Interfacing Oral Traditions and Archaeology:

An Interpretive Analysis of the Late Historic Political Landscape of Swat

Rafiullah Khan*

Abstract: The present study argues concerning the possible existence of multiple centres of power during the late historic period (7th-10th centuries CE) of Swat. Archaeological, oral and analogical data have been produced and synchronised to re/construct the socio-political landscape of Swat during this period. The present study focuses on the archaeological site of Nangrial (نگریال) in the Malam-Jaba valley along with its wider environs. The area is sumptuous enough in ancient remains and has been studied since the first ever visit of Sir Aurel Stein in 1926. Protohistoric graves, rock art and structures of late antiquity are found in the area. As a result, enough ancient history of Nangrial is now known. However, this understanding is augmented by adding oral data – dealing with political centrality of the site – in the framework of memory studies. It is argued that Swat in the last centuries of the first millennium of the Common Era witnessed the presence of more centres of political power.

Keywords: Swat, Nangrial, memory, Malam-Jaba, political landscape.

The ancient history of Swat has extensively and intensively been studied by scholars in the past. Both anthropological and archaeological data and interpretations are largely available. However, a number of crucial historical problems of the late antiquity (7th-10th centuries) hitherto persist. Insufficient textual, historical and archaeological data foil attempts in this respect. Against all odds, the last 10 to 15 years have seen some laborious attempts from art historical, settlement and landscape perspectives in this respect (Filigenzi 2006, 2010, 2011, 2015; Olivieri 2010, 2011, 2016; Olivieri and Vidale 2006). One of the problems which calls for attention relates to the political landscape of the period.

The socio-cultural phenomenon of the late antiquity Swat generally reflects trends and patterns of the Śāhi period. And such a consideration also seems to have influenced scholarly perception about this political situation (Rahman 1979; Sultan-i-Rome 2008: 23-24). Popular local tradition also relates to the last Śāhi king's (the so-called Raja Gira) defeat at the hands of Muslim armies of Mahmud of Ghazna (Sultan-i-Rome 2008: 24). This paper, while synchronising archaeological, oral and historical data, attends to questions in relation to the political phenomenon

of Swat in the centuries immediately before the arrival of the Muslims. The first two types of data specifically deal with Nangrial and its environs, in other words Ugad valley and Malam-Jaba valley at large (see maps), whereas the last one includes scattered instances of power politics from the history of Swat. It is argued that political landscape of the time seems to have been marked by the presence of multiple centres of power. At the moment it is rather impossible to produce evidence showing the nature of power politics, political control, balance of power, deterrence and systems of alliance. However, the possibility of the practice of vassalage, in terms of tiny principalities and stronger neighbouring powers, cannot be ruled out.

This study is informed by conceptual insights from memory studies, oral history and analogical reasoning. Memory studies presently focus particularly on the recent past and on individual and group experiences. Memory is also sometimes discounted as a source of history writing. Its limitations, such as unreliability, impermanence, distortion and manipulation, have faithfully been shown by various studies. However, its uses are also an accepted fact. Memory studies present the opportunity to gain familiarity not only with the

*Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations, Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan. ✉ rafiullah@qau.edu.pk

past but also with the present. The field provides for 'explanatory pluralism', groups' conflicts and crisis, and 'culturally acquired categories of understanding' (Misztal 2003: 2). Among the various mnemonic tools included are a people's physical environs, both built and natural, which 'play an important role in helping to preserve group memory' (Misztal 2003: 16). Misztal describes mnemonic communities in terms of work of remembrance and forgetfulness, which she calls as a continuous process of 'mnemonic socialisation' (Misztal 2003: 15ff.). Mnemonic socialisation is subject to socio-economic, religious and political priorities and vicissitudes in the *longue durée*. As its object goes deep in time, it may turn into an oral tradition reflecting the complexity of memory. This complexity may involve conscious or unconscious sense of affiliation or tinge of 'otherness'. Oral traditions serve the cause of historical investigation as they, along with oral history, make an accepted mode of oral historiography (Henige 1982: 2). They attend, according to Vansina (1985: 3), to 'the generation of messages' in which 'a historian will recognize

two major groups: communication that presents "news" and communication which represents an "interpretation" of existing situations.' In both these senses oral traditions can help landscape analysis of archaeological remains and understanding of ancient history from the present-day socio-religious and political perspectives. All this adds great value to studying instances of congruence between archaeological data and oral traditions (for details, see Silva 2015).

