

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

ECHOES FROM THE DUST: REVIVING THE NEGLECTED HERITAGE OF DISTRICT DIR LOWER KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA

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Osama Jan, Hazrat Umar, Mr. Nangyalay Khan, Prof. Dr. Arab Naz. Echoes From The Dust: Reviving the Neglected Heritage Of District Dir Lower Khyber Pakhtunkhwa-- Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 20(2), 2211-2231. ISSN 1567-214x

Keyword: Heritage, Archaeological Sites, Excavation, Preservation, History, Culture, Civilization.

ABSTRACT

Within the realm of heritage, a multitude of aspects come to light. Among these, Archaeological sites emerge as distinct repositories of cultural and historical importance, serving as windows into the fascinating stories of past societies and civilizations. Archaeologists and stakeholders globally embark on endeavors to excavate, study, and preserve these invaluable sites, aiming to enrich our understanding of the past and safeguard cultural heritage for posterity. Among this global pursuit, the region of District Dir Lower emerges as a unique cradle of historical heritage, hidden in mysterious whispers from centuries past, nestled within the majestic landscape of Pakistan, District Dir Lower stands as a testament to the passage of time, encompassing a diverse and rich history spanning prehistoric, protohistoric, and historic periods. A nexus of the renowned Gandhara Civilization, this region holds traces of Alexander the Great historical conquests, ancient Buddhist and Hindu relics, bearing witness to a fascinating tapestry of history. Despite its illustrious past, District Dir Lower faces the poignant reality of neglect, obscuring its priceless archaeological legacy. This paper embarks on exploration of neglected archaeological treasures, seeking to unveil the factors behind their neglect. Through interviews and observations, this paper unravels the challenges these sites face including lack of funding, limited awareness, and bureaucratic hurdles. This research echoes a call to action,

urging collaboration to revive these forgotten echoes of time and safeguard our cultural heritage.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Heritage encompasses a diverse range of elements, and within this complex network, archaeological sites stand as timeless witnesses to the rich tapestry of our collective cultural heritage. They offer captivating glimpses into the lives, custom, and achievement of past societies and civilization. As relics of the past, these sites carry paramount significance worldwide, holding keys to unlocking the enigmatic stories of human history (Whalen, 2012). After recognizing the immense importance of these heritage, archaeologists and stakeholders actively engage in the heritage management to excavate study, and preserve these invaluable sites, with the shared goal of deepening our understanding of the past and ensuring the protection of cultural heritage for future generations (Khan S. , 2021). In the global context of archaeological exploration, the region of District Dir Lower, Pakistan, emerges as a true gem, cradling a wealth of historical heritage veiled in enigmatic whispers from centuries past. Nestled within the majestic landscape of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan, holds its position as one of the notable districts in the region. This district shares its borders with Swat, Malakand, Bajaur, Dir Upper, and Afghanistan, making it a pivotal location. Dir Lower comprises seven tehsils, each bearing its unique significance. The tehsils are Adinzai, Timergara, Balambat, Khal, Lal Qala, Munda, and SamarBagh, each contributing to the district's cultural diversity and historical legacy (Khan, Alam, & Manzoor, 2021). The whole District serves as a compelling testament to the passage of time, preserving a diverse and rich history that spans prehistoric to historic periods (Ali, Rahman, Young, & Zahir, 2010).

Since ancient times, Dir has remained a captivating testament to the passage of time, encompassing a diverse history spanning several millennia. As an epicenter of the renowned Gandhara civilization, traces of Alexander the Great's conquests, ancient Buddhist and Hindu relics, and remnants of military watchtowers unveil a captivating tapestry of history. Moreover, as a hub of history, Dir's lands welcomed Aryans, Achaemenids, Greeks, Scythians, Parthians, Kushanas, Hunas, Turks, Mongols, and the Mughals, leaving indelible marks on its heritage (Wahab, 2012). These echoes of the past, visible on every mound in the Dir Lower district, beckon us to unravel the enigmatic stories of ancient civilizations. Despite its illustrious past, District Dir Lower faces the poignant reality of neglect, which obscures its priceless archaeological legacy. This unfortunate circumstance veils a treasure trove of historical riches spanning ages of human civilization. The region boasts several hundreds of archaeological sites (Ali, Rahman, Young, & Zahir, 2010) each holding the potential to unlock the mysteries of the past. Unfortunately, while some of these sites have been excavated and conserved, others are merely mentioned in archaeological surveys, and a significant number still remain unexplored. These unexplored sites face various threats and challenges, leading to their gradual decay. The potential consequence of this neglect is the irreversible loss of historical knowledge and a significant part of our collective history. The consequence of this neglect is profound, as the proper settlement from prehistory to the present becomes increasingly difficult

to understand. The enigmatic echoes of the past that lie within these untouched sites yearn to share their stories, but their voices remain stifled by the passage of time (Rahman L. u., 2009). Considering the immense importance of the locality, this research focuses on exploring the historical heritage of District Dir Lower. It will emphasize the urgent need for its preservation. By safeguarding these archaeological treasures, this effort will not only open new avenues for archaeologists to work but will also provide rich opportunities for tourists, historians, and other stakeholders to comprehend human history, culture, and civilization. This understanding will be preserved for the study and enlightenment of generations to come.

