

DISCOVERY OF ROCK ART IN AZAD, JAMMU AND KASHMIR

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Since the beginning of the human world, man has tried to prove his presence on the earth. Wherever he moved, he left his marks in different forms. Whether he lived in caves, in open spaces or in-built structures, he left evidence in art form, the earliest of which are the cave paintings found in various regions of the world. These transformed into open spaces where man carved and painted images and writings on rock faces and boulders. Although Pakistan provided an early home to such art forms, they have been discovered in Kashmir for the first time and will be revealed in this paper. In the present survey, a great number of rock art sites were found and documented in detail. These rock art sites display the earliest communities who settled down or traveled through the region, highlighting their thoughts, beliefs and practices. The tentative chronology of these rock art sites ranges from Neolithic to Hindu periods, creating an interesting mosaic in the historic profile of Kashmir.

Keywords: Rock art, Kashmir, Neolithic, inscriptions, shamanic rituals

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PROLOGUE

For several thousand years, man used as canvas and drawing board rock surfaces, canyon walls, rock shelters and boulders to produce drawings by the application of paint (rock painting) or the cutting away of rock surfaces (petroglyph). These are examples of rock art. They were made for many purposes. These images hewn into or painted on stone are a valuable component of the archaeological record. Often found in the spectacular settings of these people's most sacred places, rock carvings and paintings represent the intimate connection between native people and their spirit world. Rock art also provides other kinds of information for archaeologists as it is a sensitive tool for identifying cultural relationships, patterns of communication, evidence of trade and other types of cultural contact. Changes in style and content of rock art are often indications of the adoption of new ideologies and religious practices, which in turn reflect other shifts within the cultural matrix (Schaafsma 1986, 1-3).

In archaeology, rock carvings involve impressions, images and signs on natural stones made by humans in past times. This art is famous throughout the world in two basic forms: petroglyphs, which are carved into the rock surface area, and pictographs, which are painted images on the rock surface. Rock art is a landscape art which includes designs and motifs that have been placed on boulders or cliff faces, cave walls and ceilings and on ground surfaces (Whitely 2005, 1-3). Rock art includes shallow or deep cup-like marks in boulders or megaliths. Although the main purpose of this art form is still unknown to us, they are said to be made for shamanic rituals and/or fertility practices. They are found in North America, Europe, Asia, Africa and the Pacific islands and may have a common purpose and timeline (Varne 2012, 5-11).

BEGINNING OF ROCK ART IN PAKISTAN

The earliest rock art sites in Pakistan are reported from northern areas: Swat, Shattial, Chitral, Mansehra, Hunza, Yasin and other regions of Gilgit Baltistan. Among the famous rock art sites of Gilgit Baltistan are the Royal Inscription Danyor, the Karga Buddha, the Konodas rock carvings (Dani 1983) and the Haton rock inscriptions of Patola Shahis (Jettmar 1993, 77-122). 92% of rock art sites are reported from Shattial (Indus Kohistan) to the Alam Bridge site (Diامر) (Arif 2002, 8-10). According to Dani (1983), the primitive society of Gilgit Baltistan was the first to exploit the natural resources of the region. Arif (2002, 11) also termed these ancient men of Gilgit

Baltistan “rock art people.” These people lived in rock-shelters, megalithic structures and caves. This is shown by discoveries of rock-shelters at the Konodas site near Karakoram University, Gilgit. Many rock carvings are also found near this site. Megalithic sites are seen throughout the Yasin valley (Dani 1983, 53-64).

Due to its important geographic position, this region has always attracted travelers, pilgrims and invaders. Three famous Chinese pilgrims, Faxian, Huan Tsang and Song Yun, travelled through this region to go further into the Gandhra valley in the 4th-5th century CE (Jettmar 1993, 80). It served as a platform to transport Buddhism into Central Asia, Tibet and China. This is the reason we find thousands of Buddhist rock art sites in this northern area ranging from stupas, Buddha images, and Buddhissattvas to pilgrim images and inscriptions in Chinese, Tibetan, Brahmi, Hebrew, proto-Sharda, Sanskrit, Persian and Sogdian (Dani 1983; Humbach 1985; Hauptman 1997; Jettmar 2008).

