

Chinese Rock Inscriptions in the Indus Valley (North Pakistan)

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The area where the Hunza, Gilgit, and Indus Rivers meet has been known since ancient times as part of the great communication system usually called the Silk Road(s). Even today, the Karakorum Highway follows the course of the three rivers connecting South and Central Asia. For more than a decade the Pak-German Study Group (Ahmad Hasan Dani and Karl Jettmar, coordinators) has attempted to reconstruct the history of this area - namely the districts of Gilgit, Baltistan, and Diamir - by investigating thousands of petroglyphs found mainly along the banks of the Indus.¹

In addition to rock carvings roughly classified into three periods (Pre-Buddhist, Buddhist, and Post-Buddhist), a great number of inscriptions was discovered. These are mostly in Kharosthi, Brahmi, and Sogdian; Chinese inscriptions are comparatively rare. The readings proposed in this paper are not based on a field survey but result from the analysis of photographs and the consultation with leading sinologists and paleographers, both from China and Europe.²

So far, only one inscription (from Hunza-Haldeikish) has been published.³ It consists of twelve characters (fig. 1) translated by the late Ma Yong (1989: 144) as "Gu Wei-long, envoy of the Great Wei, (is) now dispatched to Mi-mi". Ma identifies the place of destination as Maimargh, a small country that, according to Arabic tradition, was situated to the south of Samarkand.⁴ If this localization is correct, the Chinese mission made a detour that could be explained by a possible blockade of the more easily accessible passes of the Pamirs (Jettmar 1985: 141).

There were several dynasties in China known by the title Wei⁵; before the end of the sixth century A.D. which is indicated as a terminus ad quem by an overlapping Brahmi inscription dating from that period at the latest.⁶

The dynasties to which the inscription may relate are:

Cao-Wei: 220-264 A.D.

Northern Wei: 386-534 A.D.

Eastern Wei: 534-550 A.D.

Western Wei: 535-556 A.D.

On account of toponymical criteria, i.e. the occurrence of Mimi and its variants in the Chinese annals, Ma Yong (1989: 147) concludes that "it is most likely that the title Da Wei (the Great Wei) in the inscription (...) referred to the Northern Wei". Other paleographers and art historians such as Zhao Yiliang, Su Bai, and Lin Meicun take a different view; they mainly raise stylistic arguments and prefer a dating to the earlier Cao-Wei Dynasty⁷.

In contradiction to this, it is impossible to establish any reliable dates for the other inscriptions consisting of only one to five characters. As a detailed report is to be published in the series Antiquities of Northern Pakistan, this paper will be confined to a short summary⁸. Moreover, only inscriptions made up of more than one character will be considered. Five of them were found in the area around Chilas, the other two near Shatial:

Thalpan I 314:1 (fig. 2)	Engraved upon a boulder visible from great distance, this inscription consists of three characters. They are arranged vertically, the first being Zhang (a common surname), the second Qian (in this context a given name or part of it). Its right-half part being damaged, the third character is not clear. It appears to be ji ("to inscribe", "to record", "to remember"); hence the translation would be "inscribed by Zhang Qian" or "remembering Zhang Qian" ⁹ .
Thalpan II No number (fig. 3)	This inscription consists of three vertically arranged characters as well. It is however less clear. The first character seems, again, to be Zhang (a surname), the second one maybe Fu (here a given name or part of it). The third character appears to be a variant of sang ("to die"). If this interpretation is correct, the final rendering would be "Zhang Fu died here". ¹⁰
Chilas I 2:15.1 (fig. 4)	Three characters are arranged vertically. The first one, again, represents the surname Zhang as at Thalpan. The others are severely damaged and not legible in combination with Zhang they should make up the given name. ¹¹
Chilas I 2: 15.2 (fig. 4)	On the right side of this inscription two (or three 7) more characters can be seen. They are also arranged vertically, the first one being Gao, another common surname; hence the damaged character(s) below should be the given name. ¹²
Thak 1: 1 (fig. 5)	Three characters are grouped around the picture of a two-storied building, perhaps a pagoda, the curving roofs of which are typical for traditional Chinese architecture. The two characters on the right are arranged vertically, the first one being Zhang, the second one zi. The third one, on the left, is an ancient variant of giu. These last two characters should make up the given name, hence the full name given in this inscription is Zhang Zigi. ¹³
Shatial I 10 9 : 1 (fig. 6)	In the groove of a rock three characters are arranged vertically. The first and second be either kai ("to open") or guan ("pass"). If guan is correct, the inscription could be rendered as "Guozhai pass". Guo and zhai both have a Buddhist connotation and are sometimes found in combined form; therefore a relation to the so-called "Suspended Crossings", as suggested by Herbert Franke and

