



## Tourism Potential of District Torghar Concerning Buddhist Heritage in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article History:

Received: January 03, 2026  
Revised: January 24, 2026  
Accepted: February 04, 2026  
Available Online: February 16, 2026

#### Keywords:

Buddhist Heritage, District Torghar,  
Hazara Division

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### ABSTRACT

District Torghar holds immense potential with regard to its rich Buddhist heritage. Nestled in the heart of cultural significance, the district boasts a history intertwined with the teachings and traditions of Buddhism. The ancient sites and artifacts scattered across Torghar provide a glimpse into a bygone era, offering a unique opportunity for cultural exploration and scholarly study. The present research focuses on the serene landscapes that house monasteries, stupas, and historical relics, fostering a connection to the profound spiritual roots of Buddhism. The preservation and promotion of District Torghar's Buddhist heritage not only contribute to the local economy through tourism but also serve as a bridge between the past and present, fostering a sense of cultural identity and understanding. As efforts continue to safeguard and showcase these cultural treasures, District Torghar stands poised to become a beacon for those seeking to explore and appreciate the enduring legacy of Buddhism in the region.



## Introduction

Torghar is situated between the coordinates of 34°32' and 34°50' N, and 72°48' and 72°58' E, bordered by Agror to the east, Tanawal to the south, Buner to the west, and Batagram to the northeast. The Torghar range extends 25 to 30 miles from north to south, reaching an elevation of 8,000 feet above sea level. Also known as Chagharzai, it shares boundaries with the Chagharzai areas of Buner District. Officially renamed 'Torghar,' it is located opposite Kala Dhaka, with Shangla District across the Indus River in Tehsil Martung.

The northern extremity of Torghar is washed by the Indus River, which then turns southward. The western slopes between the river and the range are inhabited by Yusufzai, while the remaining area is occupied by the Swati people. The Black Mountain (Torghar) is characterized by a lengthy, narrow ridge with periodic higher peaks and occasional deep passes. The highest peak, "Machai Sar," is visible from Agror and surrounding areas. The ridge and spurs are covered with dense forests of pine, oak, sycamore (black mulberry), horse-chestnut, and wild cherry, while the slopes are rocky and barren. Pashto is the primary language spoken in Torghar District, with residents also proficient in the national language, Urdu.

## **Historical Background**

The Torghar, also known as the Black Mountain, is characterized by a series of spurs leading to a central dominating ridge, with the highest peak named Machai Sar, reaching an elevation of 9817 feet. This ridge marked a boundary beyond which British authority did not extend, allowing local tribes to inhabit both sides without interference. The region, located away from major roads, remained untouched by the British, and its inhabitants were resistant to change. The tribes residing here were a diverse and combative group, not particularly large or powerful, but known for their warlike nature and, in some cases, religious motivations against the British. Politically, they were nominally influenced by the Nawab of Āmbelā and the Wāli of Swat, but these rulers held limited sway in the hills. The Swati people inhabited the eastern mountain closest to British territory (Watson, 1907).

Between 1852 and 1892, the British conducted over four expeditions to quell the Black Mountain tribes due to the intrigues and opposition led by leaders like Aṭā Muhammad Khān Swati and Ārsalā Khān of Āllā. Various incidents, such as the killing of British Customs officers in 1851, led to military expeditions, including Colonel Mackeson's in 1851 and General Wilde's in 1868, resulting in the submission of the tribes.

The Black Mountain, adjacent to the Wāli of Swat's territory, earned its name from the dark forests covering its slopes. The eastern side was inhabited by the original people of Swat, distinct from the Pathans. The western ridge was home to Yousafzāi tribes, less warlike but engaged in constant struggles among small tribal chiefs. The Nawāb of Āmb, an independent chief across the Indus, played a significant role, having an arms factory producing rifled cannons capable of throwing solid balls 3000 yards.

In 1888, British forces blockaded the area due to raids by the Hasanzāi and Ākāzāi tribes. Major Bettie and Captain Urmston were surprised and killed by Gujar dependents of the Ākāzāi, leading to suspicions of Hāshim 'Ali's involvement. An expedition in the same year resulted in fines imposed on the tribes and the removal of Hāshim 'Ali. In 1890, the tribe resisted the march of troops along the Black Mountain crest, leading to another expedition in 1891. After the troops withdrew, the Hindustānis and Maddā Khel broke their agreement, allowing the return of Hāshim 'Ali. A second expedition in 1892 achieved complete pacification of the Black Mountain border.