Geography and Topography of District Dir Lower

District Dir Lower, a historically significant region in the north-west of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, is adorned with captivating geography and topography. Spanning an area of approximately 1585 square kilometers, the district lies between 34°-37' to 35°-07' north latitudes and 71°-31' to 72°-14' east longitudes. Bordered by Upper Dir and Chitral to the north, Swat to the east, Malakand Agency to the south, and Bajaur Agency and Afghanistan to the west, it stands as a testament to the passage of time, veiled in enigmatic whispers of history. The landscape of District Dir Lower is dominated by an intricate network of mountains, ranging in elevation, and encircled by the imposing southern slopes of the Hindu Kush ranges, stretching in a north-south direction. Towering at the northern end, the highest peak reaches 3000 meters, while the central part varies in height between 2000 and 1800 meters. As the terrain gently descends towards the south, the confluence of Rivers Swat and Panjkora welcomes fertile valleys enriched with rivers and streams that nurture thriving agriculture. In these valleys, annual crops flourish, contributing to the region's cultural diversity (Rahman L. u., 2009).

Historical Background of the Region

The nomenclature of Dir has its origins in ancient times, Dir was known by a multitude of names, including Goraiy, Yaghistan, Biloristan, and Masaga (Haq & Rahman, 2014). However, it was during the era of Buddhist civilization in the Panjkora valley that the name "Dir" first appeared (Shahid, 2018). In the Arabic language, "Dir" translates to "Monastery," signifying the Buddhist monastic establishments constructed along the banks of the Panjkora River. Another notable appellation was "Kafiristan," (Haq & Rahman, 2014) denoting the land of non-Muslims. This name emerged during the reign of the Kafir dynasty, which ruled the Kohistan region of Dir valley from the 10th to the 15th century AD. It was not until the 15th century AD that the Pashtuns of the Yosafazai Tribe conquered the area and bestowed upon it the name "Dir." Some sources suggest that the name "Dir" is derived from the Persian word "dair," meaning "far off" or "hard to reach." This epithet was attributed to the region due to its remote location (Haq & Rahman, 2014). Each change in name signifies a shift in ruler ship, culture, and era. Through these diverse appellations, Dir's historical identity is intricately woven, reflecting the dynamic tapestry of civilizations that have traversed its landscapes over the centuries.

According to (Rahman L. u., 2009), the history of District Dir traces back to the Paleolithic era, unearthing remnants of ancient life and revealing insights into the region's evolution. The area holds significance for its stone artifacts that span various periods, including the Middle Paleolithic and Upper Paleolithic, shedding light on the lives of its past inhabitants. These archaeological findings underscore the rich historical narrative that has unfolded over millennia. Transitioning into Protohistory, District Dir unveils its intriguing grave culture, dating back to the middle of the second millennium B.C. Cemeteries discovered in Timergara and Balambat along the Panjkora River's banks provide a glimpse into the lives of the ancient Aryans who inhabited the region. Expertly led by Ahmad Hassan Dani from the Department of Archaeology at the University of Peshawar, excavations at these sites unearthed numerous graves, each containing diverse burials and an array of grave objects (Dani, Durrani, Rahman, & Sharif, 1964).

As time progressed, the region's historical journey transitioned from the Protohistoric phase to the historic period. After the arrival of Aryans, the entire Gandhara Region, including Dir, came under the influence of the Persian Empire in 522 BC. The remnants of Fire Temples along the banks of the Panjkora River in the valley's lower parts serve as evidence of the Achaemenian Civilization's footprint in the area (Haq & Rahman, 2014). Subsequently, in 327 BC, the region witnessed the victorious conquest by the Greeks, led by Alexander the Great (Moritani & Zahir, 2018). A Macedonian invader, Alexander the Great entered Dir Valley from Jalalabad, Afghanistan, passing through the Bajaur Agency (Caroe, 1958). He skillfully crossed the Panjkora River, making his way into Talash Valley, known in ancient times as Masaga, the valley's capital (Caroe, 1958). Remarkably, Alexander chose the hilly path along the right side of the main Talash Grant Trunk Road towards Chakdara. His enduring legacy remains in both tangible heritage and oral folklore traditions. When Alexander reached Gumbat Village, he took respite atop a mound known as Dobe (Gumbat). According to local folklore, elders of the valley recount that during his stay, Alexander was struck in the leg by an arrow shot by a woman. This injury significantly impacted his leg but the exact location of his wound remains a subject of debate, as each villager and historian carries their own version of the story. However, in this context, Olaf Caroe wrote that when Alexander got injured, he smiled at a doctor during his treatment at Katkala (Caroe, 1958). This statement, in fact, indicates that Alexander's injury likely occurred prior to reaching Katkala, possibly in the vicinity of Gumbat village, which is situated a few kilometers before the Katkala pass. Continuing his expedition, Alexander's path led to Macho Valley, a small village situated 16 kilometers from Timergara city along the Chakdara road (Dani A. H., *Environs of Chakdara*, 1968). The village stands at the base of a hill, about a mile away from the Talash road. Four ruins still bear witness to his presence here, as per local tradition. Moving onwards, the journey took Alexander to Katkala, before he eventually departed the Dir Valley. From there, he reached Bazira and eventually Ora Swat through Chakdara, marking the completion of his momentous exploration. The echoes of Alexander's exploits linger in the

annals of history, intertwining with the fabric of Dir Valley's rich heritage (Rahman A. , New Light on Ancient Gandhara, 2018).

In the aftermath of the Greek Empire's decline, the region saw a succession of different ruling powers, including the Scythians, Parthians, Kushanas, Hunas, and Hindu Shahi dynasties. This era extended until the year 998 AD when the region was conquered by Muslim forces. The influence of Mongol emperor Timur was felt in 1369 AD, followed by the emergence of the Yousafzai tribe from Afghanistan. Key leaders like Malak Ahmad, Sheikh Mali, and Shah Mansoor played pivotal roles in battles and leadership, establishing a period of relative peace and prosperity (Spain, 1963).