This paper first presents the physical and archaeological landscape of the Malam-Jaba valley followed by oral traditions about some of its topographical features. Analysis and interpretation of the whole data demonstrate the historical actuality of power politics and multiple centres of power in the late antiquity Swat.

Archaeology of Nangrial and its environs

The hill of Nangrial, completely spotted by archaeological remains, makes a central location in the whole of Malam-Jaba valley. It presents the view of an acropolis, which seems capable of

Map 1. Nangrial and its immediate surroundings (Source: Google Earth Map)

exercising political control in geostrategic terms over its environs.

The environs of Nangrial consist of Ugad valley, Bishband valley, villages of Ser and Talegram along with their suburbs, Ranga, Shinkad, Kishawra, Badar-dam and Malam-Jaba. All these areas are collectively known as Malam-Jaba valley. To its east is the Swat-Ghwarband watershed whereas its west and south are bounded by the Manglawar village and its surroundings. The Mangwalthan-Tuha valley is situated to the north and west of Malam-Jaba valley. To its further south and north lie Buner and Upper Swat respectively.

Nangrial and its environs are replete with archaeological remains. The hill of Nangrial contains structures representing stupas and Buddhist rock carvings. A large basement of a stupa still exists (fig. 1) and sculptures from the whole area have also been continuously recovered by illegal diggers (fig. 2). The rock reliefs include a number of depictions of Avalokiteśvara/ Padmapāṇi. One scene presents a very complex iconography in which a huge Avalokiteśvara/ Padmapāṇi is surrounded by the images of Gaṇeśa and Gandharvas (figs. 3-4). Remains of fortification of the hill can also be seen all around (figs. 5-6) (Olivieri in Faccenna *et al.* 1993: 263; Filigenzi 2000-2001: 259-260).

Towards its east the hamlet Sulti-bandai and terraced fields are also rich in terms of ruins and cultural materials. A little north-eastward is the historic village Ser. In the same direction, somewhat ahead are two caves, called Kanjar-koṭe, facing the Nangrial hill (fig. 7). The southern side of Nangrial hill is marked by minor settlements known as Araq, Bishband, etc. To its north is Talegram, a village continuously occupied from remote times. Jahanabad, not unlike Nangrial hill, is another important sacred area with the presence of a most notable Buddha statue, inscriptions, and other reliefs (Bühler 1898; Stein 1930: 50, fig. 37; Tucci 1958: 306; Khan 2011: 184-85).

