

Vāsutāra and His Family in the Epigraphic Records of the Upper Indus Valley

MUHAMMAD NASIM KHAN

The expeditions of Pakistani, German and French scholars have brought to light valuable information and data regarding the archaeology of the Northern Areas of Pakistan. Among these discoveries, the most important are the rock-carvings where enough data have, so far, been collected. It is because of this that today we are in position to utilise this documentation as a data bank for studying multiple aspects of the history of that particular area of Pakistan.

More than 30 rock-carving sites have already been discovered only in the region of Chilas, where more than 50,000 figural drawings and about 6000 inscriptions have so far been recorded from a number of sites. The epigraphical records written in different scripts reveal mostly proper names, sometimes patronymic. The majority of these inscriptions often contain names of persons generally belonging to different origins except those from the Babe Diamar locality, where Vāsutārā is repeated frequently along with other names of the same family. Also found at other sites, Vāsutārā shows a strong contact between the occupants of the region.

The Babe Diamar site is located under the shadow of the recently constructed gate, Babe Diamar, situated within the angle formed by the bifurcation of the Karakorum Highway to the Chilas town. Between Babe Diamar and the cultivated fields, more than a hundred engraved boulders are discovered in this triangular area. The engravings consist of stupas, human and animal figures, geometrical designs, etc. Most of the inscriptions written on boulders here are in Brāhmī characters mentioning the name Vāsutārā.

Vāsutārā related inscriptions from Babe Diamar

No. 1: (Pl. 1)

On the right side of the boulder are shown carvings of three stupas while on its lower left is a human figure running towards the left. Between them a four-line inscription indicate Vāsutārā as the author of all these carvings. The inscription is transliterated and read as follows:

Devadhamo

yaṃ

oṃ devadharmoyam

Vāsutārāsyā

"Hail! This is a religious gift; Hail! This is a religious gift of Vāsutārā"

No. 2: (Pl. 2)

A small boulder engraved with seven lines in Brāhmī.

oṃ namo kṛtaṃ māya

vasudatasyaḥ

Vāsutārāputenasya

++guta++++

oṃ devadharmoyam manasyaḥ

oṃ vaputrenasya

++++

"Hail! Salutation, did by me Vāsudata, the son of Vāsutārā, ++guta, Hail! This is a religious gift of Mana+, Hail! Son of Vā<sutārā>."

The genitive in *-syaḥ* is very common in the upper Indus epigraphy (Nasim Khan 1995: 83, 27).¹

No. 3: (Pl. 3)

An inscription on a huge boulder engraved with several carvings reads:

Śrī Vāsutodasya

"Of Śrī Vāsutoda"

No. 4: (Pl. 4)

A huge boulder, engraved with multiple drawings and inscriptions, has in its centre an elaborate stupa. There is a seated human figure and inscription at the right and a Brāhmī inscription at the top of the stupa.

a) Inscription at the top of the stupa reads:

oṃ vāsutā

rāsyā

"Hail! Of Vāsutārā"

b) The two-line inscription to the right of the human figure reads:

oṃ namo bhagava

to Vāsutārāḥ

"Hail! Salutation to the Bhagavant Vāsutārā"

No. 5: (Pl. 5)

A huge boulder bearing multiple carvings has two stupas at its upper end, while at the centre there is another stupa having a seated human figure on its left side.

a) An inscription to the left side of the stupa at the centre reads:

nasutārāsyā

"Of Nasutārā"

b) Below the stupa a three-line inscription is read and translated as:

oṃ ...

Vāsutārāsyā

oṃ nasutārāsyā

"Hail! ... of Vāsutārā, Hail Nasutārā"

c) Above the head of the seated figure the inscription reads:

oṃ sa[r]vadata

"Hail! Sarvadata"

No. 6: (Pl. 6)

a) On the upper left of the rock a Brāhmī inscription reads:

oṃ Vāsutārāsyā

"Hail! of Vāsutārā"

b) On the right side and below the previous one another inscription reads:

oṃ bhagavato Vāsutārāsyā

"Hail! Bhagavant, of Vāsutārā"

No. 7 (Pl. 7):

a) On the upper end of the stone:

oṃ vāsu[tārā]sya

"Hail Vāsutārā"

b) Below a two line-inscription overlapping a stupa reads:

oṃ mahātrapasaka vasuta

rasya

"Hail! Of Mahātapasaka Vāsutārā"

Mahātapasaka might stand for Mahā-kṣatrapa.

