The Cultural Dynamics Of The History Of Asia In Petroglyphs Along The Karakoram Highway

Syed M. Ashfaque

Abstract

The author proceeds from the personal narrative of his first visit to the Northern Areas in November 1979 on a somewhat urgent and confidential assignment of the Ministry of Culture, which he completed with a remarkable precision.

His technical report now buried in official files is lost virtually, but his present memoirs on such obscure aspects of ancient history as the trade in the herb of *Soma* juice, sacred to and valued by the early Aryans, and its elimination, possibly during the Achaemenian social reforms, and its replacement by the commerce in *salajeet* in the area, are interesting aspects on which the conventional books of history remain silent.

The author draws attention to another aspect of social reforms, probably achieved during the Sasanian times, as suggested by his critical appreciation of a beautiful local folk-lore. This relates to the elimination of the probable practice of marriages among sibling pairs, as part of the primitive institutions prevailing in the backward communities of isolated valleys of the high mountains.

Speaking of the petroglyphs, he augments his keen scientific observations on natural causes of stone coloration, with studied results of the field surveys of the Pak-German Study Group. At places, the author touches upon the vast subject of the indications of the Pleistocene glaciations in parts of the upper Indus Valley, which in itself is a virgin field for research by students of the Earth Sciences in Pakistani Universities. A correlation of the fluctuating phases of the glacial and inter-glacial climatic conditions would be of immense value in analysing the palaeolithic artefact industries in the Potohar region, in which the author has carried out his field works over more than ten years.

The author shows a clear grasp of the petroglyphs as products of the psychological reflexes of humans in a landscape of frightening isolation, where demons and death seem to lurk behind every boulder, and in the merciless forces of the mountain streams.

Perhaps, his most useful contribution lies in tabulating the groupings of the petroglyphs in historic perspective, essentially based on studies of the German savants, it makes a good supplement on the subject for students of social studies. The tabulation may have many drawbacks, which it is hoped, will be improved by those believing in constructive criticism. The author duly acknowledges his sources in the adequate references to the published literature.

Introductory

With completion of the Karakoram Highway in 1979, a new era of anthropological and historical researches began in the scholarly world, interested in the geopolitical setting of Pakistan. The Germans and the Italians had already been in more or less consistent pursuits of the sciences of humanities in the area since the Karakoram Expedition of 1956. The materialisation of the great highway provided a further incentive for establishing the Pak-German Study Group in 1980, in which Prof. Karl Jettmar of Heidelburg and Prof. Ahmad Hasan Dani of Quaid-i-Azam University played the leading roles.

It was perhaps on their first joint visit of the area in the autumn of 1979, and the ensuing press reports on the petroglyphs, appearing in the newspapers *(Sacred Rocks of Hunza),* that the Ministry of Culture and Tourism felt overwhelmed with the responsibility of preserving and protecting the petroglyphic sites in the vast wilderness of the mountainous backyard of Pakistan. I, as a mature archaeologist and hardy field worker at that time, was ordered to travel all the way from Taxila to Batura Glacier by road, and submit a feasibility report on the measures of preserving all such features within a week.

In the last moments of my preparation for the journey Dr. M.R. Mughal made a personal appeal to accompany me to the Northern Areas to widen his experience which I readily accepted for the sake of merry company, and also as a return courtesy for his favour to allow me on an exploratory tour of Baluchistan in the Spring of 1973. We started from Taxila in the afternoon of 13th November, and travelling via Abbottabad and Thakot, made our first halt at midnight at small hotel at Besham. This brings to memory with a touch of sadness, the personality of our excellent driver, late Cha Cha Younas of Taxila, who was an embodiment of courage, devotion to duty, and an uncanny foresight for avoiding mishaps during road journeys.

To travel from Taxila to Hunza, to note all the significant spots of petroglyphs on massive boulders with their classification and descriptive details, to gather local folklores related to the rock art, to work out the scheme of an administrative infrastructure within the scope and financial resources of the Department of Archaeology for preservation of the cultural remains and for researches on them, to return to Taxila the same way, and to submit the final report to the Ministry of Culture, sharply by noon of the seventh day after start of the journey, was a challenge worthy of placement with Jules Veren's adventure for keeping the tryst with the fixed schedule of 88 days round the world.

The onus of doing all that lay upon my shoulders, as my colleague Dr. Mughal stood outside the official responsibility of the mission. Yet, I must acknowledge his help in taking some good shots with camera, which helped me later in presenting various slide lectures on the lures of the Karakoram Highway.

This was a trying journey for both of us, but Dr. Mughal was more expressive of his discomfit in his native Punjabi. At moments of irritation he is wont to drop the veil of false suavity of conversation in Urdu. On our return journey at nightfall in the mountainous district, we had to stay

at one of the small hotels for truck drivers on the wayside at Shatial. It served good meal of mutton curry and *nan,* but offered the narrow cots with greasy smelling mattresses and quilts, whose stench reminds one of the Neanderthal dwellings in caves.

The night was getting cold after the brief showers in the evening and I accepted the comfort of the warm bed despite its smell. Dr. Mughal also had to do that after much hesitation, but registered his displeasure by uttering 'Mein to suvere suvere tur jawanga' (I will go away at the break of the dawn).

