

Maryam Shah

EXPANDING HERITAGE CONSCIOUSNESS
THE ENDANGERED ROCK CARVINGS AND INSCRIPTIONS IN
THE UPPER INDUS VALLEY, PAKISTAN

MA Thesis in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy, Management.

Central European University

Vienna

June 2022

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by

Maryam Shah

(Pakistan)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,
Central European University, Vienna, in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the Master of Arts degree in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy,
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Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

Chair, Examination Committee

Alice Choyke
Thesis Supervisor

Examiner

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Budapest, 30 May 2022

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Abstract

There are thousands of ancient rock carvings and inscriptions scattered along rock surfaces in the Upper Indus Valley in the Northern Areas of Pakistan. In relation to these carvings and inscriptions, this thesis aims to discuss and question current discourses of heritage preservation and their application in remote geographical locations where the social, environmental and political issues impact the general, global understandings and heritage practices. Attention will be drawn to community engagement in heritage management and processes, by giving agency to communities to decide what is heritage for them and what they want to preserve based on their world view and after exposure to scholarly perspectives. Besides discussion of Pakistani national heritage policies and legislation, there is also analysis of the parallel cultural, natural, social and political agents that contribute to top-down heritage processes in the region.

Exploring the idea of heritage in expert and non-expert understandings, I propose in this work an overview of value associations and the general outlook of local people towards heritage and its preservation, based on discussions and interviews with community members in Chilas city. The field visit, community outreach, and desktop research provide a basis for the argument to look for new modes of protection and preservation based on memories, regardless of the physical manifestations of heritage objects. The arguments for community knowledge and agency in decision making and memory preservation are supported by the design of a project that aims to act as both a bridge between scholarly and local understandings of the rock carvings and inscriptions in the Upper Indus River valley as well as a source of memory preservation tool for local people. The virtual exhibit aims to equip local people with a basic, scholarly understanding of the history of their own locality so that they can consciously participate in and initiate projects connected to this material for community development. The

project also emphasizes the importance of accessibility, comprehension and engagement for any community-targeted projects.

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List of Abbreviations

AKDN- Aga Khan Development Network

DOAM- Department of Archaeology and Museums

GB- Gilgit Baltistan

KKH- Karakoram Highway

NHCD- National Heritage and Culture Division

NFCH- National Fund for Cultural Heritage

Introduction

The experiences that motivated this research were seeing intricately drawn depictions of stupas and meditating Buddha on various rocks while traveling down the Karakoram Highway, disrupted by painted-over political messages and afterwards drawn names. One can tell these pictures are works of art left by ancient people owing to the visible craftsmanship and the quality of the chiseled images. The presence of later, added graphics poses questions about the motivation of the people behind their creation. At first glance, these disruptions hint to an absence of knowledge concerning these drawings' age and historic meaning and significance.

These images and inscriptions in ancient texts, chiseled out with pebbles and later with metal tools. In in this thesis, they will be referred to as *rock carvings and inscriptions*.¹ While the use of *carving* and *inscriptions* separately will specifically refer to only drawings and only texts, respectively.

This thesis unravels and summarizes findings from the various scholarly studies carried out on these rock carvings and inscriptions over the years by different experts and integrates them into an overview of what this body of knowledge means for Gilgit Baltistan, and Chilas in particular, in a global historical context. At the same time, the importance of considering local community associations with such historic assets is considered with the aim of bridging the gap in the understanding of these carvings between experts and local people.

These rock carvings and inscriptions are part of Pakistan's broad and intriguing archaeological heritage. The failure to implement existing policies and measures has also

¹ Drawings of seated Buddha, stupas, animals like ibex, elephants, horses, sundials, human stick figures and other materials that are not texts. Inscriptions include texts chiseled into the rocks, including Brahmi, Sarada, Sanscrit, Kharosthi,

affected community attitudes toward heritage and preservation. By dealing with heritage and preservation issues in isolation, the impression is given to ordinary people that such considerations are a luxury and do not add to community development, particularly in the shadow of issues like the construction of the Diamer Bhasha Dam. A similar scenario for policies and regulations demonstrates that current global practices are still mostly Eurocentric and that there is a need to shift this narrative and establish other methods to deal with challenges that are particular to local contexts and social groups.

The strategy of safeguarding or conserving these carvings and inscriptions by listing them or providing some protection for them suggests that they will only be regarded as important if they are certified as being significant according to universally accepted national or international criteria. This approach overlooks the fact that their significance stems from the millennia-long historical processes in their immediate surroundings they have borne witness to. They are the work of the people who traveled through and populated these valleys from prehistoric times to the present. While attempting to assign these carvings a "national" or "universal" value, the significance of these carvings and inscriptions in their local context, along the KKH, on the banks of the Indus River, surrounded by Chilas residents, has been overlooked. These ideals and processes are not detached from the harsh reality of the dam's construction and the potential submergence of this one-of-a-kind rock-art setting.

With the emergence of modern technologies, digitizing tangible heritage has become common practice. Digital records of tangible heritage not only maintain the visual characteristics of heritage intact in a virtual dimension but also becomes an accessible and readily available mode for people to witness and experience heritage on a digital platform. Heritage360 is an online platform that presents the digital records of the rock carvings and inscriptions digitized by the project, Upper Indus Petroglyphs and Inscriptions in Northern

Pakistan in not only Chilas but in other parts of the Gilgit-Baltistan region. Such digitization becomes a significant source of information for encouraging and promoting community awareness and outreach efforts about the historical and factual information of the rock carvings and inscriptions.

Rationale

For years, these rock inscriptions have endured the impacts of changing time and weather without any heritage intervention to preserve their materiality. Chalking and graffiti destroyed many carvings and inscriptions, while other rocks were blasted apart to use in construction. These damages were widespread for carvings and inscriptions situated closer to human settlements. Ignorance of their historic and geographic importance among local people meant these inscriptions possessed neither value nor meaning to them, hence the destruction. Though these damage issues can be considered insignificant or, at least, manageable, the bigger problem these inscriptions face is the construction of the Diamer Bhasha Dam. Construction of this dam will mean most of these inscriptions will be drowned beneath the dam's waters, although some might become visible again in the winter season as water levels drop.

Apart from the absence of heritage protection measures and policy implementation, local people's lack of awareness about the importance of these inscriptions is also a key threat to their existence. A handful of people from the local community have often saved the carvings and inscriptions from vandalism, but their numbers are meager. There exists little motivation or drive to safeguard this local heritage, partly due to ignorance and partly because the local people are more concerned about the loss of their ancestral lands and resources to the dam.

Research Questions

1. *How can heritage preservation act as a tool to bridge the gap between the value associations of these rock inscriptions between locals and academics?*
2. *Why is it necessary to keep the memory of such heritage alive when top-to-bottom preservation approaches are not operational?*
3. *What possible non-interventionist preservation methods can help make such heritage more accessible, physically, intellectually, and emotionally to the communities?*

Research Methodology

The research for this thesis focuses on the inscriptions in the vicinity of Chilas City. The main research included

- Field visits and interviews with locals. The conclusions influence the outcome of the thesis and include local opinions.
- The thesis also compares work done on similar sites in other parts of the region in the way digitization has been used to preserve the memory of endangered rock inscriptions.
- The research also includes an overview of Pakistan's policies, laws, and protective measures at both national and local levels. This overview will help establish the need for a bottom-up initiative as an outcome of this thesis.
- The research also includes the analysis of the value association of the rock carvings and inscriptions in light of current heritage discourses. This part of the analysis employs literature to support the question of memory association and authority in heritage preservation.

The outcome is to make the thesis results available to the local community and develop a historic preservation project that can be used as a model for other groups of rock carvings and inscriptions in the region while keeping in mind the scope of the thesis and the restrictions faced in the execution of such a project. The virtual exhibition project focuses on bridging the gap between scholarly research and community understanding of this local heritage. Both groups are brought together onto a single platform, thus, allowing the community to make informed decisions about the future of this heritage. The focus is, thus, on introducing heritage preservation of endangered heritage through pedagogical intervention aimed at memory preservation. This research has also raised questions concerning the understanding of heritage value among experts compared to that of locals and touches upon the issue of rigid preservation norms or letting go of the physical manifestation of endangered heritage.

Thesis Outline

This thesis comprises two parts. The thesis report supports and details the research already carried out in order to understand and provide arguments on these heritage issues. Moreover, the second part, the virtual audio-visual project, was designed based on the conclusions and understandings of the research explained in the report.

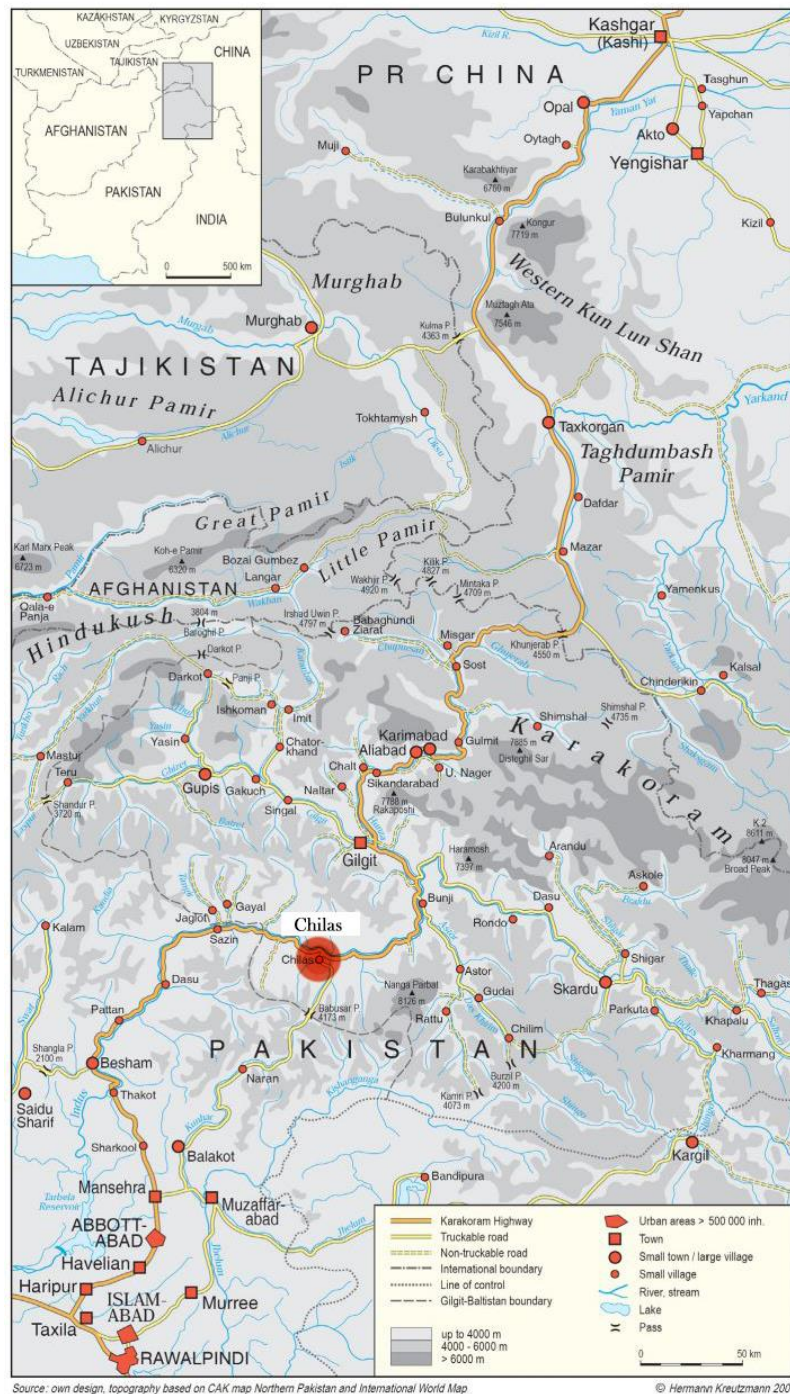
Part 1- Thesis Report

The written report consists of four main chapters. In chapter one, an overview is provided of the historical and geographic context of the narrowed-down research area, i.e., Chilas City. Chapter two summarizes the current policy context relevant to the rock carvings and inscriptions and highlights the essential legislative and protection measures and their importance. Chapter three discusses the concepts of heritage, values, memory, and

associations. In chapter four, community engagement and preservation are reviewed based on the case of these rock carvings and inscriptions.

Part 2- Audio-Visual Project

To conserve the collective memory of the Chilas rock carvings and inscriptions among the local population, the audio visual project (described in chapter 4) uses existing digitally recorded carvings and inscriptions and their textual, scholarly interpretations. The concept takes the shape of a user-friendly, instructive virtual display that can be readily presented in the local language in educational institutions in and around Chilas City. Long-term proposals include a structured, mobile teaching program targeting several locations in the surrounding areas with rock carvings and inscriptions. The goal is for the visual resources to be freely available to Chilas City residents, especially younger generations still in the local school system, rather than only contributing to scholarly study.



Source: own design, topography based on CAK map Northern Pakistan and International World Map © Hermann Kreutzmann 2009

Figure 1- Northern Areas Map (Chilas City highlighted)²

² Hermann Kreutzmann, *Preservation of Built Environment and Its Impact on Community Development in Gilgit-Baltistan*, 2016, 20, <https://doi.org/10.11588/xabooks.133.166>.



Figure 2- Circular ornamental carving near Chilas, Source: Author

CHAPTER ONE

Historic and Geographic Context of the Rock Carvings and Inscriptions

1.1 Chilas- background

Chilas is a small city located in the North of Pakistan. It is the first significant town in the Gilgit Baltistan region, coming from the direction of Islamabad³. At approximately 297 kilometers from the capital, this town is also the divisional capital of the Diamer District of Gilgit-Baltistan. It is surrounded by the rugged and rocky Karakoram mountain ranges, which rise to altitudes of around 4150 ft, and sits on the right bank (traveling from Islamabad) of the Indus River, cutting through the mountains. Following the Indus River, the Karakoram Highway, which passes through Chilas City, is the highest altitude paved road in the region. Although most of the mountainous terrain in this region is rocky and barren, some surrounding areas of the city are rich in forests with many different kinds of trees and land resources. The population of sixty thousand in Chilas are Muslims and divided into different tribes following century-old social traditions. Until 1846, the broader Gilgit Baltistan region, including Chilas and surrounding valleys, were autonomous states with their *rajas* and *mirs* (local rulers). This system of small states saw a shift in power with the dual British-Dogra control of the region⁴.

³ Capital city of Pakistan

⁴ The present-day Gilgit Baltistan region was part of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, one of the largest princely states of India. It was created in 1846 after a treaty was signed between the British and Gulab Singh of the Dogra Dynasty. In order to protect its northern border, the British seized control of military and security matters while administrative control remained with Dogra rulers. Hermann Kreutzmann, "Boundaries and Space in Gilgit-Baltistan," *Contemporary South Asia* 23, no. 3 (July 3, 2015): 276–91, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09584935.2015.1040733>.

1.1.1 Socio-Economic Situation

The tribal Jirga system still influences many aspects of local social structures and decisions.⁵ Some local writers from Chilas consider the tribal system and customs the main reason for the lack of progress in economic, educational, and social development in Chilas compared to other parts of Gilgit-Baltistan.⁶ Despite holding a key geographical position in the region and the country, Chilas City lacked basic infrastructure like paved roads and electricity until recently. This situation has improved with time, but there is still a long way. This is one of the reasons local people have been optimistic about what the completed Diamer Bhasha Dam project would bring them for more than three decades now, hoping it would mean infrastructural development and economic growth through job opportunities for the locals. Chilas has a relatively low literacy rate compared to other parts of Gilgit Baltistan, with the first college (high school) and university campus having opened just a few years ago. The residents of Chilas are involved in agricultural and forestry activities.