The uppermost parts of the valley, upto the Malam-Jaba top, show traces of antiquity in abundance. The hamlet of Malam and its
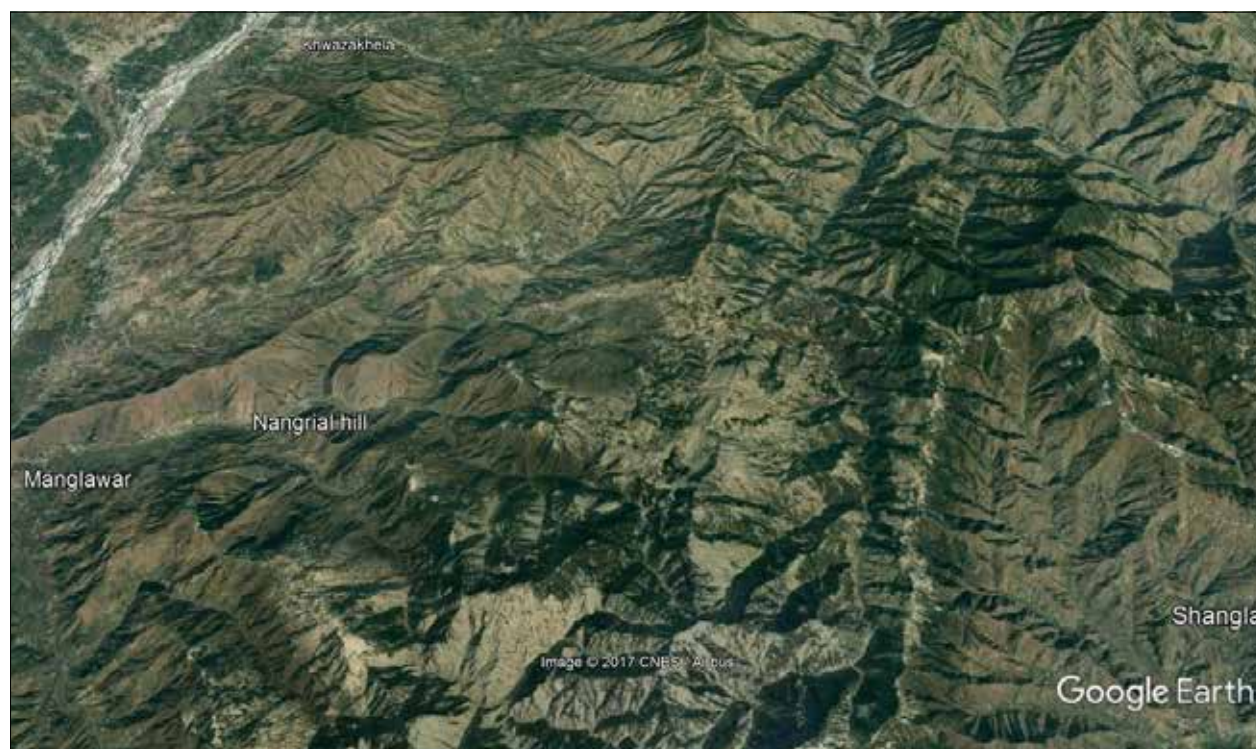
Map 2. Nangrial and its extended environs (Source: Google Earth Map)

surroundings, Spine-Uba and Malam-Jaba proper are promising localities for future research. Some data, such as a stele (Olivieri in Faccenna *et al.* 1993: 269, fig. 9) and a stupa (Khan 2011: 213) have already been reported from the area.

From an economic point of view, the whole valley is agriculturally fertile. Furthermore, flora and fauna of the area have also been a rich resource. Additional value is added to its economy by the valley being historically a much-frequented route connecting Shangla-par to the main centres of Swat such as Mingawara, Manglawar and Barikot.[1]

Materiality of Malam-Jaba valley in social/collective memory

Nangrial proper and its environs qualify Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, as against *milieu de mémoire*, 'real environments of memory' (1989: 7). *Lieux de mémoire* embody material, symbolic and functional sites. They are also invariably mutually inclusive (Nora 1989: 18-19). Places and objects serve as mnemonics of socio-cultural and historical remembrance (Misztal 2003: 16). Furthermore, some landscape features are assigned meaning in relation to each other so as to make historical sense of them as a whole. From this perspective, the historical materiality of Nangrial and its surroundings, a product of socio-cultural functions, has been symbolic to the present-day Muslim population by dint of its *otherness*. This popular-collective memory assumes vitality when it is synchronized and juxtaposed with archaeological data for the purpose of historical re/constructions.

Popular and collective memory views Nangrial as seat of government of a king by the name of Nangra (نگرہ). Due to the great wealth and opulence of Nangrial in popular imagination, the principality is considered more important in terms of power and strength. Another area, along the Manglawar-Malam-Jaba road, from Jahanabad/ Sherabad to Kare-sar, corresponding partly to the northern half of the Ugad valley, is recalled as Bazar. It is said that this was a very busy market in olden days. Moreover, certain landscape features are associated with royal lineage of Nangrial. The mountain from Salanda up to Ranga is related as being the property of two sisters of the King

Figure 1. Stupa remains, Nangrial hill crest
(Photograph: Author)

Figure 2. Buddha Image from Nangrial
(Photograph courtesy: Private Collection)

