

## **Asfan-Jahe: Discovery of an old City of Balochistan A historical description**

**Archaeology & History**

**Ghulam Farooq<sup>1</sup>, Yousuf Ali Rodeni<sup>2</sup>, Aziz Ahmed<sup>3</sup>  
& Mohammad Javed Sarparah<sup>3</sup>**

### **Abstract**

*The land of Balochistan has a great historical background. A huge part of the history of this area is still hidden and unexplored. The real history of Balochistan has not been defined by any one. The historians tried to define the whole historical events, sites and realities, but no one could explore the all historical events and realities. So, it is to say that this area is still virgin and unexplored, and it needs more research and investigation. The following article is about an area which has been discussed in the historical books but now it is hidden and unknown. This area was called Aspan jahe in Persian and Balochi languages and Asfan jahe in Arabic language. This article is descriptive in nature and analytical research method also exists in the statement. The primary and secondary kind sources were consulted for the purpose. The objectives behind this study are to explore the newly discovered area of Balochistan with their historical and social importance.*

**Key Words:** Aspan Jahe, Arab Historians, Balochistan, Balishtan, Islamic Caliphate, Mastnug, Persian, Qandhar, Sebi

### **Introduction**

The caliphate of Caliph Hazrat Ali marked the beginning of Islamic dynastic rule. Right after the incident of Karbala Banu Marwan (Marwan family) the Umayyad consolidated their rule in new colonies of Arabs. There had been several great rulers in Umayyad dynasty that expanded the boundaries of Arabia. During the region of Walid bin Abdul Malik the army of Islam conquered the areas of Spain, Sindh, central Asia and China.

---

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor (History), Balochistan Study Centre, University of Balochistan Quetta, Pakistan. Email: farooqbalochuob@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, Pakistan Study Centre, University of Balochistan Quetta, Pakistan.

<sup>3</sup> Lecturer, Department of History, University of Balochistan Quetta, Pakistan.

Muslim victories in Spain by Tariq bin Ziad, in Africa by Aqba bin Nafeh and Musa bin Nuser, in Sindh by Mohammad bin Qasim and in Turkistan (Central Asia) to China by Qutiba bin Muslim brought a considerable expansion in the boundaries of Islamic State. By this time the vast land of Balochistan also came under the Arab rule.

The Arab invasion of Balochistan had started at the final stage of Caliph Hazrat Umar reign in 644 AD or 23H. (Tibri. 2004. P-109) However, during this time on the one hand Arab army was engaged in destroying Sistan and on the other hand Hakam bin Umar Altaglabi after conquering Karman had reached into Makran. Defeating the combined army of Sindh and Makran at the bank of river Nehing he added Makran to the frontiers of Arab state. Arab army wanted to move further but Hazrat Umar stopped them going further into the hard and mountainous areas of Makran. (Baloch, 2012. Pp. 310-11) Thus, during the reign of Caliph Hazrat Umar Islamic army had reached at the frontiers of Balochistan and slowly and gradually they moved deeper. The series of Arab conquest continues even after the four pious caliphs. When Umayyad started ruling Islamic state the conquest of Arab forces touched its heights and they reached Sindh. In 712 AD Mohammad bin Qasim defeated the ruler of Sindh Raja Dair and raised the flag of Arab forces over Multan. (Langer, 1968. P-24) This marked the end of Arab invasion in south Asia and Arab forces could not exceed Multan till the end of its rule. In 750 AD Abbasid overthrew Umayyad and constituted Abbasid dynastic rule over Islamic state. This marked the beginning of a new age in Islamic history (Ibid, P-24). The veteran rulers of Abbasid also played pivotal role in the ascent of Arab rule. During Abbasid period under the ruler ship of Abu Abass Alsafah, Mansor, Haron ul Rashid, Mamon, Jaffar, and Mutasim there was a noticeable increase in the conquests of Arab forces and Baghdad emerged as centre of science in education. Witnessing several ups and down Abbasid rule finally ended in 1258 AD due to the invasion of Tatar conqueror Halako Khan. Tatari's killed the last ruler of Abassid Mutasim-b-Allah by folding him into a carpet. (Ibid. P.53)