	Karl Jettmar, seems questionable ¹⁴ . On the other hand, guo is rarely used as a surname; if this applies the full name should be rendered as Guo Zhaikai or Guo Zhaiguan.
Shatial I 113:1 (fig. 7)	A cluster of five characters is made up of three big ones (arranged horizontally) and two small ones (arranged diagonally). All of them - from right to left: Huang, Mi, Wei, Hun, and Qi - occur, at least occasionally, as surnames. A combination of two full names (the given names consisting of one and two characters respectively) is possible but not probable. ¹⁵

To sum up it can be said that - apart from the reference to the Wei envoy setting out for Mimi - all the inscriptions mentioned in this paper are personal or, perhaps in one case, place names. Three details should be pointed out: (a) the surname Zhang occurs in four out of seven inscriptions; (b) given names consisting of one character only are frequent probably more frequent than in the Central Kingdom of that period); (c) in one case (Shatial I, 113: 1) it is likely that only surnames were listed.

For these reasons the development of local traditions should be considered. At least some of the inscriptions appear not to have originated with travelers covering the whole distance from the Central Kingdom. Instead, they may have been engraved by Chinese residents who were living in or not too far from the Indus valley. This assumption is confirmed by local records such as the Gilgit Manuscripts (Hinilber 1980: 67) which mention a kulacina ("distinguished Chinaman") who had paid for copying some texts. Later on the Saka Itinerary (written in the tenth century) even refers to four Chinese towns between the Tarim basin and the Gilgit valley (Bailey 1968: 71). Therefore Karl Jettmar (1983) was by no means wrong when he got the impression of an "oversized guest book"; it must be borne in mind, however, that not every Chinese visitor came directly from the Huang He or Yangzi valley before he left his name near the banks of the Indus.

Chinese Characters

Da Wei shi Gu Weilong 大魏使谷魏龍
jin xiang Mimi shiqu 今向迷密使去

Gao 高

Gao di 高地

Guozhai guan 果齋閣
(Guo Zhaiguan)

Guo Zhaikai 果齋閣

Huang 黃

Hun 昏

Mi 米

Mimi 迷密

Qi 齊

Wei 魏

Zhang Fu sang 張夫喪
(Zhang Fusang)