Later on, the 17th century marked a significant turning point with the advent of Khanism in the Dir valley, introduced by Akhund Ilyas Baba of the Maly Zai Tribe. A series of subsequent leaders, including Malak Ahmad's descendants, shaped the region's governance. By the 19th century, the power dynamics shifted, with Khan Sharif Khan, aided by Umara Khan of Jandool, taking center stage. The region was characterized by conflicts, battles, and shifting allegiances, including Umara Khan's notable rise in the neighboring areas. Thereafter, the advent of Nawabism saw the involvement of the British and marked a new phase for Dir. Sharif Khan's rule as the first Nawab was marked by both challenges and conflicts. His successors, including Chara Nawab and Shah Jehan Khan, navigated complex power struggles and external pressures. However, it was after the arrest of Shah Jehan Khan in 1969 that Dir began to witness transformation, the district was integrated into Pakistan, heralding a new era for the region.(Shahid, 2018).

The Genesis and Progression of Archaeological Activities in Dir Lower

Archaeological activity in Lower Dir district has had a distinctive trajectory compared to other parts of Pakistan. Each region of the country has its own unique story to tell when it comes to the history of exploration and excavation(Sardar, Archaeology of Pakistan, 2022). In Pakistan, mostly archaeological pursuits began with antiquarians collecting coins and ancient artifacts as early as the 17th-18th century(Sardar, Origin of Archaeological Research Activities in Pakistan, 2019). Over time, several important institutions were established, such as the Asiatic Society founded in 1784 by Sir William Jones(Khan R. , 2018). The Asiatic Society discovered and documented several thousand coins, publishing their findings. Then, in 1861, the Archaeological Survey of India was established and tasked with archaeological research, as well as conservation and preservation of cultural and historical sites across the Indian subcontinent (Khan Z. , 2016).

In Lower Dir, Undoubtedly, collecting coins was a cherished hobby among the local enthusiasts in the past. This tradition continues today, and we can see it in our communities. However, according to (Naz & Sardar, 2020)the archaeological exploration and documentation in Dir lower begun in 19th century. During that time, there was a growing interest in uncovering underground treasures. Indo-Pak was under British rule, while the Sikh Empire held sway in the Punjab region(Talbot, 2008). Both British and Sikh

officials were intrigued by the cultural heritage of Gandhara civilization and its regions like Peshawar valley, Swat, Dir, and Bajaur. Among of these, Mons A. Court, a Military General under Maharaja Ranjit Singh, explored Malakand's archaeological sites. Similarly, British explorers like James Abbot, Major H.G. Raverty, H.W. Bellew, and H.A. Dean visited Dir and Swat to identify the footprints of Alexander the Great (Naz & Sardar, 2020). Later on, after Pakistan gained independence in 1947, the Department of Archaeology at the University of Peshawar initiated its program of excavations in the region. The first excavation was carried out in 1963-64. Prior to this, Lower Dir's archaeological heritage had not been systematically studied or documented. The Peshawar University team made the initial identifications of ancient sites and unearthed artifacts that provided clues into the area's history. Their work paved the way for subsequent teams of archaeologists in the decades that followed (Ahmad, 2023).

This initial excavation took place from 1963 to 1965 in Timergara, which revealed a significant Protohistoric Cemetery that brightened the fascinating Gandhara Grave Culture. This archaeological endeavor was a collaborative effort between the Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar and the Government of Pakistan's Department of Archaeology (Dani A. H., Timergara and Gandhara Grave Culture: Introduction, 1967). The excavation sites exposed three distinct historical periods, each characterized by unique burial rituals. The first period involved complete inflexed burials, while the second period showcased the interment of burnt bones or ashes. In the third period, a practice of fractional burial emerged. Notably, the first two periods correspond to the Bronze Age, while the last period belongs to the Iron Age, spanning from the 16th century BC to the 5th century BC. Understanding the sequential arrangement of the sites, A.H. Dani employed a multifaceted approach to accurately date these sites. His methodology included radiocarbon dating, mortuary archaeology, ceramic analysis, and a comprehensive study of ancient literature. Drawing from these diverse sources, Dani dated the first period of Timergara 1 from the 16th to the 13th century BC. Periods 2 and 3 were determined to range from the 12th to 10th century BC and the 9th to 6th century BC, respectively (Zahir, 2016).

In a simultaneous effort, the same Department undertook another excavation near the Punjkora River, in Balambat sites. These two locations, Balambat and Timergara, now stand as contrasting urban centers within Lower Dir District. The exploration began when Mr. F.A. Durrani initiated a trial trench in 1965. To comprehensively understand the settlement, a full-scale excavation was launched in 1966, led by Mr. Abdur Rahman, Mr. Sardar Muhammad, and Mohammad Sharif. Following the excavation, the researchers identified four distinct periods of historical significance. The first period aligns with the second period of the Timergara Grave Excavation. The second period corresponds to the third period of Timergara's history. The third period is associated with the Achaemenian era, dating from the 6th to the 4th century BC. Lastly, the final period abruptly concluded with no survival remains (Dani A. H., 1967).