He slept soundly till 9 in the morning, when I was already in my field kits. He woke up with a yawn and laughed at himself when after morning greetings I reminded him of his resolution to go away at the break of the dawn. After breakfast we walked to the boulder field on the cliffy bank of the mighty Indus, where a suspension bridge spans it to lead the deep across on the other side, where the track forks towards east to Darel and west to Tangir valleys. It was a feast of sight to find petroglyphs spread almost on every rock, more crowded and pleasing to eyes in the cool morning than what we had already seen at Thalpan, Thor Nala, Gizergah, Alam Pul, Heldekeish, etc.

The round trip took five full days and a better part of the sixth, when we arrived back at Taxila in the small hour of the 18th November. My overriding concern now was to prepare the detailed report, for which immediately I sat down strumming on the typewriter. There was no time to make the preliminary draft, and then the final draft. I wrote down the whole thing in proper sequence of a mental outline, ending with measures of preservation of the cultural traces. The report was complete by mid-day of 19th November 1979.

I intended to go to the Ministry of Culture next day to submit my report at the due moment of the seventh day. But it happened that Mr. Asghar Butt, our joint Secretary dealing with Archaeology in the Ministry, and who was eagerly waiting for my return, came on visit to Taxila that afternoon. He looked pleased to see me back from the mission, and was very appreciative of the fact that I had also prepared the desired report without waiting for the clerical help of any stenotypist, or making fuss of self-importance as young officers normally do on such occasions.

By placing my report in the hands of the Joint Secretary, I was able to save a day out of seven, much as Jules Veren had done by travelling westwards round the globe. The parallels between mine and Jules Veren's adventure end there. Jules Veren won some million pound sterlings in reward. My reward was only three more official visits to Hunza via the Karakoram Highway at widely distributed intervals. The last September one of these in September 198l was to finalise the scheme for establishing the Sub-Regional Office of the Department of Archaeology at Gilgit.

In my humble suggestions to the Ministry of Culture, I had always given due emphasis for creating proper paraphernalia in the proposed Sub-Regional Office of the Department of Archaeology at Gilgit to encourage researches on various aspects of the Cultural and Natural factors and features. As a nationalist, I must admit, I had an apathy and dislike of foreign scholars dabbling in our archaeology, anthropology, social sciences, etc., and I always proposed in my official

communications to the Departmental authorities to phase out the intervention of Foreign Archaeological Missions in Pakistan slowly, but inexorably, in their place. I always favoured substituting our own Pakistani scholars from the Department, learned bodies, and Universities to take the lead in the expansion of knowledge by fieldwork and academic researches.

I was wrong in doing all that. A process of rot had now set up in the Ministry of Culture, where with the exception of few, the succession of the inefficient arrogant, and corrupt Secretaries gradually ate into the vitals of the once good Department of Archaeology & Museums of the Federal Government. That Department is now reduced to the position of a mere administrative unit of the Government, and from where all scholarship, and the power of thinking, planning, and deciding in the best national interest in academic terms has departed. In its abject fall on the academic front, the Federal Department of Archaeology has surrendered to the Foreign Archaeological Missions all prerogatives of field researches, publication of scientific reports on their discoveries, and international recognition of specialization on archaeology in Pakistani.

It is probably an altruism that the intellectual subjugation of a nation is more injurious than a defeat on the physical frontier of the country. But, the high-ups of the powers that be, have never cared a straw for the situation. In such a state of affairs, a small fry like me has no business to grudge the successes of the Foreign Archaeological Missions in having a field day in Pakistan. Rather, I feel obliged to congratulate them, and accept gratefully their contributions of fresh knowledge. It is better than the insipid notifications of amendments of the service regulations, and disciplinary rules being doled out from secretariats of administration, always strengthening the powers of the corrupt bureaucracy.

Speaking of the contribution to knowledge by the Foreign Archaeological Missions, I have sincere appreciation for the good work done over the last two decades by the Pak-German Study Group, in analysing and interpreting the social enigmas and cultural dynamics of the history of Asia, reflected from the petroglyphs along the Karakoram Highway. The following account is a summary of some of my personal observations in the field, combined with study details of most of the excellent reports by members of the Pak-German Study Group on Anthropology, published in various technical journals and monographs.

A Wealth of Petroglyphs in Pakistan:

According to the latest estimates published by the Pak-Garman Study Group for Anthropological Researches in the Northern Areas of Pakistan, more than 50,000 petroglyphs and above 5000 inscriptions have been recorded along the Karakoram Highway during the two decades of the joint field work launched since its opening in 1979 (Konig, et al, 1997; Nasim Khan, 1998).

This is an impressive number of the human cultural signatures within the mountainous confines of the upper Indus Basin, and its drainage arteries penetrating into the western Himalayas and Karakoram, with main tributary of the Gilgit draining the region of Hindukush in neighbouring Chitral, and its confluent of the Hunza emerging from the watershed between Pakistan and western China.

To this profusion of petroglyphs, we may add a few hundred more, first noted by Aurel Stein during his reconnaissance of the Indus banks between Thor and Chilas, and lost in the process of rock blasting for construction of the Karakoram Highway (Stein, 1942).

