

# *History of Karachi*

The area of Karachi (Urdu: کراچی, Sindhi: کراچي) in Sindh, Pakistan, has a natural harbor and has been used as fishing port by local fisherman belonging to Sindhi tribes since prehistory. Archaeological excavations have uncovered a period going back to Indus valley civilization which shows the importance of the port since the Bronze Age. Port city of

Banbhore was established before Christian era which served as an important trade hub in the region, the port was recorded by various names by the Greeks such as Krokola, Morontobara port, and Barbarikon, a sea port of the Indo-Greek Bactrian kingdom. and *Ramya* according to some Greek texts.<sup>[1]</sup> The Arabs knew it as the port of Debal, from where Muhammad bin Qasim led his conquering force into Sindh (the western corner of South Asia) in AD 712. Lahari Bandar or Lari Bandar succeeded Debal as a major port of the Indus it was located close to

Banbhore, in modern Karachi. The first modern port city near Manora island was established during British colonial Raj in the late 19th century.

## Early history

The ancient names of Karachi included: Krokola, Barbarikon, Nawa Nar, Rambagh, Kurruck, Karak Bander, Auranga Bandar, Minnagara, Kolachi, Morontobara, Kolachi-jo-Goth, Banbhore, Debal, Barbarice and Kurrachee.

The Late Paleolithic and Mesolithic sites found by Karachi University team on the Mulri Hills, in front of Karachi University Campus, constitute one of the most important archaeological discoveries made in Sindh during the last fifty years. The last hunter-gatherers, who left abundant traces of their passage, repeatedly inhabited the Hills. Some twenty different spots of flint tools were discovered during the surface surveys.

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Ahladino and Pir Shah Jurio are the archaeological sites from the Indus valley.

clvilization periods situated in Karachi district. Floor tiles of a house have been discovered at this site of Ahladino.

The Greeks recorded the place by many names: Krokola, the place where Alexander camped to prepare a fleet for Babylon after his campaign in the Indus Valley; Morontobara, from whence Alexander's admiral Nearchus set sail; and Barbarikon, a port of the Bactrian kingdom.

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## *archaeological ruins of Bhanbore*

Debal and Bhanbore were the ancient port cities established near present-day modern city of Karachi. It dates back to the Scytho-Parthian era and was later controlled by Hindu Buddhist kingdoms before falling into Arab possession in the 8th century CE. In the 13th century it was abandoned. Remains of one of the earliest known mosques in the region dating back to 727 AD are still preserved in the city.



The present city of Karachi was reputedly founded as "Kolachi" by Baloch tribes from Balochistan and Makran, who established a small fishing community in the area.<sup>[2]</sup>

Descendants of the original community still live in the area on the small island of Abdullah Goth, which is located near the Karachi Port. The original name "Kolachi" survives in the name of a well-known Karachi locality named Mai Kolachi in Balochi. Mirza Ghazi Beg, the Mughal administrator of Sindh, is among the first historical figures credited for the development of coastal Sindh (consisting

of regions such as the Makran coast and the Indus delta), including the cities of Thatta.<sup>[3][4]</sup>



*A sketch of the old fort at Karachi from the 1830s.*

## Muslim era

In AD 711, Muhammad bin Qasim conquered the Sindh and Indus Valley, bringing South Asian societies into contact



with Islam, succeeding partly because Raja Dahir was a Hindu king that ruled over a Buddhist majority and that Chach of Alor and his kin were regarded as usurpers of the earlier Buddhist Rai dynasty.<sup>[5][6]</sup> this view is questioned by those who note the diffuse and blurred nature of Hindu and Buddhist practices in the region,<sup>[7]</sup> especially that of a royalty to be patrons of both and those who believe that Chach himself may have been a Buddhist.<sup>[8][9]</sup> The forces of Muhammad bin Qasim defeated Raja Dahir in alliance with the Jats and other regional governors.