No. 8: (Pl. 8)

A huge boulder, broken into four pieces, contains several carvings. The second portion has two seated figures with a Brāhmī inscription below them.

The third detached part of the same boulder is carved with a standing figure and three-line inscription above his head.

devadharmo

yaṃ

sarvadatena

"This is a religious gift, by Sarvadatta"

On the extreme right another detached part has three inscriptions, probably engraved by two different persons, read:

i) *sarvadatasya* "of Sarvadatta"

ii) *vasujīdena* "by Vasujīda"

iii) *sarvadatena* "by sarvadatta"

I do not know what is the relation between Sarvadatta and Vasujīda; Vasujīda might be the son of Sarvadatta.

No. 9: (Pl. 9)

A very defaced inscription, which is overlapped by a modern Urdu one, reads:

oṃ sarvadatasya

"Hail! of Sarvadatta"

No. 10: (Pl. 10)

The technique and patina of the stupa, the standing human figure on its extreme left and the inscription engraved on its right show that all of them were carved at the same time and by the same hand. The inscription reads:

Sarvadatta

No. 11 (Pl. 11):

A single line inscription the reading of which is not totally certain.

Svasti jayatu + ramakade raja ḍovadatena

"Success, victory by Raja Ḍovadata in Ramakada"

Ḍovadata is also occurred in No. 13.

No 12: (Pl. 12):

The inscription is engraved on both sides of the stupa, which is incorporated in the middle. It seems that the same hand engraves both.

nama bhalaloṭasya

"salutation, of Bhalaloṭa"

No. 13: (Pl. 13):

A huge boulder bearing a five line inscription. The reading and translation are not certain.

oṃ namo budhāyaṃ śrīsarva

virasva+++°ya ya+++kulijiva+///

mātāra+tena devakara

oṃ + pra+matu++

ḍovadatasya

"Hail! Salutation to Buddha, to all Śrī virasva...Kulijiva, the son of Mātāra, devakaraa; Hail..., of Ḍovadata"

No. 14 (Pl. 14):

The boulder is covered with many inscriptions, stupa, Chinese pagoda, axe and animals carvings.

a) The first inscription is engraved below the stupa. It reads:

śrī vasudatena

"by Śrī Vasudata"

Below another inscription:

śrī sarvadatasya

"of Śrī Sarvadata"

śrī vasuto (or no) dasya

"of Śrī Vasutoda"

No. 15 (Pl. 15):

On the upper end of the boulder:

kṛtaṃ māya aśvanena

"done by me, Aśvana"

No. 16 (Pl. 16):

The rock bears three inscriptions.

śrī vadattena

"Śrī Vadatta"

Va might be an abbreviation for Vasu-.

śrī bhalaloṭasya

"Of Śrī Bhalaloṭa"

śrī sarvadatasya

"of Śrī Sarvadata"

No. 17:

The boulder contains about four inscriptions.

It is a two-line inscription situated on the upper part of the boulder.

śrī Vāsutārā varata

ra nasutarasya

"Śrī Vāsutārā, Varatara, of Nasutara"

The inscription mentions three names. These persons seem to be brothers or most probably Vāsutārā is the son of Varatara and the grandson of Nasutara or it may be the case vice-versa.

In inscription no. 2 Vāsutārā is mentioned as father of Vasudata.

At the end of the first line of the previous inscription, a single line inscription:

dekhaśvariṭasya

"Dekhaśvariṭa"

Below, on the left lower part of the rock:

śrī dhara

The previous inscription is followed by:

sarvadatasya

"of Sarvadata"

e) At the extreme right side above the stupa, the inscription reads:

sarvadatasya nasutara

sya

"of Sarvadatta, of Nasutara"

Nasutara might be the father of Sarvadatta or they might be brothers.