## **Geography**

The Black Mountain, spanning a length of 20 to 25 miles with an average height of 8,000 ft, ascends from the Indus basin near the village of Kiara to its watershed by Bruddur. It then extends northwest by north to Chittabut on the crest and proceeds due north, eventually descending by two large spurs to the Indus once again. The primary road through Torghar, from Darband to Thakot, covers a distance of 84 kilometers and serves as the main connection to the outside world. Thakot, linked to the Karakoram Highway, offers a preferable route compared to the Darband Route, with

the Karakoram Highway in better condition from Thakoṭ down to Abbottābād. This road in Tor Ghar runs almost parallel to the left bank of the River Indus.

Torghar is also known as F. R. Mānsehra, with F. R. indicating Frontier Region. Administered by the Torghar Administrator on behalf of the Provincial Government, based in Mānsehra, there is also a political agent or political tehsildar typically stationed in Ogi town. On the western slopes of the Black Mountain, most inhabitants belong to Pashtun tribes such as Maddā Khel, Hasanzāi, Ākāzāi, Nusrat Khel, and Bāsi Khel, divisions of Isāzai and Malizāi sub-clans of the Yusufzāi tribe. The eastern slopes are predominantly occupied by the Gujjar, with some Hindko-speaking people found at the region's fringes.

The Black Mountain (Torghar) tribes trace their origins to the people of Mānsehra District, specifically belonging to the Isazāi and Malizāi clans of the Yousafzāi tribe. The Isazāi sub-clan further divides into three sub-clans: Madā Khel, Hassanzāi, and Akāzāi. The Malizai sub-clan is divided into two sub-clans: Bāsi Khel and Nasrat Khel. Bāsi Khel constitutes the largest group, making up 37% of Torghar's population, while Nusrat Khel and Ākāzāi each account for 12%. The populations of Hasanzāi and Madā Khel are 18.5% and 20%, respectively. Bāsi Khel, Nusrat Khel, and Ākāzāi inhabit the left bank of the Indus, while the Madā Khel tribe resides on the right side, and the Hasanzāi are situated on both sides of the River Indus.

### **Buddhist Heritage of the District Torghar**

Recently for the first a systematic archaeological exploration has been carried out in the District Torghar by the Department of Archaeology, Hazara University Mansehra, Pakistan with the administrative support of Directorate of Archaeology and Museums Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa under the NRPU-funded project of Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (Ali et al., 2011; Shakir et al., 2021-2023). The result of this project enlisted the archaeological profile of the district including Buddhist period heritage (Table-1 & figure-1).

