

# NEWLY DISCOVERED ENGRAVINGS & INSCRIPTIONS IN BAJAUR VALLEY, GANDHARA, PAKISTAN.

## *A PRELIMINARY REPORT*

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The Bajaur valley in the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan was long known to have produced fine specimens of the Buddhist Art and an area through which Alexander the Great entered the sub-continent in c.326 B.C. No scientific investigations had been done until the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan, selected this area for explorations in 1995. The first object of our survey was to carry out explorations and record archaeological sites and monuments for the reconstruction of the history of the Bajaur valley. The second aim of the survey was to trace out the track of Alexander from Nawapass to Massaga, the present Talash valley in the Dir District.

During our survey, a good number of Buddhist sites were recorded. There were found several settlements and grave sites of Gandhara Grave Culture. Some very important forts, Mughal period Mosques and other monuments were also documented (Saeed-ur-Rehman, M. Ashraf Khan and Abdul Azeem, 1995,122-171). Besides Gandhara Grave Culture, Buddhist and Islamic period sites, numerous rock engravings and inscriptions were recorded during the survey which created great interest among the archaeologists and scholars engaged in the field of research.

### **GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF BAJAUR.**

Bajaur is bounded on its north-west by the Dir valley, on its south-east by Malakand, on the south by the Mohmand valley and on the west and north-west by Afghanistan. It lies between 34<sup>o</sup>.10' to 34<sup>o</sup>.58' north latitude and 71<sup>o</sup>.45' to 71<sup>o</sup>.45' east longitude.

The history of Bajaur goes back to the second millennium B.C. From the Aryan source, it would appear that Alexander took an army through Kunar (Afghanistan) and

entered in Bajaur (Pakistan) through Nawapass in the year 326 B.C. However, some twenty years later in 306 B.C, Alexander's General Seleucos yielded these countries to Chandragupta Maurya. Later on Asoka, succeeded to the throne in 263 B.C. and erected the edicts of Buddhism engraved on rocks in various parts of Gandhara. It merits a mention that some major Buddhist edicts of Asoka dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. are found inscribed on stone boulders at Mansehra and Shahbaz Garhi. Menander the Bactrian King, appeared in (190-90 B.C.) followed by the Scythian and Perthian rulers (90 B.C.-A.D. 64 the Kushans (64-460 A.D.), the Huns (5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) the Hindu Shahis (822-10<sup>th</sup> cent. A.D.) and the Ghaznavids (beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D.).

### **ROCK ENGRAVINGS**

During the recent archaeological survey, rock engravings and inscriptions were documented, still preserved in situ at various places in the Bajaur valley which led to spanning a new chapter in history of this region. Their presence is attested by numerous engravings of wild animals such as Horses, Goats, Anthropomorphic figures, cavaliers, sun disks, Stupas, Sharada and Kharoshti inscriptions.

### **SALARZAI.**

Salarzai is one of the richest valleys in respect of interesting archaeological wealth. It has several Gandhara Grave Culture sites, Buddhist stupas and monasteries, settlements, rock engravings and an inscription noticed the locality of Tarala and Zarai village. The representations of domestic and wild animals were engraved on the colossal rock of Ilam Sar-I site about 2 km west of village Tarala in the Salarzai valleys(Fig 1-3). The site lies on the left of the road leading to Khar-Pashat. The graffities were engraved on the outerface of a large stone boulder which lies about 3 metres from the ground level.

The Gandhara Grave sites were spotted in a vast area all around the engraved boulders. Nonetheless, their mutual connection could only be maintained after a systematic excavation of the cemeteries.

Ragai site is situated about 2 km west of Dherakai village on the left side of the road leading to Pashat. Large flat and polished boulder, spotted at the foothills and facing north,

measured 6.45 x 3.20 x 2.00 metres. It contained deep and circular engravings, which were five in number. The symbols appearing among the engravings, represent sun discs, which are probably new symbols of power (Fig. 4). The extensive grave site stretched in the neighbourhood of the engravings probably belongs to proto-historic period, as some exposed structures of the grave pits exhibited close resemblance to the Gandhara Grave Culture.

