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**Rock-carvings and Stray Finds in the Mountains
of North Pakistan
Archaeology before Excavation**

During my travels in the valleys of the former Gilgit Agency I observed two kinds of rock-carvings. One of them is produced even nowadays. In the valley of Bagrot Peter Snoy could make a film showing how quickly schematic rock-carvings can be done, chiefly showing goats, sometimes explained as wild goats. The technique is very simple: pecking with a hard and sharp stone (fig. 1; Snoy 1960).

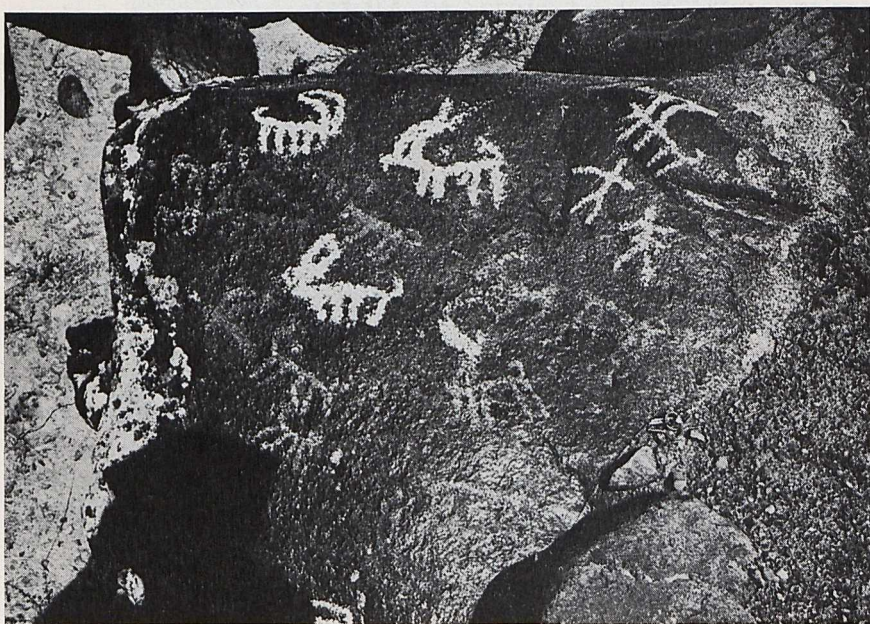


Fig. 1. — Rock-carvings of recent origin, some quite fresh, observed near the road from Pingal to Gupis (upper part of the Gilgit valley). (Photo: Martin Jettmar, 1975).

If you ask the artists they shall tell you that they make such figures just for fun, and certainly they are right. Shepherds have plenty of leisure and why should they not try to portray the goat, which is the most important domestic animal of the area, or ibex and markhor which are the most praised preys of the hunter.

But ethnographers will tell you that there are stories revealing that even such pictures once had a religious meaning. At Gilgit I heard that animals needed for food during the cold period of the year were slaughtered on the day of winter solstice. At that date it is already cold enough that the meat may be stored without decaying, and fodder can be saved. It is said that in the night after butchering you hear somebody pecking on the rocks high up in the mountains. This is Shiri Bagher Tham, once sacred king of Gilgit and most certainly a deity of the former pagan religion. He makes rock-carvings of goats, otherwise there would be no kids during the following year (Jettmar 1975: 243).

Other versions of the same story, noted by Snoy, are more adapted to the Muslim faith of today. (Snoy 1974; 1975: 178, 223-27; Müller-Stellrecht 1973: 89, 245-55).

Almost certainly there is a connection between this belief and the custom of the Kalash tribe in Chitral to make soot-drawings of animals on the inner walls of the community-houses and to form plastic figures of dough. In the course of the ceremonies the little models are destroyed in a kind of symbolic hunt (Siiger 1956: 23; Jettmar 1975: 373-74).

The carvings forming the second group are important not only for the ethnographer but for the historian as well. They were never studied systematically¹, but as a first attempt I want to stress the following typical features:

1. The weathering of the lines is considerable, so they seem to belong to a distant past.
2. The lines in the rocks are much deeper. Perhaps they were not made by sharp stones but by an implement of metal.
3. The spectrum of subjects is much broader.
4. Such rock-carvings are chiefly found near rivers like the

¹ The survey given by de Terra (1940: 41-48) for Ladakh is highly impressionistic.

Indus or the Gilgit river, on the spot where a crossing by bridge or by skin raft was possible.

5. At the same places or quite nearby, inscriptions of the Buddhist period (which included certainly the whole 1st millenium AD) were observed.

