

## **ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION AT OLD FORT MANSEHRA: A PRELIMINARY REPORT 2023**

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### **Abstract**

*The archaeological exploration conducted by the Department of Archaeology, Hazara University, Mansehra, in collaboration with the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the University of Leicester, UK, under the Pak-UK Education Gateway program, aimed to document the British period Archaeology and Heritage of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. The focus was on the Old Fort Mansehra, a significant site constructed during the Sikh era and later occupied by British colonial forces. The excavation utilized modern techniques such as topographic mapping using Total Station and employed the Wheeler Technique for grid layout and trenching. Pre-excavation activities involved meticulous surveying and topographic mapping to ensure accuracy in documenting the archaeological features. The excavation revealed significant findings, including coins dating back to the Indo-Parthian and Early Kushan periods, indicating occupation as early as the 1st century CE. Iron objects, pottery sherds, and other artifacts were also unearthed, shedding*

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light on the daily lives and cultural influences within the fort. Stratigraphic analysis helped establish the sequence of occupation periods, indicating continuous habitation from ancient times to the present. The fort exhibited a blend of architectural styles reflective of Sikh and British periods, serving as a military, administrative, and cultural center. The excavation enriched our understanding of the historical dynamics of the region and its transition from Sikh to British control. The findings contribute to the broader historical narrative of South Asia, emphasizing the complex interactions between different cultures and political powers over time. Further research, conservation efforts, and public engagement initiatives are recommended to preserve and showcase the excavated remains and artifacts, ensuring the site's historical significance is properly understood and appreciated.

**Keywords.** Old Fort, British Period, Excavation, Hazara University, Archaeology and Heritage.

### **Introduction**

The archaeological exploration by the Department of Archaeology Hazara University Mansehra under a joint venture with the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, University of Leicester, UK under the Pak-UK Education Gateway program funding of British Council and Higher Education Commission of Pakistan is in progress for the documentation of the British period Archaeology and Heritage of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. Some 39 British period monuments have been documented so far in the District Mansehra of Hazara region. Of these 39, the Old Fort Mansehra was selected for excavation purposes due to its location at a high altitude in the city and because it presented a unique opportunity to learn about a fort occupied by the British in this region. The Old Fort Mansehra was constructed by the Sikh rulers and stands as a testament to the strategic importance of the region during their reign. The fort later fell under British colonial control, serving as a key military outpost and administrative center in the region.

The archaeological excavation of the Old Fort Mansehra was conducted to uncover and document the historical significance of this site, which was built during the Sikh era and later occupied by British colonial forces. This site has the potential for further investigation into the colonial era. The proposed Archaeological excavation was a programme of controlled, systematic fieldwork with defined research objectives that examined, recorded, and interpreted archaeological deposits, features, and structures and, as appropriate, retrieved artifacts, ecofacts and other remains within the fort site. The records made and objects gathered during fieldwork were studied and the results are discussed in this report. The students and the Faculty of the Department of Archaeology, Hazara University, collaborated on this project, and in

return received training and experience in novel methods and scientific techniques, and gained valuable insights into the history of the region.

### Background

In 1818 CE the Mansehra region came under the control of the Sikhs when Makhan Singh, Governor of Rawalpindi invaded Hazara at the invitation of Hashim Khan. In 1821, Maharaja Ranjit Singh appointed Sardar Amar Singh Majithia governor of lower and upper Hazara including Mansehra. During this time, the Mujahideen Movement was very active against the Sikh rulers. In 1833 a fierce battle was fought at Bālākot in which the great Muslim warrior Syed Ahmad Bareilvi, was martyred along with his soldiers. Sardar Amar Singh was later followed by Sardar Hari Singh Nalwā who defeated the Jaduns and Tanaolis at Mangal and was made the governor of Hazara. He was killed in the battle of Jamrud in 1837 CE. It was during his rule that forts like Harkishangarh (Haripur), Nawān Shehr (Abbottabad), Shinkiāri (Mansehra), and Darband were built (Watson 1907: 126-27). Hari Singh Nalwā was followed by a Mahā Singh who governed Hazara till October 1837 when he was replaced by Sardār Tejā Singh. In 1841, the governorship of Hazara and Kashmir was assigned to Gulāb Singh. In 1843, after the murders of Sher Singh and Partab Singh, Mularaj Dilwalia resumed the management of Hazara. In 1844 Gulab Singh sent a small force under the command of Diwān Ibrāhim who was defeated and killed by the Sayyids and the Swātis of Bālākot (Watson, 1907: 130-34).

In 1846, the Sikhs entered into a peace treaty with the British government. By 1849, the British had gained control of all of Mansehra. However, the western Pashtun tribes accepted their government while Gujjars fought against the British Rāj. The Gujjars lost their major fighters, and the Pashtuns too lost a significant number. After eighteen months the Gujjars and the Pashtun created a brotherhood relationship and fought against the British Raj. In this struggle, they lost about 70,000 soldiers but they were still ready to fight. James Abbot was the commissioner of Mansehra and Abbottabad at that time. The Britishers left Mansehra but established total control at Abbottabad. After the major losses of the British Army, the British divided Hazara District into three Tehsils (administrative subdivisions): Mansehra, which was governed by the Gujjars, Abbottabad which was governed by the British Raj, and Haripur which was governed by the Pashtuns.

In 1901, when the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) (now Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa) was created, Hazara was separated from Punjab and made a part of it. The British accepted the independence of the Nawāb of Amb within his own territory. The smaller Tanoli State of Phulrā, which was granted by Paında Khan to his brother Madad Khan, was also acknowledged by the British as a semi-independent state.

### Location of the site

The British fort is located on the eastern side of Government Higher Secondary School

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No. 1 Mansehra at present Upper Nogazai village in Mansehra city. It lies between  $34^{\circ} 33'32.4''$  north latitude and  $73^{\circ}20' 22.29''$  east longitude and 1076 metres above sea level. Part of its eastern half is under the Police Department while the remaining is under the Revenue department. New construction work is also in process at the fort. The ancient remains exposed in the fort include a large, fortified area with massive bastions on all the four sides. A stone wall up to the first story level exists with typical colonial period style architecture (See Figure 1).