1.1. The Karakoram Highway

In the past decade, the influx of tourists from cities to the mountain regions has increased. The renovation of the Karakoram Highway is responsible for this sudden boom in tourism. This influx of outsiders brought opportunities for tourism-related activities for the locals, such as building hotels, restaurants, and essential markets. The demand for special transport has also

⁵ *Jirga* is an assembly of rulers from different tribes who make decisions regarding important matters and social issues. The Jirga system is still followed by ethnic groups in different part of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Hermann Kreutzmann, *Karakoram- Hidden Treasures in the Northern Areas of Pakistan* (Aga Khan Trust for Culture, n.d.), 48.

⁶ HUM Point, "History Of Chilas City + Documentary Of Chilas Valley + Chilas Pakistan + Chilas Diamer + شہر چلاس," YouTube, April 17, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R5w5IhHAjhk>.

increased due to increased adventure tourism and mountaineering⁷. What an ordinary tourist sees when they enter Chilas are lined-up hotels and restaurants on either side of the KKH. The busiest part of the year is in the spring and summer months. Despite its proximity to the KKH and an increased number of tourists, there is a dearth of any touristic activities in the area of Chilas City itself. The city is considered no more than a rest stop by tourists, who are willing to travel for sixteen hours to explore different cultures and touristic activities deeper in the mountain regions. Chilas is not known as a place that offers anything more than just hotels and rests stops.

Chilas, however, is also the entry point to the rest of the Gilgit Baltistan region and a connecting point to other parts of the country through its many mountain passes. It was an important strategic location during the British rule of the whole region. In the recent past and throughout its history, Chilas has been an important location for cultural exchanges. Detailed studies by various ethnographers, epigraphers, and archaeologists have demonstrated the historical importance of Chilas through thousands of inscriptions and rock carvings and inscriptions on numerous rock surfaces, connected to and referenced in other parts of the country and around the world. The KKH follows the same route that connected ancient travelers and traders to the silk road, running along numerous branches to and from India, Iran, the Tarim Basin⁸, and Central Asia.

⁷ Chilas region has always seen an influx of international mountaineers to summit Nanga Parbat, the world's ninth highest mountain. However, in the past few years, other touristic activities have seen relative increases in the area including hiking to the Nanga Parbat base camps and visits to mountain meadows.

⁸ The Tarim Basin is a vast depression drained by the Tarim River in the Uygur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang, western China. It is located along part of the northern Silk Road. Inscriptions found in the region point to connections with the Tarim people of eastern Iran, Central Asia and northeastern Asians. The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Tarim Basin," in *Britannica*, accessed November 20, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Tarim-Basin>.

1.2 Historic Trade Routes and Connectivity

More than thirty thousand carvings and inscriptions on more than 5000⁹ rocks are spread as a continuous outdoor assemblage stretching from Shatial to Chilas over more than two kilometers. Many other parts of the country also host similar carvings and inscriptions. Most of this ancient art depicts the travelers who passed through and participated in the valley's cultural and social way of life. Most of the images and inscriptions are related to Buddhist religious impulses. They shed light on the region's political situation under the rule of various Buddhist rulers.

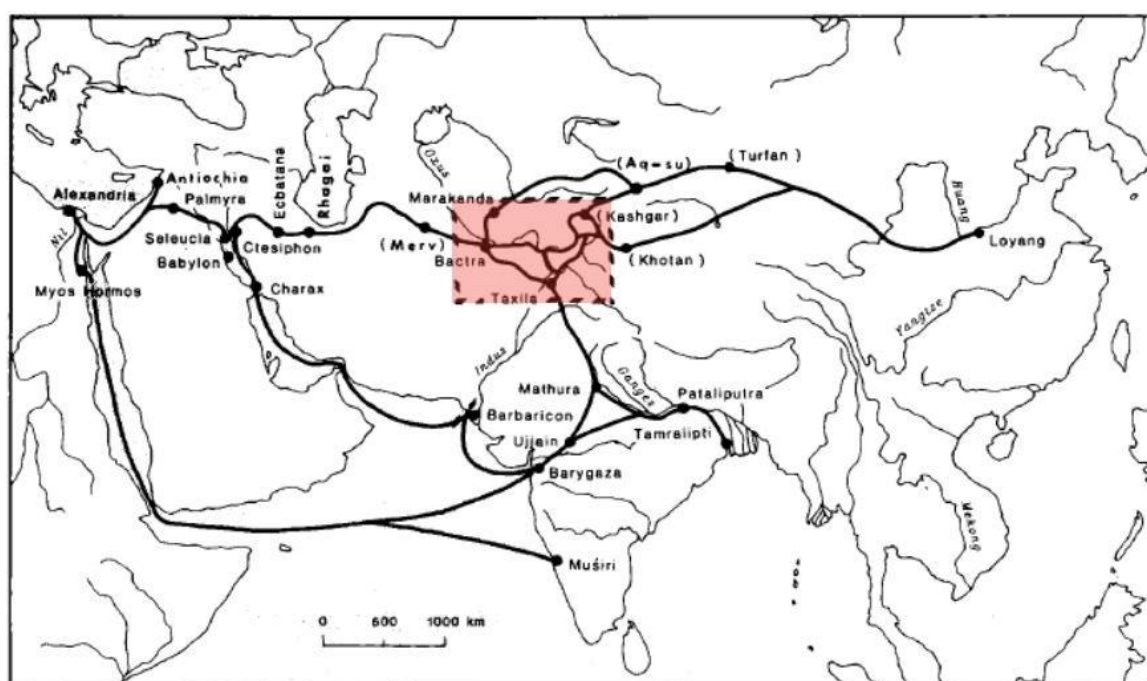


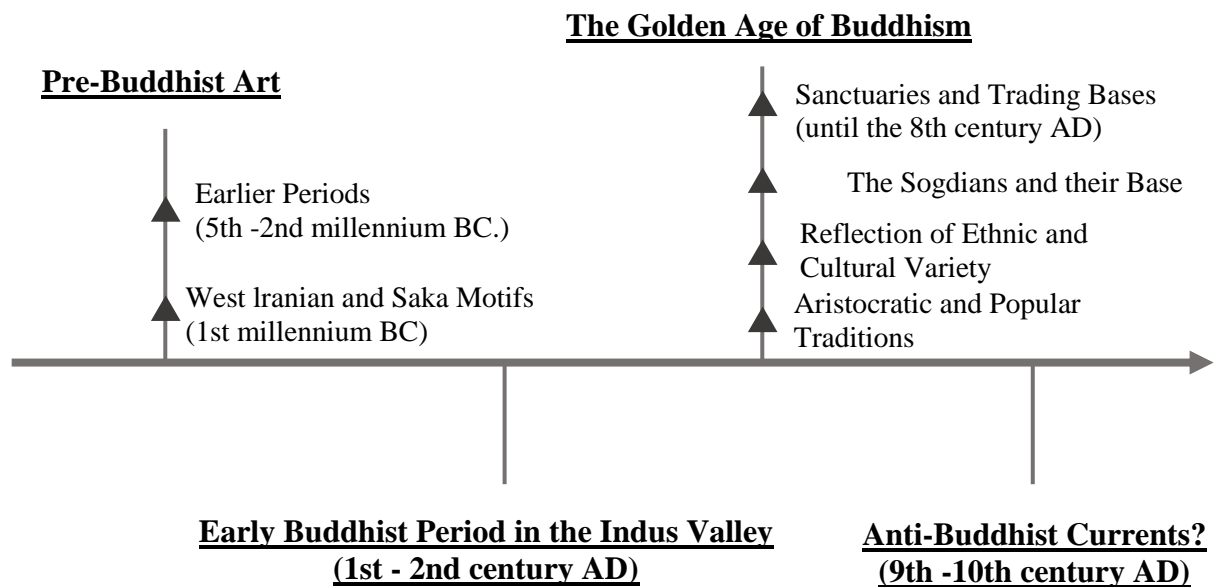
Figure 3- Old Silk Road routes passing through the Indian sub-continent¹⁰

⁹ Hans-Rudolf Bork et al., eds., *Socio-Environmental Dynamics along the Historical Silk Road*, 1st ed. 2019 (Cham: Springer International Publishing: Imprint: Springer, 2019), 459, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-00728-7>.

¹⁰ Karl Jettmar, ed., *Between Gandhāra and the Silk Roads: Rock-Carvings along the Karakorum Highway; Discoveries by German-Pakistani Expeditions, 1979 - 1984* (Mainz am Rhein: von Zabern, 1987), 6.

1.2.1 Timeline Distribution

In the publication “Between Gandhara and Silk Roads- Rock Carvings along the Karakoram Highway,” which details the Discoveries by German-Pakistani Expeditions from 1979-to 1984, the carvings and inscriptions have been distributed over the following timelines.



*Figure 4- Timeline of rock carvings and inscriptions
from “Between Ghandara and Silk Roads- Rock Carvings along the Karakoram Highway”*

1.2.2 Inscriptions

Both Kharoṣṭhī¹¹ and the two variants of the Brāhmī¹² script are used for what seem to be the personal names of different individuals. In addition, four hundred and fifty short Sogdian¹³

¹¹ Kharoṣṭhī was an ancient Indo-Iranian script used by people in present-day northern Pakistan, eastern Afghanistan, and Central Asia. Its use died out around third century BCE Cristian Violatti, “Kharosthi Script,” in *World History Encyclopedia*, May 25, 2017, https://www.worldhistory.org/Kharosthi_Script/.

¹² Brahmi script was the earliest writing system developed and used in India. It is considered one of the most influential scripts, as all modern Indian and many Southeast and East Asia scripts are derived from it. Cristian Violatti, “Brahmi Script,” in *World History Encyclopedia*, November 14, 2016, https://www.worldhistory.org/Brahmi_Script/.

¹³ An ancient Iranian civilization located between the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya (rivers) spread over present-day Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan.

inscriptions and some additional examples in Iranian and Indian languages were found in this rock collection in and around Chilas. According to Karl Jettmar, a leading German archaeologist who studied these rock carvings and inscriptions during the 1980s, these inscriptions demonstrate that Chilas City was a key point on the trade route through the mountains and that Iranians formed a critical component of the mountain population.¹⁴

Plate 127 v. Hinüber 62d; Chilas I; P81N58:24.

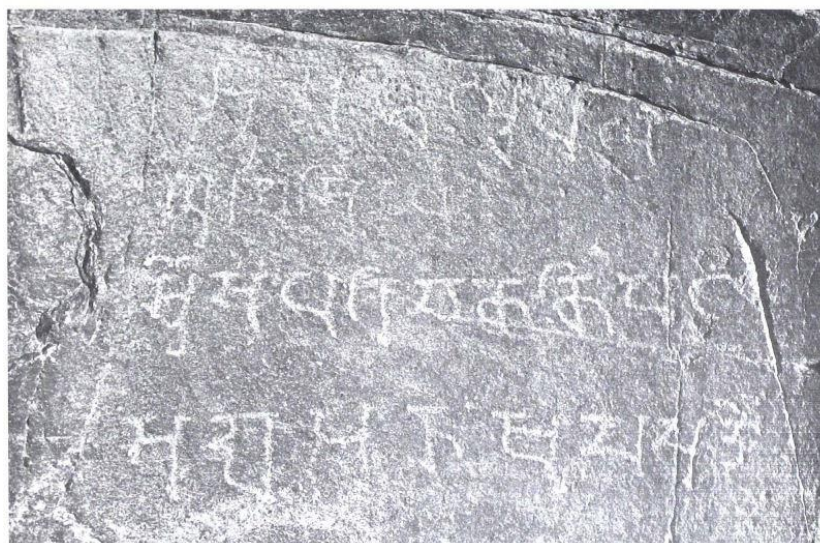


Figure 5- Inscriptions near Chilas¹⁵

Foreigners and travelers chipped out and chiseled most of these inscriptions to mark what was mostly their transient presence in this area. These traces reflected the motifs and styles of their homelands. Symbols from the Near East include fire altars and brand marks of nomadic tribes from Sogdian towns.

1.2.3 Carvings

Many other carvings are also present, including finely carved horses, human figures in Iranian dress, and wall paintings of Sogdian towns. Scholars interpret this variety as meaning that

Judith A. Lerner and Thomas Wide, "Who Were the Sogdians, and Why Do They Matter?," Smithsonian-National Museum of Asian Art, accessed February 27, 2022, <https://sogdians.si.edu/introduction/>.

¹⁴ Jettmar, *Between Gandhāra and the Silk Roads*, 6.

¹⁵ Karl Jettmar et al., eds., *Antiquities of Northern Pakistan: Reports and Studies* (Mainz: P. von Zabern, 1989).

Iranians from the west and north were the largest group of travelers leaving their signs and marks on these rocks. The overall presence of rock carvings and inscriptions declined in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, before the advent of Islam in the region. Moreover, many of the carvings of stupas found in Chilas are similar (figure 6) to the stupas found (figure 7) in the caves of Bamiyan, Afghanistan.¹⁶



Figure 6- Stupa Carving near KKH in Chilas, source- author



Figure 7- Stupa Carving image from caves of Bamiyan¹⁷

1.2.4 Connectivity

Sir Aurel Stein, one of the first modern explorers of the Tarim Basin, believed that there had been a shorter route through the high mountain passes of the Hindukush and Karakoram. This route used for travel and the spread of religions is also shown by the ruins of a Buddhist monastery in Darel, a valley not far from Chilas. This route was used for trade and encouraged the spread of Buddhism. Pilgrim traffic flowed through Chilas to the Darrel monastery and other smaller areas. Because of its strategic geographical position, it can be assumed that Chilas

¹⁶ Ibid, 20.

¹⁷ Ibid, 20

once played a vital role in economic, mercantile, and cultural relations between the Hindukush region and the old Buddhist centers in northwest India.¹⁸

1.2.5 Cultural Continuity

These carvings and inscriptions indicate that a lively trade and migration were active in the western Himalayas during the last 4000 years, with probable cooperation from local populations who inhabited the region even earlier. High passes were crossed in several directions, evidenced by discoveries in Burzahom¹⁹ in Kashmir and indications of the presence of the Harrapa²⁰ culture in Eastern Bactria.²¹ The carvings and inscriptions from Shatial to Chilas appear at short, continuous intervals along the KKH. Many other parts of the country have similar carvings and inscriptions and include well-known attractions such as the Kargah Buddha in Gilgit (figure 8), Manthal Rock Art in Skardu (figure 9), and the Haldekish- Sacred Rocks in Hunza.



Figure 8- Kargah Buddha relief carving, Gilgit²²



Figure 9- Buddha relief carving in Skardu²³

¹⁸ Aurel Stein, "Archæological Notes from the Hindukush Region," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 1 (1944): 5–24.

¹⁹ Burzahom is archaeological site in Sirinagar, Indian Occupied Kashmir. "The Neolithic Settlement of Burzahom," UNESCO World Heritage Center, accessed February 27, 2022, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5917/>.

²⁰ Harappans of the Indus Valley Civilization colonized Eastern Bactria (present day Central Asia) Clyde Ahmad Winters, "The Dravido-Harappan Colonization of Central Asia," *Central Asiatic Journal* 34, no. 1/2 (1990): 120–44.

²¹ Karl Jettmar, *Rock Carvings and Inscriptions in the Northern Areas of Pakistan* (Institute of Folk Heritage, Islamabad, 1982), 25.

²² "The Kargah Buddha Located in Gilgit," *Pamir Times*, November 25, 2015, <https://pamirtimes.net/2015/11/26/the-kargah-buddha-located-in-gilgit/>.

²³ Farman Ali Baltistani, "National Heritage Status Sought for Famous Buddha Rock in Baltistan," *DAWN*, January 22, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1309945/national-heritage-status-sought-for-famous-buddha-rock-in-baltistan>.

