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Gumbat-Balo Kale (Courtesy by ACT-Field School Project)

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CONTENTS

<i>Article</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Page</i>
1	Michael W. Meister Luca Maria Olivieri	Conservation and Studies at Gumbat-Balo Kale Site (Tahsil Barikot, District Swat, Pakistan)	1
2	Ghani-ur-Rahman Qamar-un-Nisa	Gandhara Sculptures: The Appearance of Seven Treasures with the Birth of a Great Man (<i>mahāpuruṣa</i>)	23
3	Alia Jawad	Taxila: A Type Site of the Rich Cultural and Educational Heritage of Pakistan	39
4	Ibrahim Shah Abdul Hameed	The Earliest Muslim Monument in Hazara: The so-called Tomb of Sayyid Ali Hamadani at Naukot near Mansehra	55
5	Razia Sultana	A Profile of the New Discoveries of Durrani Monuments in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan	65
6	Shakirullah Razia Sultana	Durrani's Tombs in Kiyani Graveyard at Shahpur, Kohat, Pakistan	93
7	Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro	Hide not your wine from those who drink: Folktale and Tombs of the Bar Woman and Drunkards of Gadap, Karachi, Pakistan	103
8	Sultan-i-Rome	Religious Perspective of Pre-Muslims Swat, Pakistan	117
9	Qasim Jan Mohammadzai	From Pushkalavati to Charsadda Via Hashtnagar	143
10	Ifqut Shaheen	Alexander Burnes' Report of 1837 A Brief Account of the Trans-Indus Possessions of the Sikhs	163

Journal of Asian Civilizations

<i>Article</i>	<i>Author</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Page</i>
11	Rafiullah Khan	Narrow Interdisciplinarity and the Integration of Historical and Archaeological Research in Pakistan: A Conceptual Framework	175
12	Luca Maria Olivieri	Newly Discovered Painted Shelters from Swabi, Swat and Buner: A Brief Note	185
	List of Contributors		iv
	Price List		v

Newly Discovered Painted Shelters from Swabi, Swat and Buner: A Brief Note

Luca M. Olivieri

Abstract

This paper presents newly discovered (and re-discovered) painted shelters from Mt. Karamar (Swabi District), Mt Ilam (Buner District) and from Amluk-dara (Swat District). These shelters, previously unknown or misreported, are part of a vaster cultural phenomenon, extensively studied in the last 12 yaers, by Pakistani and Italian scholars, and diffused all along the highlands' belt from Swat to Hazara.

Introduction

During the last 12 years the present Author in collaboration with others documented and studied 52 painted shelters including the ones briefly presented in this paper. All the paintings were discovered in Khyber-Paktunkwa (KP), but mostly in Swat. To these paintings we have to add also those discovered and studied by other researchers (especially Prof. Nasim Khan) in Swabi District, Hazara Division etc.¹ With this critical mass of data it would be difficult for anyone to dismiss these rock-art material as 'boyish sketches' as easily happened in the past (see below).

Some of the paintings, especially the groups from the Kotah valley in Swat, are by no means less important or impressive than others, which are listed as Word Heritage sites (like Bhimbetka) and are toured annually by thousands of visitors. Unfortunately, the sites in Kotah (especially Sargah-sar and Kakai-kandao) still lack a proper

¹ The reader can find an extensive bibliography in Olivieri 2012-2013 (ref. in fn. 3), in Olivieri, L.M, in collaboration with Faiz-ur-Rahman (2010), Painted Shelters from Swat (Pakistan) and Surrounding Areas. Recent Discovery in the frame of the AMSV Project, in Olivieri, L.M., L. Bruneau and M. Ferrandi, eds. (2010) *Picture in Transformation. Rock Art Research from Central Asia to the Subcontnent. Papers presented at the 19th EASAA Conference (Special Session and Thematic Symposia), Ravenna 2-6 July 2007*, BAR International Series S 2167, Oxford: 13-26. On the Hazara paintings, see the contribution of G. Payr in Olivieri 2012-2013 (ref. in fn. 3).

*Newly Discovered Painted Shelters from Swabi, Swat and Buner:
A Brief Note*

legal protection, and are currently protected only thanks to the efforts of the ACT-Field School project.

I do not intend to repeat here what I had already extensively discussed in this Journal about the paramount importance of these paintings for a more comprehensive reconstruction of the anthropological background of the piedmont of Karakoram-Hindukush in ancient times.² My intention is just to present the new material. Those who are interested in these aspects may find a comprehensive summary of the question in the cited article, and a more detailed study in the conclusive chapter of a recent monographic publication (freely-accessible online).³

Chargul (Mt. Karamar, Swabi District)⁴

This site was briefly reported in the past. Unfortunately the paintings were totally underestimated and remained forgotten for more than half a century. The reader will find some interesting information on that site in the following excerpts taken from two important works of D.H. Gordon and A. Foucher.

