



KEYWORDS: *Shatial Das – Kohistan – Indus River – Non-Buddhist petroglyph – Pakistan*

CONTEXTUALISATION OF PETROGLYPHS AT SHATIAL DAS, UPPER KOHISTAN, PAKISTAN

Muhammad Zahir, Ijaz Khan, Feryal Ali Gauhar and M. Shahid Khan Khalil

Abstract. This paper presents newly found petroglyphs in the vicinity of Shatial village, at the Shatial Das site, in District Upper Kohistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan. An initial survey of these petroglyphs suggests that they belong to the late pre-Historic/proto-Historic and early Historic periods. These petroglyphs are dominated by the representation of footprints, 'ibexes/markhors', 'horses', 'hunting scenes', 'horse riding scenes', individual standing figures, a possible chariot drawing, and an inscription in Kharoshthi script. Unlike the previously discovered nearby rock art sites at Shatial with dominant Buddhist religious symbols, the petroglyphs at Shatial Das did not have a single representation of a Buddhist-inspired symbol. Furthermore, the discovery of possible late pre-Historic and early Historic petroglyphs at Shatial Das also problematises the previous dating of the petroglyphs in the Shatial region from the 3rd to 8th centuries CE. These new findings shed light on the possible re-routing of ancient access and communication routes and the Indus River crossings during the mid-1st millennium CE from Shatial Das to Shatial.

Introduction

In the absence of systematic explorations and excavations, the archaeology of the northern regions of Pakistan is poorly understood and contextualised within south Asian archaeology. Consequently, the region's history and archaeological phenomena are primarily reconstructed by studying thousands of petroglyphs and inscriptions recorded along the Indus River. These

petroglyphs and inscriptions furnish important datasets on the region's pre-History and History and its connections with the neighbouring regions of south Asia, central Asia and China through the ancient silk routes that passed through it. The present paper attempts to contextualise the newly found petroglyphs at the site of Shatial Das within the regional archaeological contexts.

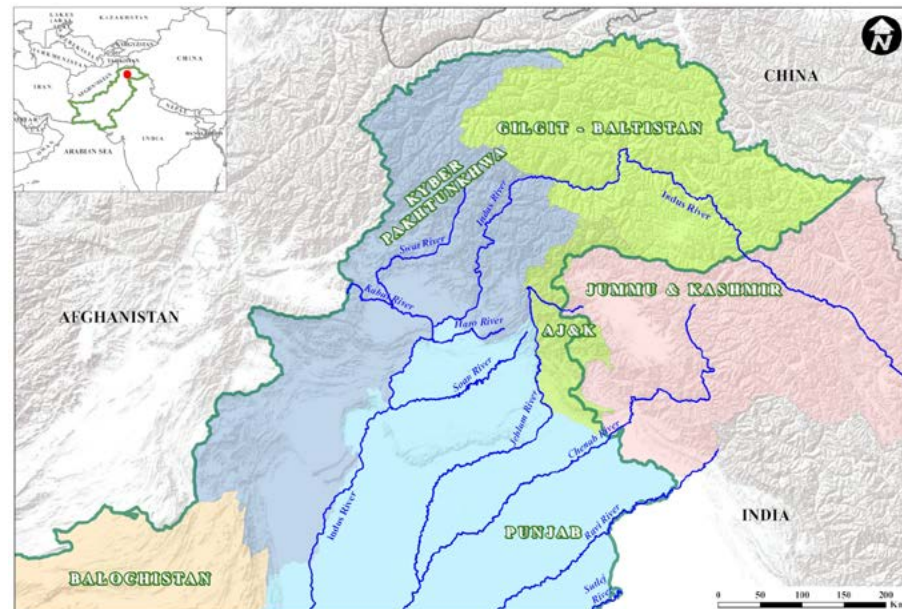


Figure 1. Map of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan.

Shatial is a small village in a remote eastern part of District Upper Kohistan of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. District Kohistan (meaning 'the land of the mountains') was carved out of the then North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) in 1976, with an estimated 7492 km² in area. Later in 2014, this district was subdivided into Upper and Lower Kohistan districts (Figs 1 and 2). Kohistan is also known as the Indus Kohistan region (Stein A. 1942: 50; Jettmar 1961a: 98; Dichter 1967: 53; Dani 1991: 76; Nasim Khan 1997–1998; Frembgen 1999; Hauptmann 2008: 352). The division of Kohistan into Indus Kohistan and Swat Kohistan is due to its 'geo-

graphical contiguity' with the Indus and Swat River systems, respectively (Dichter 1967: 53).

During the early 20th century CE, the Kohistan region was synonymous with the historical entity of Yaghistan; however, in the late 19th century CE, the term Yaghistan also signified the regions of Bajaur, Swat and Dir of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (Moonshee 1868–1869; Pundit 1870: 36–38; Tanner 1881: 278; Sökefeld 2002: 305). During the latter part of the 20th century CE, and under British rule, Yaghistan came to be equated primarily with the un-administered region of Kohistan (Dani 1991: 6; Frembgen 1999: 71). At that time, Yaghistan meant the territories of the 'free' or 'wild' people or 'rebels' of the states

(Dani 1991: 77; Frembgen 1999: 70, 2008: 2). This region was considered '*terra incognita*' during the British period (Stein A. 1928: 1; Dani 1991: 162; Frembgen 1999: 73; Sökefeld 2002: 305; the italics are Stein's 1928). The region of Kohistan was also known as 'Shinkari' due to the presence of Shina language speakers (Stein M. A. 1907: 17; Jettmar 1961a: 98). This region was never fully conquered or occupied by British India and remained a blank spot on Asia's linguistic and cultural map (Jettmar 1983: 501). Islam is believed to have arrived between the 16th and 18th centuries CE in this region (Frembgen 1999: 83, 2008: 258; Hauptmann 2008: 353).

The Indus River roughly divides the Indus Kohistan region into the southeastern and northwestern parts of Kohistan (Fig. 2). After World War II, the Kohistani regions on the western side of the Indus River became part of the Swat State and were ruled efficiently by the ruler of Swat (Jettmar 1961a: 98). However, by then, the name of Yaghistan was only reserved for the Kohistani regions to the east of the Indus River (Dani 1991: 277); western Kohistan had ceased to be identified with Yaghistan and was under the sway of the Swat state.

