

Archaeological Explorations in Balakot, District Mansehra (2006-07): A Preliminary Report

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Introduction

Mansehra lies between 34° 14' to 35° 10' north latitude and 72°55' to 74° 6' east longitude and is 3682 feet above sea level (hereafter asl) (*Imperial Gazetteer of India, Provincial Series, North West Frontier Province* 1991:137; Watson 1907:239). Mansehra is also known as *Takht-i Hazara* (i.e. the Throne of Hazara) for its scenic beauty and cultural richness. The district covers an area of 4579 square kilometre with Kohistan and Batagram districts to its north, Muzaffarabad district of Azad Jammu and Kashmir to the east, Abbottabad and Haripur districts to the south and Shangla and Buner districts to its southwest (*Census Report* 1981:5).

Mansehra was created as a district on 01 October 1976. The nomenclature of Mansehra is due to Man Singh, the Governor General of Ranjit Singh, who declared the town as his headquarters for furthering administrative and military assignments in Hazara. Mansehra is located on the Karakoram Highway, 28 kilometres from Abbottabad. The district comprises four tehsils i.e. Mansehra, Ogi, Balakot and the Tor Ghar (upgraded to districts in 2010) (*Census Report* 1981:5). The Department of Archaeology, Hazara University, has already completed archaeological explorations in the two districts of Abbottabad and Haripur whose reports have been published in *Pakistan Heritage*, Volumes One (2009) and Two (2010) respectively. Work on district Mansehra remains incomplete due to financial constraints; a summary of the explored part of the district, in addition to tehsil Balakot completed with the financial assistance of the UNESCO (Islamabad), and is being published in this volume of Pakistan Heritage (2011).

Tehsil Balakot

The ruined city of Balakot is located 32° 36.969' north latitudes and 073° 21.269' east longitudes 1004 metre above sea level, and 40 km from Mansehra city. It was one of the most beautiful cities of Pakistan, situated on the banks of the Kunhar River. It comprises the most beautiful valleys of Kaghan, Naran and Garhi Habibullah that are famous for their beautiful landscape, unique culture and traditions. The Tehsil is named after a large village lying at the mouth of the famous Kaghan valley (Watson 1907: 227).

Historical Background

Being located on the Karakoram Highway that connects China and Central Asia with Taxila and Indo-Gangetic plain, the region has remained a centre of cultural activities since antiquity (Qamar 1990: 99). Many invaders and pilgrims have made their way through the western passes by crossing River Indus. The archaeological materials recovered accidentally or by systemic explorations and excavations are solid

proofs of the Persians, Greeks, Mauryans, Indo Greek, Scythians, Parthians, Kushans, Hindu Shahi, Islamic, Sikh and British periods (Sardar 1995: 81; Ali et al 2009: 145).

Recent archaeological survey conducted by the Department of Archaeology, Hazara University, has recorded 253 archeological sites and monuments in district Mansehra ranging from the Gandhara Grave Culture (1800 BCE) to the British period.

Archaeological Investigations in Tehsil Balakot (Mansehra)

Tehsil Balakot remained unexplored as most of the archaeological investigations had been confined to the plain areas of district Mansehra until 2006. Work from 2006 onward by the Department of Cultural Heritage and Tourism Management (henceforth CHTM) and later on the Department of Archaeology, Hazara University, has recorded a large number of sites/monuments that provide a rich source material for the study of history, ancient customs, belief and cultures of the region. We present here a summary of the survey report.

Archaeological Survey conducted by the Department CHTM

The Department of Cultural Heritage and Tourism Management (Hazara University) was established in October 2006 with the aim of exploring, documenting and preserving the rich cultural and archaeological heritage of the country in general and of Hazara Division in particular. Soon after its establishment, the department started its extensive archaeological investigations in the region. The first project was launched in 2006 titled *Mapping of Cultural Assets in the Kaghan Valley* in collaboration with the UNESCO (Islamabad) with support from the Thai Airways (Bangkok), which facilitated the project survey.

