No hostelry existed here. Just the well with the broad flight of steps leading down to the level of the water where heat-exhausted travellers could repose in cool darkness. Fitted with a pumping set, the Khukha *baoli* makes for the water supply of several nearby villages today.

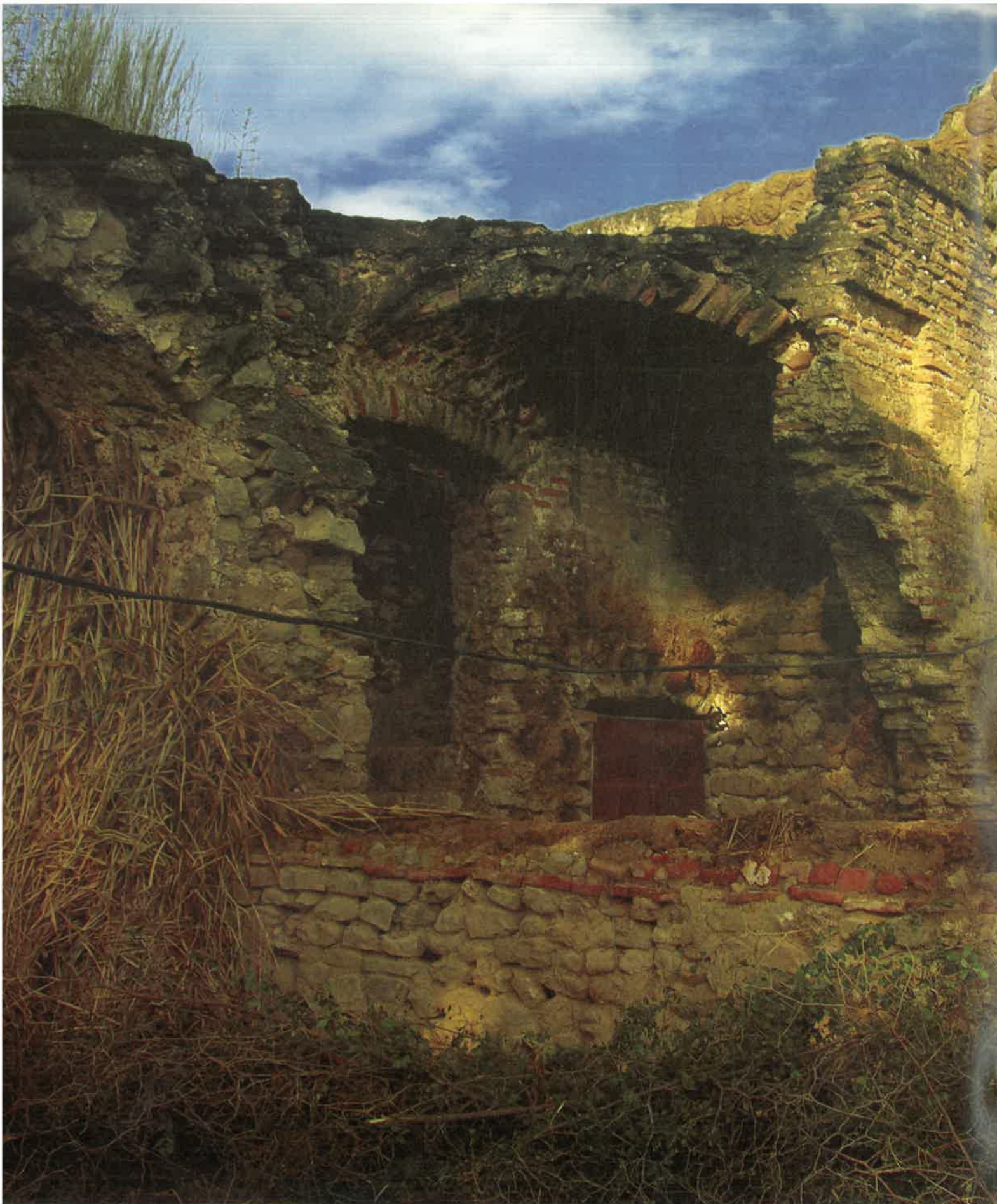
Common lore assigns this well, once again wrongly, to Sher Shah Suri. The charisma of the ablest Pakhtun ruler ever the subcontinent was to know continued to expand even after his passing away. Consequently, it was quickly forgotten that Pakhtun sway did not go far beyond the crenulated walls of Rohtas. There, beyond the Kahan floodplain in the narrow defiles of the Potohar Plateau, the defiant Gakkhars were the masters. As for the archaeologists, they are again uncertain: like the case of the caravanserai of Jhando, this stepped well could have been built any time between 1556 and the 1620s during the reigns of either Akbar or his son Jehangir.

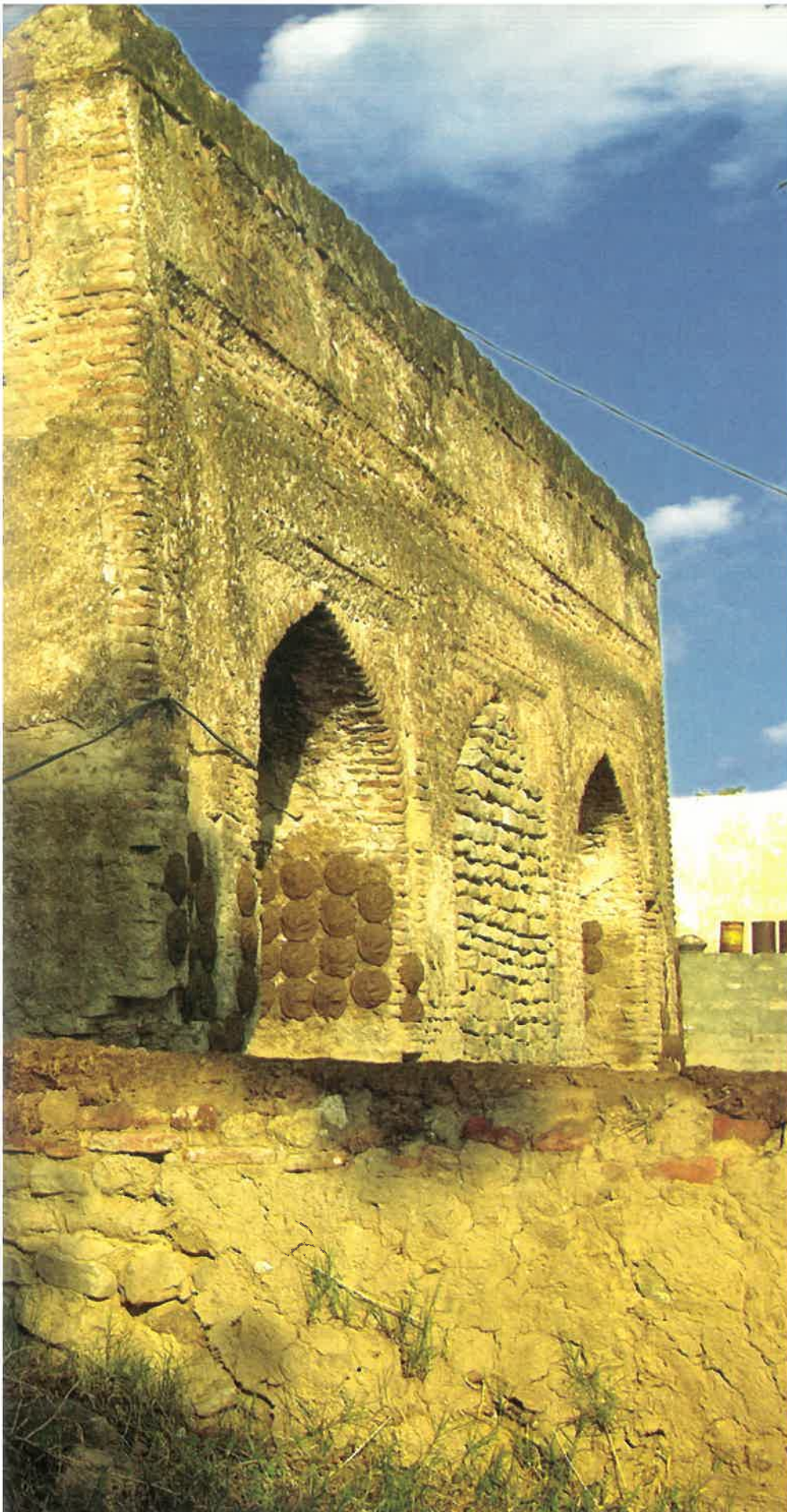
* Other similarly fortified caravanserais are those of Rewat (near Rawalpindi) and Begum ki Serai outside Attock Fort.



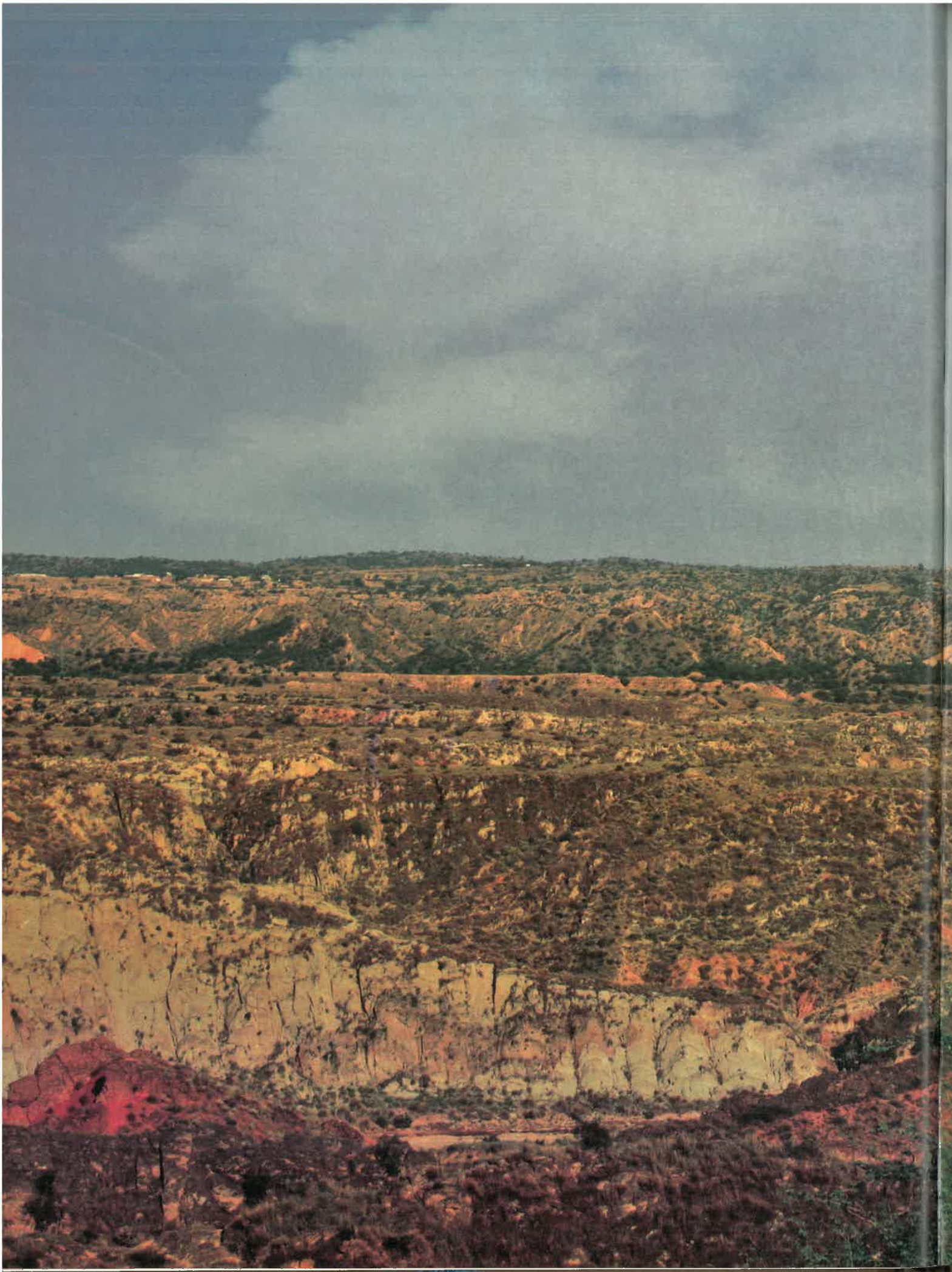


The lofty gatehouse leading into what was once a fortified caravanserai. In his journey from Tilla Jogian to Bhakrala Jehangir would have skirted this serai by several miles which is the reason that he does not mention it. William Finch, the English merchant who passed this way about the same time, also mentions only Rohtas. But as no ordinary travellers would have been permitted to reside overnight within the fort, Finch would have sojourned at this hostelry which, having been recently built, may not have had a name at the time.





