

# An Ethno-Archaeological Investigation into Irrigation Agriculture and Water System in Mid-Western Nepal

(Continued from No. 109)

-Thomas M. C. Pinhorn

## Chapter 4 : Ancient Stone Waterpoints of Mid-Western Nepal

### Introduction

The ancient stone waterpoints of mid-western Nepal are some of the most curious monuments I have come across. I mainly devoted my efforts to looking at them around the Jumla vicinity, though I did observe some along the trail.

### Water point near Dailekh

I have already mentioned in passing the location, see Fig. 1, No 2/3, (it occurs where I discovered the grinding mill wheel) and can be seen in Plate 16 and a close shot of the back wall of the waterpoint in plate 17. The waterpoint is an imposing monument and shows interesting secondary use of stone. It displays a clearly deliberate plan of

construction that would require considerable organisation to lift and carry the cut stone into the area. I postulate that the two large stones on the back wall were either door lintels or formed part of an original waterpoint. If they are lintels then they could well have come from a hall structure (Sharma, 1972, 27).

The task of carrying the stones would certainly have been easier if they came from Dailekh or Dullu, the Malla winter capital, since at least it would have been downhill. The other carved stones I think are likely to have come from temple buildings since many of them exhibit amaluka quoins. The uncut stones may well have come from a watermill that once stood on the site. The drop would have been sufficient here to allow the mill stone to turn.

The waterpoint seems to have two phases of construction with the back, paving stone

floor and steps constructed first. The two pediments were then constructed in a second phase. However I do not feel there is a great time difference in construction between the two phases, since the nature of the stone construction in the back wall is virtually identical to that of the pediments.

The function of the pediments is clear, that is where wet or dry clothes can be left or accompanying baggage. It is interesting to note that some attempt at design of the waterpoint has been made, the arrangement of the carved stones seems to imply that they may originally have been three waterpipes. If this were the case the flow rate would certainly have to have been quicker than the present rate.

Dating of the waterpoint is not easy but my feeling is that it was certainly constructed after the Malla period. The primary use of the carved stones was certainly in the Malla period. This then broadly gives us a dating range from the monument from the Baisi to Gorkha periods, I would favour the later, since the style of construction of paving slab occurs in the Kathmandu valley in the Gurkha period. Excavation may help to solve some of the dating problems.

#### **The waterpoints of the Jumla area**

Moving along the tila but crossing over to the other bank from Tatopani lies the settlement of Sanargaon, see Fig. 1, No. 4 and Plate 18. Here a very interesting waterpoint occurs. Again I think it is evident that secondary reuse of material has been used to construct the waterpoint. Malla, originally standing upright stone pillars have been taken and reused to construct the central and flanking pieces to the waterpoint. I think that the two halves clearly belong to the same pillar. You should note that they have been carefully arranged so as they slope away from the central stone.

The waterpoint is constructed around the central pillar. The basic design conforms with that of the Dailekh waterpoint. The two walls either side have similar function to that as at Dailekh.

The carvings on the stone pillar may well represent Buddhist deities, for example the lotus and flower symbols on the two halves of the pillars. The base half of the pillar on the right shows a stupa with the flowers may symbolise the three jewels, since one of the flowers is carved in high relief it is likely to be secondary.

I think the mounted figure is likely to be that of a warrior, the object he carries is a spear. This design is common on many of the pillar stones in the region and particularly common in the Jumla area, perhaps not surprising since Jumla was a centre for trading horses in the Malla period (Tucci, 1956, 41). Sharma had suggested that (Sharma, 1972, 31) other pillars containing similar designs should be considered as "hero stones" to commemorate warriors who died fighting.

The central pillar also appears to have had a mounted warrior similar interpretations can be made about this as other stone pillars. The central motif is difficult to identify, the zig-zags that surround it do not give any indication. As the spout cuts the head of the warrior this is a clear indication that the spout is secondary.