However, some rock carving types are particular to and concentrated in Chilas. These carvings include images of axes, decorated wheels, ibex carvings, and human figures.²⁴

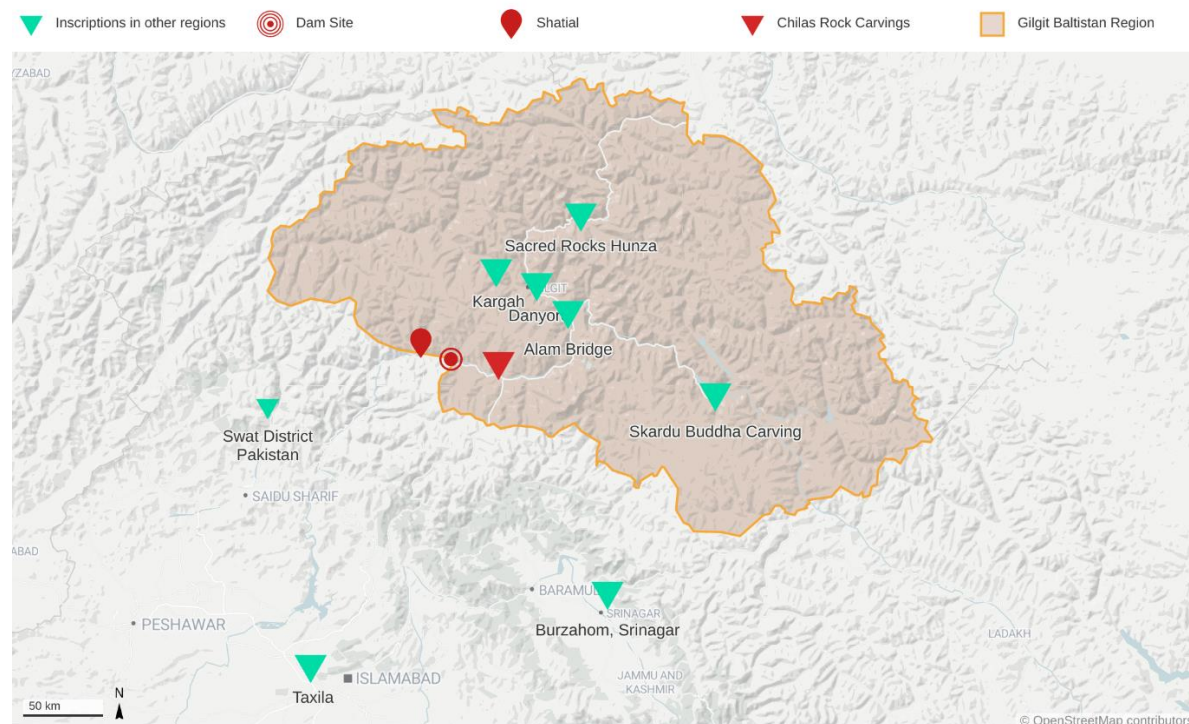


Figure 10- Various rock carving inscription along the KKH, source: author's design with Datawrapper

Many carvings also reflect human activity in the region even before the Buddhist period. While the carvings of hunters and fighting scenes reflect a post-Buddhist influence. The distribution of the rock carvings and inscriptions showed the long-term importance of the Indus River Gorge when all other connecting passes were closed off due to winter snows. According to Jettmar, the ancestors of the current inhabitants of Chilas and the surrounding regions may have arrived in different periods, bringing with them several belief systems. Over time, these ancestors also formed their own understandings and associations with these rock carvings and inscriptions.²⁵

²⁴ Jettmar et al., *Antiquities of Northern Pakistan*, 1989, 25.

²⁵ Karl Jettmar, "Petroglyphs as Evidence for Religious Configurations?," 2013, <https://doi.org/10.11588/PROPYLAEUMDOK.00001725>.

1.3 Geographical Context

1.3.1 Indus River and the Karakoram

These carvings and inscriptions have historical significance, but their importance is by virtue of their geographical context as well. They are located in a region that is home to three of the highest mountain ranges, the Karakoram, the Himalayas, and Hindukush. Moreover, the Indus River has its own vital historical significance, cutting through these high peaks. The high mountains and fast-flowing Indus River played essential roles in keeping this area hidden and inaccessible to all modern scholarly research. At the same time, during the British administrative rule, the area was deliberately cut off and made inaccessible to outsiders.²⁶ Afterward, the area was out of bounds for any kind of study during the construction of the Karakoram Highway. Many of these carvings and inscriptions were discovered when the KKH was being constructed, and many were also destroyed. It was only after the construction of the highway was complete that the German-Pakistani expedition could carry out their detailed research.²⁷

1.3.2 Role of Climate

This region's dry and harsh climate played a prominent role in producing these rock carvings and inscriptions, as they are now seen. These rocks were previously polished by water throughout the millennia, coated in a patina known as desert varnish. Travelers made the carvings and inscriptions by pecking off the upper surface of the rocks with pointed stones. These pecked-in drawings were again covered by another layer of patina over subsequent centuries. Later rock carvings and inscriptions indicate the use of metal instruments in their

²⁶ Kreutzmann, "Boundaries and Space in Gilgit-Baltistan."

²⁷ Jettmar, *Between Gandhāra and the Silk Roads*, 10.

creation. The use of metal tools produces sharp images and inscriptions, even from a distance, with striking visibility on these rock surfaces.²⁸



Figure 11- Chilas location in the mountains and in the Indus River valley gorge.²⁹

1.3.3 An Entry Point

Modern studies show that the most appropriate time to pass through the Karakoram ranges and along the upper reaches of the Indus River in the past was in autumn and winter. When water levels were low in the river and there was very little snowfall, the narrow gorge could be crossed even without bridges. However, travelers moving from the north to the south faced high snow in the mountain passes. They either had to wait until the following summer or

²⁸ Karl Jettmar et al., eds., *Antiquities of Northern Pakistan: Reports and Studies*, vol. 1 (Mainz: P. von Zabern, 1989). 14-17

²⁹ “Detailed Satellite Map of Gilgit Baltistan Coach,” maphill, accessed March 27, 2022, <http://www.maphill.com/search/gilgit-baltistan-coach/detailed-satellite-map/>.

venture into the Indus River gorge. This explains the high concentration of carvings and inscriptions between Shatial and Chilas, as this was the transitional zone for summer and winter traveler traffic.³⁰

The Chilas region, with its most diverse, concentration of carvings and inscriptions, is still a significant geographical location. Chilas City is the entrance to the most visited Gilgit Baltistan region. However, the historical importance of this area and the history of the rock carvings and inscriptions at points visible from the present-day highway are unclear.

1.4 Research Area

Detailed scholarly studies carried out in the past focused on almost all the carvings and inscriptions located in and around Chilas, including those found in smaller connecting valleys. The rock carvings were divided into smaller areas for study and divided into zones, namely Chilas I, II, and so on.³¹ However, the research area pertinent to this thesis was limited to the rock carving locations lying close to Chilas City (figure 10).

The research area refers to the locations site visits, where photographic records were taken, and marks the area where these records were used in the visual project connected to the thesis. The research aims to explore the abundance of this rock art and understand its heritage value within its local context. Moreover, as most carvings and inscriptions are not specific to one rock, but rather to a wider area, selective use of them for the visual project still provides a broad overview of the history they tell. For this thesis, three main sites close to Chilas city were

³⁰ Jettmar, *Between Gandhāra and the Silk Roads*, 28.

³¹ Ibid, 28

visited, and carvings and inscriptions from these locations are included in the final project.

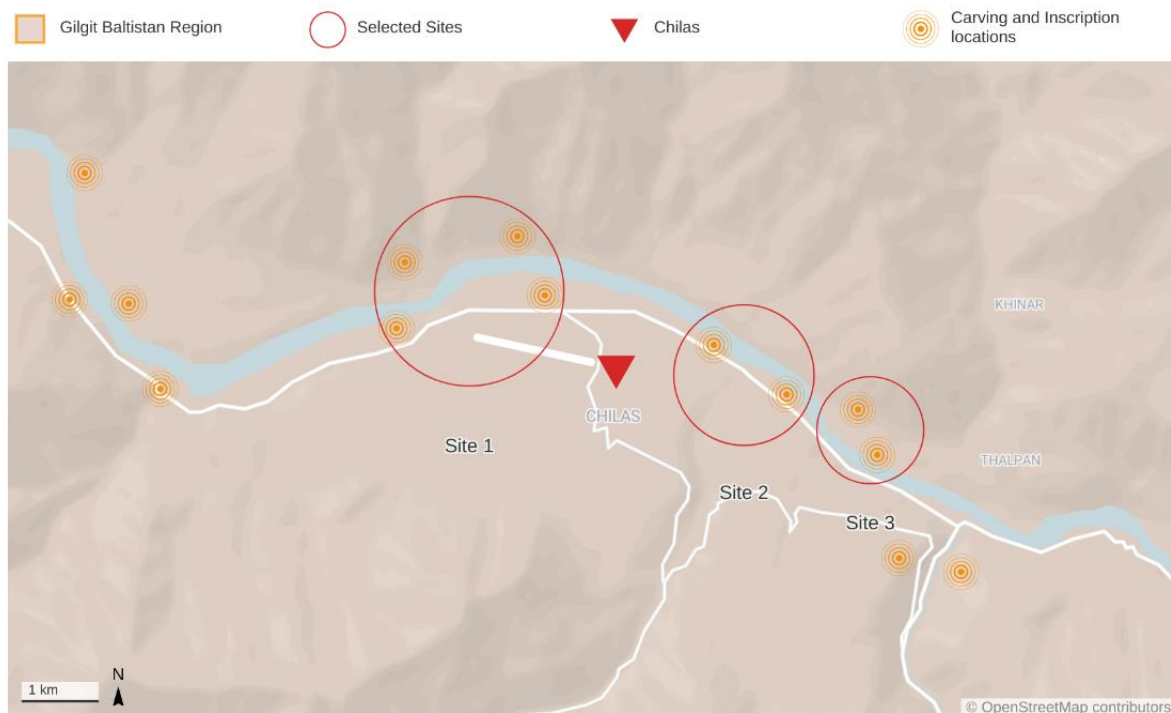


Figure 12- Selected rock carvings and inscriptions near Chilas, source: author's design with Datawrapper

1.4.1 A Tour of the Landscape.

Site 1

The first location is found on the left as Chilas is approached from the south. The top halves of gigantic boulders may be seen from KKH, but most are obscured due to their lower elevation and the fact that they are spread across vast, desolate plains of sand and rocks. Massive



Figure 13- Circular carving (Site 1) source: author

rocks begin to surface after a half-hour walk from the highway in a cliff-like formation, with their backs to the highway and facing the Indus River. Even at a distance of a few meters, giant sundials and circular figure carvings are apparent (figure 11). The contrast between the rocks' deep brown hue and the golden tint of the carved areas makes them stand out even more. A closer look shows numerous small carvings of animals, axes, and human figures (figure 12 & 13).



Figure 14- Ibex carving (Site 1), source: author



Figure 15- Human figures with extended arms and axes (Site 1), source: author

The scale and grandeur of the rocks and carvings and inscriptions buried on them are revealed when one moves down towards the Indus River (which is accessible from this point). One particular boulder (figure 14) stands out primarily because of its exceptionally smooth concave contour but also because of the varied hues acquired by being washed by water over thousands of years. Finely carved figures of elephants and images of humans strolling beside them may also be seen from a distance. The color of the rock, its size, and its distance from eye-level demand a decent amount of time and concentration to discover all of the carvings and inscriptions, much like an exciting puzzle. There are several dancing figures and faint and

noticeable carvings of stupas, many animals, and stick people. There are also realistic illustrations of elephants, goats, and other animals. The design of the stupas and the warriors' clothing (figure 15) indicate a pre-Kushan³² or Kushan date from the first century AD during the time of several independent Saka³³ and Parthian³⁴ states.³⁵



*Figure 16- Concave boulder with a cluster of carvings (Site 1),
source: author*

Inscriptions in some ancient scripts may be found even farther away, in what is today, an almost inaccessible location. Many carvings on higher areas along the line of the concave boulder call into question how it was possible to produce such drawings so many years ago. This site corresponds to the scholarly description of religious sanctuaries or meeting places. Many carvings appear as large domes atop a low cylinder. A ladder can be seen going

³² Kushan Dynasty ruled over Northern Indian Subcontinent and Central Asia during the first three centuries of the Common Era.

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Kushan Dynasty," in *Britannica*, accessed December 24, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Kushan-dynasty>.

³³ Saka or Scythian were nomadic people, known from as early as the 9th century BCE, originally of Iran, migrated westward from Central Asia to southern Russia and Ukraine in the 8th and 7th centuries BCE. The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Scythian," in *Britannica*, accessed November 20, 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Scythian>.

³⁴ Parthian empire (247 BCE–224 CE) in the modern region of Khorasan in Iran. The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Parthian," in *Britannica*, accessed February 20, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Parthia>.

³⁵ Jettmar, *Rock Carvings and Inscriptions in the Northern Areas of Pakistan*, 15.

up some of the stupas, which are depicted as hollow on the inside. Carvings and inscriptions in this location, together with impressive natural elements remote from the sounds of human activity, appear as doorways to the past.

Site 2

The second location is further north, towards the opposite end of town. This location is so close to the KKH that one



Figure 17- Location and close-up of carvings depicting warriors and horses (Site 1), source: author.

intricate carving of a stupa can be seen from the highway, unfortunately right next to painted nationalistic slogans and a flag (figure 18). Rather than formed with multiple rocks, a single enormous rough cliff face has a variety of carvings and inscriptions on it. The carvings and inscriptions are drawn on the ground, i.e., the cliff. The majority of the carvings and inscriptions in this area are elaborate easily visible stupa images and inscriptions in various scripts. Many of them are challenging to identify since they have faded and eroded due to dust and movement of people. At numerous spots, the colors of the carvings and inscriptions and the rocks blend together. While the carvings and inscriptions in the previous site conveyed the impression of remoteness and power over the observer, the engravings on this location have a reverse effect.



Figure 18- Intricate stupa carving seen from KKH³⁶

The proximity of these carvings made it easier to picture what it would have been like to carve on these rocks. The cliff's altitude and the vastness of the landscape makes this place a good vantage point overlooking the Thalpan rock carving site, the KKH, Indus River and part of Chilas City.



Figure 19- Stupa and human figure (left) carving (Site 2), source: author

³⁶ "Ancient Buddhist Rock Carvings in Pakistan Vandalized," *Buddhistdoor Global*, June 2, 2020, buddhistdoor.net/news/ancient-buddhist-rock-carvings-in-pakistan-vandalized/.

Site 3

This location lies on the other side of the Indus River and is accessible from the KKH over a wooden suspension bridge. There were two main rock carving clusters at this site. The stupa carvings in the cluster closest to the river have a different artistic style. They were drawn in bold lines; the stupas' overall design is taller than the others. A large carving representing three stupas linked at the base is on a single rock (figure 18). They were etched on the rock's vertical side, facing the river.



*Figure 20- Three stupas connected at base (Site 3),
source: author*

According to research, this carving variant can also be found in Central Asia.³⁷ Studies also suggest the detailed building of these stupas is recounted in the Bonpos holy writings.³⁸ Many other carvings on these dull orange rocks are prominently visible in the dying light at dusk. Aside from stupa carvings of varying sizes, there are numerous wheels and ibex carvings. Inscriptions have also been discovered, written in Brahmi and proto-Sarada. A collection of rocks in this place also lies closer to the rocky mountain edge, individual carvings of largely small-scale stupas and some ibex images were

³⁷ Ibid, 23

³⁸ Bonpos are followers of the Bon religion which is commonly considered to be the indigenous religious tradition of Tibet

discovered here. More carvings appear as one explores the immediate environment. They are not apparent but instead appear as unexpected discoveries.

1.5 Diamer Bhasha Dam

The Diamer Bhasha Dam construction was formally announced in May 2020.³⁹ For decades, this mega project has been the center of regional attention and is considered integral to the country's economy, resolving water crisis issues, and a green energy future. The construction cost of this project is estimated to be around the US \$14 billion. While it is scheduled to be completed by 2027.⁴⁰ The newly appointed Prime Minister visited the construction site in April this year and directed the Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) and Frontier Works Organization (FWO) to complete the project earlier than original expected date of completion.⁴¹ Two powerhouses will follow the dam's construction for energy production and will hopefully produce thousands of jobs directly and indirectly. The dam will cover an area of approximately 110km², extending 100km from the dam site up to the Raikot Bridge on the



Figure 21- Wheels, figures, animals and stupa carvings (Site 3), source: author

³⁹ Asim Saleem Bajwa, Twitter post, May 11, 2020, <https://twitter.com/AsimSBajwa/status/1259878337843003392>

⁴⁰ Hassan Abbas and Asghar Hussain, "Opinion: The Diamer-Bhasha Dam Is Neither Green nor Cheap," *DAWN*, November 10, 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1657198>.