Before the 19th and 20th centuries CE, the political and social structures of Kohistan remained largely unknown. However, their system of governance was considered democratic and autonomous rather than monarchic as practised in its neighbouring kingdoms of Swat, Gilgit and Chitral (Dani 1991: 65). The system of government was referred to as the 'valley republics', consisting of close-knit independent valleys (Biddulph 1880: 17; Stein M. A. 1907: 17; Stein A. 1916: 100–101, 103, 1928: 4, 16; Jettmar 1983: 501; Dani 1991: 65, 76, 78; Kreuzmann 1991: 714; Frembgen 1999: 77;). This system was also studied as the 'segmentary republics' by Karl Jettmar (Jettmar 1983: 509; Frembgen 1999: 77). This type of government did not need or allow a

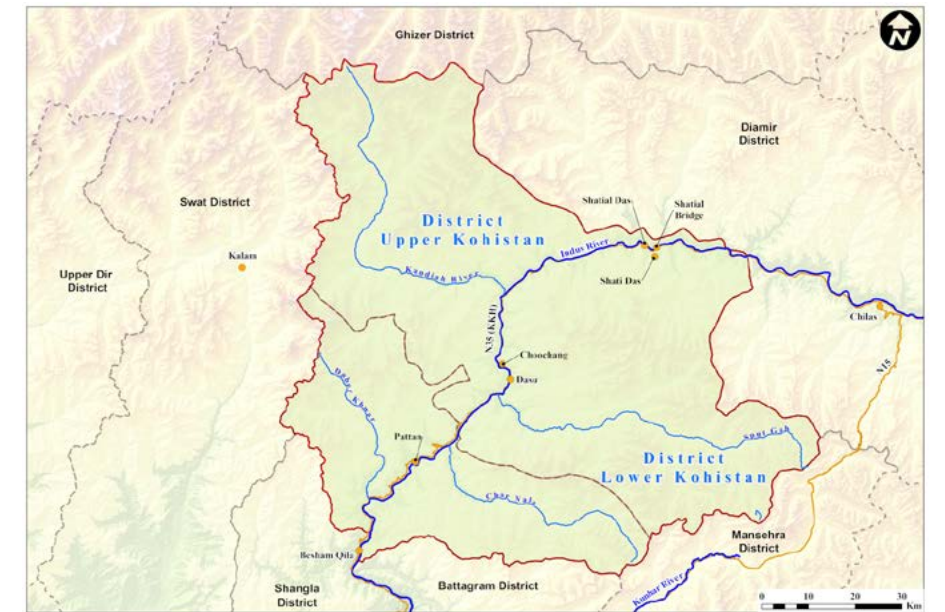


Figure 2. Map of the Upper and Lower Kohistan districts, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province.

permanent ruler but was instead based upon elected representatives and administrators (Dani 1991: 65). This system was also considered the hallmark of the Dard communities living along the Indus River (Stein M. A. 1907: 17; Stein A. 1916: 100, 1928: 1).

The system of government is the same in all these small republics, and differs somewhat from what obtains among the Afghans. Each village, according to its size, has a certain number of Jushteros, or elders, who are appointed according to the general estimation in which they are held for bravery, liberality, and eloquence. They receive no benefit from their office, and are more the servants than the leaders of those they represent. Each village manages its own affairs irrespective of its neighbours, and it is in the superintendence of these details that the Jushteros are mostly occupied. All matters affecting the village are discussed in public. [...] At the close of the general discussion, which is open as before, a loud whistle is given, after which none but the representative Jushteros are allowed to speak. If war with a neighbouring valley is determined on, the Jushteros settle the way in which those they represent shall take part in it; [...] In more serious disputes the whole valley makes common cause against its neighbours; but this does not prevent all the communities combining, when threatened by an external foe (Biddulph 1880: 17).

Within the archaeology of northern Pakistan, Kohistan is known for the discovery of a large number of petroglyphs, primarily Buddhist in nature, at three sites near Shatial village. These sites (Shatial I, II and III) are located on the southern bank of the Indus River and to the east of the present Shatial Bazar. These sites were documented by the Pak-German Archaeological Mission to Northern Areas of Pakistan (PGAMNAP), under the guidance of Karl Jettmar, Ahmad Hasan Dani and Harald Hauptmann. These sites are primarily located around the Shatial Bridge, which is considered



Figure 3. General landscape settings of Shatial Das.

to have served as a significant crossing juncture on the Indus River from 3rd to 8th century CE, connecting the regions of Kashmir and Hazara with Swat valley and beyond. These petroglyphs are exclusively documented on the southern bank of the Indus River, as no petroglyphs have been discovered on the southern and western bank of the Indus River in Kohistan.

The Shatial Das site is located about 4 km to the west or downstream of the Shatial Bridge and about 200 m downstream of the Shatial Forest and Frontier Corps check posts. The Shatial Das site runs parallel to the Indus River and Karakoram Highway at around 800 m above mean sea level (Fig. 3). Shatial Das, literally meaning 'the plains of Shatial' in Kohistani language, is a piedmont fan of the relatively small mountains to the south of the site. Part of the site has now been

converted into agricultural terraces for seasonal or rainwater-based agriculture, while the un-irrigated part of the site has been converted into fake agricultural terraces in the hope of receiving better compensation from the Dasu Hydroelectric Project under construction on the Indus River. Furthermore, the Indus River appears to be responsible for most sandy alluvial deposits at Shatial Das, although some sand seems to have been deposited through wind. At present, rocks with petroglyphs are sporadically spread across the site's 630 m length. A Government primary and high school for Shatial village has been built at the centre and the south-eastern edge of the site, and its construction seems to have destroyed the site's core area. It is plausible to assume that some other boulders with petroglyphs might have been lost due to the site's proximity to the Indus River, erosion and vulnerability to major floods. A few areas exhibit a relatively high intensity of petroglyphs (Fig. 4). However, the concentration of the rocks with petroglyphs is much lower at Shatial Das when compared with the site of Shatial I, near the Shatial Bridge, decreasing from east to west at Shatial Das. An investigation of the petroglyphs at Shatial Das and the available literature suggests that the petroglyphs had not been previously published by the Pakistani and German researchers who had worked in this region from the 1980s till 2013. The present paper contextualises the finding of petroglyphs at Shatial Das and argues that these represent the earliest known petroglyphs in the Kohistan region.