Zhang Qian 張騫

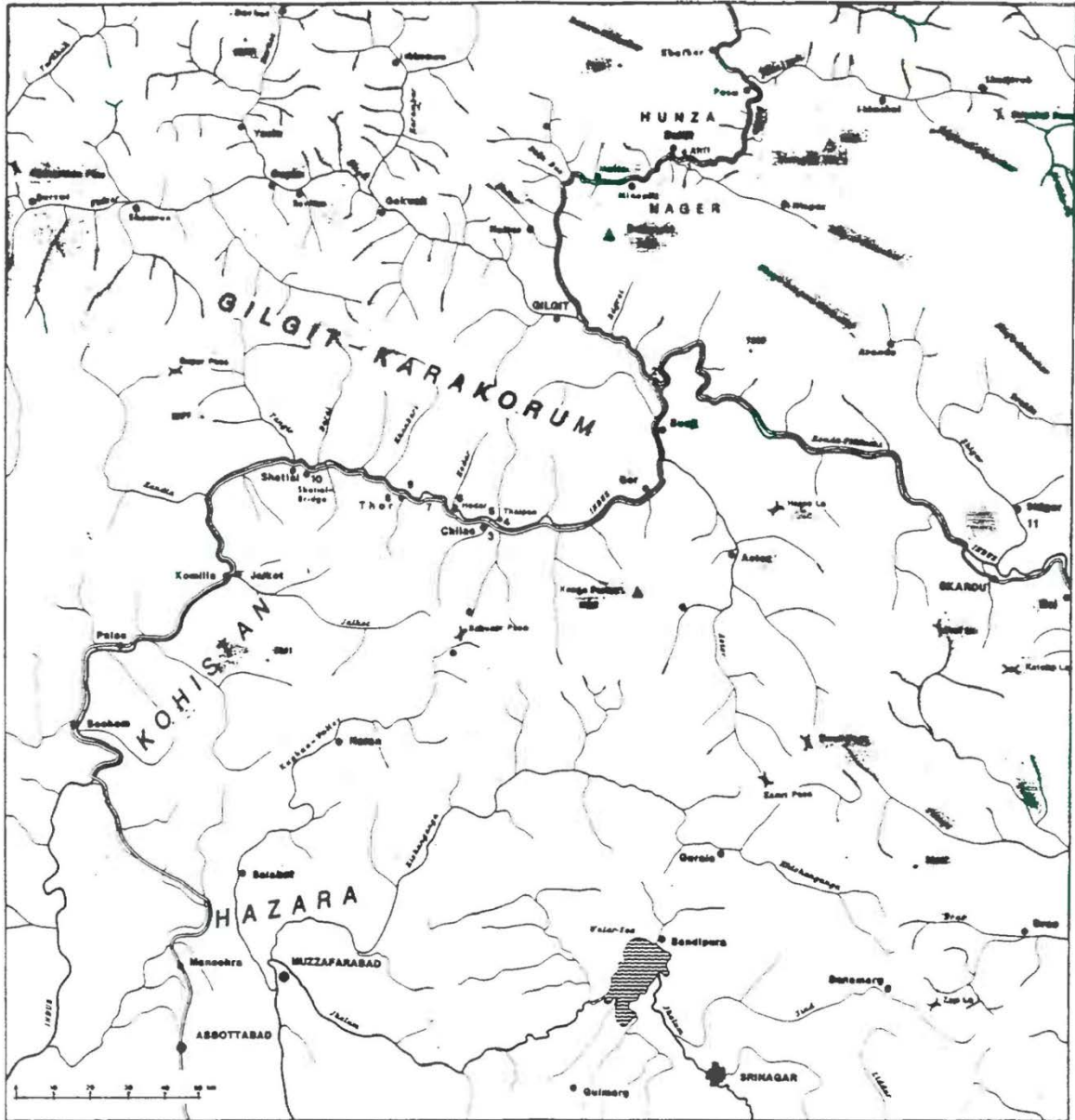
Zhang Qian ji 張倩記
(Zhang Qianji)

Zhang Ziqiu 張子琴

zhe 者

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1989. The Chinese Inscription of the Da Wei Envoy on the "Sacred Rock of Hunza". In: Jettmar



Important clusters of rock-carvings and inscriptions

Fig. 1. Eunza-Haldeikish.