In this largest concentration of petroglyphs in the world, it is not just their number which is astounding. There is also a stupendous chronological range from pre-Historic to the sub-Recent periods, which is of great interest to the students of social anthropology and the history.

The multitude of regional and ethnic associations and the cultural cross-currents from different directions of the Asian civilizations is quite amazing. Here one gets in touch with the stilled historical process of South Asia, Iranian, Central Asian, Chinese and Tibetan interchange of cultural diffusion and political moves, with lots of insight into the propagation of the Buddhist faith among the down trodden, people of Asia.

The themes pursued in the petroglyphs and the aesthetic creativity adopted in the pictorial depiction may not be judged in the best of the artistic talents of the various cultural representations. Most of the creators of these petroglyphs might indeed, have been novices, turned to graphic art as a reflex to their feelings of insecurity and superstitions in the desolation of haunted valleys and harsh landscape, which they had to traverse in reaching their destinations.

As in other thinly populated regions of the world, the semi-arid aspect of the landscape of the Upper Indus Basin, sculptured into grotesque shapes of protruding *roche moutonee,* stretches of stony glacis of *eskers,* and sandy ridges of the median *moraines* of the extinct glaciers of the *Ice Age*, are apt to evoke phantoms of jins, ghosts in human and animal shapes, and other supernatural beings. The human reflexes of lonely persons to such hallucinations are momentary feeling of paranoia. The normal scape from such overwhelming fear of the unknown is sought in involuntary bursting into loud singing, incantation to ones guardian spirits, recitation of religious texts, etc. In company, however, the escape may be sought by concentrating on more meaningful activities, like narration of the traditional romantic tales, or in graphic drawings of the symbolic objects of religious adoration.

The iconographic elements palpably suggest the mental preoccupation of the travellers through these high risk corridors of short-cut passages connecting different cultural sphere of Asia in different directions. These bring to the fore their social traits, political objectives and religious ideals.

The large number of inscriptions also reflect the racial and linguistic multiplicity in scripts like Brahmi, Kharoshthi, Sharada, Sogdian, Middle Persian, Parthian, Bactrian, Chinese, Hebrew, Syrian, and Tibetan. A systematic study of these inscriptions is proving to be a great archival wealth, which alongwith the pictorial elements is a gratuitious addition to the history of Asian nations.

Petroglyphs in General Perspective:

An interesting aspect of the study of petroglyphs has been the determination whether these belong to the indigenous dwellers of the area or to people on the move between spheres of vast cultural diversity like Tibet and Iran, or the Tarim Basin in Sinkiang and the Gandhara region of Pakistan. Once their chronological bracket and the ethnic identity is stablished, it becomes easier to say

whether they were local pastorals or foreign, traders, state emisaries, or those deputed on missions of religious proselytizing or on military expeditions.

Even before the rivalries of the Russian and the British Empires in capturing access to economic resources of Central Asia, manifested in the Great Games of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the petroglyphic records indicate some miniature forms of political rivalries in the region, created by religio-political tensions among the surrounding super powers of Asia in different ages.

The petroglyphs have been drawn on rocky outcrops and massive boulders, smoothened by water action, and abandoned on raised terraces along the course of the rivers in slow upheaval of the land in the tectonic process of mountain building in this region of the colliding continents (Molner *et al,* 1975; 1977). Windswept and sandblasted for eons, the rocky surfaces bearing scars of Pleistocene glaciations, have acquired a deep brown tint or bluish gloss, called the desert varnish.

The pictures are rendered normally by pecking at the rocky surface with a pointed pebble to draw the defining curves of the intended objects. The bruising of the desert varnish exposes a trace of lighter and fresh surface looking distict against the parent surface. With passage of time, these lines lose their fresh look and become darker by the same process of patination by slow oxidation of the exposed mineral grain texture of the rocks. With passage of time, the lines become dimmer, yet distinct with relation to the hue of the rest of the surface. Two or more lines drawn at long intervals of time, can thus be easily judged as to their relative age.

The most common figures made by rock pecking are those of ibexes. These have an ubiquitous distribution throughout the Northern Areas along passages and foot tracks following water courses, and through meadows and rocky inclines. By long tradition of illustration, the ibex figures have been reduced to symbolic shorthands of linear strokes for the body and four legs, with the characteristic pair of long curved horns, sweeping back over shoulders with convex sides upwards.

Applying the rules of the degree of patination, the time frame for certain figures spans the millennia from Neolithic to the present age. In the remote past. Ibexes and other caprids might have signified some ritualistic expression of the cult of fertility — perhaps a tenuous continuation of the cave art of hunting scenes of the Mesolithic Period. Such fertility cult continued down the ages even in chalcolithic remains of human culture in the form of day figurines of mother goddesses and other female statuettes. Ibex figures of recent dates may be nothing more than the products of idle moments or doodles by shepherds in their daily routine of tending their flocks of sheep in the solitary dales.

While the ibex figures may be generally attributed to local pastoral traditions carried over the millennia, there are pictures of other animals and episodes which look outlandish in the regional cultural context, and must belong to people travelling through these corridors in high mountains from and to different parts of Central and South Asia in different periods of history. Preserved on the non-perishable medium of rocks, the density and the diversity of these cultural signatures provide additional clues to the puzzle of piecing together the web of events in the lacunae of history in the Upper Indus basin of Pakistan.