In 1966, the same Department, led by Ahmad Hasan Dani, embarked on another exciting excavation. F.A. Durrani supervised the sites, with Mr. Sardar Muhammad Khan and students from the Department of Archaeology. Later, Mr. Sardar Muhammad Khan continued the dig, along with students. They focused their efforts on Andandheri, a central spot in the Adinzai plain, located about seven kilometers north of Chakdara, a mile south of the village Uchh, and a short distance east of the main road between Chakdara and Dir. The excavation revealed three distinct structures, the Main Stupa, the Votive Stupas, and the Monastic Area, forming an important Buddhist complex. Throughout the dig, they identified three main periods of construction, each with its own significance. The earliest period belonged to the time of Wima Kadphises and Soter Megar, prominent rulers of the Kushana dynasty. The coins found in the site's layers helped date this phase to the late 1st century AD and the early 2nd century AD. Moving on to Period II, which corresponded to the 3rd century AD, it aligned with the reigns of Kanishka III and Vasudeva. Coins again played a role in confirming this era. Finally, Period III emerged during the late 3rd and early 4th centuries AD, a time connected to the Shaka Dynasty (Dani A. H., *Excavation at Andandheri*, 1968).

During the same years, the Department carried out another excavation, this time in Chatpat. Chatpat, a small village, sits about a mile and a half away from Chakdara and is just five furlongs from the main Chakdara-Dir road. This site also belongs to the Buddhist era. The excavation at Chatpat unveiled a story spanning three distinct periods. The earliest period belongs to the Scytho-Parthian and early Kushan times. It's a significant piece of evidence suggesting that these Buddhist sites were established in the 1st century AD. This conclusion was drawn from pottery findings and the discovery of Kharoshti inscriptions. In the second period, numerous square-shaped votive stupas were uncovered. However, there is no internal evidence to pinpoint an exact date for these constructions. Unfortunately, the third period remains enigmatic and could not be definitively identified (Dani A. H., *Excavation at Chatpat*, 1968).

It is important to highlight that between 1960 and 1970, a significant portion of Dir lower underwent excavation and exploration. As archaeological efforts persisted in the region, another site called Damkot came into focus. This site's exploration unveiled a timeline stretching from the 1st millennium BC up until the period when the British occupied the region (Rahman A. , *Excavation at Damkot*, 1968). Additionally Bambolai Site were explored, not far from the Chakdara-Aspan road. Imagine uncovering clues about how Buddhists used to practice their religion. They found important things like Main Stupas and spaces where monks lived. Then, they looked at the Jabagai Stupa, about four miles from Chakdara. It was like stepping into a time when Buddhists were around. The Ramora site was another stop on this journey, along the Chakdara-Shamozai road. It's like a story told by the remains of old buildings. Sadly, some sites got messed up by people digging where they shouldn't. But the team still managed to find sculptures that taught us about ancient art. Next up was the Kamal Khan China site near Shawa village. There was this really big wall that stood for a long, long time. It's like a giant reminder of the past.

They went to Talash Valley too, hoping to find more treasures. Even though they did not dig up everything, they still found cool stuff. Like Machowa, which is now called Macho? It is a village in Talash, and they found out it was inhabited a long time ago. Amlokdara Village also had a story to tell – from the time of Buddhism to when the Hindu Shahi period began. And in Gumbat Village, there was a Hindu Temple that everyone was amazed by. As the adventure continued, they reached the Shamshikhan site. It was like discovering old Buddhist Stupas that whispered secrets from the past. And even though not everything was dug up in Talash Valley, they still found interesting places. All these places have stories to tell, and they are still calling out to anyone who wants to uncover history's mysteries (Dani A. H., *Environs of Chakdara*, 1968).

Regrettably, post-1970 witnessed a decline in archaeological excavations and explorations within Dir lower. However, scholarly discussions persisted, and both individual researchers and the Department continued to conduct archaeological surveys in the region. Notably, a comprehensive archaeological survey was undertaken in October-November 2005, orchestrated by a collaboration between archaeologists from Hazara University, Peshawar, and Leicester. This particular survey not only unveiled previously excavated sites but also made a significant contribution by illuminating 294 additional archaeological sites in Dir Lower. It is important to recognize that Dir Lower encompasses a vast district; hence, the survey focused on key areas rather than attempting to cover the entire expanse. The survey brought to the forefront a multitude of ancient pre-Muslim cemeteries, providing insights into early Islamic burials. Additionally, it unveiled sites of early historic significance, shedding light on the emergence of Buddhism in the region. The survey also documented a number of Hindu Shahi sites, marking their historical presence. Furthermore, the survey delved into Islamic sites, particularly those from the Mughal period, and identified relics from the British colonial era. This robust archaeological survey marked a significant undertaking after a considerable hiatus, adding a fresh layer of understanding to the historical landscape of the region (Ali, Rahman, Young, & Zahir, 2010).

In 2009, Lutf ur Rahman published a paper in the *Ancient Pakistan Journal*, shedding light on the Anderi prehistoric site located in Malakand valley in the north-west of Timergara about two km from Balambat. The Anderi prehistoric site yielded valuable insights into the Stone Age history of the Dir region in Pakistan. The site showcased artifacts from the Middle Paleolithic, Upper Paleolithic, and Mesolithic periods. Tools made from greenish chert, grey rocks, and other materials were discovered (Rahman L. u., 2009).

Study Rationale

Archaeological sites play a vital role, carrying information and evidence about a region's past inhabitants (Verma, Singh, & Dimri, 2020). These sites offer glimpses into the lives of those who once lived there. Therefore, the excavation and preservation of these sites hold significance for continued research and benefit of future generation (Yoffee & Fowles, 2012). In alignment with this objective, this paper delves into the exploration of the

abundant archaeological sites within the District Dir Lower. The current research study endeavors to address the neglected archaeological heritage of the region. It seeks to illuminate the factors contributing to the disregard of these sites and aims to propose strategies and recommendations for their revival and sustainable management. This comprehensive approach aims to ensure the preservation and understanding of these invaluable remnants of history.