### **Aspan Jahe**

From 750 to 1258 A.D Arabs ascended all point of development at the cost of destruction and decadency of the countries under their occupation. Arab not only imposed heavy taxes on them but also put them into the eternal slavery by using the name of religion. Consequently, most of the nations under their occupation rebelled against Abbasid rule and the started arm struggle against Arab oppressions. An impartial study can easily disclose the oppressions and

suppressions of Abbasid ruler owing to which the period faced a series of rebellions. Particularly there existed a continuous rebellion in Balochistan during the whole Abbasid period. Arab historian recording the details of these wars in their books also mentioned about the continuous uprising of Sistan, Khurasan, Makran, Turan, Qiqanan Sehra-e-luth, Kiman and Mazendaran. They identified these rebellious people as Koch-o-Baloch and Ikrad (Kurds). While mentioning these rebellious people in their books they wrote their names with their nationalities such as Alsistani, Kirmani, Manojani, Miroski, Jaski and so one.

(All Arab historians for instance Ibn Huqal ibn Khuldun, Ibn Maskoya, Ibn Khurdazba, Alama Tbri, Alyaqobi, Albalazri, Nasir Khusro Yaqoob ... while discussing Baloch regions in their historical and geographical books had necessarily mentioned these tribes).

Abbasid era is known for the development of education and science and the birth of many great scholars and philosophers. Hence the knowledge produced by them benefited both Eastern and Western civilization. Beside other field Abbasid era is also known for its great scholars of history and geography. They have compiled such histories which are even helpful for today's researchers and are being used as references in historical research. These scholars include Ibn Hoqal, Ibn Khaldun, Alama Tbri, Al maqadsai Abladi, Nasir Khusro and many other historians. These scholar and historian have written many expressive and authentic books of history and geography that after passing hundreds of years they are still known to be the best sources of knowledge and are helping the researchers in there researches.

No doubt, many of the Arab historians and geographers were travellers, who used to maintain their daily diary. Later on they added these accounts as a part of their books. It is due to this fact that these histories are considered to be authentic. Because they are the eyewitness and primary sources of histories they have produced. Owing to the writing of these geographers and historians, Arab scholars are well aware about many cities and people of Balochistan. Arab historians have recorded in detail about Balochistan and its many places in their writing which guide us to unearth the ancient history of Balochistan. Moreover, the renowned books of their time contain descriptions about many areas of Balochistan with their name and characteristic. There literatures carry details about many cities of Makran. (Al-Bilazari. Pp-103-11) And on the other hand the accounts of many cities of central Balochistan such as Taran (Khuzdar) Mashki (Mashky-Kolwa) Qiqanan (Kalat) Mastanj (Mastung) and Sebi (Sibi) are also part of their literatures. Besides, they also phrased all these cities as provinces. Such as province of Makran and its cities, province of Armabel and its villages,

province of Turan and cities and outskirts areas are well described by these historians and geographers. (Brahui. 1990 Pp- 95-115) Ibn Hoqal comprehensively composed about an Eastern province of Abbasid era and named it Balshan. He identified the main cities of Balishtan as Saibi, Mastanj, Benjohe and Asfan-jahe. (Al-Muqqaddisi. 1906, p-95) According to writers the province of Balishtan stretched over from Qandhar to Sibi meanwhile he includes Qandable (Gandawa) among the cities of Turan.

Balish is, indeed, distorted form of balush and has evolved into Balishtan. These are Arabic word and Arabs still uses Balush for Baloch. Therefore, Balishtan is Arabic and initial name of Balochistan historically. Balochistan was the very region Arab named it as Balishtan walishtan or Balishtan in their writings. Ibn Hoqal argument that the entire region expanding from Kandahar to Sibi was referred as Balochistan is authenticated by Mulana Minhan ul Siraj's acclaimed book طبقات ناصری in which he makes mentions of Belus alongside Qandahar. (Siraj. 1995. P. 1018) Besides British military official major H.G Reverti, in his famous books "Notes on Afghanistan and Balochistan" writes the ancient name of Qandahar as Belus. (Raverty. 1990. Pp-801-2) These evidences suggest that during Arab era Balochistan was used for a specific region which clearly indicates that this region was home to Baloch tribes for at least a thousand years onwards and it is possible that these tribes inhabited this region even earlier.