This was one of two mosques that served the faithful stopping in the caravanserai for the night. Now, because locals do not realise it is a house of worship, it has been a cowshed for several years. The other one has long since been pulled down and replaced with a modern structure. Such is the regard most people have for historical and protected buildings.



The scant water in the middle ground to the right marks the course of the northerly branch of the Kahan River just after it crosses the modern Grand Trunk Road to the north. Jehangir followed the river from near Rohtas to Bhakrala which is barely visible on the distant horizon as two white spots.





The most impressive baoli or stepped well ever to be seen in Pakistan lies in the broad enceinte of Rohtas. The two-hundred odd steps leading down to the water and the angular arches above give this structure a touch of the wondrous. It may not have been directly ordered by Sher Shah Suri, but this impressive monument has led common observers to believe that all stepped wells anywhere in the subcontinent were the work of Sher Shah Suri.



Rohtas: Monument of Wasted Labour

Babur, a most remarkable man, founder of the Mughal dynasty of India, poet, diarist and soldier extraordinary, passed through Jhelum district. Thus the various references to Jhelum in his diary show us. On the occasion of taking Bhera he tells of his departure from Kallar Kahar (Chakwal district) on 21 February 1519. Babur and his army crossed the river that same evening very likely by the ferry of Ahmadabad, a few kilometres downstream of Pind Dadan Khan. Having flown his banners on Bhera, Babur spent a few restful days there. Among other things, he tells us of his galas on longboats on the Jhelum River. As the waves of the river gently rocked the boat, much strong spirit (*arak*) and a confection of opium (*ma'jun*) was consumed to the accompaniment of the lute.

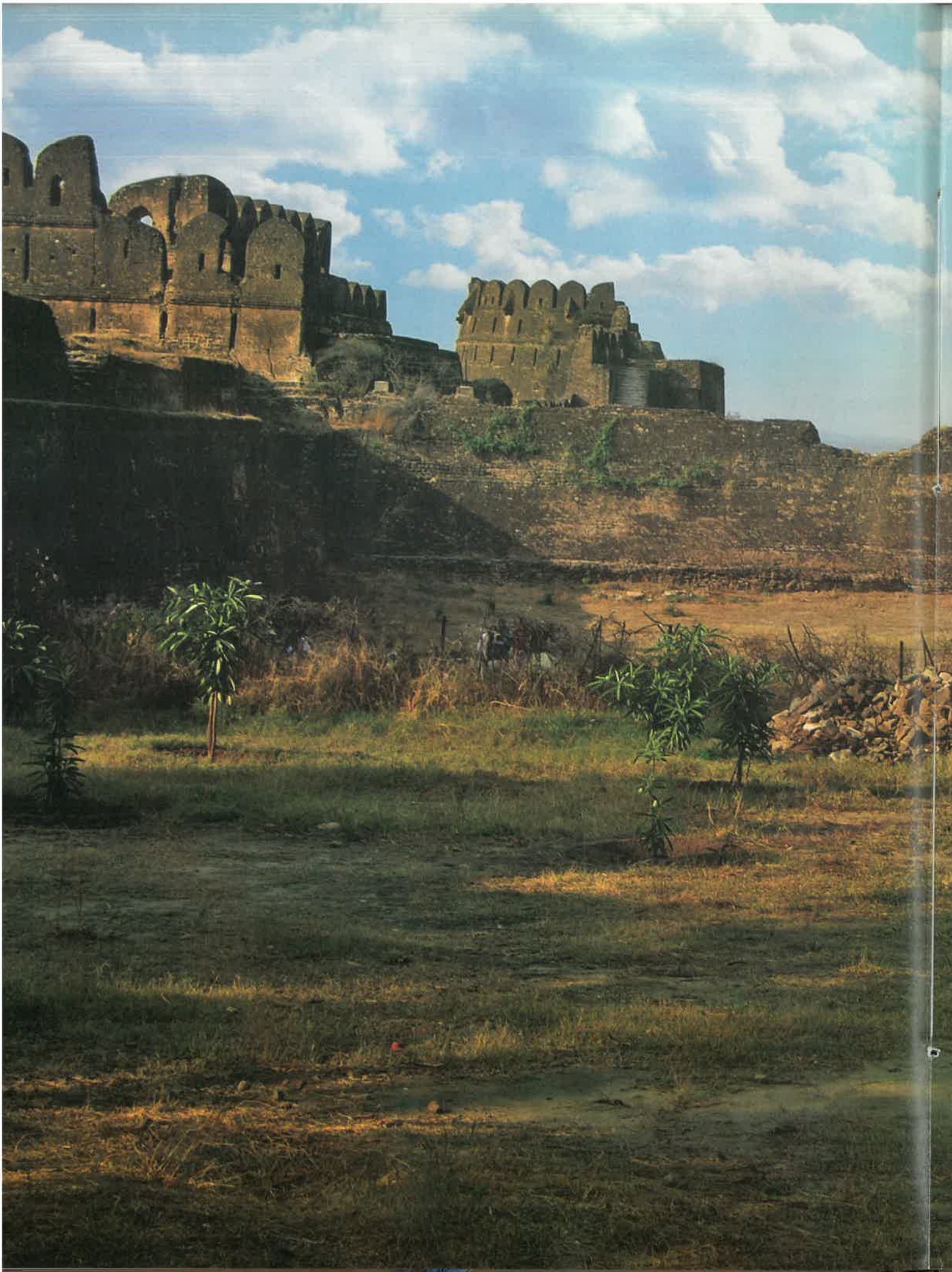
But the Mughal empire was not yet to be. Babur withdrew to Afghanistan and returned again in November 1523. The part of his diary dealing with this expedition being missing, it can only be conjectured that he crossed either at Jhelum or at a ferry below the town. Two years later, in December 1525, the day before Christmas, Babur was ferried across the 'Behat water at a ford below Jhelum [town]...' This time his route is known. It lay through the country of the Gakkhars, down by that branch of the Rajapatha that our G. T. Road now follows, south from the fortified caravanserai of Rewat and into the bed of the Kahan River in the vicinity of Bhakralla to skirt the northern edge of Tilla Jogian. The crossing place of the Behat was near the town of Sanghoi (twenty-five kilometres southwest of Jhelum) either by the ferry of Kot Basira or Khohar – both of which operate to this day. The difference today being that there is just one boat at each ferry and the ferries no longer serve long distance travellers, only local needs. As for Babur, this time around, he did not return to Afghanistan. He went on to conquer India and establish his Mughal empire that was to follow through five descendants before eventually giving way to other rulers.

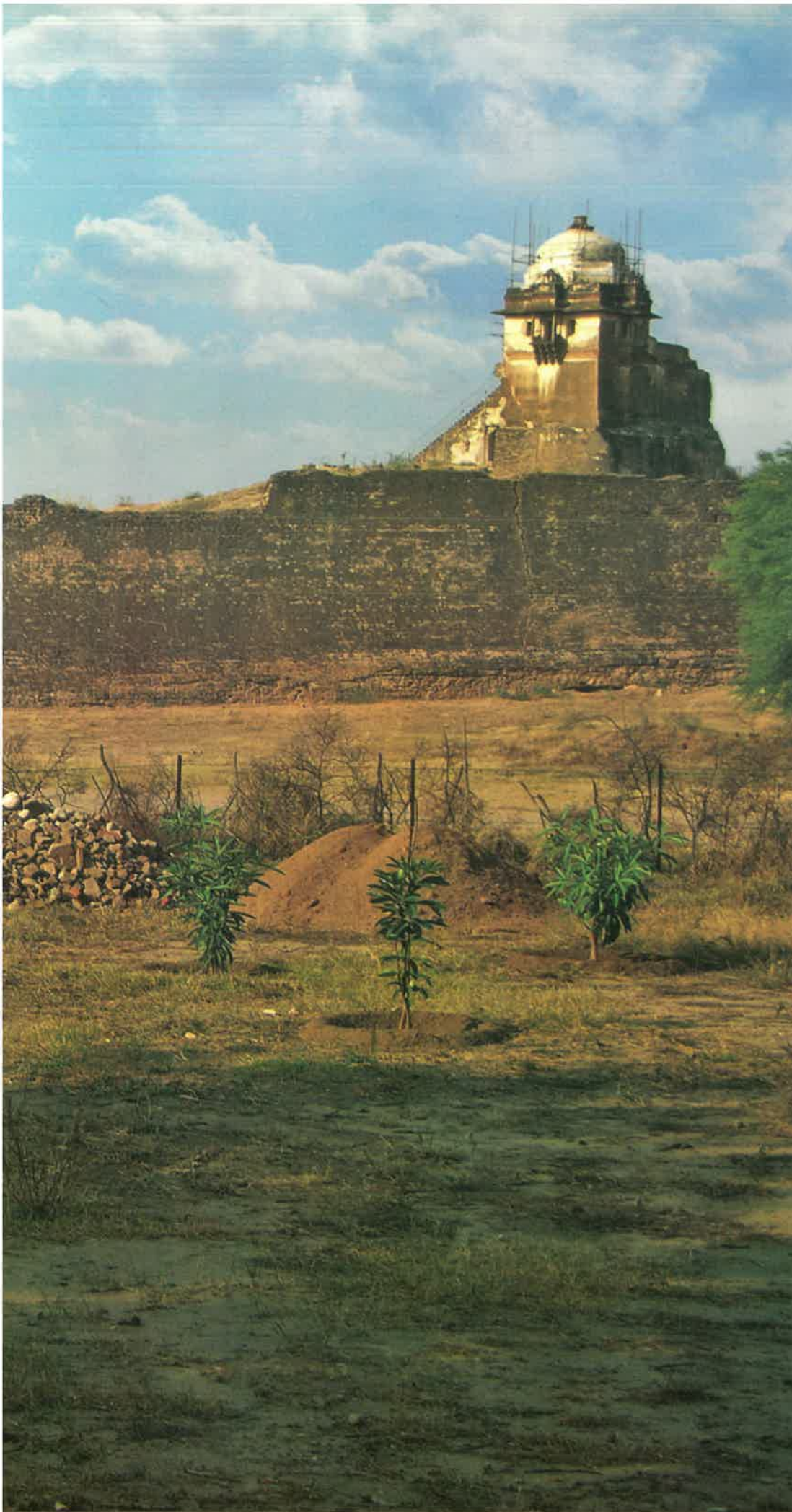
Babur's son Humayun was a weakling who very quickly ceded the empire to the ardent, wily and certainly much more capable Sher Shah Suri. Ousted and hunted, Humayun became a fugitive forced to leave India and seek asylum with the Persian king. It was only in 1555, ten years after the violent death of Sher Shah Suri, that Humayun was able to return to reclaim his father's kingdom. This is a story worth telling.

