

# **An Ancient Settlement at Karōsingal in Gurunjur, Punyāl Valley, Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan: A Preliminary Study**

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## **Abstract**

*This article is an attempt to present an archaeological site, at Gurunjur in Tehsil Punyāl of District Ghizer, yielding important artefacts of archaeological significance. The findings include so-called eye-beads, terracotta pottery, structural remains, metallic objects and other the antiquities of historical value. Here, a sample of recent findings from this site is explained, and attempted to draw a plausible conclusion based on an analytical study of the available data.*

## **Introduction**

During an academic visit to Ghizer District, in first three months of the year 2014, this site was identified as an ancient settlement, which is located in the vicinity of village Gurunjur. This village is situated at the left bank of the River *Hanisārī*, around four kilometres away from Gahkuch, the Head Quarter of Tehsil Punyāl and District Ghizer. In the surroundings of this village, Bubur is situated in the East; Kānchi is located in the West; the village's pasture, at the mountain valley above, lies in the North; and river flows below in the South. The position of village Gurunjur is in the middle of two important cross roads of Hatun and Singul in Punyāl Valley. (Figure. 1)

At Hatun, near Damās and Gulōdās, the valley bifurcates. Firstly, the main valley opens to the West, let us reach Gupis, Yasin and further to Chitral. Secondly, the valley skirted to the North, let us approach Ishkōman, which is geographically connected to Pamir steppes and trans-Pamir regions across the Karumbar Pass and Wakhan corridor of Afghanistan.

Similarly, at Singul, there are two major openings. Firstly, the main valley beside the river, leads straight towards Gilgit in the East, nearly at forty kilometres. Secondly, from the locality of village Singul, one can reach Darel, across the valley of Singul Gah

and the Passes on the road, which leads further to the land of ancient Gandhāra, i.e. Peshawar Valley. The valleys and passes in Ishkōman and Punyāl, bring Wakhan in direct connection to Darel. This was the route of Fa-Hsian, as it is proposed by Tsuchiya (1998: 47- 48, 2006: 101-103).

The site, under study, is approachable either from its western side or eastern. From the western side, a jeep-able track from Kānchi Bridge, on Ishkōman road, give access to the location of this site. Whereas, from the eastern side, it can be find by crossing the River *Hanisāri* through the wooden bridge of village Gurunjur, giving direct approach to the village, which leads further to the vicinity of this site.

This site's locality is surrounded by a hill in the North, river in the South, cultivated area of village Gurunjur in the East, and a rocky cliff in the West. The cultural remains, here, are under the covered deposit of eroded material. Since early 1990s, a portion of the site is under destruction<sup>1</sup>, which is known as Karōsingal. Geographically, this exposed portion of the site is positioned at Northing 36.16957, Easting 73.82921 in decimals degrees, and elevation is 1862 metres from sea level.

### **Human remains under the alluvial depositions**

Thick deposit of superimposed layer, over the cultural material, is comprised of eroded soil with gravels and stones of various sizes. It includes the stones with dark impressions of weathering, seen above the ground surface. As a result of debris-flow from the connected hill, alluvial-fan like deposits formed at the foot, and three major scars are observable at the northern hill. Such scars mark the main flood channels with their tributaries. (Figure. 2)

As per the law of super-positioning, the covered material is dated later than the structural remains below. The debris-flow or floods which forced the inhabitants to quit the site, is possibly caused by the environmental factors. It can include large scale deforestation during Iron-age, as one of the major causes behind this natural activity.

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<sup>1</sup> The locals, being appreciated by antique dealers to find eye-beads for them, are searching in the ruin of ancient settlements and graves.

## **Illegal digging uncovered the cultural material**

It appears that the diggers have started their activities from the lower most portion of the disturbed area (under destruction), which is connected to the jeep-able road and close to the river. Furthermore, they have gradually extended their work to the upper portion. So, the areas opened by the earlier dig have been re-filled with the material of later attempts (Figure. 3). Therefore, one cannot recognise any visible feature at the exposed portion, in general. However, a small part of structures in the upper portion is intact, which marks the existence of ancient settlement in the area.

The major findings of treasure hunters include structural remains, terracotta pottery, several eye-beads of various kinds and a Scytho-Siberian crouch legged horse. Like many others, a villager named Mr. Himat Khan<sup>2</sup>, was busy to find his luck in the ruins, found some artefacts. Now, the material under our study is mainly that recovered by said person beside the intact structures, exposed recently.

