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L. M. Olivieri

Gogdara I and Beyond. The Cultural Sequence of the non-Buddhist Rock Art in Swat. Preliminary Conclusions

This short paper is meant to sum up the preliminary conclusions of a research on Swat rock-art, which started about ten years ago within the activities of the IsIAO Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan. The research has been possible also thanks to the results of the studies carried out in neighbouring areas by other teams and particularly the research carried out in Karakoram by the Pak-German joint Mission, which represents the first complete regional study ever run in that area. Besides the numerous reports published on the rock art of India (see Chackravarty/Bednarik 1997), I would like to mention also another comprehensive study which is being run by the Mission Archéologique Française in Central Asia. Recently, scholars from the Peshawar University and the Department of Archaeology, Govt. of Pakistan, have discovered and published many new sites from Baluchistan, N. W. Frontier Province and Punjab¹. These and other studies (i. e. the reports published by Haruko Tsuchiya) have allowed us to set up the Swat horizon in a wider rock art frame.

Our research started in 1992 with the studies of the painted shelters in the area of Kafir-kot, Malakand Agency, some of them already known (Nazir Khan 1994). From a chronological point of view, these paintings were attributed to the 1st-3rd century AD on the bases of pictograms (simple representations) representing mainly Buddhist architectures (Nazir Khan/Nasir/Olivieri/Vitali 1995). In 1995, M. Taddei, at that time Director of the Mission, decided to fill an important gap resuming the study of the protohistoric petroglyphs at Gogdara I, a key place for rock art in Swat (Olivieri 1998). Then, in 2000, the research carried out in the frame of the Archaeological Map of Swat Valley led M. Vidale to the discovery of new painted shelters in the tributary valley of Kandak, not far from Kafir-kot (Vidale/Olivieri 2002; Laurenza/Vidale, in press). Although similar in style, setting and technique (red ochre paintings), the Kandak shelters show some features which seem to belong to an earlier period (see above).

The survey has also revealed other rock art sites in Kandak: rock wall and caves with carvings and a vast amount of cup-marks, or cup-marks and tanks sites, spread all over the heights of the Kandak valley (Olivieri/Vidale 2004). On the grounds of these premises, we are now able to suggest a preliminary sequence of this artistic phenomenon (see fig. 12).

The study of the Gogdara petroglyphs has revealed the presence of two partially superimposed phases. An earlier group, which we have defined as 'mature', consists in carvings representing wild animals (mainly ibex and felines). Stylistically these animals are sub-naturalistic, with bi-triangular body (fig. 1), in some cases not far from the so-called 'x-ray depiction' (fig. 2). Technically, they were carved with direct percussors, that could have been metallic. From the syntactic point of view the figurations are large and isolated. All the images are rightwards. A later groups we have called 'late', mainly represents herds of equids, light chariots with a pair of equids, standards or banners (fig. 3). Neither human figures, nor mounted equids are represented. Stylistically they were carved according to simplified, linear, 'comb-like' pattern. The figurations were carved with a light-hammer technique. They occupy the peripheral lower portion of the rock wall, while the central area was previously occupied by the earlier carvings. These figurations are leftwards and show a clear syntactic association creating 'scenes'. The superimposition of the phases is documented by an ibex figure of the 'mature' phase which was modified into a standard. The people who had carved the large ibex of the 'mature' phase belong clearly to a 'evoluted hunters' culture. Their carvings have the value of ideograms. Perhaps they are religious symbols and not mere representations.

¹ Badshah Sardar 2000; Nasim Khan 2000; Muhammad Ashraf Khan/Muhammad Bahadur Khan/Azeem 1999-2000; Muhammad Ashraf Khan/Khan Khattak/Mahmood-ul-hasan 2002, Kakar 2005.



Fig. 1. Gogdara I 'mature' phase (evolved hunters; ante mid-1st millennium BC): example of bi-triangular style. Photo F. Bonardi.