Brief overview of rock art studies in Pakistan

The Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan is home to one of the largest rock art provinces of the world (Anati 1983: 27; Jettmar 2002: 80; Sardar 2005: 9). The primary evidence for petroglyphs in Pakistan comes from this region and these range in time from the pre-Historic period to the 18th century CE (Hallier 1991: 2). The extensive petroglyphs in northern Pakistan have been characterised as the oversized 'guestbook of the silk routes' (Jettmar 1983;



Figure 4. The main boulder with petroglyphs at Shatial Das.

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Hauptmann 2008: 352). The petroglyphs in the region include pre-Historic, Bronze Age, Historic petroglyphs of the Buddhist and Hindu pantheons and thousands of inscriptions in Kharoshthi, Brahmi, Sogdian, Chinese and Hebrew scripts.

The first historical reference to the petroglyph tradition in Pakistan originated from the first quarter of the 6th century CE when the Chinese monk Song Yun ordered the construction of a stupa and a carving in northern Pakistan (Jenner 1981: 263; cf. Fussman 1994a: 18). However, the first direct historical reference to petroglyphs in north-western Pakistan was recorded by the illustrious Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang at the beginning of the 7th century CE. Xuanzang noted the presence of two petroglyphs at King Kanishka's famous stupa at Shah-ji-ki-dheri, Peshawar (Beal 1884: 101).

John Biddulph was the first European to record Buddhist stupa petroglyphs in northern and north-western Pakistan in Koosht valley of Chitral (Biddulph 1880: 109). The Austro-Hungarian adventurer Karl Eugen von Ujfalvy was the first European in 1884 to record the presence of petroglyphs in the Gilgit-Baltistan region (von Ujfalvy 1884: 247-269; Jettmar 1989; Fussman 1994a, 1994b; Hauptmann 2008; van Aerde 2019: 458).

Ghulam Muhammad was the first native scholar to document the Buddhist petroglyphs at Chilas in the Diamer region (Muhammad 1905; Nasim Khan 1997-1998: 35; Sardar 2005: 9). In 1944, Marc Aurel Stein, one of the most celebrated Victorian explorers and archaeologists, published the Buddhist petroglyphs at Chilas (Stein M. A. 1944). The Austrian scholar Karl Jettmar initiated systematic research in the Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan in 1973. The petroglyphs' systematic research and documentation started after constructing the Karakoram Highway, following the ancient silk routes and connecting Pakistan with China (Dani 1991: 9).

The collaboration between Jettmar from Heidelberg Academy for Humanities and Sciences, Germany, and Dani from the University of Islamabad (later renamed as Quaid-i-Azam University), Islamabad, led to the establishment of the Pak-German Research Project, in collaboration with the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan. In 1984, this collaborative research project was renamed 'Felsbilder und Inschriften am Karakorum Highway' (Rock art and inscriptions along the Karakoram Highway). Jettmar led it until 1989 (Bandini-König et al. 1997: 31). Harald Hauptmann from the Heidelberg Academy for the Humanities and Sciences, Germany, took charge of the project from Jettmar in 1989 and ran the project till 2013. This project led to the documentation of around 50 000 petroglyphs and 5000 inscriptions in northern Pakistan.

Beyond Gilgit-Baltistan, petroglyphs and rock paintings have been discovered in the adjoining regions of Swat, Chitral and Dir — along with evidence of rock art from Bajaur and Mohmand districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, northern and central Punjab

province, and Sindh and Balochistan provinces of Pakistan (Stein A. 1921; Gordon and Gordon 1941; Tucci 1958: 292; Qamar 1986; Olivieri 1998: 57, 2013; Khan et al. 1999-2000; Ali et al. 2005; Mohammadzai 2005; Sardar 2005; Kalhor 2009, 2011; Kakar et al. 2017; Khan and Khan 2017). Within the archaeology of Pakistan, the study of rock art has not received much scholarly attention, and except for a few important works (such as Bemmman and Bandini-König 1994; Fussman 1994a; Bandini-König et al. 1997; Fussman and Bandini-König 1997; Nasim Khan 1998; Olivieri 1998, 2013; Bandini-König 2003; Bemmman 2005), most of the studies are partial and lack in-depth analysis of the historical and archaeological contexts. However, this situation is changing as many young archaeologists are undertaking studies in the rock art of Pakistan (for example, Iqbal 2014; Ali I. 2017; Ali Z. H. 2017; Baig I. U. 2017; Baig K. U. 2017; Khan A. G. 2018).

Petroglyphs at Shatial Das

The present authors stumbled upon the petroglyphs at the Shatial Das site *en route* to the Shatial I and II sites as part of establishing the Cultural Heritage Management Plan (CHMP) of the Dasu Hydropower Project — a major hydroelectric dam project on the Indus River in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Pakistan. During the first and two subsequent visits to the site, the authors identified dozens of petroglyphs pecked on large and small boulders at Shatial Das. The documentation, conducted through digital photography, suggested that the site was mainly used during the late pre-Historic and early Historic periods — and that the area was abandoned, or only partially used, before the dominance of Buddhism in the region.

The corpus of petroglyphs at Shatial Das includes many 'footprints', 'ibex/markhor', 'horses', presumed hunting scenes and horse-riding scenes, individual standing 'human' figures and 'horse-riders', a possible rudimentary chariot drawing and an inscription in Kharoshthi script. Due to the absence of contemporary knowledge of archaeology, or rather buried/subsurface archaeology, of the region, these petroglyphs at Shatial Das can not be adequately contextualised. However, based upon the varnish on the surface of rocks and petroglyphs and the subject matter, the petroglyphs can be classified into two groups. The first group of petroglyphs have a thick varnish, and it is not easy to distinguish them from unmarked rock surfaces. They possibly belong to the late pre-Historic and proto-Historic periods of the region.