### **NAWAGAI.**

Nawagai valley is renowned for its archaeological remains especially for its valued inventory of the Buddhist stupas, monasteries and rock engravings. The engravings were found on the east of the swara Gata Stupa opposite the Nawagai headquarters based at a maximum altitude of 500 m on the peak of Tarang Hills. The structural remains of the vast stupa complex scattered all over the apex of the hills were seriously devastated due to the clandestine activity of the local people. A stupa model, measuring 75 cm in height and 28 cm in width, was engraved on the surface of large rock, standing towards east of the stupa complex. It has a base, drum, harmika and seven umbrellas (Fig. 5).

The Kharai rock engravings are situated 2 km east of Kharai Kamangara village and could be approached through an un-metalled track which offshoots from Nawagai Bazar and travelled along left side of the Khawar flowing to north from Nawagai Bazar. The engravings executed on the plain surface of the rock, measuring 30-40 metres and facing west, depict horse riders (Fig. 6). Each one of the horse riders shown in action, hold a bridle in his left hand while a sword in the right. These engravings were found near the remains of the Buddhist complex along with fragments of chhatras, spread in a vast area, disturbed by illegal diggers.

### **THE KHAROSHTI INSCRIPTION**

Two inscriptions, one in Kharoshti and the other in Sharada, were found in the Bajaur valley. The Kharoshti inscription which was before the World War second from Shinkot site, a village in the Khar valley of Bajaur, belongs to the reign of Manader. The casket was discovered by some tribal people while digging the foundations of a new fort in Shinkot in Bajaur (Majumdar, 1937: 1-2).

During our recent archaeological expedition to Bajaur, we visited the ancient site of Shinkot, the find spot of "Bajaur Kharoshti casket inscription." It is a huge ruined site with large circular mound on which is erected a modern village of the same name. Many of the houses in the village are built of stones dugout from the ancient site. The site and the adjacent land are now in the possession of Nawab Abdur Rahim and Nawab Jehangir Khan of Shinkot who proposed us to excavate the portion of the site nearby their hujra where structures of diaper stone masonry are still visible. But due to short time we were not able to dig but promised, however, to excavate it in a very near future. The Nawab Sahib also showed us the stone fragments of corinthian pilasters (capitals, bases) dug out from the site. We were also informed by him that the Menander inscription was found from this site.

According to A.K. Narain (1957: 79-80), "the inscription consists of two groups of small epigraphs of different periods; the first mentions the name of Maharaja Minadra and can be dated in the middle of second century B.C., while the second refers to reconstruction of the casket in the time of certain vijayamitra who has been identified with the vijayamitra named on certain Indo-Scythian coins and is dated some time in the 1st century B.C. Unfortunately, the portion of the lid of the casket which may have contained the date is broken." The inscription translated by Schopen as follows: (Fussman 1993: 110), "on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of Karttika, in the reign of Maharaja Minadra (the corporal relic of the Buddha), which is endowed with life... has been established. (The corporeal relic) of sakyamuni, which is endowed with life...- The gift-of Viyakamitra, who has no king as his adversary...- Vijayamitura... the bowl has been established... This corporeal relic having been broken is not held in worship with zeal. It is decaying in course of time-and-is not honoured: - and hereby the offering of alms and water encestors are no longer propitiated; -and- the receptacle of that -relic- has been cast aside. -now- in the fifth year and on the twenty-fifth day of the month of Vaisakha, this has been established by Vijayamitra, who has no king as his adversary, - namely- the corporeal relic of the Lord Sakyamuni: the one who is truly enlightened—written by Vispila under orders- (Majumdar 1937, 7-8).

From the above mentioned inscription, it is proved that Bajaur was a part of Menander empire. In this connection, A.H. Dani comments (Dani, A.H.: 1991: 13) "Menander is the only Greek King, who is mentioned in a Kharoshti inscription, viz Bajaur casket inscription which

refers to his reign. This Buddhist into this part in mid-second century B.C. At the same time the findspot of the inscription clearly shows the northern direction of Swat, Dir, Bajaur and probably Chitral over which Menander must have had his hold and probably it is through this part that he might have advanced towards Pamir via Chitral. Thus this inscription is very important to understand the geographical extent of Menander's territory. The second evidence comes from the Buddhist work Milinda-Pano (questions of Menander), according to which the Buddhist monk Nagasena. The city Sagala, even if we do not accept it be Sialkot, cannot be a place outside Punjab. Thus Menander's territory included area in both parts of east and west of the river Indus." It mark the advent of the historical era in the area. Kharoshti was written from right to left, a writing system derived from the aramic of the official acript of the Achaemenid empire, was used in the north western India from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. untill the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D. and represented the middle Indian language Gandhari. Other inscriptions have also been found in Bajur valley which are not include in this article.

