Archaeological Evidence of Possible Transhumant Settlements at Shati Das – Shatial, District Upper Kohistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

Muhammad Zahir / Ijaz Khan / Feryal Ali Gauhar
Abdul Ghani Khan / M. Shahid Khan Khalil

Abstract

This paper presents the discovery of the first archaeological evidence of early historic transhumant settlement at the Shati Das. The site is located on the left bank of Indus River near the famous Shatial rock carving sites at District Upper Kohistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan. The settlements are located around dried-up lakes at Shati Das. The present discovery shed lights on possible contemporary settlements of the Shatial and Shatial Das rock carving sites. The abandoned settlements are spread around 21 hectares and the structures within, based upon the construction methods and buried nature, belonged to two chronological phases. The settlement of both phases are mainly located in the south and south eastern sides of the lakes. More than 50 percent of the structures are less than 100 square metres in area, while few of the structures cover more than 500 square metres area. Almost all the structures seem to have been divided into two functional areas for animals and humans. The lack of chronometric and environmental datasets from the site hinders the accurate dating of the site. However, the settlements were probably contemporary with the rock carving sites at Shatial and might have belonged to 1st millennium CE.

Keywords: Shatial Rock Carving, Shatial Das: Kohistan archaeology, Transhumant Settlements, Yaghistan, Northern Pakistan Archaeology

1. Introduction

The small village of Shatial is located in District Upper Kohistan of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. District Kohistan was separated from the Gilgit Agency in 1950 as a separate administrative unit (Dani 1991: 7). The Upper Kohistan District, raised in 2014, is bounded in the north, and north and northeast by Ghizer and Diamer

districts of Gilgit-Baltistan province respectively, in the northwest by District Mansehra of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in the west and southwest by district Lower Kohistan and in the south by District Swat of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province (Fig. 1). District Upper Kohistan is about 75 kilometres (northeast to southwest) wide and 135 kilometres (northwest to southeast) long. Kohistan is also referred to as the Indus Kohistan region in literature (Dani 1991: 76; Dichter 1967: 53; Frembgen 1999; Hauptmann 2008: 352; Jettmar 1961: 98; Nasim Khan 1997-98; Stein 1942: 50). The Indus Kohistan region is mountainous and 'presents an interplay of high mountains and deep river beds' (Dani 1991: 2).

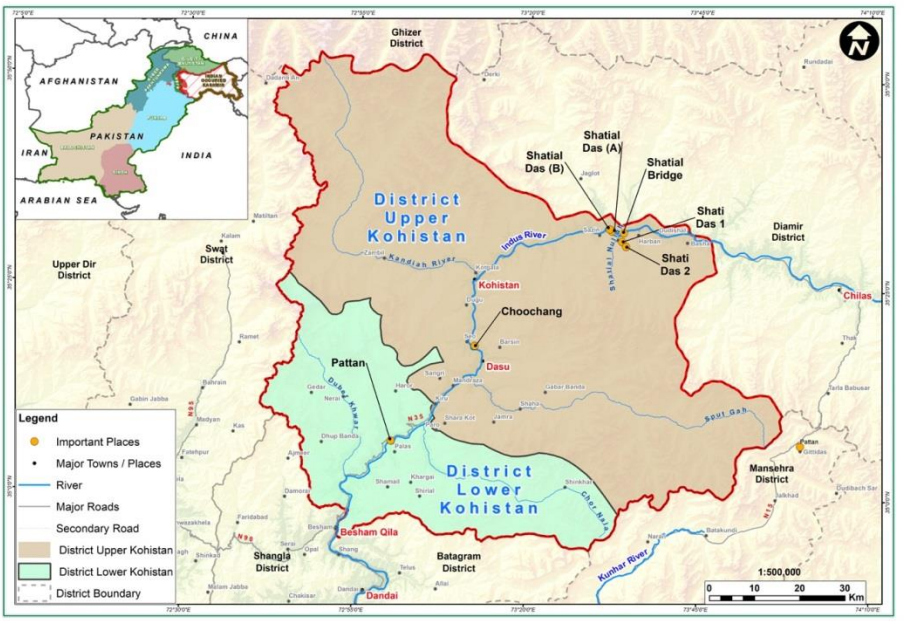

Fig. 1 - Location Map of Shati Das, District Upper and Lower Kohistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan.

The Indus River roughly divides the Kohistan region into eastern and western parts (Fig. 1). In the mid-1940s, the Wali of the Swat State forcefully merged Kohistani regions on the western side of the Indus River (Jettmar 1961: 98). Until the early twentieth century, the whole of Kohistan was considered as the *Yaghistan* region; however, after the union, only the Kohistani regions on the eastern side of the Indus River were later on identified with *Yaghistan* (Dani 1991: 277).

Kohistan is well known for the discovery of large number of Buddhist rock carvings at the site of Shatial. The relatively small valley of Shatial is located between the larger Harban and Sazin valleys; in fact, the Shatial village historically belonged to the people of Sazin (Biddulph 1971[1880]: 12). The Shatial rock carvings, classified into Shatial-I, II and III sites, are located on the left bank of the Indus River Fussman and Bandini-König 1997: 3). These sites were extensively documented by the Pak-German Archaeological Mission, under the guidance of Prof. Karl Jettmar and Prof. Harald Hauptmann, and Prof. Ahmad Hasan Dani, of the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, Germany and University of Islamabad (later renamed as Quad-i-Azam University, Islamabad), Pakistan respectively. These sites are situated around the present Shatial Bridge, which was a major crossing juncture and nodal point on Indus River from 3rd to 8th century CE, connecting the regions of Kashmir and Hazara with Swat valley and beyond. Together, these sites were considered as the only rock carving sites in District Upper Kohistan. The recent discovery of pre-Buddhist rock carvings at Shatial Das by the authors adds further to the current archaeological knowledge of the region. The rock carvings of Shatial Das, dealt in a separate paper by the authors (Zahir et al 2020 – upcoming), are significant for the archaeology of the region.