In the seventeenth century, Karak Bander was a small port on the Arabian Sea on the estuary of the Hub River, 40 km west of present-day Karachi. It was a transit point for the South Asian-Central Asian trade. The estuary silted up due to heavy rains in 1728 and the harbour could no longer be used. As a result, the merchants of Karak Bander decided to relocate their activities to what is today known as Karachi. Trade increased between 1729 and 1839 because of the silting up of Shahbandar and Keti Bandar (important ports on the

Indus River) and the shifting of their activities to Karachi.<sup>[10]</sup>

This settlement was reputedly founded by Baloch tribes from Balochistan and Makran in 1729 as the settlement of *Kolachi*.<sup>[11]</sup> According to legend, the city started as a fishing settlement, where a fisherwoman, Mai Kolachi, settled and started a family. The village that grew out of this settlement was known as Kolachi-jo-Goth (The Village of Kolachi in Sindhi). When Sindh started trading across the sea with Muscat and the Persian Gulf in the

late 18th century, Karachi gained in importance; a small fort was constructed for its protection with a few cannons imported from Muscat. The fort had two main gateways: one facing the sea, known as Khara Dar (Brackish Gate) and the other facing the adjoining Lyari river, known as the Meetha Dar (Sweet Gate). The location of these gates corresponds to the present-day city localities of Khaaradar (*Khārā Dar*) and Meethadar (*Mīṭhā Dar*) respectively. The Soomra dynasty, Samma Dynasty, Arghun Dynasty, Tarkhan and Talpur dynasties ruled Sindh.

During the rule of the Mughal administrator of Sindh, Mirza Ghazi Beg the city was well fortified against Portuguese colonial incursions in Sindh. Debal and the Manora Island and was visited by Ottoman admiral Seydi Ali Reis and mentioned in his book *Mir'ât ül Memâlik* in 1554. In 1568 Debal was attacked by the Portuguese Admiral Fernão Mendes Pinto in an attempt to capture or destroy the Ottoman vessels anchored there. Fernão Mendes Pinto also claims that Sindhi sailors joined the Ottoman Admiral Kurtoğlu Hızır Reis on his voyage to Aceh. Debal was also visited by

the British travel writers such as Thomas Postans and Eliot, who is noted for his vivid account on the city of Thatta. During the reign of the Kalhora dynasty the present city started life as a fishing settlement when a Sindhi Balochi fisherwoman called Mai Kolachi took up residence and started a family. The city was an integral part of the Talpur dynasty in the 1720s.

The name Karachee was used for the first time in a Dutch document from 1742, in which a merchant ship *de Ridderkerk* is



shipwrecked near the original settlement.<sup>[12][13]</sup> The city continued to be ruled by the Talpur Amir's of Sindh until it was occupied by Bombay Army under the command of John Keane on 2 February 1839.<sup>[14]</sup>

## Talpur period (1795–1839)

In 1795, Kolachi-jo-Goth passed from the control of the Khan of Kalat, Kalat to the Talpur rulers of Sindh. The British, venturing and enterprising in South Asia opened a small factory here in September 1799, but it was closed down within a year

because of disputes with the ruling Talpurs. However, this village by the mouth of the Indus river had caught the attention of the British East India Company, who, after sending a couple of exploratory missions to the area, conquered the town on February 3, 1839. In the eighteenth century Karachi was occupied by the Kalhora dynasty, handed over by them to the Khan of Kalat as blood money for the killing of his brother by the Kalhoras, and finally taken over by the Talpur dynasty. In 1838, the British occupied it to use it for launching their campaigns against the

Russian Empire in Central Asia and Afghanistan.

## Company rule (1839–1858)

After sending a couple of exploratory missions to the area, the British East India Company conquered the town on February 3, 1839. The town was later annexed to the British Indian Empire when Sindh was conquered by Charles James Napier in Battle of Miani on February 17, 1843. Karachi was made the capital of Sindh in the 1840s. On Napier's departure it was added along with the rest of Sindh to the

Bombay Presidency, a move that caused considerable resentment among the native Sindhis. The British realised the importance of the city as a military cantonment and as a port for exporting the produce of the Indus River basin, and rapidly developed its harbour for shipping. The foundations of a city municipal government were laid down and infrastructure development was undertaken. New businesses started opening up and the population of the town began rising rapidly.