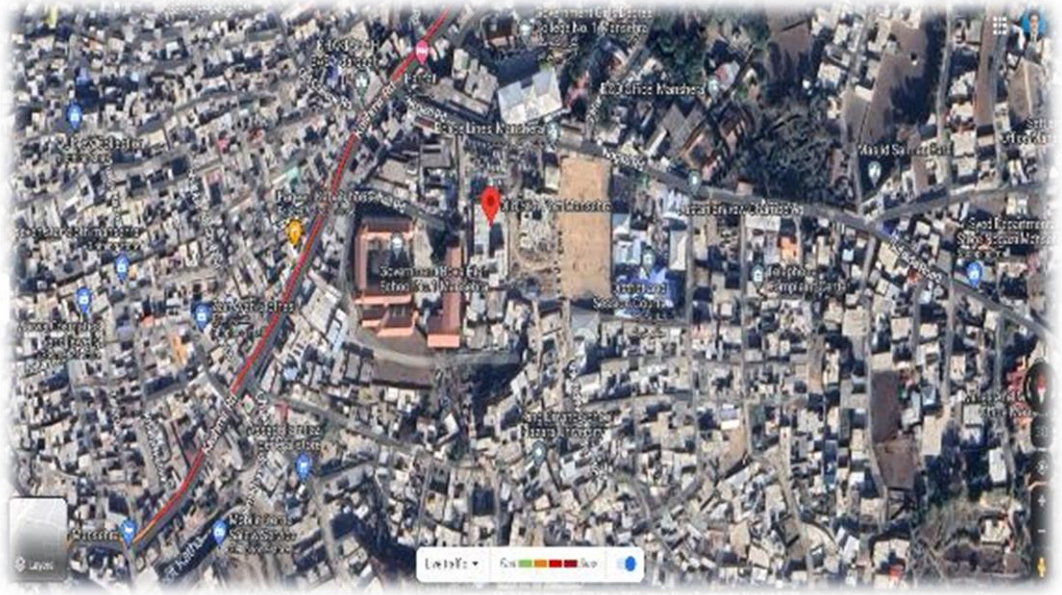


Figure 1: Location of the Old Fort Mansehra (Google)

### **Objectives of the Excavation**

To establish an historical profile of the city  
To study the social and political organization of the British colonial period in Mansehra  
To learn more about the ways in which the fort had been used by the Sikhs, then by the British, and then by the Pakistani occupation

### **Pre-Excavation Activities**

Topographic map for archaeological excavation using Total Station  
For creating a topographic map for conducting excavation at the Old Fort, a Total Station has been used following a step-by-step process that combines surveying techniques with data processing. A Total Station is a surveying instrument that measures both horizontal and vertical angles as well as distances. It is a crucial tool for collecting precise data during the survey. For accurate distance measurements, a prism or reflector was placed at specific points.

## 1. Surveying Steps

### *Setting Up the Total Station*

*A stable location was selected to set up the Total Station, ensuring it is level, and for accurate measurements, the Total Station was Calibrated.*

### *Establishing a Control Point:*

*A control point was set up with known georeferenced or coordinates using GPS.*

### *Instrument Height and Orientation*

*The height of the Total Station was measured above the ground. Orient the Total Station to a known reference point or North.*

### *Data Collection*

*The horizontal and vertical angles to specific points of interest, including archaeological features or control points were measured using the Total Station. The distances between the Total Station and the prism were recorded properly.*

### *Elevation Data*

*The elevations were measured using the Total Station by sighting known elevation points or benchmarks and each point was surveyed and notable features were recorded.*

### **Data Processing**

*The survey data was transferred from the Total Station to a computer. Different surveying software (e.g., AutoCAD, ArcGIS, or specialized surveying software) were used to process and manipulate the data.*

### **Point Cloud and Topographic Map Generation**

*From the collected data, a point cloud was generated, and that point cloud was also used to create a Digital Terrain Model (DTM) or Digital Elevation Model (DEM). Contour lines were generated from the DTM to create a topographic map.*

### **Final Output**

*The final output was a topographic map (Figure-2) that accurately represents the terrain, archaeological features, and elevations in the excavation area. As the accuracy and detail of the topographic map depend always on the precision of the Total Station measurements, the density of surveyed points, and the quality of data processing, we ensured that the Total station was properly calibrated to achieve*



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accurate results.