Further, this study is driven by the belief that reconnecting with these forgotten sites can provide profound insights into the region's rich cultural heritage. By resurrecting these echoes from the past, this research aims to empower present and future generations with a tangible link to their roots, fostering a sense of belongingness and identity for restoration as well as dissemination.

The study also recognizes the untapped potential for local economic growth and community engagement. Neglected archaeological sites, once restored to their former glory, have the potential to attract tourists, researchers, and enthusiasts. This influx of interest can breathe new life into local businesses, generate employment opportunities, and bolster community pride. By shedding light on these prospects, this research aims to spark a movement towards harnessing the heritage for sustainable development.

Aims and Objectives

District Dir remains a cradle for many ancient civilizations and cultures. Among these, traces of Alexander the Great, Buddhist and Hindu relics endure, bearing witness to a fascinating tapestry of history. Despite its illustrious past, District Dir Lower confronts the poignant reality of neglect, which obscures its priceless archaeological legacy. Consequently, this present research concentrates on exploring the neglected archaeological treasures of the locality. It aims to unveil the factors behind this neglect and the challenges faced by the concerned stakeholders in the conservation-preservation management of such sites. However, the study will particularly focus on the following main objectives:

OBJECTIVES:

1. To comprehensively explore the historical background of District Dir Lower, Pakistan, spanning Prehistoric, Protohistoric, and Historic periods, and establish its significance within the broader cultural and historical context.
2. To critically analyze factors contributing to the neglect of archaeological sites in District Dir Lower
3. The paper will also seek strategies and recommendations for the revival, preservation, and sustainable management of neglected archaeological treasures.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodology refers to a systematic and well-organized strategy chosen by researchers to conduct their investigations, ensuring the production of credible and consistent results (Creswell, 2014). It involves a set of principles, procedures, and methods that provide direction throughout the research journey, including planning the study, collecting data, analyzing information, and making sense of the outcomes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Adhering to the established rules of academic research, this study delves into exploring District Dir lower's heritage by adopting qualitative explorative research techniques following the collection and analysis of both secondary and primary data for conclusion and recommendation.

A two-sept process was executed for the collection of both primary and secondary information. A comprehensive survey of the existing literature has been conducted to identify the gap and to proceed with the development of relevant questions for data collection. In this context, the information was thoroughly reviewed and scrutinized for establishing foundational understanding of the historical evolution and progression of archaeological activities in the region. Similarly, by using semi-structured interview schedule, 25 interviews were conducted with key stakeholders as specified through purposive/convenient sampling procedure including 10 archaeologist (expert in the field), 10 local historian (expert in the local and national history) 05 government official (involved in management and policy regarding archaeological sites). Both closed and open-ended questions were included in the semi-structured interview schedule and the interviews were conducted in-person as well as virtually by obtaining informed consent for recording through audio recording and field notes. In addition, personal site observations were undertaken to visually document the current state of the archaeological sites. Detailed notes and some photographs were captured during these visits, allowing for a firsthand assessment of the sites' condition, accessibility, signage, and any ongoing preservation efforts. Besides, the study is well adhered to ethical guidelines by obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality, and respecting their perspectives throughout the research process. However, a mixed type approach of the data has been presented including presentation of the demographic data into tabular form while thematic analysis has been adopted for qualitative analysis using Braun and Clarke model which as a popular and adaptable qualitative research approach that presents a structured framework for identifying, analyzing, and documenting patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This also involved structured coding procedure, systematically identifying essential concepts, ideas, and emerging patterns, allowing the participants' accounts to directly inform the analysis. Using an inductive approach, themes emerged naturally from the data, capturing the participants' viewpoints, categorized and grouped based on their relevance to the research objectives. The data analysis is organized into two sections: Part-A deals with general and demographic characteristics of the respondents, followed by Part-B which presents thematic presentation including major and sub-themes. .

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Part-A: General and Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents Age, Gender and Education of the Participants

This analysis is based on the demographic information of 25 respondents including Archaeologists, Local Historians, Community Members, and Government Officials selected through purposive/convenient sampling approach. It is evident that respondents interviewed belong to different age groups, educational backgrounds, and gender. Among the total 25 respondents, 10 participants were archaeologists including 09 male and 01 female. The age variation of this category ranges from 40 and above years where 40% (4 participants) were in the age range of 40 to 50 years, 20% (2 participants) were aged between 50 to 60 years, and 40% (4 participants) were above the age of 60. With respect to the educational qualification of archaeologists, 20% (2 participants) were MPhil degree holders while 80% (8 participants) were PhD degree holders. In the analysis of the Local Historians and Community Members, all 10 participants were male and further, 50% (5 participants) were aged between 40 to 50 years, while the remaining 50% (5 participants) were above the age of 60 years. In terms of education, 50% (5 participants) had completed their matriculation, and the other 50% (5 participants) had achieved a Master's degree in their relative field.

The category of Government Officials consisted of 5 male participants, all falling within the age range of 40 to 50 years. Within this group, 60% (3 participants) held MPhil degrees, and the remaining 40% (2 participants) had earned PhDs.

The following table offers a comprehensive snapshot of the demographic attributes of the interviewees who participated in the research study. The table subsequently categorizes the participants according to their gender, age groups, and educational qualifications.