The year was 1527, two years since the establishment of the Mughal empire in India when Junaid Barlas, a much-trusted nobleman in the service of Babur, presented Farid Khan to the court. Young and manifestly energetic, this man was a Pakhtun of the Sur family whose grandfather had migrated from Afghanistan to seek his fortune in India.

The family settled in Bihar and there rose to high station in the service of the Pakhtun kings. Young Farid was known as Sher Khan for, it was said, he had once killed a tiger to save the life of the Nuhani king of Bihar. Once a great favourite at the Bihar court, Sher Khan had been banished from his home by the intrigues of his stepmother and half-brothers.

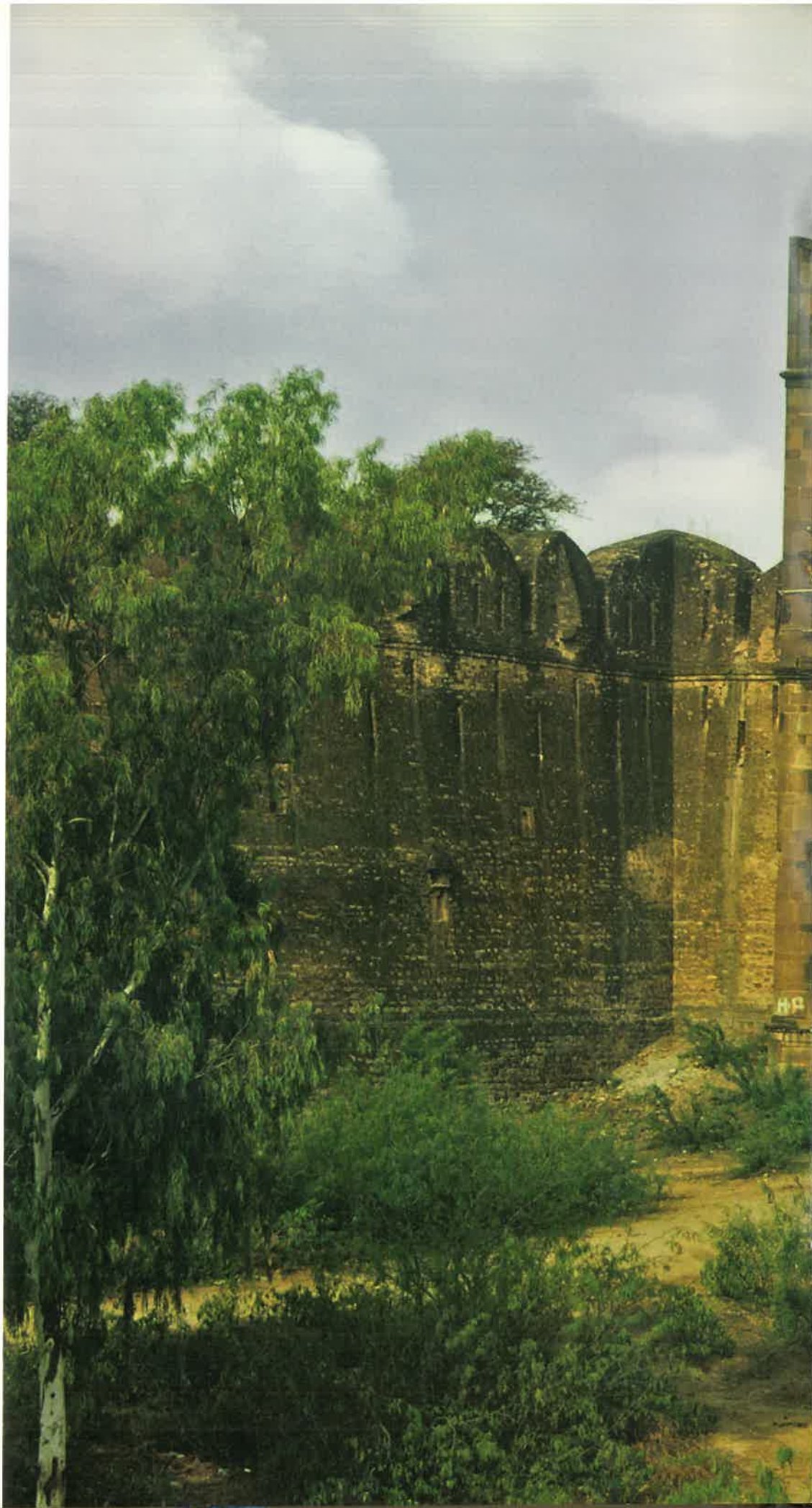
Having chanced upon him, Junaid Barlas was much impressed by the obvious administrative and martial skills of Sher Khan. Considering him a suitable candidate to serve the Mughal king, the Turk brought the Pakhtun to court where Babur marked him as a man of 'sense and spirit' who held promise of future greatness. Sher Khan's ambition was not to serve under the Mughal king, however. His dreams were greater. He defected from the Mughal court and after a good deal of wavering and scheming in his native Bihar, he was able to foment a Pakhtun uprising against the Mughals.





The lofty domed private chamber in the palace of Raja Man Singh was built when this Rajput was stationed in Rohtas during the reign of Emperor Akbar. The ground floor of the building was destroyed at some indeterminate time in the past. Recent investigation shows that this destruction was caused by exploding gunpowder.

Zohal Gate in the south is now called Sohail Gate after some supposed saint of this name. Until the early 1970s oral tradition related that the gate was so named because at the time of its construction the planet Zohal (Saturn) was directly overhead. The pseudo religiosity of the 1980s contributed to the demise of the older tradition and the invention of a saint with a similar-sounding name. To help the new superstition was an unmarked grave by the gateway. It is an interesting pointer in the right direction that the District Gazetteer of 1904 calls this gate Sohail and not Sohail.







*An ornate balcony
from the first floor
of Zohal Gate. The
corbelled
cantilever below
the balcony shows
that even when
stone masons had
been made scarce
by the Gakkhars,
Toder Mal
remained resolute
in making Sher
Shah's Rohtas a
monument that
would please the
finer senses of the
beholder.*

In the beginning of 1529, as Babur marched east to quell the trouble, he gave the first and only inkling of hurt at Sher Khan's behaviour: 'Sher Khan Sur whom I had favoured last year with the gift of several parganas and had left in charge of this neighbourhood, had joined these [rebellious] Pakhtuns.' The uprising was quelled and Sher Khan made a quick volte-face and tendered submission to Babur. On his part, the unsuspecting Mughal installed Sher Khan in his *jagir*.

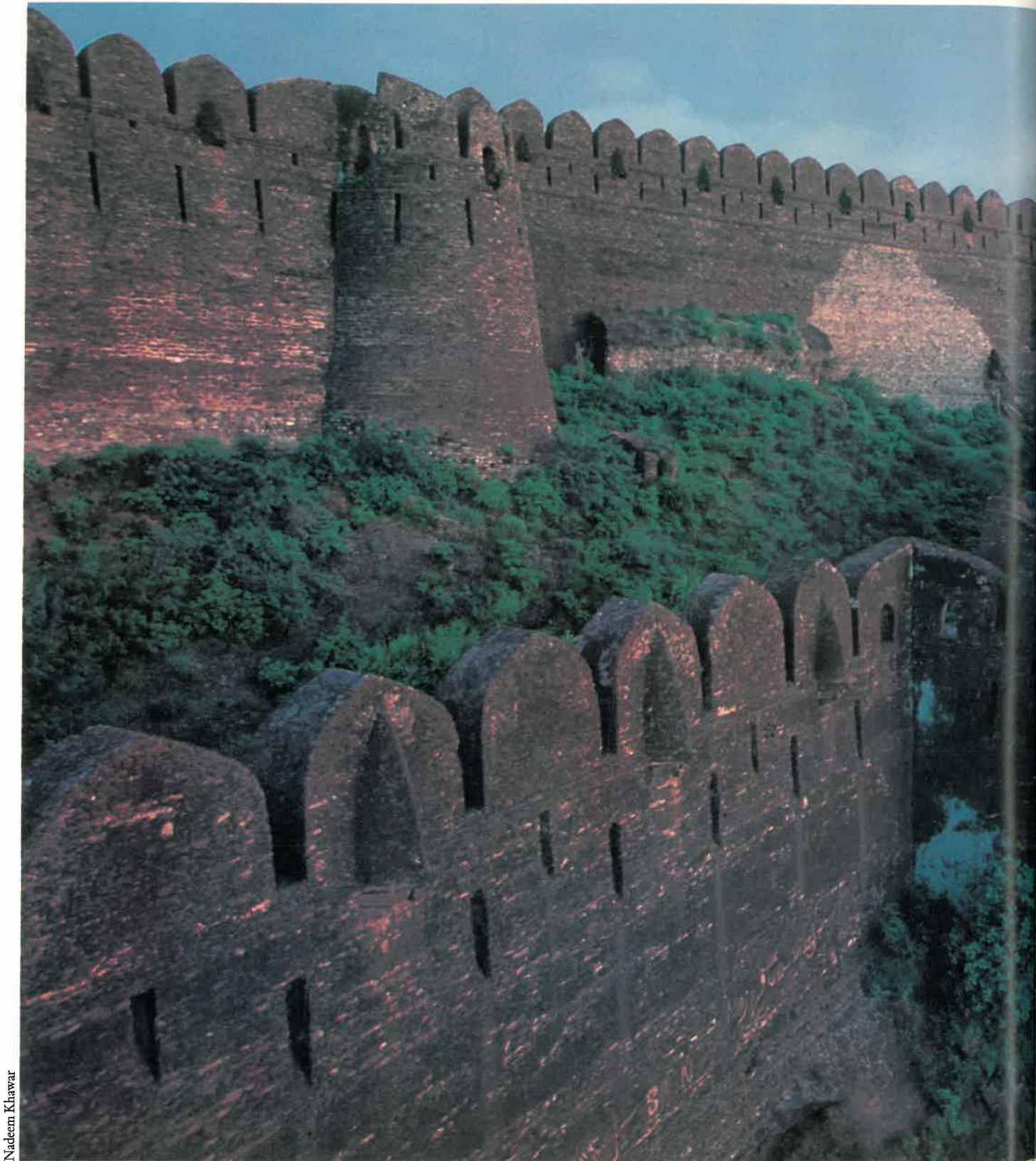
Babur died in December 1530 and his weak and inept son Humayun took over. With his mind forever befuddled with opium, this man was no match for the energetic and sharp-witted Sher Khan Sur who had considerably increased his power in the eastern provinces. It did not take very long for weakness of central government to incite the Pakhtuns to rise in revolt under the banner of Mahmud Lodhi. The sharp-minded Sher Khan sent a secret message to the Mughals that though he was overtly siding with the Pakhtuns, but as a loyal adherent of the House of Babur, he was on the Mughals' side. The understanding he gave was that as soon as engagement between Mughals and the Pakhtuns began, he would detach his forces and withdraw.

Withdraw he did, enabling the Mughal army under Humayun to defeat the Lodhis. This was scarcely a military victory for Humayun, it was brilliant strategy on Sher Khan's part. With the Lodhis weakened, Sher Khan's power increased until it set the faint heart of Humayun aflutter. He made a feeble attempt to bring Sher Khan to heel, but failing, he returned to his capital while the Pakhtun rapidly added to his stature and power. When it was almost too late, Humayun shook away the clouds of opium smoke from his mind and spent most of the year 1537 campaigning in Bihar. Sher Khan did not give battle but withdrew to Bengal duping Humayun with the chimera of victory. No surprise then that in the following months in Bihar, Humayun shut himself away with his wine and opium.

In those heady days of intoxicated revelry, news and issues of government, no matter how important and pressing, were assiduously kept from the king's ears by his aides. As Humayun sank deeper into his stupor, far away on the fringes of empire Sher Khan had applied himself to achieving his aim of ultimate power over the throne of India by steadily regaining his lost territory. It was entirely to his good luck that Mirza Hindal, Humayun's younger brother, revolted and the feckless king was forced to return to his capital. In the vacuum, Sher Khan became the master of the east under the title of Sher Shah Suri.

