

# **The Distribution and Contextualization of Protohistoric and Historic Cemeteries around Singoor Village, Chitral, Pakistan**

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## **Abstract**

*The present paper contextualizes the results of the intensive archaeological survey around the Singoor village in District Chitral, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan. The survey was optimized to specifically identify protohistoric graves through walking across the landscape in the vicinity of Shah Mirandeh graves at Singoor. The survey documented eleven burial sites, including the sites of Gankoreneotek, Gankoreni village, Hindukush Heights Hotel, Chakasht 1 & 2, Mirandeh, Noghur Dhok, Lashino Dhok, Kolambi and Sinjal Graves. Later, the site of Dolamuch was discovered in a subsequent survey carried out in 2008 during the excavations of Gankoreneotek graves. Thus, a total of twelve protohistoric cemeteries, including Shah Mirandeh graves, were documented around Singoor. Of these, three graves' sites Shah Mirandeh, Gankoreneotek and Chakasht 2 have been excavated. The present systematic survey was successful as it resulted in the documentation of one of the densest clusters of protohistoric/historic cemeteries in northern and northwestern Pakistan. The radiocarbon dates obtained from cemeteries around Singoor suggest a date range from 8<sup>th</sup> century cal. BCE to 17<sup>th</sup> century cal. CE, indicating the existence and presence of viable historic burial traditions that were possibly like the protohistoric burial traditions and shared the same landscape contexts.*

**Keywords:** Gandhara Grave Culture; Protohistoric Cemeteries; Singoor Graves; Gankoreneotek Graves; Geographical Distribution; Non-Random Survey; Chitral Archaeology; Historic Cemeteries.

## **1. Introduction**

Chitral is the largest and the most north-western district of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan (Fig. 1). District Chitral shares boundaries with Kunar, Nuristan, and Badakhshan provinces of Afghanistan to the north and west, Gilgit- Baltistan province to the east and Districts Upper Dir and Swat to the south and southeast (Zahir, 2017b: 4). The Hindukush, the Hinduraj and Pamir ranges, bordering Chitral, are the most prominent geological and geographical features of the region; these mountain ranges are perforated by several passes and routes that

connect Chitral with Central Asia and South Asia (Israr-ud-Din, 2008: 175; Zahir, 2017b: 4). District Chitral is made of several mountain valleys with their own small rivers that empty into the Chitral River (Zahir, 2017b: 4). Chitral is the major city of lower Chitral region, and it is the administrative centre of District Chitral.

The village Singoor is located about 6 km north of Chitral Museum (Polo Ground, Chitral) on Garam Chashma – Chitral Road (Zahir, 2017b: 4). The village is located on the right bank of the Chitral River, just below the junction of Lut Kho River, coming from north, and Chitral River, coming from east (Zahir, 2017b: 4). The village forms a sub-valley within the larger Chitral Valley, and it is surrounded by the piedmont hills of the Hindukush range (Zahir, 2017b: 4). The sub valley opens to the north, east and west and these openings are formed by the Chitral and Lut Kho Rivers (Zahir, 2017b: 4).

From north to south, the Singoor Valley is about 2.5 km long and is about a kilometre wide from east to west (Zahir, 2017b: 4). The small plains of the Singoor valley, lying between the Chitral River and piedmont hills, represent one of the largest fertile agricultural plains in Chitral and are presently covered by agricultural fields and Chitral Airport (Zahir, 2017b: 4). The plains are irrigated from the Chitral and Lot Kho Rivers, and the Chitral Gol and Singoor Gol streams (Zahir, 2017b: 4). The same water sources might have been utilized in the past for agricultural purposes within this valley. The fertile soil on mountain slopes and fans on the northern and western side of the Singoor village was possibly deposited through erosion and by seasonal torrents from the mountains (Zahir, 2017b: 4). The Singoor Gol, Koti Gol and Daloom Gol are the major non-perennial or seasonal streams that flow through the Singoor village.

Singoor village is situated on an important strategic location at the opening of the Garam Chashma Valley and Upper Chitral regions, such as Mastuj (Zahir, 2017b: 6). Most of the routes connecting Lower Chitral with Upper Chitral, Gilgit – Baltistan, Badakhshan, Central Asia and China passed through or near to Singoor Village (Zahir, 2017b: 6). Thus, we may assume that the current Singoor Village was possibly a major settlement in the past, at least from 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE onward (Zahir, 2017b: 6). The piedmont hills form a semicircle on the northern and western sides of the village Singoor; the parameter of this arc measures more than two kilometres in length.

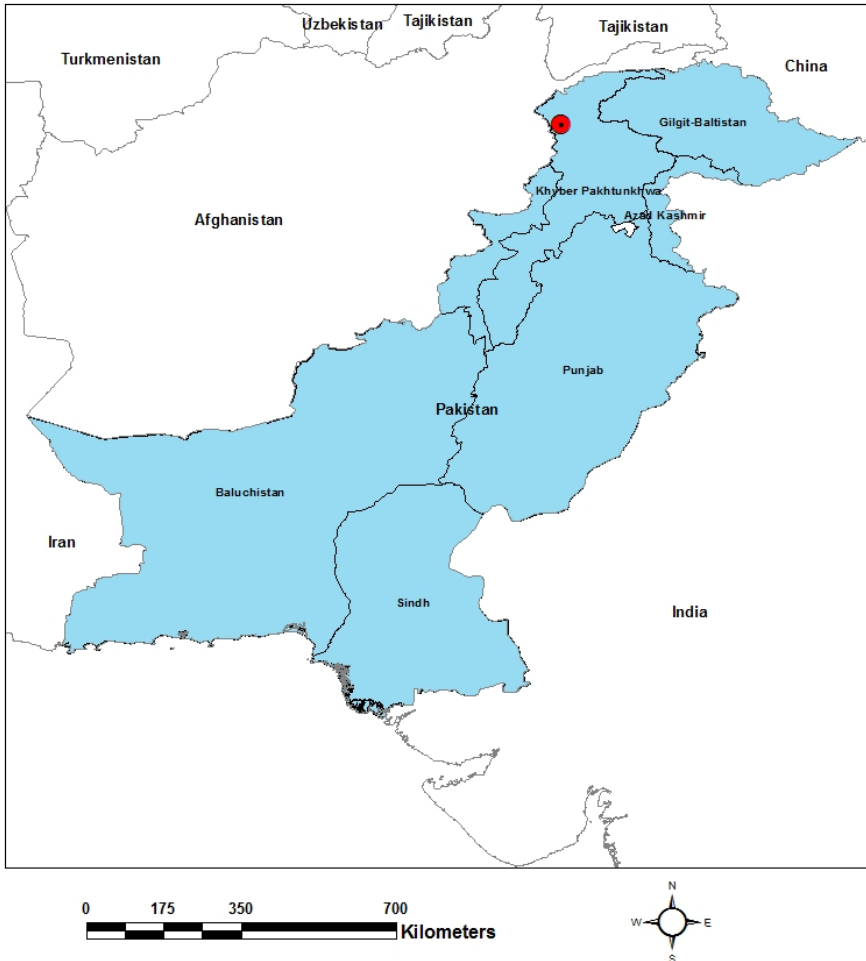


Fig. 1 - Location Map of Singoor village, Chitral, Pakistan.