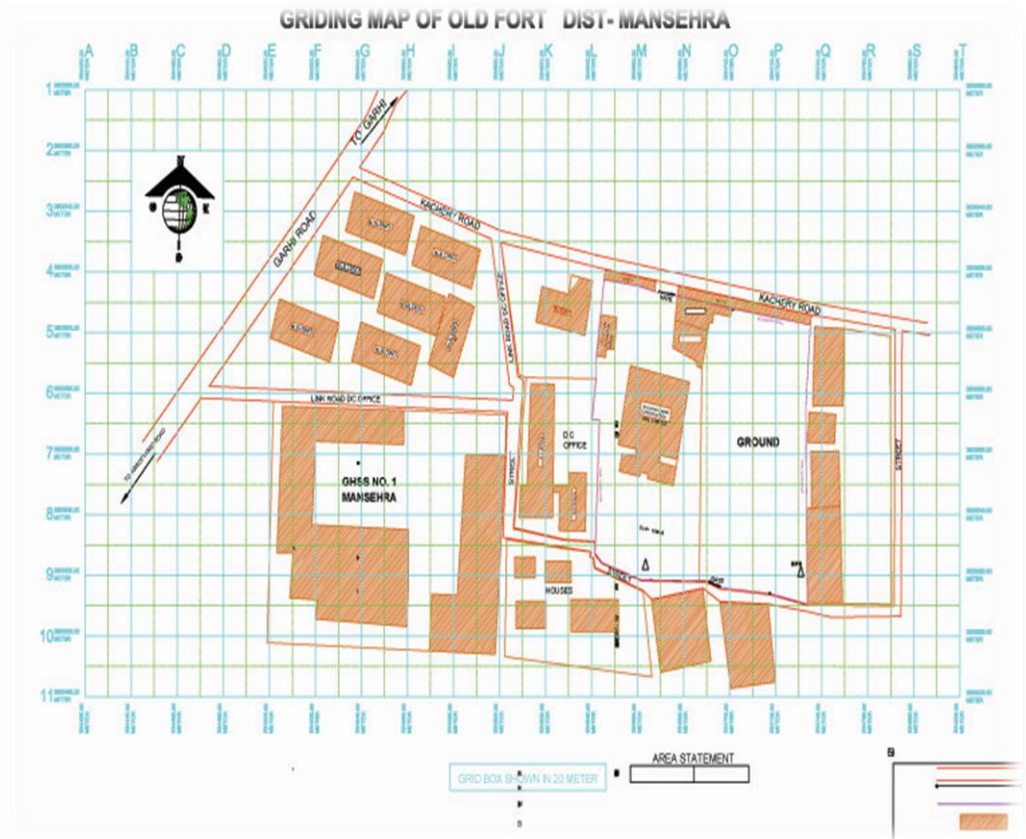


Figure-2: Topographic map of the Old Fort Mansehra

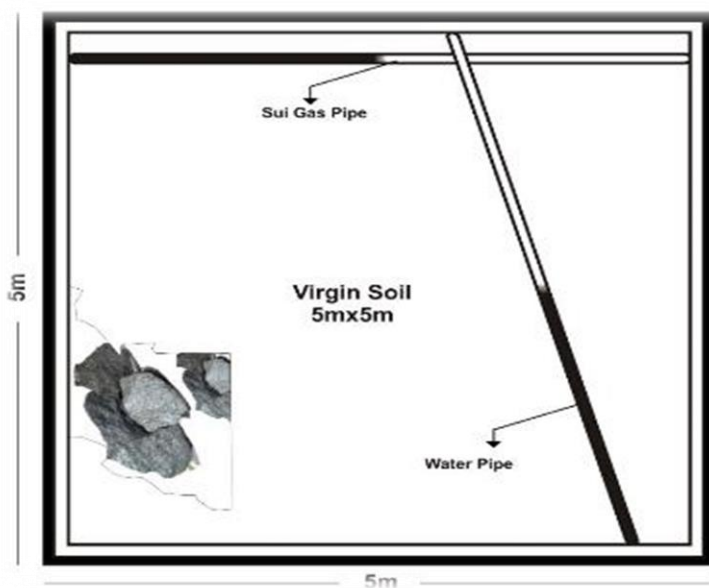
### Current Excavation

After preparation of the topographic maps, the site was divided into grids following the Wheeler Technique. Each of these grids measured 20 x 20m which was further divided into 4 trenches of 5x5 metres. Thus, a total of 880 trenches were laid to cover the entire site. Having prepared the grid plan, each of the grids was allotted a specific number starting from the northwestern corner. The numbers started with a digit (1) horizontally, while vertically it starts with (A) in alphabetical order. Thus, the first grid comprised of at the north-western corner bearing numbers i.e. (A/I, A/II, A/III, and A/IV) while the last grid at the south-eastern corner ends with SX/III and SX/IV (Figure 3).

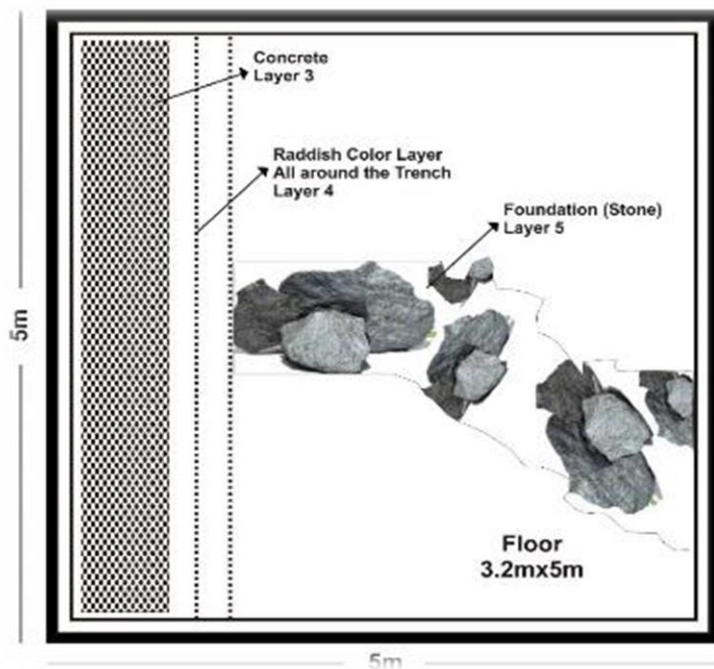
After detailed documentation, the current excavation at the site started on 18, June 2023. Initially, two trenches (M8/I AND M8/II) located on the eastern side of the current Deputy Commissioner office (DC) near the football ground were selected for excavation. As the entire fort is occupied by the district administration and many new buildings are under construction, the area selected for current excavation was



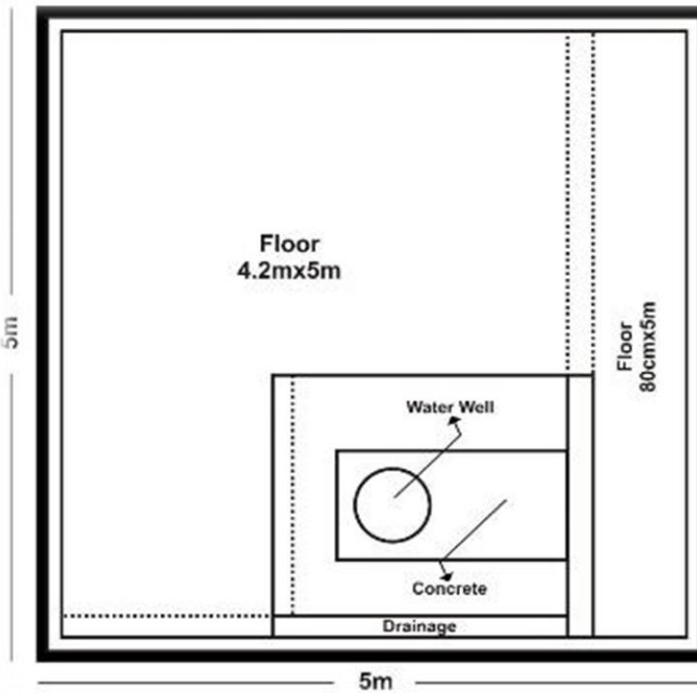
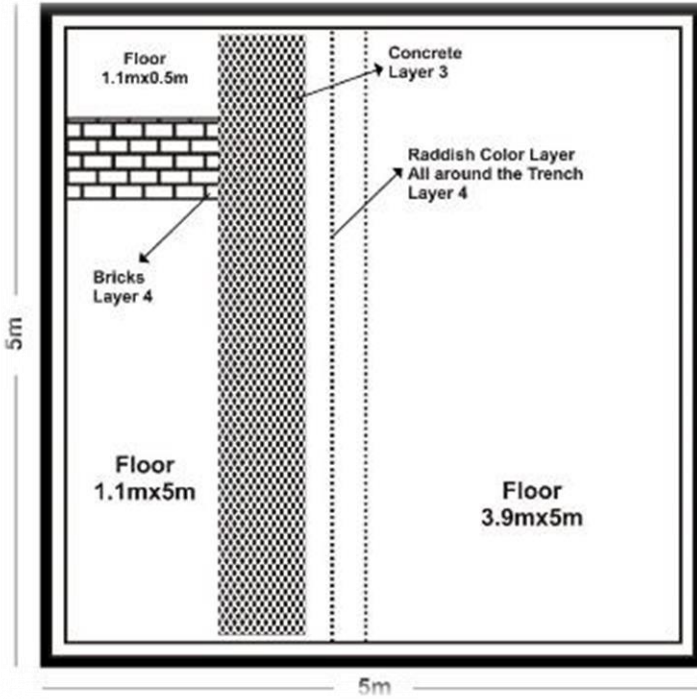
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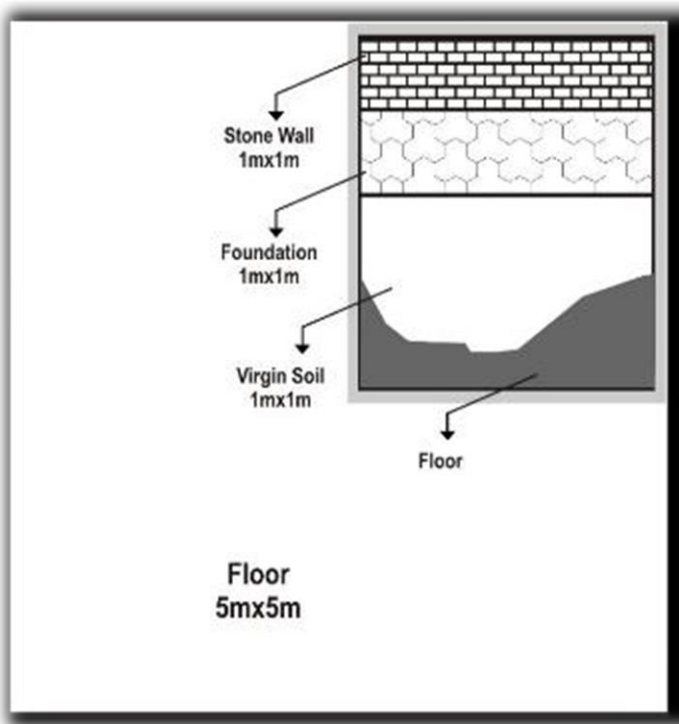
Old Fort Mansehra  
Trench No: M8/ii  
Layer: 1-5