It is very difficult to say what the three figures represent on the spout. I hazard a guess that the central figure may be that of Hatti the elephant god, accompanied by two attendants. Dating of the primary use of the pillars is firmly within the Malla period. Interestingly these pillar stones may well have some parallel in Rajasthan. Dating of the secondary use of material is of course difficult, but judging by the carvings it must fall in the Baisi or perhaps early Gorkha period.

### Waterpoint or Hot Baths at Tatopani

Tatopani was the only hot water spring we came across on our trek, see Fig. 1, No. 5 and Fig. 5. and for a plan of the springs, see Fig. 6. A large settlement has grown up around Tatopani, literally the word Tatopani means hot water and so the springs have given their name to the settlement. The settlement is so large because of the luxury of hot water in the bitter winter that comes to the region. Fig 6, Show back wall of pool no. 1.

Clearly as at Dailekh waterpoint, it took considerable effort to construct. The construction technique is similar for the three pools, that is large irregularly packed boulders topped with paving slabs. It is indeed the same construction technique as used on the Dailekh waterpoint. This leads me to suspect that the time period for construction is similar. Of the three pools, 1 is the most impressive, having a paved, guttered floor, as well as being larger than pools 2 and 3.

Pools 2 and 3 have mud floors and today they are used only for washing clothes and are certainly used less than the main pool. Interestingly, the hot water springs did not display ownership, porters freely used the pool when they came passing by. There was, though, some division in the community as to when the hot water baths could be used, for example women had exclusive use of the baths on Wednesdays and Thursdays.

The irregular arrangement at the back of the wall of pool 1, see Fig. 6, strongly suggests that these stones are of secondary use. I have been able to identify four main types and reconstruct them in Fig. 7. Type one of which two occur is either a door mantle, as at Sija. Wooden door mantles of similar type can be seen still in the Kathmandu valley. If the

stones do represent part of an original waterpoint, the evidence is that the back wall would have been smaller in nature, indeed this seems the more likely of the two. Type two, of which three occur, are very likely to represent the base Jamgha, part of a temple, like the one at Manma a few kilometres down the tila from Tatopani.

Type three, of which three occur, is also likely to be a door lintel or used in a waterpoint construction here. One of these stones has a mantle in high relief, I suggest this is likely to be the Buddhist diamond vehicle (Jenkins, 1975, 68), showing a religious connection with the spring or hall structure. Type four, of which six occur, I think may be associated with temples, some of them alternatively could be the sides of reused pillars. Two out of these stones though are very likely to have been used as part of temple structures because of their characteristic amaluka-quoins decoration in low relief. One stone, is very similar to the decorative stones which occur in the temple of Bhandaribada (Tucci, 1956), north of Jumla.

The two wooden carved reliefs are certainly meant to represent lions. The local community indicated this to me. Such carved lions can be found carved in stone at Sija and Dullu (Sharma, 1972, 31). These lions could possibly have been connected with gable ends of buildings (Wright, pers comm). Lions though are most often associated with doorways to temples guarding them.

The fact that the Pool 1 walls and the steps but onto the back well of pool 1 suggests that the back wall is of an earlier construction phase. I think it very unlikely that the stones came as far afield as Sija, the Malla summer capital, there are numerous temples down the tila which the material could have come from.

Dating is problematic for the hot springs. If I am right about the carved stones being