The chief aim of this project was to identify, document and map the endangered cultural assets of the earthquake-hit area (Tehsil Balakot). The survey was conducted by a team of archaeologists from the Department of CHTM (Hazara University), Hazara University Museum (Mansehra), and the Abbott Museum of Ethnology and Archaeology (Abbottabad), now functioning under the administrative control of the Department of Archaeology (Hazara University).

Description of the surveyed sites

A total of 53 archaeological sites/monuments were explored during the survey with the following details:

1. **Barar Kot (Union Council Garhi Habibullah, Tehsil Balakot):** The site is located about 2 km east of village But Sang, on the border of Garhi Habibullah and Azad Jammu Kashmir to the right side of the main road; lies between $073^{\circ} 22.723'$ east longitudes and $34^{\circ} 22.295'$ north latitudes, 790 metres above sea level; measuring 70x52 feet; the site was disturbed by its owner, Bashir Iqbal, for manure and agricultural purpose; now totally vanished; foundation of wall structures, pottery; Sikh Period.
2. **Barar Kot Temple (Union Council Garhi Habibullah, Tehsil Balakot):** Located on the border of Garhi Habibullah- Azad Kashmir to the right side of the main road; lies between $073^{\circ} 23.802'$ east longitude and $34^{\circ} 22.354'$ north latitude; 820 metre above sea level; made of dressed stone, completely damaged by the earthquake in 2005; Sikh Period.

3. **But Sang (Union Council Garhi Habibullah, Tehsil Balakot):** 1 km northwest of Barar Kot; lies between $073^{\circ} 23.198'$ east longitude and $34^{\circ} 23.542'$ north latitude, 811 metre above sea level; irrigated land used for cultivation of wheat and maize by the owner, Muhammad Roshan Din; the site is bifurcated by the main Garhi Habibullah-Azad Kashmir road; measuring 130x20 ft; half of the site is covered by modern houses; potsherds found; Sikh period.
4. **Shamori Dheri (Union Council Garhi Habibullah, Tehsil Balakot):** 3 km to the northeast of Butsang village; $073^{\circ} 23.258'$ east longitude and $34^{\circ} 23.063'$ north latitude, 966 metres above sea level; a large un-irrigated land measuring 130x100 feet; owned by Ali Zaman; partially destroyed by the robbers; wall structures and potsherds; Sikh Period.
5. **Garhi Habibullah Old Bazar (Union Council Garhi Habibullah, Tehsil Balakot):** On the right side of Garhi Habibullah-Azad Kashmir road, lies between $073^{\circ} 22.887'$ east longitude and $34^{\circ} 24.149'$ north latitude; 832metre above sea level; measuring 162x105 feet comprised of 29 old shops made of dressed sandstone with vaulted ceilings; slabs with Devanagri (?) inscription; Sikh period.
6. **Iron Bridge (Union Council Garhi Habibullah, Tehsil Balakot):** Connects Gul Dheri with Garhi Habibullah over River Kunhar; lies between $073^{\circ} 22.633'$ east longitude and $34^{\circ} 23.980'$ latitude; 819 metre above sea level; measuring 400x 30 feet; British Period (Watson 1907:232).
7. **Govt. High School (Union Council Garhi Habibullah, Tehsil Balakot):** On the right side of Garhi Habibullah Azad Kashmir road behind the old Bazar; lies between $073^{\circ} 22.878'$ east longitude and $34^{\circ} 24.160'$ north latitude; 834 metre above sea level; measuring 140x27.5 feet; badly damaged by the earthquake in 2005; It was originally a Hindu/Sikh temple and later converted into a Middle School and now upgraded to a High School; Sikh Period (Watson 1907:232).
8. **Atar Singh House (Union Council Garhi Habibullah, Tehsil Balakot):** On the opposite side of the Government High School, Garhi Habibullah; lies between $073^{\circ} 22.808'$ east longitude and $34^{\circ} 24.218'$ north latitude; 805 metre above sea level; presently owned by Aftab Shah; partially damaged by the earthquake in 2005; Sikh Period.
9. **Karnal Graveyard (Union Council Garhi Habibullah, Tehsil Balakot):** On the right bank of River Kunhar; lies between $073^{\circ} 22.824'$ east longitude and $34^{\circ} 22.913'$ north latitude; 781 metre above sea level, measuring 22x7 feet; it comprises 16 old graves, headstones are decorated with floral designs; Islamic Period.
10. **Tomb of Zinda Pir Karnal (Garhi Habibullah (Union Council Garhi Habibullah, Tehsil Balakot):** Lies between $073^{\circ} 22.635'$ east longitude and $34^{\circ} 23.055'$ north latitude; 838 metre above sea level; made of conjure stone; totally destroyed by the earthquake in 2005; the grave itself measures 7x5.5 feet; remnants of pillars; Islamic Period.
11. **Kot Bala Singh (Union Council Garhi Habibullah, Tehsil Balakot):** Lies between $073^{\circ} 21.218'$ east longitude and $34^{\circ} 28.324'$ north latitude; 992 metre above sea level; named after the