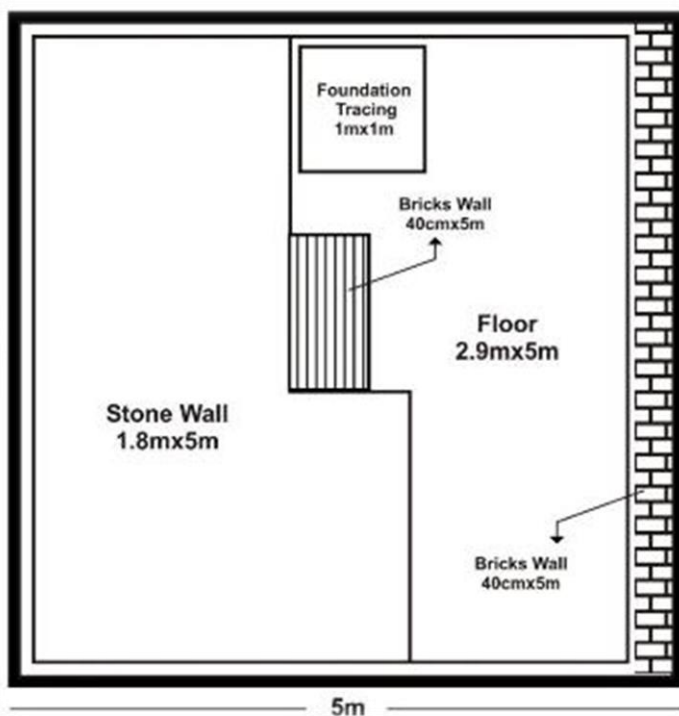
Old Fort Mansehra  
Trench No: M8/i  
Layer: 1-5



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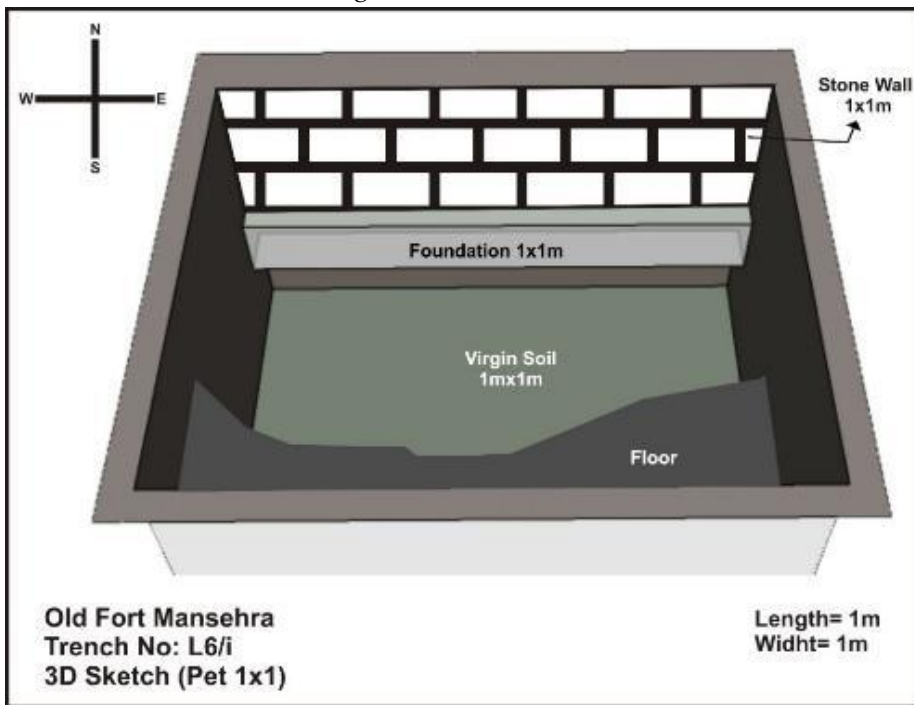
Old Fort Mansehra  
Trench No: L6/i  
Lot No: 6301-6350



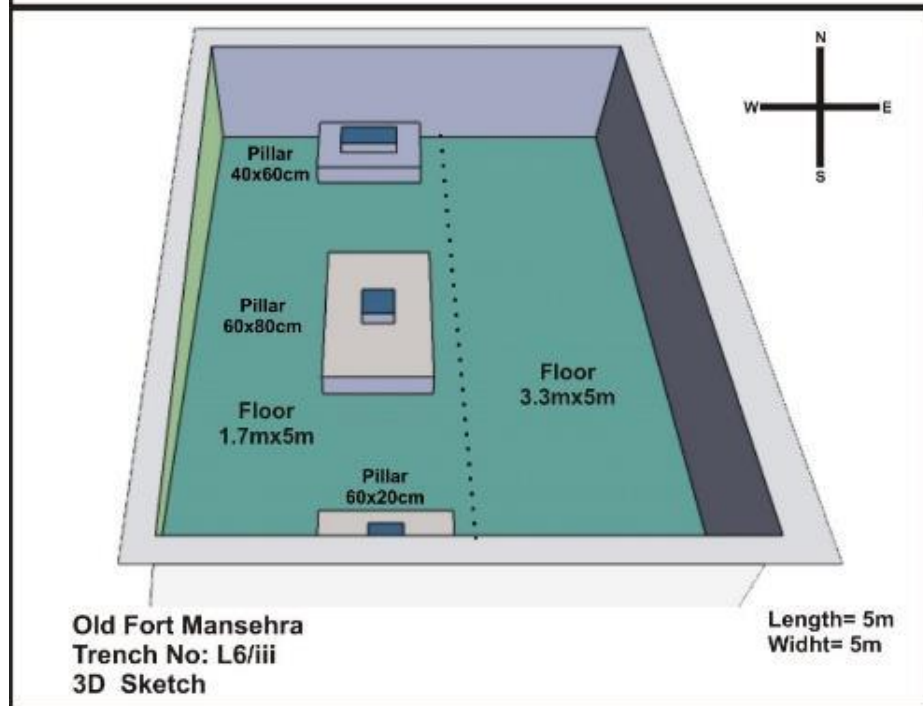
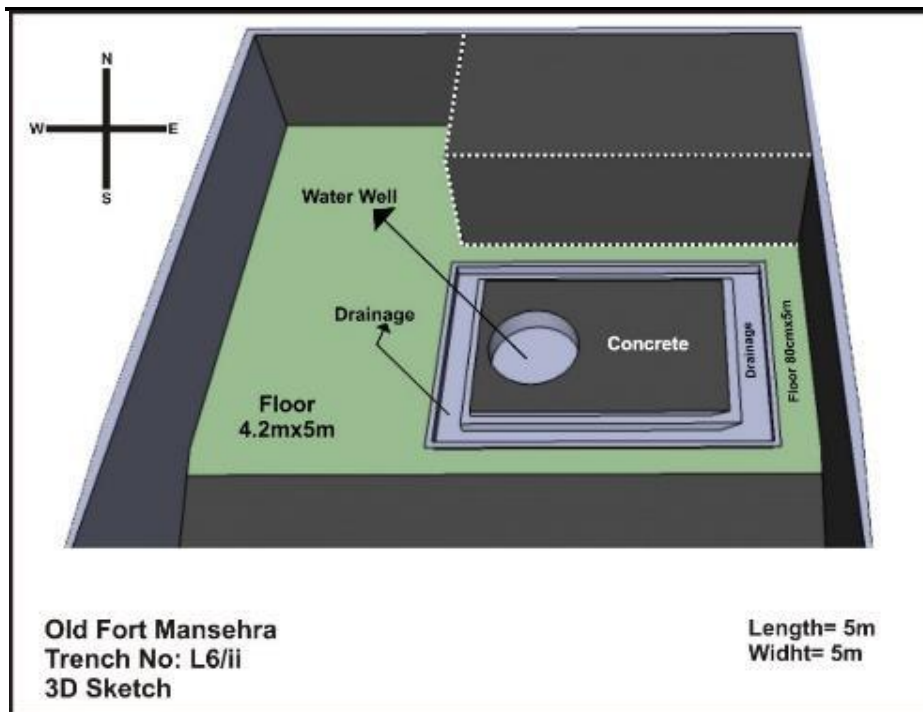
Old Fort Mansehra  
Trench No: L6/i  
Lot No: 6301-6350