## **Exposed structures**

In the northern portion of this opened area, where the structures are found intact, let us understand the plan of two separate rooms: can be called room A and room B. Both of them are uncovered by two robbers' trenches: trench 1 is at the right side exposes room A, and trench 2 at the left uncovers room B. The third trench is supportive to know about the actual ground or virgin level of the site. (Figure. 4)

Trench 1 exposes two walls of room A, with its corner: wall A1 is to the northern side and wall A2 is to the western side of the room (Figure. 5). The length of wall A1 is nearly 2.9 metres, whereas, wall A2 is of 2 metres. Beside the corner of the room in trench 1, treasure hunters dig the area down to the level of more than a metre, without demolishing the structure. So, walls are exposed. Soil debris from this trench is dumped in the remaining area inside the room, not shifted to other place. A pot found in broken condition near the trench is drawn to reconstruct. In the construction of wall, stones are

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<sup>2</sup> Thanks for his generosity in sharing experience on this site and recently recovered artefacts and allowed for publication.

partly dressed, properly placed in organised way, and small chippings are provided between the stones for their support.

Trench 2 (Figure. 6) is exposed in the same way as the former. Room B, partly opened, slightly turns towards the West, in plan, than the former. The length of the northern exposed wall (B1) is nearly 3 metres and the eastern wall (B2) is also of the same size. The debris is not shifted to other place, but dumped in the remaining portion of the trench. The masonry of both walls is same to the earlier example. Walls are constructed on proper plan, coincides one another at right angle and forms the corner.

There is no evidence which mark the use of brick in architecture. The stone, easily available in the locality as a natural resource, is utilised for constructions.

Trench 3, being exposed in an irregular circular plan, is located next to trench B, attached to the western side. The debris is dumped out at the southern side of this trench. There is no evidence of material cultural, such as structural remains, exposed out from this trench. However, this trench marks the level of fertile ground underneath a thick deposit of alluvium. This soil can be noticed at a depth of nearly two metres from the ground level, probably it is the virgin soil.

### **Other antiquities**

The antiquities recovered recently include beads, a metallic bar, several sherds of pottery including that of a broken pot, and beads of semi-precious stones of different kinds.

The beads (Figure. 8 and Figure. 9) under our study are three in number. The first sample is made in agate, red in colour, depicting several rings at each side, making so-called “eye”. It is rectangular in plan and square in section. Its length is 2.2 cm., with width of 1.2 cm. and hollow for string is parallel to length. The next bead is of Turquoise/*Firūza*, oblong in both plan and section and is green in colour. Its length is 1.4 cm., width is 1 cm., thickness is 4 mm. approximately and the hollow for string is parallel to length. Third bead is spherical in shape, white in colour and size in diameter is 1.5 cm. The small findings include a bronze bent bar of size 4.8 cm. Such beads are in fact comparable with the similar so-called eye-beads from the sites in Indus Valley

Civilisation; its culture begins around 7000 B.C. at sites like Mehrgarh (Kenoyer 2013: 1-17).

From broken sherds belonging to a pot, has been reconstructed by joining that of upper portion of pot, body sherds and base, are drawn together which able us to understand its full shape (Figure. 7). This pot has a decorative design of two parallel incised line, depicted in a form of band in zigzag pattern around the neck. The height of this pot is 17 cm., diameter at the top (neck,) is 9.5 cm., average thickness of pot's wall is 6 mm. A sherd of upper part of pot is bearing a broken part of lug handles in vertical position. This pot has flat string cut base.

### **Scytho-Siberian crouch legged zoomorphic figure**

Villagers claimed for a finding of a horse-like figure at Karōsingal, their description seems similar to figure of the stylised horse, in the collection of antiquity dealer at Gilgit (Figure. 10). Dealer also informed on inquiry that it came from Ghizer several years ago. The maximum length of this figure is 8.9 cm. and that of width is 6.3 cm. Executed features of the head is very similar that of a horse, having same ears, nose and mouth. The bent neck and six triangular extensions present its hairs. Its abdominal portion is shown squeezing to inner portion, whereas, crouched frontal and back legs are turned inward and horse's hoofs are shown touching and the tail hangs down at the back of the animal. Three circles with dots in the centre are shown depicted on different parts of the body: two of the same size impressions are on front and back thighs and a similar impression but of smaller size presents the eye of the horse. Two attached knobs on the back side of the bronze figure presents that it can be used as a lock of a belt.