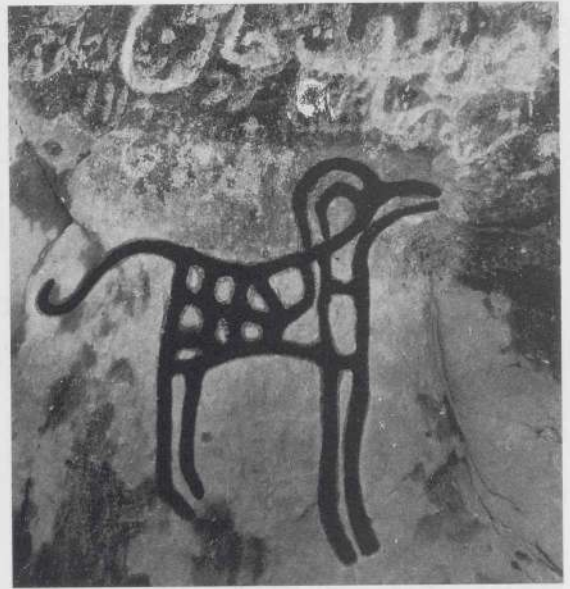


Fig. 2. Gogdara I 'mature' phase (evolved hunters; ante mid-1st millennium BC): example of 'x-ray' style. Photo F. Bonardi.

Syntactic isolation in a non-narrative composition has been recently indicated as typical of the earliest phases of Central Asia rock art (Francfort 1998, 304). The 'mature' phase could possibly be attributed to the beginning of the 1st millennium if not earlier. Meanwhile the presence of the light-chariots together with the equids and metallic tools, are excellent items to date the 'late' phase of Gogdara to the second half of the 1st millennium BC. It is clear that this phase represents an expression of 'breeders-shepherds' communities, nomad groups with a strong self-identity, as indicated by the standards. Comparison with the late protohistoric cultures of Swat could be done: for example with the horse burials of Katelai and Loebanr (Olivieri 1998, 82). The presence of the light-chariots in North Pakistan can be probably placed in the late Protohistory (e.g. in the rock art site of Mandori; Gordon 1958, 112; see also Kuz'mina 1994, 404), even if in Central Asia and Central India could be placed in an earlier phase².

Let us spend now some words on the Kandak carvings. Their style is not far from the 'late' figurations of Gogdara: schematic, linear, frequently 'comb-like' (fig. 4). On the other hand subjects are different, indeed. Outside the shelter of Muhammad-patai we found a feline attacking an ibex, while aside there is a human figure with a large round shield and a sword or club. The rock wall of Bang-dogal shows a large amount of light carvings: ibex, mounted equids, zoomorphic figurations. The style is well attested in neighbouring

areas around Swat and scholars generally tend to attribute it to the late Protohistory, if not to the early-historic period³. The grammar of the Kandak carvings shows a predominance of pictograms: figurations are frequently associated, sometimes creating 'scenes'. So, while their style and syntax can probably be matched with the 'late' Gogdara phase, the lexical features show an 'evolved hunters' culture, probably preserved in such a remote area like the inner Kandak valley (fig. 5).

As aforesaid, the first painted shelters documented in and around Kafir-kot were attributed to the historic period because of the presence of pictograms of Buddhist architecture and mounted horses (Nazir Khan/Nasir/Olivieri/Vitali 1995, 346ff.). Their syntax was clearly narrative; the lexicon shows a prevalent use of pictograms (fig. 6).

Three more painted shelters have been recently discovered in Kandak valley: Sargah-sar, Kakai-kandao and Dwolasmane-patai (Vidale/Olivieri 2002). The Kandak shelters seem to have no spatial relationship with the Buddhist cultural settlements of the valley. Nevertheless, the Kandak painted shelters share landscape, technique, lexicon and syntax features with the others. Paintings are monochromatic and executed using mainly red ochre oxides, often applied with fingers.

² Neumayer 1991, 59ff.; Sher 1994: XII–XIII; Kuz'mina 1994, 409ff.; Francfort 1998, 304.

³ Gordon 1958, 111f.; Nazir Khan 1983, 60; Nazir Khan/Nasir/Olivieri/Vitali 1995, 350.

Fig. 3. Gogdara I 'late' phase (breeders-shepherds; mid-/end 1st millennium BC): a light-chariot. Photo F. Bonardi.