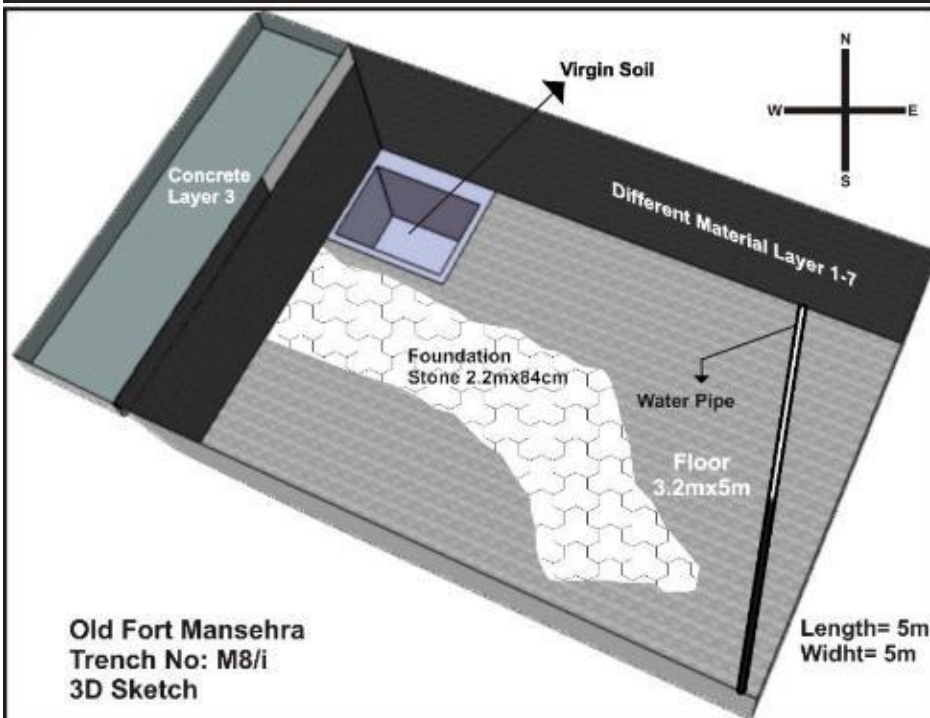
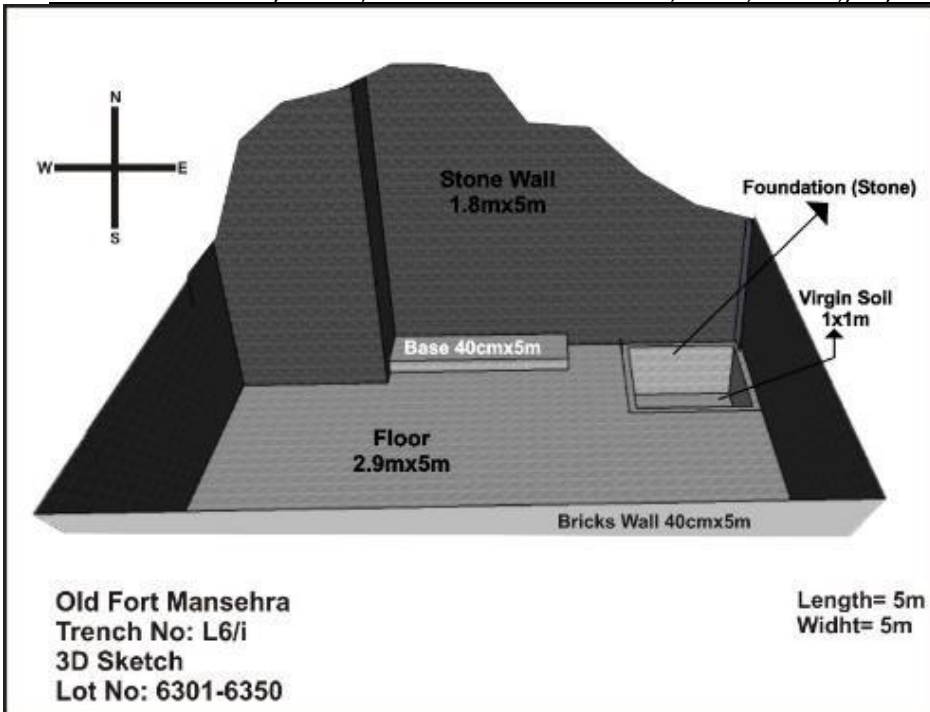
*3D Layout of the Trenches*

As we know many features unveiled during excavations can be recorded just once since the archaeological workflow physically removes most of the stratigraphic elements. Therefore, in the present excavation, we tried to create a 3D layout of every 5 metres trench. First, we transferred the excavation data into our 3D programme (does it have a name?) with the help of plans, sections, photos, and the excavation team. From the beginning, it was considered, that different building phases should be distinguishable at a later point. The colouring of the architectural remains indicates not only different periods but furthermore for each period different building phases. To enable the team to work with the 3D model at a later point, we transferred each structure from our programme to the SketchUp file format. Google SketchUp is a free software, that is able to provide simple layer structures and also easy to learn. With the help of the programme and the 3D model, the team was able to test individual features and find still unanswered stratigraphical questions. The 3D layout shows that the fort exhibited a combination of architectural styles reflective of the Sikh and British periods. The remains of large walls, bastions, and gateways indicated a robust defensive structure designed to withstand potential attacks. The architectural layout suggested a complex of residential, administrative, and military areas within the fort's walls. Elements reflecting the British colonial occupation included modifications to the architecture and infrastructure. Barracks, administrative offices, and storage facilities were identified, showcasing the fort's adaptation to its new role as a military and administrative hub during the British colonial era.