There are some carvings which clearly belong to Buddhist context, e.g., stūpas.

6. In some cases, the superior quality of such drawings is evident. We may assume that the producer had some artistic training.
7. However there is no stylistic uniformity.

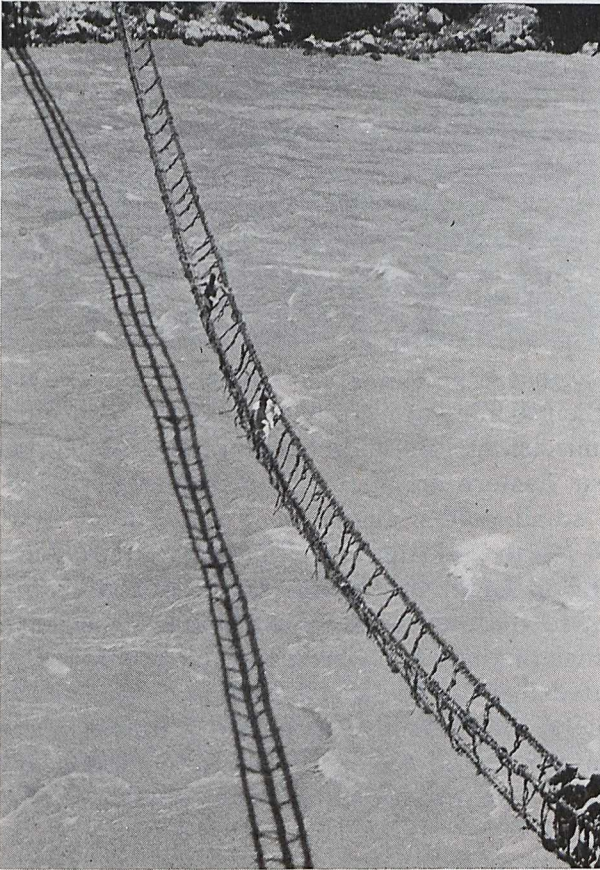


Fig. 2. — Rope-bridge with passengers. Ropes made of plaited willow twigs; bridge crossing the Gilgit river near Cher Kila, Punyal. (Photo: Karl Jettmar, 1958). Now replaced by modern construction; the first one was destroyed by flood.

I must confess that I did not see any drawings of that kind covering or damaging inscriptions and stūpa drawings, or vice versa. Buddhist and non-Buddhist carvings are to be seen side by side as made in agreement by people of different traditions.

That drawings of religious contents were made near places where ravaging rivers were crossed seems to me not difficult to understand. In olden times as well as up to the 20th century this was a manoeuvre of considerable risk. You prayed before you started and you offered thankful gifts when you had succeeded (fig. 2).

Other drawings which are not Buddhistic may be regarded as memorials showing that non-Buddhists or perhaps a war party had forced the dangerous crossing. This includes the possibility that the drawings were representative not for the tribes once living in the mountains, but coming from the lowlands. Of course, in most cases we are not able to identify the subject nor the style, so we cannot know who the passengers were, but in some cases suggestions may be made.

About one kilometre to the northeast of the place where the Gilgit river joins the Indus, there is a rock-carving of two animals looking into the same direction, one of them a bull, the other one a goat (fig. 3). Contrary to what we see in the simple pictures, their bodies are given in full, not reduced to a broad line, the muscles of legs and shoulders are clearly indicated as, e.g., in Near Eastern art of the Achaemenian period. They might recall the small golden figure of a stag found in the Hazara district of North Pakistan (Allchin 1968: 150). Moreover, the tribes living in Gilgit during the last centuries regarded cattle as unclean, so these drawings must belong to an earlier period. Rock-carvings of this kind were observed by Francke in Ladakh. He attributed them to the Dardic period, i.e., to the time before the coming of the Tibetans. But this is only a guess, and the drawings are rendered too badly, so we cannot decide whether they really belong to the same type (Francke 1906: pls. XVI and XVII).

There is another picture which seems to me easier to be dated and to be explained. A few miles west of Chilas, near Thor (where we observed many other rock-carvings during our journey in 1955) I saw a crouching animal of catlike appearance, in

1973. Its legs ended in rings. I know only one style explaining this peculiarity which was never observed in the area before: the so-called Scythian animal style (Jettmar 1964: 165). If this



Fig. 3. — Rock-carvings (bull and goat) near the junction of Indus and Gilgit river about 100 m north of the road Alam Bridge - Shute. Nearby inscriptions of the Buddhist period. Height of the figures about 50 cm. (Photo: Karl Jettmar, 1958).

association is correct, this would mean that some men coming from the steppes crossed the mountains (fig. 4). Moreover, legs ending as rings seem to be an eastern peculiarity — so the travellers were perhaps 'Tokharians'.