Nangra. It is divided into two parts: (1) from Salanda to Khonano-jai (now Gul-dherai) and (2) from the latter up to Ranga. Both are said to have been named after the sisters of Nangra i.e. Dharmala and Banjpora respectively. A little to the north-east of Nangrial is a place called Baghrai-gata (Ser). It is said to have been the residence of one of Nangra's daughters. The crest of the Nangrial turns eastward into a ridge where there is a pass connecting Ser and Bishband valley. The pass contains an Avalokiteśvara/Padmapāṇi relief, which is locally known as Butgai. It is also popularly perceived as being a statue of Nangra's daughter who was thought to have had nearby a swing for amusement. Another place of interest is Akhwar-china above the village of Ser. As the name shows there has been a spring and tradition says that Nangra's horses used to come here for drinking water. The place also served as stable. Another important remembrance relates to the provision of water to Nangrial through a terracotta pipeline from the high mountains to east.

Furthermore, towards the east and northeast of the Nangrial hill are the important villages of Shinkad, Kishawra, Spine-Uba and Kuh. Popular imagery also speaks of a chief by the name of Ranga whose headquarters were at a strategic entrance point to Shinkad. The place is known after him as Ranga. Similarly, a little beneath the Spine-Uba village is a site called Badar-dam, which is also associated with another chief of the same name. Ranga and Badar-dam, according to oral traditions, were brothers. Kishawra, now a famous village between Ser and Spine-Uba,

Figure 3. Avalokiteśvara/Padmapāṇi surrounded by other images, Nangrial hill crest (Photograph: Author)

is said to be their sister. It is related that in the past Kishawra was like a water pond and wood would be procured from Ranga. Badar-dam made a central base of power in the entire locality.

The picture of political landscape of Swat during the late antiquity

The above-mentioned archaeological data and collective memory (or oral traditions) concerning Nangrial and its environs present a challenging task with regard to deriving historical insights from them. The situation is not unlike one dealing with sets of oral data and written sources in the field of history. David Henige explicates the relationship between the two in terms of identicality, complementarity, contradiction and sharp distinction (Henige 1982: 71). The analysis of

oral and archaeological data concerning Nangrial makes great sense with the help of the second and fourth elements of this four-fold relationship. The complementarity element tentatively reveals the existence of petty principalities in the late ancient Swat while contradiction is embodied in strange local perceptions about the built and natural landscape. Oral traditions in Swat frequently refer to minor principalities which if synchronised with and integrated to archaeological landscapes of the late antiquity would give valuable insights in relation to the political situation of the period.

The historical memory about Nangrial as the seat of a dominion may not be considered as a spurious myth. It can be used as a complementary piece of historical evidence for explaining political situations during the last centuries of

Figure 4. Avalokiteśvara/Padmapāṇi surrounded by other images, Nangrial hill crest (Source: Author)

the first millennium. Etymological analysis of the name 'Nangrial' itself refers to central position of the acropolis in terms of political control. If it is divided into two components i.e. Nangra and *ala*, the former supposedly a person's name and the latter a Sanskrit word meaning 'place', it would connote to the throne or seat of dominion of King Nangra. However, a more tenable suggestion is to read 'nangar/nangra' as 'nagar/nagara'[2] which together with its suffix '*ala*' would mean a town-place (or political city/centre)[3]. This latter meaning together with the abundant archaeological structures at Nangrial and the Bazar area of popular memory seems more plausible. Furthermore, the famous Śāhi period castle at Udigram is also popularly remembered after the so-called king Raja-Gira. Actually Raja-Gira is but Rājagṛiha with the meaning of 'royal house'/ 'seat of government'.[4]

This analogy adds tentative validity to the second suggestion about the meaning of Nangrial; hence a suggestion concerning its historical actuality as a centre of political control as preserved in local memory. It is here that etymological analysis and oral traditions complement each other.