### **SHARADA INSCRIPTION.**

A Sharada inscription was found in Salarzai valley during the expedition undertook by the team in the summer months of 1995. The inscription was engraved on the face of a huge rock standing on top of Zarai hill overlooking the village Baghlai, which was located 15 km away from Sapparai, a village close to the Afghanistan border. A large number of pottery was collected on the surface of hilly tracts which was found all around the site of inscription. Besides, two ancient caves were spotted in precints of the inscriptions. Inside the cave, pottery was noticed in abundance. It is written in Sharada character and bears the date 197. The inscription originally consisted of three lines. The inscription reads (a) Samvat 197 (year 197), (b) thevaradata (Thivaradata), (c) + + + (Fig. 7)

Thivaradata (which can also read Shrevardata) or Sabivaradata with some modification is obviously the name of the engraver. The inscription was written in the year 197 of an unknown era. If, however, the inscription is dated in the Sabi era of 822, its date corresponds to A.D. 1019. This was the time when Mahmud bin Subakatigin was campaigning against the Hindu Rulers of India.

## **MATERIALS OF ROCK ENGRAVINGS.**

These engravings are found on the boulders of different geological formations: and usually executed on calcareous rock, granitic gneise and phyllite.

## **TECHNIQUES.**

The usual method of engravings was that the outer surface of the boulders was smoothly flattened. The engravings were executed with some metal instruments, especially the hammer, chisel, sharp pointed tool and knife.

## **DISTRIBUTION, CHRONOLOGY, SIGNIFICANCE AND CULTURAL FUNCTION OF ENGRAVINGS.**

The rock engravings were not only limited to Bajuar but a good number of engravings and inscriptions were also recorded by Pakistan and foreign archaeologists in other parts of Gandhara such as Attock valley (Gordon A.H. 1958: 111-112) Swat (Tucci, G. 1958: 279-328, M. Ashraf Khan, 1994: 455-466) Dir (Dani A.H. 1968: 251-257), M. Ashraf Khan, 1994: 455-466) Buner, (Olivieri, L.M. 1994: 467-480, M.H.U. Khattak, 1997: 70-72) in the surroundings Chitral region and the upper Indus valley, (D.B. Konig et al. 1997: 31-68) (Gilgit and Baltistan). Similar engravings are known in ancient Uddayana (Swat) belonging to different periods since proto-historic time to the Buddhist and Hindu time. Among them, wild animals, such as, goat, ibex, markhor, the figures of Boddhistvas, Buddhas and Ganesa have been recorded in Buner, (M.H.U. Khattak, 1997: 70-72) Dir., (Dani A.H. 1991: 13) (M. Ashraf Khan, 1994: 455-466) and puran valley. (Oliviri, L.M. 1994: 467-480).

The largest accumulation of rock engravings represents human and anthropomorphic figures, religious figures, symbols, various religious and decorative motifs and about 5000 inscriptions in Kharoshti, Brahmi, proto-Sharada, Sogdian, Persian, Parthian, Bactrian, Chinese, Hebrew, Syrian and Tibetan were found on the boulders in the narrow part of the valley between Shatial and the Raikot bridge, especially in the Chilas-Thalpan basin relating to different periods from pre-historic time to the advent of Islam (Jettmar, K. 1986: 191-195).

The primitive engravings represent wild and domestic animals of Ilam Sar and sun discs of Ragai site and may be dated to 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. by correlating them with similar

engravings which were noticed at several places in Dir near Timergara and Khal. (Tucci. G. 1958: 279-328) from Gogdara in Swat valley (Tucci. G. 1958: 279-328) and from Adina (Shahnazar Khan. 1995: 110-117) in Swabi. Such a primitive engravings were also recorded in the upper Indus Kohistan and similar to those of the Okunar Culture in southern Sibiria. 3<sup>rd</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> millennium B.C. (Francfort H. p. 1991: 125-135).

