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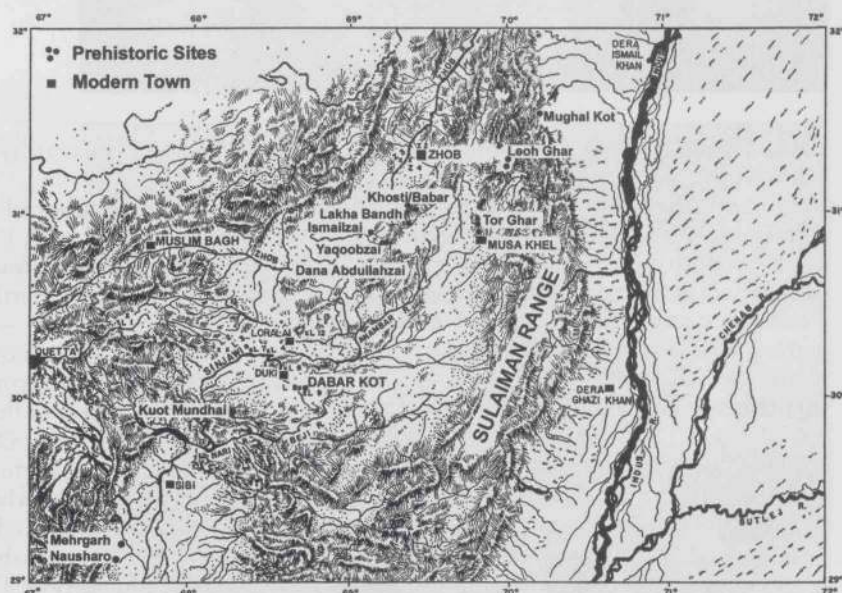
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F. D. Kakar

## Discovery of Upper Palaeolithic Rock Art in Balochistan, Pakistan

Fig. 1. Map with major sites mentioned in the text.



### INTRODUCTION

The study of Palaeolithic cultures in Pakistan has long been neglected due in part to the inaccessibility of regions where artefacts have been reported and also because of other research priorities. Based on the early discoveries of De Terra and Patterson in the Son Valley of the Potwar region and subsequent research in Swat and later in Riwat, it is quite well established that Pakistan has a full sequence of Palaeolithic archaeological sites, beginning with the earliest stone tool makers in the Plio-Pleistocene and continuing on through the Lower, Middle and Upper Palaeolithic Periods.

The ongoing work of scholars from Khairpur University in collaboration with the Italian scholars led by P. Biagi has led to important discoveries of Lower, Middle and Upper Palaeolithic sites in the Rohri Hills which lie in the middle of the Indus plain (Biagi/Ottomano/Pessina/Shaikh 1995; Biagi/Pessina 1994). In addition, the work of scholars such as Abdur Rauf Khan from Karachi University (Khan 1968) and surveys in Sindh and the Thar

desert (Allchin 1994; Allchin/Goudie/Hedge 1978) have confirmed the southern expansion of Palaeolithic cultures during the major periods.

In the context of these earlier discoveries it would be surprising not to find evidence for Palaeolithic occupations from all periods throughout Balochistan, and specifically in the Kirthar, Sulaiman and subsidiary ranges. Many scholars may not be aware that as early as 1898, F. Noetling (Noetling 1898, 1899) reported the discovery of Acheulian hand-axes from the site of Kout Mundhai just to the north of the Kachi Plain (fig. 1). Subsequent surveys of this region by W. Fairservis (Fairservis 1959) and later scholars have noted the presence of petroglyphs, but most of these can be attributed to later periods and none of them were associated with Palaeolithic sites. In fact, the major focus of research in Balochistan has been on the period of early Neolithic cultures and the proto-historic settlements, and up till now, except for the early discovery of Noetling, no Palaeolithic sites have been reported.

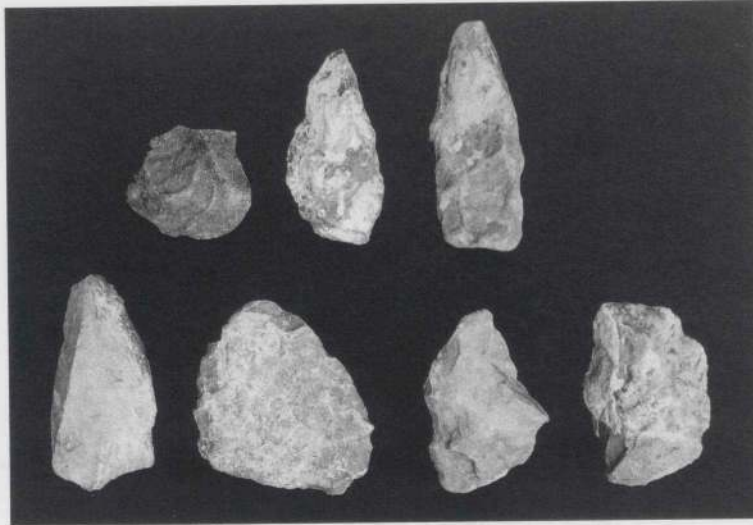


Fig. 2. Stone tools found near cave sites.