This is not all we find from the rock art of northern areas of Pakistan. Its history further goes back into the prehistoric era, which gives us representations of animal figures, human figures, demons, fire altars, unidentified markings, abstract and spiritual symbols and many geometrical designs representing from a hunter-gather society to the Neolithic era (Mathpal 1998, 47-53; Jettmar 2008, 66). Outside the northern regions, Sindh Province in Pakistan also provides some rock art sites in the Angai valley, Shakloi Dhoro, Dadhu and Kirthar (Kalhor 2010, 17-18; 2013; 2014). F. D. Kakar (2003, 22) also reported 175 rock paintings in the southern Sulaiman Range in Baluchistan during his survey in 1995-96. The subjects of these paintings revolved around the fauna and flora of the land, where we can find leopards, markhor, wild sheep, wolves and horses.

The dating of this rock art remains a very complicated job. There is no straight line strategy defining the absolute dating of rock art, although researchers have suggested some techniques to identify an era for rock art sites. It is done with the realization of the color of the patina on the rock and studying the chiseling/carving techniques and tools through the stylistic features of the art forms. Thus, with the help of these techniques, the rock art of Pakistan has been placed between 5000-10,000 BCE (Qamar 1985, 141) and the 8th century CE.

DISCOVERY OF ROCK ART IN AZAD, JAMMU AND KASHMIR

A new chapter in the history of the rock art of the northern areas of Pakistan began with the explorations of a team of researchers from the Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations, Quaid-I-Azam University, Islamabad, in 2013. In their surveys, six rock art sites were found in different districts of Azad, Kashmir. Below, we give detailed descriptions of these sites.

1. Athmaqam Rock Carvings

The site is locally called Khizanmatti. The rock is found in a steep hilly area near a waterfall named Nagdar, at a distance of about 8 km north-west of Tehsil Athmaqamin Neelum District of Azad, Kashmir.

The Nagdar nulla (stream) is connected in the south-west to the towns of Jatri, Jhart, and Phat. The boulder is present in an outcrop near a running stream and depicts three different groups of Sharda Brahmi inscriptions, a lotus flower, a bird and two different forms of *trisula*. The Sharda Brahmi inscription is engraved on the northwestern edge of the rock. The Sharda or Sharada alphabet developed from the Brahmi script during the second half of the 8th century CE. The earliest known inscription in the Sharda alphabet dates from 774 CE and was discovered in a village called Hund in the west of Pakistan. It remained in popular use for several centuries in an extensive area of the western Himalayas including Khyber Pukhtun Khawa, Dardistan, Kashmir, Jammu, Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh. Sharda script was used to write Kashmiri, Sanskrit and a number of other languages in the northwest of India, the Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and in parts of Central Asia. Unfortunately, the knowledge of this important script is fast disappearing, threatening thereby the loss of this rich and proud heritage of the western Himalayas to posterity forever. Today, only a small group of Brahmins continue to use the Sharda alphabet for writing and calculating astrological and ritual formulations (Deambi 1982, 128).

The quality of the writings is technically good as straight lines are drawn perfectly, and the rounded or curved lines of the inscriptions have a harmony and flow. Some words are complete and a few partially damaged. The inscriptions have not yet been deciphered. The bird figure seems to appear as a peacock with a crown on its head and closed plumage. In Indian philosophy, the peacock is associated with Kashmiri

Shivism, which articulates a whole range of variety in perfect unity (Patil 2003, xxii). A depiction of *trisulas* and lotus beside the peacock motif also confirms the Shiva cult in the region back in the 3rd-4th centuries. Kashmiri Shivism, also known as *Trika*, originated in the Himalayas circa 400 BCE and reached its zenith between the 10th and 11th centuries (Tikoo 1990). These symbols are apparently deeper, suggesting they were engraved by a sharp tool. The color of the stone has turned into a reddish hue due to the harsh climatic conditions.

