

# NEWSLETTER

Photo credit: Afifa Khan, 'Old Railway Station', Chakwal, Pakistan



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## Notes from Cameron Petrie MAHSA Principal Investigator



Between summer 2025 and January 2026, the MAHSA project has accelerated towards its Year 2 goals. We have continually upgraded the capabilities of our Arches database, including the testing of new versions, features, and plugins. Our terminology for documenting South Asian heritage has now been harmonised across all of our workflows, ensuring a consistent input of data using different tools.

The team has continued to work hard in progressing the mapping and analysis of regions like Sindh, Punjab, and Gujarat, and we have now documented over 4,000 heritage locations and 10,000 remotely detected features in our database.

While we have had to navigate complex global geopolitics, our collaborative field surveys and training have continued in Pakistan and India. Some 3,000 square kilometres have been covered across Punjab and coastal Gujarat, including full documentation of almost 70 sites. From ODK training in the field to hosting an interactive GIS workshop, the team has been committed to sharing knowledge with students and scholars from our partner institutions.

We are thrilled to share two new publications (see page 4). Map analysis and ground-truthing puts a spotlight on the invaluable contribution of the historical Survey of India to the documentation of South Asian heritage. MAHSA team members have also explored the opportunities and challenges that social media presents for heritage preservation. To top it off, MAHSA co-hosted CAA-UK's annual conference in December 2025, where we welcomed a record number of delegates to discuss computational methods in archaeology.

I would like to extend sincere thanks to all our collaborators. We look forward to working together in 2026.

## New Team Members



Dan Edwards  
Project Administrator  
University of Cambridge



Dr Anisha Singh  
Postdoctoral Research Associate  
Banaras Hindu University

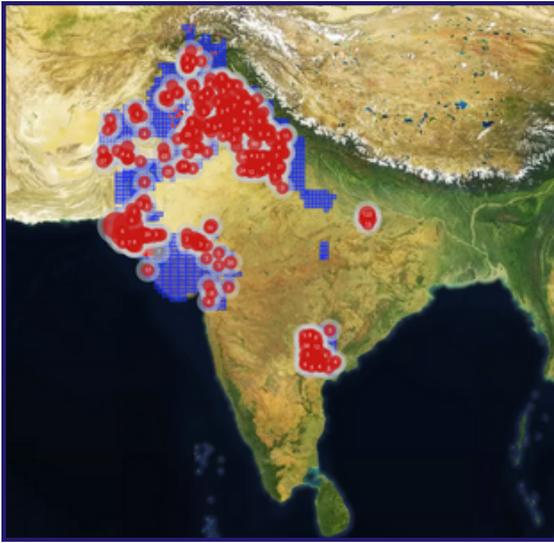


Babar Hussain  
Research Assistant  
University of the Punjab



Max Fancourt  
Researcher  
Barcelona Supercomputing Center

## Database & Digitisation



### Arches Database Statistics

**4,126** Heritage Locations

**10,830** Remotely Detected Features

**1,245** Historic Maps Resource Models

**1,043** Thesauri Terms

**50** Heritage Areas

**437** Information Resource Models

**551** Person Organisation Resource Models

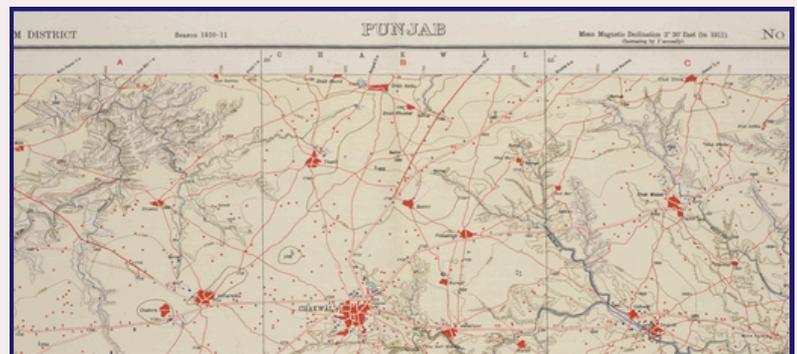
**24** Activity Resource Models

<https://databasemahsa.org/en/>

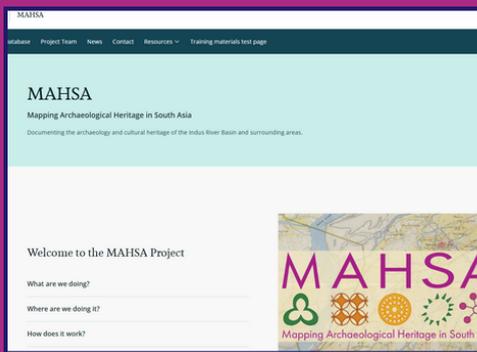
Since July, we have made significant progress with both the **MAHSA Arches database** and its contents. The database version has been upgraded, and the project has been a key partner in Arches feature testing.

We are continually progressing towards our goal of completing analysis of Cholistan, Sindh, Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Gujarat. The latest Arches database statistics include **4,126 Heritage Locations** and **10,830 Remotely Detected Features**.

