



## AYBAK

---

**AYBAK** (Uzbek “cave dweller”), now called Samangān, capital of Samangān province, associated with several important archeological sites (N. H. Dupree, *The Road to Balk*; see also [AFGHANISTAN VIII: ARCHAEOLOGY](#)). Modern ethnic groups in the area include Hazāra, Uzbek, Tājik, and a smattering of Pashtun.

Several doubtful Lower Paleolithic implements of an amorphous “Clactonian” nature were reported by Puglisi (“Preliminary Report”) from the Hazār Som (Thousand caves) area, about 16 km north of Aybak. The earliest verifiable evidence for human occupation comes from the rock shelter of Qara Kamar, near Ḥazrat Solṭān, about twenty-three km north of Aybak (Coon, *The Seven Caves*). Qara Kamar was the first Paleolithic site excavated in Afghanistan. (Its name, Black Belt, refers to the blackened roof and walls of the rock shelter, caused by smoke from the fires of generations of nomads who have camped inside.) Coon identified four cultural assemblages; but the sequence is based on a small number of finds, so little sophisticated interpretation is possible (Davis, *The Late Paleolithic of Northern Afghanistan* and “The Paleolithic of Afghanistan”). Qara Kamar IV, the lowest and oldest assemblage, is represented by ten flint flakes and blades, not enough to be diagnostic, but separated from the overlying Upper Paleolithic by a 50 cm-thick sterile deposit Qara Kamar III which Coon and others call “Aurignacian,” dates to about 32,000 years ago (Coon and Ralph, “Radiocarbon Dates”); it yielded eighty-two worked flint implements (carinated or nosed scrapers/bladelet cores, blades and bladelets, a drill), three bone awls, plus animal bones (wild sheep, horses),



and mollusks.

Qara Kamar II presents another amorphous industry with a limited number (17) of worked flints, three flake cores, and nine core fragments. This area appears to include at least elements of an intrusive industry. Qara Kamar II, however, is stratigraphically distinct from Qara Kamar I, which represents a very late Upper Paleolithic (Epipaleolithic or, as Coon refers to it, Mesolithic), dating to about 10,000 years ago (Coon and Ralph, "Radiocarbon Dates"). Although a micro-component exists in Qara Kamar I, normal-sized flakes and blades dominate, including six endscrapers, four notched pieces, and two burins. Two other, apparently later, Epipaleolithic sites occur. Darra Kalon, a rock shelter about twenty km south-southeast of Qara Kamar, has a single carbon-14 date of about 9,500 years ago (Alessio et al., in *Radiocarbon* 9). The micro-blade (including pressure retouch on edges), regular flake, and blade implements resemble those of the Kuprukian farther west. Only forty-three implements have been tabulated to date by Puglisi, including burins, endscrapers, denticulates, and *perçoirs* (Davis, *The Late Paleolithic*, pp. 64-67).

Kokjar, eight km due south of Qara Kamar, is an open-air site situated on a mesa, from which several hundred flint specimens were surface-collected, including a wide range of worked and unworked flakes and blades, plus an extensive micro-blade element. The virtual absence of flake and blade cores or nodules indicates, possibly, a temporary hunting site; but excavations must be undertaken before this can be determined.

A gap occurs from between 9,500 years ago and the B.C.-A.D. line, although the third millennium B.C. Bronze Age finds farther east at Tape Follöl (Koš Tepe) indicate a need for further surveys into this period (Dupree et al., "The Khosh Tapa Hoard," p. 34).

Puglisi (personal communication) has identified an "urban complex" of more than 200 multi-roomed, multi-storied cave dwellings in Hazār Som Valley. Many exhibit painted designs, bas reliefs, and petroglyphs. Possibly the oldest dwellings date about the first century A.D., with the climax period between the second to third centuries A.D. The erosion of Kūšān power from the third century A.D. may account for the apparent decline of this presumably important caravan way station. Early Islam may have precipitated another peak period between the seventh and thirteenth centuries A.D., when the area seems to have been abandoned and only sporadically occupied by passing nomads (Mizuno, ed., *Hazarsum*, p. 1).



The Chinese Buddhist pilgrim, Hsuan-Tsang (ca. A.D. 630) mentions Sih-min-Kien (Samangān), as do early Islamic geographers (S. Beal, *Buddhist Records of the Western World*, London, 1884, I, p. 43; Markwart, *Ērānšahr*, p. 81).

A Buddhist site, Taḳt-e Rostam, is located two km southeast of Aybak. Dating about the fourth to fifth centuries A.D., the site consists of a rock-cut cave monastery complex and an adjacent stupa cut out of limestone, a unique edifice in Afghanistan (N. H. Dupree, *The Road to Balkh*, pp. 23-25; Mizuno, ed., *Haibak*, pp. 85-94), but comparable to similar finds in India (Fischer, *Schöpfungen*, pp. 123-24; idem et al., *Architektur*, ill.).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

---

M. Alessio et al., "University of Rome Carbon-14 Dates V," *Radiocarbon* 9, 1967, p. 360.

C. S. Coon, *The Seven Caves*, New York, 1957.

Idem and E. Ralph, "Radiocarbon Dates from Kara Kamar, Afghanistan," *Science* 122, 1955, pp. 921-22.

R. S. Davis, *The Late Paleolithic of Northern Afghanistan*, Ph.D. thesis in Anthropology, Columbia University, 1974.

Idem, "The Paleolithic of Afghanistan," in N. Hammond and R. Allchin, eds., *The Archaeology of Afghanistan*, Academic Press, 1978, pp. 37-70.

L. Dupree et al., "The Khosh Tapa Hoard from Afghanistan," *Archaeology* 24, 1971, pp. 28-34.

N. H. Dupree, *The Road to Balkh*, Kabul, 1967, pp. 21-27.

K. Fischer, *Schöpfungen indischer Kunst*, Cologne, 1959.

K. Fischer, M. Jansen, and J. Pieper, *Architektur des indischen Sub-Kontinents im Überblick*, Darmstadt, 1986.



S. Mizuno, ed., *Haibak and Kashmir-Smast, Buddhist Cave Temples in Afghanistan and Pakistan Surveyed in 1960* (Japanese and English text), Kyoto University, 1962.

Idem, *Hazar-sum and Fil Khana, Cave Sites in Afghanistan Surveyed in 1962*, Kyoto, 1967.

S. Puglisi, "Preliminary Report on the Researches at Hazar Sum (Samangan)," *East and West*, N.S. 14/1-2, 1963, pp. 1-8.

*Search terms:*

سمنگان aybak ایبک