The engravings represent hunting, fighting scene, horse-riders and stupa model in Nawagai valley and may be dated to 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Engravings of Nawagai have close affinity with those found in Hathiano Kando (Nazir Khan. 1983: 59-65) and Kafirkot in Malakand Agency. (Nazir Khan, A. Nasir, Oliviri and all 1995: 333-353). It seems that this art of engravings was continued to flourish even after the devastation of Gandhara by the White Huns in 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

What was the significance of these engravings in the religious, social and cultural life of the people and what role they played in the society, is still debated among the scholars. Dr. M. Nasim Khan, comments (Nasim Khan. 1998: 47) "what exactly are these engravings, we may never be able to understand fully the origin and the specific role of all of them, it seems however, that they played an important role in the religious, social and cultural life of their engravers.

In the Buddhist period they played a religious role as they were executed by Buddhist monks, who were living near the monasteries. Since ancient times, hunters, merchants, missionaries and pilgrims travelled along the Bajaur area from far-flung places and left signs of their culture and religious beliefs as attested by them during their journey.

This art is indeed significant for the reasons that it provides ample information to the people about the religious, social and cultural life of the inhabitants of those hilly tracts.

It also throws light on the history of the area, the mode of writing adopted by the engravers and other related activities. Such ancient records of inscriptions contribute considerably in enriching the canvas of knowledge in the domain of epigraphy.

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Rock Art in Pakistan, in the glory that was Pakistan,  
Deptt. Of Archaeology, University of Peshawar and  
National Heritage Foundation< p.47, Peshawar.

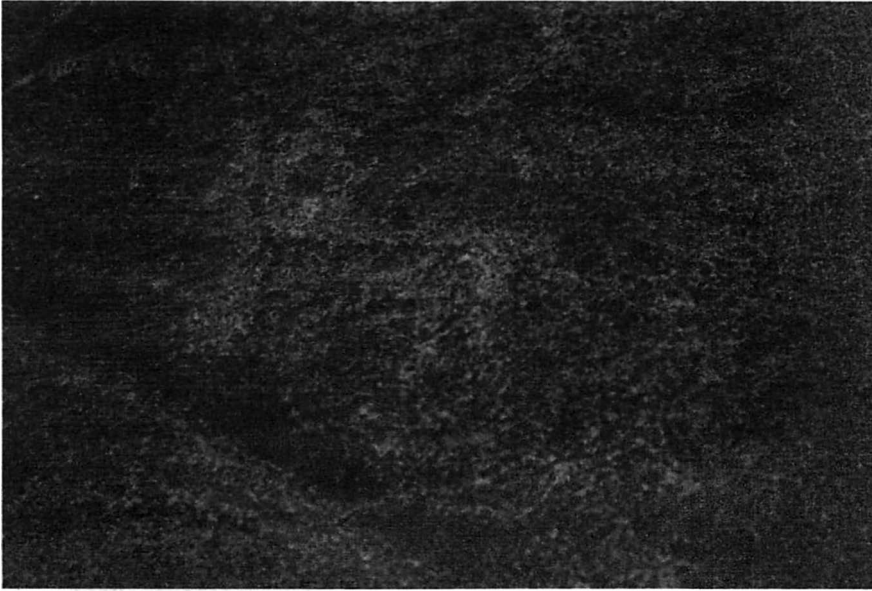


Fig. 1 Rock Engraving of Animal (Ilam Sar, Salarzai, Bajaur)