A majority of Arab historian mention Balochistan province and its cities one of which is Isfanjae or Asfan-jahe. The renowned author G.Lee Strange who has compiled the Arab geographers' accounts of Eastern provinces also writes that the geography of Asfan-jahe was unknown. He writes

*"The Arab geographers have referred the adjacent regions of Sibi as Balis or Bashkal and Balish or walishtan Istakhri's writings suggest that Sibi was capital of this region. And the rulers of the time had his fortress in the small city of Al-Qasar which was in the proximity with Asfan-jahe. In this region Asfan-jahe had the status of a second class city. Anyhow the exact location of this city was still unknown. However the referred accounts suggest that its location lied to the north of Sibi in the region of Ziringe's city Benjoe. اصطخرى and مقدمى also make mentions of the region of Mastung or Mastanj. According to them this entire region was consisted of two thousand and two hundred villages."* (Strange. 1986. Pp-524-25)

The above mentioned accounts ascertain that many ancient cities of Balochistan still have their ancient name while many other have modified names. And many such ancient cities names have completely changed. And

such an altered name continues to exist. According to G. Lee Strange the exact location of this city Asfan-jahe was still undiscovered. However, he argues that this town (Because referred as second class city) was located in between Sibi and Belus or Balishtan.

These accounts suggest that this word Asfan-jahe itself is not an Arabic word, but a pure Balochi word. And its Arabic version has evolved from Balochi and mispronounced as Asfanjahe or Aspaan-Jahe which means stable or a place where horses are abounded. This is further authenticated by the fact that Kalat region has been a well-known market for producing and trading of noble race horses. Most of the Arab historian also mentioned about the horses of Kalat region. Hence it can be argued that the word Asfan-jahe has derived from the Balochi word Aspaan-Jahe. It is also evident from the fact that the Arabic language unlike Balochi does not have the alphabet (پ) and have substituted it by (ف) and, therefore, it has changed Aspaan-Jah into Asfan-jahe.

Now what remains to be unearthed is that the region around Kalat that best represents the name geography and other mentioned characteristics of Asfan-jahe. Such a city could be found around Sibi Mastung and Quetta. So G. Lee Strange accounts of existence of such an ancient city or its reminiscent substantiate his claims. Although G Lee Strange mentions the name of this city, he does not give any clue regarding its geography.

The Arab historians do talk about the adjacent villages of Kalat among which some are still unknown to us. They also mention of Albeza which is considered to be the present city Bencha. And no doubt the city lies around Sibi and Mastung they named it as Asfan-jahe as may be the present region Isplenji (اسپلنجی). This city not only has resemblance to the name of mentioned city, but the region of Mastung and Kalat have also been famous for nurturing and trading of noble race horses with huge pasture land. (Brahui. 1990. Pp-84, 106-7) Beside the topography and climate of اسپلنجی support the argument that the region is fertile for cattle production with huge expense of pasture land. Even at present time these regions and its surrounding ares are famous for agriculture.

Its mountain range contains natural streams and its fertile plain continues to maintain grass and pasture lands in the entire season. These pasture land contribute to a healthy life for cattle. All the available literature mention this region. No doubt, after Ibn Hoqal all the historians and geographers do write about this city but they fail to specify its geography. It is possible that only the old name of Isplenji continues to exist but ancient city is replaced with new one. This claim seems true due to existence of

archaeological remains of the city. These archaeological sites prove the existence of an ancient city Asfan-jahe mentioned by Arab historian. We just have to uncover the reality of this city.

The subject, indeed, requires more research which not only leads to the new revelation on Balochistan but also help us to review the ancient history of the region. Hence it is also expected that new discoveries leads to new revelation which help a great extent to right the trajectory of historiography of Balochistan.

