

Where History Meets Archaeology: Archaeological Sites and Historical Monuments along the Khyber Pass

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Abstract: History and Archaeology are inseparable twins. Archaeological data needs to be explained with the help of historical facts and figures while historical narrations always need to be strengthened with tangible evidence in the shape of solid archaeological proofs excavated by archaeologists and described in their style and structure. The historical and archaeological monuments in different parts of Pakistan are a national heritage and potentially a source of earning if foreign tourism is revived and promoted in this country that so badly need a soft image to regain its place among the civilized nations of the world. Some of these treasures are situated in Khyber Pass and with a little effort and projection these can help convert the tourism department into tourism industry in Pakistan, bringing in foreign tourists and economic opportunities for the people.

These monuments are our national heritage and it is our duty as historians and archaeologists to save them from further destruction at the hands of both men and nature and to give them the projection and appreciation that they so rightly deserve. Most of these monuments are a perfect example of a closer link and bond between the discipline of History and Archaeology, historians doing their part of research and archaeologists supplementing their work with technical aspects of their style and structure. This is where History meets Archaeology. The paper is an effort to bring to light the important but neglected historical sites and archaeological monuments in Khyber pass with a brief history so that it becomes an inspiration for the young and budding researchers in both fields, history as well as archaeology, to explore the hidden aspects of these treasures and to make them more known to the people all over the world.

Keywords: Khyber Pass, Shahgai, Fort, Jamrud, Afridis, Ali Masjid, Shpola.

History and Archaeology are the two disciplines that go hand in hand. We would never, perhaps, divide history and archaeology into two watertight compartments as it is almost impossible to draw a definite line between the two. Archaeological data needs to be explained with the help of historical facts and figures while historical narrations always need to be strengthened with tangible evidence in the shape of solid archaeological proofs excavated by archaeologists. The historical and archaeological jewels in the Khyber Pass stand a proof to this fact.

The Khyber Pass enjoys a unique fame not only because of its military, commercial and strategic importance but also because of its rich archaeological wealth and buried history. Among these archaeological and historical treasures, the forts built in different periods by those who occupied the pass are of great importance. They include the mud fort of Jamrud built by Hari Singh Nalwah during the brief Sikh rule over the Punjab, of which the area up to Jamrud was a part, the Shahgai Fort constructed during the British Period and the most recent construction of all the forts in the Pass, the Ali Masjid Fort at the historical place named Ali Masjid which is also the narrowest

point in the Pass, and the Landi Kotal Fort which is the headquarters of the famous and legendary Khyber Rifles.

Some facts about these forts are known to people who have been to the Khyber Pass or who have studied about it but there are some aspects of these historically important and strategically significant forts which are not very widely known.

Apart from the forts, the Pass is also strewn with other archaeological gems like stupas and relics of Buddhist sites. The paper intends to give a description of the location of these historical monuments along with the details about their history and archaeological structure. It is a humble effort to bring to light and project these wonders of recent and remote past in the Khyber Pass which can be of great interest to travellers and tourists from different parts of the world, from other provinces within the country, and particularly to those interested in the military and strategic studies of the North West Frontier of British India, now the Western Frontier of Pakistan.

The Jamrud Fort

The first important place in the Khyber Pass, five miles from Islamia College and 10 miles from Peshawar, is Jamrud. It derives its name from a nearby seasonal river 'jam' and is a distorted version of 'Rood-e-Jam'. Some tribes call it simply 'Jam'. (Sabir, 1966) Some say that Jamrud derived its name from the famous Iranian emperor Jamshed, who is said to have ruled here some 2,000 years ago. (1998 Census Report of Khyber Agency, 2000).

Situated at a point where the Khyber Pass meets Peshawar Valley, Jamrud has served as the camping ground for Iranian, Greek, Tartar and Mughal armies who marched through the Khyber Pass to the Sub-Continent. It is the eastern gate of the Khyber Pass and has great

tactical importance. Even before the Sikhs constructed the Jamrud Fort, Moorcraft and Trebeck, the two travellers and writers who visited the Khyber Pass around the year 1820, mention Jamrud in these words: "It appeared to have been formerly a place of importance for the number of broken stone walls scattered about and some large tanks, one of which was sixty yards square." (Moorcraft and Trebeck, 1977)

Jamrud is now headquarters of a Tehsil of its name. It is also a meeting place of several roads from all directions and has developed into a prosperous town. It has a high school with teaching facilities in science, arts and technical subjects. There is also a well-equipped and adequately staffed hospital. (1998 Census Report of Khyber Agency, 2000)

The Jamrud Fort was built by Hari Singh Nalwah in 1836 on a high spot at a hundred yards square ground to guard against the invading Afghan forces through the Khyber but it ultimately became his final resting place. It is situated at a distance of about one furlong from the Jamrud Railway Station. We don't hear of any fort here during the Mughal period but very often the Mughal forces were posted here and as the present mud fort stands on a high ground, it seems that it was built on the site of a previous structure, which could have been a fort. The British historian Moorcraft, who visited the area before the construction of the present fort is quoted by Prof. Ahmad Hassan Dani in his book *Romance of the Khyber Pass* saying that, "The plain terminated at the foot of the Khyber range. It appears to have been formerly a place of importance from the number of broken stonewalls scattered about and some large tanks." (Dani, 1997) Shafi Sabir has given the date of construction as 1834 (Sabir, 1966).