With limited agricultural land, rainfall and drinking water, the people of district Upper Kohistan primarily engage in animal husbandry (such as goat and sheep farming) and generally practice summer transhumance. In summers, when the weather becomes extremely hot in the main Kohistan valley, most of its populace living in close proximity to the Indus River migrate to high altitude small tributary river-valleys that are relatively colder and greener as compared to the main valleys.

The Upper Kohistan District is strategically located in the middle of the Kashmir valley, Gilgit-Baltistan, Hazara and Swat regions. These regions are known for their rich archaeological heritage. However, the archaeology of Kohistan region is almost unknown and unexplored. The archaeological knowledge of the region is primarily based upon the chance finding of a Scythian gold-girdle, weighing more than 16 kilograms, near Pattan town, now stored in the State Bank of Pakistan as the property of the Peshawar Museum (Hameed 2015: 73; Nasim Khan 1997-98: 127; Rahaman 1990: 5), and the documentation of about seven hundred rock carvings at Shatial rock

carving sites by the Pak-German Archaeological Mission (Fussman and Bandini-König 1997). Prof. Ahmad Hasan Dani reported the presence of a bronze ibex in the 'Scytho-Siberian animal style' from Kandia valley of the Kohistan and dated it to the 1st millennium BCE (Dani 1983; Mughal 1985: 216).

Shatial rock carving sites are considered as the starting point of the richest rock art province in northern Pakistan. The rock art province is constituted by a continuum of rock carving sites running parallel for about one hundred kilometres along the Indus River from Shatial to the Raikot Bridge in District Diamer of Gilgit-Baltistan province (Hauptmann 2008: 353). The Shatial rock carvings were discovered when, in 1979, local people took Prof. Ahmad Hasan Dani and Prof. Karl Jettmar to these carvings (Fussman and Bandini-König 1997: 3). Gérard Fussman (1994: 1) suggested that the site was discovered by Prof. Karl Jettmar on October 25, 1979. Since then, five fieldwork seasons have been carried out by Pakistani and German researchers to document the sites at Shatial (Fussman and Bandini-König 1997: 3). In 1983, under the direction of K. Jettmar and V. Thewalt, the boundaries of Shatial I were marked up to the western edge of the Shatial bridge and Shatial III the middle and the eastern complex, while Shatail II only included the engravings on the left side of the Karakoram Highway (Fussman and Bandini-König 1997: 3). Prof. Ahmad Hasan Dani, referring Nicholas Sims-William, suggested that the old name of Shatial rock carving site was *K'rt* and that the inscriptions recorded it as a sacred site in itself (Dani 1991: 133). Shatial, connected through a bridge with the Tangir valley, was central to the movement of people, ideas and goods with the Swat region, Chitral, Badakhshan and Sinkiang regions through a relatively short route (Fussman 1994: 1).

Before the introduction of Islam in the Kohistan region, villages were believed to have been commonly fortified (Dani 1991: 65; Frembgen 1999:85; Jettmar 1983). These village forts, connected with the Shin people of the region, were constructed on difficult-to-reach terrains, such as on mountain-tops (Frembgen 2008: 254). At least six ancient forts existed in the relatively small Harban valley of the Kohistan region, namely the forts of Hagai-*kot* also known as Tairo-*kot*, Budel-*kot* or Harban-*kot*, Galo-*kot*, Doro-*kot*, Loto-*kot* and Shuro-*kot* (Frembgen 2008: 255 – 257; italics are in the original). It is also believed, though without any substantial archaeological or historical evidence, that during the phase of Islamization of the region in the 18th

century CE, the people of the region left their earlier fortified settlements located on strategic heights (Frembgen 1999: 85; Jettmar 1983: 511). In the 19th century CE, these small village fortresses were seen as a threat to the British in the region and, consequently, the British destroyed these 'local fortresses' in 1892 (Dani 1991: 79). This destruction might have caused the discontinuation of the tradition of construction of the fortified villages in the region. However, the present discovery of non-fortified early historic settlement at Shati Das in the vicinity of the Shatial and Shatial Das rock carving sites, around the now dried-up lakes, problematize this perception. The previous researcher believed that the discontinuation of fortified settlements occurred to the end of 19th Century CE while our newly recorded settlements are older, corresponding to the Shatial rock carvings, and these were not abandoned due to Islamization or British destruction. These are much earlier and the construction and abandonment seem to be related with environmental rather than human agency.

2. Shati Das site

Shati Das is the high altitude plains of the Shatial village that are located around 1000 - 1500 feet higher than the modern Shatial Bazar (Fig. 1). Shati Das in local Kohistani language mean the 'plains of Shati' or 'plains of Shatial'. The pasture lands of Shati Das communally belong to the inhabitants of Shatial and the inhabitants of Shatial still take animals for grazing there. The Shati Das was until very recently accessible through a high gradient mule/goat trails, which is now being converted into a jeep-able road. The trails would have required around 2 – 3 hours for a novice and outsider to climb the mountain. The locals were relatively quick to pace the high gradient climb and would reach the Shati Das site in an hour from Shatial rock carving sites. The Shati Das was accidently discovered by the present authors during their survey of the rock carving sites at Shatial as part of the Cultural Heritage Management Plan (CHMP) of the Dasu Hydropower Project.

The Shati Das is basically a collection of two relatively small mountain valleys, covered on all four sides by relatively steep high rising mountains (Fig. 2). These mountains drain into their respective valley bottoms without low-level outlets down into the Shatial valley below; hence the water was collected in the form of a lake in their

respective valleys. The lakes are currently dried; however, the locals have converted them into agricultural fields for dry forming.