In April 1539 Humayun marched east to settle matters with Sher Shah. In the vicinity of Chausa, negotiations brokered by a religious teacher engineered a peace that gave certain concessions to Sher Shah. Thinking this was yet again a victory for the Mughals, the useless Humayun once again gave over to endless partying. In a surprise move, Sher Shah brought his army into the rear of the Mughals, and just as morning was breaking on the 27th day of June, fell upon them. Bleary-eyed soldiery led by a drunken and spineless king is no match for an efficient fighting machine under an able commander. The rout was utter and even as the day reached its mid-point, over twelve thousand Mughal troops lay dead on the field. In disgrace did Humayun withdraw to Agra.

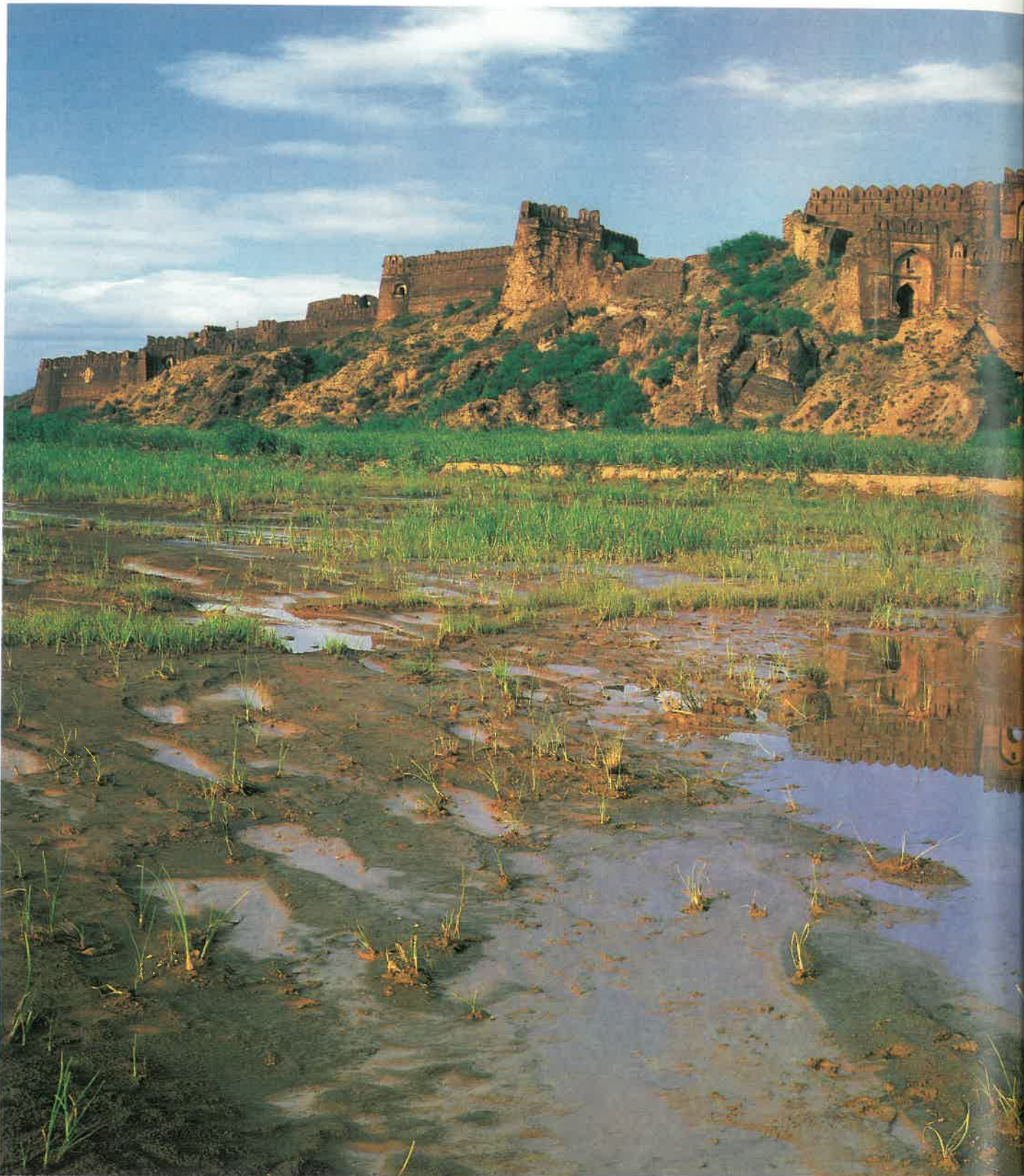
In the beginning of 1540, news arrived that Sher Shah was moving westward at the head of a large army. Forsaken by his brothers yet again and leading a disaffected army, Humayun prepared to take the field. On the banks of the Ganga River by the city of Kanauj, the Mughal army drew rein. Across the brown eddies of the river Sher Shah's Pakhtuns were arrayed. As they lay about for a full month, the Mughal army frittered away by desertions while the Pakhtuns became readier still for the coming contest. Early in May, not yet a full eleven months since the rout of Chausa, the Mughals crossed the river to give battle.



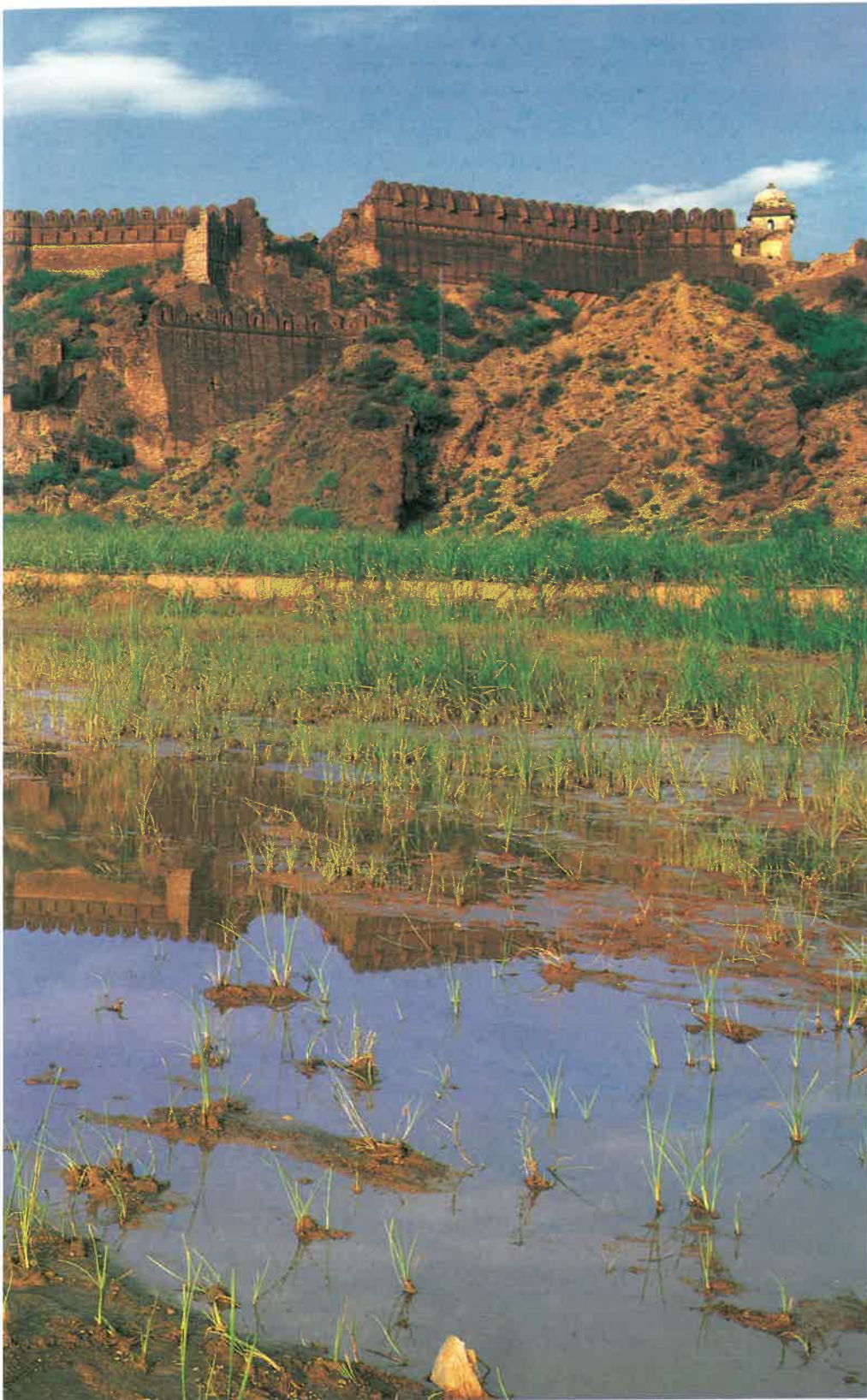
Nadeem Khawar



Detail of fortifications. Every second one of the massive merlons was equipped with hooded machicolations to pour boiling oil and water on attackers below. These machicolations are clearly visible in the foreground as well as on the inner fortification. The partially visible gateway is Shishi Gate so called because of the blue glazed tiles adorning its spandrels.

