**Nandana Fort Unexplored heritage**

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The province of Punjab is the hub of historical and cultural landmarks apart from its versatile landscapes from the south to the north. Lahore, the cultural capital of Pakistan, has recently been conferred with the title of “City of Literature” by UNESCO. Recently, I have been researching the 800 million years old salt range of Punjab, enlisted on the Tentative List. Stretching around 300 kilometres, the world’s second largest salt range came into being after the geological phenomenon of sea evaporation and underneath propelling of regional plates. In the medieval era of the Subcontinent & afterwards, many sites were built of military and religious significance such as forts & temples. Such sites are spread all over the salt range.

On February 28, 2021, while scrolling through my twitter feed I found a hashtag #AlBeruniRadius all over the timeline. It is a mega project by the name of “Al-Biruni Radius– A Heritage Trail” interconnecting seven major historical sites in the salt range. It was announced when Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan was at Nandana Fort to unveil the site where legendary Persian Muslim astronomer, mathematician, anthropologist, historian and geographer quantified the radius and circumference of planet Earth.

[Spain to take on Brazil in men's football final in Tokyo Olympics](https://nation.com.pk/04-Aug-2021/spain-to-take-on-brazil-in-men-s-football-final-in-tokyo-olympics)

Twelve centuries old, Nandana Fort has such a rich history with events of great impact on the region. It is said that the foundation of the Nandana Fort was laid in the 8th/9th century by a Prince of the Hindu Shahi dynasty. It was named after the mythological garden “Nandana” of a Hindu Lord by the name of Indra. Nandana fort is strategically situated at the hilltop nearby Baghanwala village of District Jhelum in the eastern flank of the salt range, accessible from both the Motorway and GT Road.

Nandana Fort was built for surveillance of the Nandana Pass and as a deterrent for invaders from empires in the west and north. Nandana Pass was the ancient stone paved road which used to connect Delhi with the capitals of modern day Afghanistan and Central Asia. Renowned Dutch scholar P.H.L Eggermont, in his eminent book, ‘Alexander’s Campaign in Southern Punjab’ mentioned Nandana Pass as the very route which was used by Alexander the Great for a grand clash of titans; Alexander the Great vs. Raja Porus, in the battle of Hydaspes in 326 B.C. Interestingly, it is also believed that horses of Alexander’s army first discovered the origin of the salt mines of Khewra during the same campaign.

[PM asks Muslim countries to counter growing Islamophobia](https://nation.com.pk/04-Aug-2021/pm-asks-muslim-countries-to-counter-growing-islamophobia)

What we have today in the Nandana are the ruins of a fort with a temple and a mosque. The temple is known as the Shiva temple which was built by Anandapala, son of the King of Hindu Shahi Raj “Jayapala” in the medieval times, most probably in the 9th century. The mosque was built after Mehmood of Ghazni took over this place from the Hindu Shahi Raj. Nandana Fort was surmounted by Mehmood of Ghazni in 1013 or in 1017 according to some sources. It is the same place which is believed to be Abu Rayhan al-Biruni’s observatory in the 11th century where he quantified the radius and circumference of the earth.

During the Mughal Empire, Nandana was regarded as a place of leisure. Mughal emperors Jalal ud-Din Akbar and Jahangir have mentioned Nandana as a place for hunting and leisure in the 16th and 17th century. No wonder; this is a marvellous valley.

Today, an institutional effort to uplift the standards of infrastructure, mechanism of preservation and qualitative marketing of sites with archaeological and religious significance are required that can surely help to industrialise the sector of tourism in the region.

[Khalid Mansoor appointed SAPM on CPEC affairs](https://nation.com.pk/04-Aug-2021/khalid-mansoor-appointed-sapm-on-cpec-affairs)

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