Hari Singh Nalwah surveyed the entire area. He spotted a small mound on the eastern end of Khyber Pass which was a part of the nearby

village of Jamrud. It had remnants of a small mud fort. Hari Singh selected that place for the fort. After procuring the necessary material for the construction, the foundation of a very strong fort was laid on October 17, 1836 by Hari Singh Nalwah himself after offering prayers. Masons and labourers worked continuously and completed the construction of this historic fort in a month and 25 days. Its walls were four yards wide and 12 yards high. It was named as *Fatehgarh Sahib*. Inside this fort were stationed 800 infantry, 200 cavalry, 80 artillery men, 10 big cannons and 12 small cannons under the command of Maha Singh, a seasoned general. The fort faced scarcity of water. It was overcome by harnessing a nearby stream that was under the control of the Afridis. The Afridis were offered a jagir worth Rs 1200 in return for control over the stream. An alternate arrangement of water was also made within the fort to face any eventuality by digging a big well. (Singh, "Maharaja Ranjit Singh")

Hari Singh named it as "*Fatehgarh*" (Victory Fort) to commemorate the conquest of Jamrud by the Sikhs. When Hari Singh was wounded in a battle with the Afghan forces in the plain near Islamia College, he was carried to Jamrud where he succumbed to his injuries and was cremated in the Jamrud Fort. Thus the fort, which he wanted to be the protector of the Khyber Pass, proved to be his grave. A *gurdwara* was also built in the fort as a memorial of Hari Singh Nalwah. (Sabir, 1966)

The Fort looks like a battle ship from a distance, not big but certainly beautiful. It is also not very old but connected with many important historical events. Though it had never been the residence of any ruler or sovereign yet it was of great importance due to its location. Not of much interest for a layman, the Fort contains the history of 125 years for a historian of insight.

Like other forts built in the Sikh period, Jamrud Fort is also made of soft brick, covered with clay mixed in hay and looks yellow. In architecture, it is not much different from other forts in Peshawar. (Sabir, 1966) The fort has two heavy wooden doors, mounted with thick iron sheets. One of the doors is in the outer wall to the east and the other is in the inner wall to the north. (Jaffar, 1946) After the inner gate is entered, an approach road, curving and rising higher and higher, takes us to the main inner building. On the ground floor, the sentry guard is located. On the first floor, there is a room used by Hari Singh for his residence and it is here that he was finally buried. The actual *samaadhi* (memorial) for the Sikh General was built by Gajumal of Peshawar in 1902 (now exist in the shape of a filled hole of maximum two feet in diameter). Another room was used by the Sikh soldiers as *gurdwara* (Sikh Temple). There is also a well on the ground floor near the walls, which supplied water to the inmates. Near the well, there is an underground bunker type of a prison cell for dangerous prisoners. The Fort presents a picturesque view in the background of the hill. It is erected in three tiers – a lower fort, an upper construction and the main middle portion for the deposit of fire. The lower fort has a square terrace with a circular bastion at each corner. The ramparts used to have some barracks. The upper part has an octagonal terrace. (Dani, 1997)

The Afghan ruler Dost Muhammad Khan twice attempted to take Jamrud from the Sikhs but both his attempts failed and Jamrud remained with the Sikhs till the British took over from them in 1849. Since then, for ninety-eight years the Union Jack had been flying over the Jamrud Fort and throughout this period, it remained the centre of many military activities. (Sabir, 1966)

At the time of my visit to the Fort in 2006, the fort was garrisoned by the 15th Baloch Regiment of Pakistan Army.

The Shahgai Fort

There is another army fort and cantonment at Shahgai, some 12 kilometers from Jamrud, and soldiers of Frontier Corps are stationed there. Just below the Shahgai Fort to the left of the road is situated the village of Lala Cheena in a little depth along a *khwar* or hill torrent. It is said that there used to be water flowing regularly in this *khwar* but now it is completely dry.

Shahgai at the summit of Khyber Pass is 12 kilometers from Jamrud. The Shahgai fort was built by the British in 1927-28 to command the approach from Tirah and is presently garrisoned by the Pakistan Army. (Khan, 2001) It is constructed at the point just ahead of the narrowest point with the purpose to protect and safeguard the route through the Khyber Pass. The fort has two gigantic gates; One facing the east and the other second to the west. The western gate is, however, permanently closed. The Shahgai Fort also adds to the grandeur of the historic serpentine road.

There is a cemetery of the British soldiers at the Fort and the local tribesmen, in keeping with their traditions, still respect their dead enemies. A Pathan custodian, appointed by the government, looks after this cemetery, to dust the tomb-stones and to water the flower plants. (1998 Census of Khyber Agency, 2000)

The Ali Masjid Mosque and Fort

Ali Masjid, the place which is the narrowest point in the Pass, is named after a historic but small mosque, surrounded by precipitous hills. It is built of stones and derives its name from Hazrat Ali, the fourth pious Caliph of Islam. The locals believe that Hazrat Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) came to this place and constructed this mosque. The legend has it that he fought against a pagan woman named *Khaibarai Bibi*. There is a huge boulder perched precariously in the middle of a

steep incline to the left of the road, just ahead of the mosque. The locals say that this rock was thrown at Hazrat Ali when he was praying but he caught hold of it and tucked it up there. (Khan, 2001)