The centrality of Nangrial in the wider geographical context of Mangwalthan-Tuha valley, Manglawar along with its suburbs, Malam-Jaba proper and Ghwarband and Gat and Makhozo in geopolitical terms is a fact. It not only commands over the entire Bishband valley on its south, Ser-Talegram on the north, north-east and east, Bazar, Jahanabad and Shakorai in the west but also guards and controls a network of central and peripheral routes connecting both the immediate environs and remote areas such as Buner, Shangla

Figure 5. Foundation of a watch-tower overlooking Ser village and its suburbs, Nangrial hill crest (Photograph: Author)

and further ahead Gilgit-Baltistan (see for details Khan 2011). This situation seems to have had prevailed more visibly and intricately during the late antiquity. This observation is substantiated by the remains of a strong fortification and depiction of the Buddha, Avalokiteśvara/Padmapāṇi, Gaṇeśa and a Gandharva. The fortification and rock reliefs both date to the last centuries of the first millennium. Similarly, the data from Shakhorai also belong to this period. The Bazar area, which needs further careful survey, may also be related to the same chronological framework as almost all instances of collective memory about ancient cultural landscapes hardly go much deeper than the immediate centuries before and after the arrival of the Muslims in Swat. The same may be said about the memory of Nangra and Nangrial.

Socio-historical remembrance about landscape features such as Dharmala, Banjpora, Baghrai-gata and Akhwar-china also holds good for the present argument in this whole context. The data collectively point to the existence of a principality centred on Nangrial.

The memory of Ranga and Badar-dam as chiefs also adds to understanding the mechanism of political control. Ranga provides an entrance not only to Shinkad but through the latter to Mangwalthan-Tuha on the one hand and guards entrance to the upper reaches of Malam-Jaba, beyond Ser, on the other. Moreover, from Badar-dam areas such as Kishawra, Spine-Uba, Kuh, in addition to routes to Ghwarband, Gat and Makhozo, could be watched and controlled.

Figure 6. Remains of another watch-tower guarding Talegram and Bazar, Nangrial hill (Photograph: Author)

Keeping in view the strategic position of both the sites, oral traditions give hints about strategic points garrisoned for political control. The localised memory of Ranga and Badar-dam as against the wider popularity of Nangrial speaks volumes for the central position of the latter.

The fortified site of Nangrial resembles Raja Gira Castle (Udigram), Surai-tangai (Matta), Bar-tangai and Bhatagar-tangai (Dadahara) and Damkot and Gumbat (Dir) (Rahman 1979; Olivieri in Faccenna 1993: 263, 266). Contents of popular memory about Nangrial and Raja Gira append to the argument of multiple centres of power during the late antiquity period. Prospects are also bright in relation to other known, and so far unknown, ancient sites in this regard. All this

goes in contrast to Abdur Rahman's observation that after receiving defeat 'on the plains, it would seem, the ruling class of the Śāhis took to the hills and continued to rule there for some time further' (1979: 305). Realistically speaking, the defeated dynasty could not have been able to take hold of the isolated Swat valley. Contrarily, the area most probably had long before undergone a process of balkanisation; hence, hardly any question of the strategic retreat by the Śāhi royalty to Swat.

Instances of multiple power centres in Swat can also be gathered from the different historical periods of Swat. Archaeological data from Bazira (Barikot) shows that even in the Kushan period 'political control was [. . .] maintained over the city by minor Kushan vassal chiefs acting as protectors

Figure 7. Kanjar-kote caves showed by the red circle, northeast of Nangrial hill (Photograph: Author)

