

Gregory L. Possehl

CURATOR,
ASIAN
SECTION

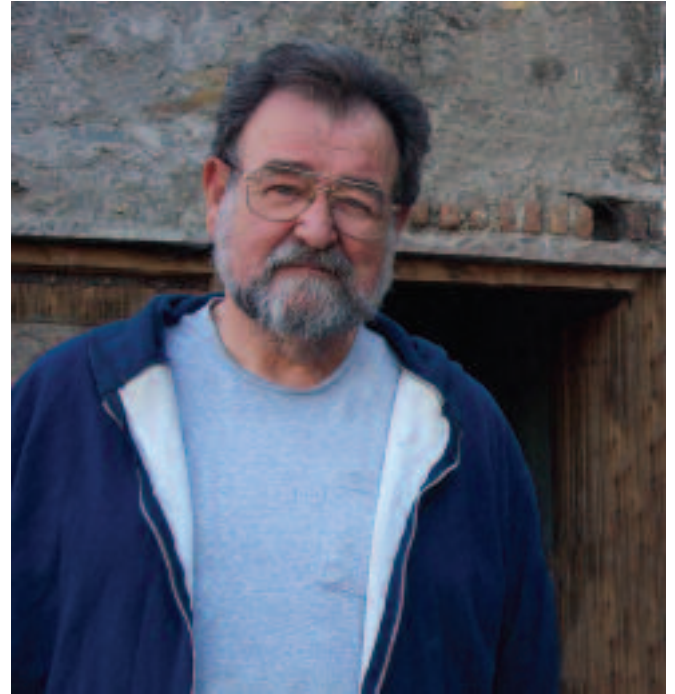
BY DEBORAH I.
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THE SUMMER OF 2004 marked 40 years of archaeological research in India and Pakistan for Gregory L. Possehl, Curator in the Asian Section and Professor of Anthropology. His career began at the University of Washington, where as an undergraduate he excavated shell

middens and worked as a survey archaeologist for the state's highways department. What series of events transformed Possehl from American archaeologist to recognized authority in the archaeology of the Indian subcontinent?

During the summer following his graduation, Possehl participated in an archaeological project in the Quetta Valley of West Pakistan. He eventually became its director while completing his master's degree from the University of Washington. After fulfilling his Army service, Possehl enrolled in the Ph.D. program at the University of Chicago, where he continued fieldwork in both Pakistan and India. After receiving his Ph.D., he taught briefly at Vassar College.

In 1973, Possehl was invited by the Museum's Director, Froelich Rainey, to apply for the South Asia position. Possehl remembers well his first interview, with James B. Pritchard, in the very office that Possehl now occupies. In his early years at Penn, Possehl received a fellowship from the American Institute of Indian Studies to examine a Kulli collection (an expression of highland Indus urbanization) from Baluchistan in West Pakistan, made in the early 1900s by the famed explorer, Sir Aurel Stein. Two years later he organized a conference in Kashmir that resulted in the 1982 publication of *Harappan Civilization: A Contemporary Perspective*. This was updated in 1993 as *Harappan Civilization: A Recent Perspective*.



Gregory L. Possehl in the house he rents at Gilund.

Shortly after the Kashmir conference Possehl began planning for archaeological fieldwork in Gujarat in western India. His excavations, which began in 1980, were the first by an American in India since 1935. He worked initially at Oriyo Timbo, a monsoon encampment of late Indus pastoral nomads, and also excavated extensively at Rojdi, establishing the plan of the Sorath Harappan village there. One of the monographs he published during this period of fieldwork was *Harappan Civilization and Rojdi* (1989).

By the mid-1990s, Possehl decided to end fieldwork and begin dismantling his storehouse of camping, cooking, and archaeological equipment. Fortunately, he was able to donate all of his supplies to several physicians who were in great need of these materials to help mitigate the ravages of a cyclone that hit Gujarat's Gulf of Kutch.



Above, a public building at Gilund with parallel walls and a bin in which seal impressions were found. Left, four seal impressions from Gilund.

Having divested himself of his entire archaeological infrastructure, Possehl, of course, soon found himself enticed back into the field by Vasant Shinde, his colleague from Deccan College (India). Since 1999, they have been excavating at Gilund, a Bronze Age site of the Ahar Banas Complex, in Rajasthan in northwestern India. One of the recent, exciting discoveries was a bin in a public building that contained 100 seal impressions dating between 2100 and 1700 BC. The designs used suggest links between Gilund and the Indus civilization, as well as with groups farther to the northwest in Central Asia and Afghanistan.

In the short run, Possehl will continue excavations at Gilund and perhaps other sites in Rajasthan. He also looks forward to retirement in a few years, but “not to go fishing.” Instead, he will focus on publishing his archaeological research, such as the recent *The Indus Civilization: A Contemporary Perspective* (2002). Other projects include a mystery novel set at an Indus Valley site, a biography of Charles Masson—the British spy in Afghanistan in the mid-1800s—and a history of the period from the First Afghan War (1837–38) to the Great Indian Mutiny in 1857. 🏠



Standing, Teresa Raczek (left) from Penn and Ms. Maryse Saldnha of St. Xavier's College Bombay excavating at Gilund.

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