No.18:

A single line inscription. Below two human figures.

oṃ Vāsutārāsya

"Hail 1 Vāsutārā"

No. 19:

A small boulder with four lines:

devadharmoyam vasudatasya

devadharmyam budha++

oṃ namo sa budha bodhisatvebhya

vasudatena

"This is a religious gift of Vasudata, this is a religious gift to Buddha, Hail! Salutation to all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, (this is done) by Vasudata"

Vasutara related inscriptions from other sites

No. 20 (Pl.17): Several examples of the name Vāsutārā can be seen at the Site of Chilas IV and VI.

No. 21 (Pl. 18):

Quite a large number of Brāhmī inscriptions are situated in the site locally called Camp site, on both the sides of the main Karakorum Highway, below Gichi Gah. One of the inscriptions engraved on the smooth surface of the cliff situated on the right side of the Highway mentioning the name *sarvadatta*.

1. om̐ siddham̐ sarvadatasya
 om̐ kṛitam̐ mayā pravase
 putra valavirena
 om̐ siddham̐ valacandrena
 om̐ raddham̐ samataṇena++

"Hail, success of Sarvadatas; Hail, done by me Valavira, the son of Pravasa; Hail, success, by Valacandra; Hail, (Success), by Samatana"

Above and below there are other Brāhmī inscriptions. The one engraved just above the previous inscription can be read as *kulajaya* equally a common name in the rock carvings of the Upper Indus Valley.

No. 22 (Pl. 9):

Similar names can be observed at the site of Thak, near Chilas.

Om̐ Vasunatyā

No. 23:

Just on the other side of Karakorum Highway, opposite Babe Diamar site, in the terrace lying between Indus and Karakorum Highway, the name *śrī sarvadatas* is mentioned.

No. 24:

In the same plain, the name *sarvadatas* is mentioned. In both these cases the style of writing and the patina are the same.

No. 25:

At the site called Akre Kai, the name Sarvadatas is incorporated in between the Kharoshthi Inscriptions.

No. 26:

Only one inscription *śrī vasudatas* in the same style of writing as of Babe Diamar occurs at Shatial site².

No. 27:

śrī varāhaputra vasudatta is occurred at Hodar site³.

No. 28:

The name Vasutara is also found at Oshibat⁴.

No. 29:

om̐ vasutara can also be found at Oshibat⁵.

No. 30:

The name Vasudatta also occurs at Manro Das⁶.

No. 31: The name Vasudatas can also be observed at the rock carving site of Ba Das.

The above names can be classified into three different broad groups: a) those the second component is --tara, b) those with the second component is -datta and c) those having toda, loṭa, etc for the second element. Under the --tara category of names come Vasu-tara, Nasu-tara and Vara-tara. The --datta category of names includes: Vasudatta, Sarvadatta, D̐ovadatta. In the third category comes Vasutoda, Vasunatyā, Mana, Bhalaloṭa, Aśvana, Pravasa, Samatana, Valacandra, Valavira, Kulajaya, Varaha, Radha, etc.

Although, these names are occurring generally without any context and seems difficult to know their relationship with each other, still there are few inscriptions that can help us imagine what relation these personalities might have had.

From inscription No. 2, it is clear that Vāsudata was the son of Vāsutārā. From the same inscription it can also be concluded that Mana was either the son of Vāsutārā or Vāsudata. Inscription No. 2 mentions the name Vāsudata along with its patronymic Vāsutārā (Va might be an abbreviation of Vāsutārā or most probably Vasudatta). In the latter case, Mana should be considered as the grandson of Vāsutārā. The inscription from Hodar (No. 27) mentioning Vāsudata as the son of Varāha might be Vāsudata II, probably the grandson of Vāsudata I.

Inscription No. 17 mentions three different names: Vāsutārā, Varatārā and Nasutārā most probably they were either brothers or Nasutārā was the father of Varatārā and grandfather of Vasutara. The last two terms might also qualify the name Vāsutārā. But inscription No. 5b can help us to suppose that Vāsutārā and Nasutārā were two different persons. While the title for Vāsutārā can be found in the inscriptions Nos. 6b and 7b where he is considered as Bhagavant and Mahātrapasaka perhaps a mistake for Mahakṣatrapa.