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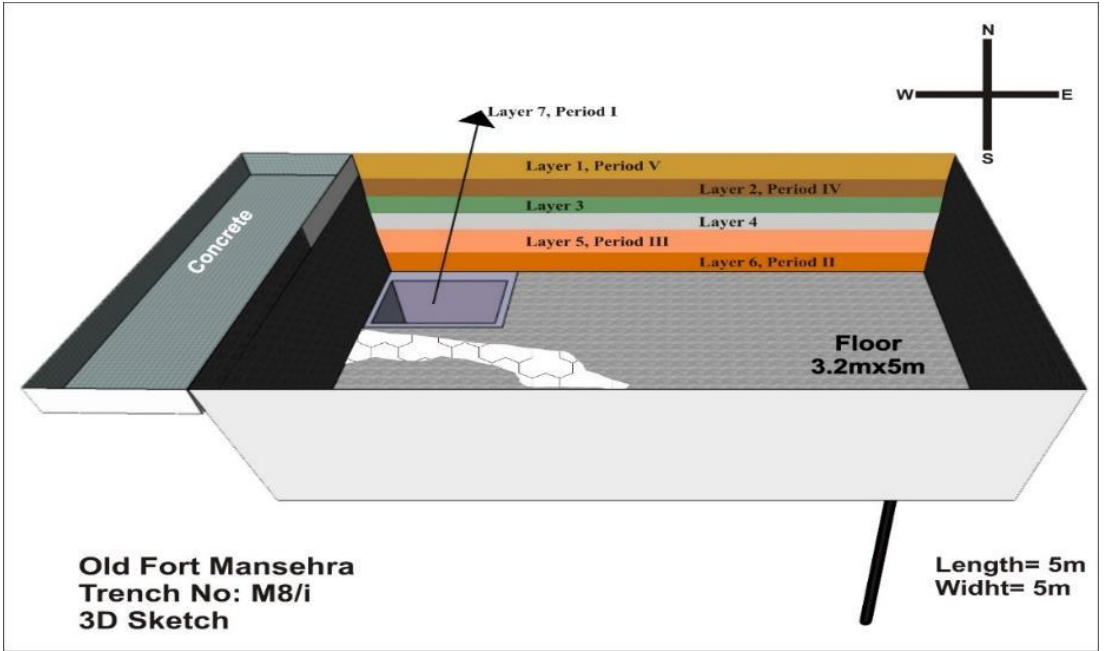


### Stratigraphic Information

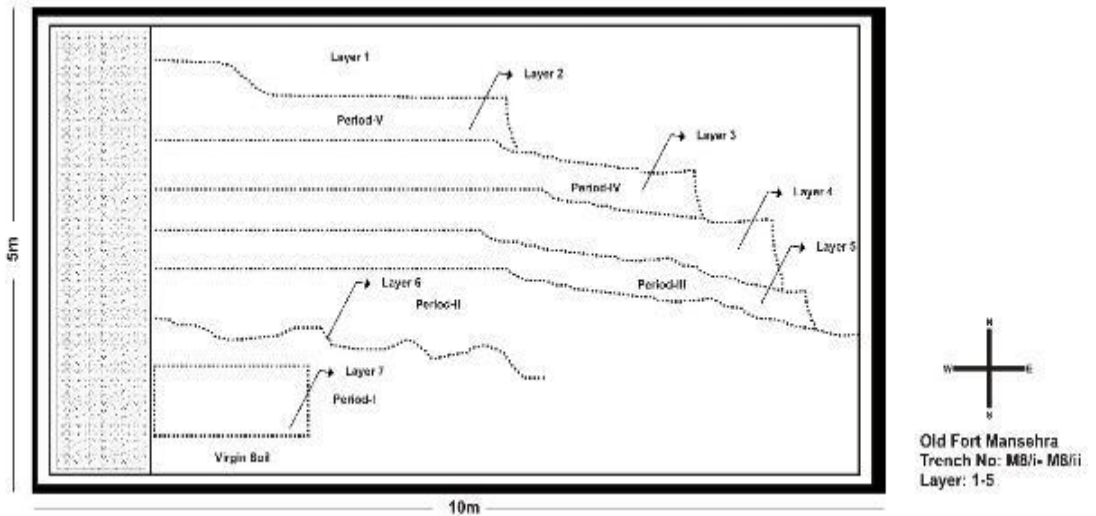
*Stratigraphic analysis helped us to understand the sequence of events, deposition, and changes that have occurred in the fort, contributing to our understanding of the history of past human activities in Mansehra. The depth,*

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location, and association of artifacts, ecofacts, and features within strata were documented to understand their temporal and cultural context. Stratigraphic information from trenches M8/i and M8/ii is used to establish cultural sequences and identify and date different phases of human occupation at this site. Based on the stratigraphical information and the cultural materials associated with different strata, the fort was occupied in four different periods or phases ranging from the early Kushan period to the post-independence.






Each layer dated on what material?






**Major Findings**


The major findings include potsherds, charcoals, bones, iron pieces and nails, copper coins, etc. Numerous cultural artifacts were discovered during the excavation, providing insights into the daily lives of the occupants. These included pottery sherds, coins, metalwork, weaponry, and personal items such as jewelry and ornaments. The artifacts displayed a blend of local and foreign influences, highlighting cultural interactions that occurred within the fort.

**Coins**

<p>OFM001: Modern Pakistani Coin                  Trench # M8/I                  Material: Silver                  Layer: 1                  Size/width: 1.88mm                  Dia: 24mm                  Weight: 0.2g                  Obverse: 5 rupees encircled with star                  Reverse: Islamic Republic of Pakistan, half crescent with star,                  Date: 2004                  Period: Post-independence                  Condition: Rusted but visible</p>	
<p>OFM002: Modern Pakistani Coin                  Trench M8/II, Layer 1, W: 0.1g,                  Size: 22.86x1.52 mm                  State: Pakistan, Period: 1979, 50                  Paisa unit                  Obv. Minar-e-Pakistan with star                  and crescent in background, floral                  motif on left and right, Hakumat-e-                  Pakistan on top and 1979 at bottom                  Rev. In circle denomination 50                  Paisa with wreath pattern outside                  circle</p>	
<p>OFM003: British Coin                  Trench M8/II, Layer 2, W. 0.05g,                  Size: 20.27x0.96 mm                  Sate: British India (George VI),                  Period: 1944, One Paisa unit</p>	