S.No	Category	Female	Male	Age 40 to 50	Age 50 to 60	Age Above 60	Total
1	Archaeologists	1	9	4	2	4	10
-	Percentages	10%	90%	40%	20%	40%	100%
2	Local Historians & Community Member	-	10	5	-	5	10
-	Percentages	0.0%	100%	50%	0.0%	50%	100%
3	Government Officials	-	5	5	-	-	5
-	Percentages	0.0%	100%	100%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
4	Total	1	24	14	2	9	25

5	Total Percentage	4.0%	96.0 %	56%	08%	36%	100%
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Education Background

S.No	Education	Archaeologists	Local Historian & Community Members	Government official	Total
1	Matriculate	-	5	-	5
2	Master	-	5	-	5
3	MPhil	2	-	3	5
4	PhD	8	-	2	10
5	Total	10	10	5	25
6	Percentage	40.0%	40.0%	20.0%	100%

Part-B: Factor contributing to the Neglect of Archaeological Sites

For a long time, cultural heritage has experienced neglect on a global scale. However, in recent times, governments and societies have come to recognize its immense value. Cultural heritage is now regarded as a precious asset that can offer numerous opportunities and benefits to countries and regions, not only in economic terms but also in terms of their country's representation in global tourism image (Marilena PAPAGEORGIOU, 2015). Similarly, Pakistan boasts a rich treasure trove of ancient heritage spanning centuries however, regrettably, insufficient efforts have been dedicated to the preservation and safeguarding of these historic treasures. This negligence could potentially result in the irrevocable loss of tangible heritage as argued by Jamil (2019). Although Pakistan's historical treasures have experienced neglect over time not only at national level but also at the regional level. With reference to the current study, the heritage of the local community (District Dir Lower) has faced the same experience of neglect whereas it has been verified from data collection process, field experience, personal observation and analysis. The analysis augment the views of the total population regarding the major theme of the study and thus affirm that the archeological sites in most of the cases have been exploited and neglected not only by the officials appointed for the purposes but also by the local community dwelling or residing near these sites. However, it has been personally observed that over the past 20-40 years, there have been no significant large-scale conservation or preservation efforts carried out by the government or any other agencies. It has become evident that only a limited number of sites underwent excavation and preservation efforts a long time ago. In contrast, a larger portion of these sites remains untouched, shrouded in mystery and awaiting attention. In comparison to other part of the country, the region has been thoroughly neglected as this point of view was also testify by one of the respondents as he narrated:

"Since very long, I haven't seen any improvement in the excavation or preservation of archaeological sites in this region and if I compared this region with Swat and Gilgit Baltistan, no such attention has been paid to it by our government or any other person etc.," (R-11-M-67).

Similarly, the neglect of archaeological sites stems from a variety of reasons globally, spanning from public perception to government responses. These factors encompass a wide spectrum, including misinterpretation of local perspectives on the sites and inadequate government management (Matero, 2008). However, it is important to acknowledge that despite these challenges, there has been substantial progress in the field of archaeological conservation over the past two decades. This progress is marked by significant advancements in both thought and methodology related to the preservation of archaeological sites (Williams, 2018). Unfortunately, as narrated by majority of the respondents during the analysis of the field data that despite of various advancements made in preservation methods and strategies of the archaeological sites, the region under study has been witnessing a gradual decline in the commitment to conserving or preserving the historical heritage of the locality. This observation was further reinforced by observation and supported by the views of a respondent as:

"Even though concerted efforts have been made to elevate preservation practices, this area has undergone a noticeable decline over the past two decades, despite its abundant and valuable tangible Buddhist heritage. It raises questions about the absence of initiatives by foreign stakeholders who are otherwise often involved in the preservation of Buddhist archaeological heritage. While the Department of Archaeology in the Museum of Pakistan remains under-resourced." (R-3-M-67).

It has been thus extracted from the literary information supported by the field data that the region's archaeological heritage has been constantly neglected by government, officials and the same attitude has been recorded from the local population. Despite the historical significance of the region, it faces inadequate attention and care from all the stakeholders.

Part-B1: Challenges in Funding and Resource Allocation

Undoubtedly, every archaeological project begins with meticulous pre-planning, among which the allocation of funds assumes a fundamental role in determining the how, who, and when of site excavation and preservation efforts (King & Lyneis, 1978). In this context, financial support plays a pivotal role in the comprehensive management of archaeological sites as stated by Ruocco & Nestico, (2018). Definitely, limited funds often make it difficult to protect historical sites. In order to secure this support, states and responsible organizations must generate adequate funds aligned with the project's planned management. However, in situations where the region encounters challenges, alternative approaches become imperative and to cater the challenges, one such approach could be the "digitization of archaeological sites" which involves creating a virtual copy of the site using technology (Ferdani, Demetrescu, Cavalieri, & Lenzi, 2019). This digital version is more secure and can be used for research and education, contributing to the preservation of heritage even with limited resources (Khalid, 2021). The financial investment in the study region for preservation and excavation of the archaeological heritage sites reflect a sign of neglect on the part of the government as well as

other such organizations. Moreover, from the analysis of field data, it has been observed that a significant majority of respondents underscored the substantial challenge of securing sufficient funding and resources for safeguarding these sites. Subsequently, the same analysis is also verified by personal observation and even from the key participants while the neglect of the heritage in terms of financial support is further reinforcement from a respondent's statement that:

“Due to limited government support, the historical sites in the area are currently facing significant challenges (Financial barriers) such is lack of protective boundaries walls, routinely maintenance and there aren't any employees to take care of them.” (R-17-M-46).