TATOPANI HOT WATER SPRINGS JULY 1986

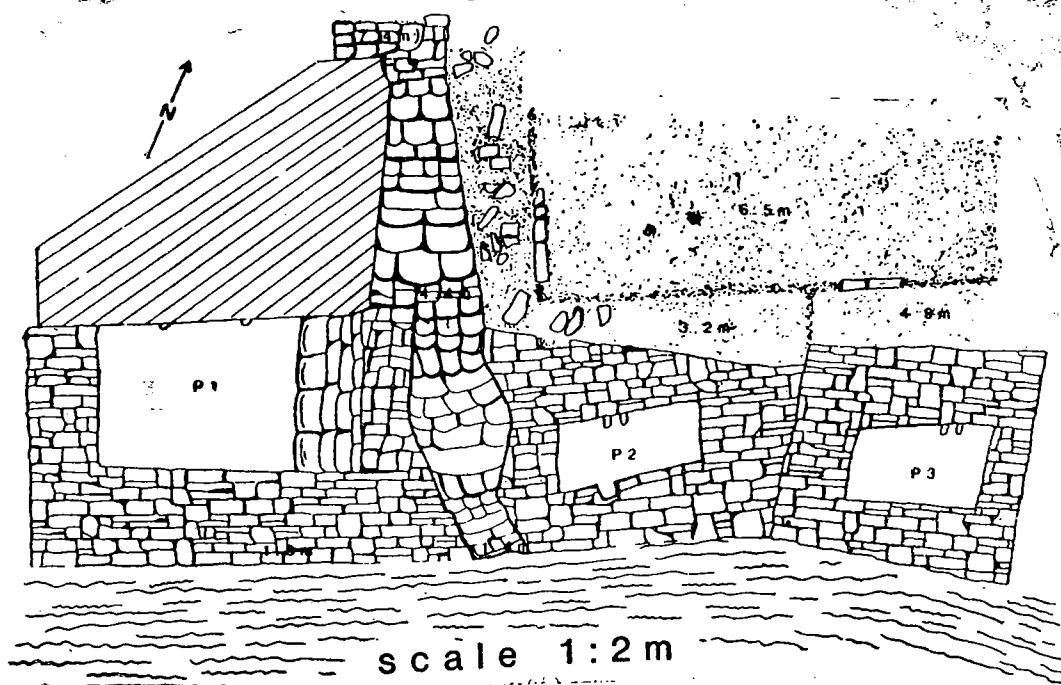
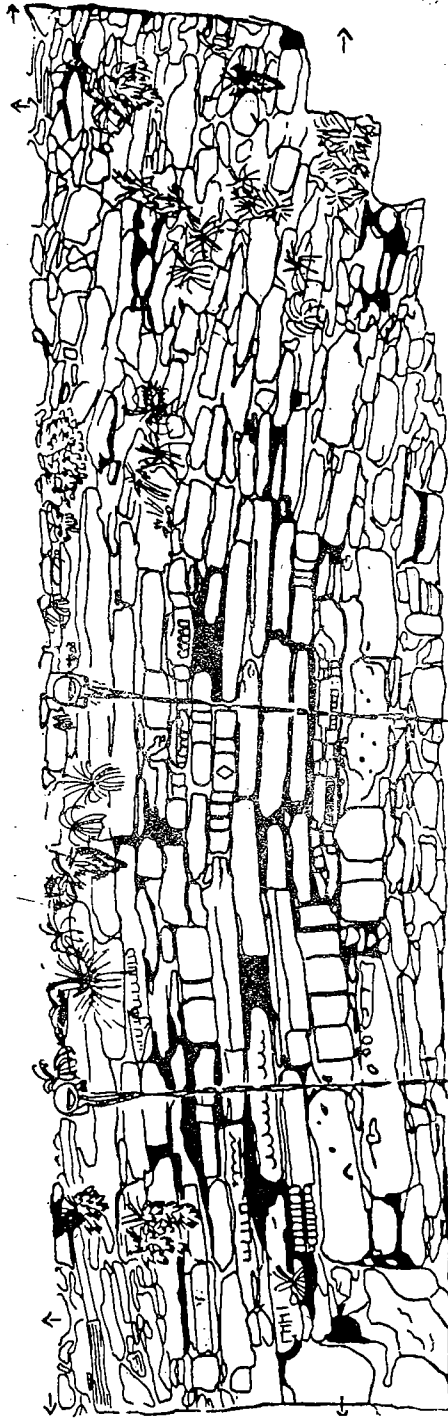