2. Sharda Cup Marks

Sharda is a *tehsil* in the district of Neelum of Azad, Jammu and Kashmir, which has the famous Sharda temple belonging to the 6th century. It is on the left bank of the River Neelum (Kishan Ganga). Here we find three rock boulders with a series of cup marks in the vicinity of the Sharda temple.

Boulder no. 1 lies vertical with 10 cup marks regularly carved in two rows as seen in figures no. 10 and 12.

Boulder no. 2 is located across the nearby Madhumatti stream. It faces the sky and has 14 cup marks in a sequence where a row of two marks are at both starts, enclosing two rows of 5 cup marks forming a cross sign. This boulder lies in an ancient megalithic graveyard dating to around the 4th millennium BCE.

Boulder no. 3 is also located across the Madhumatti stream in the surroundings of a Dogra check post. It is buried in the earth but three cup marks can be seen on the outer surface of the boulder measuring 3 x 2 cm.

3. Kotli Saula Cup Marks

The site is located about 1 km south-east of Munshi Morh in Charhoi *tehsil* of Kotli district. The boulder measures 7.31 x 3.04 m and has 33 cup marks. The site is situated along the modern settlement, slightly downwards from the settlement level. The rock boulder faces west. The River Gother flows nearby in a south-east direction from the site. The main town of Kotli Saula is situated east of the site. The area is surrounded by the Dargoti Mountains. The rock boulder is in the vicinity of the Kotli Saula caves.

4. Kotli Saula Rock Carvings

The cave is near the Kotli Saula cup marks in a mountainous area on a hill top facing east. The cave was made in sandstone rock with 3 cells and a veranda at the front measuring 2.4 meters in length, with two Corinthian pilasters and a small carved chamber at the front with a deep cup mark which was probably used for placing *shivalinga*. A *shivalinga*-like carving is also observed on the façade of the cave which also points to this cave being a Shiva shrine. The site is badly deteriorated on the inside, but on its outer part, we can still see architectural elements like lotus petals on the pilasters and some carvings over them.

5. Chitarpari Rock Carvings

This site is located near Mangla Dam south of the Dina to Mirpur main road, in the west of Mirpur district. The site contains a boulder measuring 6.5 m x 3.5 m.

The sand-stone boulder looks like a rock shelter, and has apparently been broken into two pieces and disturbed. On the upper section of the boulder, there are zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figures, giant or human demonic figures and geometrical/abstract shapes engraved with a picking technique. The giant or human demonic dancing figure is carved with joined legs, extended arms, and a small head radiating lights. One figure on the northern edge of the boulder depicts a female in a dancing pose. Two horses, one with a rider in pose, are also seen along with a goat and a circle like a sun. Two horizontal structures are also found on an exposed rock surface. Twelve cup marks, in varying sizes, are also seen. The largest cup-mark measures 0.3 m in diameter and 0.05 m in depth. Since we are concerned with Kashmir, we may look back to the research carried out in the Kashmir valley. A number of early rock art discoveries were made during the nineteenth century in the Himalayan region. Here, rock art is best known from two areas, Laddakh and the Kumaon Himalayan region of Uttar Pradesh. Sixty eight such sites have been reported in the Kumaon region: 10 pictograph sites and fifty eight petroglyphs. Painted sites occur in semi-open rock-shelters and occasionally on open boulders. They are frequently found in association with megalithic monuments, suggesting a date of around the late second to first millennium BCE (Methpal 1995, 25-60). Painted figures are generally anthropomorphs, illustrated with a variety of dancers and hunters typical of a material culture, while zoomorphic figures represent domesticated fauna, suggesting that

sites with such depictions post-date the appearance of pastoralism in this region. This site closely resembles those found in the Himalayan region. On the basis of available evidence and inconclusive study, the explorers have placed the site in the 3rd to 1st millennium BCE. The rock carvings are largely defaced, making it difficult to read or even recognize many motifs.