A group of four pairs and two separate 'footprints' were documented on top of the main rock at the site. These were executed in outline by direct percussion technique and without the provision of details, such as toes (Fig. 5). These 'footprints' seem to occur in pairs, but two individual examples were also recorded. Foot and handprints have been documented from other rock art sites in relatively close proximity to the Shatial Das, such as at Oshibat and Dadam Das, in Gilgit-Baltistan



Figure 5. Petroglyphs of 'footprints' at Shatial Das.



Figure 6. Early 'hand and footprints' at Oshibat site, Diامر district.



Figure 7. Pre-Historic 'ibex/markhor' petroglyph, Shatial Das.



Figure 8. Possible late pre-Historic/Bronze Age ibex/markhor with short horns, Shatial Das.

(Fig. 6). Generally, the hand and footprints in outline are dated to the late pre-Historic period of the region compared to the earlier compact and relatively realistic representation. Thus, 'footprints' at Shatial Das could be dated to the late pre-Historic period of the region. The representations of hand and footprints were linked with the presence of the humans at the site and as their 'personal marks' (Hauptmann 2007: 25). Hauptmann, without the application of any scientific dating regime, attributed the hand and footprints to the 6th–5th millennium BCE; however, the authors believe that these early hand and footprints may belong to even earlier epochs as probable Middle Palaeolithic stone tools have recently been discovered close to these sites in Diامر by the first author.

A total of twenty 'ibex/markhor' were documented at the site. Almost all these figures at Shatial Das appear static. The earliest pre-Historic representation of the 'ibex/markhor or mountain goats' is by at least two complete and one partially drawn petroglyphs with large triangular bodies, large curved horns, conjoined legs and short upturned tails. Slight movement of the zoomorphs is indicated by the representation of separate hooves (Fig. 7). The petroglyphs of bi-triangular

bodied ibex/markhor have tentatively been dated from the 2nd–1st millennium BCE in the neighbouring Swat Valley (Khan, N. A. 1983: 59–60).

The second group of 'ibex/markhor' petroglyphs, and possibly contemporary with the footprints, have thin bodies, were represented by a thick line with relatively short horns, straight and/or upturned tails and separately drawn legs (Fig. 8). These petroglyphs resemble the presumed late pre-Historic and Bronze Age petroglyphs from the nearby region of Yasin Valley in Gilgit-Baltistan (Hallier 1991: 12–13).

Five individual anthropomorphs were recorded at the site. These 'human' figures are usually represented in standing position with wide-open legs and outstretched arms and sometimes seem to hold objects, possibly bows (Figs. 9). 'Hunters' with simple 'bows' have been attributed to the late pre-Historic period of the region (Hauptmann 2007: 25).

The second group of petroglyphs exhibit light varnish compared to the first group and might belong to the early Historic period. These petroglyphs included anthropomorphs with zoomorphs, 'horse riding scenes', standing 'ibex/markhor' figures, and a possible simple chariot drawing connected with a 'horse' figure.



Figure 9. Late pre-Historic 'human' petroglyph, Shatial Das.



Figure 10. 'Horse rider' at Shatial Das.

The 'horses' are represented with separate legs (except for one where the front legs were shown conjoined; Fig. 10), short mane and ears, and long downward curved tails (Fig. 11). The 'riders' are usually holding the 'reins of the horse' in the right hand. The bodies of the 'horses' are sometimes shown elongated or stretched. Contemporary horse populations in Upper Kohistan and the neighbouring district of Diامر consist of the local breed of horses with short heights (or ponies) and large central Asian/Arabian horses. The presence of central Asian breeds in the region could be the result of the trade of particular breeds of prized horses from the interior parts of Eurasia, particularly from the Fergana region (Pietrowiak 2021) or Uzbekistan to China from 1st–2nd century BCE because of the establishment of the trade through the silk routes.

A possible rudimentary chariot with two wheels was recorded within proximity of these horse riders and on top of the main rock at the site (Fig. 12). Two 'horses', without riders, were also represented on either side of the possible chariot. At least one of the 'horses' appears to be attached to the 'chariot'. The presumed chariot consists of a complex structure but is not fully discernible. The 'wheels', differing in size, possibly due to the position on the rock surface, were provided with five or six spokes. A possible human figure was also represented close to the larger 'wheel'.

The chariots were primarily favoured in the 2nd millennium BCE contexts in central Asia and Mongolia, and they fell out of fashion/use during the 1st millennium BCE. Therefore, the representation of the possible chariot at Shatial Das may reflect

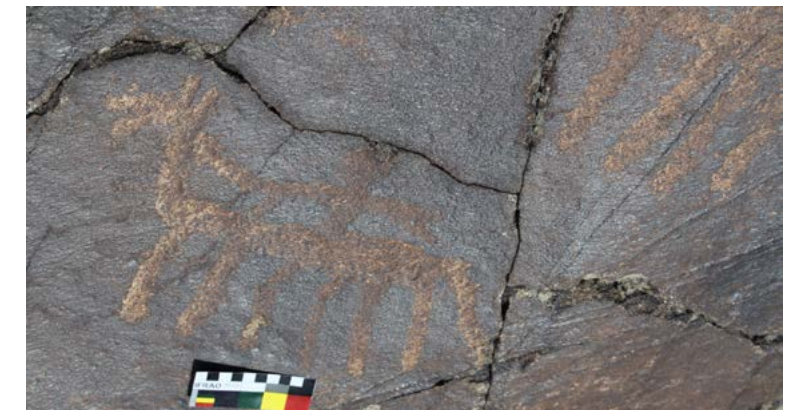


Figure 11. 'Horse rider', with an elongated body of the 'horse', at Shatial Das.