Fig. 4. Muhammad-patai (evolved hunters; mid-/end 1st millennium BC): example of 'comb-like' style carvings. Photo M. Vidale.



Fig. 5. Bang-dogal (evolved hunters; mid-/end 1st millennium BC): example of linear carving representing a mounted bowman. Photo M. Vidale.



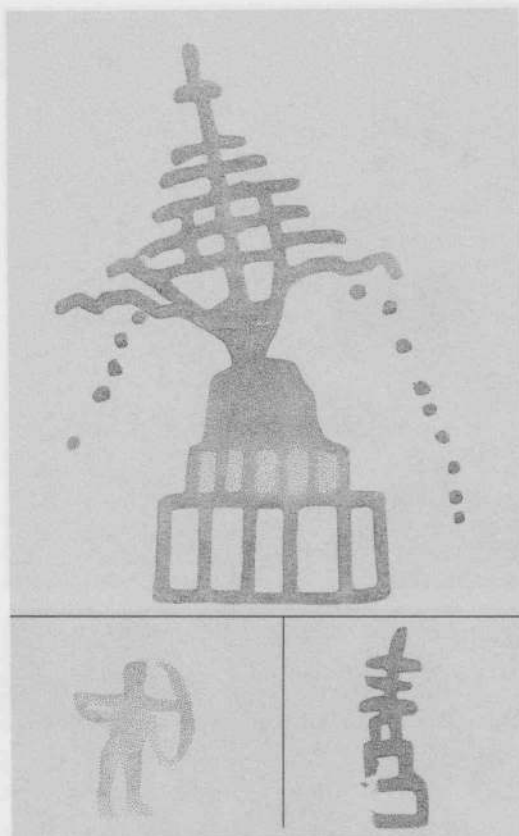


Fig. 6. Kafir-kot (1st-3rd century AD): a detail of the linear style rock painting. Drawing N. Olivieri, after Nazir Khan 1994, figs. 14-16.



Fig. 7. Sargah-sar: the shelter. Photo M. Vidale.

At Sargah-sar, painted designs are visible mainly within the natural erosive cavity shaped like a carinated ogival arch (fig. 7). This natural niche shows painted designs in various states of conservation: human figures, animals and complex geometric symbols are thickly crowded in a limited space. The designs in the upper round holes are poorly preserved. Other designs painted outside have almost faded out.

At least two different, superimposed phases of painting have been recorded. This evidence suggests that the shelter was decorated and visited for a long time. At the base of the niche lies a small saddle-shaped slab, with traces of mechanical impact and abrasion and solidified traces of red ochre. The stone was certainly used to grind and mix the red ochre used in painting. Looking at Sargah-sar gives the feeling of standing in front of a gigantic, supernatural face staring at the valley. The two round cavities in the upper part of the slab look like the eyes, while the large arch-shaped cavity at the base seems an open mouth and the saddle-shaped slab suggests a red tongue. Other designs across the face possibly recall tattoos. The feeling seems to be confirmed by the pashtu toponymy (Sargah- = 'place of the head'; -sar = 'top-hill').

The painted complex inside the shelter may be divided into two sectors. On the left side of the niche there is a group of figures which represents the centre of the complex, while the right-one seems to be peripheral (fig. 8). In the left sector two human figures holding a tool stand in front of a square grid. Other figures stand nearby witnessing the intervention of another individual (with legs represented with a reverse U, henceforth U-type). The square grid is an ideogram generally associated with the meaning of 'ploughed field' (Vidale/Olivieri 2002, no. 10). What we see in another scene may be the representation of a ritual connected with sowing. Two U-type figures are connected while another one is sowing. These U-type figures surround a 'sown fields' ideogram (that is 'ploughed field' and dots, probably 'seeds', the *peshayak* of Kalash people). The same 'sown field' ideogram, as a symbol or standard at the same time, was drafted at the centre, and connected to a U-type human figure. Nearby, a larger U-type anthropomorph is inserted in a larger 'sown field' ideogram like in an Escher's drawing; here is also another U-type human figure in the act of sowing. Interestingly, while the main group depicts a collective scene, the right sector represents a 'hunt-



Fig. 8. Sargah-sar (landfarmers; mid-/end 1st millennium BC): the linear style rock painting. Drawing F. Martore and M. Vidale.