## **2. Archaeological Research in Chitral**

Compared with the surrounding regions of Dir and Swat, District Chitral has received relatively little attention from archaeologists. British colonial officers and explorers, such as Major John Biddulph and Sir Marc Aurel Stein, were the first to record the presence of archaeological sites in the Chitral region (Biddulph, 1880: 109; Stein, 1921: 34-40, 45-46; 1933: 42). Prof. Raymond Allchin studied a collection of pottery vessels from protohistoric graves in the Ayun village (Allchin, 1970). The Italian

Archaeological Mission, directed by Prof. Giorgio Stacul and primarily working in the neighbouring Swat valley, briefly studied the archaeology of Chitral and recorded the existence of protohistoric cemeteries therein (Stacul, 1969: 99). French and Pakistani archaeologists, working together, recorded the presence of 8000 – 3000 BP or Late Holocene period, stone tools from upper Yasin Valley of Chitral (Gaillard et al., 2002: 25).

A team of British and Pakistani archaeologists conducted a small-scale survey of District Chitral and recorded 15 cemeteries, which they attributed to the Gandhara Grave Culture, including the cemetery at Singoor village or Sangoor – Chakasht (Ali et al., 2002; Dani 1968; Young et al., 2012). A team of Pakistani archaeologists, under the direction of Prof. Ihsan Ali, from the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly the North West Frontier Province or NWFP) and Hazara University, Mansehra, conducted limited archaeological surveys and excavations in Chitral from 2003 to 2008 (Ali et al., 2005a, b; Ali and Zahir, 2005; Zahir, 2017a). The team carried out excavations at the protohistoric cemeteries of Parwak, located in the middle of Buni and Mastuj towns in the upper Chitral region, and Shah Mirandeh and Gankoreneotek at Singoor (Zahir, 2017a: 3). A team of archaeologists from University of Leicester, UK and Hazara University, Pakistan conducted systematic transect survey in lower Chitral, between the Ayun and Darosh villages during 2009 – 2010 and conducted excavations at the sites of Chakasht graves at Singoor and Chillum Lasht Cave at Ayun (Ali et al., 2013, 2016; Samad et al., 2012; Young et al., 2012; Zahir, 2017b: 4).

### **3. Methods and Results of the Non-Random Systematic Survey**

Systematic landscape surveys are relatively new to the north-western Pakistan and most of the previous archaeological surveys in Pakistan have been conducted through the village-to-village methodology; a method that is based upon ease of access, documentation of archaeological sites near modern or ancient villages or routes and are prone to biasness (for details see Ali et al., 2009, 2010 and Zahir and Khan, 2018, 2020, 2021). Almost all the archaeological explorations in District Chitral, with the exception of the University of Leicester and Hazara University survey in 2009 – 2010, have been based upon village-to-village methodology. The systematic transect survey in the lower Chitral valley, between Ayun and

Darosh villages, resulted in the discovery of the largest number of sites in Chitral. During this systematic survey 17 sites in 2009 and 88 sites in 2010 were documented in a relatively small study area (Ali et al., 2013, 2016; Samad et al., 2012; Young et al., 2012; Zahir, 2017b: 4).

The presence of protohistoric cemetery at Singoor was first reported in 1972 and a single grave was excavated, by non-archaeologists. The cemetery and material culture were directly equated with the presence of Aryans in Chitral and the excavated grave was dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE (Israr-ud-Din, 1972, 1979). The Singoor site was also recorded in 1997 during the Chitral Survey by the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, by Government of the then NWFP (now renamed as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province) under the direction of Prof. Abdur Rahman and they excavated a single ‘double storey’ grave, similar in construction and material as Gandhara Graves from Dir and Swat, at Singoor (pers.comm. Shakirullah, 2019).

The same site was probably reported within the 1999 archaeological survey of the Chitral by the British and Pakistani archaeologists as the Sangoor – Chakasht site, and cist graves were reported from the site (Ali et al., 2002: 651). Ihsan Ali and his colleagues (Ali et al., 2002: 651) recorded the presence of the protohistoric cemeteries or Gandhara Grave Culture sites on piedmont fans/terraces and slopes. The same site was revisited and documented during the 2004 archaeological survey of Chitral by the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of NWFP under the Direction of Prof. Ihsan Ali (Ali et al., 2005a). Prof. Ihsan Ali and the present author embarked upon excavation of the same site, named as the Shah Mirandeh – Singoor after the nearby hamlet of Shah Mirandeh in the larger Singoor village, in 2005.

The present survey was designed and based upon the information that most of protohistoric cemeteries are located on either fans/terraces or slopes of the mountains. As the site of Shah Mirandeh graves was also located on the slope, it was assumed that it is highly likely that analogous sites would be in comparable locations within the landscape. The purpose of this non-random survey, where the existence and geographical settings of a single large protohistoric site was already known, was to look for similar sites in parallel landscape settings. Thus, the present survey was primed to document the existence of protohistoric cemeteries in the immediate surrounding hills of the Singoor village. The larger hill, to the back of the Singoor village, with a government protected forest on its top, is called Birmogh Lasht, while the lower hills around Singoor are called

### Singoor Dhok.

The slopes of the piedmont hills, Singoor Dhok, of the Singoor village were extensively walked by group of 4 – 5 members, consisting of the author, students of archaeology and a local guide. The survey team walked parallel to each other, separated by 1-5 m from each other depending on the steepness and difficulty of the slope of the hills. Sometimes the steepness of the hills would reduce the parallel line of the survey team to walking in a single profile. Considering the then Sayurj Public School (renamed later as the Langlands Public School and College) as the pivotal landmark for Singoor village and the starting point, the survey was conducted in two transect lines each from north to south and east to west.

The transects lines from north to south measured 2 km in length and their widths, depending upon the steepness of the slopes and visibility in the landscape, varied between 5 to 25 m. The east to west transects, between the Langlands Public School and the Garam Chashma road, measured 1 km in length and varying width of 10 to 25 m as the slopes were gentle and not as steep as on the north-south transects and there were relatively few issues with visibility in the landscape. The parallel transects were separated by about 100 m from each other. The elevation of the transects from east to west varied from 1550 to 1700 m above mean sea level. A handheld GPS was used to follow the transects and to record the location of the sites. The sites were marked due to the presence of a grave structure that do not conform to the Muslim burial tradition in the region. The estimation of the size of the cemeteries was not possible due to the fact that most of the protohistoric graves in northwestern Pakistan have been discovered as a consequence of finding a single grave and later excavations of the site provided evidence of the extent and nature of the discovered site. The sites of Parwak, Shah Mirandeh, Gankoreneotek and Chakasht are examples of this in Chitral, where the extent of site was only possible after the excavations and which were discovered primarily as a result of singular visible graves.