## **Conclusion**

The area of Balochistan is full of such kind of historical sites and old ruined towns. Most of these areas have been discussed in the historical books written by Arab and Persian historians. During Persian and Arab period the area of Balochistan was a cross road between East and West. The same position of this area is still exists. The town of Aspan jahe have been mentioned in the all those ancient books which are about the area of Balochistan. Most of the authors of these books are Arabs and Persians. These historians mentioned many areas of Balochistan in their own dialect or they gave them name on their own. Arab historians travelled in the different parts of Balochistan in different times. Many Arab writers focused Balochistan or some parts of this area in their books in detail. All those historians, daily diary writers, tourists and writers whose interested in the land of Balochistan, they discussed the ethnic, socio-political and geographical history of this area.

According to these sources at that time Balochistan was divided into many parts and all these parts had their own names, like, Mekran, Mashkey, Tooran (Khuzdar), Armabil (Lasbela), Quaiqanan (Kalat), Bukan (Kharan) and Budha (Kachhi). All these areas were provinces.

The many Arab and Persian historians mentioned another province of Abbasid dynasty as Balishtan. According to these writers that this province was the eastern colony of Abbasids and it name was Balishtan or Walishtan. This province consisted of the areas (towns or cities) of Sebi (Sibi), Quetta, Mastunj (Mastung), Aspan Jae and Banjoe. The capital of this province was Belos or present time Qandhar. As we know that the ancient Sebi is present time Sibi and Mastung is still called Mastung. The town of Aspan Jae was situated between Sebi and Mastung. It is my hypothesis that the ancient time Aspan Jae is now called Isplinji or Asplinji. This word has no meaning in any local language Balochi or Brahui. This famous town is situated in south-east of Quetta and in the east of Mastung, while, the Sebi is situated in the east of

Aspan Jae or Isplinji. In my opinion Aspan Jae was situated near the present time Isplinji or this is the ancient name of this town. And the town of Banjoe could be the present time Panjpai, which is a town and situated in the west of Quetta.

### **Recommendations & Suggestions**

1. This hypothesis needs more research work.
2. The primary sources would be the obliging in the solution of this problem.
3. I have recommended some important and very authentic resources for the better solution of the problem and to confirm the hypothesis in the end of references.
4. The ancient and old ruins historical and archaeological sites of Balochistan need more research and excavation on priority basis. Because without primary sources and excavation of archaeological sites, it would be difficult to explore and write the history of Balochistan and its surrounding countries fairly. So, I suggest that concerned departments and institutes fulfill their responsibilities and excavate the important places and sites for the exploring of true history of the area and the inhabitants of Balochistan.
5. I suggest that, the Department of Archaeological Studies of University of Balochistan immediately began its academic activities in the campus.
6. I suggest that the Cultural Department of the Province of Balochistan organize itself and assure its duties and responsibilities.

## References

- Al, Bilazari. Ahmed Bin yahya. *Fathoo Al Baladan*. Translated by Syued abulkhair Mododi, Takhlekat, Lahore
- Al Muqqadisi. Shams Ud Din abi Abdullah (1906). *Ahsan Al Taqaseem fila Marofat al Aqaleem*. Laden.
- Baloch, Farooq. (2012). *Balochistan Ky Tezibi Naqosh*, (Lahore: Fiction House, 2012)
- Brahui, Dr. Abdul Rahman, (1990) *Balochistan Main Arabon Ky Ftohat Aur In Ki Hkomatein*, (Mstung: Zemrud Publications,)
- Lenger, William L. (1968, *Encyclopaedia of World History Part One: History Of Islam*, trans, Mulana Ghulam Rasool Mehr, (Lahore: Sheikh Ghulam Ali and Sons, 1968), 13.
- Strange. G. Lee. (1986). *Jughrafia Khilaft-e-Mashriqi*, Translated by: Professor Mohammad Jameel-Ur-Rehman, Muqtadirrah Qaumi Zaban, Islamanad.
- Siraj, Minhaj-Ud-Din. (1995), *Tabqat-e-Nasiri*, Translated by: H. G. Raverty (Maj:) Asiatic Society of Bangal, Calcutta.