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<p><i>Obv. 1 PICE Crown INDIA, Aik Paisa, 1944, Nagari legend</i> <i>Rev. Floral motif</i></p>	
<p><i>OFM004: Kushan Coin</i> <i>Trench M8/1, Layer 5, W: 0.2g, Size: 18.12x4.6 mm</i> <i>Ruler, Sasan Gondophares (Indo-Parthians), 1st century AD</i> <i>Obv. Breaded head of king to right, Greek legend illegible</i> <i>Rev. Athena standing to left, right arm extended and holding a shield in the left arm. Khar. legend illegible</i></p>	
<p><i>OFM005: Kushan Coin</i> <i>Trench M8/1, Layer 5, W: 0.2g, Size: 20.10x3.06 mm</i> <i>Ruler, Azes II imitations (Indo-Scythians), Period: 1st century AD</i> <i>Obv. King riding on horse to right, right arm extended, Greek legend illegible</i> <i>Rev. Zeus standing to left, holding small figure of Nike in extending right hand and staff in the left.</i> <i>Khar. legend illegible</i></p>	
<p><i>OFM005: Late-Kushan Coin</i> <i>Trench M8/1, Layer 4, W: 0.5g, Size: 13.10x2.75 mm</i> <i>Ruler, Kanishka II (Late Kushan), Period: 3rd century AD</i> <i>Obv. King standing frontally with head facing left, other details off flan. Legend off flan</i> <i>Rev. Deity, Ardoxsho seated on a throne facing frontally, holding a</i></p>	


<p><i>diadem in the right hand and a cornucopia in the left arm. Legend off flan</i></p>	
<p><i>OFM006: Late-Kushan Coin Trench M8/1, Layer 4, W: 0.2g, Size: 12.86x3.09 mm Ruler, Kujula Kadphises (Kushan), Period: 1st century AD Obv. Bust of king to right, wearing diadem. Greek legend fragmentary BAC..... Rev. Heracles standing to left, holding a club in the right hand and lion skin in the left. Khar. fragmentary .....jasa rajatirajasa.....</i></p>	

**Chronology**

*There are two coins from the 1st C CE, from the Indo-Parthians and Early Kushans; then one coin of the Late Kushan belonged to 3rd century CE, and then there is a gap in the coins until the British period. The coins simply tell us that these coins were used and/or brought to the site in the 1st and 3rdCs CE, and the 20th C CE, but they do not tell us specifically about occupation periods. More work on typological analysis of pottery and possible scientific dating is needed for that*  
*Iron Objects*

<p><i>OFM007: Iron Lock Trench # L8/II Material: Iron Condition: Rusted</i></p>	
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<p>OFM008: Piece of Iron Water pipe Trench # L6/I Material: Iron Condition: Complete/Rusted</p>	 A photograph of a curved, rusted iron pipe fragment. The fragment is light brown with some darker spots of rust. It is positioned above a ruler for scale. The ruler is marked in centimeters and millimeters, with a black bar at the bottom.
<p>OFM009: Iron Hook Trench # M8/I Material: Copper Layer: 2 Condition: Rusted</p>	 A photograph of a rusted iron hook. The hook is dark brown and has a curved, pointed end. It is positioned above a ruler for scale. The ruler is marked in centimeters and millimeters, with a black bar at the bottom.
<p>OFM010: Police identification Badges Trench # L6/I Material: Silver Layer: 2 Condition: Complete/Rusted</p>	 A photograph of two silver police identification badges. The badges are circular and feature a central emblem with a crown and a shield. They are positioned above a ruler for scale. The ruler is marked in centimeters and millimeters, with a black bar at the bottom.

OFM011: 9 mm Bullet

Trench # M8/I

Material: Iron

Layer: 3

Condition: Complete/Rusted



OFM012: 22mm small bullet

Trench # M8/I

Material: Iron

Layer: 3

Condition: Complete/Rusted



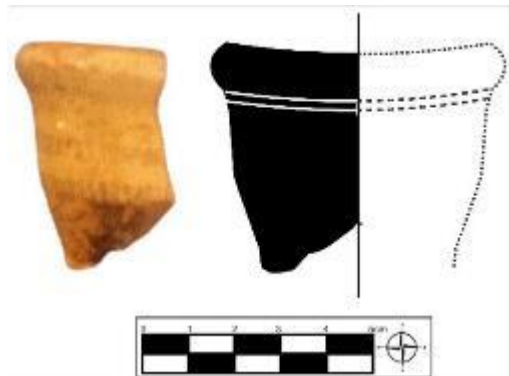
### **Potsherds**

Trench # L8/II

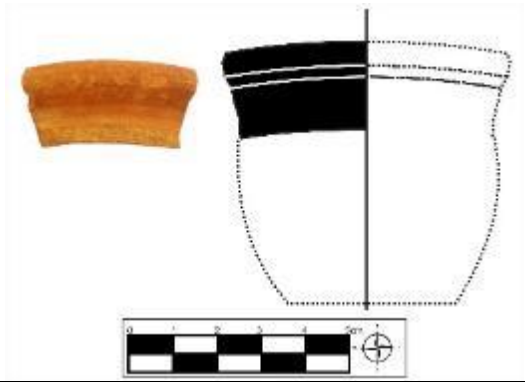

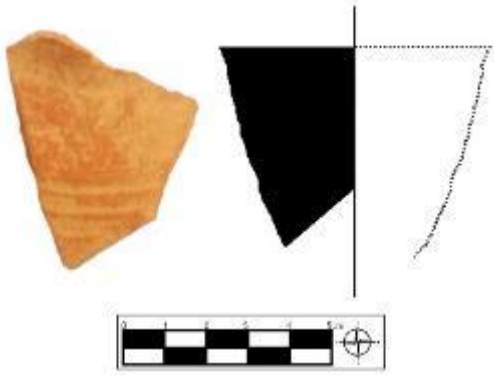
Layer: 1

Type: RIM

*Description: broken sherd of a long flower vase made of levigated clay with fine texture with the slightly out-curved clubbed rim. The long neck of the vase is decorated with two parallel rows of nail impressions. The outer surface rim and the upper neck are of buff colour with applique, glazed while the lower neck has a blackish painted band below the lower incised rows.*



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<p><i>The inner surface below the rim has a band of applied glaze on the original surface.</i></p>	
<p>Trench # M8/I Layer: 5 Type: Rim Description: Out curved rim of a short open mouthed bowl with grooves on the inner side. The medium texture of well-levigated clay with brownish light slip on the inner and outer body.</p>	 <p>The image shows a photograph of a curved rim fragment on the left and a corresponding line drawing on the right. The drawing highlights a black band of applied glaze on the inner surface of the rim. Below the drawing is a scale bar from 0 to 5 cm and a north arrow.</p>
<p>Trench # M8/I Layer: 4 Type: Rim Description: A broken clubbed rim of a flower vase. It has a fine texture of well-levigated clay. The outer surface shows painted red colour synthetic paint and slip.</p>	 <p>The image shows a photograph of a broken clubbed rim fragment on the left and a corresponding line drawing on the right. The drawing shows a black silhouette of the fragment. Below the drawing is a scale bar from 0 to 5 cm and a north arrow.</p>
<p>Trench # M8/ii Layer: 5 Type: body with rim Description: broken potsherd of a pitcher showing a low broken rim with a short neck. The outer surface has a brownish slip with medium texture. The upper and the lower body is divided by three parallel grooved lines within the body.</p>	 <p>The image shows a photograph of a broken potsherd on the left and a corresponding line drawing on the right. The drawing shows a black silhouette of the fragment. Below the drawing is a scale bar from 0 to 5 cm and a north arrow.</p>