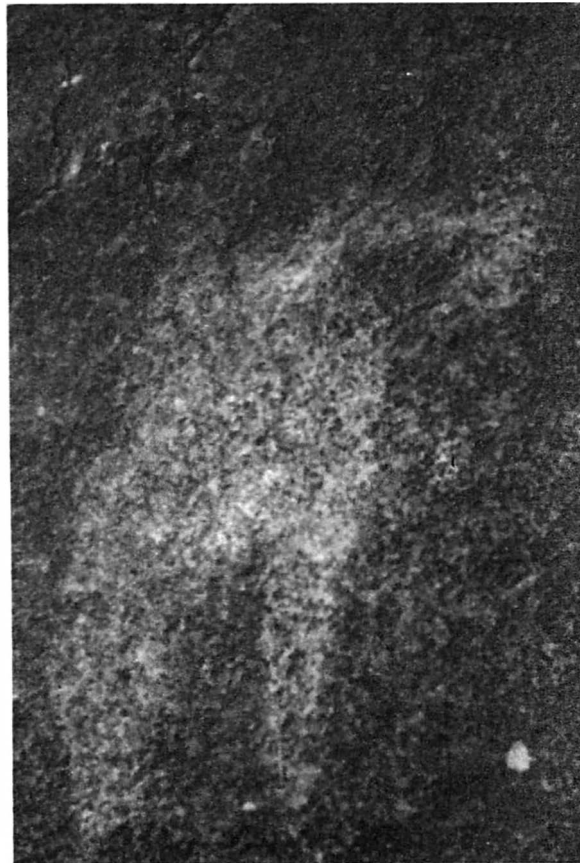


Fig. 2: Rock Engraving of Animal (Ilam Sar, Salarzai, Bajaur)



Fig. 3 Rock Engraving of Animal (Ilam Sar, Salarzai, Bajaur)

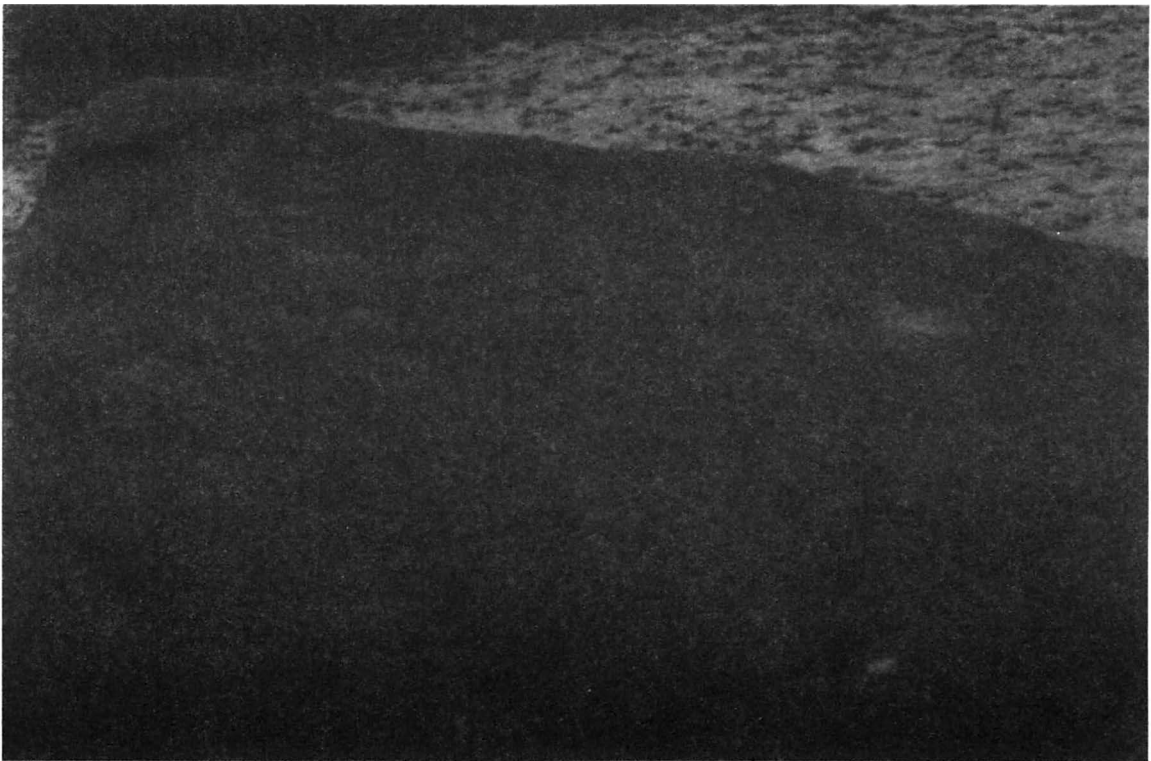


Fig. 4 Sun Disc Symbols on Rock (Ragai, Salarzai, Bajaur)