The former Political Agent of Khyber, Teepu Mahabat Khan, who also wrote a book *The Land of Khyber*, says in his book, "This may be an incredible legend but the question remains as to why there should be two Khybers at such a distance apart. Either the Jews, to whose language, Hebrew, Shafi Sabir has traced the term Khyber, originated here and took the name with them to the Middle East or vice-versa. The local legends also corroborate the theory that the Pakhtoons are Israelites and that they may be the lost tribe of the Jews." (Khan, 2001 & Iqbal, 2011) However, David Montgomery Hart does not seem to be impressed by these legends. He says that the mosque is not more than a century old¹ 'as it was not there in the time of the second Anglo-Afghan War' (1878-1881). (Hart, 1985) However, he confesses that the lack of antiquity does not denote the lack of attraction. According to Hart, the *Shia* Pakhtoons hold that Ali also stopped to pray in no less than three different localities between Kohat and the Kurram Valley while the *Sunnis* make the counter claim that he died and was buried under the magnificent mausoleum dedicated to his memory at Mazar-e-Sharif in northern Afghanistan. (Hart, 1985) Interestingly enough, while he declares the Sunni claim as incorrect, he says nothing about the validity or invalidity of the *Shia* belief.

Shafi Sabir has mentioned in his book that when Subuktagin occupied Peshawar Valley and the Frontier areas, he appointed one Abu Ali as its governor. (Sabir, 1966) Keeping this historical fact in mind, one can opine that 'The Mosque of Ali', as it is known, was probably named after

¹ It should be noted here that Hart's book was published in 1985.

Abu Ali, Subuktagin's Governor of this area, rather than Hazrat Ali bin Abi Talib, the cousin of the Prophet Mohammad and the fourth pious caliph of Islam.

Just a little ahead of the mosque at Ali Masjid is the Ali Masjid Fort, which is small but situated at an extremely important strategic point. It is at about 9 ½ miles from the eastern entrance of the Khyber Pass, situated on top of a hillock to the left of the road (while traveling from eastern end to the west). The road to the fort is in a very bad condition, narrow and has a steep ascent at various points, difficult to negotiate for an ordinary vehicle.

The original construction in the fort comprise of two buildings on the northern and southern heights, a smaller construction on the north and a comparatively bigger building on the south. In between, there are living quarters and stores. A mosque has also been added to the fort in the middle portion on a levelled ground. Right in front of the mosque is a relatively new construction, two rooms and a small veranda at a slightly higher ground, overlooking the road through the pass. It was added to the original constructions in March 1986 and the foundation stone was laid down by the then Commandant Khyber Rifles Col. Mehboob Ali Shah. The hilltops to the north, west and east of this fort are known locally as Tatara or Lakka, Cheengai Sar and Rotas respectively.

The fort itself is at considerable height but two pickets in the vicinity of the fort, one to its west and another to its south west, are at more height than the fort, both connected to each other by a low stone-wall providing protection to soldiers crawling between the two pickets.

Below the fort, a water supply station has been built recently to pump water to the fort.

The most amazing part of the Ali Masjid Fort is an underground tunnel-hospital (Not in use right

now) to the left of the main gate of the fort. The hospital is a tunnel in the shape of the English Alphabet "E", having three entrance points; in the middle and to either side of the main entrance into the tunnel. The main entrance to this tunnel-hospital, the middle arm of the English alphabet "E", is at a comparative height and after entering the door, one has to go downstairs for about forty feet to reach the longest stretch of the tunnel (north to south) and on either side of this main entrance are the two tunnels with entrances to the west to complete the alphabet "E".

The walls of this tunnel-hospital are covered with concrete columns all through the tunnel and the ceiling has also been strengthened by an extra layer of plaster.

In the main tunnel (stretching north to south), there are still small rooms once used as wards for sick and injured soldiers, an operation theatre, two recovery rooms, a laboratory, medical officers' room, and several other small rooms of about eight square feet. There are also small rooms in the two tunnels to the right and left of the main entrance. On the whole, there are about 36 rooms in this tunnel hospital. At present, there is no power supply and lighting arrangement in this tunnel-hospital but it is in such a good shape that with little renovation and power supply, it can easily be changed into an operational and fully functional hospital. However, there is no provision for ventilation, except the three entrances to the tunnel. The men of Khyber Rifles posted at the fort claim that the place is haunted and they have heard sounds of loud moaning and crying coming from the tunnel.

The tunnel-hospital is not less than a wonder and if the road to the fort is improved, it can be of a lot of interest to the foreign visitors and tourists, particularly the British whose forefathers and their untamed courage made the construction of

such wonders possible. It seems that the British did not know the meaning of the word “impossible”. Nothing was beyond the reach of their strong will and undefeatable courage and determination.

Right above the mouth of this tunnel-hospital, there is an abandoned picket which is also said to be haunted and is therefore named as “Peryano Picket” (Ghost Picket). A Naib *Subedar* of the Khyber Rifles claimed that he had been to the picket at night but he was so frightened by the strange sounds of moaning and crying there that he never dared to go there again ever after.²

H. Woosnam Mills, writing in the last years of the 19th century, describes the fort as ‘a very rough, poor old fort, but absolutely impregnable without artillery and governing the Pass completely. The road by it is only 40 feet wide, and happens to be very slippery on account of projecting rocks. The mountain rises like a wall on each side and the fort looks straight down from an elevation of 3,174 feet above the sea level, whilst Jamrud at the entrance is 1,670 feet high.’ (Mills, 1996) Following this description of the road at Ali Masjid, many local writers have also given its width at about 15 yards but the fact is that the road through that portion of the Pass is now a two-lane road and a new road to the right of the old road, at a little height, has been constructed for the vehicles coming back to Peshawar. Although the two roads are not at an even height but the combined width of the two is probably not less than 45 yards (135 feet).³

² All the information given on this page are based on personal observations during author’s visit to the Khyber, March 11-12, 2007.

