

A Short Note on Archaeological Discoveries in Chitral, Pakistan¹

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The Chitral Valley surrounded by the lofty Hindukush Mountains, dominated by the commanding peak of Tirich Mir, has inherited from nature a full range of exquisite charms. Situated in north Pakistan, it is bordered on the west and north by Afghanistan (the Wakhan corridor), China and the Central Asian republics in the north and north-west, Jammu and Kashmir in the east, and the districts of Dir and Swat in the east and south. It is a big territory, hemmed by mountains with an average altitude of 6,000-m (20,000 ft), gifted with fantastic gorges, beautiful side valleys, glaciers, icy-torrents and vast expanse of arid hills. The surrounding mountains are sources of a number of perennial tributaries to the river Kabul.

Travelling by road to Chitral via Lowari Pass is very exhausting, while by air it is uncertain due to rough weather. As soon as one crosses the pass or boards off the plane, he feels awe-struck at the sight of surrounding gigantic mountains, strong winds and alien culture and language. But hospitality and gentleness of the local people let him feel at home and comfortable, more so, especially when he travels about deeper in the Valley.

Explorers and travellers have left few records about Chitral, especially in the field of archaeology. These discoveries include a Brāhmī inscription at Barenis and a rock-carved stūpa with a Brāhmī inscription in Torkoh.² Earlier to this, Stacul of the Italian Archaeological Mission had explored some protohistoric gravesites here.³ The Barenis inscription, dated to c. 9th century AD, is situated about 43 km (27 miles) away from Chitral on the main Chitral-Booni road. While the Torkoh inscription, engraved on a huge boulder locally known as Kalandar-i-Bohtni, is about 1 km away from Raein.⁴ No more than this about the archaeology of Chitral is known.

The University of Peshawar in collaboration with the University of Glasgow, UK, jointly organised a pre-expedition visit to Chitral in 1998 to pave a way for the 1999 international expedition to the Hindukush range. Senior research scholars from both the Universities participated in the project for their mutual academic interests. The objective was to study human impact on the hilly environment of the Chitral Valley and as such to look for future prospects of research in different disciplines. Representing the Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar, the author as a member of the team discovered a good number of archaeological sites in the Valley. A short exploration of one week turned out fruitful in discovering rock-carvings, grave and settlement sites. Their brief description would give, at least, an idea of rich prospects and the need for further research in the area.

Rock-carvings

One of the most important rock-carving sites recently discovered is Jondhak, situated near the Parsan village in the shadow of the Occhur Mountain. To reach the site from the Chitral town one has to head towards Garam Chashma and arrive after 30 minutes jeep-drive at Bukhtool Gul, and crossing the river over here turn to the right. After an hour's jeep-drive from here on a shingled road, one reaches the Parsan Village, from where a climb of about two hours up the Occhur Mountain leads to the Jondhak site.

The site is located on the slope of the Occhur Mountain on the west of the ferry land.⁵ About half a kilometre further up, mining of antimony there causes continuous damage to the carvings. Being an active zone of land sliding, this region has brought catastrophe on the remains and most of the engraved boulders, crushed into pieces. One can still see traces of walled structures about the site.

The majority of the carvings represent animal and human figures. The animal group includes ibex, *markhor* (wild sheep), horses, dogs, etc. (Fig. 1). The human figures, mostly male, are in

standing position with extended or raised arms, while female figures are rarely represented and show different postures (Figs. 2, 4). The depiction of hunting and horse riding scenes seem to have been popular subjects for carving (Figs. 1, 3). The engraving is either simple scratching or deep chiselling with sharp instruments.

The only way available to us for dating the carvings is to classify them into two main groups on the basis of patination. The first group is highly patinated and, sometime, it is difficult to make clear photographs of some of the carvings or even to study them. One should, therefore, wait for a suitable daylight to get an idea of the carvings; such types of carving, presumably, are prehistoric in date. The second group shows light or medium patina and, probably, belongs to the historic period.

