

KHAROṢṬHI INSCRIPTIONS FROM AZIZ DHERI STUDY AND ANALYSIS¹

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The site of Aziz Dheri² is located about three kilometres west of the village of Ganghu Dher and about 11 kilometres north of the Jrandu bridge, a flyover constructed over a canal on the main Mardan-Swabi road (Fig. 1). The area is surrounded by mountains to the north, north-east and north-west. Recent research has showed that the area is rich in archaeological heritage which dates back to the pre-historic period as shown by the discovery of dozens of sites found in the area. Most of these sites are either looted by the antique seekers or levelled by their owners to turn them into agricultural land. But there are still very well preserved sites that need attention. The Megaliths at Asota near Shewa village are located about 4 kilometres to the south-west of Aziz Dheri and the site is almost preserved and is protected under the Antiquity Act of Pakistan. The 24 megaliths are arranged in circle whereas each one is about 3m high. The total number of the megaliths was 32. Similar megaliths are reported from Turlandi (Khan, SN 1995: 115 and Khan, B 2003) and other places of the Mardan-Swabi plain. Close to Asota megaliths, graves have been recently discovered that are made of large slabs and can be compared with Adina graves, located to the west of Asota. They may belong to the Kuṣāna period. Another important site situated close to the site are the remains at Rani Ghat (Nishikava 1994) situated to the north-east of Aziz Dheri.



Fig. 1: Close view of the site (Google image)

Among all these remains Aziz Dheri is regarded as one of the largest archaeological mounds in the area with a rich assemblage of cultural artefacts and very well organised settlement. The site was discovered in 1976 but prior to scientific excavations in 1993, illegal digging at the site continued for a very long time. The first Director of Archaeology and Museums, Government of NWFP, Professor Farid Khan, initiated the first legal excavation at the site. Since then several expeditions have been arranged by the Directorate of Archaeology in collaboration with the Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar, each time with different aims and objectives in mind. We are not going to give here a detailed report of the previous activities,³ but would like to acknowledge the efforts of the previous excavators who despite of life risks were committed to continued field activities at the site and protect it from illegal diggings.

During these excavations, thousands of antiquities were recovered which include sculptures, TC figurines, ceramics and other objects of historical significance. Among these objects, coins, seals and Kharoṣṭhi inscriptions were discovered in a large number; the latest one mostly found during 1993 season excavation. Except few of them, most of these inscriptions were originally incised on small pots or bowls in grey-ware which were found broken into several pieces. The inscriptions presented here were supposedly found in a cell close to votive stūpa no. 2 (or shrine 1; see Figure 2) situated to the south of the main stūpa.