Fig. 9. Kakai-kandao (landfarmers; mid-/end 1st millennium BC): the linear style rock painting. Drawing F. Martore and M. Vidale.

ing' scene in which a U-type 'warrior', emphasized by dots, acts in isolation: holding a big round shield, he faces a feline attacking an ibex. Another archer survives in a damaged condition on the lower left side. In both cases, they face rightwards. There might be a syntactic separation between the left sector, representing communal agricultural activities, and the outer sphere, where only isolated hunters (or 'heroes') bravely face the wild world. Squares and grids indicate 'the land of the community'; it is also possible that such squares represented an identity mark, or even the standard, of the community itself. In this light, the sequence of scenes so far described possibly narrates part of the agricultural cycle. The U-type anthropomorph inserted in the larger 'sown field' ideogram

probably represents a supernatural being, a divinity of cultivated land, who certainly had a special role in this community. Painting and re-painting might have been accompanied by mythological narrative during passage rituals or in seasonal festivals (the same might be hypothesized for other shelters). The group portrayed on the rock with the features of U-type characters probably played a leading role in that community.

The shelter of Kakai-kandao shows another interesting painted scene (fig. 9). If compared to the Sargah-sar one, we see, once more, that the centre of the scene displays figures associated with the 'sown fields' ideograms. The syntax is clear: a set of agricultural events is acted by a group of characters, most of them with U-type features.

Amongst them a monkey may represent a deity, or might be interpreted as a shamanic personage, basically with the same meaning. The presence of body modifications in some human figures (outstretched hands and even teriomorphic) is interesting, while they are frequently used in rock art to indicate a supernatural or a shamanic condition (Vidale/Olivieri 2002, no. 24).

In these two shelters we perceive the typical lexicon of 'landfarmers communities'. Their religious horizon shows some 'archaic' features and they do not seem to include any expression of the Buddhist ideology.

The paintings at Dwolasmane-patai are different from those observed at Kakai-kandao and Sargah-sar, and partially resemble those previously found at Kafir-kot (fig. 10). The preserved part comprises a group of human figures surrounding a large composite ideogram on the right hand side. Between two figures there is a small rosette-like ideogram. All hold a weapon, a tool or an attribute: a bow, or a club in the left hand. The attributes seem to have only a mere descriptive character. For example, the representation of bows does not seem to show the power of the warrior, like at Sargah-sar. Bows are depicted in detail (Scythian type), without any dynamic trait. Even the representation of the bent arm and the nocked arrow (absent at Sargah-sar) does not express movement, but is only a figurative expedient. The presence of these details is clearly meant to display only the role of the figures. All the human figures wear a 'tunic', which possibly differs from the skirt worn by two figures at Sargah-sar. Here it resem-



Fig. 10. Dwolasmane-patai (1st-3rd century AD): the linear style rock painting. Drawing F. Martore and M. Vidale.

Fig. 11. Kafir-kot (1st-3rd century AD): Buddhist architectures surrounding a central ideogram, the so-called *tamgha*. Drawing L. M. Olivieri.