⁴¹ "‘Nothing Is Impossible’: PM Shehbaz Orders Completion of Diamer Bhasha Dam by 2026," *The News*, April 17, 2022, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/951049-nothing-is-impossible-pm-shehbaz-directs-to-complete-diamer-bhasha-dam-by-2026>.

KKH. Eighty-six percent of the total area required for the project has been acquired from Gilgit-Baltistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.⁴²

On the one hand, the dam promises to be a solution for many of the problems the country is facing currently, but at the same time, it has faced controversy because of its location in Gilgit Baltistan, a region that is still technically a disputed territory between India and Pakistan. The dam's location is also considered to be a high seismic zone. In the beginning, the project also faced significant local resistance because the dam's construction will result in the displacement of more than 4,200 families, loss of agricultural lands, and submersion of a considerable part of the KKH.

Environmental experts are concerned with this project's climatic implications, particularly considering that this region, home to some of the highest peaks, numerous glaciers, and rivers, is already witnessing natural reactions to changing climatic conditions and increased temperatures.⁴³

⁴² “Diamer Bhasha Dam Hydropower Project,” *NS Energy*, accessed May 20, 2022, <https://www.nsenergybusiness.com/projects/diamer-bhasha-dam-hydropower-project/>.

⁴³ “Environmentalists Fear Diamer Dam Construction Will Affect Gilgit-Baltistan’s Climate, Wildlife,” *SAMAA*, July 9, 2020, <https://www.samaaenglish.tv/news/2075221/environmentalists-fear-diamer-dam-construction-will-affect-gilgit-baltistans-climate-wildlife>.

CHAPTER TWO

Relevant Policy and Guidelines - An Overview

On a national level, Pakistan lacks a coherent heritage management policy.⁴⁴ The main guiding principle for heritage protection and monument listing on a national level is the Antiquities Act, previously called the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act, passed in 1904 for archaeological, preservation, and management work in the Indian Sub-continent. This Act was adopted by Pakistan at the time of partition and was last amended in 1992.⁴⁵ It defines and lists moveable and immovable antiquities and proposes laws and regulations for their management and preservation. The rock carvings and inscriptions and petroglyphs in Chilas, according to the definitions in the Antiquities Act, fall within the 'immovable antiquity' category and, although they should by all rights be nationally protected, they are not listed.

Moreover, since 2011, federally protected sites and monuments have been handed over to their respective archaeology departments within provincial government administrations. Each province adopted the Antiquities Act with modifications suitable to their mandates and sites.⁴⁶ The semi-autonomous status of Gilgit-Baltistan means that it is not technically a province.⁴⁷ The complicated legal status of Gilgit Baltistan makes it more difficult to formulate policies and implement them on a regional level. There is a dire need to analyze the heritage management system and policies relevant to preserving and managing the region's numerous rock carvings and inscriptions. Different draft policy proposals have emerged over the years on both provincial and national levels to promote cultural diversity through arts, crafts, music,

⁴⁴ Bakhtiar Ahmed, *Sustainable Tourism and Cultural Heritage*, Background Paper (Gilgit: Planning & Development Dept. : IUCN, the World Conservation Union, 2003).

⁴⁵ Nisar Ali Khan et al., "Critical Review of Pakistani Current Legislation on Sustainable Protection of Cultural Heritage," *Sustainability* 14, no. 6 (March 19, 2022): 2–6, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14063633>.

⁴⁶ Government of Pakistan Directorate of Archaeology, "Government Procedures- Ease of Doing Business," October 1, 2019, 1, <https://heritage.pakistan.gov.pk/SiteImage/Policy/DOAM%20Procedures.pdf>.

⁴⁷ Kreutzmann, "Boundaries and Space in Gilgit-Baltistan."

and film.⁴⁸ However, these policies are either in the initial stages of formulation or yet to be implemented. Additionally, these policies focus more on intangible heritage, cultures, built heritage, and their promotion as parts of national identity. Detailed policies for the preservation and conservation or even educational dissemination of heritage seem to be lacking or unavailable to the public on the websites of the departments responsible for heritage management.

2.1 Institutional Framework

2.1.1 National Heritage and Culture Division

As part of the 18th Constitutional Amendment, the non-operational Ministry of Culture entities were transferred to provincial governments. Over the years, the amendment underwent various changes, shifting from one place to another and in various amalgamations with other ministries. Finally, in 2020, the National Heritage and Culture Division was placed under the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training.⁴⁹ The mandate of the National Heritage and Culture Division is to facilitate international agreements and provide assistance in the field of archaeology, national museums, and historical monuments declared to be of national importance.

Department of Archaeology and Museums

The NHCA consists of different departments and autonomous bodies working in various sectors. The departments include the Department of Archaeology and Museums, the

⁴⁸ Mansoor Malik, "Punjab Govt Approves Landmark Culture Policy," *DAWN*, October 15, 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1652032/punjab-govt-approves-landmark-culture-policy>.

⁴⁹ Khan et al., "Critical Review of Pakistani Current Legislation on Sustainable Protection of Cultural Heritage," 7.

National Library of Pakistan, the Urdu Science board, and others.⁵⁰ Jurisdiction over nationally protected archaeological sites was transferred to the Provincial Governments after the devolution of the DOAM in 2011.⁵¹ Now, DOAM's functions are restricted to the capital city of Islamabad and act as the State Party for international cooperation. Pakistani universities, provincial governments, and archaeology departments act as local partners with DOAM in any archaeological excavation or project.⁵²

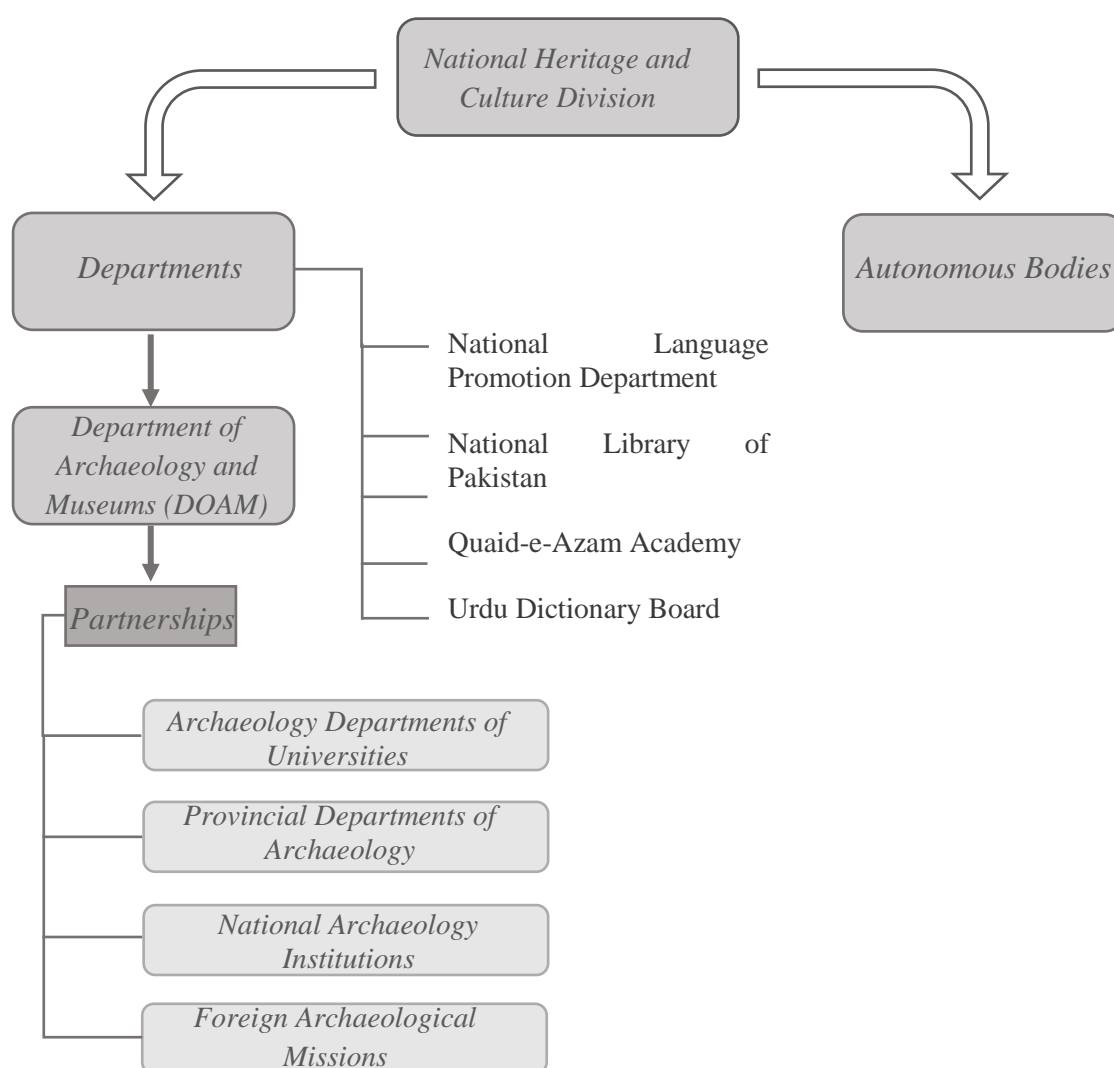


Figure 22- Federal Institutions for Cultural Heritage Protection and Management, source: made by author from NHCD information

⁵⁰ "Mandate," National Heritage and Culture Division, accessed February 27, 2022, <https://heritage.pakistan.gov.pk/Overview>.

⁵¹ "About Us," Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, accessed March 3, 2022, <http://kparchaeology.gkp.pk/about-us.php>.

⁵² Government of Pakistan Directorate of Archaeology, "Government Procedures- Ease of Doing Business," 1.

2.1.2 National Fund for Cultural Heritage

In 1994, the Act establishing a National Fund for Cultural Heritage was created by the government of Pakistan. The fund was approved in 2005. It has its own set of procedural rules and regulations.⁵³

“The primary purpose of the fund is to promote the conservation and Preservation of national heritage of Pakistan through various means, including financial and technical assistance, and to create awareness amongst the people for appreciating the Preservation of archaeological, architectural, historical and cultural heritage of Pakistan. In particular and without prejudice to the foregoing purposes.”

National Fund for Cultural Heritage, 2005.

The fund aimed to provide necessary financial and technical assistance to any cultural heritage projects to preserve and conserve various heritage sites, buildings, and monuments, regardless of whether they were listed as National or International heritage sites.⁵⁴

Currently, two main projects are being carried out with the National Fund for Cultural Heritage, as shown on the official website of NHCD. The Mapping of Historic Sites in Pakistan, Islamabad, and The Preservation, Restoration, and Presentation of Rewat Fort, Islamabad, to be completed in 2022 and 2024, respectively. Detailed information about these projects, their work, and their progress is not available on their respective websites.⁵⁵

⁵³ Government of Pakistan Ministry of Culture, Sports & Youth Affairs, “ACT OF N.F.C.H; ACT. NO. VIII OF 1994,” 1994, <https://heritage.pakistan.gov.pk//SiteImage/Misc/files/NFCH%20ACT1.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Government of Pakistan Ministry of Culture, Sports & Youth Affairs, “Financial Rules & Accounting Procedures of National Fund for Cultural Heritage (NFCH),” May 4, 2005, <https://heritage.pakistan.gov.pk//SiteImage/Misc/files/NFCH%20Financial%20Rule.pdf>.

⁵⁵ “Projects,” National Heritage and Culture Division, accessed May 19, 2022, <https://heritage.pakistan.gov.pk/Projects>.

2.2 National and International Legislations for the Protection and Management of Heritage in Pakistan

2.2.1 The Antiquities Act

Under the Antiquities Act of 1968, any building dating to before 1957 was defined as ancient. It also clearly distinguished between ancient monuments and antiquities, dealing with standing buildings and moveable cultural objects respectively. The act outlines important laws allowing the federal government to take control of antiquities or a structure as a guardian if they are in danger or if a threat to an important component of history exists. It prohibited dealing in, copying, and exporting moveable antiquities without the federal government's approval.⁵⁶

The Antiquities Act of 1968 was replaced with another one in 1975, amended in 1990, by which an ancient object was defined to be not less than 75 years old. The cultural heritage laws of Pakistan and the rules made for regulating and managing cultural properties are uniformly applicable to all categories of sites, whether or not "protected," regardless of their state of Preservation and significance at national or international levels. There are no separate rules applicable to the sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List or those under consideration for inscription. Moreover, there is no separate organization or administrative center dealing exclusively with preserving and maintaining world heritage monuments.

In addition to the federal laws, all provinces have enacted their own heritage laws. Provinces have prepared their own lists of monuments and antiquities that are considered historical and cultural in addition to a list of monuments located in their provinces but

⁵⁶ Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan, "Antiquities Act 1975 (As Amended in 1992)," n.d., 11–14.

maintained by the federal government. The federal government still gives the formal permission to carry out excavations at sites.

Antiquities Act and rock carvings and inscriptions of Chilas

The Antiquities Act provides a list of 'moveable' and 'immovable' antiquities considered to be under national protection and details about laws and regulations applicable to these objects regarding their ownership, dealing and, export as well as development projects that may take place on and around these antiquities. The Act also comprises regulations and laws for the prohibition of development and construction projects on or around these antiquities. As the Antiquities Act is the fundamental guiding principle for listing and protecting national heritage sites, the rock carvings and inscriptions of Chilas can be considered in light of this document. As per its last amendment in 1992, among other definitions, antiquity means,⁵⁷

(c), (i) “any ancient product of human activity, moveable or immovable, illustrative of art, architecture, craft, custom, literature, morals, politics, religion, warfare, or science or any aspect of civilization or culture.”

Moreover, the description of an Immovable Antiquity in the Antiquities Act is stated as,

(g) (iii) "any rock, cave, or other natural object of historical, archaeological, artistic or scientific interest or containing sculpture, engraving, inscription or painting of such interest, and includes

(3) site of an immovable antiquity."

⁵⁷ Ibid, 1-2

The definitions above correspond best to the description of the physical characteristics and cultural and historical importance of the rock carvings and inscriptions of Chilas. These carvings and inscriptions fall under the 'immovable antiquity' category based on all of these aspects. However, these rock carvings and inscriptions are not listed under the Antiquities Act, nor mentioned in this document, nor any other document protecting historical and archaeological sites. Moreover, among the many rock carving sites in the Gilgit-Baltistan region, only one such site in the area of Danyore is listed as an immovable antiquity falling under federal protection.⁵⁸ Additionally, similar rock carving sites from other parts of the country such as Swat, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, are either listed individually or in clusters of rock surfaces. These sites in other parts of the country are not only mentioned in the Antiquities Act, which is a national-level document, but they are also listed in their respective provincial documents. If not nationally protected, many of them have provincial protection, in theory at the very least.

The conversation about updating the list of federally protected antiquities or heritage rarely occurs, something reflected, in the fact that the last amendment to this document occurred in 1992, more than a decade after the German-Pakistani expedition for the documentation and study of these rock carvings and inscriptions took place in Chilas. There are irregularities in drafting and implementing new policies, managing lists, and protecting listed heritage. This overall policy and management situation makes approaching this issue from top to bottom complicated and far-fetched.

⁵⁸ Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan, "List of Immovable Antiquities (Monuments and Sites) Protected Under the Antiquities Act 1975," n.d., 8.