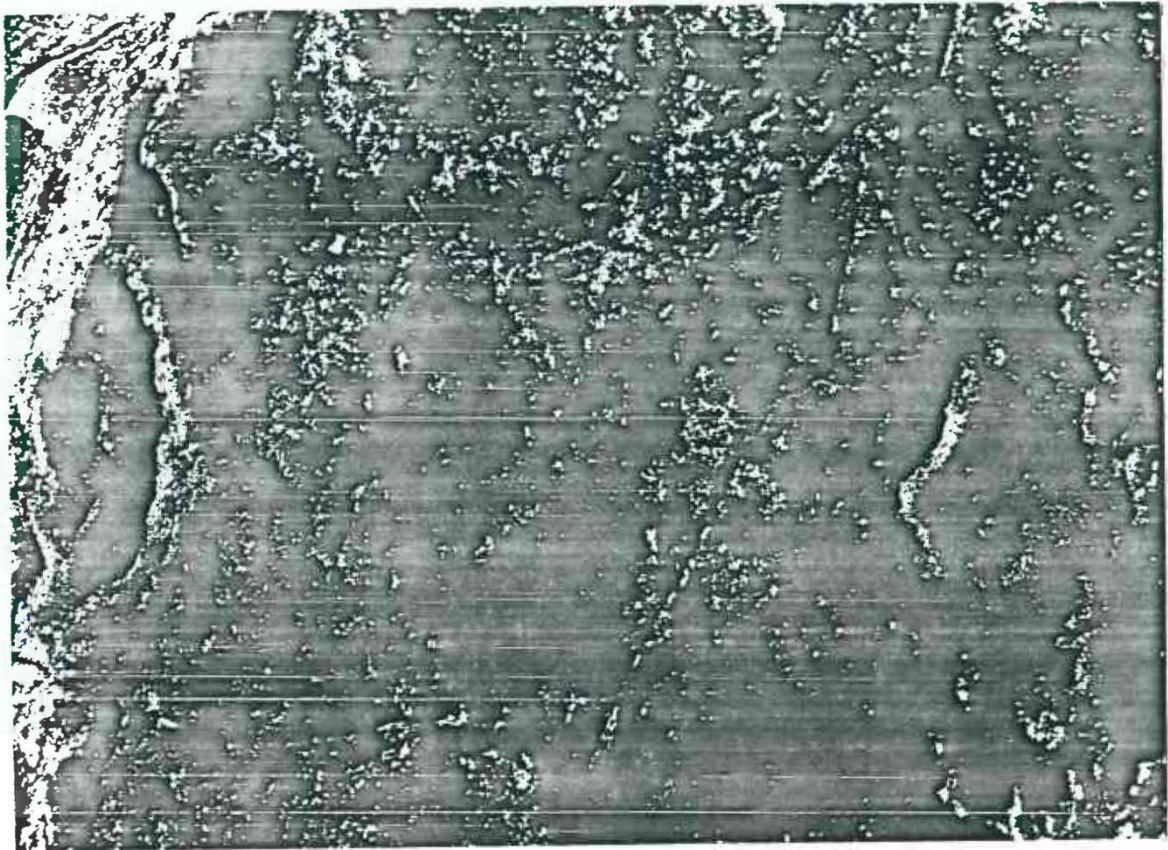
Fig. 2. Thalpan I, 314:1.



Fig. 3. Thalpan II .



Fig. 7. Chilas I, 2 : 15.