Fig. 5

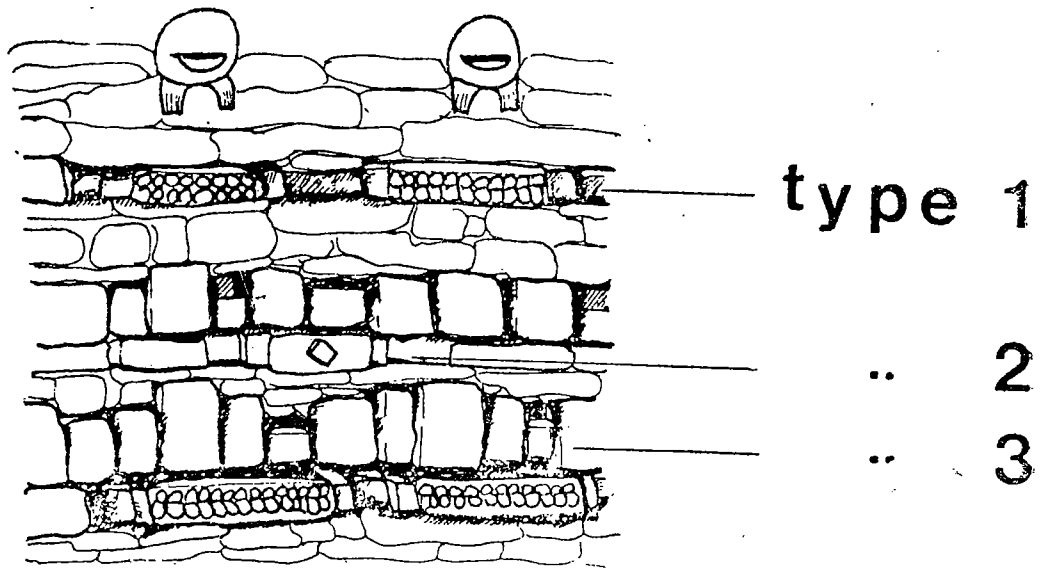
TATOPANI HOT SPRINGS BACK WALL POOL 1



Scale 1.20 cm

Fig 6

RECONSTRUCTIONS



1:15 cm

Fig. 7

from an elaborate waterpoint, then we may postulate a waterpoint at Tatopani in the Malla period. There then seems to follow a period of dismantling when the waterpoint was enlarged and more secondary material brought in from other stone ruinous or dismantled structures. It is possible that Pools 2 and 3 were later additions, though built in the same style. The second and the possible third phase must come within the Baisi and Gorkha periods.

### Waterpoint at Simkham

Just north-west of Jumla lies the small settlement of Simkham, Fig. 1, No. 6. A little way south of the settlement is a dismantled waterpoint. The waterpoint formerly consisted of four rectangular shaped stones, presumably embedded around some boulders as in other waterpoints. I visited the area where the waterpoint formerly stood and there was a deep cut into the bank here. The rectangular cut stones averages 1.5 by 1.4 m. Along the front edge of three of these stones amaluka-quoins run by regular grooves. The fourth stone has no decoration and unlike the other three has a curved top.

Associated with the dismantled waterpoint was a curious bud shaped motif with groove following the line of its body, similar to the ones at Sija, see below, but without the hole. I was told by the boy who showed me the waterpoint that two of the rectangular stones had been the top to two benches either side of the waterpoint and that the other stone had been in the back wall of the waterpoint. He went on to say that the waterpoint had been dismantled some five years earlier, and a new waterpoint where the stones now rest had been attempted, but this failed, and the stones left abandoned.