**Table 1: Buddhist sites located in District Torghar**

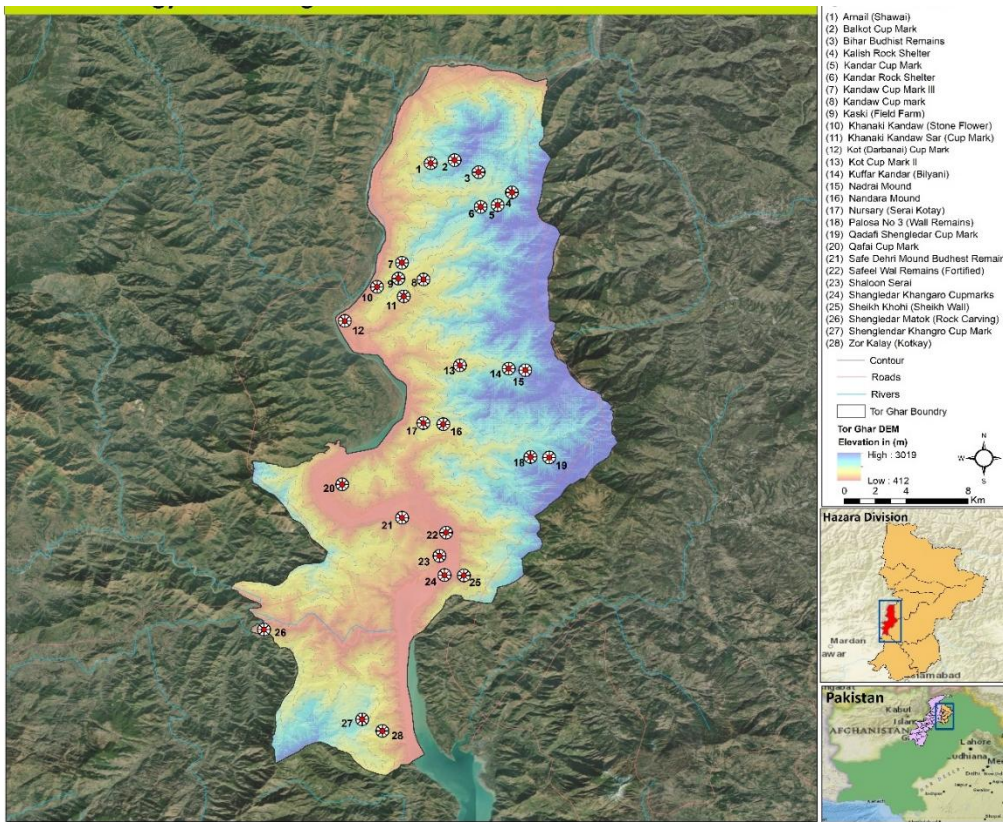
<b>S. No.</b>	<b>Site Name</b>	<b>Coordinates</b>
1.	Shenglidar Matok Carving	E72.85965, N34.70496
2.	Kalish Rock Shelter	E72.86785, N34.69437
3.	Khanaki Kandaw	E72.81313, N34.64168
4.	Kandaw Cup Marks	E72.81424, N34.64567
5.	Kot (darbanai) Cup Marks	E72.82774, N34.55566
6.	Kot II Cup Marks	E72.82762, N34.55560
7.	Shengledar Khangro Cup Marks	E72.85338, N34.70494
8.	Balkot Cup Marks	E72.83366, N34.59474
9.	Qafai Cup Marks	E72.86535, N34.70474
10.	Qafai Shengledar Cup Marks	E72.86535, N34.70474
11.	Shaloon Serai	E72.81813, N34.62805
12.	Kuffar Kandhar	E72.78049, N34.51917
13.	Zor Kalay Kotkay	E72.84321, N34.46640
14.	Nursaray (Serai Kotkay)	E72.84703, N34.46407
15.	Safe Dehrai	E72.84083, N34.49053
16.	Safeel Wall Remain	E72.81931, N34.63129
17.	Palosa No 3	E72.81527, N34.49934
18.	Sheikh Kohe	E72.79206, N34.38437

19. Nandara

E72.79430, N34.38365

20. Bihar Buddhist Remains

E72.77080, N34.61979



**Figure-1 Buddhist heritage of the District Torghar**

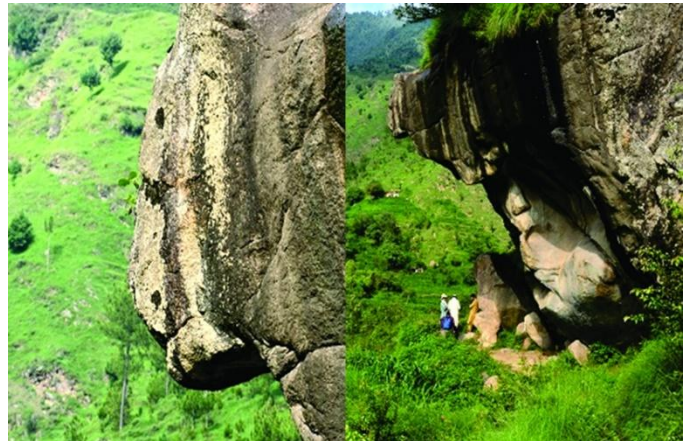
***Shenglidar Matok Carving***

The site is situated in the middle of the mountain of Shengledar, featuring a rock carving, a nearby tree, and facing threats from both the growing tree and rain, is a fascinating yet vulnerable archaeological and natural setting. Being situated in the middle of the Shengledar mountain adds to the allure of the site. Mountainous regions often hold historical significance, and the site's elevation could have served practical or ceremonial purposes for the people who created the rock carving. The rock carving in a line is a significant archaeological feature. The arrangement of the carvings may hold symbolic or cultural meaning, and the specific motifs or patterns could provide insights into the beliefs and practices of the ancient inhabitants of the region.