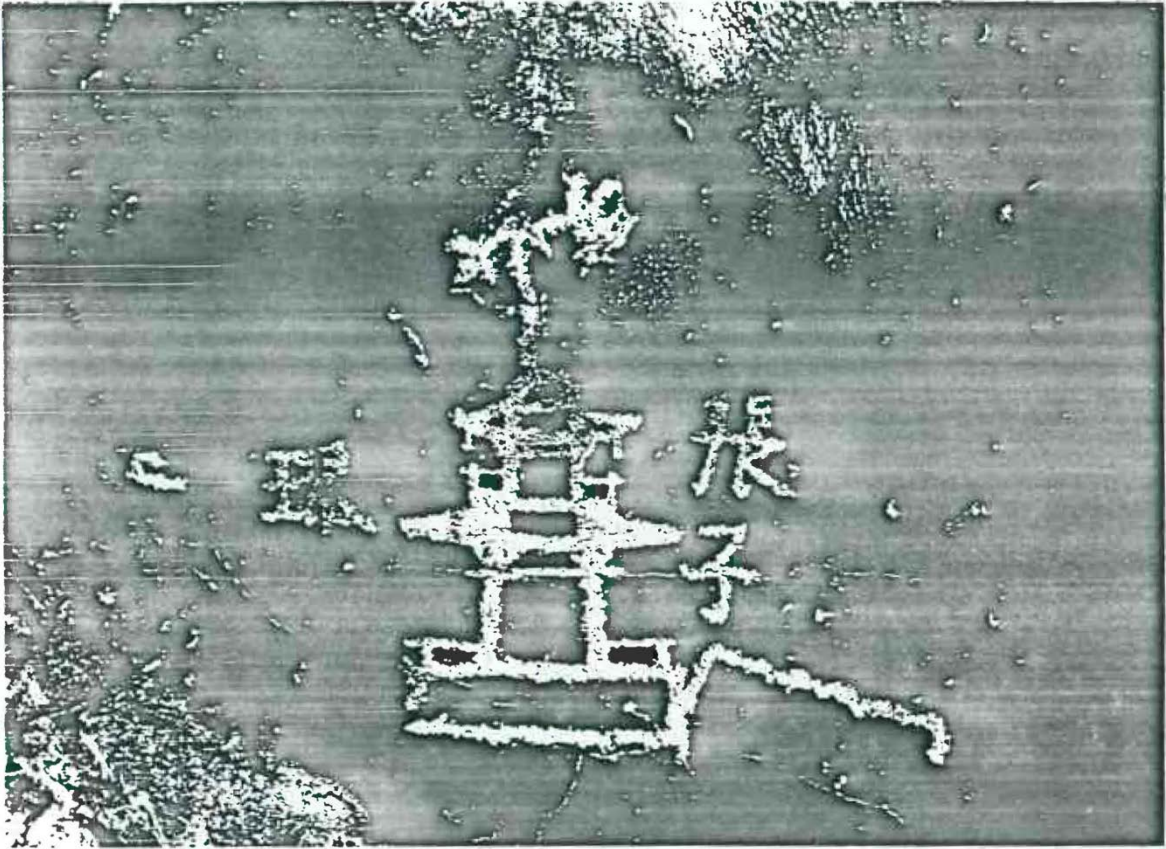


Fig. 5. Thak 1:1.