The arrival of troops of the Kumpany Bahadur in 1839 spawned the foundation of the new section, the military cantonment. The cantonment formed the basis of the 'white' city where the Indians were not allowed free access. The 'white' town was modeled after English industrial parent-cities where work and residential spaces were separated, as were residential from recreational places.

Karachi was divided into two major poles. The 'black' town in the northwest, now enlarged to accommodate the burgeoning

Indian mercantile population, comprised the Old Town, Napier Market and Bunder, while the 'white' town in the southeast comprised the Staff lines, Frere Hall, Masonic lodge, Sindh Club, Governor House and the Collectors Kutchery [Law Court] /kə'tʃəri/ located in the Civil Lines Quarter. Saddar bazaar area and Empress Market were used by the 'white' population, while the Serai Quarter served the needs of the 'black' town.

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The village was later annexed to the British Indian Empire when the Sindh was



conquered by Charles Napier in 1843. The capital of Sindh was shifted from Hyderabad to Karachi in the 1840s. This led to a turning point in the city's history. In 1847, on Napier's departure the entire Sindh was added to the Bombay Presidency. The post of the governor was abolished and that of the Chief Commissioner in Sindh established.

The British realized its importance as a military cantonment and a port for the produce of the Indus basin, and rapidly developed its harbor for shipping. The

foundation of a city municipal committee was laid down by the Commissioner in Sindh, Bartle Frere and infrastructure development was undertaken.

Consequently, new businesses started opening up and the population of the town started rising rapidly. Karachi quickly turned into a city, making true the famous quote by Napier who is known to have said: *Would that I could come again to see you in your grandeur!*

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In 1857, the Indian Mutiny broke out in South Asia and the 21st Native Infantry

stationed in Karachi declared allegiance to rebels, joining their cause on 10 September 1857. Nevertheless, the British were able to quickly reassert control over Karachi and defeat the uprising. Karachi was known as *Khurachee Scinde* (i.e. Karachi, Sindh) during the early British colonial rule.

## British Raj (1858–1947 CE)

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*An old image of Karachi from 1889*



*A postcard from 1930 of Elphinstone Street, Karachi*



*Karachi map, 1911*

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*Karachi Municipal Corporation Building, inaugurated  
in 1932.*



*St Joseph's Convent School, Karachi*

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In 1795, the village became a domain of the Balochi Talpur rulers. A small factory



was opened by the British in September 1799, but was closed down within a year. In 1864, the first telegraphic message was sent from India to England when a direct telegraph connection was laid between Karachi and London.<sup>[15]</sup> In 1878, the city was connected to the rest of British India by rail. Public building projects such as Frere Hall (1865) and the Empress Market (1890) were undertaken. In 1876, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, was born in the city, which by now had become a bustling city with Temples, mosques, churches,



courthouses, markets, paved streets and a magnificent harbour. By 1899, Karachi had become the largest wheat exporting port in the east.<sup>[16]</sup> The population of the city was about 105,000 inhabitants by the end of the 19th century, with a cosmopolitan mix of Muslims, Hindus, Europeans, Jews, Parsis, Iranians, Lebanese, and Goans. The city faced a huge cholera epidemic in 1899.<sup>[17]</sup> By around the start of the 20th century, the city faced street congestion, which led to South Asia's first tramway system being laid down in 1900.

The city remained a small fishing village until the British seized control of the offshore and strategically located at Manora Island. Thereafter, authorities of the British Raj embarked on a large-scale modernisation of the city in the 19th century with the intention of establishing a major and modern port which could serve as a gateway to Punjab, the western parts of British Raj, and Afghanistan. The city was predominantly Muslim with Sindhi and Baloch ethnic groups. Britain's competition with imperial Russia during the Great Game also heightened the need for a

modern port near Central Asia, and so Karachi prospered as a major centre of commerce and industry during the Raj, attracting communities of: Africans, Arabs, Armenians, Catholics from Goa, Jews, Lebanese, Malays, Konkani people from Maharashtra, Kuchhi from Kuchh, Gujarat in India, and Zoroastrians (also known as Parsees)—in addition to the large number of British businessmen and colonial administrators who established the city's poshest locales, such as Clifton. This mass migration changed the religious and cultural mosaic of Karachi.