### ***Kalish Rock Shelter***

The rock shelter is shaped like a cube and featuring a height of 8.8 meters and a length of 5.7 meters, is a unique geological and archaeological feature. The presence of specific elements like Kanjoor stone, lines on the rock, and another stone in contact with the shelter adds to its significance. The cube-shaped nature of the rock shelter indicates distinct geometric features, potentially shaped by natural processes over time. Such formations often attract attention due to their symmetry and may have cultural or ritualistic significance. The specific dimensions of the rock shelter (8.8 meters in height and 5.7 meters in length) provide valuable information for archaeological and geological assessments. The size may influence the usability of the shelter and can offer insights into its potential functions.



### ***Khanaki Kandaw***

The site has a huge rock forming a rock shelter near a road, and holds unique archaeological significance, particularly with the presence of cup marks and its massive size. The natural rock shelter provides a fascinating setting for archaeological exploration. Such shelters often served as shelters for ancient human populations, offering protection from the elements and serving as potential habitation sites. The presence of 28-cup marks on the rock is an intriguing feature. Cup marks are circular depressions intentionally carved into rock surfaces, and their purpose can vary. They might have served as symbolic or ritualistic markings, playing a role in the religious or cultural practices of the ancient inhabitants.



### ***Kandaw Cup Marks***

The site near the road to Petāw Āshāra, featuring a boulder with cup marks measuring 3 by 4 by 12 meters, and each cup mark having a depth of 7.6 centimeters, holds significant archaeological and cultural importance, particularly in the context of Buddhist heritage. Cup marks are commonly associated with Buddhist heritage, particularly in the Gandhara region. These cup marks often served ritualistic or symbolic purposes, potentially representing



aspects of Buddhist cosmology, meditation, or religious practices. Understanding the specific motifs or patterns within the cup marks is crucial for interpreting their significance. Analyzing the cup marks in the context of Buddhist symbolism and ritual practices is essential. They may represent religious offerings, meditative practices, or symbolic elements tied to Buddhist cosmology. Exploring the cultural and religious significance of cup marks contributes to a deeper understanding of the site.

### ***Kot (darbanai) Cup Marks***

The site's location at Kot, opposite Darbana village, adds geographical context. The proximity to a village may suggest connections between the site and the local community, possibly reflecting the historical settlement patterns or religious practices of the region. The presence of cup marks on two huge boulders and a single one on another indicates intentional human activity, likely associated with religious or cultural practices. In the Buddhist context, cup marks can be linked to ritualistic activities, meditative practices, or symbolic representations.



The detailed measurements of the cup marks, with a width and depth of 25.4cm, provide precise information about their dimensions. Consistency in the dimensions of the cup marks may suggest deliberate planning or adherence to specific cultural norms during their creation. Cup marks in Buddhist heritage often hold symbolic meanings. They may represent offerings, meditation points, or cosmological elements. Analyzing the dimensions, placement, and any associated motifs within the cup marks can contribute to deciphering their specific significance within the Buddhist context. Comparing the cup marks at Kot with similar archaeological finds in the region or broader Buddhist sites can reveal patterns, variations, or unique features. This comparative analysis helps place the site within a larger cultural and historical context.

### ***Kot II Cup Marks***

The strategic placement of cup marks on the route to Kot suggests that the site may have held a significant role in the cultural and religious landscape. Markings along pathways are common in Buddhist heritage, and they may have been associated with pilgrimage routes, religious processions, or other ritualistic activities. The boulders displaying one and four cup marks each add complexity to the site. The varying numbers may have cultural or symbolic significance, possibly



representing different aspects of Buddhist cosmology or religious practices. The presence of cup marks of different sizes, with three being uniform and the fourth being smaller, raises questions about the intentional design. This variation could signify hierarchical or symbolic importance, with the smaller cup mark potentially serving a distinct purpose within the broader context of the site. The consistency in size among the three larger cup marks, each measuring 25.4cm in depth, suggests intentional planning or adherence to a specific cultural or religious norm during their creation. Uniformity in dimensions may indicate a shared purpose or symbolic representation.