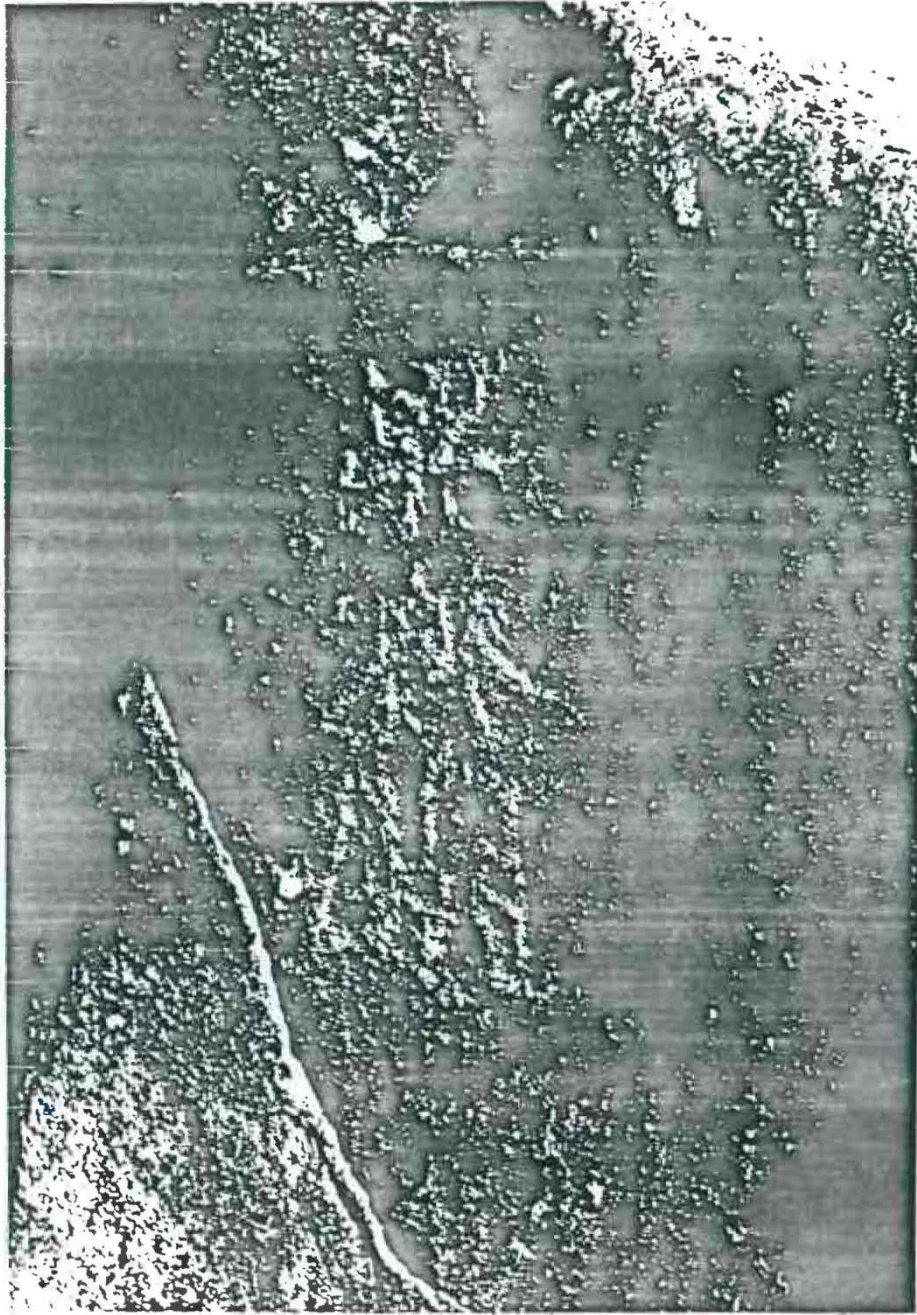


Fig. 6. Shatial I, 109:l.