Having the same characteristics as those of Jondhak, two other rock-carving sites Gumast and Shoor Gucch are located nearby. The former lies to the south-east of Jondhak at a distance of about three hours march, while the latter is lying to its north-west beyond the ferry land at a distance of one hour walk. About 6 km past Garam Chashma on the way to Daras Pass, rock-carvings are present on both the sides.

During the pre-expedition exploration, another important discovery of particular interest was that of a huge boulder in the Charan Village. The boulder, almost completely covered in the soil, is carved with a huge stūpa with an inscription on its eastern surface. The architectural part of the stūpa base, drum, dome, *harmika* and a *yaṣṭi* are clearly visible. On the right and left of the dome of the stūpa, there is a Brāhmī inscription. Both the stūpa and the inscription are deeply engraved. The left part of the inscription is damaged but one can, somehow, trace four *akṣāras*. The first and the last ones are readable as *bu+++ka*. The remaining part of the inscription, on the right of the stūpa, can be read as *rājajīvavarmah*. 'Jivavarma, the king'. According to the writing style, the inscription belongs to 4th/5th century AD. The present carving of the stūpa with an inscription is almost similar to that reported from Torkoh valley. The height of the Torkoh stūpa is 16 feet. It consists of nine superimposed bases, a drum, dome, twelve *chatras* and banners attached to the top of the *yaṣṭi*.⁶ The inscription, in two lines, is engraved in the outlines of the 5th and 6th bases of the stūpa. It can be read:

devadharmena+

rājajīvavarmasya

'A pious religious gift of the King Jivavarma'

The style of writing is the same as that of the Charan inscription. The name occurring in both the inscriptions is Rāja Jivavarma. It seems that both the carvings are the work of the same hand. Another important rock-carving site is situated on the junction between Mastuj and Shandur roads near the petrol pump. Most of these carvings are of ibex, *markhor*, and human figures. A few carvings can also be found about two kilometres from the Mastuj village on the main road leading to Baroghal pass. The majority of these prehistoric carvings are foot and hand prints.

A ten lines Śāradā inscription found in the lower Chitral Valley was engraved on the surface of a huge rock on the bank of the River Kunar near Arandu, close to the Pak-Afghan frontier. On the right side of the rock, there is another inscription in the same characters, which, probably, was executed by the same hand who did the former one (Fig. 5). On the basis of palaeographic study, we suggest 8th-10th century AD an approximate date for the inscription.⁷

Grave sites

The second group of archaeological discovery consists of ancient gravesites, mostly belonging to the iron age and located in the lower Chitral Valley. They are unfortunately subjected to illegal diggings by the antique seekers. Chitral was one of the frequently used gateways through which the Aryans and other ancient tribes from Central Asia entered into the present day Pakistan. It is, therefore, inevitable to conduct a thorough archaeological investigation of these graves and find out the chronology and history of the region before they are lost to the illegal diggers.

The most important gravesites found at Ayun in the lower Chitral are of two kinds: a) double chamber graves, and b) simple graves. Some of them, with a very thin deposit, are situated on

the slopes of the mountain, while others with over 3-m (10 feet) deposit are located in the terraces at the beginning of the Ayun village. The grave goods generally consist of large storage jars (Figs. 6, 7), small and medium size jars, beaker and cup-shaped utensils. Copper bowls are also reported from the graves. The most common type jewellery is lapis lazuli and terracotta beads found in these graves, while hairpins and antimony rods are generally made of copper.

Remains of graves similar to those of Ayun are also present in the Chitral town near the Governor's House, actually constructed on an ancient graveyard. Graves can also be found on the west of the Ragh village, on the main Chitral-Mastuj road, below Charan. Both of them seem to be of the same period. Similar type of graves can also be found on the way to Garam Chashma.⁸

Another important gravesite is situated in Booni near the C&W Guesthouse, flanked on either side by two artificial mounds with ancient graves covered by recent ones on the top. The mound on the right is almost destroyed by the natives quarrying stones for construction of houses. It still has more than two metres thick deposit having remains of recent and ancient graves. Fragments of bones scatter all over the mound. On its western side slabs of old graves can be seen. The local people have no idea about these graves. Sometimes, modern graves superimpose the older ones.