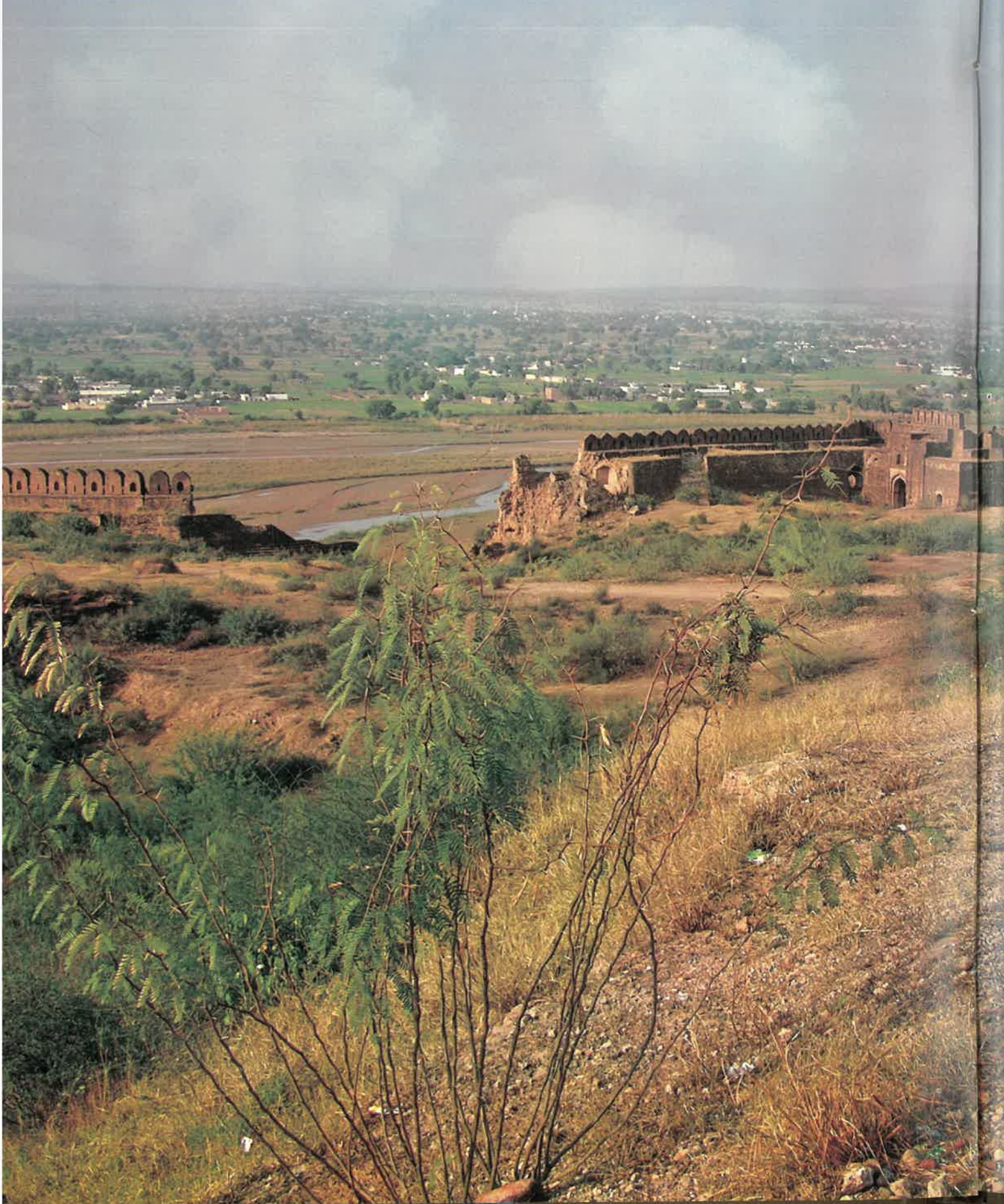


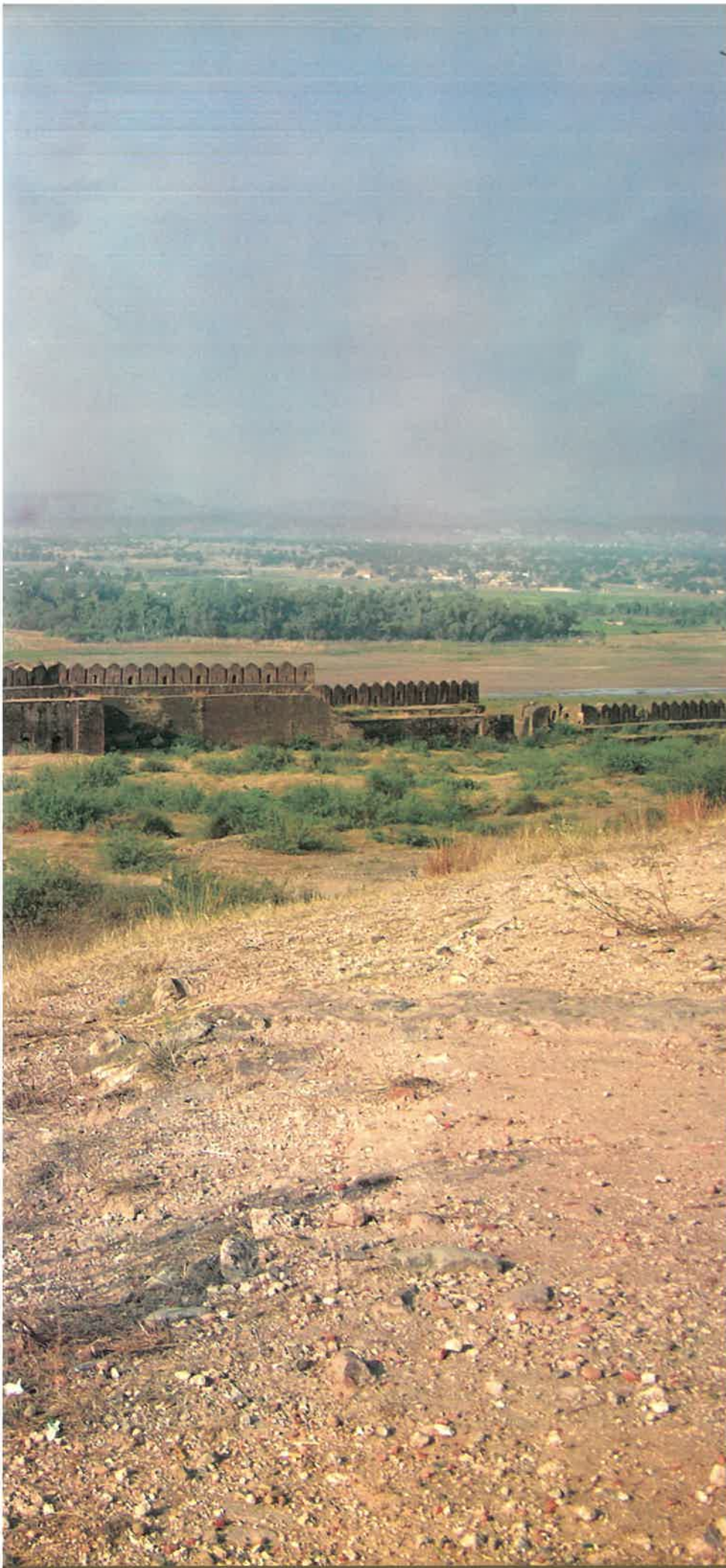
Nadeem Khawar



As Humayun returned from his long years of exile and approached Rohtas from the far side of the Kahan, he would have regarded this view with a good deal of trepidation. Only the lofty dome of Man Singh's palace (seen on the right) would not yet have been built. But even as Humayun was leading his troops down the Sohawa Pass, Tatar Khan Kasi, the governor of Rohtas, and his men had abandoned this powerful garrison and the Mughals walked in without firing a shot. The gateway on the skyline is named Kabuli because it faces westward in the direction of the Afghan capital.

Looking west from the palace of Raja Man Singh.





The best account of this ignominious defeat of the Mughals is given by the worthy Mirza Haider Dughlat, a cousin of Babur's, in command of a division. Forty thousand disorganised and dispirited Mughal soldiers, he notes, fled before ten thousand well-orchestrated Pakhtuns even before a single arrow had been loosed. So gutless and hasty was the Mughal rout that not a man from either side was wounded. In the scramble, writes Dughlat, many a man of illustrious name, too panic-stricken to remove his mail, drowned in the Ganga. And Humayun with all his pretence to generalship escaped across the river on a diseased, limping nag. That, for the time being, was the end of the Mughal empire in the subcontinent.

Humayun fled to Rajasthan and Sindh, but finding no truck with local rulers eventually took refuge in Persia. In India, Sher Shah Suri began to consolidate his hold over the new empire. One of the first things was to induce the Gakkhars to join him. This small but warlike tribe living on the northwest fringe of his empire, had sworn allegiance to Babur two decades earlier and had not hurried over to Sher Shah's side. Advancing to Bhera on the banks of the Jhelum River, Sher Shah sent out an emissary to demand their loyalty. Sarang Khan, the Gakkhar chief, remained unequivocally defiant, replying with a pair of maces and some

arrow-filled quivers. Gakkhar lore says there was a pair of lion cubs as well and the message, 'You call yourself "Sher," so I send you these cubs that you try to imbibe the qualities of these noble creatures. It is doubtful, but you may yet acquire some of their courage.'

If there was ever a declaration of war this was one. Sher Shah advanced across the Jhelum and into the Potohar Plateau where he got a good enough measure of the Gakkhars. Those of his advisors who knew this tenacious lot advised the king that it would be best to possess their territory by controlling the roads with strong permanent garrisons. The government would then not only be able to control their plundering raids, but also have access into their country whenever needed. And so a survey was undertaken to build the first garrison that was to hold the redoubtable Gakkhars at bay.

On the borders of Gakkhar country, by the right bank of the stream known as the Kahan, surveyors noted a straight-sided low hill. It was, the report to the king observed, 'in the vicinity of Tilla Balnath.' The site, a few kilometres south of the sub-montane branch of the Rajapatha and about fifteen kilometres from the ferry of Jhelum, was chosen for the garrison. Here was to be built a fortress of singular strength and design that would overawe any aggressor. It would be called Rohtas, so the king ordained, after the fort of the same name in Bengal that he had won by stratagem only some years earlier.

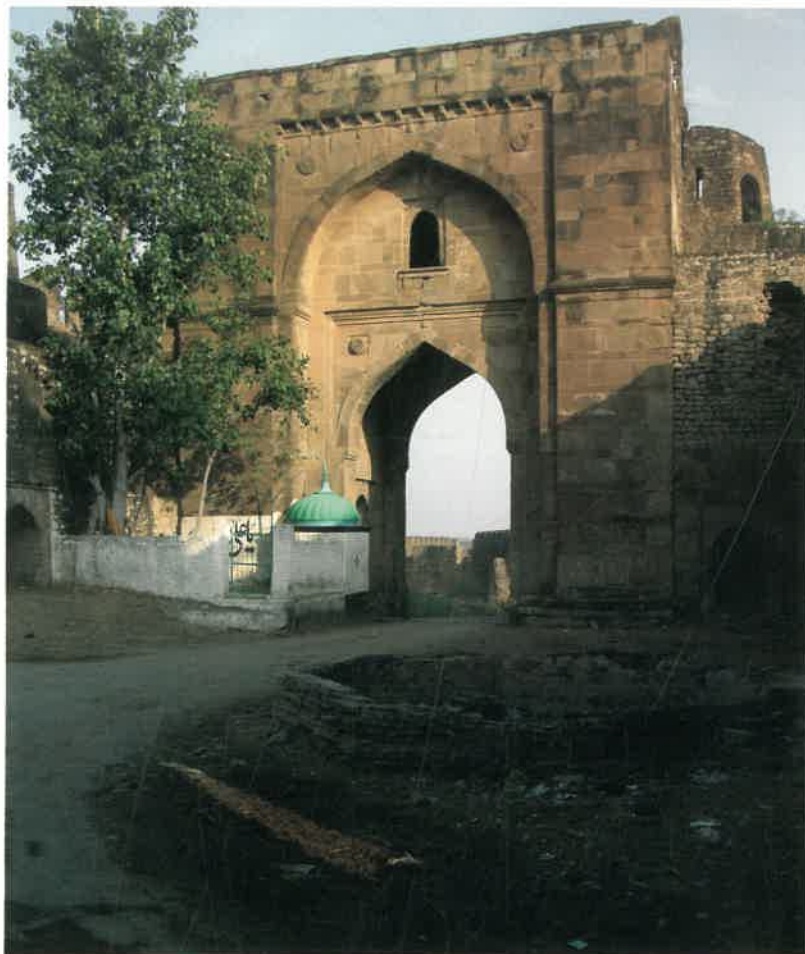
The able Haibat Khan Niazi was placed at the head of the force to guard the northwest border of Sher Shah's kingdom while administration was to be overseen by Khowas Khan. Toder Mal, Sher Shah's revenue minister, was placed in-charge of the construction work. Leaving Toder Mal with a plentiful supply of funds and the instructions to complete the fort most expeditiously, Sher Shah returned to Bengal to quell a revolt.

Work on the fort of Rohtas began in 1541. Wages were good and able-bodied men from surrounding localities came to benefit from this new bounty. Slowly the massive walls of Rohtas began to rise above the sandy banks of the Kahan. The Gakkhar chief, resolute in his royalty to the son of Babur, proclaimed that anyone from the Gakkhar tribe working on the construction of Rohtas would be banished. Work slowed down, but it did not cease altogether for there were other willing workers as well. In sheer defiance of the Niazi general and his crack troops, the Gakkhars embarked upon periodic incursions to drive away construction workers.

Time came when Toder Mal was hard put to recruit labourers and stonemasons. Work came to a standstill. The man wrote to his king to apprise him of the state of affairs. Sher Shah, however, had no misgivings concerning his project. Nothing was going to come in the way of accomplishing it. He wrote back, 'I selected you from among many, to execute this work, thinking you a man of sense and experience. You have been supplied with money. Go on, at any expense, to fulfil my object, and draw on my treasury for the amount, whatever it may be.' History was never to say that Sher Shah was miserly when it came to achieving his desired ends.