Most of the rock carvings of Azad, Jammu and Kashmir, are located at the intersection of the lithic geological bend, low mountain ecological habitats, and low mountain roads. Sometimes, these sites are also found near rivers and lakes.

6. Chitarpari Cup Marks

The cup marks at Chitarpari are made in a boulder measuring 4.1 m x 2.05 m. The boulder contains two beautiful series of 21 and 15 cup marks. The tentative timeframe of these cup marks is from the 3rd to the 1st millennium BCE. Kashmir boasts one of the biggest collections of cup marks. They are located where four factors are present: good rock outcrops, human habitats, inter-regional roads and water resources. A large number of cup marks can be found on the top and ridges of isolated granite and sandstone boulders on both horizontal and vertical surfaces, sometimes together with petroglyphs. At Chitarpari, these cup marks are found on several boulders along with the rock carvings.

7. Bihal Cup Marks

Near an ancient baoli (water tank) at Bihal village in Khoiratta, a piece of rock shows 10 cup marks. These cup marks are in a poor state of preservation which can be viewed in Fig. 30. Consequently, the rock art of Azad, Jammu and Kashmir, demands the immediate attention of the authorities to create a better setting for its protection.

8. Pirchinasi Hand Impressions

The site is located at a distance of 30 km east of Muzaffarabad on the top of Nanga Mountain at an elevation of 2781m.

It contains a rock boulder measuring 1.03 x 1.83 x 0.83 m, oriented in an east-

west direction and having nineteen hand impressions carved with small, refined tools. A pecking technique was used in carving these hand impressions. Hand impressions from very remote antiquity have been found in different parts of the world and are commonly found in Australia and Europe. Ucko and Rosenfeld (1967, 239) summarize rock art as art of many living “primitives.” According to them, some representations seem like the work of children (perhaps floor engravings), some were used in acts of sympathetic magic (representations with pierced holes), some were placed in order to please (perhaps some open air low reliefs), and some were illustrations of myths and traditions (perhaps those with imaginary creatures, anthropomorphs and unexpected combinations of animal species). It is very possible, however, that some and perhaps many Paleolithic representations were made for reasons which still totally escape the modern observer.

Hand and feet impressions in Asia have been associated with religious personalities. However, these kinds of carvings—being in a very rudimentary and crude form—are an indication of being very old. Rock art stretched through the Paleolithic period and was quite common in some parts of the world during the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods, and of course the historic period is no exception. These carvings are from the Neolithic period, but only further study and comparison with such carvings in other parts of the region and other continents will greatly help in precise dating. The area of the site has gained large fame for its *ziyarat* of the famous Saint Pir Shah Hussain Bukhari.

Similar hand impressions have also been reported in the Gilgit Baltistan region (Thalpan, Chilas, Thour, Dum Sum and Haldi) as recorded by a German archaeological mission from Heidelberg University, Germany, and a team from the Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, dated to the 3rd millennium B.C.

CONCLUSION

Rock art has always been a vital source in archaeology to know about primitive communities inhabiting a region. Throughout the world, we come across a huge number of rock art sites verifying the existence of man. Similarly, in Pakistan, northern areas have remained the focus of researchers in the field who have explored thousands of rock art sites, specifically in Gilgit Baltistan and the Swat valley. However, the evidence presented in this paper shows a picture of the earliest inhabitants of the region of

Azad, Kashmir. The engravings tell something about their beliefs and social system from prehistoric times to the medieval period. These carvings do not let us know everything about past man; rather they serve like scattered codes which need to be collected throughout the land that ancient man moved around and where he left these marks for us to decode. It tells us of from hunter gatherer societies to the historic era where this carving culture stood side by side with paper scriptures. This art work also shows the affiliation of those past people with their culture to such a level that wherever they roamed, they drew their ideas and promoted their philosophies. Though much work is still remaining in the area to know more about these ancient cultures and communities, the discoveries of rock art sites in Azad, Jammu and Kashmir, place this region on the list of the earliest inhabited regions.