2.2.2 Regional Level Protective Measures

There are many reasons that virtually attention has been paid to the protection of these rock carvings and inscriptions as listed antiquities. First, there is a general lack of attention paid to updating and adding relevant sites to these lists, particularly after the devolution of DOAM in 2011, when all authority for maintaining and protecting listed sites and antiquities was transferred to provincial governments. Moreover, as mentioned before, four provinces have adopted the Antiquities Act with modifications and have their own listed monuments but Gilgit-Baltistan does not have its own list nor any specific department for the protection and conservation of heritage. As per the draft management plan for Cultural Heritage Management of Diamer Bhasha Dam, a draft of the Gilgit Baltistan Antiquities Act has been forwarded to the legal department for vetting and shall be put before the GB Parliament in the near future.⁵⁹ In theory, the Department of Tourism, Sports, Culture, Archaeology, and Museums of Gilgit Baltistan is responsible for looking after the archaeological sites, architectural monuments, and museums in the Gilgit Baltistan region.⁶⁰ However, no specific designated archaeological sites that could be maintained or looked after have been listed, marked, or mentioned yet in any document, nor does the region have a state-established museum. The NGO Aga Khan Development Network is most active in heritage management and community development in various parts of Gilgit-Baltistan. AKDN, under its Historic Cities Program, carried out conservation projects in Baltit, Altit, Ganish, Khaplu, and Shigar⁶¹. In 1992, the Baltit Fort was

⁵⁹ Feryal Ali Gauhar, "The Legal Framework and Guidelines For Cultural Heritage Management - Cultural Heritage Management Plan – Diamer Basha Dam Project," October 8, 2013, 7, <http://www.wapda.gov.pk/index.php/projects/water-sector/under-construction/diamer-basha-dam/item/640-cultural-heritage-management-plan>.

⁶⁰ Khan et al., "Critical Review of Pakistani Current Legislation on Sustainable Protection of Cultural Heritage," 8.

⁶¹ "Conservation and Development in Gilgit-Baltistan," Aga Khan Development Network, accessed March 14, 2022, <https://www.akdn.org/where-we-work/south-asia/pakistan/cultural-development/conservation-and-development-gilgit-baltistan#accordian-title-8>.

conserved and restored as a local history museum and cultural center. It has become one of the major tourist attractions in the region.⁶²

2.2.3 International Conventions

Pakistan ratified the UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage from 1972 in 1976. Implementation of the Convention to the heritage sites inscribed on the World Heritage List and the sites on national and provincial lists is the responsibility of the provincial governments. The rock carvings and inscriptions in Chilas and Hunza were nominated to be added to the World Heritage List in 1980-1981 but deferred by the World Heritage Committee.⁶³ These rock carvings and inscriptions are not mentioned in later World Heritage Committee decisions. Based on the definitions provided in the Convention for 'cultural heritage', sites are:

“Works of man or the combined works of nature and man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view.”

UNESCO World Heritage Convention, 1972

The definition provided for an "immoveable antiquity" is more distinct in the Antiquities Act, which clearly describes the attributes of the rock carvings and inscriptions compared to the definitions found in the UNESCO Convention of 1972. Moreover, articles 4 and 5 of the Convention state that ratifying the Convention by the state party means recognizing

⁶² Baltit Fort was submitted to the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List in 2004 “Baltit Fort,” UNESCO World Heritage Center, accessed April 21, 2022, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/1882/>.

⁶³ UNESCO World Heritage Centre, “Periodic Reporting Exercise On The Application Of The World Heritage Convention,” September 21, 2002, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/pk/documents/>.

the state's responsibility to identify, protect, and conserve the natural and cultural heritage for future generations. Additionally, the state party must agree to adopt the necessary policies to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the community's life and integrate that heritage's protection into comprehensive planning programs. As much as the articles of the Convention correspond to the characteristics of the rock carvings and inscriptions, the situation surrounding them and their future, in practice, do little for them as they are not on the World Heritage List nor nationally protected.

2.3 What does it mean to be listed?

In today's world, when a site, building, or intangible heritage makes it to the World Heritage List, its importance and value for all of humankind are accepted without question (at least among those people who know what this means). The process includes (for example) convincing the World Heritage Committee that a building from a far-off mountain community in the north of Pakistan possesses 'an outstanding universal value' and that the state party will ensure all necessary measures for the building's management and protection while the listing criteria and protective measures follow European aesthetics and heritage value concepts. Sites or buildings from non-European countries make it to the list on the basis of eurocentric criteria for 'value' and 'management', and in doing so, they may lose the specific values and ideologies associated with the social context of the heritage.⁶⁴ In the past five decades, the idea of the 'World Heritage List' has also become a trademark for countries to demonstrate the richness and diversity of their cultures and to show themselves globally as unique nations.⁶⁵ This produces a preconceived notion in visitors' minds when they visit a site on the World Heritage List. What they 'see' is based on the characteristics of 'heritage' and 'value' they are familiar

⁶⁴Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London ; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2006). 98-100

⁶⁵Rodney Harrison, *Heritage: Critical Approaches* (Milton Park, Abingdon ; New York: Routledge, 2013). 94

with or the globally better known ones. This race for having a place on this prestigious list also throws up obstacles for some communities to have their sites treated as important heritage⁶⁶. They associate the value of their heritage with whether the sites make it to the World Heritage List.

2.3.1 Heritage Preservation and Resources

Apart from varying understandings of heritage values in different parts of the world, the resources available for their protection and management vary from country to country. Funding depends on the country's economic, social, and cultural development as a whole and the financial resources at hand. While proposing criteria for protection and management that are followed globally can be considered fair in some cases because all countries have to follow the same rules and procedures, there is no denying that some nations struggle to fulfill these requirements as well. Nevertheless, this general trend to inscribe all important heritage on the World Heritage List represents a constant effort for developing countries, in the belief that existing, westerns narratives of heritage and value are the only legitimate ones to follow.

2.3.2 Legal Tools - The Issues

Before considering whether the carvings and inscriptions scattered along rock surfaces along the course of the Indus River should be added to a national or international list, it is essential to consider the situation of similar existing listed heritage sites and buildings. As mentioned previously, no significant heritage management effort has been made concerning only listed rock carvings and inscriptions in GB. The suggestion in the Cultural Heritage Management Plan for the future Diamer Bhasha Dam (discussed in detail in chapter 3) to add these rock

⁶⁶ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*. 98

carvings and inscriptions to a protected list on the national level or the World Heritage List contradicts the fact that it would call into question the construction of the Diamer Bhasa Dam itself. If the carvings and inscriptions were added to the list in Antiquities Act, a legally binding regulation prohibiting any construction or development activity around the carvings and inscriptions would come into force. It is therefore unlikely that these carvings and inscriptions will receive any protection from the federal government at this stage. Furthermore, even if they were added to a list of protected antiquities, it is implausible that any legal step would be taken to protect them from being flooded underwater.

3.3.3 National Value versus Contextual Value

The approach to protect or conserve by listing these carvings and inscriptions or giving them some kind of protection indicates once again that these carvings and inscriptions will only be considered necessary if they are declared 'important' based on globally accepted national or international standards. This approach fails to consider that their importance actually derives from the historic processes they have borne witness to over millennia, within their immediate context, created by the people who passed through and settled these valleys. While looking to add a 'national' or 'universal' value, the value these carvings and inscriptions have in their local context, along the KKH, on the banks of the Indus River, surrounded by the inhabitants of Chilas, has been utterly ignored. These values and processes are not isolated from the cold reality of the dam's construction and the possible submerging of this unique rock-art landscape.

CHAPTER THREE

Heritage Values, Processes, and Preservation

Rock carvings and inscriptions as heritage, the processes, experiences, values, and interactions that give them importance (or not) will be examined in this chapter. What have been the historical values ascribed to these carvings and inscriptions in the past and what have they meant to scholars and local people alike as remnants of the past in this region. The dynamics of agency and the authority of remote mountain communities in the management and preservation efforts of the heritage surrounding them will be examined as well as the way their voices have been excluded from making informed decisions when heritage values are forced on them without explanation will be examined.⁶⁷ Arguments will be presented about ownership issues and the very meaning of heritage when the humans with direct associations with these artifacts are no longer present, at least culturally. Within the Indus River valley, people's closest cultural associations with them is their geographical proximity rather than through cultural practice or inheritance. The concept of preservation and conservation in the case of these rock carvings and inscriptions will also be mentioned. Finally, the ethics and extent of legitimate intervention created by declaring something worth preserving and saving for local communities with different understandings of heritage will be considered.

3.1 Heritage Values

The value associations of these rock carvings and inscriptions differ between academics in the field, the professionals involved in constructing the dam, and the people living in the physical context of these carvings and inscriptions, i.e., the natives of Chilas. On the one hand, the locals

⁶⁷ Harrison, *Heritage*. 110

are unaware of the diverse cultural past these carvings and inscriptions commemorate, and on the other hand, they do not entirely identify with what little they know about them. Here, the question of heritage ownership arises. Who are the owners of this heritage and does geographical proximity develop its own associations and sense of ownership.

The process of movement in these perilous valleys in history, memories of their past wiped from subsequent generations, active studies in the twentieth century for their research, and their final fate of being drowned in the dam may all be considered part of the process that gives them worth. These engagements surrounding these rock carvings and inscriptions between communities, objects, knowledge practices, and even natural disasters comprise the heritage processes that give them value.⁶⁸ Moreover, this disrupted cultural process is ongoing, from the past, to the present, and to the future.

3.1.1 The Expert Value

The scholarly research carried out on these carvings and inscriptions, notably the work done by German-Pakistani expedition, is awe-inspiring in its scope and complexity. The number of scholars involved in lending their expertise in translating and interpreting these historical records to produce a coherent catalogue of digital imagery with descriptions and explanations is undoubtedly of great academic value nationally, as it displays the historic context of the region and the country. Not only did this research show the political and economic significance of this geographical location in the past but also the worth of this artistic endeavor in the global academic context. This extensive research shed light on the areas' rich, multi-layered history. Numerous volumes of catalogs with chronological and descriptive information are available to supplement further research in this field. The importance of this geographical location in

⁶⁸ Rodney Harrison, *Heritage Futures: Comparative Approaches to Natural and Cultural Heritage Practices*, 2020, 5, <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.9781787356009>.

ancient history, studying this history in the recent past, and the conversation around these carvings and inscriptions in the present provide us with parallel value associations for these carvings and inscriptions.

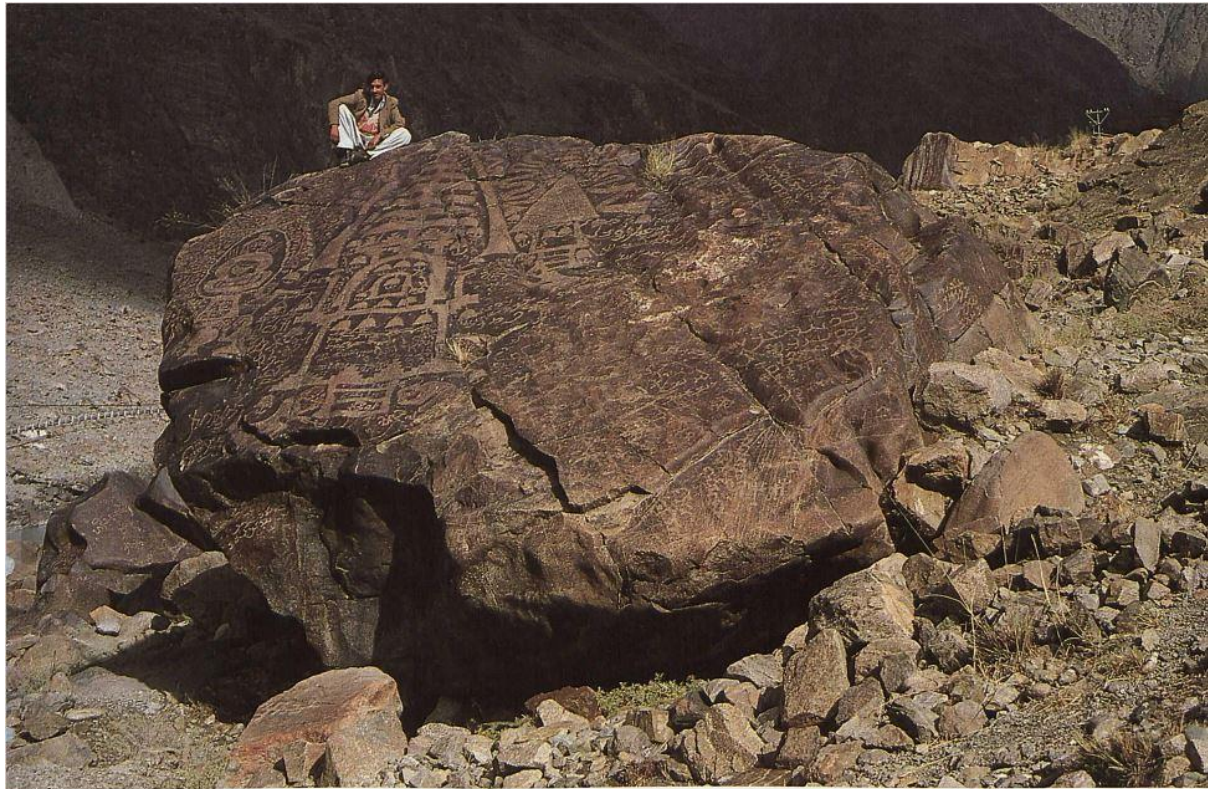


Photo 33 - Tafel 19

Links: Szene aus dem Śibi-Jātaka («Körperopfer»). Zentral: 2 pagodenartige Stūpas. Darunter Adoranten. Im Zwischenraum und rechts: Inschriften in Kharoṣṭhī, Brāhmī, Sogdisch. Shatial Bridge. (Ab 4. Jh. n. Chr.)

Photo 33 - Plate 19

Left: Scene from the Śibi-Jātaka. Centre: 2 pagoda-shaped stūpas. Below: adorants, in between and to the right side: inscriptions in Kharoṣṭhī, Brāhmī, Sogdian. Shatial Bridge. (Starting in the 4th century A.D.)

Figure 23- Excerpt from photographic exhibition arranged by the Department of Archaeology & Museums, Government of Pakistan, in collaboration with Heidelberg Academy for Humanities and Sciences 1992⁶⁹

The scholarly interpretations also state that many carvings and inscriptions represent the apprehensions of pilgrims passing through dangerous areas. Some visitors offered their literary or artistic skills up for hire by local notables. It is clear that the rock art found in this

⁶⁹ Karl Jettmar, *Cultural Heritage of Northern Regions of Pakistan down to the Islam. An Introduction* (Heidelberg University Library, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.11588/PROPYLAEUMDOK.00001727>.

vast zone is interconnected proven by similar findings elsewhere in the trans-Pamir regions of Xinjian, Ladakh, Kashmir, and Swat and shows cultural continuity from prehistory to history.⁷⁰

Introducing the same photographic exhibition arranged for these carvings and inscriptions in 1992, Karl Jettmar writes,

"Indeed, Pakistan is not simply a part of South Asia, it belongs to a region between the forests of Siberia and Persian Gulf which has made an enormous contribution to the evolution and development of sociocultural pattern of the ancient society."

Cultural Heritage of Northern Regions of Pakistan An Introduction, 1992

3.1.2 Research Surplus

Volumes of books, articles with historical interpretations, and photographic exhibitions arranged by the Department of Archaeology & Museums, Government of Pakistan, in collaboration with Heidelberg Academy for Humanities and Sciences, came out in 1992.⁷¹

With the abundance of documentation and studies on the carvings and inscriptions, one cannot help but wonder about the gap between this great body of knowledge and the relatively poor local understandings of these rock carvings and inscriptions among the people of Chilas. The history written in stone in their surroundings has journeyed through important scholarly conferences and exhibitions worldwide, yet locals are barely aware of what these carvings and inscriptions, always part of their local landscape, signify. The importance of these inscriptions in a global context is not the same as in its immediate context. We see multiple sides of the same story. Part if it tells the tales of the pilgrims, travelers, artists, and traders who

⁷⁰ Ahmad Hasan Dani, *History of the Northern Areas of Pakistan*., 2nd ed. (Islamabad: National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research, 1991).