of the monastic complexes.' Since the 7th century decline had set in and local mountainous tribes had regained control in the area (Olivieri 2010: 358). Olivieri has intensively produced both textual and archaeological data regarding the transformation of urban and centralised socio-cultural and political phenomena into degeneration and disintegration during the later half of the first millennium CE. He has argued in favour of a stronger possibility of multiple political centres. Similarly, multipolar power structures have also been seen in the early centuries of the second millennium (Olivieri 2010, 2016). Since the turn of the second millennium CE, evidence can be produced from inscriptions and accounts of Tibetan pilgrims' about the presence of a number of principalities and royal lineages (Tucci 1940/1971; Rahman 1997-1998). The classical *Tawārikh-i-Ḥāfiz Rahmat Khāni*, a narrative account of the Yusufzais' arrival into the valleys of Peshawar and Swat, also presents data showing the existence of more than one power centre (Shah 1971/1987). However, clearer examples of the division of the Swat valley comes from the early 20th century. In the acephalous society of Swat, before the rise of the state (1917-69) (Sultan-i-Rome 2008), the concept of various power bases was embedded to the *ḍala* system. The whole Swat at macro level was characterised by two *ḍalas*, each one a kaleidoscopic mix of micro level *ḍalas*.[5] The state could not wipe it out. However, the situation was manipulated by the *Walis* in their best interest. The concept and practice of *gharai* (meaning fort and watch tower) owned by the most powerful actors till the early decades of the 20th century, also explains the nature of political power and control, the balance of power, defence and deterrence and the complex system of alliances. With the expansion and consolidation of the Swat state, this phenomenon was replaced by the visibility of state power in the form of forts and *thānas* garrisoned by the *Walis'* forces (for the state forts see Martore and Olivieri 2016). During the early decades of the *Walis'* reign, parallel power and authority was exercised by Habibullah Khan (also known as Darmai Khan) in the Matta area and the Mians of Sar-sardari (Sultan-i-Rome 2008: 98-100). Furthermore, Khan Bahadar Sahib of Matta, though loyal to the *Walis*, had actually his own strong power base. In

the words of Charles Lindholm he 'was a wily and intelligent manipulator' and 'was hardly a puppet' (1996: 81). He had created

> [. . .] in effect, a state within a state in Upper Swat, just as Swat itself existed as a separate state within the British Raj. . . . Khan Bahadur acted as a buffer between the ruler and the abrasive and contentious *khans* of Upper Swat. He monopolized all communication channels to the Badshah and controlled the Pukhtun with his arbitrary judgements and land appropriations (Lindholm 1996: 81).

In this capacity his contributions were crucial as far as the consolidation of state was concerned. Further evidence to the multi power political situation in Swat may be seen in the constant invasions of the Nawab of Dir on the right bank of Swat. Adinzai was also part of the Dir state. Thana and Batkhela were included in the political agency of Malakand since the closing years of the 19th century (Sultan-i-Rome 2008).

Some insights from the modern politics of the Swat valley are helpful in our understanding of the political landscape of the late ancient Swat. As archaeological data in isolation cannot answer some crucial socio-political questions of the period, oral traditions garner great significance. Archaeological remains of Nangrial and Malam-Jaba valley and instances of socio-historical remembrance about them complement each other and show the possible existence of a dominion centred on the hill of Nangrial. For showing the vitality of the argument, analogous cases from the 20th century Swat are of great value.

Discussion

Swat of the early four to five centuries of the Common Era is well studied with the help of archaeological and textual sources. However, the succeeding period till the advent of the Muslims in the beginning of the 11th century has been obscure due to a lack of sufficient data. There have been some successes linked to new archaeological data and the theoretical insights over the last ten to fifteen years. The present study has argued that multidisciplinary programmes such as coordinating archaeological, oral and

analogical data can give new perspectives and understanding. In this respect, Nangrial and its environs, as a case, have been studied here and all the three types of data indicate the possibility of the actuality of different centres of power in the late antiquity Swat. The presence of the Śāhi period coins and built heritage may not be taken as evidence of Śāhis' strong hold during and a little before the invasion of Mahmud Ghaznavi's forces over Swat. Swat, thus, may not be seen as a single political unit. It seems as divided amongst many of petty chiefs and rulers having complex political and diplomatic relations with each other.

