

Latest Archaeological Explorations in the Chitral Valley (2009)

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The present report is a summary of recent field investigations conducted jointly by Hazara University (Mansehra), the University of Leicester (UK) and Abdul Wali Khan University (Mardan) as part of a 3-year project titled *Archaeological Investigations and their Link to Heritage Management in District Chitral, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan* being funded by the British Council. Archaeologists, students and technical experts from these three institutions participated in the field work that spread over a period of about two months.

The chief aims of this project are to systematically explore the archaeology of the Chitral Valley, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan and to develop ways of presenting and managing this unique heritage. Chitral is one of the most remote areas in all Pakistan, and primarily known to foreign and domestic visitors for natural beauty, mountaineering, hiking and wild life. Preliminary investigations show that Chitral has a wealth of cultural history, which is poorly understood. If this cultural history can be identified, excavated and recorded, it would not only help scholars and residents of the valleys to understand the past in this area, but it could also be used to develop sustainable cultural tourism here. In the first field season (2009), archaeological survey was the primary means of obtaining archaeological data, and in order to remove bias and to begin to obtain a more complete picture of past settlement activity in this region, a systematic approach to survey was taken. This systematic approach consisted of surveying in 24 parallel transects, each one five km long, allowing us to cover an area of 125² km in total. This method is in direct contrast to the more usual 'village to village' survey approach, which has been employed in this region to date. Alongside this new survey methodology, sites reported by local people were also recorded, as well as preliminary work on the heritage element of the project, which will be reported separately.

In this first year of the project, survey was focused in the lower part of District Chitral, to the south of Chitral town, and a total number of 17 archaeological sites were documented; most of them attributed to the so-called 'Gandhara grave culture' including one big cemetery of Balasht in the Ayun area. Another interesting grave complex was documented in Muldeh Ayun. Some historic period fortresses such as Chamarkun fortress (Noghorzoom), located at an elevation of about 5500 feet, Noghorgai and Narotek fortresses (all previously known sites) were also explored.

Transect Survey

The area from Chamarkun to Syedabad village, located on the left bank of the river Chitral, was covered in the grid of twenty four transect lines. The extreme topography of Chitral made the survey very difficult in this first season. In almost all transect lines, our teams had to climb up for two to three hours only to reach their starting point, from where they had to mount further five km without any climbing equipments/training etc. Furthermore, to reach finishing transect points, our teams

constantly had to cross high and rigid peaks of 10,000 feet to 12,000 feet. However, this season has provided considerable valuable information towards our understanding of past human settlement, and our testing of models of site location. Our results indicate the absence of settlement on the upper slopes of the foothills of the Hindu Kush range which characterize Chitral, and the survey did not locate any sites indicative of past resource exploitation in these upper slopes, despite the survey team noting various minerals, plants and animals in abundance. The sites noted during transect survey comprised two historic period mosques and one other site of unknown period. Given the location of this latter site and reported nature of the finds thus far removed by local people (see below), this site could be a focus for further exploration in the second field season of the project.

Sites discovered through Transect archaeological survey

Transect No:	A13-A14
Site No:	A13-1
Site Name:	Umair mosque in Dhamoon
GPS coordinates:	N 35.74582, E 071.79748
Elevation:	1745m
Location:	Broz (Chitral)
Tentative period:	British period
Material:	Wooden, mud and stone construction

Further remarks

This beautiful mosque (Fig. 1) is located in the centre of *Dhamoon* village. The old name of this mosque was 'Moldeh mosque'. Wall enclosure of the mosque is about one metre high. Two entrances are provided, one in the basement through the northern side, while another (main) entrance on the eastern side. Wood is the main building material used in this mosque. The three aisle deep prayer hall is supported on carved wooden pillars and cusped arches.

Transect No:	A13-A14
Site No:	A13-2
Site Name:	Bilal Mosque Dhamoon
GPS coordinates:	N 35.74557, E 071.79927
Elevation:	1769m
Location:	Broz, Chitral
Tentative period:	Mehtar, historical period

Further remarks

Bilal mosque (Fig. 2) is located next to Umair mosque. The old name of this mosque was 'Toldeh mosque'. Architectural similarity of both these mosques tends to suggest that they were built contemporaneously. This mosque is enclosed by two metre high wall with two entrances, both being on the northern side. The wooden pillars are carved with floral and geometrical designs. The courtyard contains a water tank for ablution. Steps are constructed to provide access to the basement of the mosque.