This bronze figure visibly shows the die striking technique involved in its manufacturing process. It seems that there were two dies with flipped negative impressions, used for such manufacturing: first, die for the obverse and, second, for the reverse. The obverse die was intended to execute the visible feature of the figure; however, the reverse was intended to add such features. During manufacturing process, probably a bronze sheet was placed in-between two dies, and the force was applied over the reverse side, executing the image. This would be added by the finishing work of

attaching the two knobs at the back and by removing extra portions of bronze sheet (Figure. 11).

Similar to this figure of horse, there are carvings depicting comparable zoomorphic figures at Upper Indus Valley, including bronze figure from Kandia and also other akin evidences from the sites in Central Asia (Bandini-König, et. al. 1997: 38). The similar evidences from Upper Indus Valley include the figures from Thalpan and Dadamdas sites of rock art. Such animals with crouching legs, can be seen on stone surfaces (Bandini-König 2003: Figures. 226, 190, 73 and L, 2005: Figures. 78 and 48, 2007: Figure. 42, 2009: 499) known as Scytho-Siberian Animal Style (Jettmar 1982: 4).

The stylistic features of this figure of horse has slim feature at the abdomen, two impressions of dot and ring seal is shown punched on both legs and smaller scale same impression is made to depict the eye. Close assimilation of this work of art is to the two horse figures with almost same features, reported from Georgia dated to the period of Sakas around 500 B.C. (Rice 1965: 20-21 and ill. 8-10). This work of art is depicting movement in the art. If this relative understanding is true, than it would be a strong evidence to strengthen the idea of cultural connections between Gilgit region and other parts of Central Asia. Likewise, it is endorsed by similar discoveries from Imit, in Ishkōman, at a distance of around thirty kilometres from the site. Close assimilation of copper cauldron and composite bronze rhyton from Imit (Stein, 1944: 14-18) and a sample of similar artefacts from Saka burials from Pamir and evidences of examples of animal figures (Litvinskij, 2002: 131-144) has already revealed the existence of similar culture in Pamir and Ghizer valley. The evidence of horse discovery from this site, places it in the same category. Based on this evidence one can believe that this settlement might belong to the Sun and horse worshipers of Central Asia known as Sakas and Scythian. Therefore, based on such grounds, it may be safe to say that the site can be dated to mid of 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C.

## **Conclusion**

A portion of this early historic settlement site, exposed by the treasure hunters, explores its archaeological importance. The findings mark the usage of bronze articles, pottery, decorative designs, and use of variety in semiprecious stones. The material evidences

also represent the establishers' aesthetics in their cultural life. It also adds our understanding about the approach in construction of their dwellings, in a mountain environment. Two visible examples of rooms help us to know about the art involved in construction, based on proper plan and style of masonry. All the information jointly forces to think about a higher degree of civilisation. Its decline is shown by a thick alluvial deposit over the remains, covered the site due to natural disasters, which may include flash floods.