The next name most commonly occurring in the inscriptions is Sarvadata while sometime occurs together with Vasudata (No. 14). Sarvadata might also have been in relation with Valavira, the son of Pravasa. Valavira might be the brother of Valacandra and Samatana.

Of course, there is no genealogical table or description in all these inscriptions except for few where patronymic is mentioned. But it seems that all these persons were of the same family who occupied the area for some time. This also shows that while this area remained a free zone at that time, the land around Chilas was certainly distributed and the bulk of traffic was through this region.

Who was Vāsutārā? Nothing can be said with authority about his personality and position. But at least it is clear that he was not an ordinary man and belonged to a high class of the society at that time as shown by the inscription Nos. 4b and 6b where he is mentioned as Bhagavant or Mahātrapasaka or Mahakṣatrapa. As far as his origin and religion are concerned, the name is Indian and the many inscriptions show that he was probably a Buddhist. Regarding the date, the palaeography confirms 4th/5th century A.D.

Notes

¹ The linguistic problems and the orthographic mistakes will be discussed somewhere else.

² Fussman 1997: 121:1

³ Bandini-König 1999: 69:10

⁴ Bemann 1994: 1:4

⁵ *ibid*: 29:1

⁶ Report on Manro Das site is in the press.

Bibliographic References

- Bindini-König, Ditte, Bemann, M. and Hauptmann, H. 1997, Rock Art in the Upper Indus Valley, *The Indus, Cradle and Crossroads of Civilizations*, Pakistan-German Archaeological Research (ed. Harald Hauptmann), Islamabad, 29-70.
- Dani, A.H. 1983, *Chilas - The City of Nanga Parvat (Dyamar)*, Islamabad.
- Nasim Khan, M. 1994, Rock-Carvings and Inscriptions at Helor Das, In G. Fussman und K. Jettmar (ed.), *Antiquities of Northern Pakistan* 3, Mainz, 201-212.
- Nasim Khan, M. 1995. Thor Nord, Helor Das Ouest, Helor Das Est: Publication des Trois Sites Archéologique de la Haute Vallée de l'Indus. unpublished Ph.D. Thesis submitted to the Sorbonne University Paris III.
- Nasim Khan, M. 1997. Iranian Symbols in the Rock-Carvings of the Upper Indus Valley. *Athariyat (Archaeology)* 1. Peshawar, 97-107.
- Nasim Khan, M. 1998. Stupa or Temple ? Some Notes on the Stupa-Like Structure in the Petroglyphs of the Upper Indus Valley. *Ancient Pakistan*, Vol. XII, Peshawar.
- Nasim Khan, M. 1998a. Fauna in the Rock-Carving site Thor North (Northern Area of Pakistan). *Ancient Pakistan*, Vol. XII, Peshawar.
- Nasim Khan, M. 1998b. Rock Art in Pakistan. *The Glory that was Pakistan. 50 Years of Archaeological Research in Pakistan. A Photographic Exhibition*, February-March 1998, Peshawar, 45-48.



Pl. 1: Boulder engraved with Brahmi inscriptions, stupas and a human figure.