Fig. 1. Nagdar stream, Athmaqam



Fig. 2. Team of researchers at Nagdar, Athmaqam



Fig. 3. Boulder showing the name of the site



Fig. 4. Carved boulder along Nagdar with date (Athmaqam stream, Athmaqam)

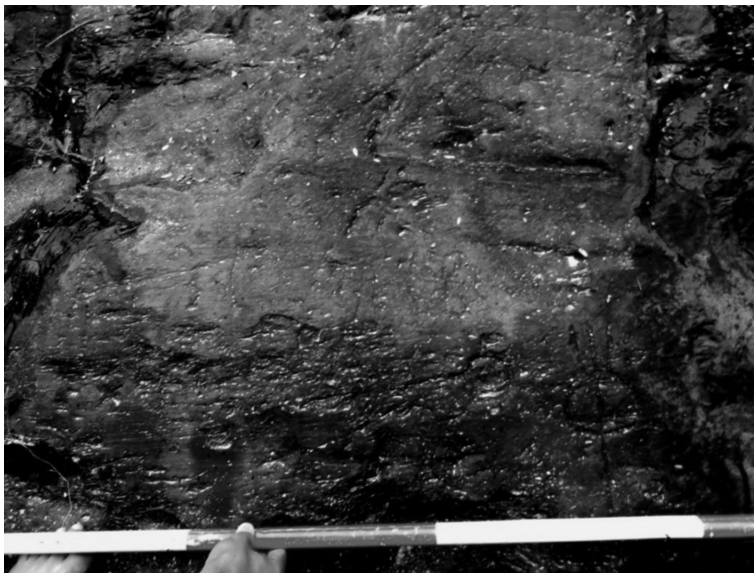


Fig. 5. Rock showing trisula, lotus, bird and inscription (Athmaqam)



Fig. 6. Image of a bird (peacock, diagram on the right), Athmaqam



Fig. 7. Trisula carved on a boulder (diagram on the right), Athmaqam

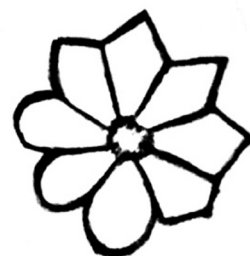
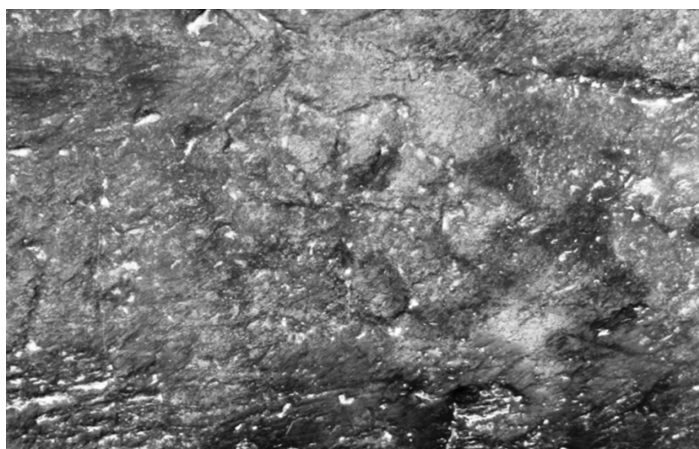


Fig. 8. Lotus flower carved on a boulder (diagram on right), Athmaqam



Fig. 9. Trisula carved on a boulder along with inscription (diagram on the right), Athmaqam