*Port trust Building*

British colonialists embarked on a number of public works of sanitation and transportation, such as gravel paved streets, proper drains, street sweepers, and a network of trams and horse-drawn trolleys. Colonial administrators also set up military camps, a European inhabited quarter, and organised marketplaces, of

which the Empress Market is most notable. The city's wealthy elite also endowed the city with a large number of grand edifices, such as the elaborately decorated buildings that house social clubs, known as 'Gymkhanas.' Wealthy businessmen also funded the construction of the Jehangir Kothari Parade (a large seaside promenade) and the Frere Hall, in addition to the cinemas, and gambling parlours which dotted the city.

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By 1914, Karachi had become the largest grain exporting port of the British Empire.

In 1924, an aerodrome was built and Karachi became the main airport of entry into British Raj. An airship mast was also built in Karachi in 1927 as part of the Imperial Airship Communications scheme, which was later abandoned. In 1936, Sindh was separated from the Bombay Presidency and Karachi was made again the capital of the Sindh. In 1947, when Pakistan achieved independence, Karachi had become a bustling metropolitan city with beautiful classical and colonial European styled buildings lining the city's thoroughfares.



As the movement for independence almost reached its conclusion, the city suffered widespread outbreaks of communal violence between the majority Muslims and the minority Hindus, who were often targeted by the incoming Muslim refugees. In response to the perceived threat of Hindu domination, self-preservation of identity, language and culture in combination with Sindhi Muslim resentment towards wealthy Sindhi Hindus, the province of Sindh became the first province of British India to pass the Pakistan Resolution, in favour of the

creation of the Pakistani state. The predominantly Muslim population supported Muslim League and Pakistan Movement. After the independence of Pakistan in 1947, the minority Hindus and Sikhs migrated to India and this led to the decline of Karachi, as Hindus controlled the business in Karachi, while the Muslim refugees from India settled down in Karachi. While many poor low caste Hindus, Christians, and wealthy Zoroastrians (Parsees) remained in the city, Karachi's Sindhi Hindu migrated to India and was replaced by Muslim

refugees who, in turn, had been uprooted from regions belonging to India.

## Post-Independence (1947 CE – present)

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### **Pakistan's capital (1947–1958)**

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Karachi was chosen as the capital city of Pakistan. After the independence of Pakistan, the city population increased dramatically when hundreds of thousands of Muslim Muhajirs from India fleeing from anti-Muslim pogroms and from other parts of South Asia came to settle in Karachi.<sup>[18]</sup>

As a consequence, the demographics of the city also changed drastically. The Government of Pakistan through Public Works Department bought land to settle the Muslim refugees.<sup>[19]</sup> However, it still maintained a great cultural diversity as its new inhabitants arrived from the different parts of the South Asia. In 1959, the capital of Pakistan was shifted from Karachi to Islamabad and Karachi became the capital of Sindh.

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**Cosmopolitan city (1958–1980)**

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*Habib Bank Plaza was the tallest building in Asia between 1963 and 1968.*

During the 1960s, Karachi was seen as an economic role model around the world. Many countries sought to emulate Pakistan's economic planning strategy and one of them, South Korea, copied the city's second "Five-Year Plan" and World Financial Centre in Seoul is designed and modeled after Karachi.

The 1965 Pakistani presidential election disturbance and political movement against President Muhammad Ayub Khan started of a long period of decline in the city. The city's population continued to grow exceeding the capacity of its creaking infrastructure and increased the pressure on the city.

The 1970s saw major labour struggles in Karachi's industrial estates. During the administration of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto riots and Karachi labour unrest of 1972 caused major decline in economic



development. During President Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq's martial law, Karachi saw relative peace and prosperity, specially during the 3 years of Major General Mahmood Aslam Hayat, as Deputy Martial Law Administrator Karachi from 1977 to 1980.