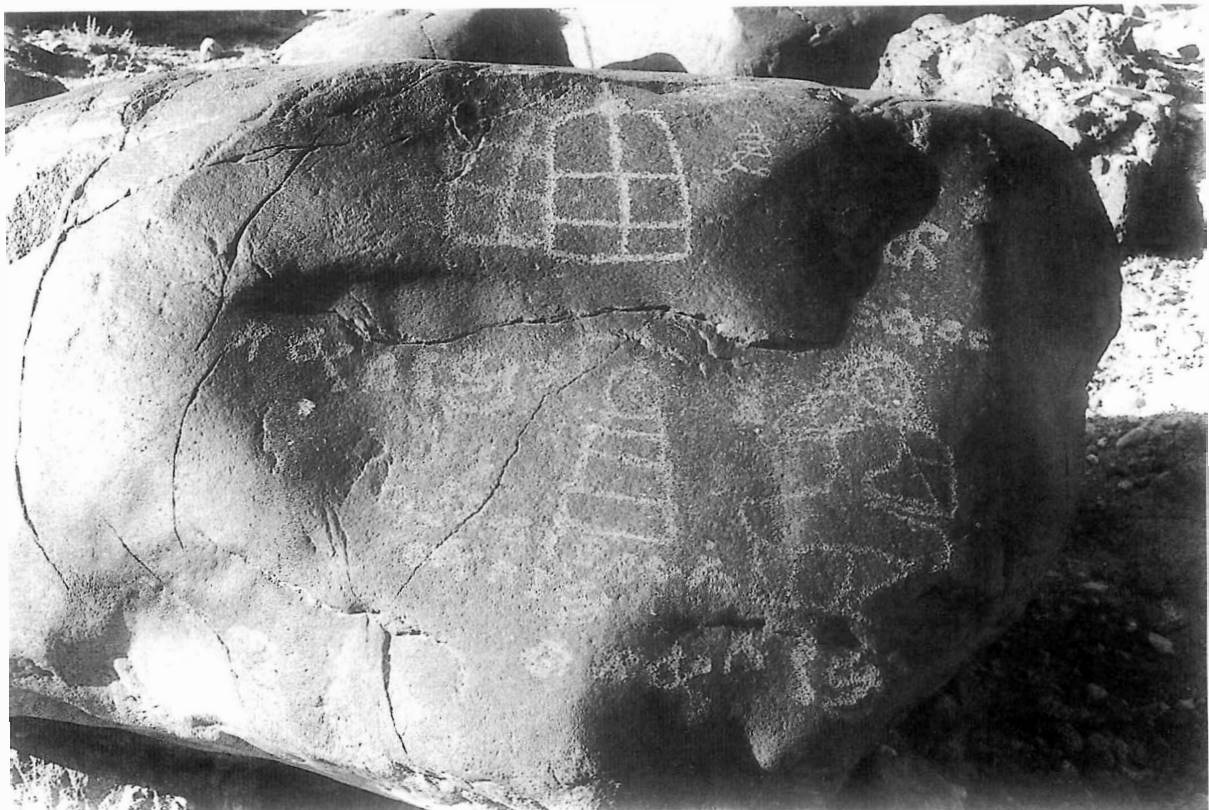
Pl. 2: Seven lines Brahmi inscription (4th/5th century A.D.)



Pl. 3: Rock with several carvings.



Pl. 4: Rock bearing stupa, human figure and two inscriptions.



Pl. 5: Rock engraved with stupas, human figure and inscriptions.



Pl. 6: Rock showing two Brahmi inscriptions.



Pl. 7: Boulder with a stupa and two Brahmi inscriptions.