Petroglyphs of this genere along the Karakoram Highway tend to be clustered at select spots, which probably signify halting stations at convergence of routes from different directions, or at ferrying points across the turbulent rivers where crossing becomes inevitable necessity to reach a given destination.

Ferrying across the raging tides of the tumultuous rivers in these mountains has been a hazardous gamble of fate from ancient times. It evoked premordial fears of capsizing of the craft, and incited the traveller to deeds of piety for atonement of sins before venturing on the ferry, and of gratitude to the presiding deities of good luck after crossing the currents safely. In preliterate society, such occasions often led to raising cairns or crude memorials to placate the evil spirits. In people touched with more advanced culture or organised religion, however, a show of piety or gratitude in the desolate wilderness could take so better form other than an exercise in graphic assertion, of faith in one's religious beliefs by drawing the pictures of its most celebrated or legendary figures of exalted animals, or sacred symbols of cult objects or personalities.

Most of the dreaded ferrying points from prehistoric days were converted into rope bridges over the rivers in medieval ages. Hieun Tsang mentions the passage of hanging ropes in his itenerary through these parts of Pakistan in about 629 A.D. These rope bridges were subsequently made more secure as hanging bridges of steel cables in the modern age, and provided with floors of strong wooden planks, upon which four-wheel drive jeeps, tractors or Suzuki pick-ups scurry about unconcerned for safety. Modern technology has definitely robbed this realm of the primitive mystic beliefs of most of its occultism.

Ferrying is still done at some places in the Northern Areas on the primitive gondola crafty which, according to my young colleague archaeologist, Mr. Arif of Khaplu village of Baltistan, is called a *zakh.* These are outsized baskets made of wooden ribs, covered with bull or yak hides. The craft is rowed with a long barge pole, and is often, guided from both banks by men holding long relays of yak hair ropes belayed to the gunnel of the craft. A modern improvement in the ferry craft has been the replacement of the bull hides by strong tarpaulin/sheets of the army trucks.

With opening of the Northern Areas to Western tourists, there has been an increasing interest in the water-sports of rough riding in inflated dinghies of rubber or other durable material with modern gadgets for safety. Hence, the awesomeness of ferrying across the swollen mountain streams of the past ages looks rather obsolete today. The factor of the morbid fear of the powers of evil spirits, which motivated the creation of petroglyphs in the dark ages, has vanished from the scene. It leaves us amazed at the vagaries of the rock art without any obvious purpose today.

Vestiges of the Past in Living Traditions:

In our whirlwind journey to Northern Areas in November 1979, we had noted with some interest the small clumps of a particular shrub growth on the way side, when we resumed our journey in the morning after the night's halt at Besham. The little plants with beautiful small oval leaves exuded a pungent sweetish smell. My companion, Dr. Mughal, suggested that it could be the famed herb *ephedra,* from which the ancient Aryans used to extract their sacred *Soma* juice, literally meaning

the Moon drink. In ancient Vedic texts, the plant is mentioned to have grown in the cold region of the sub-Himalayan hills. The bundles of these plants were transported by the hardy Gujjar folks on mule backs to market town situated in the plains, and were bought by the distilleries of the *Soma* drink.

Probably, the remains of distillation apparatuses in the forms of spouted terracotta pots, as recovered in the archaeological excavations of distant Shaikhan Dheri and other places may represent the ancient links of manufacture and commerce in the sacred *Soma* drink.

The occurrence of the clumps of the fragrant herb increased as we proceeded farther in the wide glen of Chilas town. The name of the town, itself suggests some association with the legends of the Moon in ancient Dardic traditions. Perhaps, in ancient times, Chilas served as the emporium of the bulk supply of the *Soma* plant over Babusar Pass, through Kashmir to the Punjab plains.

We had carried a small bunch of the leaves of the sweetish smelling herb as a specimen to Gilgit. The aim was to discover further the attributes of the herb from the local people, if the plant had any medicinal utility in the indigenous pharmacology. The first problem was to find somebody who was reliably knowledgable in such esoteric matters, and who could communicate with ease on such subjects. Luckily, we found such a person in our hoast, Mr. Karim of Hunza, with whom we stayed in his Tourist Inn at Jutial in Gilgit.

Our hoast critically examined the leaves, smelled them, and threw them out in the courtyard as if they carried some contagious disease. He said in a grim voice that the peculiar smell of the plant induces sleep. If the leaf is kept in large quantity in a closed room and a person falls asleep, he would never again rise. Its toxic smell would send him in coma and final death within a few hours.

I never bad the courage to try such an experiment with the sweet smelling plant of the Northern Areas. Although not a botanist, nevertheless, I had my serious doubts about such fatal attributes of the aromatic, plant, if it really was the valued *Soma* plant of the ancient Aryans of South Asia. Could Mr. Karim's tirade against the herb be a reminiscent of a distant villification campaign against the *Soma* drink, transmitted through hundreds of generations after the Achaemenian period?