Fig. 2 - Dried-up lakes (outlined in white), transhumant structures (outlined in red) at Shati Das and Shatial carving site (source: Google Earth Pro 2019).

The Upper Kohistan district has a humid subtropical climate with mild and generally warm and temperate weather. With an average rainfall of 648 millimetres precipitation per year at the district headquarters Dasu, the Upper Kohistan district could be considered as supporting environments 'with moderate rainfall spread across the year or portion of the year with sporadic drought, mild to warm summers and cool to cold winters' (Simmons 2015). There is no long term environmental dataset available for the region to warrant comments on environmental fluctuations in the last two millennia. However, with extensive forest cover, the rainfall patterns might have been different in the past. The extensive deforestation might have affected the rainfall patterns within the last few centuries.

Fig. 3 - Dried-up lake 1, Shati Das, Shatial.

There are four dried-up lakes at the Shati Das site (Fig. 2). The Shati Das lake 1, located at latitude 35°30'52.51"N and longitude 73°33'36.63"E, is the nearest and the first to encounter when climbing from north-west or Shatial village. It, located at about 4200 feet from mean sea level, has a perimeter of about 1480 metres and covers an approximately 4.6 hectares in area (Fig. 3). The Shati Das lake 2 is the farthest to the south and the largest of the lakes. It is approximately 500 feet high, by conservative estimates, from the first lake at around 4700 feet from mean sea level. It is located at latitude 35°30'12.90"N and longitude 73°34'9.85"E, and has a perimeter of approximately 2350 metres, covering an approximate area of 26 hectares (Fig. 4). The lake 3 at Shati Das is the smallest of all the lakes and is located at latitude 35°31'7.62"N and longitude 73°34'16.07"E. It has a perimeter of about 147 meters and is 0.25 acres in area. The Shati Das lake 4 is located almost in the middle of the lake 1 and 2 and is located at latitude 35°30'16.26"N and longitude 73°33'36.86"E. The perimeter of the lake 4 is around 850 meters and covers around 4 hectares in area. All the lakes were rain-filled in the past and collected waters from their respective mountains. A similar lake, located at latitude 35°32'28.20"N and longitude 73°32'40.49"E was also discovered on the right bank of the Indus River, across the Shatial bridge. This lake has a perimeter of 1050 meters and covers around 6.5 hectares in area. No settlement was found around this lake.

Fig. 4 - Details of settlement around dried-up lake 2 at Shati Das, Shatial (source: Google Earth Pro 2019).

The survey team, in the company of a local guide, was able to briefly visit the site on Saturday October 6, 2018. In fact, the visit lasted for about a couple of hours as the team had to return to Dasu before evening on the same day. Since then, the team has not been able to visit the site. The present report is based upon field notes, photographs and investigation through Google Earth Pro software. During the field visit, settlements were only recorded at the first lake at Shati Das; however, later investigation through Google Earth Pro revealed extensive settlements along lake 4 and other areas near Shatial rock carving site III. All the measurements for perimeter and areas of the buildings, with the exception of two, and the extent of the sites and settlements, was calculated through Google Earth Pro. Extensive settlement activities were only recorded at and around lake 1 and 2 at Shati Das (Fig. 5 and 6).

Fig. 5 - Structures along the southern edge of lake 1, Shati Das, Shatial.

Fig. 6 - General view of the structures and lake 1, Shati Das, Shatial.

3. Analysis and Discussion

Through Google Earth Pro, a total of 80 structures were documented, primarily built and spread around the lake 1 and 2. The settlement around lake 1 covered around 9 hectares area and were located to the

north-west, west and south-west banks on the slope of the mountains. The settlement around lake 2 covered an approximately 12 hectares area and was located at the eastern, south-eastern and southern banks of the lake.

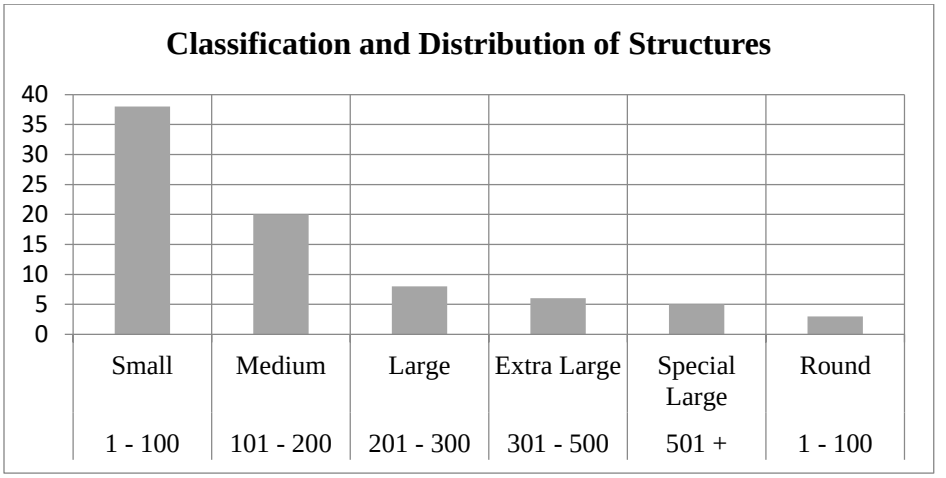

Fig. 7 - Classification of structures by area at Shati Das

Based upon the shapes of the structures, the overwhelming majority, or 77 of 80, of structures were constructed in rectangular shape, while the reminder three were round in shape (Table 1). Similarly, based upon the area of the structures, we classified the structures into five categories, namely Small (including structures from 1 to 100 square metres in area), medium (101 to 200 square metres), large (201 to 300 square metres), extra-large (301 to 500 square metres) and special-large (501 square metres plus).