As Director of the Archaeological Museum of Balochistan, the author undertook a long term systematic survey of different districts of Balochistan in order to document all archaeological sites of the prehistoric to historic periods. This paper will present important discoveries of rock art and Palaeolithic stone tools recorded during surveys carried out in 1995–96 in northern Balochistan along the Zhob and Loralai rivers, and in the numerous small valleys leading to the Indus plain.

#### GEOGRAPHY AND CHRONOLOGY

The great Sulaiman Range in Balochistan Province is located at 28°31', 32–4 N and 67°52', 70°17' E, lying from north to southward, some 250 miles long. The great Sulaiman Range is actually a part of the high mountains of the Hindu Kush, radiating from the Greater Indus Valley. The geological formation of the Sulaiman Range consists mostly of sandstone, clays, and marls of the lower Jurassic. Pale marine coral limestones, with Cretaceous sandstones, abound with natural caves and rock shelters, and a suitable flora and fauna. Although no studies of the Pleistocene climate and flora/fauna have been conducted in the Sulaiman Range, the region appears to have been a favourable habitat for the early human communities as indicated by the discovery of numerous stone tools that can be dated to the Lower, Middle and Upper Palaeolithic periods.

At this time it is not possible to provide concrete dates for these periods, and it is necessary to use the generally accepted dates based on excavations in Afghanistan, the Potwar plain, the Rohri Hills, and Peninsular India.

Epi-Palaeolithic	10,000 ± 1000
Upper Palaeolithic	c 30,000–10,000
Middle Palaeolithic	100,000–30,000
Lower Palaeolithic	+ 700,000–100,000
Earliest stone tools	+ 2MYA – 700,000

Tab. 1. General Palaeolithic chronology.

#### ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

During the survey of the Sulaiman Range conducted by the author in 1995–96, two caves and twenty rock shelters were found in the southern portion of the range 42 km north of Musa Khel town, locally called "Tor Ghar" – or Black Mountains (fig. 1). The two caves did not have any paintings or petroglyphs, but have considerable occupation debris built up as well as thick smoke-blackened ceilings and polished walls. On the basis of crudely shaped stone tools (fig. 2) found on the slopes near these caves that appear to be similar to Lower Palaeolithic choppers and hand axes, it is possible that they may have been inhabited at some time during the Palaeolithic period. They are definitely worth further investigation.

The rock shelters close to these caves also may have been used by Palaeolithic communities, and, in contrast to the caves, these rock shelters contain approximately 175 rock paintings. The subject matter of the paintings is mostly of animals, and although the precise dating is not possible without further excavation and analysis, many of the fauna depicted appear to be large fauna similar to what would be expected around the end of the last ice age. If this can be confirmed, then some of these paintings may date to the Upper Palaeolithic period and would be generally comparable to paintings found in Europe during the Gravettian and Magdalenian periods.

The technique most commonly used for the paintings is that of outlined figures, but human figures are more realistic and the groupings of animals more sophisticated. Prominently displayed are small animals with long tails that appear to be either wolves or jackals (fig. 3). Other animals appearing in the caves include leopards, curved and straight horned makhor, wild sheep and horses. While some of the animals are easily identified, others have odd shaped extensions that could be

Fig. 3. Rock paintings showing long tailed animals.

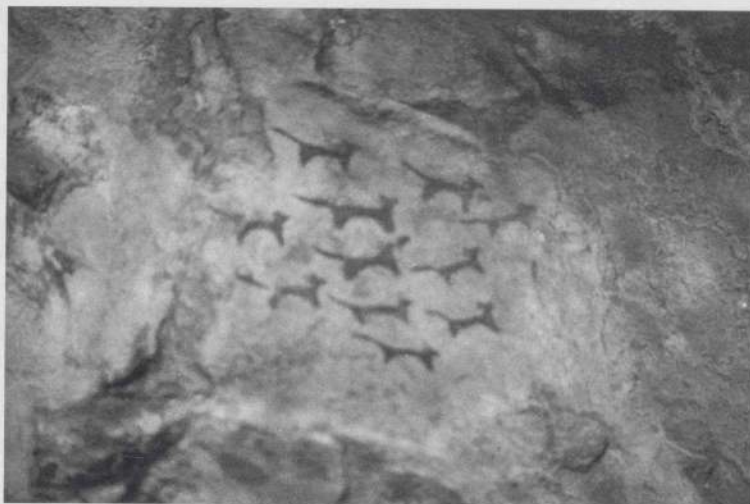


Fig. 4. Rock paintings showing unique animals and fish motifs.