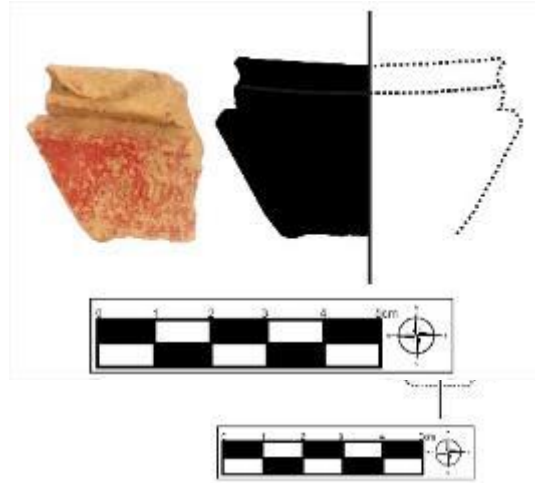
trench # m8/i

layer: 2

type: rim

Description: a broken part of a big flower vase having out curved clubbed rim. The outer top shows a lobe pattern, and the top of the rim has incised lines. The outer surface, below the rim on the upper neck, is moulded while the lower neck is decorated with a series of incised vertical lines. The body and neck are separated by a low grooved line. The sherd has a rough texture with the outer surface is fully painted red.

2. piece of the same port. The rim is badly broken from one side.



Trench # M8/II

Layer: 3

Type: rim

Description: broken sherd of a vase with flanged rim, inner collar is partly broken. It has fine texture of well-levigated clay with a smooth surface. The outer body and neck are separated by a low round mould.

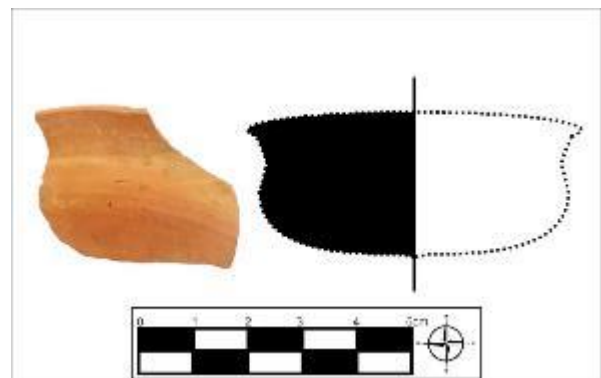


Trench # M8/I

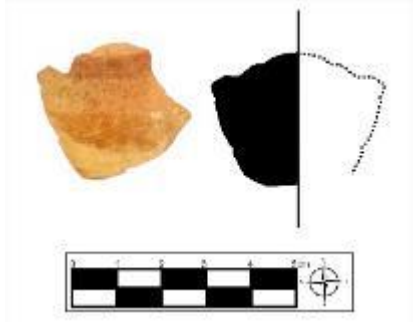


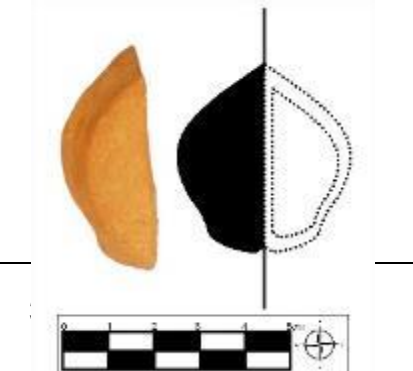
Layer: 3

Type: base with rim

Description: body herd with the rim of a medium-sized red ware dish with out curved rim and a flate base.



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<p>Trench # L6/II Layer: 3 Type: base Description: a broken piece of the lower part of a flower vase with slightly out curved body wall with a flat string cut base. Medium texture showing rough outer surface and the inner showing dabber mark.</p>	
<p>Trench # M8/II Layer: 5 Type: body herd Description: body sherd of a spout broken from a big-size flask showing medium texture of well-levigated clay. On the outer it has an insized nail punch impression.</p>	
<p>Trench # M8/III Layer: 3 Type: base Description: The upper part of a long flower vase of medium size having a convex flat rim of a neckless body showing an outer vertical long groove. It has a medium texture with both rough surfaces (inner and outer). The outer is painted with red synthetic paint.</p>	
<p>Trench # M8/II Layer: 1 Type: base Description: Broken base of a small bowl. Wheel-made string cut flat base inner showing dabber marks. Rough surface with medium</p>	

texture.

## Conclusion

The excavation at the Old Fort Mansehra was carried out by the Department of Archaeology, Hazara University Mansehra, Pakistan as a joint venture with the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, University of Leicester, UK under the Pak-UK Education Gateway programme funded by the British Council and Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. The selected site is in the middle of the city in the form of high mound suitable to establish the archaeological profile of the city. The excavation was launched at different points on the mound after a scientific survey of the site and development of a topographic sheet showing the distribution of grids and trenches. The excavation brought to light different cultural materials and archaeological artifacts found in-situ in the existing strata. Two periods are dated via coins i.e. the Indo-Parthians and Early Kushans during the 1st C CE and then there is one coin of the Late Kushans from the 3rd C CE. It seems that the site had been occupied from at least the 1st C CE. We do not yet know if this early occupation was continuous, or if there was a break between 1st and 3rd Cs CE. We can infer from the proximity of contexts yielding the 3rd C Ce coin and the 20th C CE coins that there was a break in occupation, but we know from the architecture and historical records that the site was re/occupied from at least the Sikh period onwards, right up until the present (i.e. 2023).

The Old Fort Mansehra served as a strategic stronghold during its Sikh and British occupation, shaping the regional history in significant ways. The architectural features and cultural artifacts unearthed highlight the diverse cultural influences that converged within the fort's walls. The transition from Sikh to British control was evident through architectural modifications and changes in the fort's functionality. The archaeological excavation of the Old Fort Mansehra has enriched our understanding of the historical dynamics of the region during its Sikh and British occupation. The fort's architectural features, cultural artifacts, and written records have collectively provided a comprehensive picture of its role as a military, administrative, and cultural centre. The findings contribute to the broader historical narrative of South Asia, shedding light on the complex interactions between different cultures and political powers over time. Further research, conservation efforts, and public engagement initiatives should be undertaken to preserve and showcase the excavated remains and artifacts from Old Fort Mansehra. This will ensure that the site's historical significance is properly understood and appreciated by present and future generations.



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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION AT OLD FORT MANSEHRA: A  
PRELIMINARY REPORT 2023**

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