The data are of interest from the viewpoint of memory studies and folklore. It is undeniable that some of it stems from historical facts (parallel examples can be seen in Henige 1982; Silva 2015; Vansina 1985). In the data concerning Nangrial, Nangra's sisters' association with Dharmala and Banjpora, his daughter's linking with Baghrai-gata and Akhwar-china as his stable are issues which fit in Henige's category of stark distinction with archaeological sources. Padmapāṇi's statue as perceived to be Nangra's daughter's image is extremely spurious and shows how historical and archaeological facts sometimes lose sense in a different socio-cultural and temporal context. In the framework of 'mnemonic socialization' the data are characterised both by remembrance and forgetting. The memory of Nangra (Nagara), Bazar, water line and opulence is embedded into the mnemonic objects comprising archaeological remains. The first two are popularly known in their tradition-like capacity while the third and fourth situations, in addition archaeological structures, have resulted from agricultural and treasure hunting activities producing coins, sculptures, beads, etc. Similarly, the division of the mountain into Banjpora and Dharmala, if divested of its mythical association with Nangra's sisters of the same names, points to the traditional boundary of *daftar* between the villages of Ser and Talegram. The royalty's connection with different parts of land, as toponyms show, may be seen in terms of royal control, possession, property rights and management. Furthermore, social memory about rock reliefs as images of the so-called Nangra and/or his relatives might preserve political

involvement with production of this late Buddhist art. As such, another speculation may also be permitted. About the kernel representation of Avalokiteśvara/Padmapāṇi, surrounded by Gaṇeśa and Gandharvas, Anna Filigenzi observes that '[e]very feature of the scene alludes to a victorious event' (Filigenzi 2000-2001: 260). Shall one wonder to conjure up a combined religio-political victory with respect to this visual narrative? Could it be seen as an evidence of Nangrial's elites' association with the late form of Buddhism? These and many other such questions need further investigation.

Notwithstanding the above, much information about the socio-cultural life in the ancient Malam-Jaba valley has been forgotten. The forgetfulness is two-fold and for its explanation careless use of Nora's concepts of *lieux de mémoire* and *milieu de mémoire* may be made. First, the archaeological landscape of Nangrial no doubt lacks *milieu de mémoire*. No evidence is available in either shape about economic patterns, administrative machinery, religious concerns etc. Second, it has also undergone fundamental transformation in its character of being *lieux de mémoire*. The continuous process of transformation and mutability of oral traditions necessitates analysing them in the *longue durée*. Owing to valuable results provided by such laborious investigations, 'several authors have argued for the archaeologically verifiable reality of oral histories' (Silva 2015: 164-165). Fabio Silva maintains that some elements of folklore and archaeology appear congruent despite considerable temporal divide and phenomenal transformative events in the long term. His study (2015) of the Neolithic Iberians living 6000 years ago in the Mondego river valley in Portugal and a folktale explaining 'the name of *Serra da Estrela*, a mountain range in central Portugal' demonstrates the prehistoric phenomenon as the likely source of the tale. His diachronic analysis led him to observe:

> Any one of these socio-cultural transformations could have severed the ethno-historic links between the indigenous Neolithic populations and the present-day story tellers (for instance, in the presence of the total population replacement). As such to

find congruence between an archaeologically derived Neolithic reality and present-day European folklore is not only to recognize the possibility of social memory surviving in the longue durée and through several possible transformations, but also to rethink how we have approached it (Silva 2015: 159).

These insights make it understandable that reliefs of Buddhist deities and other structures at Nangrial and its environs do not transmit memory to the present-day Muslims of the area in the same way as they were capable of doing so previously (for the meaning of Buddhist rock art see, Filigenzi 2015). Now these *lieux de mémoire* make not merely a *socio-religious* but also a *temporal other*. Thus, all this forgetfulness, save the market place 'Bazar' and power centre 'Nangrial', may be understood in the historico-cultural process of 'otherizing' in the *longue durée*. And the process of 'otherizing' has its own socio-religious context – for instance, the advent of Islam and its ideological and political conflict with local faiths,[6] the arrival of Yusufzai Pukhtuns and the puritanical programme of some Muslim sects – over the last millennium. Despite all this, social/collective memory in relation to Nangrial still presents cues for speculating about the possibility of a complex political landscape during the late ancient Swat. The existence of the historic castle at Nangrial spur also finds reflection in the name of a hamlet, *Qal'a* (a Persian word for fort), at a point on the southern bottom of the hill. Similarly, contiguous to it in its north-east the Sulti-bandai hamlet may also preserve memory of the Nangrial principality. Sulti seems to be a derivative of *sultan* (ruler/chief) or *sultanat* (kingdom/empire) and *bandai* means village or even a pasture-like hamlet. Further data in this respect can be produced in future research.