It is possible that some of the Muslim graveyards at Singoor have utilized the same locations of protohistoric or historic non-Muslim graveyards, as in the case of some of the protohistoric cemeteries in other parts of northwestern Pakistan (for details see Zahir, 2012); however, there were no visible evidence of it at Singoor. Thus, the Muslim graves or graveyards were excluded from this survey. Generally, the Muslim graveyards are located within the unirrigated parts of the plains of Singoor

and these do not share the same landscape settings as the protohistoric graves in Singoor. It is possible that some of the Muslim graves were ancient, that is more than hundred years' old such as the at the Muslim graveyard located to the south of the Gankoreneo village. However, due to the presence of strong tradition of up-keeping of the graves by the descendants of the deceased and the continuation of the same grave construction and burial traditions, it is difficult to assign the Muslim graves to any particular historical epoch at Chitral.

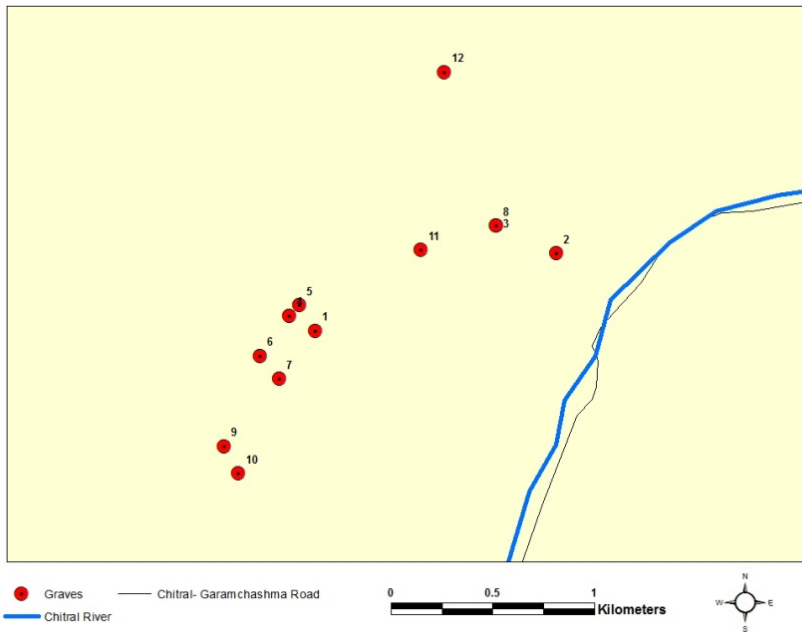


Fig. 2 - Distribution Map of the protohistoric and historic cemeteries around Singoor Village, Chitral.

Four sites each were recorded on the first (that is the sites of Kolambhi, Mirandeh, Chakasht 1 and Chakasht 2) and second (that is the sites of Sinjaal, Lashino Dhok, Shah Mirandeh and Noghur Dhok) north to south transects, while on the east to west transects, the site of Gankoreneotek/Gankoreneo-taek and Hindukush Heights hotel were recorded on the third and Gankoreneo village site was recorded on the fourth transect (Figs. 2-4). The site of Dolamuch – Seen Lasht was discovered in November 2008 outside the east to west and north to south

transects when excavations were being carried out at the site of Gankoreneotek.

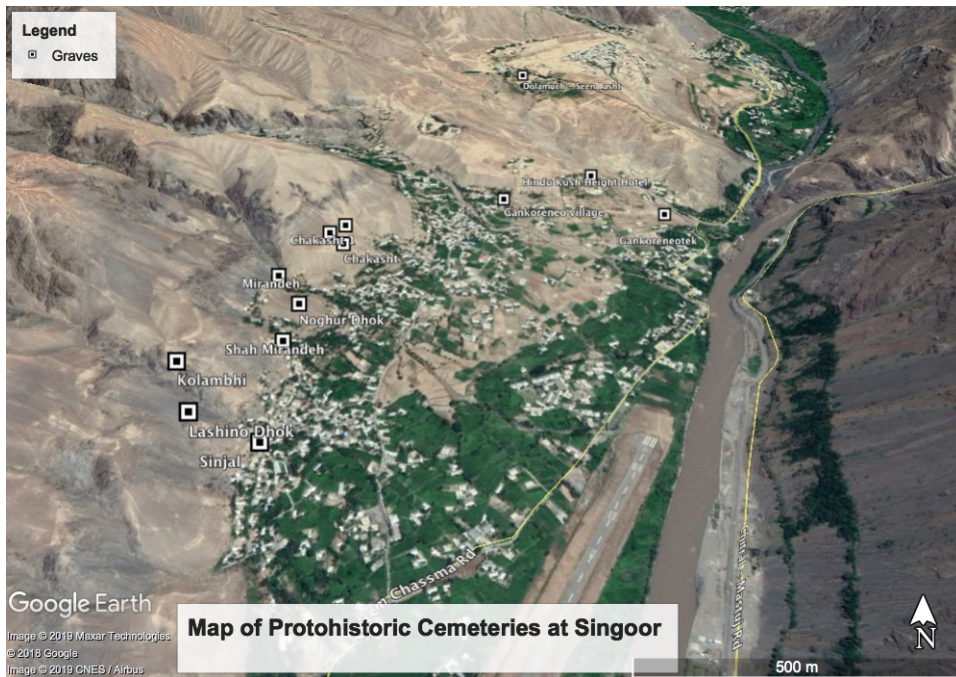


Fig. 3 - Distribution of cemeteries in the landscape around Singoor village, Chitral (source: Google Earth Pro).

#### 4. Inventory

The individual details on the sites are given as below:

1. The Shah Mirandeh graves are located at latitude  $35^{\circ} 53' 54.78''$  N and longitude  $71^{\circ} 47' 45.60''$  E in the Singoor village and are first recorded protohistoric graves of the Singoor village. The graves were recorded first in 1972 and then in 1997, 1999 and 2004 (Ali et al., 2005a; Ali et al., 2002; Israr-ud-Din, 1972). The site was excavated by the Prof. Ihsan Ali and the present author from June 28 to August 28, 2005 (Fig. 5).





Fig. 4 - General View of the Singoor Arc (Photograph by Muhammad Zahir).