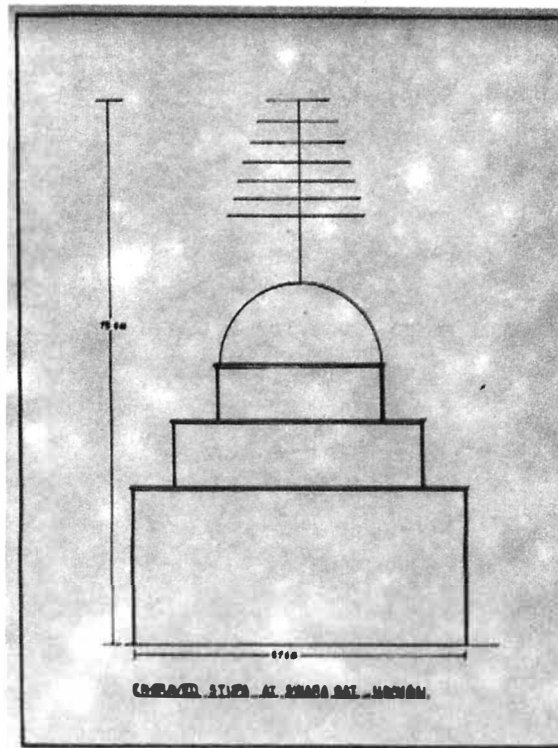


Fig. 5 Stupa on Rock (Sawara Gat, Nawagai, Bajaur)