It is possible that the popularity and commerce in Soma drink suffered a crushing setback with the advent of the Achaemenian supremacy, when this part of Pakistan became a *satrapy* of the Iranian empire. As votaries of the Avestan philosophy, which is an antithesis of Vedic religion and rituals, the Iranians hated everything which the Brahmins held in esteem. After establishing their rule over these parts of high Asia, the Achaemenians probably launched a programme campaign of various social reforms, among which an *anti Soma drink campaign* appears to have met a total success.

The disappearance of the *Soma* herb as commercial commodity from the Chilas emporium must have been an economic disaster for the Northern Areas. The vacuum must have been filled up soon, however, by another medicinal commodity exalted in Ayurovedic pharmacopia. This was the notorius *salajeet,* consumed for sexual potency. Its trade still thrives today at Chilas as the main

centre, with its subsidiary market at Gunar Farm some distance in the west. Our inquiry showed that *salajeet* had different grades, from the raw hard pitch mixed with stone fragments and dried Lichens of the exposed mountain slopes, to the refined varieties called *aatshee* (firy), *shamsi* (solar), and *qamree* (lunar). The names indicate the mode of obtaining the concentrates by evaporating the excess water after a solution is made of the raw *salajeet.*

More than in its chemistry, we showed our keen interest in how the substance was formed on the rocky slopes. A local enthusiast who was hearing our conversation in the *salajeet* shop at Gunar Farm, volunteered to give us the information on the subject all that he knew about. He was a resident of the village Gor, and a policeman by occupation, posted in District Diamar, now proceeding home on leave for a month.

The man spoke fluent Urdu, and asked us first to take him to Thalpan, a few kilometres back on the road from Gunar Farm, and across the Indus over the suspension bridge. We had already been there spending a couple of hours in photography of the profusion of petroglyphs, spread wide over the high terraced banks of dark, basaltic rocks, and massive boulders, half submerged in overwhelming mass of clean brown sand furrowed with beautiful wind-ripples.

After some search, the man excitedly to one of the pictures pecked on the boulder surface, looking like a flying horse in a coltish prankfulness. 'This is the animal'; he said, 'which can go up even vertical slopes of high mountains. Where ever it urinates, hard crust of salajeet is formed in the winter season. Only on rocks exposed to the sun, it becomes soft enough to be detached by the gatherers. The men climb up the high rocky faces of the mountain with the help of ropes and iron hooks. I have forgotten the name of the animal, but its urine in Shina language is known as *badan re.'*

The information sounded naive in the extreme, but it established at least the nexus of the petroglyph with the existing reality of the material world in the memory or imagination of the local people. There was room to doubt the innocense of the informer as a shrewed policeman, but I dismissed the idea as I had made no show as a generous man to reward him for his garbage talks. He had voluntarily joined our team to show with pride what his native land possessed.

As we headed back towards Gunar Farm from where the man had joined us, he made a plea to give him a lift upto a point on the Highway opposite his village Gor from where he could walk his way home. I readily conceded to his request and we drove on beyond Gunar Farm, with the magnificent view of the Nanga Parbat towering over the landscape on our right. The road was leading us to a tract of thick silt formations, badly gullied by a profusion of seasonal streams, and negotiating over many culverts and small bridges. On the opposite side across the deeply entrenched course of the Indus, the thick silt stratigraphy on mountain sides was quite absorbing to me, as I tried to analyse the tangled skein of the geological deposits in the sequence of tectonic movements of the Himalayan orogeny.

Particularly notable on the opposite side of the valley on the mouatain side, high above the valley floor, were two large caves with flat roofs and concave floors. It must have been a miniature geosynclinorium formed by the bucking of the lower strata. The caves must have been enormously

large, and I wondered if I would ever have a chance to examine them for traces of any Palaeolithic remains.

All the while, our informer looked absorbed in the scene on the right side of the Highway. After turning a bend he pointed to a conical mountain peak looking pygmy compared with the towering white hulk of the Nanga Parbat at long distance from it. Anticipating that he would say something important about the conical peak, I gestured him to wait a while till I had located the mountain on the Pakistan Survey map sheet. It was there indeed, with its name given as Jabardar, showing altitude above 14,000 feet from sea level. For a while I mused over the tact that Mt. Blanc of the European Alps was just that high, but famous in the world for distinction of being the highest mountain of Europe. And here we had its peer existing in oblivion under the shadow of the Nanga Parbat.

Seeing me through with the map business, the man pointed towards the peak of Jabardar, which wore a fresh white apparel of the first snowfall in November. Its sides had a good cover of pine trees in lower portion, which thinned upwards with clumps of rhododendron and other vegetations. The man insisted to look a little below the peak at a pair of closely set black dots. I could discern the dots, but in order to be more clear about their nature, I trained my binocular over them. They looked like two elongated but enormous boulders perched vertically on the steep slope like artichokes, or menhir stones. 'These are the bodies of Saiful Muluk and Badar Munir, brother and sister whom Providence had turned to stones to spare them the ignominy of a grave sin.' Said the man. 'Oh! How it happened and when?' Said I.