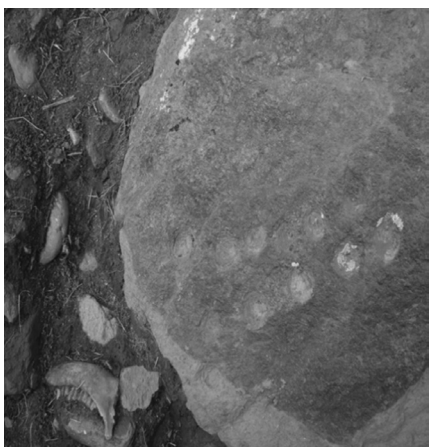


Fig. 10. Cup marks, Sharda



Fig. 11. Measuring the boulder at Sharda



Fig. 12. Boulder 2 with 14 cup marks, Sharda



Fig. 13. Boulder 3 with 3 cup marks, Sharda

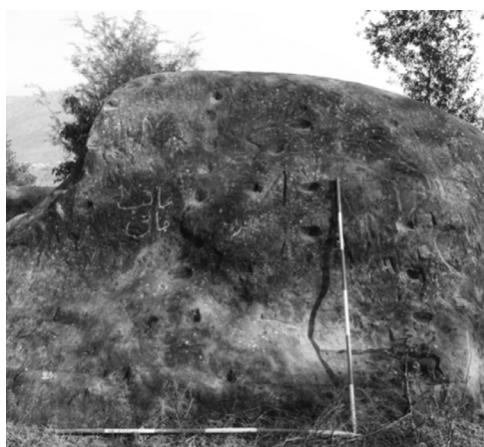


Fig. 14. Cup marks on a rock at Kotli Saula



Fig. 15. Front view of the rock-cut cave, Kotli Saula



Fig. 16. Carvings (trisula?) on the façade



Fig. 17. Lingam-like carving on the façade of the cave, Kotli Saula



Fig. 18. Unidentified mark on the pillar of the cave, Kotli Saula



Fig. 19. Other carvings on a pillar, Kotli Saula



Fig. 20. A carved chamber with a deep cup, Kotli Saula



Fig. 21. Goat with offspring and cup marks, Chitarpari



Fig. 23. Zoomorphic figures, dancing figure, Chitarpari



Fig. 24. Horse-rider carved on boulder,
Chitarpari



Fig. 25. Sketch of horse-rider, Chitarpari



Fig. 26. Tracing of a horse figure,
Chitarpari

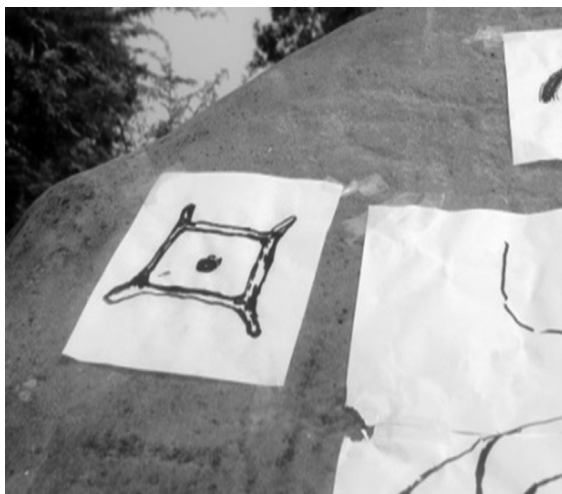


Fig. 27. Abstract symbol, Chitarpari



Fig. 28. Other abstract symbols, Chitarpari



Fig. 29. Cup mark in boulder 2 surrounded by marks of cow-dung, Chitarpari



Fig. 30. Cup marks carved on a boulder



Fig. 31. Pirchinasi Boulder with hand impressions at Bihal, Khiratta



Fig. 32. Numbering the hand impressions at Pirchanasi



Fig. 33. Documenting the rock boulder

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