Sikh ruler Bala Singh, presently occupied by the Khan family; foundations of fortification walls; Sikh Period.

12. **Aman Kot Showhal (Union Council Garhi Habibullah, Tehsil Balakot):** Lies between 073° 21.603' east longitude and 34° 28.392' north latitude; 916 metre above sea level; unirrigated land now occupied by the Swati family; remnant of stone structures; Sikh period?
13. **Chopra Sharif Abad (Union Council Garhi Habibullah, Tehsil Balakot):** The site lies between 073° 22.233' east longitude and 34° 27.801' north latitude; 1095 metre above sea level; unirrigated land measuring 300x167 feet presently owned by the Swati family; potsherds and foundations of stone wall revealed; Sikh?
14. **Borhi ki Dheri (Union Council Garhi Habibullah, Tehsil Balakot):** The site is bifurcated by the Balakot-Garhi Habibullah road; lies between 073° 22.233' east longitude and 34° 27.801' east latitude; 1095 metre above sea level; un-irrigated land measures 250x135 feet; owned by Muhammad Zaman who claims that his father had found a large number of potsherds during the digging associated with structural remains; Sikh period.
15. **Naukot Cemetery (Union Council Garlat, Tehsil Balakot):** Located on the right side of Balakot-Garhi Habibullah road; lies between 073° 21.755' east longitude and 34° 30.159' north latitude; 1073 metre above sea level; measures 12x9 feet; presently owned by the Swati family; potsherds and charcoals found; Gandhara Graves/Sikh?
16. **Naukot Haveli (Union Council Garlat, Tehsil Balakot):** Lies between 073° 21.718' east longitude and 34° 30.221' north latitude; 1015 metre above sea level; measuring 210x150 feet; unirrigated land owned by the Swati family, completely destroyed; potsherds; Sikh period?
17. **Bela Mosque (Union Council Kaghan, Tehsil Balakot):** On Kaghan-Naran road lies between 073° 38.748' east longitude and 34° 53.832' north latitude; 2417 metre above sea level; the oldest preserved mosque in Kaghan, measuring 8.5x7 feet; the pillars with Ionic capitals are beautifully carved; building materials reused; 20th century.
18. **Batla Mosque (Union Council Kaghan, Tehsil Balakot):** Lies between 073° 37.428' east 34° 52.078' longitude and 34° 52.078' north latitude; 2367 metre above sea level; reconstructed; the materials i.e. wooden carved pillars and Ionic capitals are of earlier period; the present building is square in plan measuring 9.5x8 feet; late Islamic.
19. **Palurdan Mosque (Union Council Kaghan, Tehsil Balakot):** Lies between 073° 34.375' east longitude and 34° 50.901' north latitude; 2259 metre above sea level; measures 15x12 feet; materials i.e. richly carved wooden pillars and capitals reused; Late 20th century.
20. **Paludaran Houses (Union Council Kaghan, Tehsil Balakot):** There are two old houses near Paludaran mosque, one of them is claimed by the owner to be 500 years old, which is now used as a store room; while the second one is 130 years old; the former is larger in size measuring 41x20 feet; 17th-19th century CE.
21. **Paludaran Graves (Union Council Kaghan, Tehsil Balakot):** Graveyard lies between 073° 34.375' east longitude and 34° 50.901' north latitude; 2257 metre above sea level; headstones of

one of the graves is beautifully decorated with zoomorphic design (ducks), while that of the remaining with floral designs; Islamic Period.