‘There are, however, rock paintings of a sort at Chargul in the Mardan District of the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan. They are very inaccessible, but good copies were made in 1882 and submitted to Alexander Cunningham, who dismissed them as “boyish sketches – a sort of Afghan Noah’s Ark”. Just what these signs did mean is hopeless to speculate, but they were certainly something more than that. Though the majority are stylized animals and riders on horseback, there are a number of alphabetiforms [fn. 9: Maxwell, C. ‘Inscriptions painted in red on rocks on the Hill Doda near the village of Chargul’, 1882 (An Arch. Survey of India report in pamphlet

² Olivieri, L.M. (2011) Behind the Buddhist Communities: Subalternity and Dominancy in Ancient Swat, in Ghani-ur-Rahman and L.M. Olivieri, eds. (2011) Italian Archaeology and Anthropology in Northern Pakistan (1955-2011) *Journal of Asian Civilizations*, Special Issue, 34, 1: 127-156.

³ Olivieri, L.M. (2013) *Rock Shelters of the Swat-Malakand from the Bronze Age to Buddhism Materials for a Tentative Reconstruction of the Religious and Cultural Stratigraphy of Ancient Swat*. Berlin .

http://www.diss.fu-berlin.de/diss/receive/FUDISS_thesis_000000040006.

⁴ This survey was carried out in collaboration with Abdul Nasir Khan, Curator Taxila Museum.

form)]. These pictographs can probably be dated to much the same period as rock engravings of the Middle Indus which will now be discussed'.⁵

‘Dèja, lors de notre premier voyage sur la Frontière du Nord-Ouest, en 1896-7, le Directeur du Musée de Lahore, M.F.C. Andrews, nous avait donné communication, à notre retour du Gandhâra, de copies d’inscriptions pictographiques révélées au beau milieu du district de Peshâwar. Les figures 40, 41 et 42 [herewith Figs. 1, 2] sont la reproduction des dessins n^{os} 5, 6 et 7 annexés au *Report on Buddhist Explorations in the Peshawar District* by the 10th Company, Sappers and Miners, under the command of Lieutenant C. Maxwell, R.E., during April 1882. Le moment nous a paru venu de les publier: mais, comme nous n’avions pas vu nous-même les originaux des ces documents, nous avons pris la précaution de demander au Directeur général de l’Archéologie de l’Inde de les faire examiner à nouveau. Voici le reinsegnements que, par lettre du 17 mars 1938, M. Dikshit a bien voulu nous transmettre sur leur compte: «Le Curateur du Musée de Peshâwar me fait savoir qu’il a vu les inscriptions en question avec l’aide de M. Azim Ullah Khan, B.A., fils de Maazullah Khan du village de Chargul, lequel accompagna le lieutenant Maxwell jusq’à ces rochers en 1882. les inscriptions ne sont pas gravées dans le roc, mais tracées au moyen d’une peinture rouge (rubrique ou hématite). Plusieurs d’entre elles sont très difficiles d’access. Aux termes du rapport qui m’a été adressé, elles sont encore en bot état et situées sur la colline de Doda, près du village de Chargul, *tahsil* de Mardân, district de Peshâwar, à environs dix milles au Nor-est de Shâhbâz-Garhî. La colline de Doda est une éminence détachée qui s’élève en arrière (c’est-à-dire au Nord) de la montagne de Karamâr»’.⁶

In 2001 the remains of a late ancient Buddhist monastery at Chargul-dheri, now in the Swabi District, was the objective of a rescue excavation carried out by the DOAM (Federal) and directed by Abdul

⁵ D.H. Gordon (1960²), *The Prehistoric Background of Indian Culture*, Bombay: 110-111. Gordon here refers to the Ghariala, Mandab and Mandori; on the basis of two Kharoṣṭhî inscriptions ‘[...] a general dating of 200 BC to A.D. 200 can be put as reasonable to cover the whole of this artistic output’ (ibid.: 112).

⁶ A. Foucher (1942-47) *La vieille route de l’Inde à Taxila*, I-II, MDAFA, 1, Paris: 388-389.