Transect No: A13-14
Site No: A13-3
Site Name: Upper Dhamoon
GPS coordinates: N 35.74517, E 071.80326
Elevation: 1889m
Location: Broz, Chitral
Material: Potsherds, bones and stone slabs

Further remarks

The site is located on the high mound near *Dhamoon* village in Broz area of Chitral. The surface of the site is littered with potsherds. Few illegal excavated pits could also be seen. According to the local people, it was from these pits that two big terracotta jars were unearthed. The date and nature of the site could be determined only through proper excavation.

Sites recorded during Village to Village Survey

Further work will take place in season two of this project to determine which of these sites has already been noted by previous surveys in the area; particularly those in the Ayun region, to the north of the first season survey area.

Site Name: Naghorzoom
GPS coordinates: N 35.78904, E 071.78412
Elevation: 1744m
Location: Chamarkun
Site size: (L) 45m (W) 24m
Tentative period: Mehtar/ historical period
Material: Potsherds

Further remarks

This small beautiful fortress (Figs. 3-4) is located on a very high hill peak near Chamarkun village. This is the highest fortress in the Chitral valley discovered so far. In the local language, the name *Naghorzoom* means 'Fort on mountain'. This well-fortified structure is located on a considerable strategic point, from where the three valleys of Chamarkun and Chitral city on the north, Broz on the south and *Orgoch* valley on the west could be easily guarded. Noghorzoom is not within easy reach, which lies at two hours tedious march from the Chamarkun village. The only entrance is from the eastern side, which is passable through very perilous creeping. The fortress contains twenty one rooms of different sizes and style. Most of the construction is done in rubble masonry. Large number of potsherds are scattered on the surface.

Site Name: Tor Deh Cave complex
GPS coordinates: N 35.80103, E 071.79108
Elevation: 1626m

Location: Chamarkun
Tentative period: Historic
Material: Mud plaster

Further remarks

This cave complex is mostly eroded due to land sliding. We were unable to find any cultural material from here. Located to the left side of Qakdar Gol, it is locally known as *Zooyotek*. These caves are made without any proper planning. We could determine the age of the caves in case of proper excavation and removing the debris. The local people use them as store houses and also as a shelter for their cattle in harsh weathering conditions.

Site Name: Naghoorgai
GPS coordinates: N 35.78503, E 071.77299
Elevation: 1471m
Location: Chamarkun
Tentative period: Mehtar, historic period
Material: Potsherds

Further remarks

This is a small historic period fortress located on the left bank of river Chitral. According to local information, this place was used by the prince as a hunting camp. The fortress can be classified mainly into two parts, upper and lower. The lower part is further divided into five portions, all interconnected by small passages. Each compartment of the lower part is having small room at the centre, facing southwards. All construction is made with rubble masonry. The fortress is protected from erosion from the hill side by a series of parallel walls.

Entrance of the fortress is well guarded through small posts, suggesting a highly secured place. Currently this place is re-occupied by nomadic people, who use to live here during seasonal migration with their cattle.

Upper part of the fortress is accessible only through steps from the lower area. The upper portion still preserves remains of a big hall, facing towards very scenic view of the river Chitral.

Site Name: Kror
GPS coordinates: N 35.76276, E 071.78040
Elevation: 1456m
Location: Broz, Chitral
Tentative period: GGC
Material: Potsherds, bones

Further remarks

Located on the left bank of the river Chitral, this vast area measures (800x500)m, most part of which is still cultivated. According to some reliable local information, large number of human bones,

terracotta jars and other metal implements were recovered during field cultivation. Presently, we could find some grave slabs and scattered potsherds.

Site Name: Bakarabad
GPS coordinates: N 35.80549, E 071.78106
Elevation: 1516m
Location: Bakarabad, Chitral
Tentative period: GGC and Historic period graveyard
Material: Potsherds/grave slabs

Further remarks

Bakarabad is a sizeable ancient graveyard. It is also used by the Muslims for their burials. We find here two main types of graves: with no specific orientation, whose slabs are visible only, the main feature of the Grave Culture site, while the second type of graves are in north-south direction. Limited number of potsherds was collected during our field work.