³ Personal observations and information collected during author’s visit to the Khyber, March 11-12, 2007.

Moorcraft and Trebeck, the two travellers and writers, visited the Khyber Pass area around the year 1820 and mention that there were ‘relics of a fortress and remains of stonewalls on a conical hill of about six hundred feet to the left’. (Moorcraft & Trebeck, 1977) This location is precisely the site of the Ali Masjid Fort, built by the Afghan ruler Dost Mohammad Khan much later than these two travellers passed through this area. But it signifies one thing; the Fort was built there by Dost Mohammad Khan due to the strategic importance of this place and the fact that there had been some sort of construction in the past, most probably a fort. The Fort was then rebuilt by the British in 1890.⁴

Although the Fort is described by several writers as an important military post that ‘governs the Pass’ but in fact it was of small value as a military position during the early British period due to the want of water and the fact that it is commanded by the adjacent heights. There used to be no water within the fort but the garrison might be supplied from a well to which there was a covered way. The water at Ali Masjid, however, though beautifully clear was very unwholesome, being impregnated with antimony as the spring there emerged from under a rock composed from the sulphuret of that metal. It appears that not only the water of the well that was supplied to the garrison in the fort but all the water in the area was so impregnated. From this or some other cause, the mortality by sickness of the British troops posted there in 1839 was frightful; of 2,442, no less than 243 died in fifty-seven days (Thornton, 1994).

The gateway of Ali Masjid Fort faces due south towards the hills above Chora. Exactly to the north lies the stupendous Rohtas Range, which is about 6,000 feet high (above the sea level). The side facing Ali Masjid rises up in sheer

⁴ “Khyber Agency”, [Khyber.org](http://www.khyber.org/pashtoplaces/khyber.shtml) (Online), <http://www.khyber.org/pashtoplaces/khyber.shtml>

cliffs 2,000 to 2,500 feet overhead. To the naked eye, there is no path visible which can take a human being to the highest crest of this ridge. Whenever a Viceroy of India or any other important personages paid a visit to Ali Masjid, a party of six or seven men of the Khyber Rifles was sent up to this crest to hold it for security reasons and to remain there until the visitor had moved away. In the spring of 1886, a party of the Khyber Rifles was seated on the ground sunning themselves by the gateway of Ali Masjid. The men had their own rifles, all muzzle-loaders, with a few Enfields and they started arguing whether a bullet fired from a rifle on the top of Rohtas would reach the gateway or not. Finally one of them was asked to go to the top and fire his rifle in the direction of the gateway of Ali Masjid Fort to see if the bullet reaches down or not. The man took up his rifle and after a laborious climb got to the crest. The bullet of the first shot was not traced but the second bullet, by accident, found the forehead of one of the onlookers at the gateway and killed him on the spot. There was no possibility of communicating between the marksman on the top and the onlookers down at the gateway by voice. So when the marksman came down, he was astonished to see what he had done and more astonished to find himself made a prisoner. Due to the accidental nature of the killing, he was probably helped later on by his own fellow guards to escape (Warburton, 1975).

The Ali Masjid Stupa

Apart from its Muslim Identity due to the Mosque of Ali, there are also ruins of a Buddhist Stupa near Ali Masjid, 21 miles to the west of Peshawar, situated on the summit of a small hill and surrounded by a series of stupas lying in ruins. The site was subjected to scientific excavation by General Cunningham's Assistant in 1879 and the result of these excavations was the discovery of 'important materials'. Some

idea of their original form and beauty could be had from the profuse figure decoration of their basis, which alone have survived to a certain extent (Salim, 1991).

These relics of Buddhist stupas and other monuments are the legacy of the Mauriya Dynasty (327-190 BC). The Khyber Pass had been the favourite route of the invaders of India from the western side but there have been backward movements through the Khyber Pass as well. The zealous Mauriya rulers of India like Kanishka and Asoka made it a mission of their life to spread the teachings of Buddhism as far as Bamyān, Balkh, Bukhara and Samarkand. The Khyber still has its due share of Buddhist monuments and their relics. The Ali Masjid Stupa is one of them. Although the Stupa has vanished, but its stone foundations are still there, very much visible from the road. According to a former Political Agent of Khyber Agency, somebody has raised a mud house structure on the site of that Stupa, 'preferring the open and sunny hilltop to the suffocation of the nearby caves from where he ultimately must have come out, like some wild burrowing animal'. (Khan, 2001)

Mohammad Shafi Sabir is of the view that it once housed a monastery and a temple. 'According to a tradition, when Lord Buddha had attained glory, he personally travelled through Peshawar to this spot in Khyber and spent many years in devotion and prayers in these mountains and caves of Khyber.⁵ Later on, Asoka made a stupa on the spot where Lord Buddha used to pray. The Chinese traveller Fahien himself came to the Khyber to visit this stupa (Sabir, 1966).

⁵ The tradition has no solid historically documented proof. It would not have been physically possible for Lord Buddha to be at all those places where there are his statues or Buddhist stupas and temples.

The Shpola Stupa or Khyber Tope

At a distance of some six miles from the Ali Masjid Stupa, going westward on the Peshawar-Landi Kotal road, there are ruins of another huge stupa on the 27th mile from Peshawar known as Shpola Stupa or Khyber Stupa, as it lies close to a village of the same name. It is also situated on a high hill, to the right of the road and above the railway near village *Ziarai*, from where one can enjoy a panoramic view of all the surrounding area. It was built in the 3rd or 4th century and was quite famous during the reign of the last Kushan rulers. The statues found here are now being placed at the Peshawar museum (Sabir, 1966).