A total of thirty-three graves were opened up during the course of excavations including remains of twenty-six humans, of which 18 could be studied anthropologically due to poor state of preservation (for details see Hemphill et al., 2018). The majority of graves (twenty-one of thirty-three or 64%) were provided with grave goods. The most common grave goods included pottery vessels, iron arrowheads, bronze anklets and bracelets, bronze bells and carnelian beads. The majority of the graves were either walled or cist graves and were constructed from schist stones and slabs, queried from the nearby hills. One of the most interesting feature of the Shah Mirandeh graves was the finding of the empty/emptied or intended graves. Fifteen of the thirty-three graves or about 46% of the total excavated graves were of this category. Six of these empty/emptied or intended graves were provided with grave goods and sometimes small broken pieces of human bones were also noticed during the excavations, suggesting the possible removal of human remains after the decomposition for secondary burial at other graves or locations. Ten graves contained single burials, four double burials, two triple burials and a single grave

contained the remains of four individuals. Almost all the graves were discovered at less than 50 cm from the ground surface (Hemphill et al., 2018: 1). For the current survey, the Shah Mirandeh site was used as a reference point.



Fig. 5 - Excavations of Shah Mirandeh Graves 2005  
(Photograph by Muhammad Zahir).

2. The site of Gankoreneotek, or Gankorini-o-Taek, was first recorded during the 2004 archaeological survey (Ali et al., 2005a; Zahir, 2016b). The hamlet of Gankoreneotek is a constituent part of the larger Singoor village and is located on the right bank of the Chitral River, at latitude 35°54'7.06"N and longitude 71°48'23.88"E, at an altitude of about 1562 m above mean sea level, on Chitral ~ Garam Chasma Road or the eastern tip of the piedmont arc around Singoor village (Zahir, 2017a; 2018). The Gankoreneotek cemetery is located in the vicinity, across the road, of the Chitral Power Station, on a small earthen hill slope (Ali et al., 2010: 210; Zahir, 2017a). During the archaeological surveys, only few grave structures, primarily cist graves, were visible in the agricultural field terraces and the pits/cuts made during the construction of the houses. The

owners of the houses/agricultural lands also kept few vessels from the destroyed graves from the site and were shown to the survey teams. Although, the evidence on the ground were scanty, the later excavations and house construction activities have shown it to be perhaps the largest protohistoric/historic cemeteries that have been discovered, and most researched, cemeteries in District Chitral.

The site was first excavated by a team of archaeologists from the University of Leicester, UK and Hazara University Mansehra in 2007, primarily to collect bone samples for radiocarbon dating and for understanding the nature and extent of the site (Ali et al., 2008). From the single excavated grave, Grave 1, cremated bones were dated through Waikato University – New Zealand radiocarbon laboratory to 2494±30 BP, ranging between 790 – 420 cal.BCE (at 95% confidence) (Ali et al., 2008; Zahir, 2016a: 288).

Following the initial 2007 work, the Hazara University team conducted the first proper excavations at the Gankoreneotek from November 2007 to January 2008 and excavated a total of 41 graves at the site (Ali et al., 2010: 210; Zahir, 2017a, 2018; Fig. 6). However, the detailed excavations report is yet to be published, hampered by challenges in accessing the excavation datasets. The finding of two bronze Chinese Tang Dynasty coins was perhaps the most important discovery from the excavations at Gankoreneotek – Singoor, representing a milestone in the archaeology of Chitral (Fig. 7).

A different team from Hazara University again excavated the site during June – August 2008, and a brief excavation report was published in 2010 (Ali et al., 2010: 210). The team excavated 39 graves that contained the remains of 54 individuals: ranging from infants, children and adults (Ali et al., 2010: 211–3). The grave goods were dominated by pottery vessels, of different types but primarily consisting of bowls, jars, pitchers, glasses and miniature pots (Zahir, 2018). The metal artefacts included copper/bronze mirrors and hairpins, pendants, ear pendants, bangles, hairpins, arrowheads, dress buttons and knives (Ali et al., 2010: 215, 221). Salvage excavations were conducted at Gankoreneotek site in 2016 to record archaeological remains that were threatened by the destructive house building activities. These excavations were confined to the excavations of four graves (graves 1, 2, 4, and 30) and the reopening of previously excavated grave, GTG\_003 (Zahir, 2017a; Zahir, 2018). The site is currently being excavated by the team of archaeologists, through the Higher Education of Pakistan' National Research Program for Universities

(NRPU) funding, from Hazara University, leading to the discovery of multiple graves, including small-sized empty graves, more than a dozen human skeletons and material culture (pers.comm. Dr. Abdul Hameed, 2022). Without substantial evidence to support, and the existence of broad evidence of historic material culture at the site, historic burials in the vicinity and without proper definition of Iron Age, the site is being dubbed as the Iron Age cemetery by the current team under the NRPU project. The restriction of the Gankoreneotek cemetery to a single technological episode in the history of Chitral seems impulsive and needs extensive corroborations from the site and region.



Fig. 6 - Excavations of Gankoreneotek Graves, Singoor 2007-2008  
(Photograph by Muhammad Zahir).

3. The Hindukush Heights hotel, perhaps one of the best hotels in northern and northwestern Pakistan, is located at latitude  $35^{\circ} 54' 11.51''$  N and longitude  $71^{\circ} 48' 14.38''$  E, on a hill top above the Gankoreneotek site. There were no visible grave structures currently at the site of the hotel; however, the owner, Prince Siraj ul Mulk, informed us about the discovery of graves during the construction of the hotel. Prince Siraj ul Mulk was

kind enough to show us some of the antiquities recovered from the graves that are on display at his hotel (Fig. 8). The findings, including six complete vessels, two large copper/bronze anklets, a copper/bronze bowl and a copper/bronze bottle, are unique and broadly compare with findings from protohistoric cemeteries in the region (Zahir, 2021). The graves seem to have been completely destroyed by construction of the hotel. The site was first mentioned in 2012 (Hemphill et al., 2018: 2; Zahir, 2012: 331). The comparative analyses of the grave goods from site suggest that the copper/bronze vessels possibly belonged to mid-1st millennium BCE, while the copper/bronze bangles/anklets could probably be dated from 1st century BCE to 1st century CE (Zahir, 2021: 75). Similarly, the jug with pinched lip could be dated from 5th – 7th century CE, while the drinking pots could possibly be dated to the last quarter of the 1st millennium CE (Zahir, 2021: 75). The analysis of the material culture suggests that this was probably in existence from mid-1st millennium BCE to the end of 1st millennium CE (Zahir, 2021: 75).



Fig. 7 - Chinese Tang Dynasty coins from Gankoreneotek excavations 2007-2008 (Photograph by Muhammad Zahir).