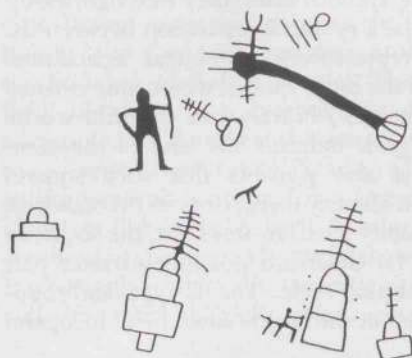
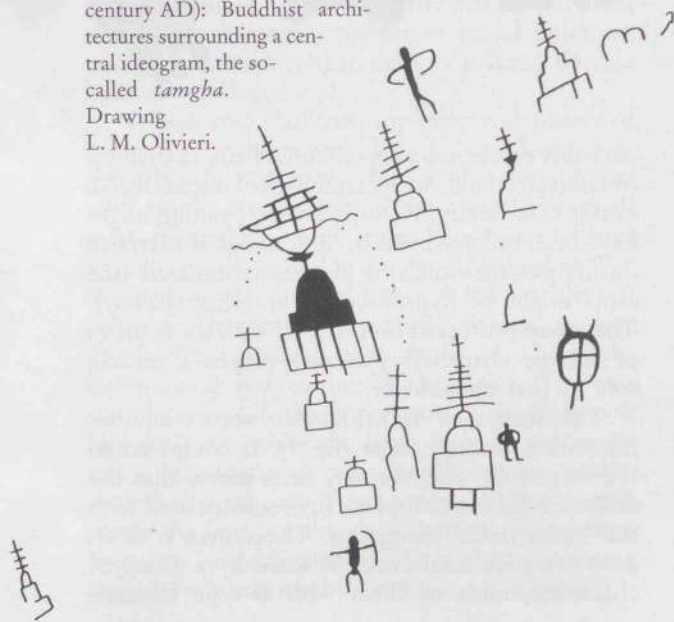


Fig. 12. The preliminary sequence of the non-Buddhist rock art in Swat.

CARVINGS	PAINTINGS	STYLE	SYNTAX	SUBJECTS	DATE AND CULTURE
	Kafir-kot; Hinduano-hatai; Marano-tangai; Shamo; Dwolasmane-patai.	Linear.	Complex; narrative; non-figurative codex (dots, grids, <i>et cet.</i>).	Buddhist architectures; mounted horses; bowmen (Scythian type bow); Kushan fashion dress.	1 st -3 rd century AD. Mixed economy.
	Sargah-sar; Kakai-kandao.	Linear.	Complex; narrative; non-figurative codex (dots, grids, <i>et cet.</i>).	Human figures; agricultural scenes; hunting scenes.	Mid-/end 1 st millennium BC. Landfarmers community.
	Bang-dogal; Muhammad-patai.	Linear; comb-like.	Simplified; narrative.	Hunting scenes; mounted horses.	Mid-/end 1 st millennium BC. Evoluted hunters.
	Gogdara 'late'.	Linear; 'comb-like'.	Simplified; narrative; non-figurative codex.	Non-mounted equids; light chariots; standards.	Mid-/end 1 st millennium BC. Breeders-sheperds.
	Gogdara 'mature'.	Bi-triangular; 'x-ray'.	Non-syntactic; non-narrative; isolated figurations; non-figurative codex.	Wild animals: ibex, felines and others; 'tree-like' figurations.	Ante mid-1 st millennium BC. Evoluted hunters.

bles a dress tightened with some kind of belt. These figures may be compared to other carvings where human figures wearing long kaftan are identified with Kushana people⁴. Of course, the depiction of the club hold in the left hand, if compared, for instance, with the famous Mathura statue, is quite significant.

Looking at the rock paintings of the first two shelters, the most likely dating is a late-protohistoric horizon related to 'landfarmers communities' of ancient Kandak. Painters might have continued to draw their figures on rock cliffs until the 1st-3rd century AD, as attested by the complexes of Kafir-kot and Dwolasmane-patai, where the syntax

and style do not noticeably differ from Sargah-sar and Kakai-kandao. At Kafir-kot, Shamo, Hinduano-hatai, stupas and bowmen are carefully described, just as the human figurations were executed in detail at Dwolasmane-patai: perhaps this graphic care depends upon the fact that these subjects had no traditional part in the lexicon of the painters (probably illiterate). At Kafir-kot, as in the Kandak complexes, important actions are emphasized by dots⁵. At Kafir-kot, but also at

⁴ For example the well know carving published in Tucci 1958, 294, fig. 8 and Orofino 1990, fig. 33.

⁵ On the value of the dots, see Vidale/Olivieri 2002, no. 14.

Marano-tangai, there are some indications of the persistence of an ideogram-based lexicon: for example, the central abstract figuration of Kafirkot, already interpreted as a tribal sign or *tamgha* (Nazir Khan/Nasir/Olivieri/Vitali 1995, no. 1), may stand as an important ideogram, which significance is still unclear (fig. 11).

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