More than 50 percent or 41 of 80 structures made up the small-sized category of structures which fell under 100 square metres area. These included three round structures as well and one of them, upon physical visit, seemed as the base of a stupa-like structure (Fig. 8). However, this observation was not based upon any finding of Buddhist material culture or architecture at the site during the brief visit; however, this may change with intensive surveys and excavations in future. The second largest group, 20 of 80 or 25 percent, belong to medium-sized structures, which had an area between 101 and 200 square metres. Ten percent or 8 of 80 structures belonged to the large-

sized category of the structures, measuring 201 to 300 square metres. The extra-large and special-large-sized categories, with areas between 301 to 500 square metres and plus 501 square metres respectively, were the smallest of the groups at the Shati Das and are represented by 6 and 5 structures respectively. This means that, although, the majority of the structures at the site were less or equal to 200 square metres in area, the large, extra-large, and special-large structures were also not uncommon. It is possible that the size of the structure was defined by their function and roles in the landscape, and the creation and maintenance of social identities and statuses within the contemporary society.

Fig. 8 - Stupa-like round structure of earliest phase, Shati Das, Shatial.

The two physically measured structures around lake 1 were 28 metres x 27 metres (or 756 square metres in area) and 19. 4 x 7 metres (or 136 square metres in area) and belonged to the medium-sized and special-large-sized categories. The first structure belonged to the earliest phase at the Shati Das, while the latter structure belonged to the later chronological phase at the site. If these could be considered as type-structures of the two chronological phases, it was clear that the earliest structures were larger than the later structures at Shati Das site.

Fig. 9 - Earliest phase structures at Shati Das, Shatial.

The brief physical inspection of the structures around lake 1 revealed at least two chronological phases, based upon the conditions of the structures and buried nature. The earliest phase structures were buried deep into the alluvial deposits (Fig. 8 and 9), while the later phase structures had largely intact walls, sometimes standing up to one metre high (Fig. 10). The building methods seemed to have remained the same within these two structurally-defined chronological phases. The structures were usually constructed of irregular shape stone and were laid in mud-mortar. Sometimes, the mud mortar, especially in the later chronological phase, contained small bits of pottery or grounded potsherds. Generally, the structures, especially in the later phase, consisted of a large hall with an attached small room. A single example was also noted of which consisted of two large halls; one of the halls had a flat stone in the middle, possible a base of wooden pillar. It is also possible that the stone, which had a broken edge in the form of an opening, might have been sacrificial stone, where animals might have been slaughtered (Fig. 11). The earliest structures were almost always buried deep into the soil and usually a single layer of stones of the walls is visible on the ground. Bits of potsherd in the earliest phase structures were well-fired red-ware, sometimes decorated with grooved designs on the outside. The grooved designs on historic pottery were generally associated with early historic or Buddhist settlements in the

Taxila Valley, Vale of Peshawar and Swat Valley. Some of the potsherds had grey interiors and were provided with a yellowish/reddish wash on the exterior. The walls of the earliest phase structure were generally wider, mostly more than one metre in width, as compared to the later phase structures. At least one of the earliest structures, round in shape, seemed like the base of a stupa-like structure; however, no potsherds or broken sculpture or umbrella pieces were found in and around the structure. This structure was located on relatively higher ground near the south-eastern corner of the lake 1.

Fig. 10- Later phase structures at Shati Das, Shatial.

Fig. 11- Possible sacrificial stone at Shati Das, Shatial.

Fig. 12- Square niches in the walls of later phase structures, Shati Das.

Fig. 13 - Narrow entrances to the structures, Shati Das, Shatial.

Most of the later phase structures had high standing walls with 6-8 rows of irregular stones set in mud-mortar. The walls did not show nay sign of plaster on the exterior or interior surfaces. However, the interior surfaces of the walls were more aligned than the exterior surfaces, suggesting that the builders paid more attention to the interior rather the

exterior. The thickness of the walls of these later phase structures was less than half a metre, almost half of the thickness of the earliest structures. On the interior, these walls were provided with square niches (Fig. 12). Entrances were provided in one of the corners of the large halls and were usually about half a metre in width. This means that the structures were generally provided with narrow entrances (Fig. 13). Some of the large halls were oriented along the slope of the mountain (Fig. 10). The attached room is almost always square in shape and is usually much smaller than the main hall of the structure.

The close inspection revealed at least two types of masonry in the later phase structures; some of the structures were more carefully constructed with extensive use of mortar than the others. The walls of the halls were generally well-laid and straight. In the later phase structures, the walls were generally constructed of small-sized broken rocks from mountain slopes and were usually less than 20 – 40 centimetres in lengths and widths. However, in some of the building large rocks, more than one metre in lengths or widths were also utilized within the large perimeter walls. The earliest structures generally utilized larger stones as compared to the later phase structures. It was also observed that the early phase structures were built largely square in plan. Furthermore, the later phase structures were generally constructed in rectangular shapes, where the length almost always exceeded the width. In fact, sometimes, the lengths were three to four times the widths of the structures. At least within one earlier phase structure on the extreme northwest of the site, and located on the track from Shatial to Shati Das, there were few possible grave structures. The orientations did not correspond to the Muslim burials and these seemed to have been oriented in north-south directions. Small bits of potsherds were found near the graves. Some of the graves were illegally dug.

The local populace of the Shatial and the surrounding villages have no recollection of the time of structures at Shati Das and their use. The Shati Das, its dried up lakes and the abandoned early historic settlements are not part of the oral history or traditions of the region. These structures were only referred to as ancient ruins, sometimes in conjunction with the Shatial bridge site. The local population in their summer houses in the narrow highland valleys of district Upper Kohistan pay greater attentions to the housing of their herds than their own and the enclosures for animals are much larger than their own rooms. Thus, our guide for example, was instantly able to associate the

combination of large and small rooms as of animals and humans respectively. This association was perhaps drawn from their long history of animal husbandry, transhumance and animal enclosures in the Kohistan region and the wider traditions in the northern and north-western South Asia.