⁷¹ Jettmar, *Cultural Heritage of Northern Regions of Pakistan down to the Islam. An Introduction*.

immortalized themselves through these rock carvings and inscriptions, while the other side is only vaguely aware of some carvings and inscriptions which hold very little meaning for local people in Chilas.

Before the large-scale 1984 German-Pakistani expedition dedicated to exploring and documenting this historical art form, no detailed study had been conducted on the rock inscriptions. The carvings and inscriptions were first noted by the Hungarian adventurer Karl Eugen in 1884 and by the Pakistani explorer Ghulam Muhammed in 1907. Sir Aurel Stein studied a limited sample of these carvings and inscriptions in the early twentieth century⁷². Various scholars involved in research on these rock carvings and inscriptions also included the renowned Pakistani archaeologist Dr. Ahmad Hassan Dani. Linguistic experts in Brahmi, Kharosthi, Sogdian, and Chinese from Freiburg University, College de France, London University, Mainz University, and The Russian Academy of Sciences (Academy of Sciences in Leningrad) and Bavarian Academy of Sciences, also played an essential role in these scholarly projects.

3.1.3 Heritage Value in the Local Context

To decide on an appropriate level and method of 'preservation' of these rock carvings and inscriptions, it is crucial to consider local people's knowledge and input. A layer of heritage value playing a vital role in determining the significance of any historical or contemporary art resides in the value associations of local people living in the region today.⁷³ The heritage values presented in scholarly research or the understandings surrounding this scholarship was

⁷² Jettmar, *Between Gandhāra and the Silk Roads*.

⁷³ Emma Waterton and Steve Watson, eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

concluded without the involvement of the heritage values given to these rock carvings and inscriptions by local people.

Input from field research

Around 17 local members of the community were approached for semi-formal interviews and discussions about these rock carvings and inscriptions in Chilas during the thesis field study period in the summer of 2021.⁷⁴ Local politicians, schoolteachers, doctors, government officials, and hotel managers were approached. The majority of this group knew that these carvings and inscriptions were ancient designs created by individuals passing through regions for religious and commercial reasons.

"These drawings and inscriptions are locally known to be related to Buddhism. Later, I learned from experts and archaeologists that their history dates back six thousand years. Many travelers used to come and go from Central Asia and China, and when they would stop to rest by the river, they would make these drawings and inscriptions; some are also related to religious practices. That is what we have heard from people."

Interview respondent- Chilas

One respondent, who generally had considerable knowledge and interest in preservation projects for the rock carvings and inscriptions also shared that while they used to come across these carvings for years, they did not have the same attitude towards them as now.

"I remember when we were younger we tried to carve our names on these rocks, trying to copy the inscriptions. Because at that time we did not know about their historic importance and their meaning."

Interview respondent- Chilas

⁷⁴ Field research details are added in appendix.

They were also aware that, while most people had little knowledge of the carvings and inscriptions, those in Chilas and adjacent communities who did were sure that gold and other precious objects had been hidden beneath some of these rocks in the past.

"Many local people, including women, think that these carvings and inscriptions give directions to a hidden treasure. Batogah Valley has many such rocks with carvings and inscriptions, and people have extracted different gemstones and artifacts from different locations"

Interview respondent- Chilas

This belief was strengthened by discoveries of artifacts and precious stones buried under and around these rocks. While driving towards the Chilas Fort during the field research, our guide pointed out a recently built hotel and informed us that the owner constructed the building by selling the gold he had found beneath a rock with carvings and inscriptions.

There was also a belief that fairies carved these images and inscriptions on the rocks in ancient times. The fairies were formerly visible to everyone, but now they can only be seen by pious religious leaders.⁷⁵

Talking about the dam construction, its impacts and general reaction of the locals, the interview respondents expressed their hopes for the economic and social development the dam promises to bring.

"People of Chilas have made a sacrifice for the dam. We have sacrificed our ancestral lands and homes for the development of our country."

Interview respondent- Chilas

While discussing the research objectives of the project and general preservation efforts for the rock carvings and inscriptions, respondents involved in the education sector responded

⁷⁵ Ghulam Muhammad, *Gilgit Folklore*, n.d., 50.

in a positive and welcoming manner regarding making local schools and colleges the leading platform for information dissemination about these carvings. They believe that Chilas and its surrounding areas lack such initiatives in general, and the idea of targeting the local schools and school-going children will not only be beneficial for education but also provide extra-curricular activity for the people.

Demographics of Interviewed Locals

Field research was conducted in Chilas city, and local people approached. Due to certain accessibility limitations, this group of interviewees primarily represented certain prominent community members, i.e., middle-aged, educated males. Reaching out to other community members like school children and local women was impossible due to Covid restrictions and general privacy concerns connected to gender in the area. These accessibility issues will also be considered when proposing an outcome based on this research. It is also important to mention that because the group of interviewees possessed a certain level of education, they also knew relatively more about the rock carvings and inscriptions. Through them, it was revealed that local uneducated people with little exposure to books know next to nothing about these rock carvings and inscriptions on their very doorsteps.

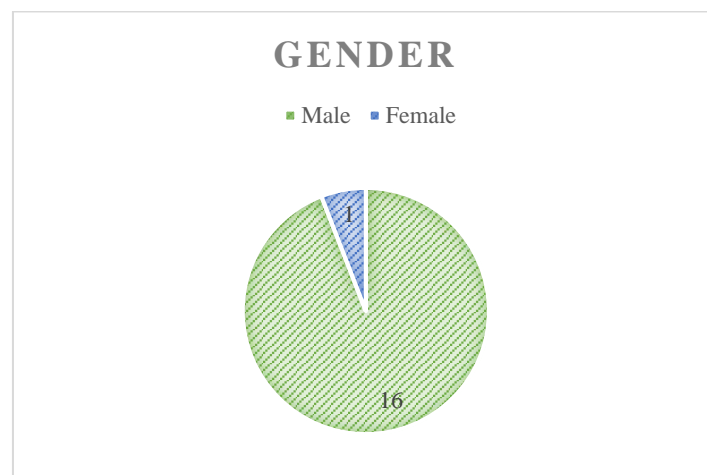


Chart 1- Field Research Demographics: Gender

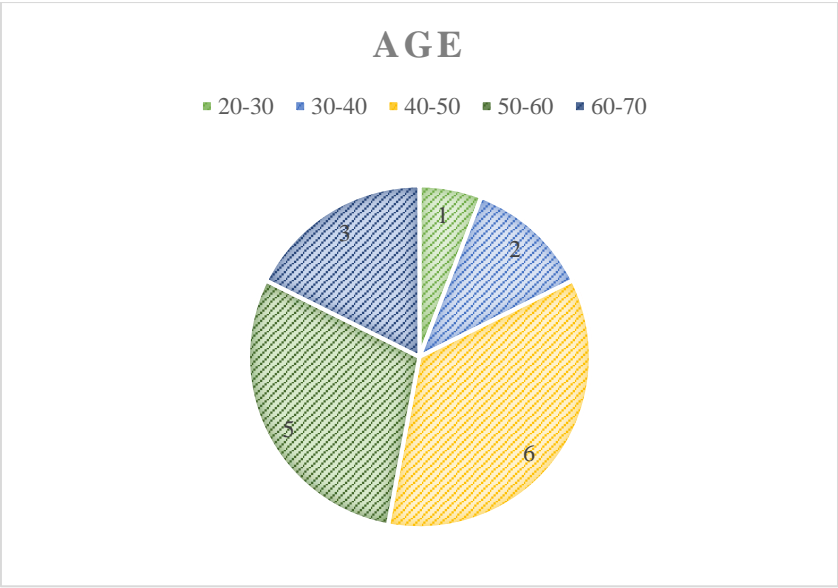


Chart 2- Field Research Demographics: Age

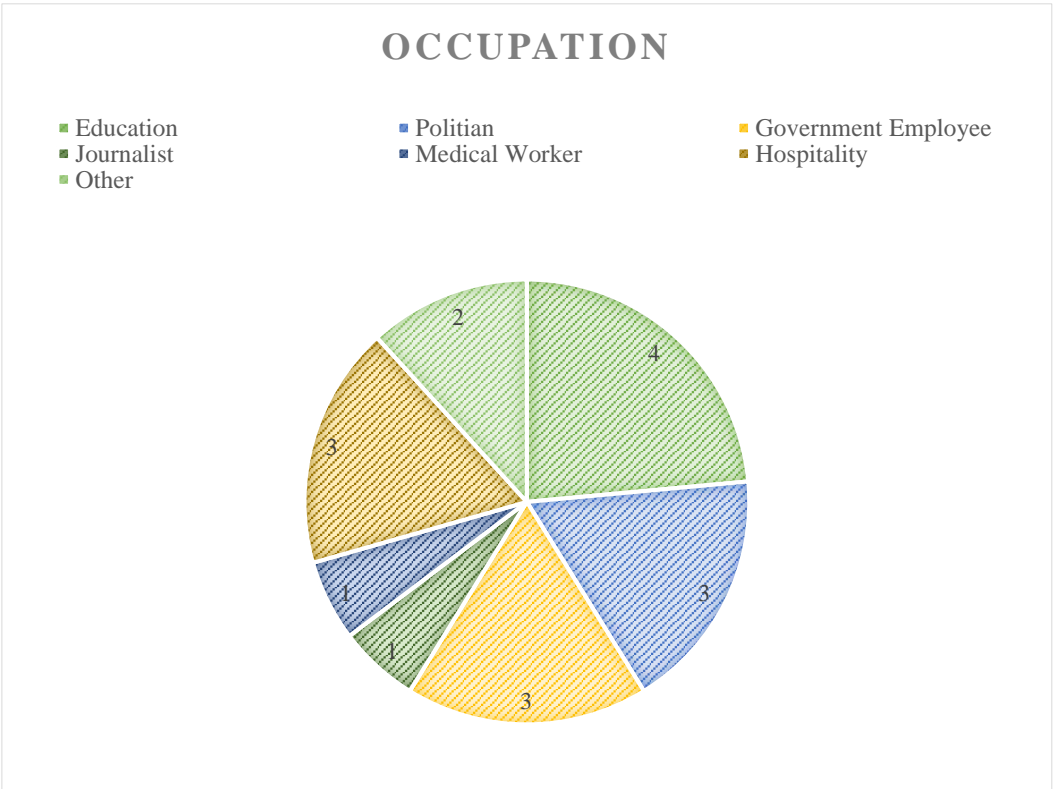


Chart 3- Field Research Demographics: Occupations

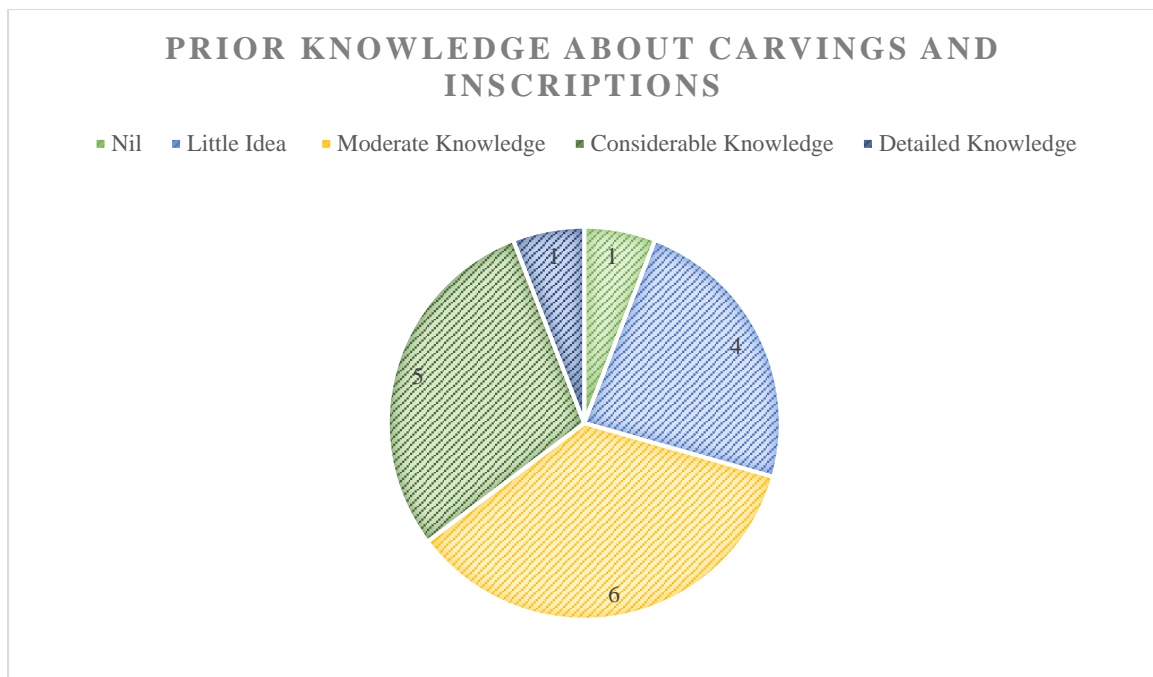


Chart 4- Field Research Demographics: Prior Knowledge about Carvings and Inscriptions

The field visit and interviews were assisted by a resident of Chilas, Mr. Inayat Ullah, an employee of the Chilas office of the Gilgit Baltistan Rural Support Program. Mr. Inayat Ullah was also a participant in the Training Workshop of Chilas Rock Carvings Cultural Landscape Project, held in 2010. Our guide's knowledge and experience working in the field facilitated visiting various sites with rock carvings and inscriptions and meeting residents of Chilas.

Observations from interviews

The locals considered these associations to be irrelevant, the stories and activities dismissed as myths and practices that people engaged in because they lacked knowledge. This outlook is arguably rooted in the fact that this side of the story had hardly been part of any public discussion over the last decades. The stories rarely made it into academic research, nor did they fit any widespread definition of heritage. Locals have connections to these inscriptions

but are hesitant to claim them. Although the local people made up these myths, the activities that surrounded them were essential aspects of the people's cultural and social lives, even if only for short periods.

Field research revealed that people familiar with these rock carvings and inscriptions believe that the lack of informed knowledge is due to a lack of interest among the general public. However, this lack of interest cannot be blamed on people living in harsh climatic, political, and economic conditions with more pressing concerns. Moreover, there are hardly any tools to develop any interest among them to acquire such information. Academic historic resources in a foreign language, far from their understanding, with hardly any means of access, about some people who traveled through these mountains thousands of years ago are of little interest to these people. It is also a fact that specialists hardly ever make an effort to provide their work to the common folk in an accessible form, as stated by Karl Jettmar himself in *The Cultural Heritage of Northern Regions of Pakistan, An Introduction*, 1992.

Another observation made from the field research was that most people expressed their concerns about the rock carvings and inscriptions in the context of the dam construction. Most conversations about the rock carvings and inscriptions circled back to the dam and issues connected to it like loss of lands, financial compensation issues, and families being displaced. It was evident that people considered the flooding of their hometown and the loss of their lands so much that rock carvings and their knowledge about them were overshadowed. This is also directly linked to the fact that what is not known fully by the people does not get attention.

3.2 Preservation Efforts and Dam Construction

3.2.1 Cultural Heritage Management Plan – The Diamer Basha Dam Project

In 2010, an Emergency Action Plan, was initiated by The Pakistan Water & Power Development Authority as a first step toward developing a complete Management Plan for the rock carvings and inscriptions.⁷⁶ Some local community members took part in these activities and were trained to understand the history of these inscriptions and the importance of cultural heritage in general. A new heritage management plan developed in 2013 is now available.⁷⁷ It addresses the impacts of the dam construction on the cultural and social life of local people. This management plan proposes several recommendations, appropriate managing bodies to implement the management plan, coordination between the public and private sector, and the involvement of the local people as stakeholders in the plan. It also points out the type of preservation plans that are not feasible for this site. The most important recommendations include the inscription of this rock art on the UNESCO World Heritage in Danger list and the laser scanning and 3D projection of these inscriptions in a locally functioning museum.⁷⁸ Importantly, this management plan touches upon 'value-based site management' and emphasizes the importance of contextualization of this plan in the heritage element's physical and cultural surroundings, i.e., acknowledging the documentation and representation of the context of an inscription as equally important as the record of the inscription itself. It also

⁷⁶ Rogers Kolachi Khan and Associates, "Training Workshop Report- Chilas Rock Carvings Cultural Landscape Project," December 2010, <https://www.wmf.org/publication/training-workshop-report-chilas-rock-carvings-cultural-landscape-project>.