Conclusions

The ancient history of Swat, especially its late antiquity, is not only almost deficient in written record for making historical reflections but its archaeology is also marred by such a dearth. Combined they have offered a little evidence for scholarly use. Many problems could hardly be addressed through recourse to this data. This paper, therefore, presents a new type of data, variously known as oral history, social remembrance or collective memory. The archaeology of Nangrial mountain and its surrounding small valleys has been, therefore, reflected upon with a conceptual understanding of the complementarity between orality and materiality. It has been shown that oral traditions could be a source of sufficient value addition, if carefully treated, in archaeological research. Swat in the late antiquity has been seen as a politically fragmented landscape. It has been argued that the valley since the seventh century onward was not a centralised political unit. Various principalities and chiefdoms seem to have had existed at the time and Nangrial was one amongst them. This suggestion is based on the highly complex and important archaeological ruins – stupa remains, rock reliefs, a Śāhi period castle, the Jahanabad Buddhist complex etc. – in its extended environs. Traces of an extended network of defense, i.e. entry points and watch towers, also furnish valuable information about the possible existence of the Nangrial principality. All this is complemented by oral data. The very memory of Nangra hints to the area's political significance. Moreover, the area remembered as Bazar also evidences socio-political centrality of Nangrial. This study also demonstrates that though valuable for historical reflections, oral data suffers from some shortcomings due to the process of continuous transmission in the *longue durée*. Hence some distorted images vis-à-vis the historical landscape are found.

All this necessitates a careful engagement with and integration of oral, textual and archaeological data. The archaeology of Nangrial is greatly familiar to scholarly world. Nonetheless, to inhabitants of the area it gives an imagery which is all about a socio-religious and political other. And this otherisation has faded, and distorted, some social context of these traces from the past. As a result, we have an archaeology of conflict. However, for a researcher there is no question about the extreme significance of oral data and both oral and archaeological data entail complementary dimensions. Pursuing this line of inquiry is needed with respect to studying the late historic Swat, and other parts of the Indian subcontinent for that matter.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. Till the mid-20th century, Ghwarbandis and Kohistanis used to access urban areas of Swat via Malam-Jaba valley. Resting-places, locally called *mandahai* (which no more exist but this author has collected information about three, two in Ser and one in Kishawra), would provide minimal facilities to these small caravans (personal communication with a number of elder persons over the years). Even Stein also noticed during his survey in 1926 these people using the Malam-Jaba valley route (for details see Khan 2011). Modern road systems have effected fundamental changes as far as traditional communication networks are concerned.

2. It seems that in Pashto sound of 'n' is added before 'g' as is possible concerning '*nagar*' as '*nangar*'. Another such word is '*magar*' (Urdu) which is pronounced by the illiterate as '*mangar*'.

3. These possibilities are suggested with the help of analogical parallels such as Shambhala (place of silence or peace) and Dharmala (place of dharma).

4. This is a popular meaning especially in relation to Rājagṛiha as the capital of Magadha. And this is the reconstruction by Abdur Rahman with respect to Raja-gira (1997-1998: 39, n. 11). However, a recent study revisits this toponym. Raja-gira is related with the locality of Giri and Giri fort mentioned by Arabic and Persian sources of the early centuries of the last millennium in relation to political and historical implications for the Ghaznavid royal house (Bagnera 2015: 49ff.).

5. Generally the words party and faction are used for the word and concept of *ḍala*. 'However, the word party and faction does not give the sense which the term *ḍala* does' (Sultan-i-Rome 2008: 325).

6. There is also a Muslim shrine towards the eastern limit of Nangrial spur. It is locally venerated as *shaheed* (martyr). Shrines of *shaheeds* can be frequently encountered in Swat. No more information is generally known about them except their memory of martyrdom while fighting against infidels. The *shaheed* at Nangrial may be taken as a historical reference to Muslim invasion of the Malam-Jaba valley. In the extended environs of Nangrial, a number of such cases can be seen. At the moment they seem as preceding the Yusufzais' arrival.

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