Site Name: Muldeh
GPS coordinates: N 35.73005, E 071.77183,
Elevation: 1449m
Location: Ayun, Chitral
Tentative period: GGC
Material: Stone slabs, bones and potsherds

Further remarks

Divided into two parts, this ancient graveyard of Ayun is presently reused by the Muslims for their burials. Remains of ancient graves in the form of bones and stone slabs were exposed due to erosion caused by water action. The local people frequently find grave materials during digging for construction or cultivation. Potsherds are thickly scattered all over the surface of the site. Currently, most of the site is encroached by the local villagers. The second part of the Muldeh grave complex is located near Ayun Bridge; the site too is very rich in nature. The local people use the site as a quarry for their building materials.

Site Name: Tolian
GPS coordinates: N 35.72911, E 071.77074
Elevation: 1451m
Location: Ayun, Chitral
Tentative period: GGC
Material: Potsherds, bones and stone slabs

Further remarks

Some open graves were observed, inside which bones and potsherds could be seen (Fig. 5). The site is mostly occupied by the Muslims for their graves and houses. No other structural remains were found during field walk.

Site Name: Kashkara-o-Tek
GPS coordinates: N 35.71101, E 071.76236
Elevation: 1575m
Location: Ayun, Chitral
Tentative period: GGC
Material: Potsherds, bones and stone slabs

Further remarks

This grave culture site is located just outside the main village, and near the small hill basin. Grave pottery and slabs visible on the surface connote to its being an archaeological site. This site is rapidly mouldering due to natural hazards.

Site Name: Barausht/Balausht
GPS coordinates: N 35.72496, E 071.76876
Elevation: 1479m
Location: Ayun, Chitral
Tentative period: GGC
Material: Potsherds, bones and stone slabs

Further remarks

This interesting and huge site (Fig. 6) is used for cultivation. Most part of the site is located on the edge of the spur, where during rainy season, erosion is wiping out this peerless grave complex. Because of water erosion one can see few open graves, with huge slab boxes, bones and pottery inside. Houses and tube well is constructed in the middle of the site.

Site Name: Masjid-i Kalan
GPS coordinates: N 35.71278, E 071.76662
Elevation: 1461m
Location: Ayun, Chitral
Tentative period: Mehtar/British period
Material: Wood, mud and stone structure

Further remarks

This mosque (Fig. 7) is located on the raised edge of the eastern part of the main Ayun bazaar. There is an ablution tank in the down storey of this beautifully constructed mosque. The wooden architecture of the mosque seems to be the carbon copy of the stone structure of the British period.

Site Name: Narotek
GPS coordinates: N 35.7157, E 071.75774
Elevation: 1761m
Location: Ayun, Chitral
Tentative period: British period
Material: Potsherds and cut stones

Further remarks

Remains of a small fortress can be seen on the high peak of the hill (Figs. 8-9). The fortress type structure is built in stone and contains few rooms in the southern end. Potsherds are dotting the whole covered area, which indicates that once the entire structure had been thickly populated. The fortress is located on the key strategically location, where one could guard all the four directions of the valley.

Site Name: Karits
GPS coordinates: N 35.73657, E 071.77178
Elevation: 1606m
Location: Ayun, Chitral
Tentative period: Mehter
Material: Potsherds, bones and stone slab

Further remarks

This fortress is located near Muldeh archaeological complex, and can be divided into two main parts, upper and lower. Enclosure wall is observed around the structures inside. There are traces of four bastions at each corner of the fortress. Scattered pottery can still be seen in large number. Alongside, one can see outlines of water tank and small cells. This fortress is also located at significant strategic location. According to the locals, there was an ancient route along this fortress, which had been used by the Kalasha people for moving towards Chitral.

Site Name: Gumbat
GPS coordinates: N 35.72671, E 071.79481
Elevation: 1764m
Location: Broz, Chitral
Tentative period: Historic period
Material: Potsherds

Further remarks

Before reaching the transect starting line of B15, we recorded a small compound, badly disturbed. Some potsherds were scattered in this single room structure.

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Fig. 1: Umair Mosque in Dhamoon



Fig. 2: Bilal Mosque



Fig. 3: Chamarkun Fortress



Fig. 4: Details of Fig. 3



Fig. 5: Tolian Graves



Fig. 6: Balausht Cemetery



Fig. 7: Masjid-i Kalan (Ayun)



Fig. 8: Narotek Fortress



Fig. 9: Detailed view of Fig. 8