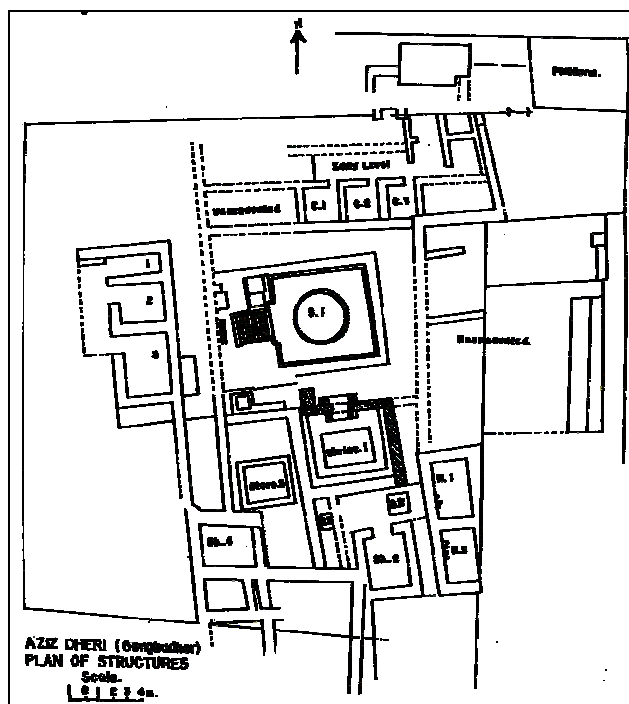


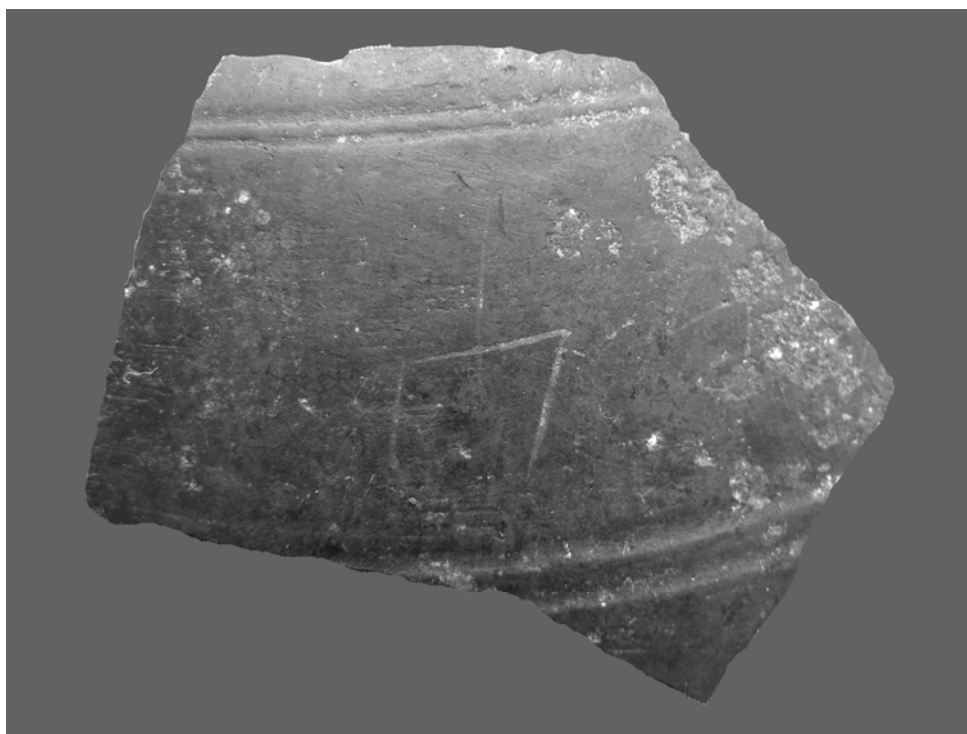
Fig. 2: Layout drawing of the excavated areas (1993)

No.1 (Fig. 3)

Measurement: 6.7x4.4cm

Weight: 31.70gr.

There are at least two letters slightly scratched on the glossy surface of the sherd between to cordons on the convex body of the pot. The letters are very faint and the reading proposed is not certain. The first letter to the right could be read as 'ta' shown with sharp angles. The second letter is composed of three strokes, the top horizontal line with two vertical parallel lines attached downwards to the horizontal stroke, one to each end. This could be the letter 'śa' added with a slanting stroke to the outer surface of the horizontal and in the middle which make it 'śi'. The whole could be read 'taśi' or 'tuśi' because of the traces of a loop attached to the bottom of the letter. The beginning of the inscription is missing. To the extreme left side, there seems part of a missing akṣāra.



No. 2 (Figure 4)

Measurement: 5.7x3.6cm

Weight: 15.74gr.

This is also a grey ware sherd broken from a small bowl. The inscription is engraved on the convex body of the pot. Compared to the previous inscription, here, the letters are engraved deeply and the preserved letters could be read without any difficulty. This seems originally a long inscription that goes round and close to the rim of the bowl. The beginning and the end of the inscription is missing. The remaining part is composed of five letters whereas reading of the first and the last letters are difficult due to their missing parts. The rest can be read: *+[ma]ṣamīde+*.

We were expecting in the late Kuṣāna period the looped form of the medial vowel 'i' applied to the letter 'ma' but such form of 'mi' is also commonly known in the late Kuṣāna period. It is more probable that the object itself is earlier in date than the inscription which was most probably added to it later on as the patina explains.



No. 3 (Figure 5)

Measurement: 3.5x3cm

Weight: 7.68gr.

Similar to the previous inscription, this one is also engraved on the convex part of the bowl and close to the rim. Like the previous inscription, this one is probably also added in a later periods. The shape of the bowl and the size of the letters and the way they are engraved suggest that this inscription and the previous one (No. 2) may be part of the same inscription.

There are three signs whereas reading of the first and the last letters is difficult because of their broken nature. The only letter readable with certainty is 'mi' in the middle; the form of the letter is similar to that of the previous inscription. The first missing letter could be 'ḍa'.



