

Archaeological Exploration in the Mohmand Agency

M. QASIM JAN MOHAMMADZAI

Covering an area of 2,296 sq km (*Sensus Report*), the Mohmand Agency stretching along the Durand Line between 34°-10' and 34°-43' North Latitudes and 70°-58' and 71°-42' East Longitudes is bounded by Afghanistan in the west, the Bajaur Agency in the north and north-east and the Malakand Agency in the east, while the districts Charsadda and Peshawar border it on the south-east and south respectively. Administratively, it is divided into seven sub-divisions (*tehsils*) of Ghalanai, Halimzai, Safi, Ekka Ghund, Pandyalai, Ambar and Prangghar—all under a political agent, who is directly responsible to the governor of the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan.

The Mohmand Agency, mostly hilly area, is formed of rugged and barren offshoots of the Hindu Kush range. Being the principal entry point from Afghanistan to the Peshawar Valley in the ancient past, it has continued to enjoy an important geo-commercial location at the present as well (Yousafi 1960: 62). It is the busiest trade route second only to the Khyber Pass (Ali 2003: 20-21). Not only formidable armies made their way to Pakistan, but peaceful caravans of merchants also availed the opportunity of access to the Silk Route via passes in this region (Dani 1967: 7-8). Its inhabitants have maintained their tribal way of life throughout the known history (Dupree 1980: XLII). During the time of the Mughals, Sikhs and later in the British period in particular, several attempts were made to bring this area under their direct control but stiff tribal resistance forced them revert their scheme (Swinson 1967: 32).

Glimpses of its ancient past could be recollected from numerous archaeological remains scattered all over the Agency. Despite its historical importance it is still among the least explored parts of the country (Rahman 1996). Some time ago while exploring ancient cemeteries, which are found in large number in this area, the present author came across thirty-eight archaeological sites belonging to different periods. A summary of selected sites is presented here.

1. ALINGAR ROCK INSCRIPTION

The site is located in Alingar valley about 3.0km north of the main road on the slopes of a steep hill Karkanai Ghar to the north west of the hamlet. In this locality, also known as Warkotay Nao, there are two big stones called Palang Gat and Nawe Gat. Ruined stone-structures scattered widely around indicate this an ancient settlement area.

A Śāradā inscription on a rock surface, facing south-west, is engraved at a height of about 150m from the ground level (Pl.1). Close-by there are rock carvings (Pl.2) of animals and horse-rider.¹ The site, therefore, seems to have been occupied for a very long period of time. Found here, the local people showed to us a number of coins, which belonged to different dynasties from the Indus-Greeks to the Hindu Śāhi period. Śāradā script, originated in Kashmir, was used in this region during the Hindu Śāhi period (8th to 10th century AD). Another Śāradā rock inscription has also been located in the nearby Bajaur Agency (Khan *et alii* 1999-2000: 15).

2. ADINKHEL DHERAI

The cultural mound at Adinkhel is situated 3.0km north-west of Ghalanai, the Agency Headquarters. It spreads in an area of 50x30m with a height of 10.0m from the ground level. There are signs of an enclosure wall, which is 1.0m thick and built in diaper stone-masonry. To the south-western side a 10.0m high section, created by digging the mound as manure for cultivated fields, reveals different layers including segment of a stone-wall with a covered passage, having an arched roof (Pl. 3).

Stone-sculpture, coins and gold, silver and copper objects are reported. Different types of earthenware of daily use are still occasionally found here.

3. EKKA GHUND CARAVAN-SARAI

The routes passing through this region connect the Indus and Oxus valleys by several routes, all lying north of the river Kabul (Dani 1967: 7). Merchants with their goods travelled between the East and West and rested in caravan-sarais constructed at suitable places along these routes (Dani 1969: 29). Remains of one such building have been located about 2.0km north-west of Ekka Ghund on the left side of the main road in the south-western end of the Agency. It is built at a very strategic point where the low Mohmand-hills gradually recede into the Peshawar valley.

The cravan-sarai, a rectangle of 60x46 m, has traces of a strong 1½ m thick fortification wall, mostly intact at the southern side, provided with semicircular bastions. The use of burnt-bricks with stone-masonry suggests that the enclosure wall was constructed somewhat at a later phase. There is also a report of the discovery of a mosque having a *mihrab* (prayer niche). Islamic period coins bearing the *kalima* (the religious confession) on one side are reported. Owner of the land has now covered all the exposed structures in the soil.

4. KANRO QALA

Close to the hamlet Sro Sha in the Ambar *tehsil* are structures constructed of rolled undressed stones. The site is situated near a stream on the left side of the road leading to Bajaur. River pebbles of various sizes were used in the enclosure wall of an area measuring 80x60m. Probably belonging to early historic period, debris of ruined structures within the enclosed area spread on a large surface (Pl. 4). Red-ware potsherds scatter on the surface.