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## Figures

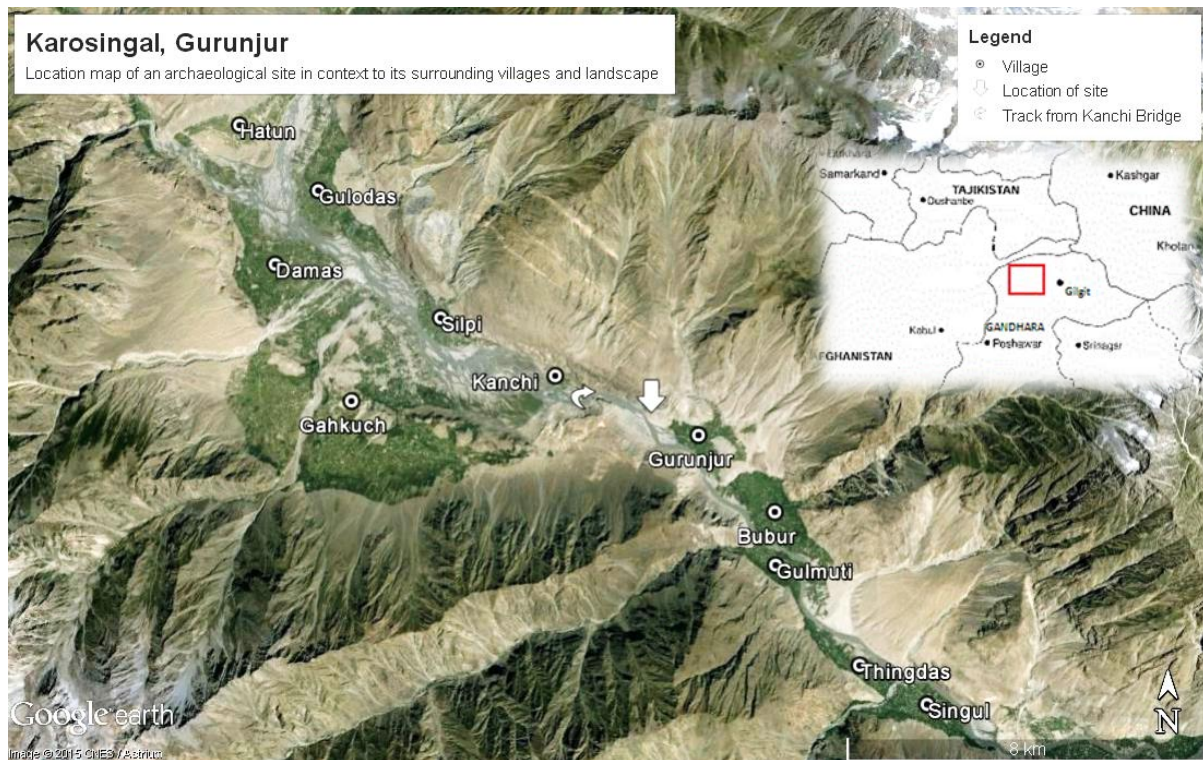


Figure.1: Map presenting the location of site in Punyal Valley.



Figure. 2. Terrain of village Gurunjur and the location of uncovered area of the site.



Figure. 3: Site badly destroyed by treasure hunters and arrow locates the area of exposed structural remains.

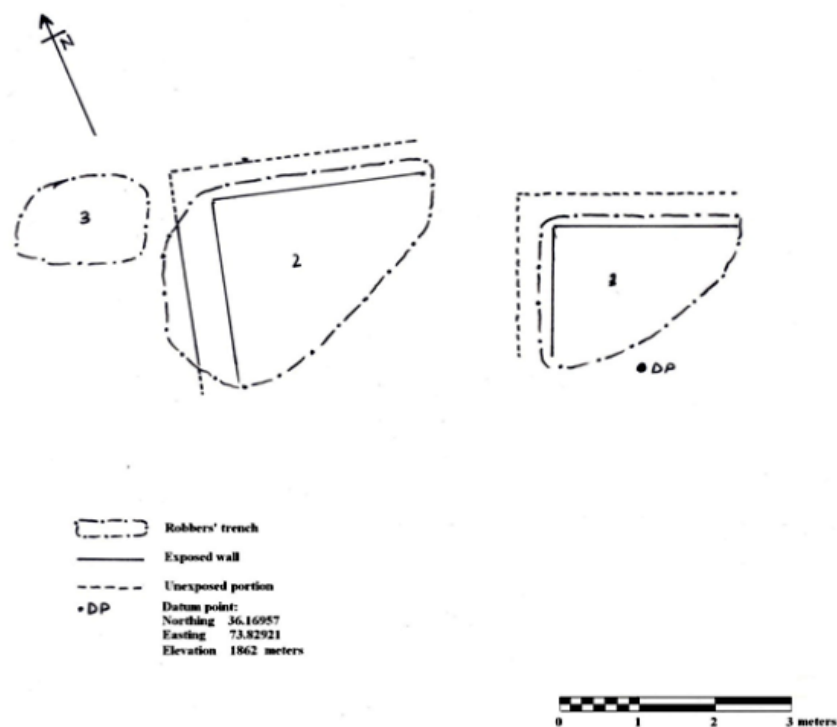


Figure. 4: Plan of exposed structural remains by treasure hunters, trench number 1 exposes room A, trench 2 exposes room B and trench 3 shows the thickness of alluvial deposit and fertile ground.



Figure. 5: Structural remains of room A, the visible Northern corner and walls A1 to right and A2 to left.



Figure. 6: Structural remains of room B, the visible corner, are between walls B1 to right and B2 to left.