### Interpretation

Again I think you have the secondary use of Malla stones. The carved stone's original

use was probably as tiers as at the Sija waterpoint which show a similar design. The fourth stone mentioned is certainly that of a revised pillar stone, now worn and the design not visible. The stones have been dressed at the back with some type of chisel to produce a series of cuts downwards, creating banks of striations. The secondary dating may be assigned to the Baisi and Gorkha periods, the original use of the stones was in the Malla period.

### Waterpoint West of Simkham

A few hundred metres west of Simkham I discovered another waterpoint, located on Fig. 1, No. 7. This waterpoint is relatively small and lacks sophistication. It can be seen in Plate 19. The primary use of the stones is likely to have been in the construction of Malla period temples, especially the rectangular stone with amaluka-quin relief and a plain.

Interestingly, the same type of stone also exists in the waterpoint. Other stones are likely to be reused pillar stones.

Dating can once again be given two periods, one for the primary use of the stone in the Malla period, and the other in the Baisi or Gorkha periods.

### Waterpoint at Sija

This waterpoint I discovered about while reading a local history book on Jumla. The location of the waterpoint can be found on Fig. 1, No. 8. The waterpoint is extremely elaborate, the back wall contains twelve carved stones. It is constructed in a series of tiers with flat grooved stones, like the ones at Simkham in between larger blocks. There is a double tier decorated in amaluka-quoins in low relief before a larger, heavier band of amaluka-quoins above it, cut into this band are two bird shaped motifs with holes cut through the

central part of them. Presumably originally to allow water to alight.

These curious grooved bird shapes are of the same type as the one at Simkham. On top is a large impressive mantle that runs across the back. From the evidence of the photograph a wall similar to the back wall is joined at right angles to the back wall on the left hand side. There must presumably be a similar wall on the right hand side, forming a typical three-sided waterpoint, which is the feature of most waterpoints in the region.

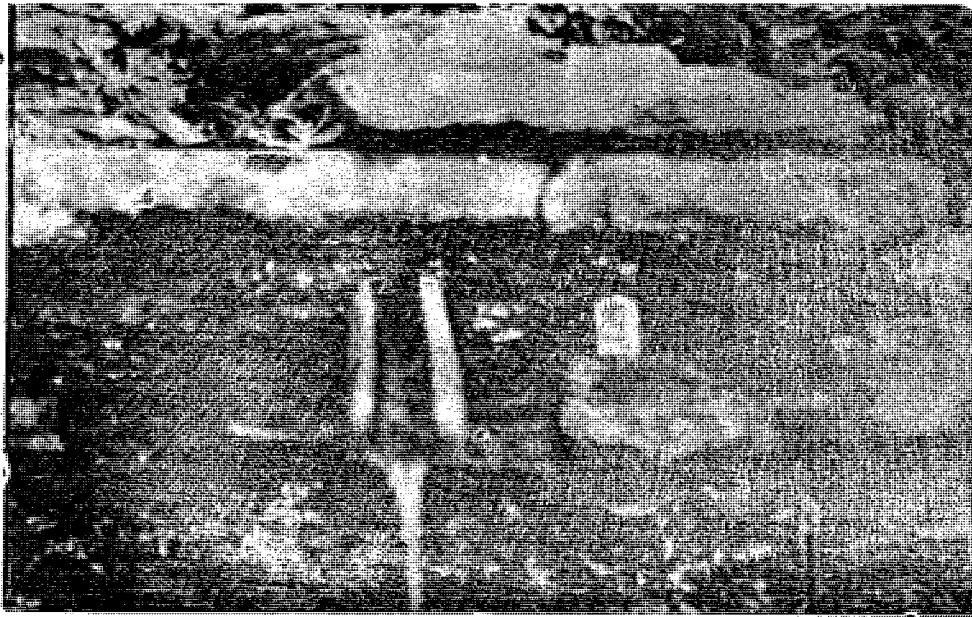
### Interpretation

This waterpoint is extremely important for it is the first evidence of a complete Malla waterpoint. It is extremely elaborate, perhaps this is not surprising since it is based at the Malla summer capital of Sija. The builders of the waterpoint evidently were trying to create the impression that the back wall was constructed by four pillars similar in design to those of the front pillars to temples in the region, though in this case they are in two dimensions. Lotus and amaluka-quin designs occur on the front part to the pillars, but not in any regular system.