The Stupa is built of massive limestone blocks with smaller stones intervening and with an inner core of rough rubble filling. The face seems to have been finished off with a coating of stucco which at places is more than an inch in thickness (Jaffar, 1946). The structure seems to have been very strong and there are coloured figures on the walls, painted in red and yellow colour. There is a huge dome on the top of this Stupa, which is about a 100 feet in diameter and 45 feet in height and a cornice is also built on it. Although it is as famous as the Ali Masjid Stupa but there is no mention of it in the accounts of the Chinese travellers (Sabir, 1966).

Dani has given more details about the structure of this Stupa in his book. He tells us that the 'spherical dome, which has been restored, stands on three tiered platform, the middle one of which shows some pilasters. It is decorated with stucco figures. At the foot of the Stupa, according to Prof. Dani, one can observe the unexcavated remains of a monastery. "The tall domed Stupa, although not described by any of the Chinese pilgrims, stands alone in a desolate place to remind the visitors that in about third or fourth century AD, the Khyber Pass was used by the Buddhists and they have left behind their

traces wherever water spring is now to be found" (Dani, 1997; Shah Nazar Khan, 2004).

The Shpola Stupa is an honoured relic that bears testimony to the zealous devotion of the Buddhists and their spirit of highest mission to spread their religion, even along difficult passes like the Khyber and proceed onward to Afghanistan and Central Asia. "It is this spirit that is entombed in the derelict Stupa that marks the Buddhist route through the Khyber Pass" (Dani, 1997).

In 1938, Rao Bahadur K. N. Dikshit, the Director General of Archaeology in India expressed his concern over the condition of this monument in a letter to the Political Agent of Khyber Agency. He had recently visited Khyber and he was of the view that Shpola Stupa is really in need of conservation and preservative measures. He writes in that letter, "The interior, which has been exposed by treasure hunters, will have to be filled up, the drum of the Stupa rebuilt in plain masonry where it has been ransacked and the area in which a number of votive stupas are to be seen examined and properly conserved."⁶ He expressed the hope that the work on the Stupa will not evoke any opposition from the tribesmen, rather it should be welcomed by them as it would give employment to a certain number of masons and workers.⁷ He requested for the permission of the Political Officer Khyber to commence the conservation work and the permission was granted by the Political Agent on July 6, 1938.⁸

⁶ Official letter from Director General Archives (India) to the Political Officer Khyber, No. 539/S, dated June 25, 1938, File No. 48D/VII, Serial No. 341, Bundle No. 36, Directorate of Archives and Libraries, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Peshawar.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Letter from Political Agent Khyber to the Director General Archives No. 3403, dated July 6, 1938 Peshawar, File No. 48D/VII, S. No. 241, Bundle No. 36, Office of the Political Agent Khyber Record,

After this restoration work in 1938, it was again subjected to callous and surreptitious excavations and pillage by the treasure hunters for the priceless statues and other precious historical relics (Khan, 2001). Recently, a local *malik* during the course of a fighting against his enemy went on top of the mound on which this Stupa is located to build a trench. During the construction of the trench, he found a relic chamber which contained 60 gold coins and a “Teak” of gold with ashes. Some other people of the nearby village have also found some idols near the Stupa. A tribal student of the same locality, who did his masters from Peshawar University, has written in his thesis that very often idols are found during the digging of foundations for the construction of the houses in the Khyber village.

Today, the Shpola Stupa or the Khyber Tope seems to be quite intact when seen from the southeast, but is in fact completely dilapidated on all other sides. Interestingly enough, the same condition of this Stupa was reported by Moorcraft and Trebeck in their travelogue written during the 1820s (Moorcraft & Trebeck, 1977).

In 1926, Captain W. D. Bowen of the 6th Gurkha Rifles, 1st Indian Infantry Brigade while writing to his superiors reported the finding of the site of Graeco-Buddhist Shrine, 300 yards north east of village Sultan Khel, constructed in his estimation around 120 AD.⁹ As Sultan Khel and Khyber are situated close to each other, it is not certain whether this Graeco-Buddhist Shrine mentioned by Captain Bowen is the same known as Khyber Tope or Shpola Stupa, or it's a

separate structure. However, Prof. Dani has mentioned the thickly populated village of Sultan Khel and the Railway station there but he has not mentioned the presence of any Buddhist relic in the vicinity. It's just possible that the above-mentioned shrine is none other but the Shpola Stupa or the Khyber Tope. A letter from J. W. Thomson Glover, the Political Agent Khyber to the Secretary to the Government of NWFP Transferred Department, dated October 4, 1932, however, clearly indicates that the Shpola Stupa and the Sultan Khel Buddhist relics is one and the same site.¹⁰

The Landi Kotal Fort

The Landi Kotal Fort was constructed in 1889 and it accommodates the Head Quarters of the Khyber Rifles. It spreads over a vast area and has four different gates – the Peshawar Gate, the Torkham Gate, the Shilman Gate and the Stadium Gate. It is actually not a fort but a full-fledged military cantonment, accommodating not only the Khyber Rifles but also the regular units of the Pakistan Army, offices of the Inter Services Intelligence Agency (ISI) and the Intelligence Bureau (IB).

In the Landi Kotal Fort, not many of the original constructions have survived and those buildings which have defied the cruelties of time and weather are almost abandoned. Some, however, are still used for different purposes.