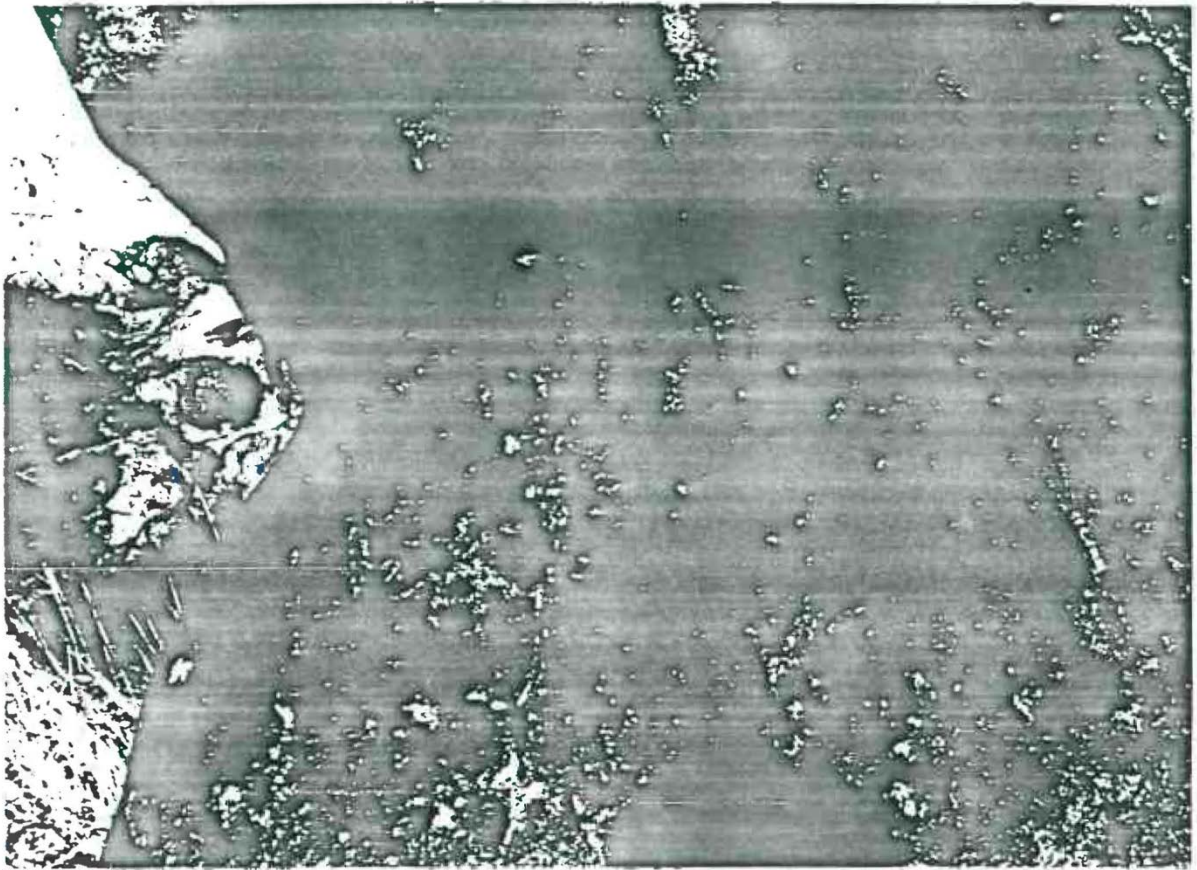
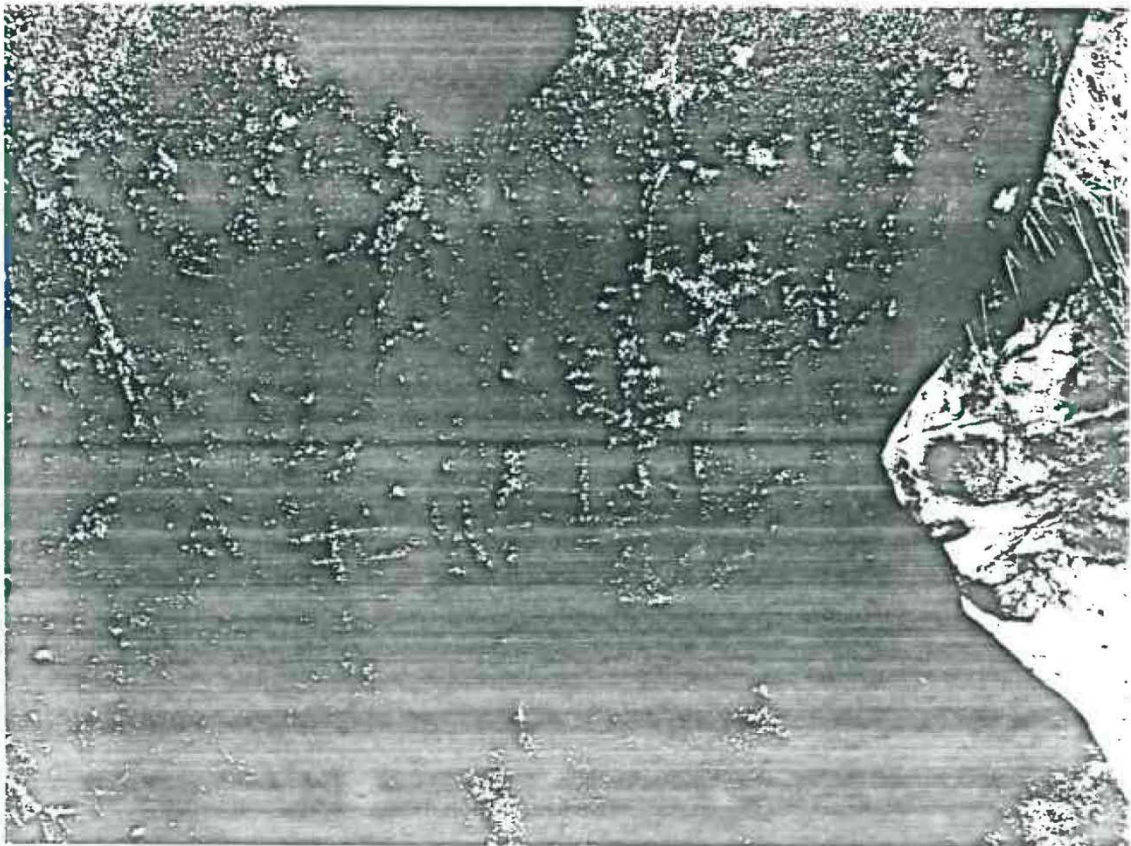