Many individuals interviewed emphasized the pressing issue of insufficient funds to effectively safeguard and preserve these ancient sites. The consensus among most interviewees was that the region is not receiving adequate financial support for the maintenance of its historical sites. Interestingly, in response to the question of potential solutions, one interviewee provided a notable perspective, stating,

“The digitization of the sites as a one-time investment. This alternative approach could effectively address the lack of funding by creating a virtual version of the sites. This digital preservation could serve research and educational purposes while overcoming the constraints of limited financial resources.” (R-8-M-46).

The analysis of the field data also shows that all the sites are in a state of decay and are at risk of future destruction due to several factors, including human encroachment (illegal digging) and environmental impacts (heavy rain). The sites observed were found in complete state of destruction, no maintenance and even no such guarding was available to perform duties over there. While asking about the suggestion from the field participants, one of the interviews was of the view that

“It is crucial to take prompt action to address these issues and prevent further deterioration of the sites.” (R-9-M-62).

The findings from literary sources, interviews, and field observations underscore a significant challenge in the region, the struggle to secure adequate funds for the maintenance of its historical sites. Additionally, the concept of digitization emerges as an alternative to address this challenge. However, physical preservation offers broader opportunities, benefiting not only the region but also entire countries by enabling them to reap the benefits.

Part B2: Community Awareness and Engagement

Active engagement of the local community plays a pivotal role in the successful management of archaeological sites. Recognizing and involving the local residents can bring about substantial improvements to the often precarious conditions of archaeological sites around the world (Fushiya, 2013). During field data, majority of respondents expressed concerns about the

lack of awareness among local residents regarding the significance of these historical treasures. It has also been observed that nearly all the sites in the region have experienced unauthorized excavation, theft, and even smuggling. The individuals involved in these activities often lack awareness of the true value of these sites and hold the misconception that all buried sites conceal treasures like gold, diamond and other precious items. Consequently, majority of sites have been disrupted, and this legacy of illegal digging persists. This perspective finds further confirmation in the words of one of our respondents, who remarked:

"Local people are not aware of the value of these sites, and this ongoing illegal digging is indicative of their lack of awareness." (R-11-F-52).

Similarly, a significant number of sites have been disrupted by local individuals who hold a misconception that these sites pertain to a different religion, deeming their preservation irrelevant to the existing social and religious norms of the society. This lack of awareness not only endangers the sites but also their historical and cultural significance. This perspective was reaffirmed by one of the respondents, who expressed:

"Many local people believe these sites are associated with other religions (kafirān) and this misunderstanding has led to their neglect and harm." (R-10-F-41).

However, it has also been observed through observations that the local community often lacked awareness about the importance of these sites and this lack of awareness has posed a significant threat to the sites. Furthermore, local people have created their own stories about different sites, even when these stories were not scientifically proven or accurate and have thus spread incorrect information towards the distortion of the true meanings of the sites. With respect to the majority of the people who are ignorant, some respondents noted that there is a gradual increase in awareness among the local population about the importance of these archaeological sites. One respondent shared:

"Now local folks are fully aware of how important these sites are, and I hope this growing awareness will lead to a more positive view. However, the absence of awareness programs in the region might hinder the progress of this increased awareness." (R-14-M-43).

A common sentiment was the absence of awareness programs in the region. The lack of such initiatives hampers the spread of knowledge and appreciation for these historical assets. Instances were witnessed wherein religious sites were subjected to destruction by extremists owing to a lack of understanding, there were instances of locals actively participating in preservation efforts.

Comprehension gained through literature, interviews, and on-site observations reveals that community awareness and engagement are pivotal for effective archaeological site management. However, the region faces a lack of awareness among locals regarding the historical value of these sites, posing a significant threat. For quite some time, the region's residents have not

witnessed any archaeological activities or involvement. This absence of archaeological engagement has a crucial impact on how local people perceive the importance of these sites.

Part-B3: Government Officials' Perspective

Both national governments and local authorities share the responsibility of protecting archaeological sites. However, without essential support and established plans for maintaining these sites, they become vulnerable to damage and deterioration (Palumbo, 2000). Based on the perspectives shared by the officials interviewed, the region holds a significant position in the realm of archaeology. Both provincial and national Departments of Archaeology have invested considerable efforts in excavating, conserving, and protecting these sites. This concerted endeavor showcases their commitment to preserving our historical heritage. One of respondents further validated this viewpoint by narrating:

"In the early stages of archaeological activities in the province, this region was extensively explored and excavated. I believe that most of the significant sites have been excavated and preserved." (R-21-M-45).

Moreover, government officials express optimism for the future. They aspire to collaborate on initiatives that ensure the continued well-being of these sites. However, they acknowledge the presence of obstacles on this path. The ever-changing political instability in the country can hinder the timely execution of new projects. Additionally, a lack of sufficient financial resources poses a challenge to their aspirations. In essence, while government officials are dedicated to the preservation of archaeological sites, they must navigate the complexities of politics and funding constraints. Their unwavering commitment underscores the importance of safeguarding our heritage amidst these challenges.