## **Post 1970s–present**

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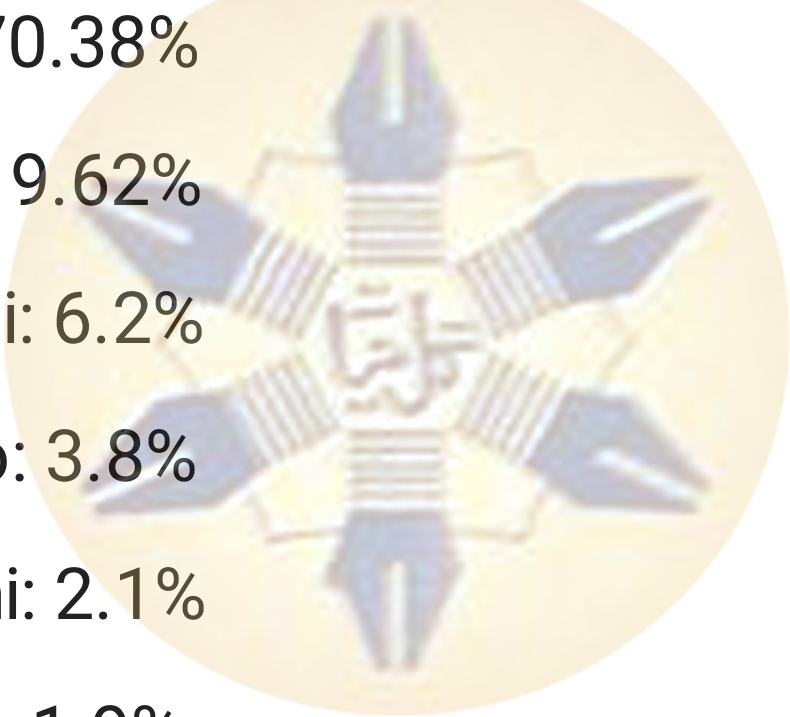
The 1980s and '90s also saw an influx of Afghan refugees from the Soviet–Afghan War into Karachi, and the city. Political tensions between the Muhajir and other

groups also erupted and the city was wracked with political violence. The period from 1992 to 1994 is regarded as the bloody period in the history of the city, when the Army commenced its Operation Clean-up against the Mohajir Qaumi Movement.

Since the last couple of years however, most of these tensions have largely been quieted. Karachi continues to be an important financial and industrial centre for the Sindh and handles most of the overseas trade of Pakistan and the Central

Asian countries. It accounts for a large portion of the GDP of Sindh, Pakistan and a large chunk of the country's white collar workers. Karachi's population has continued to grow and is estimated to have exceeded 15 million people. Currently, Karachi is a melting pot where people from all the different parts of Pakistan live. The Sindh government is undertaking a massive upgrading of the city's infrastructure which promises to again put this heart of Sindh city of Karachi into the lineup of one of the world's greatest metropolitan cities.

The last census was held in 1998, the current estimated population ratio of 2012 is:

- Urdu: 70.38%
  - Sindhi: 9.62%
  - Punjabi: 6.2%
  - Pashto: 3.8%
  - Balochi: 2.1%
  - Saraiki: 1.9%
  - Others: 6%.
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The others include Konkani, Kuchhi, Gujarati, Dawoodi Bohra, Memon, Brahui,

Makrani, Khowar, Burushaski, Arabic, and Bengali.

## Picture gallery



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A map of Karachi from 1889



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The Empress Market, 1890





A map of Karachi from 1893



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View of the dense old native town by the  
end of the 19th century



View of the Bunder Road (now M. A. Jinnah Rd.), 1900



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Bunder Road



Farewell arch erected by the Karachi Port  
for the Royal visit of Prince of Wales, later  
King George V, 1906

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British family at Elphinstone St., 1914



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Frere Hall, Karachi, c1860.

See also




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- Demographic history of Karachi
- Abdullah Shah Ghazi
- Bhambore
- Culture of Karachi
- Debal
- Demographics of Karachi
- Economy of Karachi
- Education in Karachi
- History of Pakistan
- History of Sindh
- Karachi
- Kolachi jo Goth

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- Kolachi
  - Krokola
  - Kulachi (tribe).
  - Mai Kolachi
  - Morontobara
  - Muhammad bin Qasim
  - Politics of Karachi
  - Timeline of Karachi history.
- 

See also

- Timeline of Karachi

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- [A story behind every name](#)

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- The real Father of Karachi (it's not who you think)
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