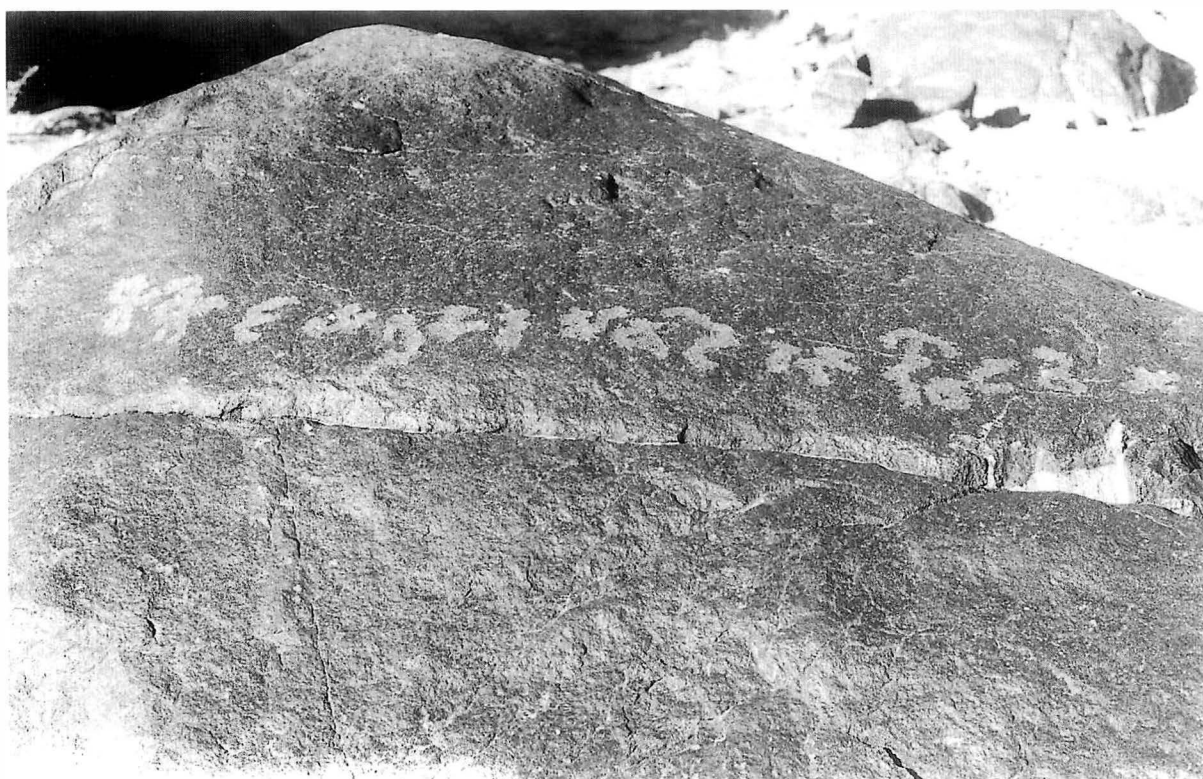
Pl. 8: A huge boulder broken into four pieces.



Pl. 9: Brahmi inscription.



Pl. 10: Stupa carving with a human figure and an inscription.



Pl. 11: A single line Brahmi inscription.



Pl. 12: Stupa carving with a Brahmi inscription.



Pl. 13: A five lines Brahmi inscription.



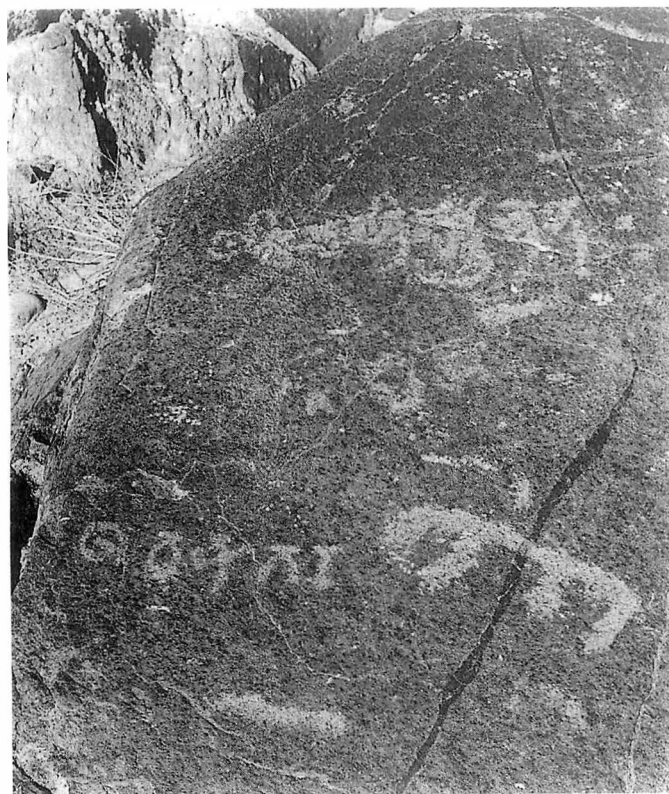
Pl. 14: Boulder showing multiple carvings.



Pl. 15: Brahmi inscription.



Pl. 16: Three Brhami inscriptions.



Pl. 17: Brahmi inscription from Chilas IV.



Pl. 17: Brahmi inscription from Chilas IV.



Pl. 18: Brahmi inscription from Camp site.