5. KHAZANO SAR SETTLEMENT

Five kilometres north of Mian Mandai is a small narrow valley Shati Kor in the south-eastern slopes of Nahaqai hills. There are ruined structures of a large historic period settlement site on the slopes of Khazano Sar hill. The remains of every house seems to have several rooms, either square or rectangular in plan, opening into a courtyard (Pls. 5, 6). Nearly all the houses are provided with a small bathroom. The remaining walls are preserved to a height of 1½ m. Potsherds in red-ware spread all over the site.

Bellow the settlement site, there are ancient graves on the cliff to the northern side. They are rectangular and constructed of several courses of undressed stones. Oriented in the east-west direction, they are dug out by the local people who still have the grave pottery.

6. KOTKAI DHERAI

The old Ghalanai village is approached through a branch road at a distance of 2 km to the south-west from the Ghalanai Bazaar. To the south of the village a ridge dominating the surrounding valley has Kotkai Dherai site located right on its top. A fortification wall bounds the rectangular mound with its best-preserved portion to the western side. Illegal digging has exposed segments of stone walls at various places.

There are traces of rectangular small rooms, which measure 3x5 m and open in the south. Six rooms noted in a row suggest that other sides of this building may also have similar rooms (Pl. 7). Some walls, 2 m thick, might have supported a multiple storey structure. On the topmost terrace, there are remnants of square foundations. Carved stone panels are reported from here. These remains, no doubt, belong to the historic period.

7. LAKARO ROCK INSCRIPTIONS

About 2.0km west of Lakaro Bazaar is the towering hill of Ziyarat Ghar, known today for its active white marble quarry, and a little south is the shrine of Haji Abdul Wahid, famously known

as Haji Sahib Turangzai (a prominent freedom-fighter in the British period). 2.0km past Lakaro Baazar towards the north, a path leads for 3 km westwards from the main road to the quarry lying just above the hamlet Said Khan.

Ancient inscriptions in Śāradā characters, executed on the surface of marble rocks facing to the south, were discovered right amidst the quarry site. The inscriptions are near a water spring, locally called Akhun Kwee, about 170 m above the plain. These are carved in five different groups, apart from each other at a distance of a few metres. According to the local informants, there below the inscriptions were carvings of animals and horse-riders, all perished recently because of quarrying marble. Among all the surviving specimens, the largest is a ten-line inscription carved on a rock measuring 70x40 cm. The average size of each letter is 5x3 cm. The right side of the rock is missing (Pl. 8).

The area has remains of structures in diaper masonry; and bellow the spring there are remnants of an ancient cemetery, from where stone-lined graves having pots filled with burnt bones are reported. With this complex cultural environment all around, we believe that it might have been settlement site belonging to the late ancient historical period. It is feared that the inscriptions if not saved promptly at this crucial moment will be lost forever due to quarrying.

8. PANDYALAI CEMETERY

A large ancient cemetery lies on the slopes of a steep hill called Tor Kamar about ½ km north of the road in a somewhat green valley Pandyalai. The graves built in stones have their chambers covered with long slabs (Pl. 9). A long gravestone erected vertically marks the head of an individual grave. Illegal diggers have dug out a number of them for grave-goods, including pottery of various shapes and other funerary objects.

To the west of the cemetery a ruined settlement site has huge remains of stone structures in diaper masonry. A variety of cultural objects reported from here include coins, we were shown some of the Indo-Greeks, Scythians, Kushans and the Hindu Śāhis.

9. SAPPARE

Two kilometres north of the Munda bridge there near Sappare are remains called Wrana Qala. The area is home of the Mullagoori branch of Utmankhel tribe of Prang Ghar *tehsil*. The ruins are perched on the top of a high ridge called Qala Jai, 2 km north of the hamlet Sangroba. Strategically located, the site is covered by hills on its three sides, while the river Swat bounds it on the south-west and the Hashtnagar plains on the south. It is situated close to the Abazai village, famous for its fertile fields and mango orchards.

The most densely constructed area is a flat terrace having the remains of thirty-nine square rooms in diaper masonry built on all its four sides (Pl. 10). The average thickness of their walls is 1.0m and the style of masonry shows affinity with that of the Kuṣāṇa period. Red-ware potsherds with plain surface and iron arrowheads are reported among the finds.

To its north-east, also on the top of a hill called Kafiro Kandar near the Muslim period cemetery of Bābāgān, are also traces of ruined structures and remnants of a long fortification wall, more than 100 m in length and stretching in the north-south direction. It has semicircular bastions facing eastwards.