Fig . 7 . Shatial I, 113:1.











Notes

¹ For an extensive bibliography of material published by members and collaborators of the Pak-Gerrnan Study Group, see Jettmar 1989: VI-X.

² Thanks are due to Herbert Franke, Rainer von Franz, A. F. P. Hulsewe, Lothar Ledderose, Lin Meicun, P. van der Loon, Ma Shichang, Dietrich Seckel, Su Bai, and Zhao Yiliang. For stylistic improvements I am indebted to Roderich Ptak and Johannes W. Raum. Karl Jettmar permitted me to consult the project's archive and provided me with detailed topographical notes; this contribution is dedicated to him.

³ Ma Yang 1986; 1989. The inscription was transliterated by him (1989: 144) as Da Wei Shi Gu Weilong jin xiang imi shigu (Romanization slightly changed).

⁴ Ma Yang 1989: 149; for a cartographic rendering, see Herrmann 1935: 30-31, 37.

⁵ Dynasties used to style themselves "great"; hence Da Wei only means "Great Wei".

⁶ Dani (1983 : 91) r e l a t e s this Brahmi inscription to the Gupta period (4th to 6th century).

⁷ Personal communication; in addition, these scholars hold that the envoy's name should be rendered as Wei Long. The character romanized by Ma Yong as Gu and taken as a surname should i n their opinion be conceived as zhe, "the one who is <the envoy >".

⁸ Antiquities of Northern Pakistan is published by the Research Unit "Rock Carvings and Inscriptions along the Karakorum Highway", Heidelberg Academy for the Humanities and Sciences. Vol. 1 is edited by Karl Jettmar (1989) and deals mainly with the Khoro~t, Brahmi, and Sogdian inscriptions.

⁹ According to Herbert Franke, Lothar Ledderose, and P. van der Loon the characters were "inscribed by Zhang Qian" (written communication). The given name of the famous traveler Zhang Qian, who is said to have opened the Silk Road in the second century B. c., is written with a different character. It cannot be completely ruled out, however, that somebody who wanted to "remember Zhang Qian" simply confused the characters.

¹⁰ However, the third character might also be a component of the given name.

¹¹ The suggestions o f P. van der Loon (letter of June 27th 9.3J) and Ma Yong (1989:141) regarding the second and third character could not be verified.

¹² Gao also means "high". Therefore, according to P. van der Loon (letter of June 27th 1980), the "inscription appears to be kaoti <Pinyin: gao di> 'high land'".

¹³ The drawing of a similar building was discovered in the same area two years earlier.

¹⁴ Franke (letter of July 30th 1983) and Jettmar (1987).

¹⁵ Herbert Franke (letter of April 18th 1984) would prefer combination of the first two characters of the horizontal line and the other three characters to make up two names.