⁷⁷ "Diamer Dam: Action Plan for Conservation of Rock Carvings to Be Developed in 6 Months," *Pamir Times*, February 13, 2013, <https://pamirtimes.net/2013/02/16/diamer-dam-action-plan-for-conservation-of-rock-carvings-to-be-developed-in-6-months/>.

⁷⁸ Feryal Ali Gauhar, "Setting Up a Museum at the Chilas Fort - Cultural Heritage Management Plan – Diamer Basha Dam Project," October 8, 2013, <http://www.wapda.gov.pk/index.php/projects/water-sector/under-construction/diamer-basha-dam/item/640-cultural-heritage-management-plan>.

summarized the national legal framework and international guidelines that support the implementation of the management plan. These supporting documents include The International Federation of Rock Art Organizations - Code of Ethics, World Commission on Dams: Advisory Guidelines for Site Impact Assessment and Project Level Impact Assessment, UNESCO Declaration concerning the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage, the Burra Charter, the Nara Document on Authenticity and many others.

Because of the majority of a strict fundamentalist interpretation of Islam in this region, it was widely assumed that all pre-Islamic material would not be considered worthy of conservation or protection in the Chilas Cultural Landscape. However, it was highlighted in the management plan that local stakeholders held favorable views towards preserving and safeguarding cultural assets based on conversations with important stakeholders representing the local community.⁷⁹

Recommendations in the Management Plan.

The Management Plan's final recommendation is to establish a museum at the Chilas Fort dating to the British period. It adds that the Gilgit Baltistan government should examine the importance of creating a proper venue for presenting and interpreting the province's rich



Figure 24- Chilas Fort, source: author

⁷⁹ Feryal Ali Gauhar, "Stakeholders Meeting for Cultural Heritage Management Plan, DBDP - Cultural Heritage Management Plan – Diamer Basha Dam Project," October 8, 2013, <http://www.wapda.gov.pk/index.php/projects/water-sector/under-construction/diamer-basha-dam/item/640-cultural-heritage-management-plan>.

cultural and natural assets. It advises that Chilas Fort be repurposed as a museum and cultural center, with these rock carvings and inscriptions being included as originals or copies. The rooms can be restored, renovated, and rented to guests, authorities, and scholars for both short- or long-term stays. According to the Cultural Heritage Management Plan, this facility should be protected and used to preserve Diamer's rich heritage.

3.2.2 Digital preservation of rock carvings and inscriptions - Heritage 360

Heritage 360 is an online platform initiated by Lahore University of Management Sciences in Pakistan that works to digitize and digitally record Pakistan's built and archaeological heritage.⁸⁰ The projects carried out for this website include the Upper Indus Petroglyphs and Inscriptions in Northern Pakistan project, which is carried out in partnership with Wilfrid Laurier University and funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).⁸¹ The project addresses critical concerns of cultural heritage preservation, provides high-quality documentation accessible to the general public, and promotes cultural tourism by generating interest in Chilas and nearby places among local and foreign tourists through these digital records.

⁸⁰ "Digital Preservation of Pakistan's Heritage," Heritage360.PK, accessed February 27, 2022, <http://heritage360.pk/>.

⁸¹ "Upper Indus Petroglyphs and Inscriptions in Northern Pakistan," Wilfrid Laurier University, accessed April 27, 2022, <https://www.wlu.ca/academics/faculties/faculty-of-arts/faculty-profiles/jason-neelis/upper-indus-petroglyphs-and-inscriptions/index.html>.



Figure 25- 3D model of Rock Carving hosted by Heritage360.pk

Archaeologists, information technology specialists, art historians, epigraphists, philologists, and academic and non-academic partner institutions, such as the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) and the archaeology, museum, and tourism departments of Pakistan's Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit-Baltistan provinces, are among those involved in these collaborations. The project team has been working in the Chilas region in recent years, and the documentation is available online. It features 3D models of single and clustered rocks and 3D panoramic views of the surrounding area. As a result, this collection of digitized resources will be valuable when the rock carvings and inscriptions are submerged, allowing future generations to reimagine and comprehend the landscape before it was engulfed in the waters of the dam. Further project plans include reaching out to the community and making these digital resources easily accessible for local people.

3.3 Values for the Future?

While the Cultural Heritage Management Plan for the Diamer Bhasha Dam is a step in the right direction, it is not without flaws. It is a top-to-bottom approach encompassing a variety of government and non-government organizations, with the primary goal of improving the region's tourism potential and producing cash for locals. This may assist Chilas in enhancing its economy by upgrading tourism infrastructure, but knowledge and comprehension among the local population are also vital considerations. Locals will have limited agency in decision-making due to a lack of knowledge of the importance of what is being protected and a lack of association with the rock carvings and inscriptions.

3.3.1 From a Historic Landscape to Confined Walls

There is also a proposition to move some of the rocks from their current locations and put them in Chilas fort, which would be detrimental to the heritage value of these carvings and inscriptions since they can only be properly experienced as part of a grander landscape. By their juxtaposition with this natural and cultural landscape, all of the rock carvings and inscriptions create a tale about the terrain they sit in. Taking some of them and putting them in a limited space without context devalues them because the entire historical value is connected to experiencing them within the landscape.

The proposal to virtually exhibit a digital collection of this rock art seems most appropriate, considering the whole situation and resources, but there needs to be a step that precedes it. Part of the value of these rocks will be lost since they will no longer be experienced in their original form; this loss will be compounded by the fact that the information presented in these recreations remains largely unknown to the local people.



Figure 26- Wide-angle view of the context as seen from Site 2, source: author

A new approach to giving value to any heritage in context, be it people, landscape, objects, resources, or natural processes, needs to be considered. This approach calls for heritage experts to be a part of the surroundings, rather than examining local heritage from above, working together with these scholarly, administrative and local stakeholders to create new, unique heritage conversations that can respond to community requirements.⁸²

3.3.2 How to Preserve Value?

When programs like the cultural heritage management plan and digitization are launched, the presumption is that these carvings and inscriptions will be key to it, especially with regard to the expert approach. The scholarly aspect of the rock carvings and inscriptions is unquestionably valuable in the eyes of heritage experts, but this evaluation still falls far from local perceptions. This reaction of immediately identifying the worth of heritage and attempting to conserve it stems from a collective perspective and thinking that professionals in the field have attained through discourse, exposure, and the interchange of ideas within the same thought collective. The locals possess hardly any knowledge to decide if this heritage is valuable to them as well.⁸³

⁸² Caitlin DeSilvey, *Curated Decay: Heritage Beyond Saving* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 184

⁸³ Waterton and Watson, *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research*. 538

So, before determining whether there is something valuable to retain and conserve in these rock carvings and inscriptions, we must first think closely about what is being preserved. We look to the work of previous scientists, archaeologists, and historians documented in several volumes to answer this question of what is being preserved. The following stage is to consider this information, known to us as heritage experts but far from local people who deal with it directly and who will be impacted by any preservation, conservation, or digitization efforts. So, rather than excessively preserving, conserving, and digitizing in any manner imaginable, we can also take an unconventional approach to preservation by conversing with the inhabitants about the histories behind these rock carvings and inscriptions.

When heritage managers and professionals discuss preserving these rock engravings, they can readily answer the question "what is being conserved," but the locals cannot. Is such preservation worthwhile if it excludes the immediate, present-day context of the heritage? In such cases, historic preservation may form a bridge over the gap between professional knowledge and local understanding, a gap which is only growing due to authorized preservation efforts. Heritage preservation answers the 'what' rather than the 'how.'

3.3.3 New Modes of Preservation

The word preservation contains the idea of active intervention associated with it. It has become common knowledge that some action needs to be taken to 'save' the heritage. However, preservation can also be understood as a subtle form of dialog. These dialogs also need to be made accessible and understandable by the local community. This inclusiveness involves minor details like language barriers, information dissemination methods, platforms, and equal participation. It cannot be denied that many heritage management programs strive to involve local communities in the entire heritage management process and claim to work for the

community. However, herein lies the problem: this authoritative approach reaches out to communities and instructs them about what is valuable and what has to be preserved. This results in a narrative in which heritage practitioners include and integrate the excluded rather than innovating new approach techniques.⁸⁴ Without an active dialogue between community understandings and values and those of scholars and specialists, such approaches of 'include the community into heritage management processes' become simply superficial inclusions. .

It all comes back to the primary issue of whether or not to conserve these Chilas rock engravings. Even putting aside the current challenges of dam construction as well as a lack of policies and legal resources for the physical protection of the rock carvings and inscriptions, the critical issue, for now, is the input and voice of local communities in any heritage preservation or heritage management initiative. Giving locals the authority to decide how, why, and what is worthwhile is a necessity. Furthermore, as heritage experts, we can contribute to providing the community with the resources it needs to comprehend this heritage so that when they enter into dialog with professionals to discuss these carvings and inscriptions, they can consciously participate in the decision-making processes.

⁸⁴ Smith, *Uses of Heritage*.

CHAPTER FOUR

Community Engagement and Memory Preservation

Before introducing large-scale management plans and involving locals in establishing a museum in the Chilas fort or introducing them to a website that hosts a 3D recreation of rock art, information-based interventions for preservation can act as sources for collective memory development and engagement. Bringing together the many years of scholarly research and presenting it to the community can become a grass-root preservation effort. Unless there is some organic development and understanding of the rock carvings and inscriptions among the community, the preservation and management of these rock carvings and inscriptions in the Chilas area will not be authentic. There will always be a gap and lack of association with this heritage in the community. Such an effort involving the community members from the beginning informs them scholarly understandings of what these rock carvings means to local history and lets local people decide if they want to form a connection with it or consider it necessary to their region. This includes their existing associations and memories, what they think should be the next step in information dissemination and preservation, and what they want to do with this knowledge. Many may be interested in using this heritage for tourism and economic development. Many might be interested in actively converting it into a learning effort to start preserving this disappearing heritage 'for the future'.

4.1 Collective Memory

Collective memory and its link to the idea of heritage represent one way to understand cultural processes and interactions that make something heritage.⁸⁵ Collective memory deals with associations, memories, and interactions with a heritage that gives it meaning - more than management, tourism, and presentation do. An example would be the associations of some local Chilas people with these rock carvings and inscriptions, including the purported discovery of artifacts such as jewelry connected to the immediate surrounds of some carvings. These activities do not point towards an understanding of heritage that needs to be conserved, managed, or presented to tourists; instead, it deals with an aspect of this rock collection that guided an active treasure hunt in the village or perhaps represented an opportunity to get rich for some people. Many people know of this rock art because they know people who have been involved in such activities. There are direct and indirect associations. However, this belief in hidden treasures represents a common and collective memory association. Some people are still bound by the activity itself, while its memory binds others. This collective memory is also another way of dealing with the community's understanding of the past. Some individuals still think that something is concealed in and around these engravings, others know that others believe it, and some know of those who believed it before them, although they themselves have personally disregarded this notion. This continuous change of memory and associations keeps generating new local meanings and values.⁸⁶

4.1.1 Preservation Through Memory Making

This collective memory related to historic remains does not stand alone. It is influenced by the context, social and environmental conditions, and personal associations. It marks a

⁸⁵ Smith, 66.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 66

reaction to past remains, influenced by the surrounding cultural context. As a result, this collective memory represents the society or community to which it belongs in terms of how the community deals with heritage sites and other social and cultural processes such as human interactions with nature and belief systems, and religious beliefs affiliations, all of which also shape the future. The future is not a generic outcome of heritage practices but is founded on specific measurable and broad practices that bring together specific human and non-human actors at a particular moment and location.⁸⁷

The focus on collective memory and its influence in discussions about management and conservation are closely connected with heritage, both tangible or intangible, heritage as an act of visual, aural, emotional, temporal, and mental interaction with objects, places, and performances. Moreover, these interactions are the most potent ways to preserve. Hence, preservation should be an act that supplements collective memory development. Heritage management should aim to assist meaning-making and value association in the direction they are currently headed and fill gaps required for community participation, discourse, and equitable interactions. No matter how imprecise, inconsistent, or changing, these connections must be addressed and incorporated into the story as vital processes because the process of changing collective memory is heritage. Preservation should be defined as preserving associations and memory formation while recognizing the potential for change in these associations through education.

4.1.2 Letting Go

It has been established by now that the materiality of the rock carvings and inscriptions cannot be conserved, partly because it is a practically impossible effort due to their large numbers and

⁸⁷ Harrison, *Heritage Futures*. 523

partly because doing so removes much of their cultural significance. Often, important traces are destroyed by strategies to preserve the physical look of an object or place.⁸⁸ On some level, shifting the preservation strategy to conserving memory rather than physical manifestation begins with deciding to let go of the physical being itself and acknowledging that heritage is an ever-changing process that cannot be stopped in any time and space. The occasional appearance and disappearance of the carvings and inscriptions with shifting water levels will be a monument to a change in the context centuries after the dam is built. It will be a story of different people who arrived thousands of years apart and interfered with rivers and mountains in their own ways, within various technological limitations. In some cases, letting go of the urge to preserve and conserve physical manifestations becomes the first step toward adding value to heritage because more processes and interactions between different agents are allowed.

4.2 The Way Forward

For a long-term solution to the preservation of this historical rock art for the future and its contribution to the nation's development, the heritage for 'posterity approach' needs to consider who and what is the future, what are the ways to preserve such art using unconventional and intangible methods that allow a variety of processes and changes to take place and include a path forward that is well aware of the heritage's context, resources, and limitations.⁸⁹

4.2.1 Addressing Critical Issues in Heritage

The construction of Diamer Bhasha Dam and submerging of these ancient rock carvings and inscriptions also have the potential to initiate a conversation about other critical issues and re-direct attention on heritage as a process directly linked with pressing issues of the present and

⁸⁸ DeSilvey, *Curated Decay*. 177-185

⁸⁹ Waterton and Watson, *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Heritage Research*.

future. These issues include but are not limited to water shortages and rising global temperatures. One way to look at it is that the heritage field, as well as other sectors such as environmental sciences, poverty, and humanitarian issues, are currently so fragmented and limited in their boundaries that highlighting the issue of cultural heritage loss becomes a luxury for places that are directly confronted with these issues, including Pakistan's current water crisis.⁹⁰ This is directly linked to the fact that universally, until now, these issues have been seen and dealt with separately.

The rock carvings and inscriptions in Chilas and many other heritage issues worldwide have been directly or indirectly impacted by human responses to changing climatic conditions and are proof of the need for interdisciplinary conversations and dialog. The heritage fields of management and preservation are yet to be appropriately equipped to cope with the existential difficulties that the heritage field and processes face. Suitable steps need to be taken to address heritage challenges faced in specific situations in cooperation with other relevant fields.⁹¹ Preservation and conservation measures need to include these pressing issues in practice because heritage and culture are a complex composition of the natural and cultural processes that surround them.

Ethical concerns

When the dam project was initially proposed, its estimated scale suggested that almost all inhabitants would lose their ancestral lands in different areas along the Indus River. The dam's size also predicts that a large portion of the town will be engulfed by rising water levels. The locals feel that they have already made a significant sacrifice for their nation by giving up

⁹⁰ Aamir Qureshi, "Water Crisis, Power Cuts Worsen Misery in Pakistan's Hottest City," *Aljazeera*, May 16, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/16/water-crisis-power-cuts-worsen-misery-in-pakistans-hottest-city>.