22. **Pona Graves (Union Council Kaghan, Tehsil Balakot):** Lies between 073° 32.179' east longitude and 34° 50.132' latitude; 2173 metre above sea level; measuring 150x 12 feet; headstones of the old grave decorated with zoomorphic designs (ducks); Islamic period.
23. **Rajwal Graves (Union Council Kaghan, Tehsil Balakot):** The graveyard lies between 073° 32.995' east longitude and 34° 49.269' north latitude; 2133 metre above sea level; measuring 100 square feet; headstones decorated with zoomorphic designs (horses and ducks); Islamic Period.
24. **Rawalkot Graves (Union Council Kaghan, Tehsil Balakot):** The graveyard lies between 073° 30.764 east longitude and 34° 47.314' north latitude; 2233 metre above sea level; measuring 213x170 feet; comprised of both modern and ancient graves; headstones decorated with both floral and zoomorphic designs; Islamic period.
25. **Kaghan Graves (Union Council Kaghan, Tehsil Balakot):** The graveyard is located in the middle of Kaghan town on the right side of Kaghan-Naran road; lies between 073° 31.496 east longitude and 34° 96.688' latitude, 2075 metre above sea level; headstones decorated with floral and zoomorphic designs (ducks, owls and horses); Islamic Period.
26. **Agla Garan Graves (Union Council Kaghan, Tehsil Balakot):** Located on the right side of Kaghan-Naran road in the middle of Village named Agla Garan next to the British Period Jail; lies between 073° 31.496 east longitude and 34° 96.688' north latitude; 2075 metre above the sea level; measuring 319x270 feet; headstones of the old graves are richly decorated with floral and zoomorphic designs (ducks); Islamic Period.
27. **Agla Gran Jail (Union Council Kaghan, Tehsil Balakot):** Located next to the graveyard on the right side of the Kaghan-Naran road in village Agla Garan; the building is made of stone; measuring 86x30x28 metre; lies 073° 331.719' east longitude and 34° 46.162' north latitude, 2092 feet above sea level; It is the only British period building in the region; badly damaged by the earthquake in 2005; comprises of three main cells for the prisoners; lower cell for one year, middle for six months and the upper cell for three months; presently owned by Humayun Shah Syed of Kaghan; British Period.
28. **Pehli Lari Graves (Union Council Kaghan, Tehsil Balakot):** Lies between 073° 32.006' east longitude and 34° 45.476' latitude; 2197 metre above sea level; measuring 30x23 feet; headstones of the graves decorated with zoomorphic designs (ducks); Islamic Period.
29. **Mahandri Graves (Union Council Mahandri, Tehsil Balakot):** Located on the left bank of Kunhar; lies between 073° 34.681 east longitude and 34° 41.805' north latitude; 1520 metre above sea level; measuring 200x150 feet; graves with headstones decorated with floral, geometrical and zoomorphic designs; Islamic period.
30. **Sehri Manoor Graves (Union Council Mahandri, Tehsil Balakot):** Located about 20 km northeast of Mahandri; lies between 073° 38.242' east longitude and 34° 46.637' north latitude;

2212 metre above sea level; measuring 215x134 feet; the headstone of the graves decorated with ducks, flowers and wheel designs; Islamic period.