The top part of the waterpoint is not particularly well constructed for example the right hand bird motif is slightly higher than the one on the left. This bird shape motif is a common feature of all but one of the waterpoints I came across north of Jumla (see below). Clearly these shapes have some association with the waterpoint. I observed such shapes along carved wooden bridges of the tila, but without grooves. Significantly, thought, similar shapes to these occur on the waterpoints in the Kathmandu valley, see Plate 20. I was told by the Archaeology Department in Kathmandu that these are crocodile waterpoints. It seems odd to me that the crocodile shapes should occur in the northern parts of the Jumla district where the crocodiles do not occur, being only common in the tropical and sub-tropical areas. It is, though, possible that in the past porters could have brought news of such animals inspiring the decoration. Whether the stone crocodiles have any connection with puja (worship) it is difficult to say, but must, I think be regarded as a possibility.

(To be continued)

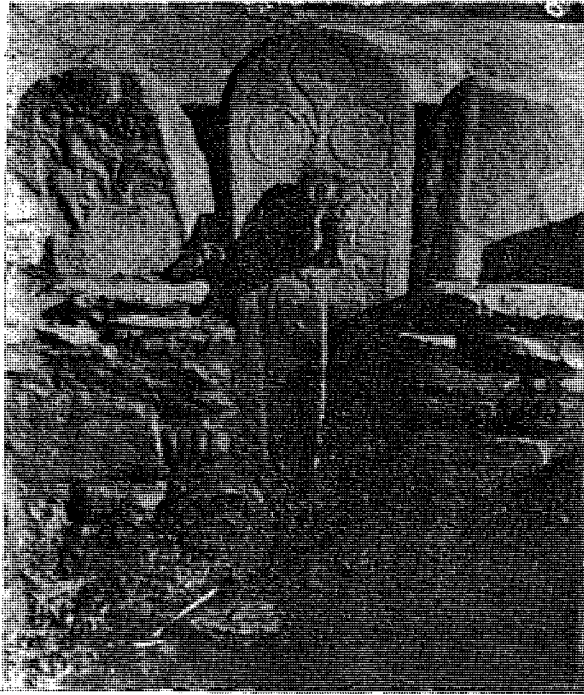




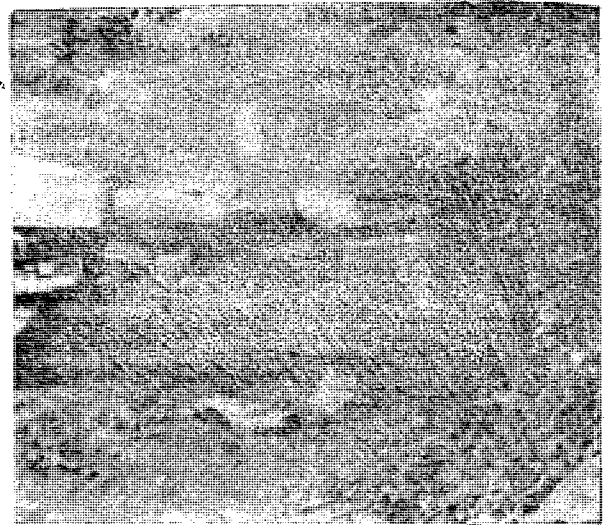
*Plate No. 16- Close-up view of back wall of waterpoint near Dailekh*



*Plate No. 17- Side view of waterpoint near Dailekh*



*Plate No. 18— Sanaragon waterpoint*



*Plate No. 19— Waterpoint west of Simkham*



*Plate No. 20— Crocodile waterpoint, Kathmandu*