No.4 (Figure 6)

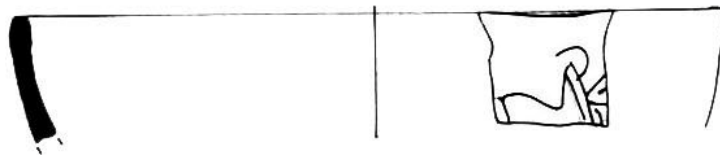
Measurement: 2.7x2.5cm

Weight: 5.72gr.

This is a small fragment of a medium size bowl in light grey ware. The broken letter in Kharoṣṭhī is superimposed by another late period drawing. The letter is difficult to read first because it is partially missing and secondly, it is overlapped by a late period drawing most probably a vase with flowers when the direction is changed. The patina of both the carvings shows that they were not engraved at the same time. Most probably the inscription is added to the bowl in a later period and the drawing of vase subsequently, as the fresh patina indicates.



Fig. 6



Drawing of Fig. 6

No.5 (Figure 7)

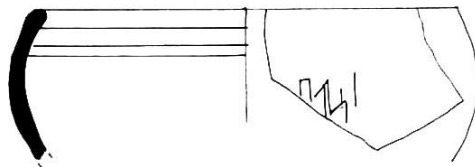
Measurement: 7.5x5cm

Weight: 23.34gr.

A small sherd in light grey colour broken from a bowl with the same texture as No. 4. It bears a Kharoṣṭhī inscription round the shoulder and below the rim. The letters, four in number (?) are in the extreme left side of the sherd and show most of their part missing or overlapped by some other scratches, which render reading of the inscription very difficult. The inscription either starts with a date '100 10' and could be read '100 10 śi' or the first signs are for '+tsa++śi'; in both these cases the reading is not certain except for the last letter 'śi'.



Fig. 7



Drawing of Fig. 7

No.6 (Fig. 8)

Measurement: 6x3.3cm

Weight: 10.72gr.

This sherd is broken from a bowl in grey ware and is inscribed with four Kharoṣṭhī letters depicted close to the rim. Only the lower part of the first letter is intact but it is difficult to reconstruct it. The second letter is partially damaged but readable and could be reconstructed into 'da'. The last two letters are clear and pose no problem in reading. The inscription reads '...+daisa'. The name or the word is in genitive case as indicated by the letter 'sa' at the end and could be a proper name, probably the name of the donor. The form of the letter 'sa' whereas the mouth is fully opened indicates that the inscription belongs to the late Kuṣāna/Kuṣāno-Sasanian period.

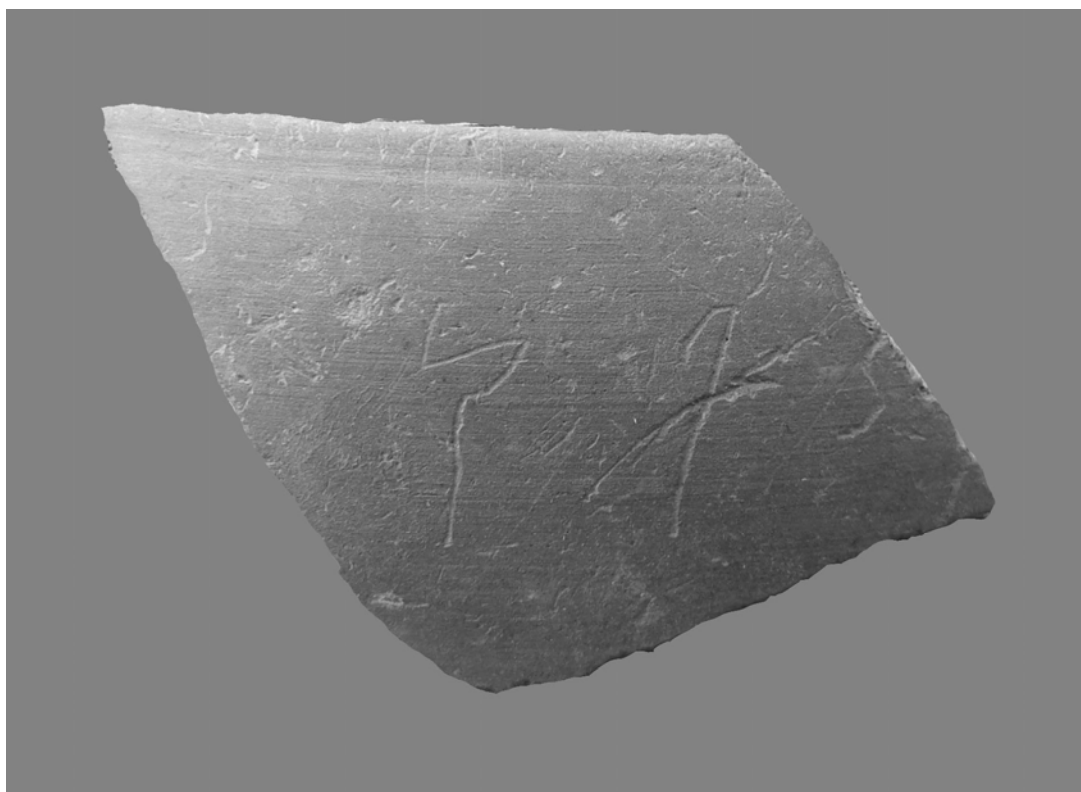
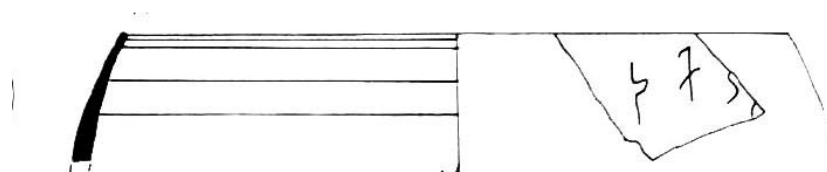