4. The site of Chakasht 1 is located at the latitude 35° 53' 57.21" N and longitude 71° 47' 41.54" E. Chakasht is a relatively large un-irrigated plateau on top of the Singoor village to the northwest and has been

converted into a cricket ground by local children. A single disturbed or illegally excavated cist grave was noted to the northern side of the Chakasht and the site was named as Chakasht 1 graves. The graves were constructed of schist slabs, possibly brought from the nearby hills (Fig. 9). The site was first mentioned in 2012 (Hemphill et al., 2018: 2; Zahir, 2012: 330; 2021: 75-90).



Fig. 8 - Grave goods from Hindukush Height Hotel, Singoor, 2005 (Photograph by Muhammad Zahir).



Fig. 9 - General view of a partially exposed grave from Chakasht - 1, Singoor 2005 (Photograph by Muhammad Zahir).



Fig. 10 - General View of the partially exposed grave from Chakasht - 2, Singoor 2005 (Photograph by Muhammad Zahir).

5. The site of Chakasht 2 is located at latitude  $35^{\circ} 53' 58.83''$  N and longitude  $71^{\circ} 47' 43.11''$  E. The graves are located on the highest side of the Chakasht and are around 400 m apart from Chakasht 1 graves. During the survey, two graves were recorded as their schist slab walls were visible on the surface (Fig. 10). The cist graves were constructed of the schist slab, queried from the nearby hills. The visible graves were of two sizes, the smaller-sized cist (measuring about 30 cm in length) and medium-sized cist (measuring about 105 cm in length). The excavations of the Gankoreneotek revealed that smaller cist graves either contained the remains of infants or secondary/fractional burials of adults or had pot-burials of children/adults. Later on, in 2009, a team of archaeologists from Hazara university excavated about fifteen graves at the site (pers. comm. Mehir Rehman Khalil, 2019). A complete flexed adult inhumation burial was transported to Hazara University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology for display from 2009 excavations. The site was first mentioned in 2012 (Hemphill et al., 2018: 2; Zahir, 2012: 330).

6. The site of Mirandeh is located to the north of the Shah Mirandeh village at latitude  $35^{\circ} 53' 50.80''$  N and longitude  $71^{\circ} 47' 36.88''$  E. The graves, bone fragments and potsherds are visible in the terraces of the fields along the village pathways (Fig. 11). The shape and structure of the graves could not be discerned, as the terrace were covered with wild vegetation and possible human interventions, such as the expansion of the pathway and/or the deposition of soil off the street. The site was first mentioned in 2012 (Hemphill et al., 2018: 2; Zahir, 2012: 331).

7. The Noghur Dhok, literally meaning the hill of the fort in Khovar language of the area, is located on a nearby hill to the Shah Mirandeh graves. The site is located at latitude  $35^{\circ} 53' 47.16''$  N and longitude  $71^{\circ} 47' 39.86''$  E. The locals consider the hill to have been occupied by a fort in the distant past; however, no evidence of the fort were encountered during the survey. Potsherds were relatively numerous on the site and were badly eroded. The presence of at least three partially exposed graves were recorded on the surface (Fig. 12). It seems that the graves were either constructed near to the surface or the topmost soil has washed due to erosion and exposing the graves in the process. Two of the graves are cist graves, marked by exposed schist slabs, and are oriented in east to west directions. The third grave is provided with a 20 cm thick covering slab. The area of the grave is marked by stones encompassing the slab. All the recorded graves are rectangular in shape. The northern part of the hill is eroding due to the seasonal torrent, called Singoor Gol, and the building of the small irrigation canal for Singoor village. A large broken pot was seen in the section of the hill at the depth of about 2 m from the surface of the hill. The site was first mentioned in 2012 (Hemphill et al., 2018: 2; Zahir, 2012: 332).

8. The site of Lashino Dhok is located at latitude  $35^{\circ} 54' 11.51''$  N and longitude  $71^{\circ} 48' 14.38''$  E. A single grave structure was noted on the surface of the site. The grave, square in shape, was constructed of relatively large schist slabs and the slabs were visible on two sides of the grave (Fig. 13). The grave roughly measured about 1.8 x 1.4 sqm and was broadly oriented in east to west direction. No potsherds were visible on the surface of the site. The site was first mentioned in 2012 (Hemphill et al., 2018: 2; Zahir, 2012: 331).





Fig. 11 - General View of the exposed section of the graves at Mirandeh village, Singoor 2005 (Photograph by Muhammad Zahir).



Fig. 12 - A view of the grave at Noghur Dhok at Singoor 2005 (Photograph by Muhammad Zahir).

9. The site of Kolambhi is located at latitude  $35^{\circ} 54' 11.51''$  N and longitude  $71^{\circ} 48' 14.38''$  E. A single grave structure was recorded on the surface of the site. The grave was round in shape and was constructed of irregular shaped schist slabs and the slabs were visible for more than 50% of the circumference (Fig. 14). No potsherds were visible on the surface of the site. The site was first mentioned in 2012 (Hemphill et al., 2018: 2; Zahir, 2012: 331).



Fig. 13 - A general view of the Lashino Dhok grave, Singoor 2005  
(Photograph by Muhammad Zahir).

10. The Sinjal graves are located at latitude  $35^{\circ} 53' 32.13''$  N and longitude  $71^{\circ} 47' 33.45''$  E. The graves are exposed by cutting of the irrigation canal at the foot of the hill at the top of the Singoor village. The irrigation canal runs at the top of the Singoor village. The cutting has exposed at least five graves in the section (Fig. 15). The graves seem to be rectangular cist graves, constructed of large grey schist stones, possibly queried from the hills at the top of the Chakasht plains. The slabs thickness varied from 4 to 10 cm. The grave was oriented primarily in east to west orientation. One of the relatively well-preserved grave section

measures about 61 cm in depth and width. The floor of the grave was also paved with schist slabs of varying lengths as visible in the section. Human bones and potsherds are visible in the section, though there are no potsherds or pottery scatters around the graves. Small-sized broken potsherds are visible in the irrigation canal. Modern houses have been constructed on top of the graves. The small canal is a community based and managed irrigation that brings water from Chitral Gol to the Singoor village. The site was first mentioned in 2012 (Hemphill et al., 2018: 2; Zahir, 2012: 332).



Fig. 14 - General view of the grave at Kolambhi, Singoor 2005  
(Photograph by Muhammad Zahir).

11. The Gankoreneo village is located at latitude  $35^{\circ} 54' 7.65''$  N and longitude  $71^{\circ} 48' 2.41''$  E. The agricultural terraces have exposed protohistoric graves. While graves are encountered during the construction of the houses and the survey team noticed one such grave partially destroyed during the construction of the house. Few of the villagers, by virtue of excavations in their fields or homes, have come in possession of

complete pots, such as spouted drinking vessels and double handled storage jars. The later excavations at Gankoreneotek in 2007 – 2008 revealed that large storage jars with or without handles were used to contain inhumation and cremation burials of both adults and children. The Gankoreneo village graves are cist burials constructed of large flat schist slabs and sealing (Fig.16). The visible graves seem to have been oriented north to south. Potsherds, large vessels' broken parts and human bones were visible in the exposed section of the graves. The site was previously not reported.