In fact, many archaeological sites and evidence have been linked with transhumance in northern and north-western South Asia, starting from Ladakh, to the Indian-administered Kashmir, to the Swat and Dir valleys and to the Vale of Peshawar, especially in the pre-historic, Neolithic, protohistoric and historic epochs (Biddulph 1971[1880]; Coningham and Sutherland 1998; Ota 1993: 107; Young 2003; Young et al 2000, 2008; Zahir 2012). Transhumance practices in northern-western South Asia, and Afghanistan, continues till this day (Biddulph 1971[1880]; Barth 1956; Dupree 1975; Young 2003; Young et al 2000, 2008). However, the archaeology of transhumance has not received its due attention from South Asian archaeologists and the archaeological evidence, though indicative of common practice of transhumance, are relatively sparse.

Biddulph (1971[1880]: 13) was perhaps the first European to mention the existence of transhumance in north-western Pakistan, especially in the adjoining regions of the district Upper Kohistan, on the right bank of the Indus River.

> "Tangir and the neighbouring valley, Darel, are celebrated for the number and fine quality of their flocks and herds. Large numbers of sheep are here annually reared for sale to the inhabitants of the neighbouring valleys. Being somewhat straitened for summer pasture, the people of Tangir have long been in the habit of driving their flocks across the watershed to the Yassin country. In return for permission to graze, they pay to the ruler of Yassin a fixed tribute of salt and tobacco from each village. Besides this tribute, they give sheep and goats in varying numbers as a free gift" (Biddulph 1971[1880]: 13).

Although Biddulph (1971[1880]) did not specifically mentioned the Kohistan region for transhumance, the Tangir and Darel valleys are historically and geographically closely linked with Kohistan. In fact, the modern main route to Darel valley passes through the Shatial, right through the Shatial rock carving sties. Thus, it is equally possible that the same transhumance practices were going on within Kohistan region, devoid of the political linkages with the rulers of Yasin valley,

Chitral. The people of Tangir, Darel and Yasin valley almost share the same landscapes, geographical and environmental contexts and socio-economic relationship as of the Kohistan region.

The study of modern transhumant groups and environmental data from protohistoric archaeological sites in north-western Pakistan suggested to the existence of multiple transhumance subsistence strategies (Young 2003; Zahir 2012: 29). Prof. Ruth Young identified five subsistence strategies, namely intra-valley Winter Transhumance (from Dir and Swat valleys to Vale of Peshawar), inter-valley Winter Transhumance (within high/lowland regions of Dir and Swat valleys), inter-valley Summer Transhumance (within high/lowland regions of Dir and Swat valleys), non-stationary Nomadic Pastoralists (from Dir and Swat valleys) and stable Sedentary Farmers (of Dir and Swat valleys) (Young 2003: 64-69; Zahir 2012: 301-2). Furthermore, it was found that there was a close connection between the animal husbandry practices (primarily goats and sheep farming) to the transhumance practices in the protohistoric phase of the region (Young 2003: 78-82; Zahir 2012:302). This ethnographic-archaeological study also established that the transhumant groups were more inclined to go to the same place and this choice and connection with the same place was part of the group memory of the people practicing transhumance with their past generations (Young 2003: 64-5; Zahir 2012: 240-1). The repeated visits to the same site could have also been linked with the identity of the group or their socio-political statuses.

The prehistoric evidence in the Ladakh region, dated from $5^{th}/3^{rd}$ to 1^{st} millennium BCE, were linked with transhumance practices, hunting and food gathering, based upon the faunal evidence (Ota 1993: 105, 107).

> "It seems plausible that these settlements were seasonal camps, probably occupied during summer seasons when the high altitude areas become suitable for human movements and pastures for cattle are available. The camps were selected wherever a suitable flat land near the river banks was available in narrow valley. These suitable flat lands were repeatedly occupied as evidenced from the successive hearth remains" (Otta 1993: 107).

Six prehistoric sites, with stone tools, and some associated rock shelters, dateable from 8^{th} to 3^{rd} millennium BP, were discovered from the upper reaches of Yarkhun Valley in northern Chitral in the 1990s,

primarily near the river banks and mountain passes, by a joint team of French and Pakistani researchers (Gaillard et al 2002: 25). These late prehistoric sites, similar to their cotemporary sites in the Ladakh, may also be linked with the summer transhumant groups.

Coningham and Sutherland (1998), through analogy with British Iron Age storage pits interpreted the Neolithic "dwelling pits" in the Swat valley in Pakistan and Indian controlled Kashmir, and associated with the Neolithic cultures, as grain stores and linked them with transhumant groups (Zahir 2012: 29). Young (2003) and Young et al (2000, 2008) linked faunal evidence from protohistoric cemeteries and settlements in the Swat valley with those from the site of Bala Hisar, Charsadda during the 2^{nd}-1^{st} millennium BCE, and suggested a strong linkage within these sites in mountainous and plains settings respectively. Zahir (2012), through the study of the grave constructions, grave measurements, and material culture, of the protohistoric cemeteries in Dir and Swat valleys of Pakistan and Vale of Peshawar, also known as the Gandharan Grave Culture of Pakistan, suggested its connection with transhumant practices and inter-valley movement of people and possible trade links during the 2^{nd}–1^{st} millennium BCE (Zahir 2012). He also associated the grave-like structures at the site of Timargarha 3 in Dir Valley with grain stores of the protohistoric transhumant groups (Zahir 2012).

Fig.14 - Transhumant structures at Chillum Lasht Cave, Ayun, Chitral.