We've also been committed to producing fully open, accessible resources. In collaboration with the Cambridge University Library, **480 digitised Survey of India maps** have now been made ready for open access release via a special collection. Similar plans are in place for **over 1,000 British Library map sheets**.



As we prepare for our move to using **Lingo**, we have worked to maintain a single, consistent set of terms across all our workflows. We've achieved this by harmonising thesauri terms across our Arches database and related tools, and implementing new procedures to ensure any changes to terms are consistently replicated across all data input and preparation processes.



## New Website Launched!

In Autumn we transferred the contents of our website to the standardised Cambridge Web Platform. This gives us much more control over our site, and we're currently building a new section for storing and distributing our training materials and workshops.

[www.mahsa.arch.cam.ac.uk](http://www.mahsa.arch.cam.ac.uk)

## Social Media Statistics

**883** Instagram followers

**5,041** views on top Instagram post

**874** Bluesky followers

**951** LinkedIn followers

**4,914** views on YouTube

[https://www.instagram.com/mahsa\\_project/](https://www.instagram.com/mahsa_project/)

<https://bsky.app/profile/mahsa-project.bsky.social>

<https://uk.linkedin.com/company/mahsa-project>

## Fieldwork in India & Pakistan

Despite a reduced fieldwork schedule due to geopolitical circumstances, we have covered at least **3,061 km<sup>2</sup> in ground-truthing** in Year 2 to date, progressing towards our goal of covering 10,000 km<sup>2</sup>. More fieldwork is planned from January onwards.

### Fieldwork in Gujarat, India



Photo credit: Kuili Suganya

In November, Kuili Suganya & Shivani Dubey from IIT Gandhinagar navigated salt marshes and flamingo-filled waters to survey archaeological sites on the fossilised islands of Khadir and Bela in Kachchh, Gujarat. They recorded **35 archaeological sites**, of which 75% were reported for the first time. The cultural period of the sites ranged from prehistoric, Harappan, historic, and early modern periods.

According to Kuili, "the highlight of the survey was the dozen or so Paliya memorial stones which dot the landscape, seemingly existing in isolation, but having relevance to the many settlement sites that we explored."

### Fieldwork in Punjab, Pakistan



Photo credit: Afifa Khan

In Pakistan, surveys were conducted with the University of the Punjab and University of Chakwal, **documenting 34 sites** dating from the Later Historic to the British Colonial period.

Working around Lahore, we systematically surveyed a number of gurdwaras, temples and mounds. Most of the surviving mounds have since become graveyards.

Chakwal was a particular highlight, where Dr Samia Anwar took the lead in recording a number of 'British Colonial period' sites in the district using ODK. Unlike many other surveys, this was focused on built heritage from a specific period. The British period maps were therefore especially relevant, facilitating analysis beyond the mounds which are usually our focus.

## New Researchers Join MAHSA

The MAHSA team has expanded, with **Dr Anisha Singh** appointed to the position of Postdoctoral Research Associate at Banaras Hindu University, India, and **Babar Hussain** appointed as Research Assistant at the University of the Punjab, Pakistan. Both are assisting with the ground-truthing of archaeological sites identified from desk-based assessments. **Max Fancourt** has also joined us at the Barcelona Supercomputing Center, and will be applying remote sensing machine learning to archaeological mounds. In Cambridge, we're currently hiring **Research Assistants** to accelerate the pace of documentation in 2026 and enable us to achieve our objectives.

## The Plan for 2026!

Continue to collate high-quality data about archaeological heritage

Work with our partners to refine the Arches database to their operational needs

Increase the scale and pace of ground-truthing archaeological sites with our partner institutions

Complete our automated analysis of historic map sheets to identify potential archaeological sites

Expand the recording of coastal heritage

## MAHSA Hosts CAA-UK 25

On the 9th & 10th of December 2025, MAHSA, MAEASaM, and members of the Department of Archaeology organised and hosted the UK branch of the **Computer Applications and Quantitative Methods in Archaeology annual conference**.

A record number of **105 delegates** attended in person and online for two days of engaging workshops, presentations, and poster sessions. We delivered a dedicated **workshop on Arches**, attended by 40 people. The talks included in this session will be shared via the Getty Conservation Institute YouTube channel.



Photo credit: Michaela Heale

## Recent Publications

The following publications arising from MAHSA work have been published open access:

Khan, A., Sarmah, M., Vidyarthi, V., Roberts, R., and Petrie, C.A. (2025) **'#Hashtaggingheritage: An Exploration of South Asian Social Media Landscapes and Heritage'**, in B, Rouhani, B. Finlayson and T. Clack (eds.) Reporting Heritage Destruction. Bicester: Archaeopress Publishing Ltd, pp. 187-204.

<http://doi.org/10.32028/9781805830382>

Petrie, C.A. et al. (2025) **'Hidden in Plain Sight: The Unrecognized Contribution of the Survey of India in the Documentation of Ancient Settlements in Pakistan and India'**, Journal of Field Archaeology, pp. 1-22.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00934690.2025.2572881>