31. **Sehri Manoor (Union Council Mahandri, Tehsil Balakot):** The site is located about 1 km north of the graveyard; lies between 073° 38.024' east longitude and 34° 44.759' latitude; 2391 metre above the sea level; disturbed by the owners Maqbool-ur-Rahman and Ni'mat Shah for manure and agricultural purposes who claims to have revealed a pot full of charcoal during the digging process for pipe lines; Gandhara Grave/Hindu Shahi Period?
32. **Jarid Graves (Union Council Mahandri, Tehsil Balakot):** The graveyard lies between 073° 34.681' east longitude and 34° 41.805' north latitude; 1520 metre above sea level; measuring 200x 150 feet; headstones of the graves decorated with wheel design; Islamic period.
33. **Jarid Graves II (Union Council Mahandri, Tehsil Balakot):** The site lies 073° 33.490' east longitude and 34° 40.525' north latitude; 1494 metre above sea level; measuring 20x15 feet; headstones of the graves decorated with geometrical designs; Islamic Period.
34. **Sahri Manoor Bala (Union Council Mahandri, Tehsil Balakot):** Lies between 073° 38.024' east longitude and 34° 44.759' north latitude; 2391 metre above sea level; measuring 500x445 feet presently converted to agricultural field; the local people claim to have revealed potsherd and charcoals during the digging probe for water pipelines; Hindu Shahi Period.
35. **Jarid Graves III (Union Council Mahandri, Tehsil Balakot):** The site lies between 073°33.504' east longitude and 34° 40.610' north latitude; 1519 metre above sea level; measuring 15x12 feet; the headstones of the graves decorated with ducks and wheel; Islamic period.
36. **Butan Magra Gali Shohal (Union Council Angrai, Tehsil Balakot):** 20 km to the north west of the Jaraid village on the top of the hill; lies between 073°31.038' east longitude and 34° 40.326' north latitude; 2343 metre above sea level; unirrigated land measuring 300x250 feet; terracotta figurines (animal), potsherds; feasible for excavation; Hindu Shahi period?
37. **Kameel Gali Shogan (Union Angrai, Tehsil Balakot):** 200 metre to the north west of Butan Marga site; lies between 073°30.942' east longitude and 34° 40.442' north latitude; 2303 metre above sea level; unirrigated land covered with thick forest and partially covered with modern graves; potsherds and terracotta figurines found; Hindu Shahi?
38. **But Garan Kiwai (Union Council Kiwai, Tehsil Balakot):** Located to the right side of the Balakot-Kaghan road; lies between 073°28.279' east longitude and 34° 37.629' latitude 2355 metre above sea level; Irrigated land presently owned by the Syed family of Kiwai; the owner claims to have found potsherds and terracotta figurines; Hindu Shahi?
39. **Kapi Gali Graves (Union council Ghanul, Tehsil Balakot):** The site lies 073°22.309' east longitude 34° 35.378' latitude; 1339 metre above sea level; the headstone of the old graves decorated with floral designs; Islamic Period.
40. **Lari I, Kaghan (Union Council Kaghan, Tehsil Balakot):** The site is located on the right side of Mahandri-Kaghan road; lies between 073°31.761' east longitude and 34° 35.453' north

latitude; 2126 metre above sea level; Irrigated land completely vanished; owned by Syed family of Kaghan; potsherd; Sikh Period.