10. SHNE GHUNDAI

The remains of a settlement site Shne Ghundai are located 5.0km south-west of Ekka Ghund on the crest and slopes, mainly southern, of a hillock commanding over the vast Peshawar plains. Its close proximity to the extensive Aryan period cemetery Zareef Koroona has greatly increased importance of this site (Khan 1973).

Segments of diaper masonry stonewalls could be seen at different portions of the site. Square and rectangular burnt bricks of various sizes are also seen on the surface. A well, lined with burnt bricks, is also noted.

Wheel-turned potsherds, some with black decoration, of red ware were strewn all over the surface. Occasional illegal digging has revealed cultural objects including baked clay pots of various sizes and shapes, round rusted copper coins and Gandharan stone reliefs. Although some sections have been illicitly dugout, yet it seems that quite a big portion of the site is still intact.

11. SHO GHUNDAI

The settlement is situated on the top of a low spur, standing isolated on the right side of the road leading to Ambar at the northern end of the Pandialai valley. To its southern side is the hamlet of Bābā Tabar, about 3.0km from the Pandialai *tehsil*. Stone building remains are to be seen on the top of a hillock on a wider area. There are traces of ordinary living rooms along with small rooms made in diaper masonry. Potsherds seen on the surface are totally in red-ware, some are decorated with stamped designs as well as black paint. Copper coins of the Kuṣāṇa period are reported.

12. BADE SIYA

The valley northwest of Mian Mandai Bazaar has been the battle site of many combats between the British and the tribes of the Agency in the past. Three kilometres north of the bazaar is a hill, stretching in the east-west direction near the hamlet Pratha, on the top of which is a ruined structure called Pirangyano Morcha. Nearby in another locality Miradin Jai there are ancient ruined structures spreading on a large area. Recently a hoard of silver coins is reported from here. Other finds include pottery of various shapes in red-ware with black painted designs, iron arrowheads and carnelian beads.

The archaeological sites in the Agency, like those in the settled areas, are also prone to human and natural hazards and are on the way to fast disappearance. Individual efforts, we feel, do not suffice to cope with the gigantic task of documenting all ancient sites in a systematic way. The Federal and Provincial Departments of Archaeology should take an initiative for conducting systematic exploration of this important, culturally rich and so far neglected area. This will not only provide fresh data for research to students and scholars, but also result in saving potential sites from further destruction.

Note

¹ Dr. Nasim of this department is busy in deciphering the inscription.