### ***Shenglidar Khangro Cup Marks***

The presence of about 40 cup marks carved on a huge boulder situated in a small ravine is a significant archaeological find with potential implications for Buddhist heritage. The specific characteristics, such as the arrangement of cup marks in a row and variations in size, can provide valuable insights into the cultural and religious practices associated with the site. The presence of both smaller and larger cup



marks indicates a deliberate choice in design. Such variations could signify different levels of importance, representational purposes, or symbolic meanings associated with each cup mark. Understanding the significance of size differences contributes to the interpretation of their cultural context. The systematic arrangement of cup marks and their variations in size suggest a potential ritual or religious significance. Cup marks in Buddhist heritage have been associated with offerings, meditation points, or symbolic representations. Analyzing the context and patterns of the cup marks can provide insights into their specific purpose.

### ***Balkot Cup Marks***

The proximity of the cup mark to Balkot Village is noteworthy. The relationship between the cup mark and the village may indicate historical connections or cultural practices associated with the local community. Investigating the village's history and any existing Buddhist traditions could provide additional context. The specific dimensions of the cup mark, with a depth of 24.3cm and a width of 5.9cm, provide detailed information for analysis. The size and shape of the



cup mark may carry symbolic meanings within the context of Buddhist cosmology or religious rituals. Cup marks in Buddhist heritage are often associated with symbolic meanings. They may represent offerings, meditation points, or cosmic elements. Analyzing the design, dimensions, and context of the cup mark can help interpret its potential symbolic significance within the Buddhist cultural framework.

### ***Qafai Cup Marks***

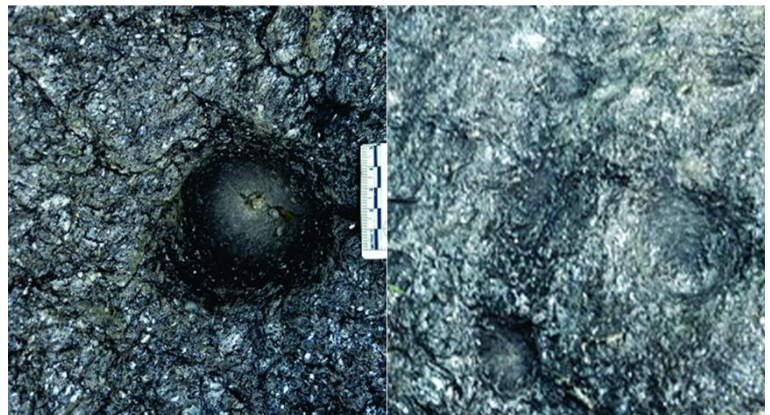
The presence of cup marks at Qafai, located in the land surrounded by cultivated fields between two ravines, represents a significant archaeological site with potential implications for Buddhist heritage. The characteristics of the cup marks, including their number (16), size variations, and the specific geographical setting, contribute to the understanding of the cultural and historical context. The location



between two ravines and within the expanse of cultivated fields adds an interesting geographical dimension to the cup marks. The choice of this specific landscape may have held symbolic or practical significance within the broader context of Buddhist heritage. The presence of 16 cup marks indicates a deliberate and purposeful activity in the area. The numerical significance may have cultural or ritualistic meanings, possibly related to cosmic or symbolic representations in Buddhist traditions. The proximity to Qafai cup marks suggests a potential interconnectedness between these sites. The shared geographical location may imply a cultural or religious landscape that extends across the region. Comparative studies with Qafai cup marks can provide insights into regional variations in Buddhist practices.