Toder Mal made it known that the king of India was willing to pay whatever price the builders would ask. And so, it is said, wages hiked up to one gold *ashrafi* for each stone cut and laid. Historians have worked out the cost of Sher Shah's most extravagant monument to have been between three and a half million to just over four million rupees at that time. Fortune permitted Sher Shah to see his fort but once however, and that when it was not yet complete. To the general's eye the fort did not seem capacious enough to hold a sufficiently large garrison that could stem a major uprising should there be one. He ordered its enlargement and so we have an *under kot* or inner fort enclosed within the sweeping outer walls of Rohtas.

The inside façade of Khowas Khani Gate has a small tomb to the left. Local lore places therein the head of Khowas Khan who is transformed from gifted administrator and competent general to a miracle-working saint. Khowas Khan was foully murdered in Kashmir, his head sent to Salim Shah and his body is believed to be buried next to Sher Shah Suri. This 'tomb' is the burial of folklore born when news of the beheading of Khowas Khan became common knowledge. It shows that in death, even as in life, the man was much revered.



In May 1545, five years to the day that he had routed Humayun at Kanauj, Sher Shah invested the fort of Kalinjer in Rajasthan. The Rajputs held out and Sher Shah had his engineers prepare to blow out a breach in the walls. The device misfired, igniting a powder magazine. Sher Shah who was supervising the operations right under the walls was in the way and grievously burnt. He ordered his injury to be concealed from his troops lest they lose heart and abandon the siege. With remarkable self-control he continued to direct the operations until at last his Pakhtuns stormed across the breach and overcame the Rajputs.

The sun was going down behind the western dunes when Sher Shah, his body wracked with excruciating pain, his mind amazingly clear, got word of the victory. He offered up thanks to his Lord and quietly passed away from this life. Farid Khan, a treacherous man of extraordinary genius whose ambition knew no bounds; ardent lover who made no secret of his amorous liaisons and military commander who could employ subterfuge and strategy with equal flair to win tough battles was dead. Farid Khan the ablest Pakhtun ruler India was ever to know and the gifted administrator whose rule brought unparalleled security to the lives of ordinary folks was dead. He had ruled the country for a full five years and two months styled as Sher Shah Suri.

His sons were no better than the sons of Babur. Adil Khan, the elder, was an irresolute man who being far away in Ranthambore was sidelined by the younger Jalal Khan. Styling himself Sultan Islam

Shah (a.k.a. Salim Shah) he declared himself king and soon induced his brother to abdicate in his favour. But there were men like Khowas Khan and Haibat Khan Niazi who did not approve. So far as they were concerned, the crown should have passed on to the elder. To assert what they considered fair, these two worthy men set out to put things right. Battles ensued against imperial forces under Islam Shah in which the smaller confederacy was routed. It was perhaps the most ironical twist of fate that Haibat Khan fled to find refuge with the Gakkhars – the very people he had earlier battled so that Rohtas could be built. Khowas Khan headed for Kashmir where Taj Khan Kerani, a man who owed his very life to that worthy general, laid him low in his sleep. But that is another story.

Despite the ineptitude of Islam Shah, the empire that his father had raised kept the fugitive Humayun at bay for a full ten years after Sher Shah's death. Early in the year 1555 Humayun staged his return. The Mughal horde advancing in all its pageantry along the sandy flood plain of the Kahan River, with the broken, scrub-covered hills of the Potohar in the background must indeed have presented a formidable sight to the lookouts manning the crenulations of Rohtas. The shout would have gone up even as the advancing Mughals were well out of cannon shot. Tatar Khan Kasi, the commandant of the Rohtas garrison had perhaps known this was the beginning of the end of Sher Shah's magnificent empire. He did not even pause to argue. By the time the Mughal van waded across the shallow Kahan, the Pakhtun garrison had long abandoned Rohtas and melted away into the broken ground to the east.

Awe would have been the overriding emotion as the Mughals came across the water under the massive walls. Perhaps Humayun himself had scarcely expected Sher Shah to have possessed the finances as well as the military acumen to site and build such a fortification and might have paused a long time regarding the strength of the walls of Rohtas. But no deadly volley of arrows came soughing through the cold winter air. As they prepared the escalade the Mughals would have expected the machicolations with their tapering hoods to erupt with boiling water and oil to repel them. But there was nothing. All was quiet. Then only it would have become known that the heavy timber gates were unguarded; then only would they have been thrown open and Mughal soldiery teemed into Rohtas. The virtually unassailable fort of Sher Shah Suri capitulated without a shot being fired.

The only thing of note that transpired about this time was the blinding upon the orders of Humayun of his rebellious brother Mirza Kamran. Gul Badan Begum, Humayun's sister and author of the *Abrwal Humayun Badshah*, tells us that the event took place in the vicinity of Rohtas. Another more graphic, and therefore perhaps more authentic, account places the gruesome event in the Gakkhar fort of Pharwala, however.

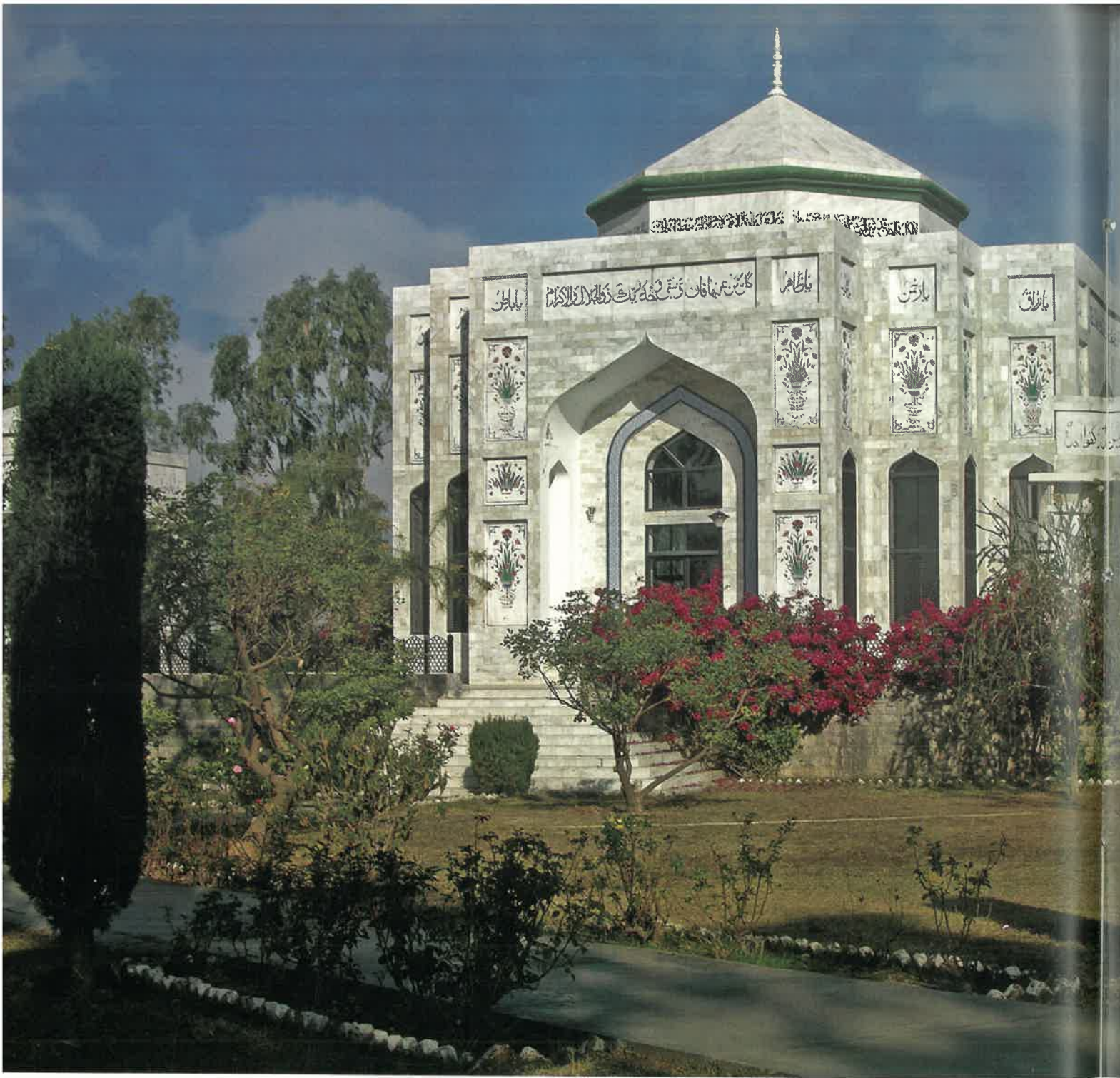
With the return of Mughal rule, the magnificent Rohtas was reduced from the status of a frontier garrison to a stopover point in the heart of settled country. Humayun's son Akbar placed the fort in the charge of his trusted Raja Man Singh who raised an impressive palace for his residence inside *under kot*. Jehangir inserts a brief note of the fort in his memoirs. He was evidently impressed by its siting and construction for he wrote, 'This fort was founded in a cleft of the ground, and the strength of it cannot be imagined.' He also goes on to tell us that the fort had been completed at the colossal cost of over four million rupees.

With the death of Sher Shah Suri, his fort never served the purpose it was built for. From frontier garrison it was demoted to a sort of picnic spot for royalty transiting between the Punjab plains and the Kashmir or Kabul highlands. And so it has been called, and not untruthfully, a monument to wasted labour.



Nadeem Khawar

The Khawas Khani Gate in the north is named after the able Khawas Khan who supervised the construction work carried out by Toder Mal. He was among Sher Shah Suri's most trusted friends and was made the first governor of Rohtas. After the death of Sher Shah, Khawas Khan fell out with his son Salim Shah Suri and was eventually treacherously murdered.