'Sir, in your tone of sarcasm, I perceive a disbelief. For your assurance I must mention that still in the Spring season a country fair is held at the spot high up the mountain, where people go by the mule track situated on the backside of the peak.' I felt sorry for hurting him, and pleaded him to tell us the whole story. In brief, the story or the folk-lore is as follows:

During the good old days of king Kaikaus, there lived a poor shephered in this valley where we are travelling. He had a young son and a daughter, who helped him in tending the flock of sheep the whole day. One day, the old shephered fell sick and sent his son and daughter together to tend the sheep. It was spring time, and the Nature showed the signs of rejuvination in the songs of birds that fly, and antics of the beasts that roam over the land.

The brother felt an intense carnal urge for the sister. She refused vehemently to yield to his lust, pleading that the sin of incest would bring doom upon the whole tribe. When the insistence of the brother rose to maddening pitch, she thought of a ruse to escape the disgrace. She asked him to allow her climb up the Jabardar, and there he should bring water to her from the Indus in a sieve.

The young man, blind in the heat of his passion, tried to carry the water from the river in a sieve uphill several times. However fast he would run, the water always leaked out even before he could reach the foot of the mountain.

At that moment, a bad *jin* appeared on the scene, and scolded the young many calling him; a *moorakh* for his foolishness. He advised him to cover the bottom of the sieve from inside with

sticky clay from the river bank. This done, the sieve became impermeable to hold the water longer. The young man rushed up the mountain to where the girl was hiding and trembling with fear in the bush.

Seeing him approach so close, the girl raised a pitious cry to Heaven to save her honour. In an instant, a thunderbolt of lightening from the blue vault of Heaven struck the mountain peak. Both the brother and the sister were turned to stone. The two dark specks aloft the Jabardar Peak were the reminders to the dwellers of the valley below, of the powers of quick retribution of Heaven when the ambition of a mortal for committing a grave sin exceeded all restraints of good reasoning and pity.

By the time the story was finished, we had reached the point opposite the suspension bridge to Gor. Our companion bade us goodbye and departed. The folk-lore had a lucidity like a Greek myth of the foibles of characters of the Olympian deities, much larger than human proportions, yet full of the petty passions for lust, inhibition, stupidity and cunning. The folk-lore was definitely of Sasanian origin, and carried a message of social morality — that of denouncing matrimonial bonds between sibling pairs.

In ancient times, the areas of cultural backwaters, like the mountain valleys of high Asia, had remnant of various primitive institutions like polyandry, and marriage between brothers and sisters. Even today, polyandry and incestuous custom survives in some of the communities living in the secluded valleys of the Himalayas. It is possible that till expansion of the Sasanian rule to this part of Pakistan (Ghafur 1966), such execrable social traits of the primitive days lingered in some parts of the Northern Areas, against which a campaign had to be launched by the sagacious rulers of the more cultured people of the west. The folk-lore offers at least a glimpse of some features of the social anthropology in the area.

By the way, the romantic characters of Saiful Muluk and Badar Munir also figure large in the myths haunting the archaeological site of Gondrani Caves beside the River Kud or Ornach in the hilly borderland in the west of Las Bela District in Baluchistan. This time they appear in the folk-lore as the Egyptian prince in exile, and a virtuous daughter of the ruler of Shahr Roghan — the classical name of the Gondrani Caves in Sasanian time. They fall in love and finally get married after a great deal of opposition and persecution by the evil spirits. The Lake Saiful Muluk in Kaghan probably also has some such lingering folk-lore around it.

Hence, we gather from this long digression from the account of petroglyphs that both Achaemenian and Sasanian eras used the device of some sacred scriptural ordains, and of romantic folk-lores as tools of campaigns in stamping out the custom of drinking the Soma juice, and of the matrimony between human sibling pairs.

Petroglyphs in the Historic perspective

A chronological classification of the variety of petroglyphs made in my preliminary report submitted to the Ministry of Culture in 1979 was of necessity, an untidy mess made out of the plethora of visual impressions. It was like defining the outer form of the dome of coloured glasses when actually one bad just seen it only from the inside. As a perspective of the panoramic view in graphic art

requires some interval of space between the eye and the relative layout of objects, so does the perspective of historical sequence demand a lapse of time between the initial observation and the final docketing of the pictures in time brackets on the basis of cultural or stylistic peculiarities.

My vision of the historic perspective of the diversity of themes improved considerably during my subsequent three visits to the area. In one of these in June 1980, I travelled to Gupis and Yasin via the Punyal track from Gilgit. But the greatest clarification of the chronological relativity of the motifs and some deviant elements, I must acknowledge, has resulted from the perusal of the excellent publications of the German research scolars (Jettmar 1979; 1982; 1986; Jettmar et al. 1987).

The petroglyphic display along the Karakoram Highway has been called an enormous open-air gallery of art (Jettmar 1993). The petroglyphs offer a kleidoscopic change in the prime mental concern of the authors in context with the then prevailing trends of thought in their respective heartland of culture. But the changes seem to follow the law of the inverse square in diminishing the intensity of empathy with increasing distance, which Jettmar calls the reducing relevance of the source (Ibid.).

The diversity of pictorial illustrations of the real or imaginary beings, shows the progress of intellectual evolution from a stage of nascent chaos of thought to more organized and rational perception of realities. ln the earliest substratum of the prehistoric age, the animistic cult of the good and evil forces of nature seems to dominate the scene in all directions and over the longest range of time.