Settlement sites

The most important structural remains are found in Gahirat and Kohl. The former site is situated on the main road between Ayun and Drosh on the left side of the river. There are square or box-shaped structures made of dressed stones.

Another group consists of round structures, made of rough irregular stones, is found at Kohl, situated on the other side of the river below the Gahirat site. These structures might have been used for storage because similar cells are still in use in the area, especially Rumbur, where the people normally roof them for storage. Sometimes more than five similar storage chambers can be found inside a room of a house.

This brief discoursé on a short survey of one week has unfolded the archaeological riches of the Chitral Valley, which needs to be extensively and intensively explored and documented before it is too late. Ancient rock art, grave culture, epigraphy and palaeography, as well tracking old routes between Central Asia, China and Pakistan all have good prospects for future research. Here a large number of sites from the pre-historic to the historic period should help in reconstructing a complete archaeological profile of the region and understanding the role of Chitral in the cultural, religious and commercial contacts it had with the neighbouring states.

Notes

¹ The article was first submitted to the *Lahore Museum Bulletin* in 1999 but the issue is still not published. Therefore, I wish to include it in the present issue of *Ancient Pakistan*.

² Afzal Khan, M. 1975: *Chitral and Kafirstan—A Personal Study*, p. 12.

³ Stacul, G. 1969. Discovery of Protohistoric Cemeteries in the Chitral Valley (West Pakistan). *East & West*. Vol. XIV. PP. 92-99

⁴ Mohammad Nawaz Khan, *The Gandhara Times*, Peshawar, issue No. 46, vol. 2, made photographs but he was not able to read the inscription.

⁵ According to the locals, the area is famous for ferries and many different ferry stories are generally associated with that particular area. One amongst these famous tales is the story of two sisters; the one who was living at the mountain of Occhur and the other one at Tirich Mir mountain

⁶ The banners are variously interpreted. M. Afzal Khan found in this carving the figure of a Buddha while M. Nawaz Khan considered the upper part of the stūpa a flying bird or probably a tortoise.

⁷ A detailed study of the inscription is under progress.

⁸ Because of shortage of time, I could not verify whether the graves in Ragh, and those on the way to Garam Chashma, contain goods or not. This needs, of course, a detailed survey and documentation.



Pl. 1: Boulder representing hunting scene (Jondhak, Chitral).



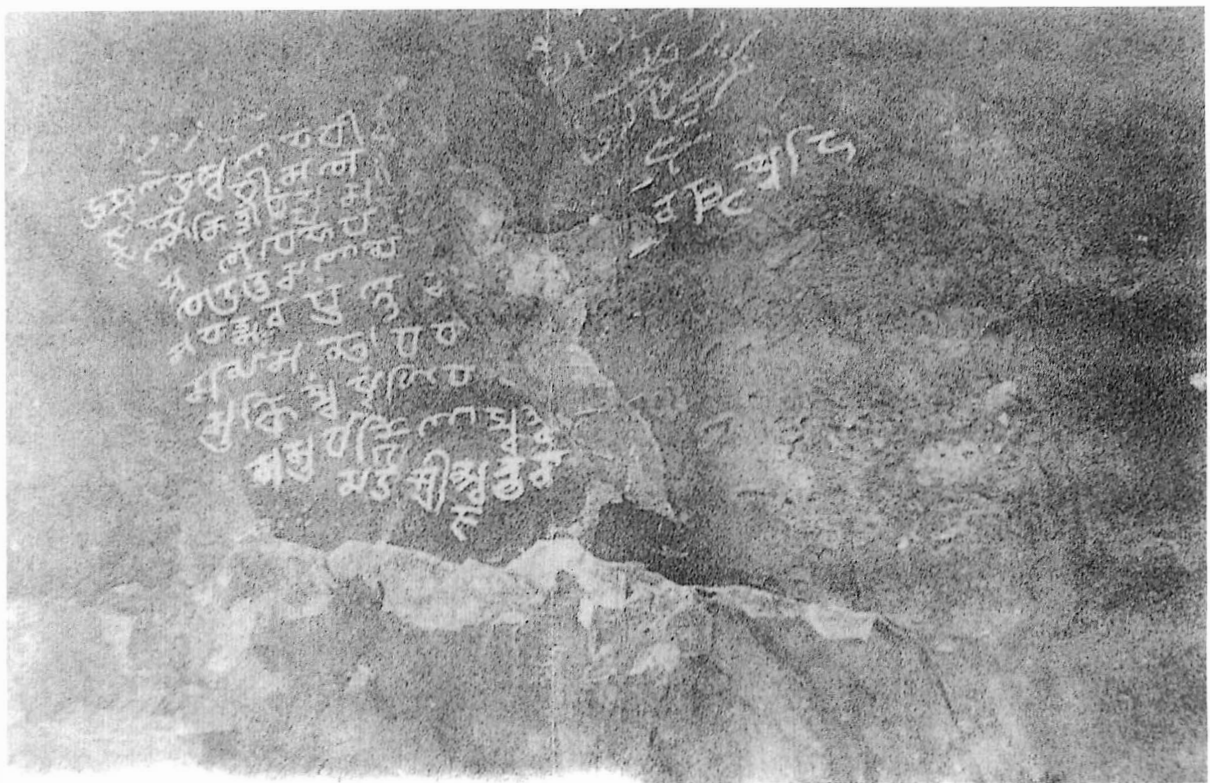
Pl. 2: Boulder showing human figures with extended and raised arms (Jondhak, Chitral).