*Newly Discovered Painted Shelters from Swabi, Swat and Buner:
A Brief Note*

Azim, Mehmood-ul-Hassan and A. Nasir Khan (Fig. 1). A. Nasir Khan noticed the presence of a small painted niche uphill the digging (Site 1). In summer 2010 A. Nasir Khan and L.M. Olivieri visited the area and six other painted niches were then documented (Sites 2-6; Fig. 3). These latter are located on scattered boulders along a shallow defile overlooking the area E of Chargul-dheri. The paintings definitely correspond to those reported by Cunningham, Maxwell, Foucher and Gordon (see above). The niches are naturally carved into granite boulders of different sizes; the figures are all painted in red-ochre.



Fig. 1

Site 1

It is located roughly 300 mt SE of the remains of Chargul-dheri. Inside a deep hollow-like arched niche naturally carved onto a boulder, there are few, almost vanished painted figures (square ideograms and animals). The boulder is located above an artificial terrace supported by a rough stone-masonry wall.

There are plenty of ruins of similar walls and structures in the whole area between Site 1 and Sites 2-6.

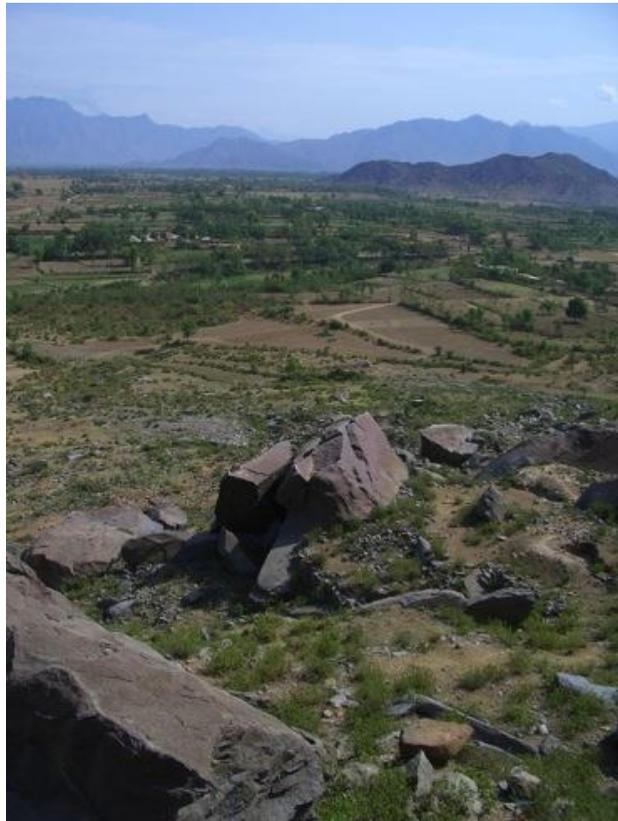


Fig. 2

*Newly Discovered Painted Shelters from Swabi, Swat and Buner:
A Brief Note*

Site 2

Inside a round hollow-like niche open to the N of an isolated boulder, few isolated figures are painted: a horseback hunter heading to the right in direction of an ibex. Above the latter, to the right, a strange pictogram is depicted (a boat?): a triangle turned upside down surmounted by a T-shaped pole (a mast with the sail?); at the angles, there is an unidentified object.

Site 3

Less than 100 mt below Site 2 one comes across a very large boulder, almost round in shape and marked by three natural round niches, one on the top, the others at the bottom of its N face. Within the lower niches only few figures are visible. Within the right niche (A) a grid-like ideogram, an anthropomorph and a horse are the only recognizable figures. The left niche (B) hosts almost two dozens of figures: amongst them multiple rows of horseback riders, a radial disk, and an anthropomorph.

Site 4

About 50 mt below Site 3 there is a second boulder. The round niche is fully crowded with dozens of figures, mostly horseback riders, grid-like ideograms, animals, circles and a crossed-wheel. The painting is probably one of those reproduced by Foucher.⁷

Site 5

Immediately below Site 4 lays an elongated granite boulder; on its concave N face open two niches. Within the left one, shallow and triangular, facing N, a cluster of figures is almost vanished.

Site 6

At the very bottom of the defile, one encounters a peculiar elongated boulder featuring multiple shallow concave surfaces. The main concavity, facing N, shows a set of circular niches. Both are covered with groups of figures, unfortunately almost invisible. The right niche (A) shows a set of unclear figures surrounding a central ideogram, a

⁷ Foucher, cit.: fig. 42.

radial wheel, whose spokes converge towards a round hub. The left niche (B) is marked by a permutation of dots and crossing lines, probably pertaining to grid-like figurations.



Fig. 3

Amluk-dara (Swat District)⁸

The shelter is located approximately 300 mt SSE of the archaeological site of Amluk-dara, just across a stream at the backside of the Main Stupa (Fig. 5).⁹ The site was labeled as AMSV 706 in the Archaeological Map of the Swat Valley.¹⁰ The shelter is a large and open natural niche facing N (Fig. 4).