Fig. 5. Rock paintings with humans and animal motifs.



horns or a tail, or possibly even someone riding the animal (fig. 4). In addition to these animal paintings, representations of humans, hunting scenes and abstract signs were also found and are of equal

importance. All these subjects were probably painted with a finger or stick, using red ochre, black and turquoise-blue colours, oxides of iron, manganese and copper, respectively (fig. 5).

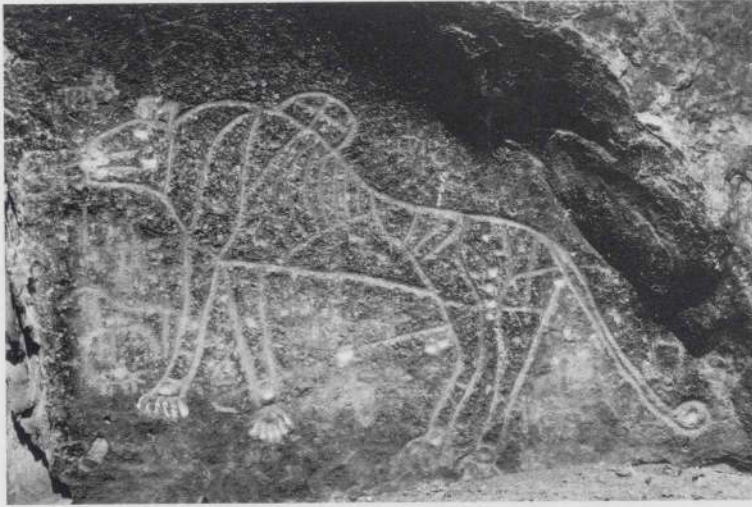


Fig. 6. Incised leopard.



Fig. 7. Incised humped bull.

After the survey of Tor Ghar, further explorations were carried out in the northern portion of the Sulaiman Range, which separates the NWFP and Punjab province from Balochistan, and its subsidiary ranges running in various directions in the Zhob District. Five caves and 27 rock shelters were found, which are similar to those found in the southern portion of the Sulaiman Range. The five caves discovered bear no paintings, but were definitely inhabited during the Palaeolithic Period, as indicated by stone tools found on the nearby slopes.

The rock shelters, however, bear many paintings, particularly those discovered at Khosti, Lakha Band, Dhana Abdullahzai, Yaqoobzai, Ismailzai, and Mughal Kot. At these places in the rock shelter, the artists of Upper Palaeolithic used both techniques of painting and engraving simultaneously, as in other parts of the world. The range of subjects of this rock art in these shelters includes predominantly animals like wild horses, leopards (fig. 6), wild boar, ibex, humped bull (fig. 7), which were hunted during the late Pleistocene period by Stone

Age man. Non-representational signs are frequent, too, such as dots, negative handprints, lines, and other paintings, particularly depictions of various types of animals which also occur in the Franco-Cantabrian art of the Upper Palaeolithic and which are interpreted in various ways by scholars.

#### INTERPRETATION

The purpose of the Stone Age rock art of Balochistan is far from clear at present and may have been purely recreational or representations of animals that were either useful or dangerous to the people. Based on a wide range of archaeological information from Pakistan and Afghanistan, we know that early human communities survived by hunting the animals shown by the paintings and by gathering plants: They lived in small groups, perhaps with seasonal moves or meeting with other groups for seasonal rituals and cooperative hunting occasions. One school of thought believes that the

key to the interpretation lies in the concept of sympathetic or hunting magic, believing that the act of painting an animal will help the hunter to go out and kill such an animal. In support of this interpretation, some of the abstract signs shown by many of the paintings appear to be arrows, wounds, corals, etc. The other school of thought favours a totemic interpretation of the rock art. These perspectives both acknowledge the limitations of our knowledge and the speculative nature of our interpretations. We may thus conclude by stating that the rock art probably served multiple functions at different times, and fulfilled both aesthetic and ideological needs for survival and adaptation of early human communities.

#### CONCLUSION

The evidence presented here creates the picture that some areas in the province of Balochistan were inhabited for lengthy periods of time by Palaeolithic communities, covering a span of time lasting at least half a million years. Altogether, although much remains to be done for the study of Stone Age man activities in Balochistan, we have sufficient evidence to identify the Province of Balochistan in Pakistan as one of the most ancient cradles of human culture in South Asia. The presence of rock art of the Upper Palaeolithic Period in Balochistan is of prime importance and a fabulous record of prehistoric times, belonging to the common heritage of humanity. Undisturbed for twenty to thirty thousand years, these paintings will provide scholars from numerous disciplines an exceptional field of study about human and animal life, and are testimonies of the metaphysical concerns and artistic approaches of our direct ancestors.

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