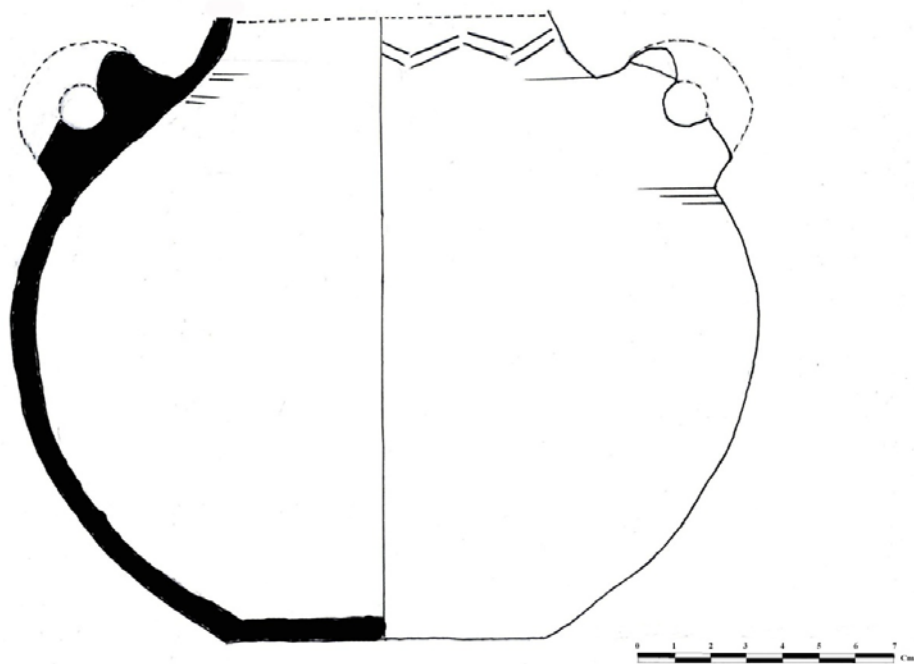


Figure. 7: A jug restored from several broken sherds of a single pot, found near trench 1.

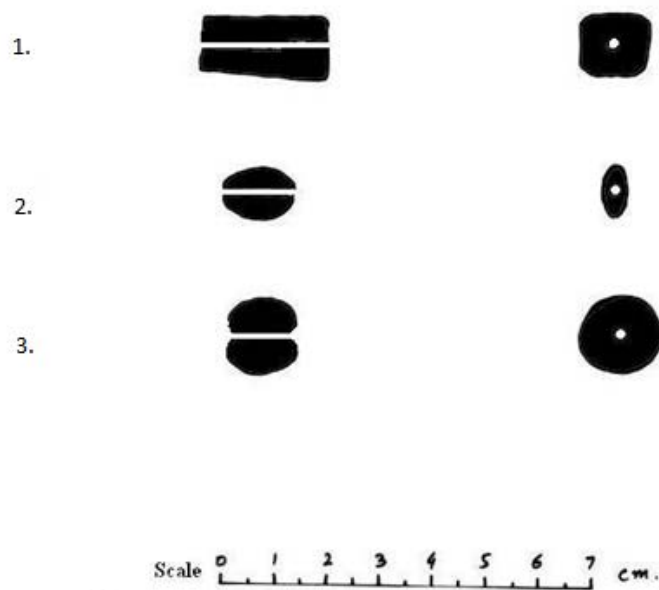


Figure. 8: Plan and section of three beads shown in Figure. 9 (1-3)

1.



Kind: Agate  
Shape: Rectangular in plan  
Length: 2.2 cm  
Width: 1.2 cm  
Thickness: 1.2 cm  
Hollow direction and size:  
parallel to length  
Diameter: 1.5 mm.

2.



Kind: Turquoise/ *Firūza*  
Shape: Oblong  
Length: 1.4 cm.  
Width: 1 cm.  
Thickness: 4 mm. Approx.  
Hollow direction and size:  
Parallel to length

3.



Kind: Unidentified semi-precious stone  
Shape: Spherical  
Diameter: 1.5 cm.  
Hollow direction and size:  
Across the centre of spherical bead  
Diameter: 2.5 mm.

4.



Kind: Metallic—bent bar  
Shape: elongated, bent and round  
Metal: Bronze  
Rust: Greenish  
Length: 4.8 cm.  
Diameter: 7 mm.  
Hardness: hard

Figure. 9: Beads (1, 2 and 3) and a metallic bar (4), found by a treasure hunter from the site.



Figure. 10: Frontal features of horse-like figure in Bronze from Ghizer (in private collection).



Figure. 11: Rear features of Figure. 10.