Figure 12. Possible rudimentary chariot petroglyph at Shatial Das.

the arrival of the concept of actual chariots and people from central Asia during the 2nd millennium BCE. Thus, the possible chariot could be dated from the 2nd millennium BCE and not later than the mid-1st millennium BCE. Hauptmann (2008: 353) argued that [w]e can only assign some rare rock art examples of wild animals or hunting scenes, and some depiction of chariots, to the 2nd

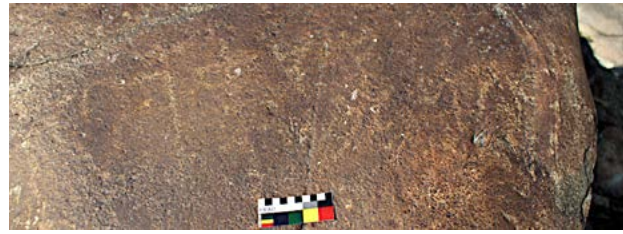


Figure 13. Kharoshthi inscription at Shatial Das.

millennium [BCE].

Dani (1991: 136) stated that the images of horse riders in the petroglyph tradition of northern Pakistan started around the latter half of the 5th century CE. Dani considered these to be the representations of the Huns in the region (Dani 1991: 136). He further explained that Huns 'ride on horseback, stand on running horses, shoot from running horses, play on horseback' (Dani 1991: 136). However, the direct equation of horse riders or horse-riding petroglyphs with Huns in the absence of archaeological and historical evidence in northern Pakistan, as suggested by Dani, shall be viewed with caution. Horse riding was not an exclusive proprietary of the Huns, and the concept and tradition of horse riding or horse riders seems to have been introduced much earlier than the Huns in northern south Asia. Direct evidence of horse burials and horse/donkey bones have been recorded from 2nd–1st millennium BCE archaeological contexts from nearby Swat valley (Bernhard 1968: 300–314; 370; Silvi Antonini and Stacul 1972: 288, 291; Azzaroli 1975: 353–355; Compagnoni 1987: 140; Young 2003: 45).

Hauptmann has understood the cruder petroglyphs of riders and horses, especially those riders standing on horses, as a later phenomenon, following the demise of the Golden Age of Buddhism (Hauptmann 2007: 35, 2008: 357). These riders carry 'axes' in their hands and have been referred to as 'the Battle-Axe people', dated after the 9th–10th centuries CE and these were considered the possible ancestors of the current inhabitants of the region (Hauptmann 2007: 35, 2008: 357). Axes of the same shape and style were found to be in use by the communities in Diامر in the 20th century. However, these newly discovered horse-riders were not of the so-called 'Battle Axe people', and they did not carry axes. They seemed to be chronologically earlier than the Buddhist petroglyphs at the Shatial sites. Some of the Buddhist petroglyphs, such as a stupa at Chilas Bridge in District Diامر, Gilgit-Baltistan, were pounded on top of an earlier made image of a 'horse-rider' (Bandini-König 2003: 81). This can be interpreted as evidence of an earlier date for horse-rider petroglyphs than the introduction of Buddhism in the region.

As part of the second group of petroglyphs, an un-deciphered inscription in Kharoshthi script, consisting of two lines and 14 words, was also recorded on a relatively small boulder on the southern edge of the site (Fig. 13). This inscription was similarly varnished as the figures in the second group of petroglyphs

at the site. The Kharoshthi script was introduced in north-western Pakistan (that is, Gandhara) when it was one of the provinces of the Achaemenid Empire of Persia in the mid-1st millennium BCE. Although detailed palaeographic studies have not been conducted, this inscription probably belongs to the late 1st millennium BCE or the first centuries of the 1st millennium CE.

Contextualisation of Shatial Das petroglyphs

The Upper Kohistan District is one of the most rugged mountainous regions of north-western Pakistan. In this area, cultural and past and present subsistence activities have primarily involved the few plains, mountain slopes, small river valleys, and the banks of the Indus River. The river is the main artery, draining all the small and medium-sized perennial and seasonal streams in the district. However, the Indus River, primarily running in its deep gorge in this area, plays a minimal role in the lives and subsistence strategies of the people of Kohistan. It has acted as a 'natural boundary for centuries' between the two parts of the Kohistan region (Hallberg 1992: 87). People living on either side of the Indus River in Kohistan spoke either different languages or dialects of the same languages, suggesting that the people on either side of the Indus River had limited interactions in the past (Hallberg 1992: 85, 87). The construction of the Karakoram Highway led to the building of bridges on the Indus River in the last quarter of the 20th century, facilitating inter and intra-valley communications (Hallberg 1992: 85, 87). Past activities on opposite sides of the Indus River may or may not represent similar cultural or chronological phenomena and meanings. Detailed archaeological and historical investigations, supported by rigorous methodologies, theoretical frameworks and interpretative regimes, are needed on both sides of the Indus River to explore the nature and extent of their relationships in the past.

With a scarcity of agricultural land, water and rainfall in this area, the people of Upper Kohistan district almost exclusively engage in animal husbandry, especially goat and sheep farming. The residents of Kohistan have practised summer and winter transhumance since time immemorial. In summers, when the main Kohistan valley becomes extremely hot, most of its inhabitants living around the Indus River migrate to high altitude small tributary river-valleys that are relatively cool and green (Barth 1956: 1081–1082; Dichter 1967: 54; Frembgen 1999: 74–75). Despite its harsh climate, the Upper and Lower Kohistan districts were instrumental in silk routes that connected south Asia with China, central Asia, and Europe.

The Upper Kohistan District is strategically located in the middle of the Kashmir, Gilgit-Baltistan, Mansehra and Swat valleys; however, this region's archaeology and early history are almost unknown and unexplored. The region had remained out of bounds for outsiders and researchers, even from as early as British colonial times. It was not until 1979, after the opening of the

Karakoram Highway, that the region became accessible to outsiders, and limited archaeological research could be undertaken. The area was known for its resistance to centralised governance and its indigenous political system. To this point, assumptions had led outsiders to perceive the region as ungovernable until the beginning of the 20th century CE. The British were unable to subjugate or own the region fully — it enjoyed partial independence until 1947 (Fussman and Bandini-König 1997: 3).

