

# Fort of yore

1340  
Herit  
Nation

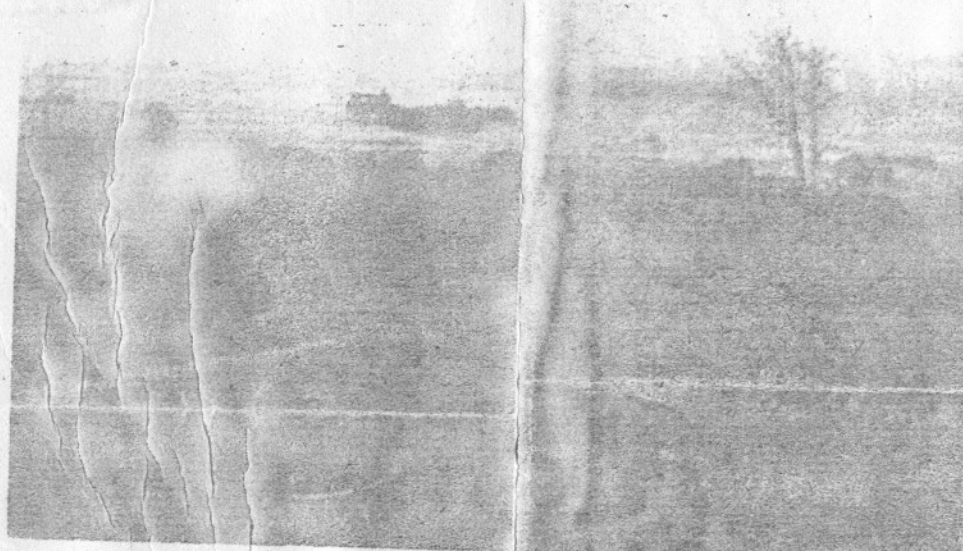
IHSAN H. NADIM says the remains of the fort helped quite a few inscriptions, helping to piece together information about

any a city of the great cultures and civilisations of the yore are found located by the banks of the rivers for obvious reasons of sustenance and security. No wonder then that the remains of the mighty strongholds, cities and towns are still traceable by the great river Indus. One such fort is Hund, which lies about 80 kilometres east of Peshawar, and around 20 kilometres upstream of the gorge at Attock. By virtue of its location at one of the most treaded routes of the invaders and the conquerors from the west to the mainland South Asia Subcontinent, it has witnessed the history of the area being made over the course of thousands of years.

The historians give interesting explanations on its turning to the present nomenclature over its long existence. It is said that it was known by the Sanskrit name of Udobhandapur in the ancient times. The word literally means 'the city of water-pot', which goes to suggest that the Indus was crossed over here by swimming with the help of pots under the chest in the ancient times. However, the most common means of swimming across has also been the inflated cow or buffalo-hide, which medium is thought to have been followed in the historic times by most of the armies.

Hiuen Tsang, who visited the region of Gandhara between 629 AC and 645 AC recalls it as Ou-to-kia-han-t'cha, which has also been thought to be a version of the same name. Udobhandapura, the variation observed due to the different linguistic rendering. The place with such a name has also been mentioned as the winter capital of the Shahi kings of Kabul by the Kashmiri chronicler, Kalhana, who wrote his Sanskrit book Rajatarangini in 1150 AC. But before that, it had also

been called as Waihand by Alberuni during his sojourn around 1030 AC. He gives its Latitude as East 34(30'. It has been recorded as Wehand or Waihand during 1310 AC and as Ohind as late as 1790 AC by Mirza Mughal Beg. One thing is common among all these authors, who mentioned it with slight variation of phonetics, that they tell it of being the capital of Gandhara. Tabaqat-e-Akbari makes a mention of the Fort of Hind where Sultan Mahmud besieged Jainal in 1002



AC. The famous archaeologist and a great linguist, Sir Alexander Cunningham, aptly summed up as to its name. He says, "from all these examples I infer that the original name of Utakhanda, or Utkhand, was first softened to Utand.... And then shortened to Uhand or Ohind". The modern scholars think that it further 'modified' to become Hund of our times.

It may be interesting to note here that a recent Kharoshthi inscription discovered by this scribe at Takht-e-Bahi, about 50 kilometres north-west in the Mardan district, reads a similar word, Udakabhadra, meaning 'auspicious water'. It could be assumed that it was because of its association with the Buddhist religious establishment that water has been sanctified. The discovery thus also emphasises on the importance of water and its affinity with the cities or other establishments.

Hund being at the confluence of the routes from the east (via the Khyber Pass) and from north (Swat, Dir etc. via the Karakoram Pass) has played 'host' to many an adventurer. The written records mention of its having been visited by Alexander the Great, the Scythians and the Kushans, the Chinese Pilgrims, Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna, Sultan Shihabuddin Ghauri as also Timur on his return march. From the house of Timur, Babur also paid it a visit on his entry to the plains of Punjab. Before him it had been visited by the great Mongol conqueror, Chingiz Khan, who was in pursuit of Khwarizm Shah, Jalaluddin Mankarni. After the defeat of the Turki Shahis in Kabul, the Hindu Shahi rulers made Hund their capital in the 9th century AC. The 10th century Muslim traveller, Muqaddasi, eulogises Hund for its riches and congenial environs.

The ruins of the ancient city lie on the Right Bank of the River Indus and stretch in length for quite a few kilometres. Although the outline of the fortification wall around the modern village is very clear yet it is on the southern side - on the river front - that it appears in somewhat better form in the thickets and trees of the jungle. It clearly shows its construction in stones set in rubble type of masonry. The wall at that time used to have been further strengthened with squarish bastions. There are at least two of such bastions

surviving to recognisable height on the riverside. The bastions are, however, built in stone diaper. The Hindu period fortification wall and the village seem to have considerably been washed away by the centuries of high floods in the river, or periodical change in its course. This must have necessitated its building and rebuilding over several times. The last phase of such an activity seems to belong to the Hindu Shahi period when big gravels and stones appear to have been used to raise the wall. There are certain indications of the presence of a Hindu Shahi period gate towards the river.

During the reign of Emperor Akbar the Great, several forts were built in the plain of the Yusafzais mainly to keep in check their oft-rebellious attitude towards the Mughal authority. Among these forts was the one at Hund, which was built in 1586 AC, using the small bricks. This Mughal Fort, which is square in plan, has four entrance gates on each side of the square. These gates, which are also made with small-sized bricks, are adequately strengthened by bastions. The fortification wall runs over a length of 1280 metres and is built of the larger stones of diaper masonry wall of the earlier period, put together in usual Muslim period rubble construction. A total of 36 bastions have been provided to further strengthen the whole length of the fortification wall. This wall engirdles the modern village access to which is through the western gate, which in turn is connected with a straight passage with the eastern gate on the side of the River. There are two rooms near the western gate, possibly for the use of the guards on security duty. From the traces of the building activities it is clear that the Mughals placed their stronghold within the perimeter of the earlier Hindu period fort.

It is probable that Hund Fort lost much of its utility, hence prosperity, when Emperor Akbar the Great installed a ferry at Attock, some 18 kilometres downstream, and built a huge fort on the cliff, on the left bank of the River, to guard the crossing and the region.

The remains of the Hund Fort have yielded quite a few inscriptions, some of them clearly dated, helping to piece together the information on such an important place of the yore.