41. **Darvaish Abad (Union Council Kiwai, Tehsil Balakot):** Lies between 073°23.508' east longitude 34° 36.737' north latitude; 1412 metre above sea level; the sites reveals old graves headstone decorated with floral designs; Islamic period.
42. **Kapi Gali (Union Council Ghanul, Tehsil Balakot):** The site lies between 073°22.342' east longitude and 34° 35.359' latitude 1330 metre above sea level; severely damaged and used for agricultural purposes; potsherds; period unknown.
43. **Pambara (Union Council Angrai, Tehsil Balakot):** Lies between 073°21.169' east longitude and 34° 36.106' north latitude; 1598 metre above sea level; potsherds and animal figurines; Hindu Shahi Period?
44. **Pumbara Water Tank (Union Council Angrai, Tehsil Balakot):** Lies between 073°21.169' east longitude and 34° 35.508' north latitude; 1598 metre above sea level; made of undressed stone; used for storage of water for cattle; early 20th century CE.
45. **Sever Graves (Union Council Angrai, Tehsil Balakot):** Located on the right side of Balakot Sever road; lies between 073°21.957' east longitude and 34° 38.026' latitude; 1788 metre above sea level; headstones of old graves decorated with floral designs; Islamic period.
46. **Margag Graves (Union Council Angrai, Tehsil Balakot):** Located on the left side of Balakot Sever road; the headstone of the old graves decorated with floral and zoomorphic designs; Islamic Period.
47. **Bandian Graves (Union Council Angrai, Tehsil Balakot):** The site lies between 073°18.919' east longitude and 34° 33.825' latitude; 1435 metre above sea level; headstone of the graves decorated with floral designs; Islamic Period.
48. **Batangi Graves I (Union Council Angrai, Tehsil Balakot):** Located to the left side of Balakot Angrai road; lies between 073°21.184' east longitude 34° 36.664' north latitude; 1724 metre above sea level; the biggest fortified graveyard of the region having a variety of graves headstones decorated with floral, geometrical and animal designs; Islamic period.
49. **Batangi Graves II (Union Council Angrai, Tehsil Balakot):** The site lies between 73°21.229' east longitude and 34° 36.654' north latitude; 1775 metre above sea level; the graveyard is comprised of modern and old graves headstone decorated with floral, geometrical and zoomorphic designs; Islamic period.
50. **Matti Kot Graveyard (Union Council Balakot, Tehsil Balakot):** The site lies between 73°20.176' east longitude and 34° 24.266' north latitude; 1230 metre above sea level; headstone of the graves decorated with floral designs; Islamic period.
51. **Lower Matti Kot (Union Council Balakot, Tehsil Balakot):** The site lies between 73°19.19.295' east longitude and 34° 22.625' latitude; 1509 metre above sea level; wall structures associated with potsherds; unidentified.

- 52. Kameel Gali I (Union Council Angrai, Tehsil Balakot):** The site lies between 73° 22.910' east longitude and 34° 38.763' north latitude 2424 metre above sea level; unirrigated land covered with bushes; measuring 270x 73 feet partially destroyed by the robbers; potsherds and figurines; feasible for excavation; Hindu Shahi period?
- 53. Kameel Gali II (Union Council Angrai, Tehsil Balakot):** 2 km to the west of Kameel Gali I; lies between 73° 21.627' east longitude and 34° 34.38.957' north latitude; 2464 metre above sea level; measuring 210x70 feet; potsherds and animal and human figurines found scattered on the surface; partially destroyed by illegal diggers; feasible for excavation; Hindu Shahi?

Summary

The field investigation conducted in Tehsil Balakot (Mansehra) by the Department of CHTM and later on resumed by the Department of Archaeology (Hazara University) was very productive. The survey has recorded a total of 53 sites, which include archaeological mounds, old houses, mosques, tombs, graves and other secular buildings. Worth mentioning among them are old graves with elegantly decorated headstones. The headstones are carved with floral, animals, birds and geometrical designs. According to the local population, these graves belong to the Turks, who ruled this region from 1399 CE to 1713 CE when they were defeated by Jalal Baba (Khan 1976: 217-218).

This tradition of carving headstones continued and was adopted by the rest of the people with some modifications. The old headstone are made of hard sandstone decorated with zoomorphic (ducks, horses and owls) and geometrical (wheel designs) and so forth.

Although most of the sites reported during the survey belong to the late historic period ranging from the Hindu Shahi to the British periods, some of them like Naukot Cemetery and Sehri Manoor may be assigned to the earlier Gandhara Grave culture on the basis of pot burials as claimed by the local population. In addition, three caves were also reported from Garhi Habibullah having black soot on the ceilings but no stone tools found on the surface. These lithic and Gandhara Graves sites need further investigations to authenticate the cultural and archaeological past of the region.

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Plates



Agla Garan and Batangi Graves with Headstones of the graves decorated with wheel horse and floral designs



A view of Chamra Gali site in Union Council (Bala Kot) partially damages by the illegal diggers



A view of Bela Mosque in Union Council Naran



Iron Bridge and old shop in Union Council Garhi Habibullah



Tombs of Sayid (Kaghan) and Zinda Pir Kanol (Garhi Habibullah)



Pot Burial from Naukot (Balakot)



Animal Figurines and potsherds reported from Buttan Shograh, Union Council Angrai

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