As the inhabitants of this region were generally considered hostile to outsiders, archaeological explorations in Kohistan were almost forbidden, and hence the archaeological knowledge of the region remained limited. It is equally true that the region's archaeology is devoid of spectacular finds or sites compared to the surrounding regions, such as the Swat valley, that could have evoked the sustained interest of archaeologists. During the 19th century CE, British military/political officials such as David Lockhart Robertson Lorimer and John Biddulph, who had left incredible records of all the adjoining regions, were hardly interested in the area's antiquities (Fussman and Bandini-König 1997: 3). Dani reported a bronze ibex in the 'Scytho-Siberian animal style' from Kandia valley of the Kohistan and dated it to the 1st millennium BCE (Dani 1983; Mughal 1985: 216).

Kohistan became part of the archaeological discussion of northern Pakistan after the discovery of petroglyphs at Shatial and the so-called Scythian gold ornaments from the town of Pattan, about 90 km downstream of Shatial. The gold ornaments, consisting of a hollow bangle and a heavy girdle or necklace, were found by a local shepherdess (Hameed 2015: 73; Nasim Khan 1997–1998: 127; Rahaman 1990: 5). The heavy gold ornament, weighing approximately 16 kg, was broken into 11 relatively large and 46 small pieces by the local goldsmith (Nasim Khan 1997–1998: 127). The hollow bangle was lost to perpetuity (Rahaman 1990: 6; Nasim Khan 1997–1998: 127). In addition, 2 kg of the gold girdle was also lost during the process and was not reported or recovered by police. Thus, gold pieces weighing a little over 14 kg were salvaged from the goldsmith and were handed over to the Peshawar Museum, Peshawar. These ornaments are now stored in the State Bank of Pakistan as the property of the Peshawar Museum.

The gold ornaments were exquisitely decorated with floral, animal and human representations akin to the Scythian gold ornaments and their decorative and representative styles (Dani 1990: 16; Nasim Khan 1997–1998: 132; Hameed 2015). The gold ornaments were variously dated from 1st century BCE (Dani 1990: 17; Nasim Khan 1997–1998: 132) to 1st century CE (Hameed 2015: 80). Dani, a graduate of the Institute of Archaeology when V. Gordon Childe was its director, was an ardent adherent of culture-historical or normative interpretations and he considered, or directly equated, the findings of these ornaments as reflective of

the 'march of the Scythians from Chilas to Taxila' from central Asia (Dani 1990: 17). However, it is essential to note that by this time, no Scythians were moving out of central Asia into south Asia and this particular style of animal representation was used widely, from Xiongnu to the Yuezhi and Iranians.

Although these important and precious ornaments were found at the surface of an archaeological site, no further archaeological investigation was carried out therein.

The site is marked by the remains of an ancient fortress consisting of defensive walls, some residential quarters and watch towers, still visible from the Highway in the bend of the Indus river. Much of the debris has been eroded by rain water, and whatever is left behind shows deposits of potsherds embedded in brownish gritty soil. The site at present is covered by bushy vegetation and at places shows unauthorised diggings by antique hunters (Rahaman 1990: 5).

It is inherently assumed in the current literature that the nature of the ornaments was religious (for example, Nasim Khan 1997–1998) or as part of burial goods (Hameed 2015). However, in the absence of detailed archaeological investigations at the find-spot of the gold ornaments, it is difficult to argue about the nature of the site as a defensive fort, a Scythian burial place or a religious building. Furthermore, it is equally possible that these gold ornaments came from a fortified settlement and that these were possibly not religious or burial objects. The presence of fortified villages was considered a common feature of the settlements in the Kohistan region before the introduction of Islam (Jettmar 1983; Dani 1991: 65; Frembgen 1999: 85). These forts, connected with the Shina language-speaking people of the region, were constructed on difficult-to-reach terrains, such as on mountain-tops (Frembgen 2008: 254).

At least six ancient forts exist in the relatively small Harban valley of the Kohistan region, namely the forts of Hagai-kot, also known as Tairo-kot, Budel-kot or Harban-kot, Galo-kot, Doro-kot, Loto-kot and Shuro-kot (Frembgen 2008: 255–257; italics are in the original). It is also believed, though without any substantial archaeological or historical evidence, that during the period of Islamisation of the region in the 16th–18th centuries CE, the people of the region left their earlier fortified settlements located on strategic heights and that these forts deteriorated into ruins (Jettmar 1983: 511; Frembgen 1999: 85). Considering these small village fortresses as dangerous, the British destroyed them in 1892 (Dani 1991: 79). This destruction might have led to the discontinuation of the local tradition of construction of the fortified villages in the region. However, a recent finding of transhumant settlements at Shati Das, near Shatial, possibly suggests the presence of non-fortified settlements in the early Historic period in the Kohistan region, confirming multiple settlement patterns within the same chronological settings (Zahir et al. 2020).

The Upper and Lower Kohistan districts are strate-

gically located on ancient silk routes, and it may have been a conduit for the movement of people, goods and ideas during the pre-Historic and Historic periods between south Asia, central Asia and China. Chinese Buddhist monks and government officials, who visited northern and north-western south Asia during the 1st millennium CE, left remarkable historical records of the surrounding regions, such as Swat valley, but did not mention the Kohistan region or its Buddhist remains. Evidence of the presence of pockets of large, non-Buddhist, enclaves such as Chitral, during the 1st millennium CE, is slowly emerging in northern and north-western Pakistan (see Zahir 2017). It is possible that most of the Upper and Lower Kohistan districts remained largely non-Buddhist, and possibly hostile to Buddhists during the time of the visits and hence were not visited/mentioned by the Chinese pilgrims and officials. Furthermore, the chronological overlap and differing petroglyph themes between the Shatial I and Shatial Das sites could suggest the existence of two divergent political entities and their border areas, similar to the late Historic valley republics of Kohistan, separated by the small Shatial torrent.