### ***Qafai Shengledar Cup Marks***

The presence of cup marks on a huge stone, with three in number and a specific arrangement (one small and two large), situated in the area between two ravines, holds archaeological significance with potential implications for Buddhist heritage. The specific characteristics of the cup marks and their geographical setting contribute to the understanding of the cultural and historical context. The location



between two ravines adds a unique geographical context to the cup marks. Ravines often hold natural and spiritual significance, and the intentional placement of the cup marks in this setting may have symbolic meanings within the broader Buddhist cultural landscape. The three cup marks, with one small and two large, suggest deliberate planning or design. The numerical significance of three could have cultural or ritualistic meanings, possibly related to triads or trinities found in various religious traditions, including Buddhism.

### ***Shaloon Serai***

The discovery of the stump of an ancient stone wall with diaper masonry, presently serving as the retaining wall of a farm, is a significant archaeological find with potential implications for Buddhist



heritage. The site's features, including the presence of potsherds, the size of the cultivated farm, and the local narratives about the wall running around a fortified area, contribute to the understanding of the historical and cultural context. The dimensions of the cultivated farm (32m in width and 62m in length) provide insights into the extent of the agricultural activities in the vicinity of the ancient wall. The integration of farming practices with historical structures underscores the dynamic nature of land use over time. The presence of lat diaper masonry indicates a sophisticated construction technique. Lat diaper masonry involves the use of alternating rows of stones of different sizes and shapes, creating a decorative pattern. This type of masonry is often associated with architectural styles of ancient civilizations, showcasing the advanced craftsmanship of the builders. Further research, excavation, and collaboration with the local community are essential to unravel the full cultural and historical significance of this site within the context of Buddhist heritage.

### ***Kuffar Kandhar***

The site located on the top of the hills, characterized by numerous step-by-step rooms, a fortified stone wall, and a strategic vantage point providing views of the River Indus and Bilyani village, presents a compelling archaeological and historical context with potential connections to Buddhist heritage. The choice of a hilltop location suggests strategic considerations for defense or visibility. Hilltop



sites were often selected for religious or defensive purposes in ancient cultures. In the context of Buddhist heritage, elevated sites were sometimes associated with monastic or meditation practices. The presence of many rooms-built step by step indicates a structured and intentional construction. The arrangement of rooms could have served various purposes, such as residential quarters, meditation cells, or communal spaces, depending on the site's historical function. While the site's association with Hindu occupancy is mentioned, its hilltop location, fortification, uniform room dimensions, and potential for meditation or communal activities align with features found in Buddhist monastic sites. Investigating any Buddhist artifacts, inscriptions, or iconography could strengthen the connection to Buddhist heritage.

### ***Zor Kili Kotkay***

The site was anciently located on the bank of the river Indus and is nowadays in the middle of it. According to the local people the site is known as Zor kili. It has a fortification wall which suggests that the place was a citadel. The wall and the remains belonging to the Hindu Shahi period are still visible. The site consists of 13 rooms on the top besides some more rooms on the lower side. All the walls are of the same



measurement, the width being 1.2m and the length of the entrance is 1.28m. Rubble masonry and a diaper masonry wall are shown on the lower as a foundation as a clue for Buddhist occupation. On the eastern side is a huge boulder. On the western side of the fortification wall also wooden rafter has been used. A local person Mr. Yousaf Gul, told us that before the construction of the Tarbela Dam the people who lived there changed the village due to erosion of water. The cement walls are also shown on the western side. He said that it was the place of the Holy mosque. Towards the Indus side, it has a cup mark which is 0.10m in size, while seven others are small.

### ***Nursaray (Serai Kotkay)***

The archaeological site located near I R B, situated between two small knolls on Narsary Kotkai Serai ravines, with a clear indication of plundering and the presence of a single above-ground wall, holds potential significance in understanding Buddhist heritage. The surrounding landscape, including a huge rocky mountain, adds to the site's context. The site's location near I R B and between two small knolls on Narsary Kotkai Serai ravines provides



insights into its geographical context. Such locations were often chosen strategically for their visibility, defensibility, or spiritual significance. The presence of a visible wall with semi-ashlar masonry, albeit with signs of plundering, is an important feature. The wall's visibility suggests that it was once part of a larger structure, possibly a building or enclosure. Analyzing its construction style and materials can offer insights into the site's Buddhist period.

