

Excellency, Sirs, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

During the years I was in Makran, I never thought that I would come to Sindh and start to carry out research-work at Banbhore. In 2010, when I was invited by Dr Kaleemullah Lashari to join hands with a Pakistani Team and a French Team headed by Dr Monique Kervran it seemed to all of us a positive challenge. I submitted the Project to the Rector of my University; he was bewildered...but accepted it and urged me to organise a good Team. Here we are, all of us: Prof. Mario Piacentini, Dr Agnese Fusaro, Alessandro Tilia...and myself, though writing from my home in Italy following to a bad accident occurred to me in Islamabad in November previous year. Only Doctor Niccolò Manassero in 2016 made a different choice, and the same for Monique Kervran. The Italian Team did not surrender. Dr Simone Mantellini bravely accepted to be "field-director" for the archaeological research-work within the framework of a *Memorandum of Understanding* signed between the Director General of Antiquities of Sindh and the Magnifico Rettore of the Catholic University of Milan.

We were well aware that the Project would involve us in hard work. But the mystifying magnificent site of Banbhore, stretching at the foothold of the Quhistan Plateau along the Gharu Creek and holding tight its secrets, was still defying us as it had defied other eminent scholars that had tried to grasp its secrets since longer than one century ago. Last but not least, Dr F.A. Khan and Dr N.A. Baloch – that is "History through Archaeology" or "Archaeology and History" – had carried out a systematic campaign during the years between the "50s and the "60s of the previous century. Unfortunately, F.A. Khan's notes went lost...and once again the site hid its secrets in the folds of its stones and gravels. Any research-work on that site had to be started again. We accepted its challenge. And here we are, deeply grateful to those who persuaded us and supported and collaborated with us during these long years.

Still many questions are unanswered. But some queries have been unveiled. A special number of the series of "Sindh Archaeology" dedicated to Banbhore has been drafted and is in press.

Some issues relating to the early-Islamic phases of life and settlement of the archaeological area *intra* and *extra-moenia* of the bastioned citadel of Banbhore have been elucidated...A fluvial and maritime mercantile system has stemmed out on the Indus delta, outlet to the sea for the wealth circulating along the land-routes of Sindh, religious centre, centre of production and re-distribution of luxury goods, prominent market, one of the main stages along the monsoon-routes of the Indian Ocean, likely the Daybul/Debol of chronicles, travelogues and geographies in Arabic and Persian.

Today, I am deeply moved to welcome once again this Technical Session. I am not here, and it is time for me to leave the voice to the ones (Pakistanis and Italians) that have carried out a very hard work...day and night, at last grasping to the site of Banbhore a major secret which confirms its mercantile dimension, and makes this site a unique within the whole archaeological panorama.

Acknowledgements? Too many persons have to be acknowledged on my personal behalf, too many persons and faces to be named, from the Minister of Culture HE Sardor Ali Shah to Her E. the Consul of Italy to Karachi Anna Ruffino, from the Magnifico Rettore of the Catholic University, Franco Anelli, and my Colleagues in Milano to the General Director of Antiquities of Sindh, Manzoor A. Kanasro, and his precious incomparable staff. My staff and all the members of the Italian and Pakistani teams that in the course of these years have hardly worked with- and for us. From the "Bureaucrats" (the backbone of any written administration in Pakistan as well as in Italy) to our Academic colleagues in Pakistan and in Italy...and then the "Security" (always alert), drivers, labour, cooks and local carpenters that are providing to the preservation of our... discoveries. To all my Pakistani Friends that have spurred and supported us in the course of these years...too many to be named... my warmest gratitude.

Valeria Piacentini Fiorani

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