In 2010, the first author, and Prof. Ruth Young, during the excavation of a cave site, witnessed the occupation of a proto-historic, possibly prehistoric cave, Chillum Lasht in the Ayun valley of Chitral, by historic and current transhumant groups (Fig. 14). The non-Muslim Kalasha indigenous community and Kho Muslim community of District Chitral, in the Hindukush mountains, engages in summer transhumance practices even today (Young et al 2000: 135). In Chitral, due to the existence of high mountain pastures, and the choice of animals, such as goats, sheep, cows and bullocks, was conducive to the raising and rearing of livestock was possible (Young et al 2000: 138). Most of the adult Kalasha males take their herds to high-altitude pastures to their family/lineage designated places and remain therein with their herds for most of the summers in their rudimentary/semi-permanent structures (pers.comm. Wazir Khan Kalash). Their return from these pastures is celebrated by the whole Kalasha community in the form of a seasonal recurring festival.

> "Goat and sheep herds are taken up to the high pastures by male family members, for four summer months. These pastures are around seven hours on foot from the villages in the valleys. The men and youths travel with the animals and look after them. During this time the animals are milked, and cheese, butter, ghee, and yoghurt made which are all sent back down to the village for storage for winter" (Young et al 2000: 136).

It is believed that the transhumant aspect of Kalasha subsistence is crucial to their social and ideological character (Parkes 1987: 642; Young et al 2000: 138). Similar practices are also carried on the other side of the mountains in the Hindu Kush mountain series in Afghanistan (Dupree 1975).

> "Nomads in Afghanistan migrate either horizontally, over long distances, or vertically (transhumance) from winter pasture lands in the plains to summer alpine pasturelands. Some combine the two. Winter pasture lands exist in the northern low, loess-covered foothills and plains of Afghan Turkestan, the fringe valleys of the Hindu Kush mountains in the south and southeast, and south western semi deserts of Sistan. Summer pasture lands are found in the north eastern mountains of Badakhshan, especially around Lake Shewa, and on both the northern and southern slopes of the high watershed of the Hindu Kush mountain system which cuts through central Afghanistan" (Dupree 1975: 401).

Fredrick Barth (1956) suggested that a strong presence of transhumant practices of Kohistani community under the then extant Swat State in Pakistan. The same could also be true for the Kohistani people of districts Upper and Lower Kohistan in the Indus Kohistan region.

> "Kohistanis, however, have a two-fold economy, for transhumant herding is as important as agriculture. Sheep, goats, cattle, and water-buffalo are kept for wool, meat and milk. The herds depend in summer on mountain pastures, where most of the Kohistanis spend between four and eight months each year, depending on local conditions. In some areas the whole population migrate through as many as five seasonal camps, from winter dwelling in the valley bottom to summer campsites at a 14,000 foot [sic] altitude, leaving the fields around the abandoned low-altitude dwellings to remain practically untended" (Barth 1956: 1081-2).

In his important work on the regional geography of the then North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan, David Dichter (1967) noted that

> "In meeting the demands of environment as formidable as that of Kohistan, the people, particularly in Indus Kohistan, practise an extreme form of transhumance, which centres on annual movements involving whole village populations between altitudes 2,000 and 14,000 feet. Their wholesome movements involve the occupation of as many as four to five different houses in a year, based on an altitude belt appropriate to various seasonal conditions" (Dichter 1967: 54).

In fact, Jürgen Wasim Frembgen (1999), who worked extensively in Kohistan, also notes the similar phenomenon in the Indus Kohistan region.

> "In summer goats and to a much lesser degree also sheeps [sic] are put out to graze on alpine meadows. In some parts of Indus Kohistan this is only done by shepherds, in other areas most of the population perform a periodic cycle of migration between the winter villages of lower altitude and the high mountain pastures. The pattern of transhumance can somewhat differ from valley to valley but generally the main winter village is abandoned by most of the population in spring and people move up step by step - in between preparing their fields - to reach the high altitude pastures in the peak of the summer" (Frembgen 1999: 74-5).

Thus, the archaeological, ethnographic and geographic studies in the northern and north-western South Asia, indicate a long history of the continuation of the tradition of owing herds, herds management and transhumance in the region and these traditions go back to at least five thousand years. The current population of district Upper Kohistan, practicing transhumance, keep their herds of goats, sheep and cattle at specially constructed small make-shift enclosures, usually slightly away from their homes in winter villages (Fig. 15). However, they construct a simpler form of house in their summer pastures, devoting more space to the herds than their human handlers. Now-a-days, many of the families send a few members, usually comprising of young males or young couples to the summer pastures with herds and the older members of the family remain in their winter villages. This pattern is practiced in Choochang, one of the historic villages of Dasu valley in district Upper Kohistan. (pers.comm. Liqat Ali) and may or may not be the case in other parts of the Kohistan and adjoining regions.

Fig. 15 - Animal enclosure at Choochang village, Dasu, Upper Kohistan.

Thus, considering the archaeological, ethnological, historical and contemporary practices within the broader region of northern and

north-western South Asia, and the physical and environmental settings of the Shati Das valley, it is highly possible that the ruined settlements belonged to the early historic transhumant groups. Perhaps, these were one of their first stops in their altitudinal summer migrations for summer pastures in high altitude plains. Similar to the present practices, the inhabitants of Shatial, and surrounding valleys, in the past were practicing inter-valley summer transhumance between the high/lowland regions of the district Upper and Lower Kohistan. Furthermore, the Shati Das site was seasonally occupied when environmentally conditions were, perhaps, different than the current environmental conditions. When the lakes had water, it probably attracted the transhumant communities for establishing their summer settlements. When the lakes were full of water, the environmental conditions might have been favourable for the transhumance communities in terms of subsistence potential for themselves and their herds. The plentiful water resources and grazing lands might have attracted the population to station at Shati Das for extended period of time, requiring permanent and semi-permanent structures. Similar, round the year valley bound lakes, are still encountered in different parts of the district Upper Kohistan (pers.comm. Liaqat Ali 2018). Kohistan in general and Shatial in particular holds a strategic location on the ancient Silk routes, and supplementary regional routes, and it is also possible that an important access route passed through the Shati Das valley or in its surroundings.