Both time range and the spatail distribution, patterns contract considerably in the subsequent phases of the historic vistas. The main petroglyphic theatres occupy the east-west stretch of the course of the Indus between the great bends at points where the River Astor in the west and the River Kandia in the east debouch on the Indus. This part of the upper reaches of the Indus presents the aspect of heavily glaciated trough of the subsequent drainage artery resulting from the Himalayan orogeny during the widely fluctuating phases of the climatic conditions of the Pleistocene.

This usually a wide glen of U-shaped profile at the bottom, narrows occasionally where the resistent outcrops of hard lithic units were too strong for the glacial aggradation. The whole aretch is covered by a mantle of glacial sand from which protrude the hard country rocks at intervals. The major petroglyphic sites are at Shatial, Thor, Oshibat, and Chilas on the left bank of the Indus on the side of the Karakoram Highway. Others like Hodar, Thalpan, Minargah are located on the right bank, and are accessible by the suspension bridges. In detailed studies made by the Pak-German Group, most of these sites bear subdivisions like Chilas I, II, III, Hodar I, Thalpan; I (Altar Rock), Thalpan II and III, etc.

Other concentrations of petroglyphs and inscriptions are at the junctions of the Indus and River Gilgit at Alam Pul, at southern side of the junction of rivers Gilgit and Hunza, and on the left rocky banks of the River

Hunza opposite the Baltit Fort, where the stream from Nager joins the Hunza. Except for the prehistoric cult figures of Ibex which may occur anywhere, some rock art exists near Yasin. The western reaches of the River Gilgit have many spots of historic inscriptions in Kharoshthi and Brahmi, like the ones at Dainyor, and Hatun. Early in 1980, a granitic block in obelisk shape, sculpture on three sides with standing Buddha in relief was dug out from a corn field at Shergarh. It was probably a boundary stone or stella of the time of Kanishka empire.

In total agreement with the German savants, but not necessarily with identical names of the Chronological divisions, I have tried to work out a simplified version of the historic perspective of the different groupings of petroglyphs in a tabulation with semblance of a flow-chart. Before enclosing these into a tangible scheme, it is necessary to define the four significant criteria or particulars of the petroglyphs which justify their place in a designated chronological division. These significant particulars are as follows:

A. Dominant motif / theme with simantic interpretation in (parenthesis).
B. Subsidiary motif / theme with simantics in (parenthesis).
C. Ethnic/Regional/Spiritual/Temporal Context.
D. Place of concentration/Distribution pattern.

The given, four significant criteria may not be sufficient enough to highlight any special features in all cases of the groupings of the petroglyphs. Any special aspect of such abnormal classes of the pictorial representations may be defined with any of the four criteria where the relevance properly belongs. As we are dealing with manifestations of artistic creativity, any approach to lay down hard and inflexible criteria of mathematical parameters would be self-defeating in making the tabulation, very tangible.

As the given four significant criteria have to recur in all chronological divisions of the perspective chart, it would be unnecessary to repeat these every time with full verbal display. It would be sufficient to give only the alphabetic labels A, B, C, and D in each chronological division of the historic perspective tabulation.

Speaking of the nomenclature for Eras and Periods, the most obvious ones in currency of the archaeological literature on the heartland of Asia have been selected. In the five-fold chronological divisions, the first has been called Neolithic – Bronze. The second and third ones carry appellation in pairs of one ethnic and the other dynastic names, while the fourth is a pair of a cultural and racial names. The last is spiritual in essence, announcing demise of the rock-art. The tabulation is as follows:

Tabulation of the Historic Perspective of the Petroglyphs

Era/period Approx. Date	Label	Assemblage of the Petroglyphs
Neolithis - Bronze Age V-II Millennium B.C.	A	Ibex, Markhor, and other capridae (Fertility cult of ancestors carried from Mesolithic Age)
	B	Birds, stretched fingers of hand, Faceless humans standing (Souls, personal identity/claim of possession, demons, giants, *jins,* evil spirits)
	C	Local pastorals, possessed of animistic beliefs, superstitions
	D	All over Northern Areas/uneven distribution in all eras. Hands at Oshibat, Demons at Dadam Das/Thalpas III/Chilas VI (spoilt In Buddhist times)
Scytho - Achaemenian First Millennium B.C.	A	Capridae, cervids, canines, felines, snake, birds (The variety of animals indicative of Nature worship. Animals drawn in carricature style of Scythian Art, resembling those on massive gold ring discovered in Kandia Valley. All pictures in lime drawings/ No shadings and filling by dots) Also masks and maskoids of Okunev culture of south Siberia.
	B	Mythical animals of horse family, some horned and winged, capridae, cervids, tamed horse, dog, lion, woolf, fowl, pheasant, Man in Persian military dress slaughtering goat in standing posture, another man perhaps military officer in typical Persian dress of Achaemenlan time in posture of giving instructions (The art may be simple amusement and play of ambitious dreams for speedy transport on winged horses of supernatural breed. Haman figures in stilled kinematic moments bespeak of military detachment scouting the borderland of the empire). Pictures distinct from the Scythian art in following more naturally the curves of the animal shapes, and in shading for chiaroscuro effect or filling up area of outlines with dense dotting.
	C	Menagerie of animals against A relates to the nomadic art of the Scythians from Russian steps of south Siberia, as also confirmed by the masks and maskoids of Okunev culture of cattle herders of the region at Chilas IV and Thalpan III. The animals mentioned against B are distinctly of a different ethnic tradition of art. The human figures in military dresses, with peculiar tunic and garters worn over legs clearly indicate the Achaemenlan context.
	D	Animals in Scythian art mainly at Thalpan I, II, III, Chilas III, Dadam Das, Minargah, Shatial, Thor I, Hodar. Animals of Achaemenian Art at Thalpan I (Altar Rock), III, Chilas I, II, Gich, Hodar, Minargah, Shatial, Oshibat.