Fig. 8



Drawing of Fig. 8

No.7 (Fig. 9)

Measurement: 3.1x3.6cm

Weight: ?

The inscription was found during 2006 season excavation in trench E02 corresponding to our area EVIII at a depth of about 5 meters almost from the same level where the other Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions were found. The inscription is on a sherd broken from a bowl with grooved line and in dark and fine grey ware. Both sides, the beginning and the end, of the inscription is missing. Probably it is a part of a long inscription engraved close to the rim and around the body of the bowl. The three letters preserved here are read as: *sarvatha/thu* or *mi...* This might be an inscription representing two words: *sarva* and *thu...* the first one means 'all' and the second one is a part of missing word and can be reconstructed in any word, e.g., 'thuba' etc. The last letter could also be read 'mi'. The form of the letter 'sa' confirms its date to the late Kuṣāna/Kuṣāno -Sasanian period or even later.



Fig. 9

No.8 (Fig. 10)

Measurements: ?

This is a fragment of a sherd broken from a medium size shallow bowl in grey ware. It is the longest inscription so far known to me from Aziz Dheri. It is engraved alongside the rim of the bowl and the letters are deeply incised to the surface and pose no problem of readings except for some letters. But the inscription is missing at both its ends and the preserve part does not give any satisfactory meaning. The inscription reads: ...*vahaujadhasa miṃśu*+or *vahaujavaṃ saṃgaṃśu*+... On Palaeographic ground it is dateable to the late Kuṣāna/Kuṣāno -Sasanian period as to be confirmed by the fully opened mouth 'sa'.