### ***Palosa No 3***

The description of the site, with a buried wall and only a few visible ashlar blocks, suggests that the area may have archaeological remains hidden beneath debris. The mention of three routes, now covered by rubbish, adds another layer of historical significance to the site. The presence of ashlar blocks, even if only a few are visible, is noteworthy. Ashlar masonry, characterized by carefully cut and dressed stones, is a



construction technique often associated with ancient civilizations, including Buddhist monastic sites. Further exploration and excavation could reveal more details about the construction style, potentially indicating a link to Buddhist architectural traditions. The three routes mentioned as covered by rubbish might be ancient pathways or walkways. In Buddhist monastic complexes, there are often defined routes or paths connecting different structures within the site. These paths could lead to meditation areas, stupas, monastic cells, or communal spaces. Uncovering and studying these routes may provide insights into the layout and organization of the site.

### ***Sheikh Kohe***

The description of a well with semi-ashlar stone masonry, situated on the side of a small stream, provides insights into the architectural features of the site. The use of semi-ashlar stone masonry suggests a certain level of craftsmanship and architectural sophistication. While ashlar masonry is often associated with precision-cut stones, even semi-ashlar masonry can indicate a



deliberate effort to construct a durable and aesthetically pleasing structure. This could reflect the cultural and architectural practices of the time. In Buddhist monastic complexes, water features, including wells, were crucial for the daily needs of the residents. The presence of a well suggests that the site may have been part of a larger settlement or monastic establishment where access to a reliable water source was essential for the community.

### ***Bihar Buddhist Remains***

The archaeological site situated in District Shangla, opposite to Judba along the River Indus, near Kābal Grām village, presents a fascinating blend of historical layers, including a stone wall with apparent old diaper masonry, a chapel-like structure, a modern wall, and the remnants of a plundered mound with a bastion. The presence of a chapel-like structure within one of the village houses adds complexity to the site.



The integration of religious or ceremonial structures within residential areas was not uncommon in historical contexts. The mention of a discovered bronze stupa adds further intrigue to the site. The stone wall with old masonry is a key feature of the site. The use of ancient masonry techniques indicates historical construction, possibly dating back to a period when the site had a specific cultural or religious function. The mention of a local person stating the discovery of a bronze stupa is highly significant. Stupas are sacred Buddhist monuments, and a bronze stupa would be a rare and valuable find. Further details about the size, design, and context of the stupa would contribute to its historical interpretation.

### **Conclusion**

The District Torghar, with its rich archaeological landscape and the intriguing sites described, presents a promising canvas for exploring Buddhist heritage. The presence of structures such as fortifications, wells, and pathways, coupled with the specific architectural features like ashlar stone masonry, opens avenues for uncovering the region's historical and cultural tapestry. However, it is essential to approach the potential of District Torghar concerning Buddhist heritage with a comprehensive understanding that requires further exploration and multidisciplinary investigation.

The fortification walls, with remnants from the Hindu Shahi period, offer glimpses into the region's pre-Islamic history. While not explicitly stated, the coexistence of Hindu and Buddhist influences in the area during ancient times is plausible, considering the interconnected cultural and religious exchanges prevalent along trade routes. The mention of a well with semi-ashlar stone masonry near a small stream adds a layer of significance. Water sources held paramount importance in Buddhist monastic life, and the symbolic significance of water aligns with Buddhist practices. However, conclusive evidence linking the well to Buddhist heritage would necessitate thorough archaeological excavation, artifact analysis, and a deeper exploration of the site's contextual landscape.

District Torghar's potential as a treasure trove of Buddhist heritage lies not only in its visible structures but also in the untold stories that the archaeological layers may reveal. To unlock this potential, collaborative efforts between archaeologists, historians, and experts in Buddhist studies are imperative. Rigorous excavation, advanced dating techniques, and the integration of local oral histories could provide a holistic understanding of the Buddhist legacy in the region.

In conclusion, while the descriptions hint at the rich historical and cultural legacy of District Torghar, particularly with reference to the Buddhist heritage, a conclusive assessment requires sustained research efforts. The district stands as a tantalizing prospect for uncovering the footprints of ancient civilizations and their spiritual practices, awaiting the careful and dedicated exploration of its archaeological treasures to fully appreciate and preserve its cultural heritage.

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