(Continued)

Era/period Approx. Date	Label	Assemblage of the Petroglyphs
Bactro - Kushan Period 1st-2nd Century A.D	A	Facial profile of a Hun and a Sogdian/a kneeling Sogdian Baking offering at fire altar/ Tamghas or signs of relationship of Sogdians and Huns/symbol of Samarkand/ animal figures of an elephant, a goose, and a horse/a number of Sogdian inscriptions around facial profiles and animal drawings (Petroglyphs suggest idel aesthetic amusement of sensuous merchants of the Oxus Valley, who seem to have established trading outposts with the Silk Road through shortcuts of the Indus route. Sogdians formed a racial mixture of the Hellenistic-Persian components of Bactria and the Huns of Mongolian origin, with their language and script. The Sign of Samarkand at Thor).
	B	Contemporary with prosperous trading Sogdians in the upper Indus Valley are a few rudimentary Stupa figures with Kharoshti inscriptions. One of these at Chilas II reads 'Simhaba and Dekavatraida have come to the Stupa' (Propagation of Buddhism from Gandhara under patronage of the Kushans, and successive Indo-Greek dynasties seems taking off).
	C	Sogdian and Huns of Central Asia show no special predilection for religion/seem content with fireworship/show tolerance and respect for Buddhist stupas. The Gandharan travellers deeply enamoured with Buddhist lores).
	D	Sogdian petroglyphs and inscriptions at Shatial and Thor I, Kushana Buddhist figures at Chilas II.
Bactro - Kushan Period 1st-2nd Century A.D	A	Stupa with prominent domes, through stages of elaborate decoration on multi-level plinth and base, umbrellas tapering upward in symmetrical, shape of cosmic tree, with bells hanging from eaves and streamers fluttering from spire, to simple types of rudimentary shapes. Next in frequency are Buddha figures, sitting in various 'mudra' or postures. Also scenes of Jataka or life story of Buddha. Particularly the Viaghri-Jataka at Chilas I. Figures of Bodhisattavas such as Maitreya and Avaloketisvara. (Petroglyphs reflect height of popularity of the Mahayana Buddhism emanating from Gandhara region of Pakistan).

(Continued)

Era/period Approx. Date	Label	Assemblage of the Petroglyphs
Bactro - Kushan Period 1st-2nd Century A.D	B	Ornamental and floral designs, Trident, Swastika. Fire Altars, magical loops. Labyrinth, Kharashthi and Brahmi inscriptions.
	C	Predominantly the Buddhist monks of Gandhara travelling through the upper Indus Valley. Also presence of Sasaians indicated by figural art in Iranian style, and the Fireworship altar of the Zoroastrian religion.
	D	Shatial, Thor I, Thalpan, Chilas I & III. Non-Buddhist figures at Oshibat, Hodar, Chilas I, II, III, Dadam Das, and Thalpan.
Decline and Super Session of Buddhism. End of Rock-Art 9th - 10th Century A.D.	A	Buddhist stupa architecture transformed into Shiva temples, with panelled facade. Essential canonic features of stupa, the solid drum and dome *(anda),* meant to represent Cosmic Mountain disappear. Further degeneration in architecture shows stupa as chequered baloon, or as an axe blade, in which fluttering long streamer assumes the form of solid cudgel as a handle hafted to the axe blade.
	B	Ceremonial axe, sun discs.
	C	Degenerate stage of Buddhism in Tantric movement, in which Brahmanic rituals gradually permeated the concepts and religious liturgy of orthodox Buddhism. Could also be the result of the new religion of *Bonism* gaining popularity in the fringe valleys of Pamir in Central Asia.
	D	Chilas VII, Thalpas II, Chilas III, Thalpan Bridge.

Besides the assemblage of Petroglyphs tabulated from published records of the Pakistan-German Archaeological Research (Konig et al. 1997), there are more than 5000 inscriptions recalled by the German scholars. The languages are Sanskrit, Gandhari, Sogdian, and various Persian dialects, besides Tibetan and Chinese. To quote the report, 'Over 80% of the inscriptions are written in Brahmi. Approximately 600 examples are in so-called Sogdian, while 300 inscriptions are in Kharoshthi. Other inscriptions such as those in Chinese, Bactrian or Hebrew play a minor role and are at most fifty in number.' (Ibid, p. 66).

In the babel of Asian languages, Arabic and Turkish are conspicuous by their absence (Jettmar, 1993). Most of the significant and legible inscriptions in various languages have been studied (Bemman, et al. 1993; Dani, 1987; Fussman, 1994; Hinuber, 1989; Sims-William. 1986).

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