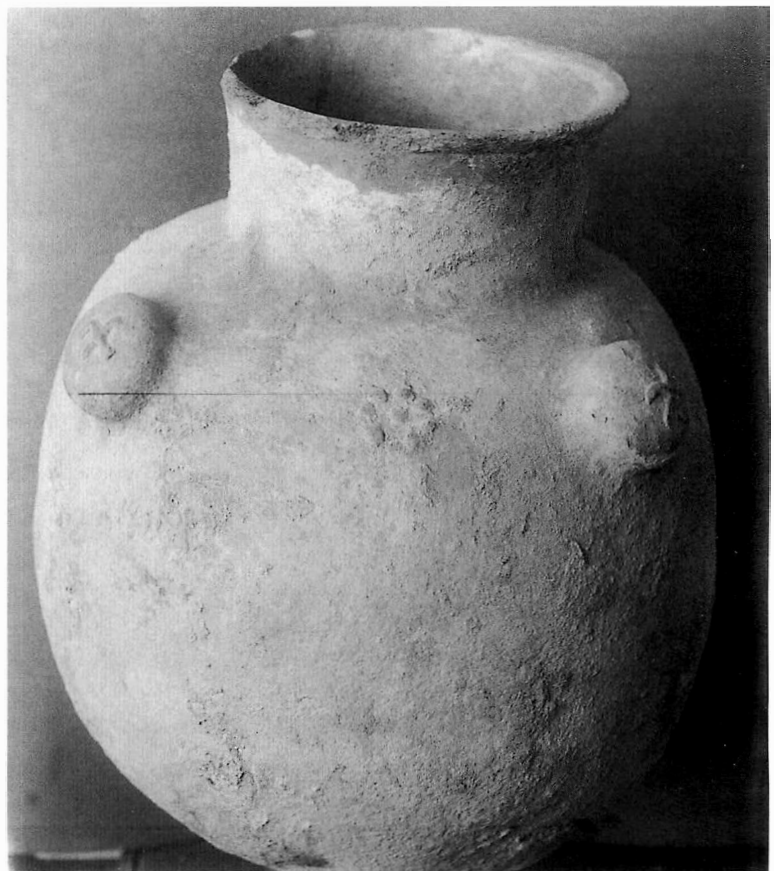
Pl. 3: A horse raider (Jondhak, Chitral).



Pl. 4: Multiple figures in different gestures (Jondhak, Chitral).



Pl. 5: Śāradā inscription from Arandu, lower Chitral.



Pl. 6: Pitcher from a grave at Ayun, Chitral.



Pl. 7: Another view of figure 5.