The most impressive part of the Cantonment at Landi Kotal is the Khyber Rifles Officers' Mess. The building has been reconstructed during the times of Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto on the same location where the original building

Directorate of Archives and Libraries, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Peshawar.

⁹ Letter No. nil, dated April 26, 1826, Landi Kotal, File No. 49D/VII, S. No. 222, Bundle No. 33, Office of the Political Agent Khyber, Directorate of Archives and Libraries, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Peshawar.

¹⁰ Lt. Colonel J. W. Thomson Glover, Political Agent Khyber to the Secretary to the Government of NWFP (Transferred Department), No. 4735, dated October 4, 1932, Peshawar, File No. 48D/VII, S. No. 241, Bundle No. 36, Office of the Political Agent Khyber, Directorate of Archives and Libraries, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Peshawar.

stood. The interior of the building is simple but impressive. On the ground floor are three big halls; one used as a Conference Room, another as Guest Room and the third as Dining Hall where refreshments are served to the guests and foreign delegates visiting the Mess. To the right of the main entrance into the Mess are several rooms and a doorway in front of them. Two of these rooms have been converted into galleries displaying historical pictures of dignitaries and world leaders who visited the Pass and the Khyber Rifles Officers' Mess.

There are also Visitors Books, no less than eight in number, placed in one of these two galleries containing the autographs and comments of all important national and international visitors, each covering a specific period between the years 1900 till present. The books have been signed by some of the most famous and influential world leaders and celebrities who visited the Khyber Pass and the Khyber Rifles Officers' Mess like Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip of United Kingdom, Princess Diana and Princess Anne, General Douglas Mac Arthur of United States, Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Fatima Jinnah, Liaqat Ali Khan, former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Ghulam Mohammad, the former Governor General of Pakistan, John F. Kennedy and Jacqueline Kennedy, Ayub Khan, the former President of Pakistan, General Mohammad Yahya Khan, another former President, Mohammad Raza Shah Pehlvi, the former Shah of Iran, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Chaudhry Fazal Elahi, the former President, Richard M. Nixon and Mrs. Nixon, George W. Bush (Sr.) and Mrs. Barbara Bush (they visited the Pass when Bush was the Vice President of United States), General Mohammad Ziaul Haq, General John P. Abizaid of the United States Army, and scores of other important world leaders.

Princess Diana spent a few hours in one of the rooms in the left corner of the ground floor, since then named as 'Diana Room'. Princess Anne of United Kingdom had a night stay at the same room when she visited the Pass.¹¹

In one of these galleries, the sofa set used by Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Fatima Jinnah during their visit to the Khyber Rifles Officers Mess on April 14, 1948 is on display, placed in a glass showcase.

Outside the two galleries, pictures of all the Commandants of the Khyber Rifles are displayed in chronological order. Among them are some very historical pictures of Col. Robert Warburton and Nawab Sir Mohammad Aslam Khan with his two sons.

On the first floor, there are several rooms but four of them are lavishly furnished and available totally free of cost to the official guests and on a nominal payment to all the unofficial guests who want a night-stay in the Mess building. Three of these rooms are named Jamrud Room, Michni Room and Shilman Room, while the fourth is a TV Room where the guests can sit, gossip and enjoy watching TV.

Apart from this, there are four wonders in the Khyber Rifles Officers' Mess which are a must see for every visitor. In the well maintained lawn right in front of the Mess building is installed the Sun Dial, a watch that shows correct time with the help of the rays of sunlight falling on a steel plate marked with lines representing months, hours and minutes. This is the only working Sun Dial in the world, installed in 1923 and still giving accurate time.

¹¹ Interview with Col. Qaisar Alam Khan, Commandant Khyber Rifles at Khyber Rifles Mess, Headquarters Khyber Rifles, Landi Kotal, Khyber Agency, March 11, 2007.

The second wonder is an ‘Arrested Tree’. The wooden plaque posted next to it gives the story of its arrest. One fine evening, the British Officers of the Khyber Rifles were having their drinks in the lawn when one of them suddenly felt the tree was moving. He ordered the tree to halt and when it defied the orders, he asked the soldiers to ‘arrest the tree’. The tree is in chains ever-since. The exact date of this event and names of the officers who ordered the arrest of the tree are not known to anyone or were probably deliberately removed from the official files later on.

Across the lawn, right in front of these two wonders, is Micky’s Grave. Micky was a puppy of Sir George Roos Keppel, a former Commandant of the Khyber Rifles (1900-1912). Micky was born on May 4, 1898 and died on August 3 1904. Roos Keppel’s love for Micky made him bury the puppy at the side of the main lawn in front of the Officers Mess.¹²

The fourth worth-seeing part of the Khyber Rifles Officers’ Mess is the ‘Mathra Village’, a small heritage museum depicting the scene of a traditional Pathan village where rare and extinct household items and equipments like the loom, the hand grind-mill, the carpet loom, and several other things associated with the traditional Pathan way of life are exhibited. In the Mathra House¹³, there is also a ‘Nawey Kota’ (bride’s room), a ‘Hujra’ (the guest house) and Palwasha’s Hall (the traditional Pathan kitchen and dining place where the family members assemble to have their meal). There is also the

¹² Information collected from the Staff of the Khyber Rifles Officers’ Mess during author’s visit to the Khyber Pass, March 10, 2007.