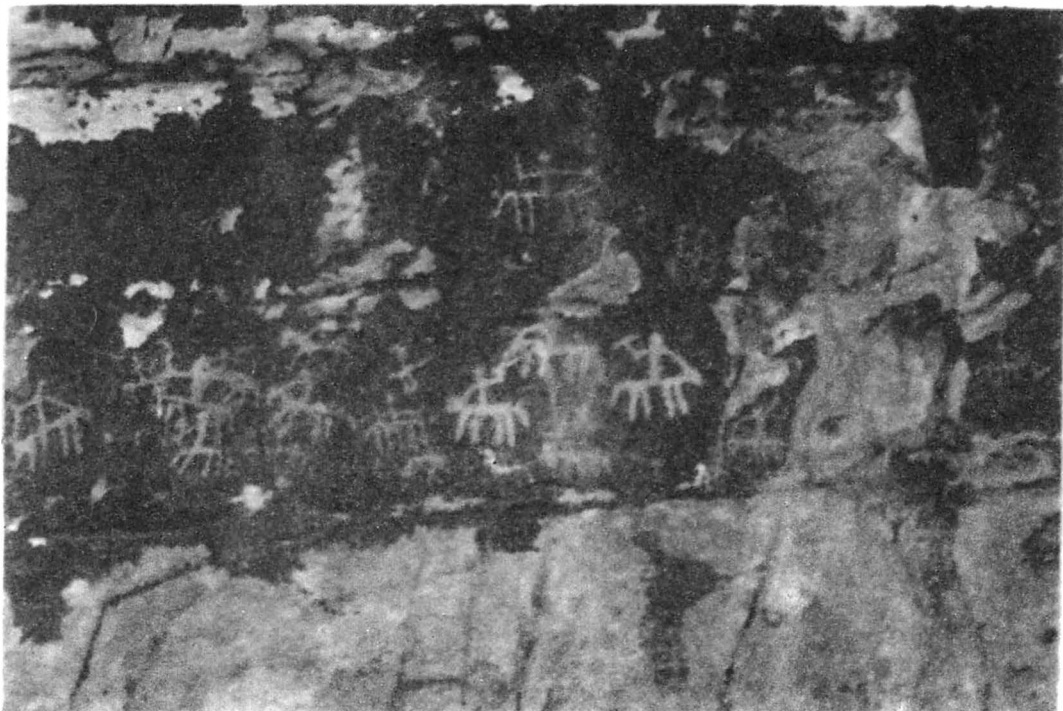
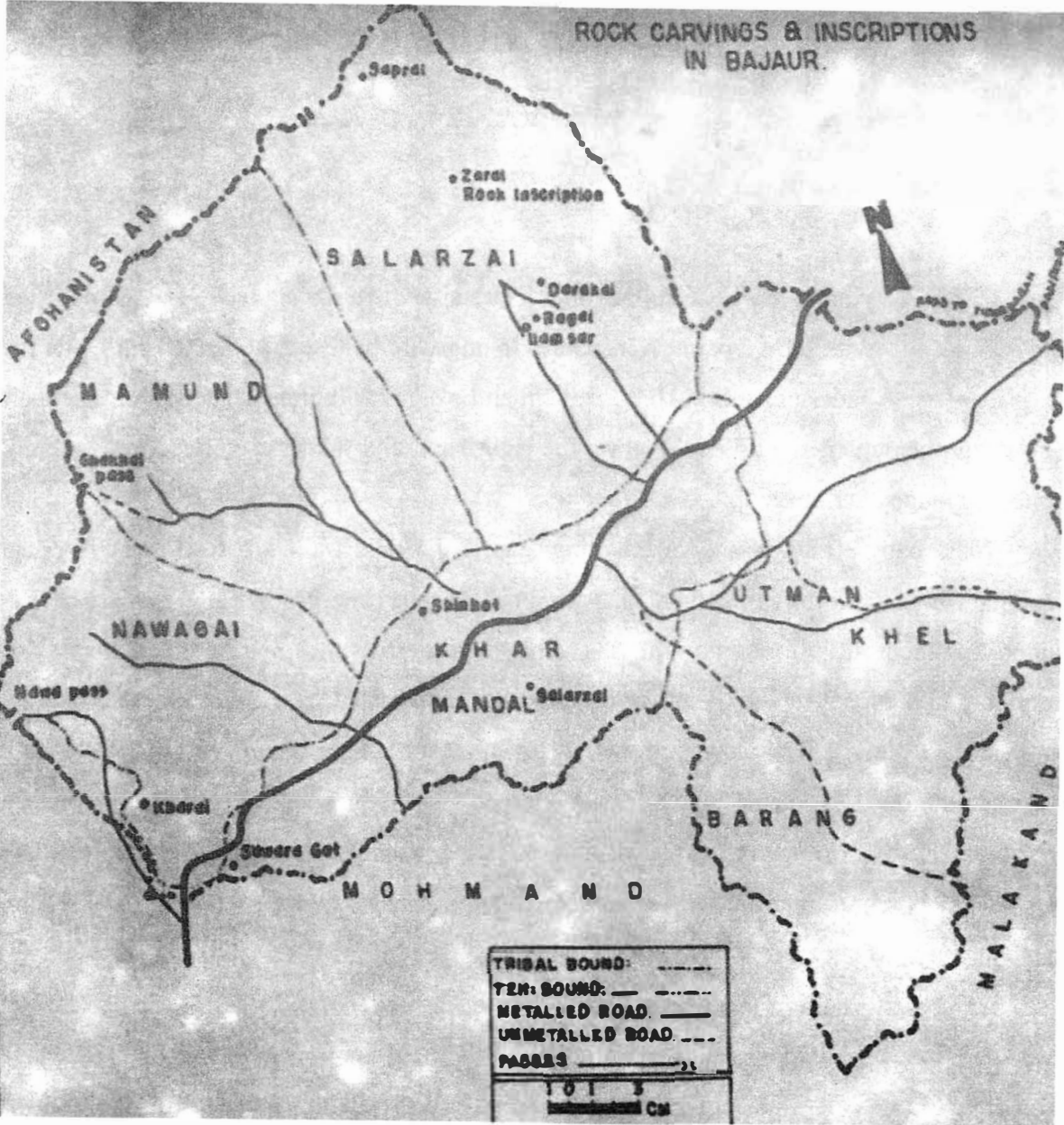


Fig. 6 Rock Engravings depicting horse riders, Kharai. Nawagai, Khar, Bajaur.



Fig. 7 Sarada Inscription, Zarai Hill, Salarzai, Bajuar



Map of Bajaur Valley