⁸ The survey and documentation of this site was carried out in collaboration with Massimo Vidale, University of Padova, and Aatif Iqbal, Hazara University.

⁹ The site of Amluk-dara was target of an excavation project in 2012; the excavation report is in press (L.M. Olivieri and Shah Nazar Khan, eds., *The Buddhist sites of Gumbat and Amluk-dara (Barikot)*, in ACT-Field School Reports and Memoirs, II)

¹⁰ For a list of the AMSV entries updated to 2006, see: Olivieri, L.M., M. Vidale with

*Newly Discovered Painted Shelters from Swabi, Swat and Buner:
A Brief Note*



Fig. 4

There we noticed surviving traces of white and ochre traits. Three clusters of ideograms were recognized. On top left, a square ideogram is surrounded by permutations of dots delimited on the left side by a continuous series of left-flipped L-shaped segments (hooks). Below there is a complex permutation of grid-like ideograms. To the right one sees an ideogrammatic pattern formed by 4 inverted L-shaped segments (hooks) flanking a dotted grid-like ideogram. This cluster is heavily darkened by soot (Fig. 6).

contributions by A. Nasir, T. Saeed, L. Colliva, R. Garbini, L. Langella, R. Micheli & E. Morigi, (2006) *Archaeology and Settlement History in a Test-Area of the Swat Valley. Preliminary Report on the AMSV Project (1st Phase)*, *East and West*, 56, 1-3, 73-150.

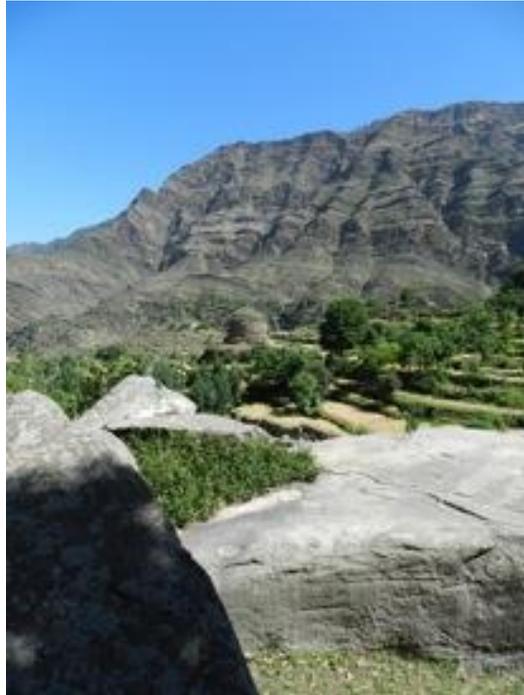


Fig. 5



Fig. 6

*Newly Discovered Painted Shelters from Swabi, Swat and Buner:
A Brief Note*

Marghan, Mt. Ilam S (Buner District)¹¹

These paintings were documented on the S side of Mt Ilam, in the *tahsil* of Char, in district Buner, on the side of Mt. Ilam opposite to Amluk-dara, at the height of approx. 1,500 mt asl. Two groups of red-ochre paintings are housed within two large boulders, both opening to the N, facing the Ilam top. Both boulders lie about 5 mt from each other, on a sub-horizontal granite plaque or platform overlooking the Buner plain (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7

¹¹ The visit to this site was carried out in company of my friend Arshad Khan, at the time DG Excise and Taxation, Government of KP.



Fig. 8



Fig. 9

The first boulder, located W (AMSV 704; Fig. 8) has two niches, one opening northwards (niche 1), the second one to E (niche 2). The second boulder (AMSV 705; Fig. 9) has two niches too, both opening to N (niches 1 and 2). In the first boulders only the pictograms painted in niche 1 are distinctly visible. Mounted warriors and standing individuals are well recognizable (Fig. 10).

*Newly Discovered Painted Shelters from Swabi, Swat and Buner:
A Brief Note*



Fig. 10

In the second boulder figures are preserved in both niches. Niche 1 is also distinguished by a couple of (natural?) cup-marks on the vertical wall at the bottom of the niche. Red-ochre splashes fill both the cup-marks and large portions of the niche wall. The second niche, similar to a funnel-like shallow gallery, hosted paintings on both sides. Those on the left side are partially weathered, whereas those on the right are heavily encrusted with soot. Human figures are visible with noticeable difficulty on both sides, and only by digital color enhancing I saw under the darkened surface, on the right side, a mounted figure.