¹³ Mathra House is named after the native village of Col. Qaisar Alam Khan, Commandant Khyber Rifles at the time of the author’s visit, at the Warsak Road in Peshawar. Col. Qaisar Alam was taking a deep interest in giving the Khyber Rifles Officers’ Mess a traditional and cultural look.

Alishba Bazaar¹⁴, a souvenir shop where the visitors can buy different kind of souvenirs as a reminder of their visit to the Khyber Pass.

Next to the Mathra Village is a tented passage where different uniforms and weapons used by the Khyber Rifles in different ages since its creation till present are displayed. It also displays some of the traditional local dresses of the area and the musical instruments more popular in the Pathan areas. The foreign and important local visitors and delegations of visitors are also entertained by the *Jawans* of the Khyber Rifles with the traditional local dances, of which the Khattak dance is perhaps more popular.

The Khyber Rifles Officers’ Mess is a representative of the Pathan tradition and culture. It not only contains stalls giving information about the Pathan culture but the officers and *jawans* of the Khyber Rifles practically demonstrate the Pukhtoon traditions like *Melmastiya* (hospitality) by welcoming the guests with traditional cultural fervor and entertaining them lavishly with food, music and dance.

The Killing Cell of Taimur (Tamerlane) and Kafir Kot

Slightly to the left of Michni post on the hilltop are two small fortress type constructions named as North Kafir Kot and South Kafir Kot, situated at some distance from each other and connected by a wall. The construction is said to be of Second century BC but was further improved by the Mughal Emperor Akbar during the 16th century.¹⁵

¹⁴ Palwasha’s Hall and Alishba Bazaar are named after the two little daughters of Col. Qaisar Alam.

¹⁵ Personal observations and information collected during author’s visit to the Khyber, March 11-12, 2007.

Some believe that it was the Killing cell of Taimur Lang (Tamerlane). It is a unique kind of a torture and killing cell. It is said that it worked like a mincing machine; prisoners were thrown into it at the top and when their bodies would reach the lowest point, they would be completely minced and chopped into pieces.

Just a little ahead of this point, overlooking Landi Khana and situated on a high rock are the ruins of an old fort at Charbagh near Torkham, also called 'Kafir Kot' or 'Heathens' Castle', presumably because it was inhabited by the 'non-believers'. The remains of the Hindu period can still be seen in these ruins. It is believed to have been built by Asoka. Commanding a strategic point at the very mouth of the Pass on the western side, it could safely be used as a base for military operations against the invading armies from the west (Jaffar, 1946).

According to Dani, this fort shaped building above Torkham almost at the terminating point of the Pakistani territory was built by the Huns, who followed the Turki Shahi rulers in 8th century AD and who made Kabul their summer capital and Hund on the Indus their winter capital. The Khyber Pass connected these two capitals of the Huns. They built a series of hill forts all over the region for defense, one of which was the 'Kafir Kot' (Dani, 1997).

These historic and archaeological sites along the Khyber Pass are now at the mercy of time, climate, and local people. So far, the local people were less interested in excavations of such archaeological sites, rather they were averse to even thinking of them as these were pagan relics. But with the increasing commercial importance of Gandhara artifacts and other archaeological relics, the religious prejudice has been toned down by pragmatic considerations. Hence such sites are no longer safe from pilferage if not outright loot and plunder (Khan, 2001).

The pillage and destruction of these monuments had started as early as their discovery. On August 10, 1929, the Political Agent Khyber circulated a confidential note regarding the illicit export of Buddhist relics from the Khyber Pass area. He had received the information that a consignment of Buddhist relics would be exported to India in a few days. The political authorities at Jamrud were directed to be alert and look out accordingly. As a result, a number of people were detained at Jamrud with more than 130 images. They included both local people and two Hindus of Peshawar named Lal Chand and Rup Lal. The images were allegedly excavated from the Sultan Khel Buddhist site and were sold to two Hindu goldsmiths in *Andar Sheher* bazaar Peshawar.¹⁶

In 1932, Lt. Colonel J. W. Thomson Glover suggested to the Secretary to the Government of NWFP (Transferred Department) that the Buddhist Stupa at Shpola, Sultan Khel village in Khyber and Kafir Kot near Bagh village above Torkham are of sufficient historical importance to be commemorated by tablets or noted in the Government records of buildings of historical and archaeological interest.¹⁷

Conclusion

The historic and archaeological sites along the Khyber Pass have survived all the adversities of time, apathy of man and harshness of weather but they need to be preserved or else they would be lost forever like the statues of Buddha at Bamiyan in Afghanistan. Luckily, the forts in the Khyber Pass are still in very good shape as they are under the control and care of Pakistan

¹⁶ Political Agent Khyber's Confidential note dated October 19, 1929, File No. 49D/VII, S. No. 222, Bundle No. 33, Office of the Political Agent Khyber, Directorate of Archives and Libraries, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Peshawar.