Fig. 15 - General view of the exposed graves at Sinjal, Singoor 2005  
(Photograph by Muhammad Zahir).

12. The site of Dolamuch or Dolamush was not recorded during the non-random survey in 2005 but was recorded during field walking of the surrounding hills in 2007 – 2008 at the time of the excavations of the Gankoreneotek. The site is located near the newly constructed village of Seen Lasht at a latitude  $35^{\circ} 54' 35.85''$  N and longitude  $71^{\circ} 48' 6.08''$  E. The site was then located in un-irrigated plains of Dolamuch, which was

actively being converted to agricultural fields. At least five graves were noticed in one of the terraced fields. The graves are provided with walls of schist stones on four sides and relatively large schist slabs as sealing (Fig. 17). A partially destroyed grave seemed to be unique as a large schist slab was used as the floor of the grave and the walls were constructed on top of it. A single cist grave was also visible on the surface of the site with exposed schist slab. No potsherds were visible on the surface; however, the owner of the land during the preparation of the agricultural fields had recovered two large broken parts of querns. The querns were carved of granite stones, probably brought from the river bed about 2 km, and 300 m below, to the south of the site. The site was first mentioned in 2012 (Hemphill et al., 2018: 2; Zahir, 2012: 332).



Fig. 16 - General view of the exposed section of graves at Gankoreneo village, Singoor 2005 (Photograph by Muhammad Zahir).



Fig. 17 - General of the graves at Dolamuch, Seen Lasht, 2008  
(Photograph by Muhammad Zahir).

#### **4. Contextualization and Discussion**

The geographical distribution of the protohistoric cemeteries is key for their interpretations in their chronological and landscape contexts (for details see Zahir, 2012 and 2016b). The protohistoric cemeteries in the Chitral Valley have been included in the Zone 1 or Northern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan of the eight recently proposed geographical zones for distribution of protohistoric cemeteries in northern and northwestern South Asia (Zahir, 2016b). This zone primarily consists of the valleys of the Chitral, Panjorka and Swat Rivers and it is bounded by the Indus River and Hindukush mountains in the east and west respectively (for detailed discussions of these geographical zones, see Zahir, 2016b). This zone, also encompassing the regions of Dir and Swat, is considered as the most important geographical unit for understandings of the protohistoric cemeteries due to systematic and sustained research on protohistoric cemeteries, especially the Swat protohistoric cemeteries, since the early 1960s (Narasimhan et al., 2019; Zahir, 2016b). Needless to

mention here that the largest number of protohistoric cemeteries has been recorded from this zone (Zahir, 2016b: 3).

With the addition of the Gankoreneo village site, a total of 262 protohistoric cemeteries have been discovered in northern and northwestern South Asia so far (Zahir, 2016b). These sites generally share the same landscape choices and are mostly located on mountain slopes and terraces, and are closely linked with permanent water resources, such as rivers (Zahir, 2016b: 3). A total of 48 protohistoric sites have been discovered in District Chitral; most of these sites have been recorded in the lower Chitral region and are located around the Chitral city and Ayun village. The excavation, to various degrees, of six cemeteries, namely Noghure Muri, Parwak, Parwak Lasht, Shah Mirandeh – Singoor, Gankoreneotek and Chakasht, have brought to life different aspects of the protohistoric cemeteries in Chitral (Ali and Zahir 2005; Ali et al., 2005a; Hemphill et al., 2018; Stacul, 1969; Zahir, 2017a).

The oldest dates of the Chitral cemeteries are later than the earliest cemeteries excavated in the Dir and Swat Valleys and the Chitral cemeteries continue much longer than the Dir and Swat cemeteries (Zahir, 2012, 2016a). In fact, the Chitral cemeteries continue right up to the 17<sup>th</sup> century CE (Narasimhan et al., 2019: 161 – 162). The presence of 17<sup>th</sup> century CE non-Muslim and/or pre-Muslim burial in a protohistoric cemetery is very interesting. It corresponds well with the believe that in most parts of the Gilgit-Baltistan province and northwestern regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, especially the Kohistan regions and with the exception of the Swat and Dir regions, organized Islam was introduced largely in the 18<sup>th</sup> century CE (see for example Frembgen, 2008: 258; 1999: 83; Hauptmann, 2008: 353).

The earliest evidence for Islam in northern and northwestern Pakistan comes from the Raja Gira Mosque at Udegram, Swat. The mosque was constructed during the Ghaznavid time in the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE (e.g., U. Ali and Khan, 1998: 188; Sardar, 2001: 95; Scerrato, 1986: 57, 59; Stein, 1927: 434, 437) In fact, the 17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> centuries CE are very interesting in the history of the District Chitral as there is no authentic historic literature on the region and Chitral was effectively *terra incognita*. The Dynastic history of the Chitral is also not reliable beyond 18<sup>th</sup> century CE. The presence of dominant non-Muslim ideology bearing groups in at least some parts of the Chitral has been recorded meticulously since the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century CE (for example see Robertson, 1886).



Site Name	Lab. n°.	Context	Radiocarbon age (BP)	Calibrated date (95% confidence)
1.Gankorinotek	WK-22036	Grave 1	2494 ± 30	790 – 420 cal.BCE
2.Shah Mirandeh, Singoor	WK-22040	Grave 22	2167 ± 30	360 – 110 cal.BCE
3.Shah Mirandeh, Singoor	WK-22038	Grave 1	1975 ± 30	50 cal. BCE – cal.CE 90
4.Shah Mirandeh, Singoor	WK-22039	Grave 21	1499 ± 30	cal.CE 440 – 640
5.Parwak	WK-22759	Grave 31 / Burial 2	1157 ± 37	cal.CE 770 – 980
6.Parwak	WK-22758	Grave 31 / Burial 1	1148 ± 36	cal.CE 770 – 980
7.Parwak	WK-22760	Grave 51	1138 ± 37	cal.CE 770 – 980
8.Parwak	Beta-428663	Grave 52	1200 ± 30	cal.CE 720 – 895
9.Shah Mirandeh, Singoor	Beta-428668	Grave 51	310 ± 30	cal.CE 1485 – 1650

Table 1 – List of radiocarbon dates from protohistoric and historic cemeteries in Chitral (Ali et al., 2008; Narasimhan et al., 2019: 161-2; Zahir, 2016a).