Shatial is considered the starting point of the richest petroglyph assemblages in northern Pakistan, a continuum of sites running parallel for more than one hundred kilometres along the Indus River right up to the Raikot Bridge in District Diamer (Hauptmann 2008: 353). The Shatial petroglyphs were not documented during the construction of the Karakoram Highway in the 1960s and 1970s. These petroglyphs were only discovered when, in 1979, local people took Dani and Jettmar to the site (Fussman and Bandini-König 1997: 3). Since then, five documentation campaigns have been carried out by Pakistani and German researchers to document the site. The Shatial site was subdivided into three sites, Shatial I, II and III (Fussman and Bandini-König 1997: 3). In 1983, under the direction of Jettmar and Thewalt, the boundaries of Shatial I were marked up to the western edge of the Shatial bridge and Shatial III, the middle and the eastern complex, while Shatial II only included the petroglyphs on the ruins (Fussman and Bandini-König 1997: 3) on the north side of the Karakoram Highway.

A total of 224 rocks with petroglyphs were documented at Shatial I, II and III sites. The site originally contained more than one thousand inscriptions and seven hundred petroglyphs (Fussman and Bandini-König 1997; Neelis 2010: 279). Some of these petroglyphs have since been destroyed due to the construction of a link road running through the middle of the Shatial I site from Karakoram Highway to the Shatial Bridge. These petroglyphs are predominantly Buddhist, with representations of stupas, *jataka* or pre-birth story of Buddha and Buddha figures, testifying to the extensive presence of Buddhists and Buddhism at Shatial. At Shatial, most of the inscriptions are carved in Brahmi script and are in the Sogdian language, while some of the Brahmi inscriptions are in Bactrian, Middle

Persian and Parthian languages, dating from the 3rd to 7th century CE. However, the site is best known for representing the *Sibi Jataka*, a story of future Buddha or Bodhisattva in the past as the king of the Sibis, and the donation of his flesh to save the life of a pigeon from a hawk. According to Buddhist mythology, this *jataka* story foreshadowed the test of the future Buddha by the god Sakra — the Indra of gods. The god Visvakarman was transformed into a pigeon, while the god Indra took the hawk's form, chasing the pigeon (Fussman 1994a: 8). This *jataka*, along with elaborate petroglyphs of two stupa structures, famously known as the triptych, made the site of Shatial I an important Buddhist shrine in itself (Fussman 1994a: 8; Neelis 2010: 279; 2012: 19, 2014: 55).

Despite the presence of 91 caprines, including 37 'markhors' (*capra falconeri*), nine 'hunters' and four 'hunting scenes' (Fussman and Bandini-König 1997: 6–28), Hauptmann erroneously argued that ... among the 700 pictorial representations in Shatial, prehistoric animal drawings play such a minor role that Shatial as a Hunter's place in the early days was insignificant (Hauptmann 1997: X).

With the exception of the presence of few pre-Historic animals, most of petroglyphs of the caprines and 'hunters' were believed to be Historic (Fussman and Bandini-König 1997: 28). Additionally, our findings of a relatively large number of possible footprints, ibex/*markhor* images, along with hunting scenes, hunters on horseback and on foot, at the Shatial Das site, suggest a major role for hunters in the region's pre-History.

Evidence of the pre-Historic stone tools and sites belonging to early hunting economies are rare in northern Pakistan. In the nearby region of Chilas, quartz stone tools, including triangles, large flakes, points, scrapers and microliths, have been discovered from a quartz outcrop at Gechi stream near the site of Chilas VII in District Diamer. These stone tools have been broadly ascribed to the Mesolithic era of the region and have been dated from about 5000 to 3000 BCE (Dani 1983: 15; Mughal 1985: 214–215). In the 1990s, French and Pakistani archaeologists recorded six sites with stone tools and some associated rockshelters in the Upper Yarkhun Valley in the northern part of district Chitral. These sites have been dated to the mid-Holocene period, between 8000 and 3000 BP (Gaillard et al. 2002: 25). These findings indicate that the use of stone tools by hunter-gatherer communities living in largely inaccessible regions continued in the Chilas region or Diamer district and the upper realms of the Chitral region until the beginning of 1st millennium BCE. In the absence of direct evidence of pre-Historic material culture such as stone tools, it may be assumed that the pre-Historic epoch of Kohistan might have been the same or of the same chronological settings as those in its surrounding regions. However, as mentioned above, systematic research in future may result in much earlier dates for the pre-Historic period of the region than the currently known dates.

The possible representation of a chariot at Shatial

Das is important, as it could suggest connections with central Asia, where chariots are extensively represented in rock art. Most of the routes connecting central Asia with south Asia passed through northern Pakistan, and the representation of the chariot within the petroglyphs at Shatial Das appears to point to this relationship. Recent archaeological and palaeogenetic studies suggest a strong linkage and population movements from central Asia to south Asia during the 2nd millennium BCE (Narasimhan et al. 2018, 2019).

Thus, we may argue that hunting activities, and hunters, were a significant concern and part of the lives of the people of Shatial from late pre-Historic/proto-Historic times. Furthermore, we may also suggest that the subsistence strategies in the proximity of Shatial, initially based upon hunting, possibly went through a change from mid-1st millennium CE onwards to rely more on transnational trade than hunting. In the absence of proper archaeological excavations, there is no evidence for domestic animals from archaeological records of the Kohistan region. However, sizeable remains of domesticated animals, such as goat, sheep, cattle and even buffalo, have been recorded from proto-Historic archaeological contexts, primarily from urban and cemetery contexts, in the neighbouring Swat valley (see Young 2003). Thus, we may assume transition from hunting to the rearing of animals and pastoral economies at the same time when it occurred in the Swat valley during the 2nd–1st millennium BCE.

The dominance of transnational traders and trade in the economy of Kohistan region in the 1st millennium CE is perhaps reflected by the presence of a large number of Sogdian inscriptions of the Iranian traders and the non-representation of hunt and hunting animals at Shatial I (Hauptmann 1997: X; Neelis 2010: 279). It is equally possible that the influx of international trade did not entirely replace subsistence economies and that the trading was not necessarily in food but perhaps in commodities or even knowledge. Thus, hunting might have continued in the region beyond the trading hubs or nodes on the silk routes, say at the Shatial Das site, when the region experienced a tremendous amount of internationalised trading.