There is another archaeological evidence for an immigration from the north. During the second world war two bronze vessels were found at Imit, Ishkuman, and published by the indefatigable Sir Aurel Stein (1944: 14-16). They are now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. One of these vessels is a miniature cauldron with two handles in form of loops, and a third one in the shape of a ram's head. Evidently the third handle is the transformation of a spout. Similar cauldrons were found in the Pamirs where they were used by the local Saka population in

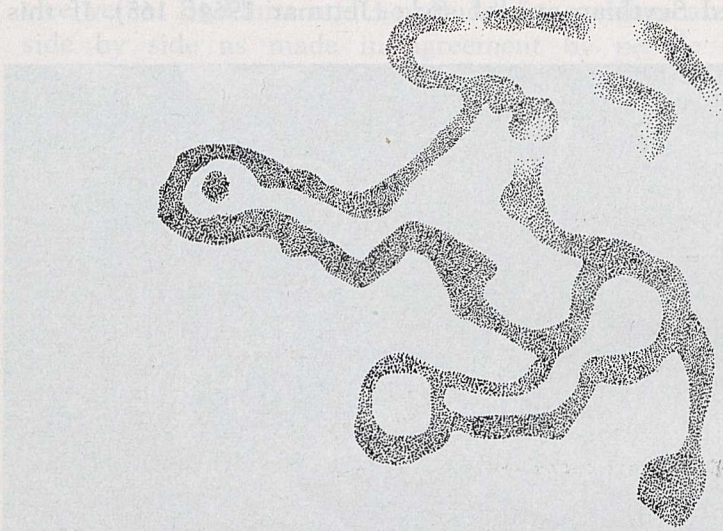


Fig. 4. — Rock-carving near the road between the mouth of the Thor valley and Chilas at a place where the Indus river can be crossed. Feline beast of prey with antlers(?) and legs ending as rings. Height of the carving about 60 cm. (Drawing by Eiwanger after a photo by Karl Jettmar, 1973).

the last centuries BC. They can be derived from a type belonging to the culture of the Sarmatian tribes in the 5th and 4th centuries BC (fig. 5.1-2; Litvinskij 1964: 151; 1972: 43-50).

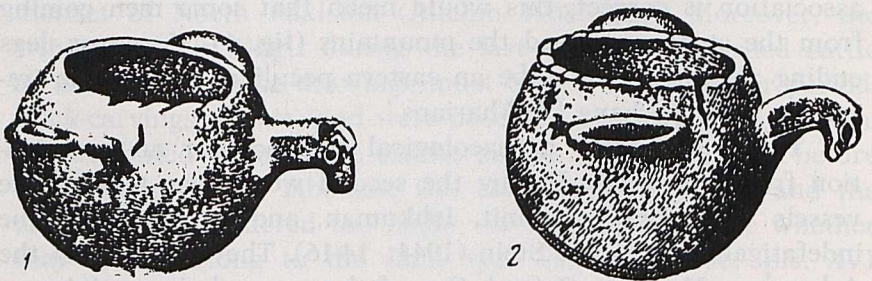


Fig. 5. — Miniature cauldrons of Imity (Ishkuman, left) and the Pamirs (right), cast of bronze. The handle of the specimen of Imity is in form of a horse head, the handle of the cauldron of Aličur II, Kurgan 3, ends as an eagle's head. Height of the Imity cauldron 5.7 cm, diameter of the opening 6.4 cm. (After Litvinskij, 1964).

The second piece is a rather clumsy rhyton. The lower and more interesting portion shows a centaur holding the small figure of an ibex in the hands of his outstretched arms (fig. 6).



Fig. 6. — Rhyton found at Imit (Ishkuman). Centaur holding a goat (fixed by a pivot). Bronze. Height after repair 31.7 cm. (Photo by courtesy, the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford).