Deception at Dhamiak

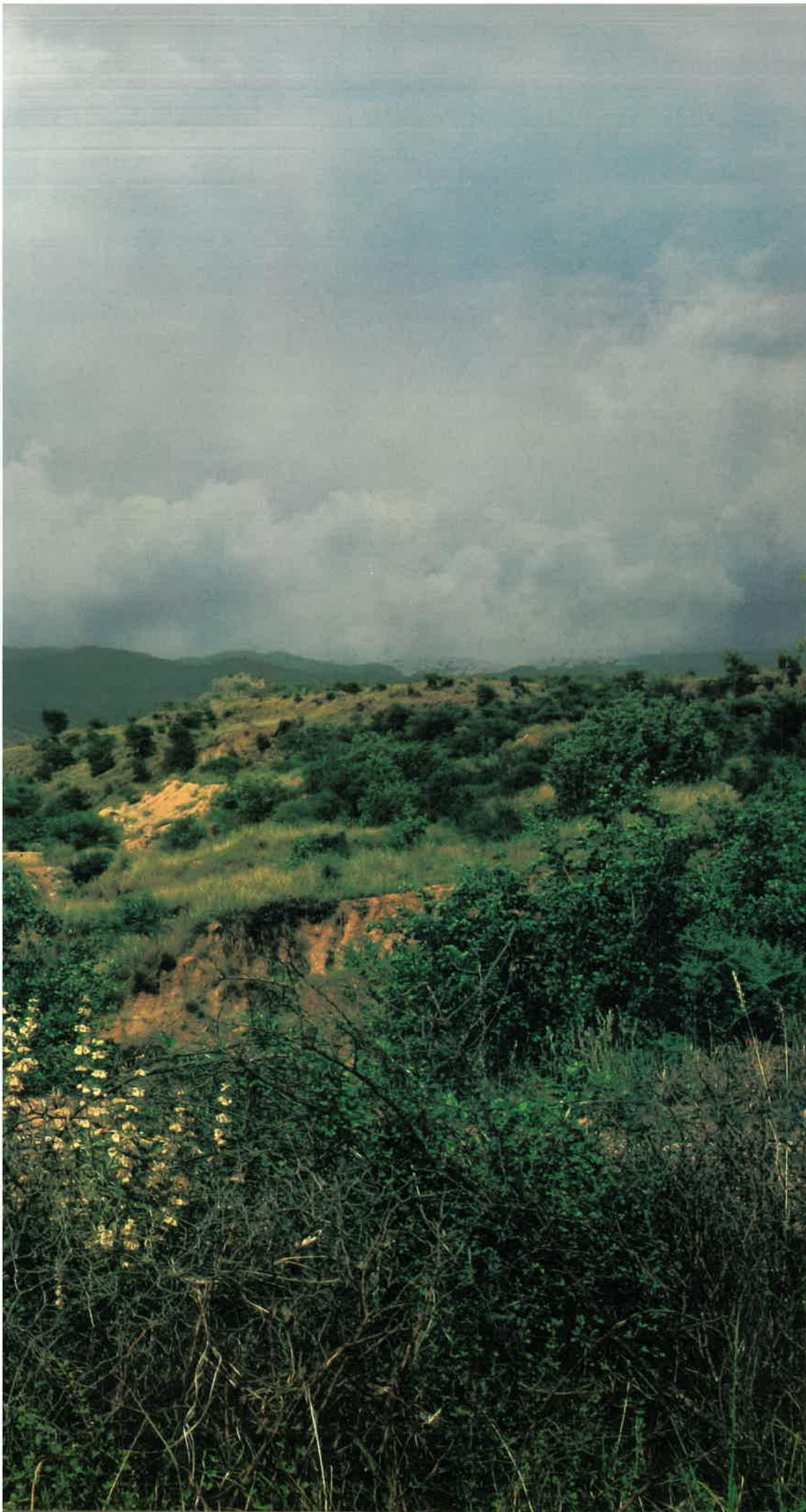
In the bleak, tortured landscape of the northeastern Potohar Plateau, Dhamiak had remained uncelebrated since the beginning of time. Lying amid a wearisome tangle of narrow and meandering gullies, tinged red by sub-soil salt and thinly covered with scrub, it never had reason for fame or glory. Its only claim to renown was for being a staging post on one branch of the old Rajapatha, or King's Road, that has been in use from ancient times. While the main royal road, leading west through Punjab went by the Salt Range, this branch followed an alignment only slightly different from the modern Grand Trunk Road (see: Alexander on the Hydaspes).



Shahab ud Din Ghorī may have been murdered by the Khokhars at this spot by the village of Dhamiak, but a reliable historical source records the march of the funeral procession from here to Ghazni. It is very likely that the royal intestines, having been removed to prevent putrefaction of the corpse, were buried here. Raised in the early 1990s, this building should have been better named the Sarcophagus of the Intestines.

This branch was the road less travelled; the majority of traffic passing through the heart of the Salt Range. The celebrated Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang writes of his prolonged sojourn at Taxila (631 AD) and a visit to the monasteries of the Salt Range. Thereafter, he tells us of his journey to Kashmir. Though he does not describe his route, it is evident that on the latter journey he would have used this road. Nine hundred years later Babur, the founder of the Mughal Empire in India, tells us of having travelled by this 'sub-montane road' through the country of the warlike Gakkhars of the Potohar Plateau en route to Lahore in November 1523. Between the time of the Chinese master's passage through this area and that of Babur's, a remarkable event took place by this lesser branch of the King's Road: the assassination of a Turkish king in present day Jhelum district.





*Looking
northward from a
point not very far
from Dhamiak.
The old Rajapatha
or Grand Trunk
Road passed
through the
tortured folds of
these badlands
where the
Gakkhars live. The
tarn in the
foreground is a
result of damming
of a seasonal
torrent.*

The Khokhar Rajputs, a tribe that held considerable sway in the Salt Range during the Middle Ages, are believed to have converted to Islam sometime in the early 11th century. It is believed, however, that their conversion was merely superficial in order to escape persecution at the hands of the bigoted Turks who erupted from Afghanistan from time to time. Conversely, it has also been said that the Khokhars were Ismaili Shiites. That made them heretics in the eyes of the more intolerant Turks. Though nominal tributaries of Moiz ud Din a.k.a. Shahab ud Din of the impoverished kingdom of Ghor, these independent-minded hill people chafed under Turkish yoke.

The Khokhars' chance arrived in 1203 when rumour reached them that Shahab ud Din had been killed by the Mongols on the wind-scoured grasslands of far away Central Asia. These doughty warriors began to assert their independence by closing the roads that passed through their territory and set about raiding Ghorid dependencies in Punjab. But it was only rumour: Shahab ud Din was alive. By 1205 he brought retribution upon these people in full force. The battle fought near Gujrat was all but carried by the Khokhars until Turkish reinforcements under Qutub ud Din Aibak arrived from Delhi to turn the tide. The Rajputs were routed and the country returned to Turkish control.

Smarting under the shame of defeat, the Rajputs set their hearts on revenge. Barely a year later, when the Ghorid sultan was returning from Delhi to the Afghan highlands, he was done in. The sources say that it was either a single individual or a small band of Khokhars (no more than three) that stole into the king's camp, dispatched his bodyguards and repeatedly stabbed the king as he slept in his tent. And even before an alarm could be raised, these intrepid guerrillas had vanished into the dark of night while the sultan lay dying in a pool of blood. Another source claims that the killing was authorised by Sultan Mohammad of Khwarazm.

The sources are also divided on the issue of the location of this historical event. At least two early sources tell of the king's tent having been pitched by a ford on the Sindhu River and that the Khokhars entered his camp by swimming in. But the *Tabakat-e-Nasiri* of Minhaj ud Din Siraj, generally considered fairly reliable as an historical source of the period in question, very categorically states that the murder took place at 'the halting place of Dhamiak at the hand of a disciple of the Mulahida.' The Mulahida or heretics here mean the Ismailis, a persuasion that many of the Khokhars are believed to have followed at that time. Several contemporary and later writers agree with Siraj that Dhamiak was indeed the site of the murder. The fact generally accepted, then, is that Shahab ud Din, the Turk, was murdered in cold blood at Dhamiak in what is now called Jhelum district.

The *Tabakat-e-Nasiri* tells us in no uncertain terms of the dispatch of the king's bier from Dhamiak towards Ghazni. Now, it needs be told that at the time of this murder (1206 CE), parts of Afghanistan were held by the Turks as different principalities all owing allegiance to the sultan. While Ghor was held by the sultan's cousins, Ghazni was under the control of Taj ud Din Yalduz, one of Shahab ud Din Ghor's most trusted freed slaves turned general. As the funerary procession accompanied by amirs from both Ghor and Ghazni crossed the Sindhu River and arrived in the vicinity of modern day Kohat, a dispute for the possession of the coffin as well as the considerable treasure being borne with it broke out between the two parties.

From all accounts it appears that a minor battle was fought. The Ghoris were defeated and routed. The funeral then proceeded to Ghazni by way of Sankuran that we today know as Shalozan. This is a right beautiful, well-watered valley of orchards and farmland lying a few kilometres to the northwest of Parachinar. It was long a stopping place on the highroad from Parachinar to Peiwar Kotal that leads

into Afghanistan's Paktya province and on to Ghazni. It was at Sankuran that Yalduz kept headquarters and as the bier reached in this vicinity, we hear of him riding out to meet the body of his departed lord and master. The histories tell us of how, having seen the grim procession from a distance, Yalduz dismounted and came up to the bier with 'utmost veneration.' It is also recorded that he wept so inconsolably that his grief moved others to tears as well.

Arriving at Ghazni, the sultan's body was buried in the mosque and seminary he had founded during his lifetime and named after his daughter – his only child who survived beyond infancy. To recount the subsequent battles between the houses of Ghor and Ghazni over the late sultan's treasures is beyond the scope of this story. Nevertheless all available histories tell of the corpse of Sultan Shahab ud Din Ghorī safely reaching and being buried at Ghazni.

Yet we have a new-fangled marble monstrosity plonked amid the furrowed badlands of the Potohar Plateau believed to house the last remains of Shahab ud Din Ghorī. The building can be reached by a blacktop motorable road that takes off to the east of the Grand Trunk Road at Sohawa exactly opposite the fork that goes in the other direction to Chakwal. About fifteen kilometres from the main highway, the white tomb is easily spotted from some way off. The façade bears a plaque that briefly tells of the sultan's exploits against the Rajputs. Understandably enough, it does not recall the chivalry of the victorious Rajputs in the first encounter. For the Rajputs a battle was no different from a sport: when they routed an enemy, they did not stoop so low as to pursue and annihilate a withdrawing army. They broke away and jubilantly went their own way permitting the vanquished foe to live to fight another day. That was how Prithvi Raj Chauhan behaved in victory – something that he would surely have regretted later.

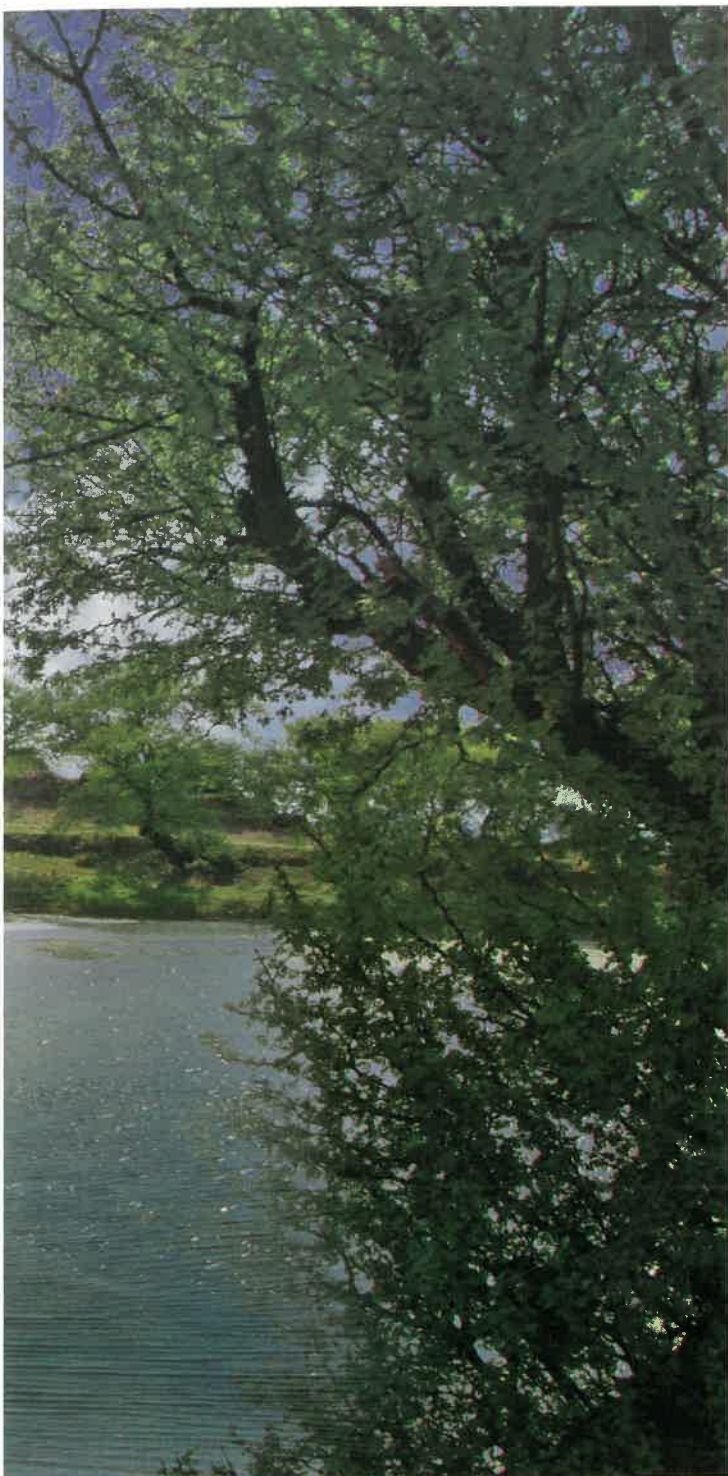
The question then is: if the king's corpse was borne to Ghazni as history testifies, who is buried in this tomb? No one. At least not a person. It must not be forgotten that summer had begun when the murder took place and the body would have started to rot very quickly in the Punjabi heat. As was the practice, the sultan's courtiers would in all probability have eviscerated the corpse. All that would have been buried at Dhamiak was the royal liver and intestines. As time passed and memory faded, it was only remembered as the place where Shahab ud Din Ghorī was ignominiously murdered by a Khokhar sworn to revenge. The only reminders of that long ago deed were the simple graves of the sultan's bodyguards who had vainly sacrificed their lives to save that of their master's.