Nine radiocarbon measurements from human bones are now available for Chitral and they show the existence of protohistoric burial traditions and historic non-Muslim/pre-Muslim burial traditions from at least 8<sup>th</sup> century cal.BCE to 17<sup>th</sup> century cal.CE (Table 1). The radiocarbon measurements from Gankoreneotek suggest a date range from 8<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> centuries cal. BCE. From the same site, two Chinese Tang Dynasty coins of mid-8<sup>th</sup> century CE have been discovered from a grave (for details see Zahir, 2018). We may assume that the Gankoreneotek site existed at least from 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE till 8<sup>th</sup> century CE. There are two radiocarbon measurements from Shah Mirandeh graves which suggest 4<sup>th</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> centuries cal.BCE as the earliest date ranges. A couple of other radiocarbon measurements from the same site suggest 7<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries cal.CE as the latest date ranges. Thus, we may suggest that the Shah Mirandeh graves were in existence, possibly intermittently, from at least 4<sup>th</sup> century cal.BCE to 17<sup>th</sup> century cal.CE and that the cemetery could possibly have been in use for around two thousand years. The date ranges from Parwak are consistent and hovers between early 8<sup>th</sup> to late 10<sup>th</sup> centuries cal.CE. The latest dated grave from Shah Mirandeh has an extended burial and not a flexed burial – the dominant protohistoric burial practice within Chitral – and without a proper grave. Thus, it is plausible

to assume that this burial possibly represents the burial of the 'other' in a protohistoric cemetery setting (this phenomenon of otherness in grave contexts would be further explored in future publication by the author).

The earliest dated grave in Chitral comes from the Gankoreneotek, while the latest dated grave comes from the Shah Mirandeh cemetery. Both cemeteries are located on the fringes of the Singoor village, within walking distances from each other. Thus, we may suggest that the protohistoric cemeteries around Singoor were in existence from at least 8<sup>th</sup> century cal.BCE and were used until 17<sup>th</sup> century cal.CE. Thus, in the absence of individual radiocarbon measurements from the current explored sites in the vicinity of Singoor village, it may be assumed that all these explored sites fall within the same chronological framework and date range. This may also mean that within Chitral, we are dealing with both protohistoric and historic cemeteries sharing the same grave construction and burial traditions, and landscapes and locations. The historic cemeteries are non-Muslim and have broadly similar burial traditions as the protohistoric cemeteries from Chitral, Swat and Dir regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit-Baltistan region. In fact, going by the ratio of protohistoric and historic dates from Chitral graves, we may suggest that most of the graves, and possibly the cemeteries, are historic in nature. Furthermore, there exist a strong continuity and longevity of the protohistoric cemeteries and burial traditions, and possible continuities of similar ideologies, in Chitral right up to the time of mature Mughal period in South Asia.

Furthermore, the non-Muslim people of Chitral region and neighbouring regions, such as the Nuristan region, were in constant struggle of existence with the neighbouring Muslim regions, such as Kunar, Chitral, Dir and Bajaur till almost the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century CE, which culminated in the capture of the 'pagan *Kafiristan*' (the land of unbelievers or infidels), their homeland, and its conversion into a 'Muslim *Nuristan*' (the land of light) (Barrington et al., 2006; Robertson, 1886). Thus, it seems that the time between 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries CE is an interesting period in the history of Chitral and adjoining regions, where the political control of the non-Muslims or indigenous, progressively decreased and they were either ousted or converted to Islam. The spread of Islam and the contraction of indigenous non-Muslim ideologies in the Hindukush regions as reflected in the archaeology is not well understood and there is huge potential for future investigations into the subject.

The radiocarbon results provide us with a window to view the protohistoric cemeteries in Chitral as linked protohistoric and historic phenomena in northern and northwestern South Asia that need to be further investigated. These measurements also problematize the understanding of the protohistoric cemeteries in northwestern Pakistan as something long gone before the introduction of Islam in the 8<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> century CE. The presence of the indigenous non-Muslim people, such as the Kalasha people of Chitral, coupled with their similar burial traditions as compared with the protohistoric cemeteries and distinct from Muslim and Hindu practices at death and dealing with the bodies, and the possibility of very late arrival of Islam in Chitral, present a very interesting research area and shall be investigated in future. Their cemeteries, with exposed over ground burials in wooden coffins and exquisite grave goods, are in almost similar landscape settings, such as the Bamburet and Birir Valleys' graveyards, as compared to the protohistoric cemeteries in Chitral (Fig. 18). The burial tradition of the Kalasha people needs to be investigated and documented for not only understanding their ideologies linked with death, burials, and choices of the landscape location but also for creating reference materials for detailed analogies with the protohistoric and historic non-Muslim burial traditions in the region. However, a direct or unbroken link between the protohistoric and historic cemeteries in Chitral and their relationship with the living community practicing similar burial tradition is not argued here.

The latest radiocarbon measurements along with the absence of viable evidence of major South Asian religions (such as Buddhism and Hinduism – for example see Zahir, 2017b), the absence of authentic historical records prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century CE (for example see Israr-ud-Din, 1979) at Chitral make it an interesting topic for future investigation into the continuity of burial traditions and communities in remote, and relatively isolated, regions of the Hindukush mountains.

Furthermore, the relationship between the regions and people of Hindukush and the dominant Iranian Safavid Dynasty during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, and the relatively large scale movement of the persecuted religious communities under them, such as the followers of the Ismaili (a major Muslim sect in Chitral and Gilgit regions) and Sunni sects of Islam, from Iran into the remote parts of the northern and northwestern Pakistan, is not very well understood and documented in the history and archaeology of the region. It is plausible to assume that their movement for safety into the regions, such as Chitral and Gilgit, was not peaceful and

possibly involved warfare resulting in diminishing indigenous political and economic control and the rise of petty states and Muslim ruling houses in the Hindukush. Thus, it may be argued that the political history of Muslim states in the Hindukush, and their rise during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, cannot be understood without investigating the role of the Safavid empire and their religious persecutions of the ‘others’ and that future research shall focus on the subject. Additionally, it is interesting to point out here that large scale migrations and their settlements, even in the historic period, in north-western Pakistan from the surrounding regions, such as the major Pashtun tribe Yousafzai’ migration from Afghanistan and settlement in Swat in the 16<sup>th</sup> century CE, have not been vigorously correlated and contextualized with the archaeological and material culture records from the region.



Fig. 18 - General View of the Kalasha graveyard at Bamburet Valley, Chitral 2005 (Photograph by Muhammad Zahir).