Litvinskij was the first to see the similarity between the cauldrons of the Pamirs and the specimen of Imit. Adding some relevant material he came to the conclusion that the Saka tribes living in the Pamirs crossed what was later the Gilgit Agency on their way to India. In doing so they joined their brothers who had made the long detour via present Afghanistan using the passes of the Western Hindukush. If the Pamir Sakas came

over the Baroghil pass, Imit was just on one of their possible ways. When they proceeded to the south they had to cross the Indus river near the point where the crouching cat was drawn

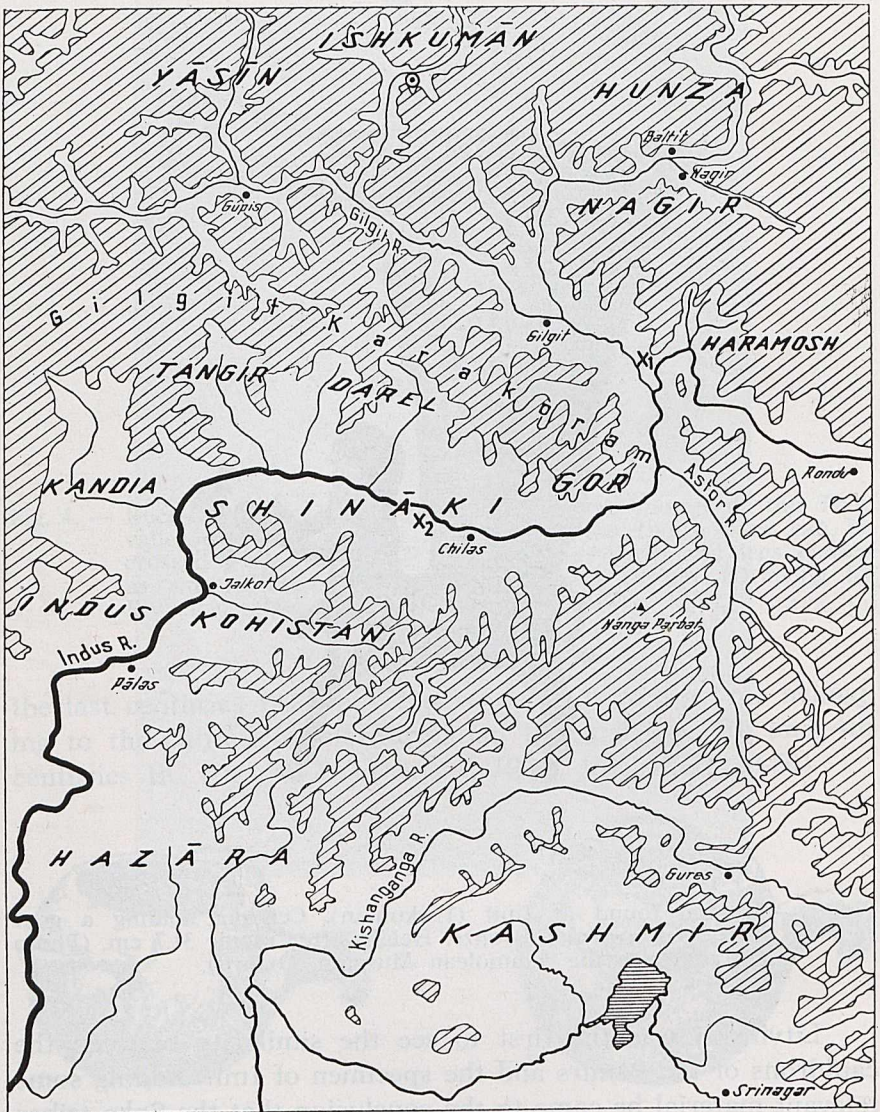


Fig. 7. — Map of the former Gilgit Agency and adjacent areas.
 ⊙ - Finding-spot of the Imit hoard.
 x₁ - Rock-carvings: Bull and goat (fig. 3).
 x₂ - Rock-carvings: Feline beast of prey (fig. 4).
 (Map after Jettmar 1961).

remembering of the Scythian animal style (fig. 7; Litvinskij 1963: 32-35).

So I think that the thesis of Litvinskij is basically correct. A suggestion may be added:

We know quite well the combination of centaur and human being sitting on his shoulders, for instance from Nisa, but not the combination of centaur and goat (Masson and Pugačenkova 1959: 222-27). This must be a local trait, and really it fits into local belief preserved even up today. The goat is the holy animal of the Dardic tribes, and on the other hand these tribes have a mythologic tradition that once upon a time horses ruled over the mountain valleys before the coming of men (Jettmar 1975: 339 and 421; Kapp 1977). In order to preserve their liberty they destroyed the figure of man just formed in clay by the Creator. The same myth is well known among the aboriginal tribes of Chota Nagpur.

So perhaps we should presume a mythical background of this extraordinary specimen, rooted in local and foreign traditions. Maybe the Saka hordes did not only cross the mountains, but some of them mixed with the aboriginals, in this way founding the first state which controlled the traffic between Central Asia and the northwestern corner of the Indian Subcontinent for a long period — the kingdom of Bolor².

² For the history of Bolor cf. Jettmar 1977.

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