Eight hundred years after his death, Shahab ud Din was resurrected, not on the basis of historical research and new discovery. He was brought back in the mid-1990s by Sher Ali Khan, a retired general of the Pakistan Army. The gentleman woke up one morning to tell that the burial place of the long-dead Sultan had been revealed to him in a dream. It was, he said, one of the half dozen simple graves at Dhamiak. Since there were a four or five graves in one group, and another solitary one some distance away, the assumption was easy: the group contained the remains of the Sultan's bodyguards and the single grave that of the man himself.

It might be that in his retirement leisure the general had been reading medieval histories and came upon this bit about Dhamiak. History was read out of context: the part that interested the general, that is, the site of the murder was built upon, while the rest about the body being taken to Ghazni was blacked out. With nothing better to do, the man went ahead to deify Shahab ud Din. And so the marble Tomb of the Viscera was raised in the Potohar badlands at a place that was once passed by the less travelled branch of the Royal Road.



The raising of this edifice is criminal on two counts. On the one hand, the man commemorated is not buried therein. To commemorate just the place of his murder with such wasteful expenditure was therefore uncalled for. On the other, in a country where ordinary folks superstitious as they are who worship every available tomb, this has only created yet another giver of sons and wealth. For utterly gullible and irrational



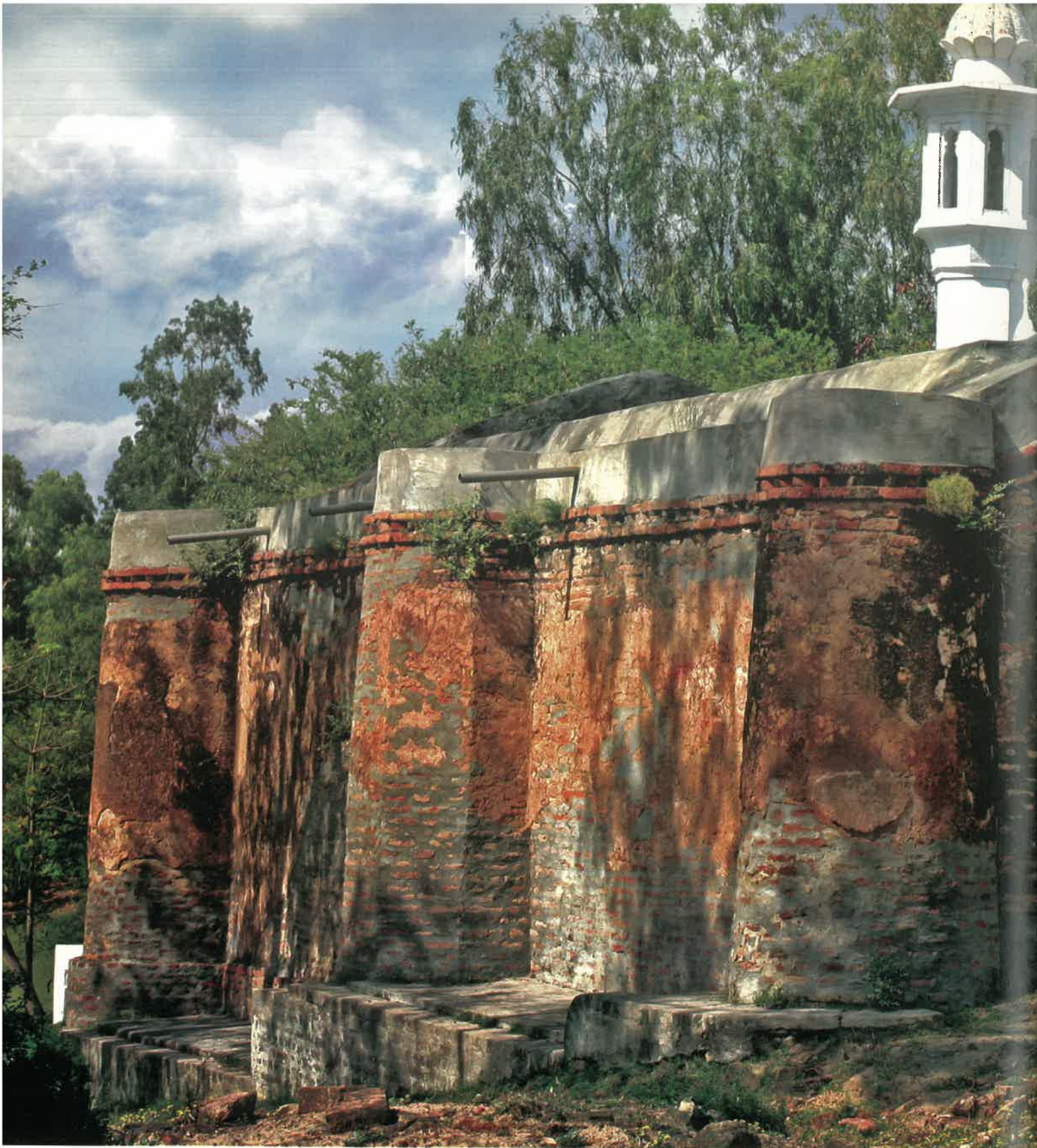
Sar Jalal – the Pond of Jalal, lies some two kilometres southward of the false burial place near Dhamiak. Jalal Khan was a great-grandson of Sultan Sarang Khan who defied Sher Shah Suri. Jalal Khan faithfully served the Mughal crown and died in 1620 at the hands of the Bangash Pakhtuns while collecting revenue on behalf of Emperor Jehangir. Though named after Jalal Khan, the pond, a part of the serai complex on the old road, is definitely much older. Adjacent to the pond stands a portion of wall that was probably part of a now ruined mosque.

people this is another demi-god to worship and pray to.

Postscript: When Jehangir, the fourth Mughal emperor of India, died in Kashmir in the summer of 1627, his body was brought to Lahore by way of Bhimber and Gujrat. As it neared this latter city, it was already beginning to putrefy. Evisceration was the only way to impede further damage. The detritus was buried just outside town. Today there stands a tomb over that site and the plaque commemorates the mausoleum as that of 'Shah Jehangiri.'

Over time the humble intestines of a rather worldly monarch were deified. Today Shah Jehangiri boasts of a large weekly gathering and an even greater annual urs. Men and women come from distant corners of the country; it is said, to seek the intervention of the

intestines in the acquisition of health, wealth and children. Some of them surely are granted their desires. The Auqaf Department that was raised to curb such mindless superstition actually abets in its spread for every new shrine in the country means more income for the department. Even when the shrines contain only excrement-filled royal intestines.



According to Tariq Masood of the Punjab Archeology Department, this mosque at Sar Jalal is a composite of more than one building styles. That is, it has been renovated a few times in its long and un-written history. To the architectural historian, the tapering turrets at the corners (the cenral one among the



three on the left is actually the mihrab) would mean that the mosque dates back to as early as the 11th century CE. The two turrets on the façade were topped with mock minarets at a very recent point in time. The grafting is evident on the whitewashed turret to the right.



This lake in Lehri was formed by damming a seasonal stream, but in order to defeat the very purpose of water conservation, the Forest Department planted water-guzzling eucalyptus around it. It is ironic that though plantation of this alien species was prohibited as far back as 1991, it continues unchecked under ignorant lower level officials of the Forest Department. Until early 2005 the department was also maintaining extensive eucalyptus nurseries within the Reserve.

Lehri Nature Reserve

Some thirty kilometres northwest of Jhelum and just off the Grand Trunk Road lies a protected parkland spread over 17,000 acres of broken hills, stark rock faces and deep gullies. Naturally covered with phulai (*Acacia modesta*), sanatha (*Dodonea viscosa*) and wild olive, this chunk of land belongs to the Lehri and Jindi Reserve Forest. It is today known as Lehri Nature Reserve.

Being an offshoot of the semi-arid Salt Range, Lehri is a fragile eco-system because of scant subsoil water and depends largely on seasonal rains. Consequently, the wildlife that the area harbours has but a precarious foothold. This fact, however, did not stop rapacious and well-connected people to plunder the meagre natural resources of this reserve forest. By the middle 1980s the Lehri-Jindi complex was a moribund eco-system and it was very fortunate that it caught the official eye. With the idea of

developing it to resemble the Lake District of northern England, work began on Lehri Nature Reserve in 1986. Some of the several seasonal streams that cut across the forest were dammed to form bodies of water and in times of good rains there are over three dozen ponds of various sizes. Two of these are large enough to be called lakes.

With grazing and timber collection restricted, the depleted forest made a quick recovery which was helped along by additional plantation of indigenous species. In a fit of misguided enthusiasm, the forest department also did not desist from planting large numbers of the fast-growing eucalyptus. Shortly thereafter good sense prevailed and this alien, water-guzzling tree was banned in 1991.

In order to protect the native Punjab urial (*Ovis vignei punjabiensis*), two chain link enclosures of five hundred acres each were constructed and stocked with this species. Not long after the establishment of the reserve, funding dried up and the first thing to suffer was maintenance. Seasonal floods broke the fencing in some places and the urial escaped into the wild. This was perhaps just as well for the dispersion of the ungulates in the wild gorges of the reserve resulted in an increase of another natural inhabitant: the wolf. Patient observation today shows that area is now fairly rich with



The lodge at Lehri Nature Reserve.



Landscape in the Jindi-Lehri forest area.

pangolins (scaly anteater) foxes, jackals and the handsome but shy leopard cat as well. Seesee, grey partridges and chukor are also to be found in the glens of Lehri. As well as that, there are six dozen other species of migratory and resident birds.

Designated walkways in the forest afford the naturalist and the birdwatcher to observe nature at close quarters. It is advisable, however, to take a forest department guide before venturing out. A lodge in the forest offers reasonable overnight accommodation and cooking facility for visitors. Bookings for the lodge can be made at the office of the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) at Jhelum, phone number 0541 927 0031.

Photo by Shabnam Rashid



Salman Rashid was born in Lahore in February 1952 where he received his early education. Long before he was to become the country's foremost travel writer, he was a traveller with insatiable curiosity for out of the way places in the country. Young, callow and unread, he began by roving in the Salt Range in the early 1970s. What his inexperienced mind registered then was to lead to a long period of edification in the best libraries of the country.

In 1983 he discovered his ability to tell a tale and began to write for PTDC's now defunct magazine *Focus on Pakistan*. This was followed by two years of contributing to PIA's in-flight magazine *Hamsafar*. In the beginning of 1986 he became a regular contributor for *Star*, a leading English language evening paper from Karachi. He gave up his job with a multinational firm and became a full-time writer. This new-found freedom took him roving the country from the deep south to the farthest reaches of the Chitral and Shimshal in the north of Pakistan. Today he is arguably the only Pakistani who has seen so much of his country in such detail.

Salman Rashid is a travel writer who journeys back and forth through history and has the ability to make his travel tale absorbing and readable. He is teller of historical stories spiced with today's anecdotes.

His other books include:

- Prisoner on a Bus
- The Salt Range and the Potohar Plateau
- Gujranwala, the glory that was
- Riders on the Wind

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