The two Tang dynasty coins from Gankoreneotek, Singoor, are of the 11<sup>th</sup> Tang Emperor Su Zong (756 – 762 CE). These were probably cast in 758 – 762 CE, appearing generally to be 10-cash/2-cash coins (*pers.comm.* Late Dr. Mark Blackburn, 2008 and Dr. David Hartill, 2019; for details

see Zahir, 2018). There was a robust relationship between the ancient region of Gandhara in northwestern Pakistan and Tang Dynasty (Nasim Khan, 2018: 308; Rhie, 1988; Zahir, 2018). During the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE, the petty Hindukush states, such as Chitral, assumed a central role between the Chinese and Tibetan empires, and between the Tibetan and the invading Arab armies in the Central Asia. The Arabs in Central Asia, in the beginning of the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE, tried, and failed, to get into alliance with the small kingdoms of the Hindukush against the Chinese. The Tang Emperor Xuanzong recognized this and as a reward sent envoys to these states bestowing the title of kings on their chiefs or rulers, for example the ruler of Mastuj was declared a king in 720 CE (Stein, 1921: 43).

Later, the Tibetans managed to get into alliance with some of the kingdoms, which was not acceptable to the Chinese. Resultantly the Chinese sent at least four expeditions to the northern and northwestern Pakistan during mid-8<sup>th</sup> century CE; however, it was the expedition led by Gao Xianzhi or Kao Hsien-chih, the celebrated Tang general of Korean descent from the Four Garrisons at Tarim Basin, that was successful in dislodging the Tibetans from Chitral and Gilgit in 747 CE (Stein, 1922: 116). In 750 CE, Gao Xianzhi intervened again in the region on the orders of Emperor Xuanzong and removed *P'o-tê-mo*, the ruler of *Chieh-shuai* or Chitral proper and replaced him with his elder brother *Su-chia* and declared him king (Stein, 1921:29, 32). The Chinese influence over the regions of Chitral and Gilgit waned after the defeat of Gao Xianzhi by the Arabs and their allies in 751 CE at the battle of Talas, Farghana (Stein, 1907: 68; 1921: 32; 1922: 130).

In the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century CE under the Qing Emperor Qianlong/Ch'ien-lung (r. 1735 – 1796) the Chinese restored their interests and authority on the petty states of the Hindukush, such as Chitral, and the rulers of Chitral accordingly accepted Chinese sovereignty and suzerainty as late as 1789 CE (Biddulph, 1880: 151; Stein, 1921: 33, 1922: 131). The political relationship between Chitral and China is still almost unknown and future research may find ways to investigate this connexion, especially during the 8<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries CE.

The presence of a dense cluster of protohistoric and historic cemeteries indicate to the possibility of the presence of a large settlement(s) in the past at the Singoor village or its vicinity. However, no archaeological evidence of settlements, except for occasional reports by local people of the presence of potsherds when digging new graves or foundations for new houses in the area, have come. It is possible to

assume that, as is the case with most of the historic settlements in South Asia, the ancient remains of settlement at Singoor are under the modern Singoor settlement and future investigations, such as focused excavations in the middle of the Singoor village, may reveal the presence of settlements linked with the cemeteries all around it. Comparatively, there is dearth of archaeological evidence in the immediate vicinity of the Chitral city, except for possible protohistoric cemeteries at Jhang Bazar and Governor Cottage (Zahir, 2016b: 23).

The presence of a reported Muslim saint Shabor Wali's tomb in the Jhang – Chitral Bazar cemetery in a prominent location and beautiful wooden architecture, attributed to the 18<sup>th</sup> century CE (Shakirullah, 2012a: 21; 2012b), is very interesting and points to the possibility of the presence of Muslim in prominent positions in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Chitral city. Though, there are some historical references to the presence of the Chitral town in early historic periods, it may not be out of place to suggest that Chitral city, with its valley like settings and large agricultural lands, assumed its prominent role during the 18<sup>th</sup> century CE after the dominance of the Muslims and that Singoor village, before Chitral city, was previously a centre of attraction in the lower Chitral region during the protohistoric and historic epochs as evidenced from archaeology. However, it is worth mentioning that the explosion of population in and around the Chitral city, and its resultant expansion, during the last century might have obliterated some or all the archaeological evidence of Chitral city that could establish Chitral city being an equally important protohistoric and historic centre as the Singoor village.

Except for the Shabor Wali tomb, the earliest Muslim mosques in District Chitral are primarily located in the Darosh town, Ayun Valley, Broz village, Singoor and Upper Chitral regions and not in the immediate surroundings of the Chitral city (pers.comm. Ihsanullah Jan, 2019). Based upon the presence of earliest Muslim monuments, it may be argued that the earliest forms of Islam entered Chitral from the direction of Kunar, Dir, Bajaur through Darosh and Ayun, and from northern passes of Chitral, through Garam Chasma and Mastuj regions, and that the regions around Chitral city were late to link with Islam as evidenced by the latest Muslim monuments. Detailed and focussed archaeological research in future may provide clues to the contemporaneity and the historic and strategic importance of Chitral city and Singoor village and their relationship with each other.

The sites in Singoor are located in extremely strategic locations, overlooking the Singoor village and corresponding valley and the routes that pass through the valley into northern reaches of Chitral, Central Asia and beyond. The locations are still attractive to the local people for building their homes and relatively recent advantageous access to water have resulted in the construction of agricultural fields. With the growth of population and the resultant expansion of the village, most of these sites are actively being destroyed for house construction and conversion into agricultural fields. Antique hunters and illegal diggers, using handheld metal detectors, are vigorously destroying the sites. The Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the Government of Pakistan, need to take aggressive actions to stop the destruction and protection of the heritage in and around Singoor village in District Chitral.

## **5. Conclusions**

Singoor is perhaps one of the most important ancient villages in the lower Chitral region and it has remained at the core of archaeological investigations in District Chitral for the last two decades. The sites of Shah Mirandeh, Gankoreneotek and Chakasht around Singoor village have been excavated from 2007 onward, testifying to the importance of Singoor in the study of protohistoric cemeteries in Chitral. The scope of the present survey was to locate protohistoric cemeteries based upon the known location of protohistoric cemeteries and landscape choices and was confined to the identification of graves. The non-random systematic survey of four transects on the north – south and east –west axis along the Singoor village resulted in the documentation of 12 protohistoric, and possible historic non-Muslim, cemeteries, constituting one of the largest clusters of protohistoric cemeteries in a small geographical niche within northern and northwestern South Asia. The cemeteries were identified by the presence of visible graves on the surface, except for the Hindukush Heights hotel, which was identified based on grave goods and testimony of the owner about the presence of graves that were destroyed during the construction of the hotel. The relatively latest radiocarbon measurements from Gankoreneotek and Shah Mirandeh suggest a date range from 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE to 17<sup>th</sup> century CE, attesting to the use of the same locations for about two and half thousand years. This shows tremendous continuity

of burial traditions, landscape choices and utilization of strategic locations in the past. The late dating of the graves at Singoor village make it imperative to study the nonlinear continuity of religious and political ideologies, burial traditions and spread of Muslim religious and political ideologies in this part of the world.

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