It can also be suggested that the social position of the hunter declined, and the social status of the trader rose after the 3rd century CE, resulting in changing petroglyph patterns that reflected status changes rather than subsistence *per se*. During the first half of the 1st millennium CE, the deforestation or environmental degradation may have also led to the destruction of the natural habitat of ibex/*markhor* near the site and hence their numbers may have declined around Shatial. Alternatively, sites with extensive Buddhist presence may not have been patronised by hunters as much as by traders or pilgrims, for whom these might have been way-stations or resting places on long routes and travels.

The domesticated and wild goats, especially ibex and *markhor*, were part of the pre-Buddhist religious

ideologies that survived until recently in northern Pakistan (Jettmar 1961a, 1961b; Parkes 1987; Zahir 2012: 292). Thus, it may also be argued here that their representation was possibly not just reflective of their environmental presence or subsistence patterns, but they were also linked with the ancient ideologies of the region. These ideologies were probably superseded or suppressed by the arrival and dominance of Buddhism, at least for some time, and their non-presence at Shatial sites may be reflective of this ideological shift. The lack of relevant historical and archaeological information and scientific dating hinders a clear understating of this phenomenon at Shatial Das. Future work should seek to align these apparent changes in the frequency of wild animals in the petroglyph record of Shatial Das with palaeoenvironmental and archaeofaunal patterns to help review these alternative explanations.

Shatial was strategically located at the junction of the historic routes, connecting Kashmir, Mansehra, Swat Valley, Chitral Valley, Gilgit and Diamer regions in northern and north-western south Asia. This pivotal location on trade routes led to its prosperity during the 3rd–7th century CE (Neelis 2010: 279). The location of Shatial was also crucial due to a crossing point at the Indus River from 3rd–7th century CE onwards; the Shatial Bridge remains a major crossing point across the Indus River. However, our discovery of many late pre-Historic and proto-Historic petroglyphs and an early Historic inscription, concentrated in a relatively small strip along the Indus River, suggest that, from the later pre-Historic period, a crossing point was located at Shatial Das. Based on the footprints, a rudimentary chariot and some of the horse and riders' images, the use of Shatial Das for crossing might have begun in the 3rd–2nd millennium BCE and continued through the first quarter of the 1st millennium CE. Based upon the chronological patterning in the rock art, we hypothesise that this crossing point was abandoned and moved about 4 km upstream to the present Shatial Bridge site sometime in the early 1st millennium CE. Furthermore, it may be possible that petroglyph traditions at Shatial Das and Shatial sites coexisted during the 3rd–5th centuries CE and that during this time, both crossing points were used by the inhabitants and travellers to cross the Indus River.

The representation of the 'chariot wheels' is largely similar to the representation of the Bronze Age/Indus civilisation petroglyphs at the site of Mandori in District Attock, Punjab, on the Indus River (Gordon and Gordon 1941: 199). At least four carts or chariots were recorded there (Gordon and Gordon 1941: 202). The wheels of the chariot, drawn by a pair of bullocks, are represented laterally with a full view of their roundness from above at Mandori (Gordon and Gordon, 1941: 200). Petroglyphs of chariots with spoked wheels have also been recorded from northern areas of Pakistan (Hallier 1991: 1; Hauptmann 2008: 353). The function of the chariot at Shatial Das seems to be different as it appears to be drawn by two horses. Petroglyphs of



Figure 14. The blasting of rocks with petroglyphs at Shatial Das.

wheeled chariots, possibly from the 2nd millennium BCE, were also recorded at the site of Gogdara, in the neighbouring Swat valley (Khan N. A. 1983: 59).

The Shatial Das site, though important in understanding the archaeology of the region, is now in danger due to the construction of the hydroelectric dam at Dasu, Upper Kohistan District. The land between the rocks with petroglyphs and the Karakoram Highway was utilised for rain-based agriculture in the past. Currently, the owners have transformed the landscape into elaborate terraces with stone boundaries in the expectation of better payment as part of the compensation package of the Dasu Hydropower project. These stone boundaries have been constructed by blasting large boulders, sometimes bearing petroglyphs. The same boulders are also blasted for obtaining stones to construct new houses at the site (Fig. 14). The process of blasting the large boulders continues and poses a severe threat to the petroglyphs at the site. Some of the large rocks with petroglyphs have been additionally disfigured through graffiti and the application of white paint/lime. The reservoir of the Dasu Hydroelectric Dam would reach up to Shatial Bridge, and as a result, the current level of the river would rise considerably. As per the design of the reservoir, the Shatial Das site would probably not be inundated or submerged. However, it is in danger, not just because of the inundation but due to the additional construction of a settlement and agricultural activities. The Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan and Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, as the custodians of the cultural heritage, should take immediate steps to safeguard this unique and valuable site in Upper Kohistan District.

Summary

The Shatial Das petroglyph site is located on the main Karakoram Highway in the vicinity of the well-known Shatial petroglyph sites in the Upper Kohistan District of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The Shatial Das site has probably some of the earliest

petroglyphs in the Kohistan region of northern Pakistan. The petroglyphs include possible hunting and horse-riding scenes, representations of ibex/markhor and other zoomorphs, a possible rudimentary chariot and anthropomorphs, along with an inscription in Kharoshthi script. The petroglyphs can be cautiously dated from the 3rd to 2nd millennium BCE and could continue to the first quarter of the 1st millennium CE.

Although the famous sites of Shatial and the newly discovered Shatial Das site occur in close proximity, the nature and scope of the petroglyphs are altogether different at the two localities. The Shatial sites are dominated by images of the Buddhist pantheon, while Shatial Das exhibits predominantly pre-Historic and proto-Historic petroglyphs. Furthermore, there is probably some possible chronological overlapping between the Shatial and Shatial Das sites, as there are limited similarities between the subject matters of the rock art at the two sites. The existence of these two vastly different sites in such proximity possibly indicates the choices of trade routes, Indus River crossings, halting places and way stations by different communities, such as traders and hunters, and polities in different periods.

The Shatial Das site seems to be important in the archaeology of the Kohistan region, throwing significant light on some of the earliest petroglyphs, change of routes and the Indus River crossing points over time during the 1st millennium CE. Because of the construction of the Dasu Hydropower Project, the site is now in grave danger. The Federal and Provincial Departments of Archaeology and Museums of Pakistan should take the necessary steps to preserve and document Shatial Das.

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