The evidence from Shati Das point to fact that unlike the historical fortified settlements, the summer seasonal early historic and high-altitude settlements were not fortified in Upper Kohistan region. The high elevation of the early historic settlements at Shati Das was perhaps considered sufficient and advantageous for their protection or that the fortification of the villages was introduced later on, perhaps in the early part of the 2nd millennium CE. It may be argued here that the Shati Das is perhaps the first and most preserved early historical settlements of the transhumant groups recorded in northern and north-western South Asia. The existence of stupa-like round structures in the earliest chronological phase is also very important and suggest the effort of the residents to address their religious needs even when they were moving between their permanent village and semi-permanent seasonal settlements and camps.

The lack of comparable and datable materials, and the brief nature of the current investigation hindered the accurate dating of the structures. However, considering the current knowledge of the archaeology of the region, especially the presence of rock sites at Shatial and Shatial Das, it may cautiously be suggested that perhaps the two architectural phases of the sites were linked with the two cultural phases at Shatial Das (later phase – 1st to 5th century CE) and Shatial rock carvings (3rd – 8th century CE). Thus, the first phase of the site could be tentatively dated from 1st half to mid-1st millennium CE and the second phase from mid-1st to end of 1st millennium CE. It is guardedly suggested that there were at least one abandonment and re-occupation of the Shati Das site as evidenced from two separate construction phases

The two construction phases might possibly have corresponded to two environmental episodes of wet and dry seasons during the first millennium CE. This means that when the lakes were full of water, seasonal settlements were thriving and when the lakes dried, the settlements were abandoned in favour of other suitable regions. It is possible that the gradual decline of Buddhism and the revival of Hinduism, coupled with environmental fluctuations, the dynamics of the political and natural landscapes changed, in the 1st millennium CE resulted in the abandonment, resettlement and final abandonment at the Shati Das site. The construction of the tremendous amount of forts and defensive structures by the Hindu Shahi dynasty in the neighbouring region of Swat and Dir towards the end of first and the start of 2nd millennium CE, might also have influenced the construction of fortified villages in Kohistan in the beginning of 2nd millennium CE. However, it must be emphasised that the tentative nature of these findings and dating parameters requires extensive explorations and excavations at Shati Das and the coring of the ancient dried-up lakes to come up with reliable scientific evidence. These may not only provide datable materials but also, hopefully, furnish tremendous environmental datasets for environmental reconstruction of the past of the immediate and distant regions of northern and north-western South Asia.

Furthermore, multi-disciplinary investigations at Shati Das have the potential to reveal interesting avenues of religiosity, rituals, herd-management and economics of the early historic transhumant groups in Kohistan region. The buried archaeology of the Indus Kohistan is still largely unknown as no proper explorations or excavations have so far been conducted in the region. The knowledge of the region primarily

derives from the rock carving sites at Shatial. The nature of the relationship between the Shatial rock carving sites, Shtial Das, and Shati Das settlement is also unknown; however, their close proximity permits the possibility of the existence of a robust and inter-dependent relationships in the past, and these settlements stand a good chance to be the corresponding, but missing, settlements with the rock carving sites. The presence of round shape stupa-like structure is probably indicative of this possibility. However, the extent of this relationship can only be accessed through multi-disciplinary research projects focusing on investigation of the landscape, systematic transect survey and proper excavations.

Fig.16 - Illegal excavated trenches, pointed out by our guide, at Shati Das.

The site is being plundered by antique hunters and it is not impossible to assume that they will eventually destroy the whole site. Sadly, this destruction at the hands of illegal diggers and by the road building activities, is going on at a rapid pace, along with illegal diggings that are going unabated at the site. Currently, the illegal diggers seem to be primarily concentrating on excavating around the large rocks and in the middle of the structures in search of treasures (Fig. 16). The Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan in general, and the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in particular should initiate

explorations, excavations, documentation and preservation of the existing structures at the site and surrounding regions.

4. Summary

The discovery of the Shati Das historical transhumant settlements is important not only in the archaeology of the district Upper Kohistan but also in the archaeology of northern and north-western South Asia. Although, archaeological evidence of transhumance exists even for the prehistoric and Neolithic phase, the direct evidence of pastures and settlements have not been documented so far, making the current discovery of considerable importance in the archaeology of South Asia. Similarly, the discovery of dried-up lakes with possible early historical settlement is also also significant as both archaeological and geological datasets could be obtained from the site for archaeological and environmental reconstructions of northern and northwestern South Asia.

The majority of the structures, in both chronological phases, were constructed of un-dressed stones set in mud-mortar and the structure seems to fall in the small-sized category (with 1 – 100 square metres area). All the structures seem to have been constructed favouring the needs of the herds and the human needs were relegated to the secondary position. The structures could broadly be dated to the 1st millennium CE and were tentatively considered to be linked with the rock carving sites of Shatial and Shatial Das. Detailed multi-disciplinary research, and in-depth explorations and excavations, in future would hopefully provide precise datasets on the dating and nature of the settlements at Shati Das. In addition, the contextualized views in this paper on the nature of the site and the chronological classification are by no means final; however, these represent exploratory understandings of the archaeology of the site and region and it may change with new datasets from proper explorations and excavations, and multi-disciplinary research, at the site and region.