⁹¹ Tim Winter, "Clarifying the Critical in Critical Heritage Studies," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 19, no. 6 (September 2013): 532–45, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2012.720997>.

their lands and agreeing to the dam project. They also believe that the state has not fairly paid them and seek additional compensation in guaranteed jobs, better infrastructure, and improved facilities. The issue of the rock carvings and inscriptions is overshadowed by these other challenges. Locals do not talk about it since their lands and future economic stability are more important than the rock carvings and inscriptions. They are also unaware of the potential for such heritage to bring economic, social, and intellectual progress to the region since they have not personally experienced it.⁹² These problems pose ethical concerns regarding heritage specialists continuing to advocate for the preservation of rock carvings and inscriptions and urging the community to take action.



Figure 27- Diamer Bhasha Dam site⁹³

On the one hand, tackling the issue as a heritage professional raises ethical concerns because the expert approach does not always align with community opinions in nations where

⁹² For example, other parts of the Northern Areas saw an increase in touristic, cultural, and economic growth as work on heritage preservation and promotion actively increased and more and more people became positively impacted, directly or indirectly, by these activities. Now, such activities are further encouraged by locals because they are aware of the results of using heritage positively

⁹³ Hassan Abbas and Asghar Hussain, "Opinion: The Diamer-Bhasha Dam Is Neither Green nor Cheap," *The Third Pole*, November 5, 2021, <https://www.thethirdpole.net/en/energy/pakistans-diamer-bhasha-dam-neither-green-nor-cheap/>.

the heritage industry is not yet fully engaged. Compared to the water crisis in Pakistan and other difficulties, efforts to save heritage appear as a privilege rather than a necessity in local perception. On the other hand, heritage management of these rock carvings and inscriptions might serve as a stepping stone for using heritage management for community development in a region where it is severely lacking. It is also a chance to engage the local community to begin such activities and promote cultural heritage management, cultural tourism, and community development on their own.

4.2.2 Heritage and Community Development

Initiatives for community participation that meet people on their own level are critical in community development discourse while being respectful of their concerns. The purpose of informing the people about the history of carvings and inscriptions is not to impose a relevance that scholarship has predetermined. Instead, it provides a chance for the community to grow and develop its associations with that heritage. Basic information on what this rock art is, what it signifies, and its historical significance will broaden their understanding and alleviate their fears of not knowing enough and not being knowledgeable. Furthermore, recognizing these crucial issues that impact heritage from the start may assist communities, particularly those living in harsh natural environments, understand the relationship and effect these greater challenges have on their way of life. Providing necessary knowledge is a means of building capacity in individuals to decide for themselves or collectively for the community how to use their heritage. Only then can the community fully participate in further preservation activities.

4.3 Community Engagement

4.3.1 Bottom-up initiatives

Bottom-up efforts encourage people to engage in and use heritage to their own advantage, rather than being alienated by it. These activities should focus on the locals as the main actors and heritage management experts as facilitators. The bottom-up initiatives in the case of Chilas rock carvings and inscriptions should include the following factors:

1. Accessibility
2. Comprehension
3. Engagement

Accessibility

A grass-root initiative, be it an end product of this thesis or part of a bigger project, should be accessible to the community. This accessibility includes but is not limited to

1. Consideration of available resources that are necessary to disseminate any information, for example, educational facilities, access to the latest technologies, and the general situation of the concerned field in the heritage context
2. Mindfulness of language barriers between existing resources and reduction of these barriers as much as possible
3. Given the impossibility of bringing all community members together in one location for such projects a distinct, often subtle approach is required. In this scenario, the women in the Chilas community, will need to be approached differently from adult men due to privacy concerns.

Comprehension

Any project initiated for community participation or capacity building should consider the level of understanding of the people and focus on communicating on that level; this should include

1. Taking into account the common perceptions of the rock carving heritage and how it is viewed as a part of the community's identity
2. Being conscious of the fact that the academic and expert jargon of history, heritage, and cultures differs from common language and understanding and also differs between diverse communities
3. Presenting the historical facts and knowledge in a way that gives the locals a general understanding of the importance of their location in its global context all the while making room for further interest through curiosity
4. For knowledge transmission, easy-to-understand words and local languages should be used and user-friendly methods.

Engagement

There are a number of methods and tools that cater to the engagement component and generate interest for example,

1. Using methods that foster a sense of belonging among the project's target audience. To build such an engagement, introduce a subject they are familiar with, such as a local voice, perspective, or familiar area.
2. Another technique to create an engaging initiative is to provide an incentive to the target audience, which may be done by allowing them to participate in the project directly or

by introducing the means to take the initiative on their own, i.e., what can be done with the information.

3. Using means that are more appealing to non-experts, such as audio-visual storytelling and interactive platforms, to approach local people with limited knowledge of the historical aspect

4.4 Proposed Outcome

Based on the above conclusions, field research, and current discourse surrounding the heritage management field, this thesis proposes a pilot project for knowledge dissemination about the rock carvings and inscriptions among the local people of Chilas that aims to bring their understanding closer to that of heritage experts and help them make informed decisions in the management and memory of this heritage. I offer here a virtual audio-visual project that provides current knowledge about the rock carvings and inscriptions to the people of Chilas in an accessible, intelligible, and engaging manner as a tool for preservation. The purpose is to bridge the knowledge gap between professionals and the general public about these carvings and inscriptions. As discussions about preserving this heritage and using it to boost tourism for the benefit of locals began with the dam's construction, it is critical to share the values that experts associate with this rock art and allow locals to express and further develop their own associations with it as a first step toward preservation. This audio-visual story or exhibition will include the historical and chronological aspect of the rock inscriptions, focus on the historical research carried out by international experts in this field, and make the local people aware of the different ways this heritage can be perceived and dealt with. Giving an overview of the work done by Heritage360.pk, it will also focus on the latest digital technologies and their use in preserving such heritage and collective memory.

4.4.1 Project aims

The project aims to be presented to the local people of Chilas through collaborations with educational institutions and community centers and as an interactive and informative project. It aims to be disseminated with the help of local people who are aware of this history. Though the primary goal of this project is to reach Chilas residents, it is also meant to be presented as an informational project to a variety of audiences using simple, non-academic language. It outlines previous scholarly interpretations of these carvings and inscriptions and displays those found in the Chilas region. The goal is to educate the local public about the scholarly meaning of the carvings and inscriptions and the historical significance of their hometown in the past as well as to allow them to form new associations (or not) with the carvings and inscriptions as they perceive them in their surroundings.

4.4.2 Components

The project comprises of,

1. Visual elements

Mainly photographs and videos that were taken during the field research in the summer of 2021

2. Audio recordings

Interview excerpts from the research, including local people's understanding of the carvings and inscriptions and their opinions,

3. Scholarly studies

Historical data and interpretation of the carvings and inscriptions and their history in text

4. Audio narration

All information present in the story/ exhibition is through narrated audio in Urdu to allow local people to understand. Eventually, a narrated audio should be made available in the local language as well.

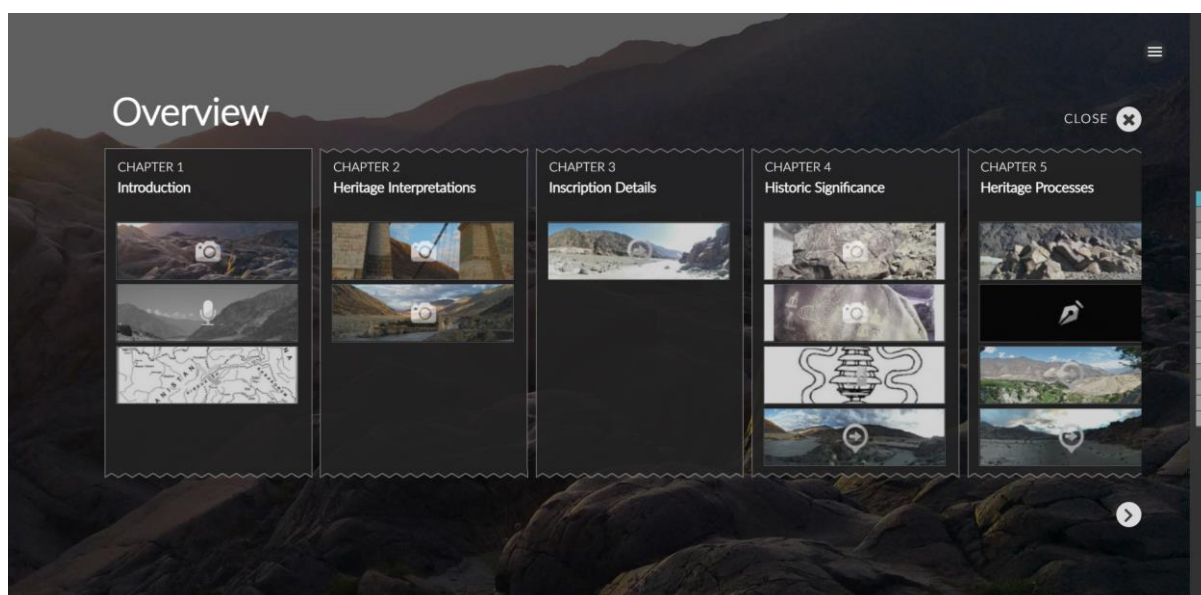


Figure 28- Summary of the audio-visual project, source: author, made with pageflow

The audio-visual project is structured as a story that the viewer may navigate or stroll through like a guided tour. The navigation is constructed so that even someone unfamiliar with the area can easily locate themselves within the context, while natives may use these pictures of known sites to assist them in locating rock carvings and inscriptions and inscriptions in their surroundings. The text and photos used in the audio-visual tale are included in the appendix.

4.4.3 Limitations

Although it is currently held on a website, the objective is to develop this project so that it may be viewed without needing internet connections. Currently, this project version is designed to be projected and distributed in groups to students and community members when resources such as sufficient broadband internet connectivity and people with a command of Urdu are available. As a result, at the beginning, the project will concentrate on literate individuals

involved in education to some degree. However, another version of the digital tale in China (the local language) will expand the project's scope and aid in integrating additional community members, primarily local women. The project as set out here, also does not depend heavily on financial resources, allowing it to be widely distributed in the initial stages.

4.4.4 Future plans

A community awareness project will be proposed as an extension of the MA thesis. The primary goal of this initiative will be to show the exhibition and arrange visits to local rock carving locations at local schools, colleges, and university campuses in and around Chilas City. This part of project aims to create a sense of familiarity and link the material displayed in the exhibition to the actual inscriptions. Later, the project's scope will be expanded to include schools in *the* surrounding smaller valleys.

Long term plans

The long-term plans include a series of workshops for young people interested in using this heritage. They will be trained to start their own guided tours of these inscriptions of rocks and spread awareness about them on a national level. Such programs were also suggested as necessary by respondents during the field research. This will also increase tourism-related activities in the area, which can help build capacity and economic growth for the community, particularly among the younger generation. This pilot project might also inspire other projects aimed at memory preservation of rock inscriptions throughout Pakistan.

Stakeholders and funders

The initial dissemination of the audio-visual project mainly requires collaboration with educational institutions and local community members. For further long term plans, collaborations can be carried out with local stakeholders

- The Tourism, Sports, Culture, Archaeology & Museum Department Gilgit-Baltistan
- Local educational institutions of Chilas and neighboring valleys
- Karakoram International University campus
- Community Centers
- Hospitality Industry

Impacts

- A conversation starter among the locals about what these carvings and inscriptions are, what they mean, and the global historical significance of the place they live in
- Equipping locals with enough knowledge to take part in decision making processes regarding this issue
- Knowledge of these rock inscriptions will allow the younger generation to be involved in any activities/ projects carried out relating to this issue
- Information about the international research on these inscriptions will help members of the local community understand how cultural heritage can potential play a role in bringing together people from around the world and how it can be part of a community's intellectual growth.

Practical Steps

The outcome of this thesis focuses on the end product, i.e., the audio-visual project aimed at bridging the gap between the community and expert knowledge; it is essential to acknowledge that many practical steps will also be required to successfully bring such a project to the community. Approaching different community members will require careful consideration of the locals' cultural, social, and religious values. Moreover, the active input from the community about different forms of outreach will be another critical step to consider. For some locals, educational institutions may act as platforms for outreach, while for others, particularly local

women, some other form of approach may be needed since women do not move as freely in the public sphere. Another vital step will be to involve as many locals as possible as mediators in presenting this initiative to the local population so that the Chilas audience will have more of a welcoming attitude. Moreover, checking the structure and content of the mobile audio-visual exhibition with mediators such as teachers and preparing the content in the local language for more outreach. Community gate-keepers like religious leaders, local activists, and school teachers may become the link between the project and the locals.

Conclusions

The rock carvings and inscriptions of Chilas are an example of the heritage management challenges in which individuals with ambiguous relationships to the history around them are directly influenced by preservation attempts, particularly in the Pakistani setting where there are many more such examples. It also demonstrates how a lack of policy-level management measures leads to activities that jump from one point to the next, neglecting the gaps between expert and non-expert understandings of heritage. The word "preservation" conjures up the idea of active intervention. Preservation should, however, be viewed as a nuanced form of communication. These discussions must also be accessible and intelligible to the general public. Heritage management programs aiming to work for the community and incorporate local people in the whole heritage management process should focus more on aspects such as language obstacles, effective information transmission techniques, and platforms, rather than only on top-to-bottom programs. The traditional approach of reaching out to communities and instructing them about what is valuable and what has to be preserved needs to shift to a narrative discussing heritage values. Such ways of including the community in heritage management procedures provide common ground for both community understandings and the scholarly values.

The collective memory situation of Chilas' rock carvings and inscriptions also demonstrates that it is not isolated from heritage futures in the region. People have already established associations with the carvings and inscriptions connected to local cultural contexts as well as the present-day social, and environmental situation. This collective memory currently represents the community's approach to heritage sites and other social and cultural processes such as human connections with nature, belief systems, and religious affiliations, all of which

impact their future. It highlights that the people, landscape, and rock carvings and inscriptions futures depend on efforts taken today, keeping all on them in mind together.

The purpose of informing local people in the community about the history of the rock carvings and inscriptions as well as other potential heritage assets, should not be to impose a relevance that specialists have determined. Instead, it should be a chance for the community to strengthen its connections with that heritage. A basic understanding of what this rock art represents to them as well as to scholars and the outside world as well as its historical significance should raise their awareness and minimize their hesitation connected to the feeling that they do not know enough. Furthermore, addressing the critical concerns that affect heritage from the outset may help communities, especially those living in tough natural environments, realize the link and influence these bigger challenges have on their way of life. Giving people the knowledge they need is one way to help them determine how to use their heritage for themselves or the community. Only then will they be able to make informed decisions.

This thesis has explored the idea and practice of community engagement and agency in complicated issues of heritage in its political, economic, social, and natural contexts. There is a need to reach out to a community that has struggled in various ways and is generally considered hard to approach. The strong optimism I feel concerning the possibility of community development through bottom-up initiatives comes from personal experiences of successful efforts in other parts of the region, in the past and present, and with the hope that people living in difficult natural environments realize their potential to improve their own economic and social conditions.

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Appendix

Field research summary

The field research for the thesis was conducted in July-August 2021 for two weeks in Chilas. It included discussions with community members, visits to rock carving and inscription sites near Chilas, and visits to Chilas city.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted in groups and with individual respondents. A semi-formal interview format was followed to gather information and understand the issue. The discussions mainly touched upon topics of Diamer Bhasha Dam, the loss of lands of local community members, their understanding of the rock carvings, general information about the community's understanding, and the type of associations locals have developed with the carvings and inscriptions over time. Seventeen people were interviewed for the research from various fields like education, NGOs, medicine, hospitality, local journalists, and politicians. Due to privacy issues, Covid restrictions, and general concerns about easy movement in Chilas, the interviewed people were from one group, i.e., middle-aged, educated males. Despite efforts, women from the community could not be approached for interviews.

Site Visits

Accompanied by a local guide, the rock carving and inscriptions close to Chilas city were visited. The visits were done mainly by walking along the Indus River and exploring the sites for rock carvings. A visit to Chilas Fort was done with the same guides.

Pictures from the field visit (source: author)



Site 1



With local guides at Site 1



Site 1 Visit



Site 2



Site 3



View of Chilas from Chilas Fort