The findings uncovered that the majority of sites remain unexplored, and even those that have been excavated face preservation challenges. Government officials have voiced a strong commitment to preserving archaeological sites, recognizing their significant historical narratives. Despite having policies for protection and maintenance in place, the challenge lies in their effective enforcement. A recurring limitation is the limited financial support available for allocating resources to site preservation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis and exploration of District Dir Lower's archaeological sites revealed a series of challenges that have led to their neglect, by looking at both existing information and conducting interviews, it has been pieced together a picture of why these sites have been forgotten. One of the main issues is that the government has not provided enough funds and support. This lack of financial help has made it hard to properly explore and dig up these sites. Another issue is that a significant portion of the local community is unaware of the historical significance of these sites. Most folks are not aware of the interesting stories these sites hold. Plus, there are not many ways for people to

learn about them or see their importance, which keeps the awareness pretty low. Engaging in conversations with archaeologists, historians, community members, and government officials, it has become evident that the acquisition of funding and resources presents a formidable challenge. There is a lot of red tape and obstacles that slow things down. The government officials understand the significance of these sites, but enforcing rules to protect them is a challenge. Yet, amidst these difficulties, local stories keep the past alive. Tales of the Gandhara civilization and Alexander the Great's presence remind us of the region's history. This connection could be a way to change things for the better. Overall, the findings realize that working together is key. All stakeholders, including the government, archaeologists, local communities, and interested parties, must collaborate collectively to effect change. It is imperative that devise strategies for disseminating historical knowledge, establish effective regulations, and allocate the necessary funding to revive these overlooked narratives.

RECOMMENDATIONS: A ROADMAP

As we stand at the crossroads of history, with a keen awareness of the neglected archaeological treasures in District Dir Lower, it becomes imperative to chart a course towards their revival, preservation, and sustainable management. This research, rooted in the historical echoes and contemporary insights, serves as a guiding compass to propose actionable strategies that can breathe life into these forgotten relics.

Community Engagement and Education:

Empowering local communities through awareness and education initiatives is pivotal. Collaborating with schools, community centers, and media outlets can help create a narrative that resonates with the heart of the people. Outreach programs, workshops, and interactive platforms should be established to foster a sense of ownership and pride in the historical heritage.

Government Allocation and Collaboration:

Advocating for increased government funding and support for archaeological projects is crucial. Engaging with relevant government bodies to emphasize the socio-cultural and economic value of preserving these sites can yield results. Collaborative efforts between governmental agencies, archaeologists, and local communities should be forged to ensure effective resource allocation and enforcement of protection policies.

Tourism and Economic Opportunities:

Harnessing the potential of cultural tourism can create economic incentives for site preservation. Developing visitor centers, guided tours, and informational signage can make these sites accessible and captivating for tourists. The economic benefits can create a positive feedback loop, channeling resources back into site preservation and maintenance.

Capacity Building and Training:

Investing in capacity building programs for local stakeholders, such as community members, guides, and local officials, can enhance their understanding of the historical significance and the importance of preserving these sites. Workshops on site management, conservation techniques, and heritage interpretation can empower them to become custodians of their own history.

Technology and Digital Preservation:

Leveraging technology for digital documentation, virtual tours, and online resources can transcend geographical barriers and increase global awareness about the neglected treasures. Digital preservation efforts can also serve as a backup to safeguard historical data against unforeseen challenges.

Conflict Resolution and Land Management:

Addressing land disputes and conflicts is paramount. Collaborative dialogues involving stakeholders, legal experts, and community leaders should be initiated to find amicable solutions that prioritize both historical preservation and local needs.

Partnerships and International Collaboration:

Forging partnerships with international organizations, universities, and research institutions can bring expertise, funding, and exposure to these sites. International collaborations can also aid in benchmarking preservation practices and adopting best global standards.

Youth Involvement and Cultural Celebrations:

Engaging the youth through art, culture, and heritage festivals can ignite a sense of curiosity and belonging. Celebrations that celebrate the historical legacy can be a rallying point for the community's commitment to preserving their heritage.

In weaving these recommendations into action, it is essential to recognize that preserving District Dir Lower's archaeological treasures is not merely an academic endeavor but a moral responsibility. Each stone, each artifact, carries the whispers of the past, waiting to be heard. By embracing these recommendations, we can ensure that these echoes from the dust are not forgotten but continue to resonate across time, inspiring generations to connect with their roots and protect their cultural legacy.

CONCLUSION:

In the quiet corners of District Dir Lower, where history whispers in the wind, the quest to uncover forgotten treasures comes to an end. The echoes from the dust have been heard, and they have sparked a plan to take action – to protect, save, and take care of the ancient relics that tell us about our history. Looking

back at what has been learned, it becomes apparent that the past and the present are interconnected. The places that have been forgotten possess stories that establish a connection between people from earlier times and those of today. These sites used to be really important for people a long time ago, and they can still teach us a lot. The research findings provide insight into the situation in District Dir Lower. The neglect of these regions stems from a lack of attention, and it is not solely attributable to the indifference of local residents but also to significant issues within the responsible departments. These issues encompass a wide range, from insufficient financial support to a lack of community awareness. This research extends a call to action to all stakeholders. The path forward is discernible – it entails a comprehensive approach that involves various measures working in tandem. This endeavor is inclusive, encompassing government authorities, history enthusiasts, local communities, and individuals worldwide. It emphasizes the imperative nature of preserving the past and underscores the significance of collective effort.

It is crucial to acknowledge the profound importance of historical artifacts and sites in tracing our origins. As this chapter of our narrative concludes, the echoes of history persist. They serve as a reminder that neglect is not the end; it is but the beginning of a journey where ancient stories meld with new aspirations. May this research serve as a compass for that voyage, a means to resurrect forgotten narratives, and a testament to the notion that, through collective collaboration, our history can be safeguarded for the generations that will succeed us?

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