Acknowledgements

We are thankful to the Water and Power Development Authority for facilitating and supporting our research. We are thankful to Mr. Mujeebullah, Assistant Director Environment, Dasu Hydropower Project, and Mr. Tajamul Hussain, PhD student, for their help and support during our fieldwork. We are indebted to Mr. Usman Ahmed of the Associated Consulted Engineering (ACE), Lahore for his help in the preparation of the GIS map of Kohistan. We are also indebted to Mr. Junaid Ahmed, PhD student at the Edinburgh University for his help. We are also thankful to the staff of the Shatial rock carving site, and our guide from Choochang village, Mr. Liaqat Ali, for their help.

References

Barth, F. (1956) Ecological Relationships of Ethnic Groups in Swat, North Pakistan. *American Anthropologist* (New Series) 58 (6): 1079 – 1089.

Biddulph J. (1880) *Tribes of the Hindoo Koosh*. Quellen zur Entdeckungsgeschichte und Geographie Asiens, 2. Graz (Austria): Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1971.

Coningham, R.A.E. and T.L. Sutherland (1998) Dwellings or Granaries? The Pit Phenomenon of the Kashmir-Swat Neolithic. *Ancient Pakistan*, 12: 177-187.

Dani, A.H. (1983) *Chilas: The City of Nanga Parvat (Dyamar)*. Islamabad: published by the author.

Dani, A.H. (1991) *History of Northern Areas of Pakistan.* Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research.

Dichter, D. (1967) *The North-West Frontier of West Pakistan (A Study in Regional Geography)*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Dupree, L. (1975) Settlement and Migration Patterns in Afghanistan: A Tentative Statement. *Modern Asian Studies,* 9 (3): 397 – 413.

Frembgen, J.W. (1999 Indus Kohistan: An Historical and Ethnographic Outline. *Central Asiatic Journal*, 43 (1): 70 – 98.

Frembgen, J.W. (2008) Old Forts in Harban: Settlement and Islamization in Indus Kohistan. *Journal of Asian Civilizations,* 31 (1-2): 253 – 259.

Fussman, G. and D. Bandini-König (1997) Die Felsbildstation Shatial. In H. Hauptmann (ed.), Material zur Archäologie der Nordgebiete Pakistans 2. Mainz: Philipp von Zabern.

Fussman, G. (1994) Une Peinture Sur Pierre: Le Triptyque au Stupa de Shatial. *Antiquities of Northern Pakistan (Reports and Studies),* 3: 1–56.

Gaillard, C, Dambricourt-Malasse, J. Magraner, A. Maitrerobert, T. Ali, J.L. Voisin, A. Nasir, (2002) Discovery of Recent Lithic Industries with Archaic Features in the Hindu Kush Range (Chitral District, North Pakistan). *Indo-Pacific Prehistory Association Bulletin*, 22: 25 – 33.

Hameed, M. (2015) Scythian Art in Gandhara: A Case Study of the so-called Gold Girdle from Pattan (Kohistan). *Ancient Pakistan,* 16: 73 – 82.

Hauptmann, H. (2008) Rock Art in the Upper Indus Region. *Gandhara – The Buddhist Heritage of Pakistan: Legends, Monasteries, and Paradise*. Verlag Philipp von Zebern. Mainz, pp. 352 – 357.

Jettmar, K. (1961) Bronze Axes from the Karakoram. Results of the 1958 Expedition in Azad Kashmir. *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society,* 105 (1): 98 – 104.

Jettmar, K. (1983) Indus Kohistan. Entwurf einer historischen Ethnographie. *Anthropos,* 78 (3 – 4): 501 – 518.

Mughal, M.R. (1985) The Significance of Some Pre-and Protohistoric Discoveries in The Karakoram Region. *Journal of Central Asia*, 8 (2): 213 – 235.

Nasim Khan, M. (1997–98) Some Thoughts on the Nature of the Gold Ornament from Pattan (Indus Kohistan). *Ancient Pakistan*, 12: 127 – 138.

Ota, S.B. (1993) Evidences of Transhumance from Ladakh Himalayas, Jammu and Kashmir, India. In Ganjoo, R. K. and Ota, S. B. (eds.), *Current Advances in Indian Archaeology*, 1. Dattsons. Nagpur, pp. 91-110.

Parkes, P. (1987) Livestock Symbolism and Pastoral Ideology Among the Kafirs of the Hindu Kush. *Man* (New Series), 22 (4): 637 – 660.

Rahaman, S. (1990) Unique Find of Gold Ornaments from Pattan (Kohistan), Plates I – XV. *Journal of Central Asia,* 13 (1): 5 – 17.

Simmons, M.T. (2015) Climates and Microclimates: Challenges for Extensive Green Roof Design in Hot Climate. In Sutton, R. K. (ed.) *Green Roof Ecosystems*, New York: Springer, pp. 63 – 80.

Stein, A. (1942) From Swat to the Gorges of the Indus. *The Geographical Journal,* 100 (2): 19 – 56.

Young, R. (2003) Agriculture and Pastoralism in the Late Bronze and Iron Age, North West Frontier Province Pakistan. *BAR International Series,* 1124, Oxford: Archaeopress.

Young, R., R. Coningham, I. Ali and T. Ali (2008) The archaeological visibility of transhumance tested using faunal material from NWFP, Pakistan. In: E.M. Raven and G.L. Possehl (eds.) *South Asian Archaeology* 1999. Groningen, pp. 203 – 210.

Young, R., R. Coningham, C. Batt and I. Ali (2000) A Comparison of Kalasha and Kho Subsistence Patterns in Chitral, NWFP, Pakistan, *South Asian Studies,* 16 (1): 133 – 142.

Zahir, M. (2012) *The Protohistoric Cemeteries of Northwestern Pakistan: The Deconstruction and Reanalysis of Archaeological and Burial Traditions*. PhD Thesis submitted to the University of Leicester, UK (Online publication, https://lra.le.ac.uk/handle/2381/11059).