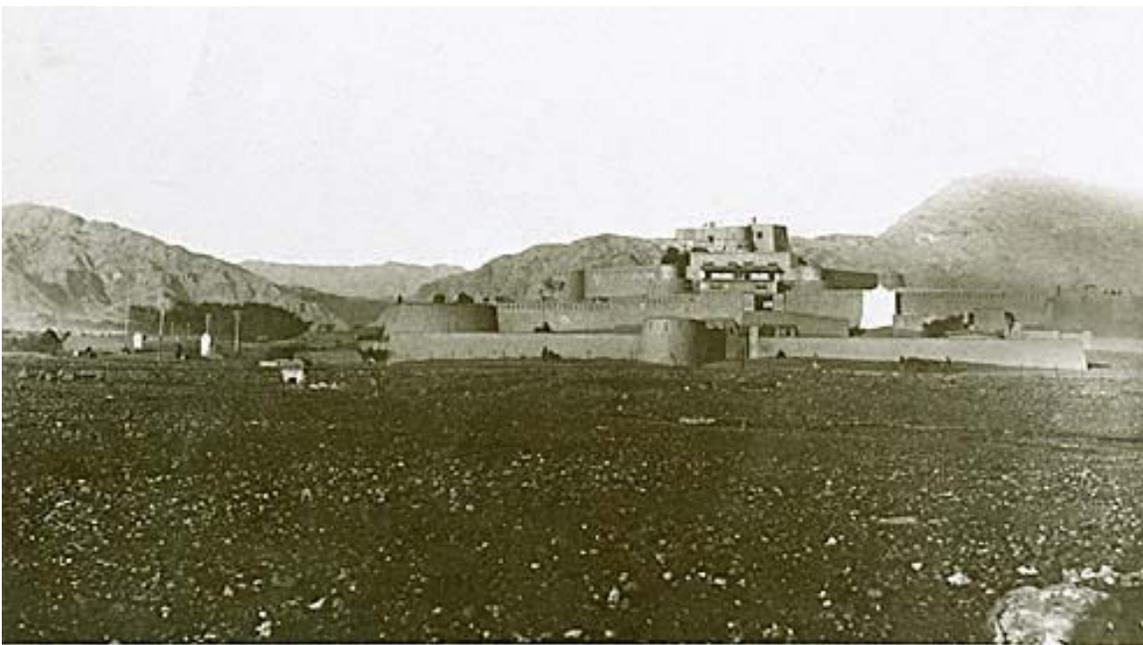
¹⁷ Lt. Colonel J. W. Thomson Glover, Political Agent Khyber to the Secretary to the Government of NWFP, No. 4735, dated October 4, 1932.

Army and the Frontier Corps. As long as they hold their strategic importance they will be respected and kept in good shape and it seems they would never lose their importance. However, the two stupas and other archaeological treasures like the Killing Cell of Taimur are not as well kept as they should have been. Had they been anywhere else in a country mindful and aware of their worth, these monuments would have been earning millions of dollars worth foreign exchange as tourist spots.

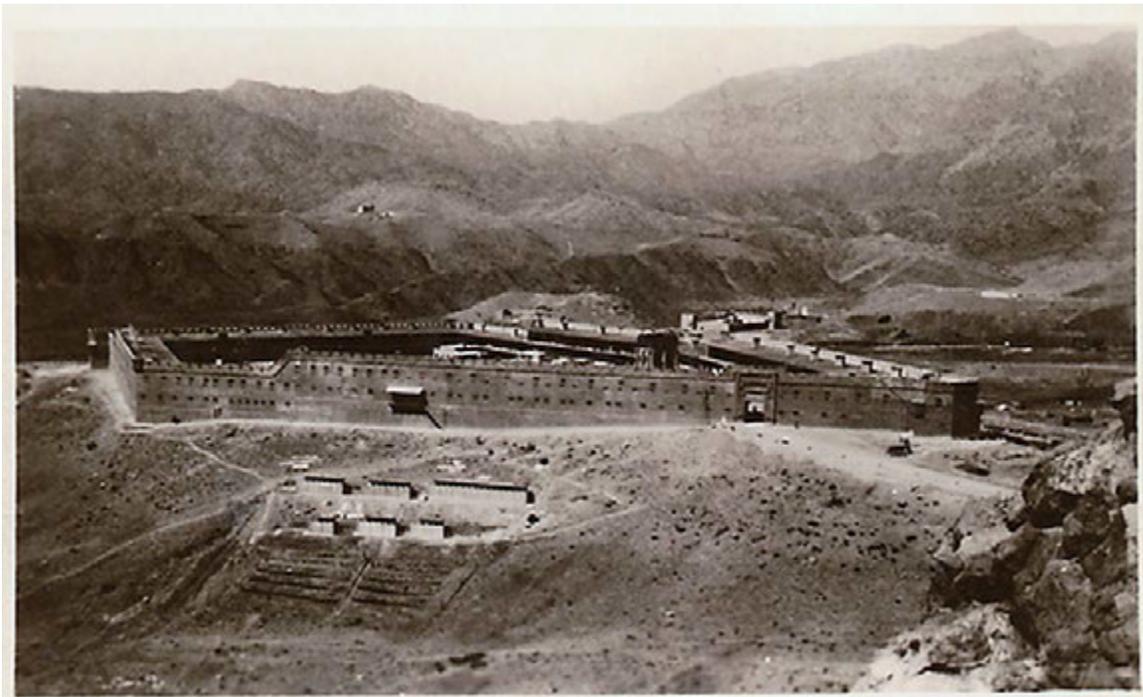
The suggestions of Lt. Colonel J. W. Thomson Glover to the Government of the then NWFP in 1932 are still as valid and important as they were 80 years ago. These treasures need immediate attention or else they would be lost forever. Let the world know about them and let the students of history and archaeology be motivated to dig out more facts about these treasures of the past. Let this paper be an appetizer for researchers interested in this area.

Illustrations

Aerial View of Ali Masjid in 1919



A View of the Jamrud Fort in 1920



Shahgai Fort during the British Period



Darbar-i-Ali in the Mosque at Ali Masjid



The Sphola Stupa or Khyber Tope



The Sphola Stupa or Khyber Tope: a close up view

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