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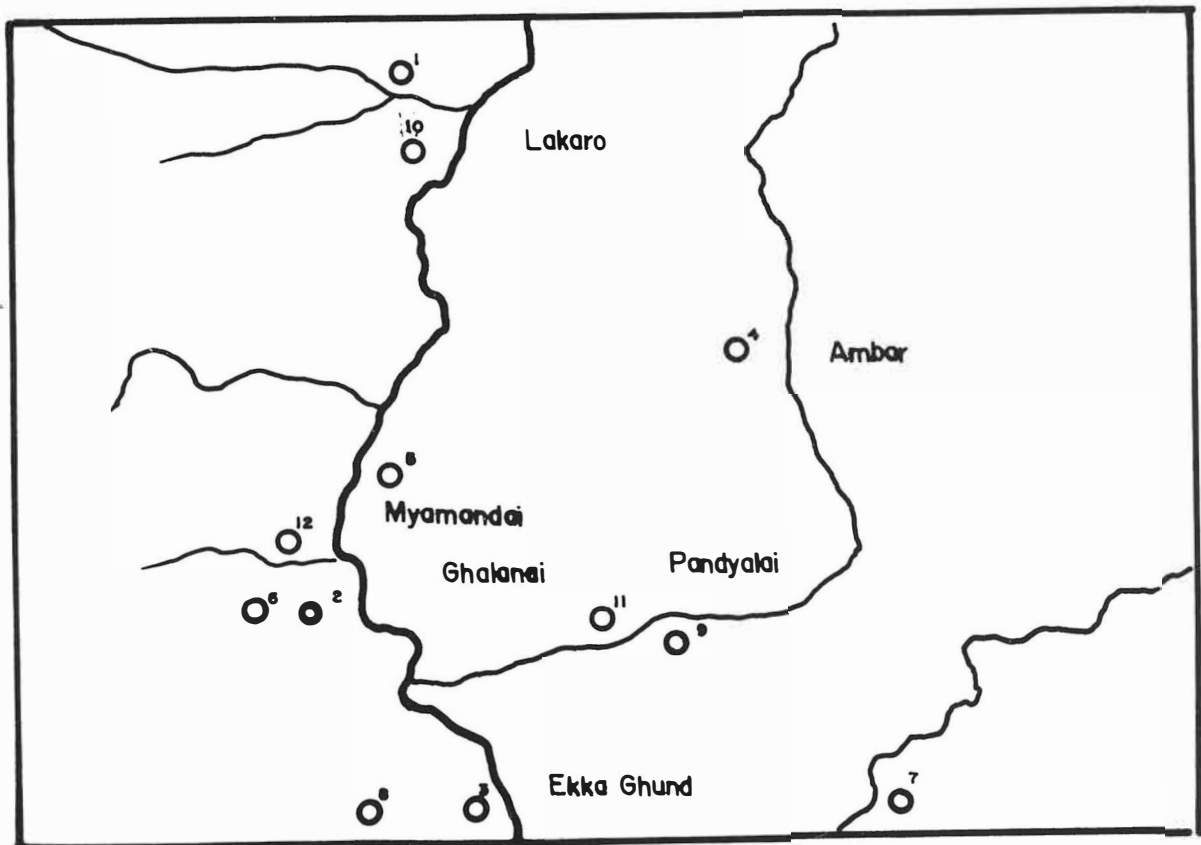
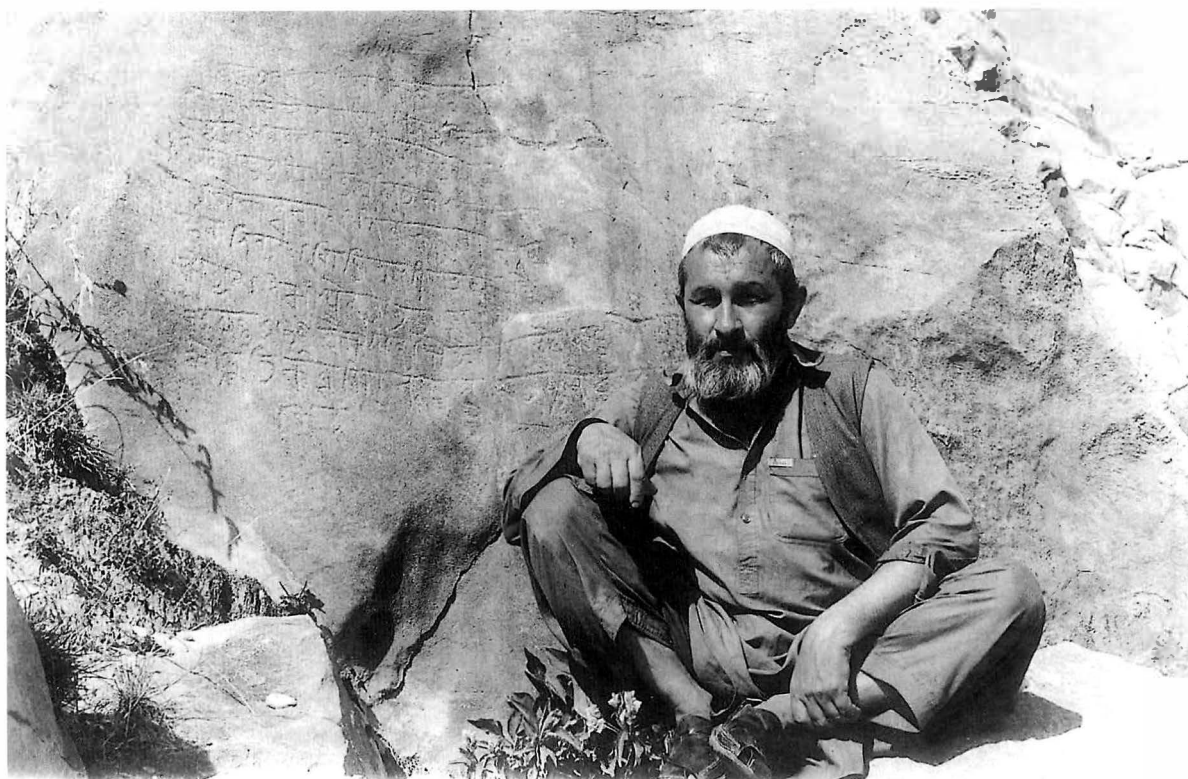


Fig. 1: Mohmand Agency Selected Sites.



Pl. 1: Alingar: Rock with Sharada inscription.



Pl. 2: Alingar: Hunting scene on the rock.



Pl. 3: Adinkhel: Structural remains.



Pl. 4: Kanro Qala: Fallen stones and part of the enclosure wall.



Pl. 5: Khazano Sar: Structural remains of a house.



Pl. 6: The valley below, as seen from the settlement.



Pl. 7: Kotkai dherai: Inside walls of a room.



Pl. 8: Lakaro: Sharada rock inscription, its right side damaged.



Pl. 9: Pandyalai: Grave with one of the capstone.



Pl. 10: Sapparai: A bird's eye view of the structural remains.