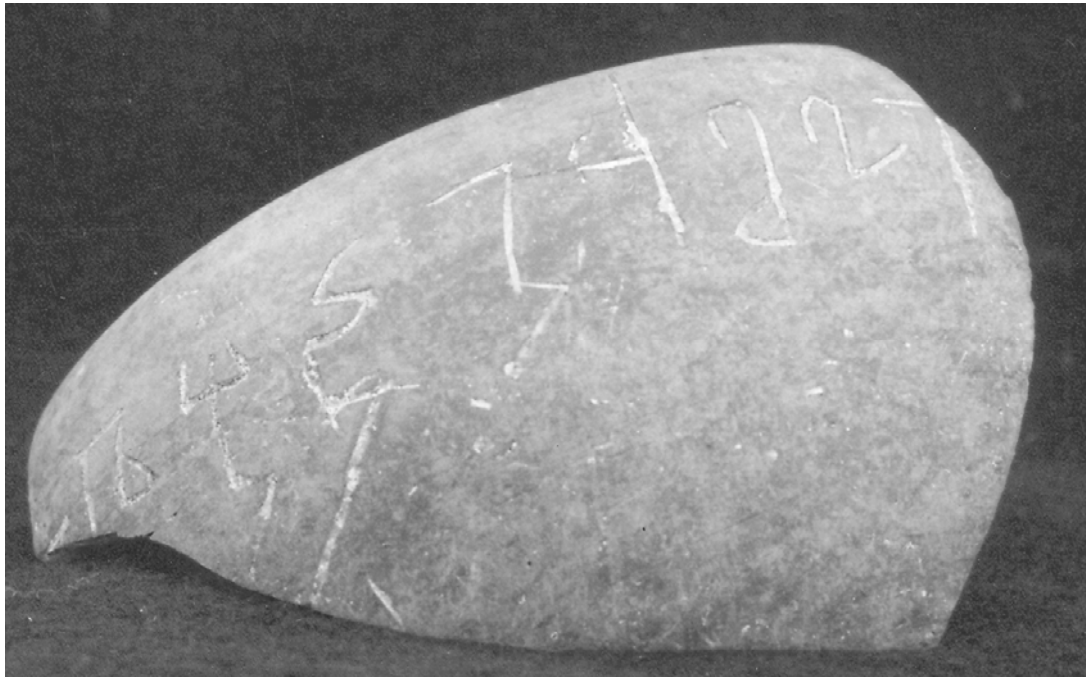


Fig. 10

No.9 (Fig. 11)

Measurements: ?

Weight: ?

The author tried to locate the object and to get all details about the lamp but unfortunately could not find it in the reserve of the Peshawar Museum. The only photograph that is included here is out of focus and the reading of the inscription could be doubtful. But *faute de mieux* I have to suggest the following reading: The inscription reads: ...[roami]++... For similar findings see Nasim Khan 2007.

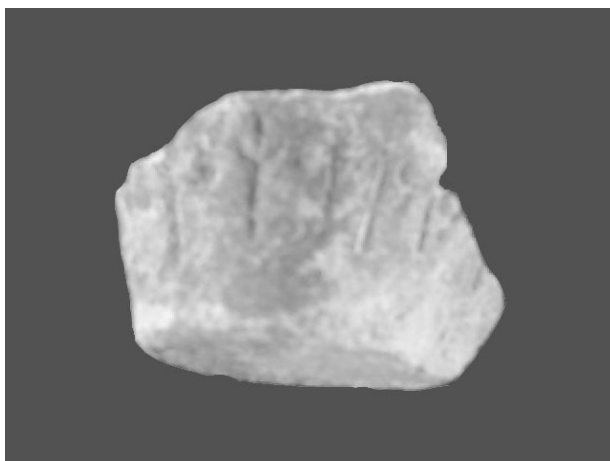


Fig. 11

One of the main elements for reconstructing the ancient history of any region is the study of inscriptions and we are fortunate to have enough inscriptions on which we can base the ancient history of Pakistan. Among different areas of Pakistan, the history of the Gandhāran region is mostly based on numismatic and epigraphic evidence. A good number of inscriptions, mostly written in Kharoshthi, are found, so far, in the area and which are to be considered key elements of information on which we can base our knowledge regarding the ancient history of Gandhāra. Kharoṣṭhi inscriptions are recorded in most of the Buddhist sites in Gandhara including Aziz Dheri from where a lot of other antiquities were recovered together with more than 500 sculptures (Nasim Khan 2010) which were recovered from the different levels of the mound. Before 2007/2008 season excavation it was extremely difficult to date all these sculptures and which were generally associated with Kuṣāṇo-Sasanian period. But the discovery of dozens of coins found in their proper archaeological context and the inscriptions recorded in 1993 are important materials which not only help us to establish a chronological framework for Aziz Dheri but they also help us to date these sculptures and other antiquities. The coins and inscriptions not only confirm the uninterrupted cultural profile of the site starting from the Indo-Greek period to the Islamic period but they also help us to place the so far recorded antiquities from Aziz Dheri including sculptures in their proper archaeological context.

Notes

¹ These inscriptions along with other antiquities from the site are studied in their archaeological context (Nasim Khan 2010: Vol. 2).

² The name of the site is due to the owner of the land. Aziz was the name of the owner of the land while ,*dheri* is a local term used for a raised portion of earth mound.

³ On these activities see Nasim Khan 2010.

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