

**BRONZE AXES FROM THE KARAKORAM**  
**Results of the 1958 Expedition in Azad Kashmir**

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## BRONZE AXES FROM THE KARAKORAM

### Results of the 1958 Expedition in Azad Kashmir

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#### I

BEFORE 1947 most of the Karakoram belonged to the State of Jammu and Kashmir. A part of this area, including the famous principalities of Hunza and Nagir, was leased to the British and administered by a Political Agent residing at Gilgit. After partition and a period of cruel fighting the territory was divided into two parts by a cease-fire line.

The East—Ladakh and the valleys immediately surrounding the basin of Kashmir—belongs to India. The West, with Gilgit as a center, forms a part of Azad Kashmir, i.e. Free Kashmir, and is administered by Pakistan. It is still called Gilgit Agency as in British times. On the southern border of the Gilgit Agency on both sides of the River Indus there was a large tribal area barring the direct way into Swat and into the Punjab.

The tribal area was called Shinkari,<sup>1</sup> because the inhabitants were mostly Shina-speaking Dards. They were famous for their bravery and their spirit of independence, but also for lawlessness and robbery. Murder and blood-feuds went on almost constantly. They had no higher political organization so that Barth<sup>2</sup> speaks of them as "acephalous" communities.

The area was in general completely closed to foreigners. Sir Aurel Stein was able to enter the two large valleys of Tangir and Darel only because a conqueror, Pakhtun Wali Khan, had temporarily imposed his rule on their inhabitants.<sup>3</sup> Soon after Stein's visit Pakhtun Wali Khan was murdered and the old disorder prevailed for another thirty-five years. A few years ago, however, the elders of the two valleys decided spontaneously in the spirit of Islamic unity to introduce

law and order by bowing their necks under Pakistan. The valleys became part of the Gilgit Agency and are now administered by an Assistant Political Officer (A.P.O.). His residence is Shumari in Tangir. This enabled the members of the German Hindukush Expedition of 1955, Professor Adolf Friedrich, Dr. Georg Buddruss, Peter Snoy, and myself, to enter this formerly forbidden country for linguistic and anthropological research. Owing to Professor Friedrich's untimely death at Rawalpindi, in 1956, only a few preliminary reports have as yet been published.<sup>4</sup>

The expedition was helped by the intelligent and efficient Mr. Ismael Khan, then A.P.O. at Tangir-Darel. He is himself a Shina-speaker, born in the Astor valley, and is deeply interested in the history of his people. During many long hours Friedrich explained to him the aims of anthropology and archaeology. Mr. Ismael Khan told us that in Darel the locals had frequently found gold, bronzes, and ceramics in their fields. When we hurried to Darel, he showed us a place where graves had been opened by the peasants and invited us to make excavations. This was, however, forbidden by an agreement between the Department of Archaeology and the expedition (without the cooperation of a specialist of Pakistan). Moreover, the site had been thoroughly spoiled. Unfortunately, all further investigation had to be stopped because one of my companions fell ill and we had to return to Gilgit.

An invitation of the Austrian Himalaya Society to join the Haramosh Expedition of 1958 enabled me to return to the Gilgit Agency.<sup>5</sup> At Gilgit we met Mr. Ismael Khan, now head of the Village Aid Department. He told me that it was a great pity that we had not been there two years

<sup>4</sup> Jettmar, 1957a; 1957b.

<sup>5</sup> The mountaineering team (Dr. Franz Mandl, Stefan Pauer, Dr. Rudolf Hammerschlag and Rudolf Ebner) under the leadership of Heinrich Roiss (decd.) conquered the Haramosh peak. The scientific team consisted of the geographer Professor Konrad Wiche, the zoologist Dr. Eduard Piffl and myself as ethnologist. Cf. Wiche, 1958.

<sup>1</sup> Biddulph, 1880: 8. Shina belongs to the Dardic group of Indian languages. Southwest of Shinkari was another tribal territory, Indus-Kohistan. The western part of Indus-Kohistan has been governed by the highly efficient ruler of Swat since World War II.

<sup>2</sup> Barth, 1956: 79-86.

<sup>3</sup> Stein, 1928: 1: 10-25. Schomberg, 1935: 272.

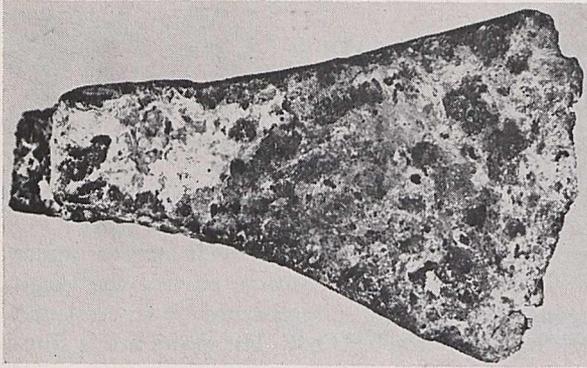


FIG. 1.

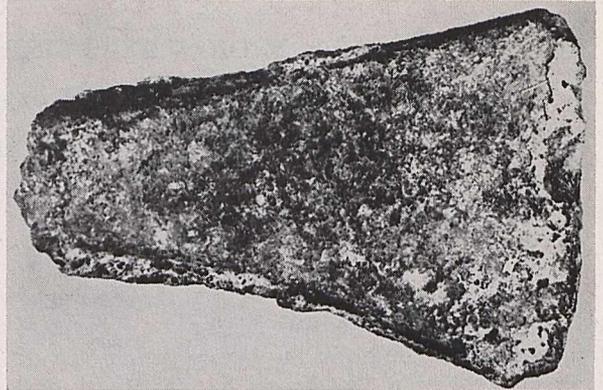


FIG. 3.

before (1956), because a big hoard, mainly of bronzes, had been found at the village of Manikhal in Darel. It consisted of a large number of axes, but there were also big flat spoons and forks, and some rods.

As he had heard so much of archaeology from Professor Friedrich, Ismael Khan saved some pieces and said he had taken them with him when he was transferred to Gilgit. He immediately ordered a servant to bring them. The servant, however, confessed that they had been lost.

A grant from the American Philosophical Society enabled me to revisit Tangir and Darel. On the seventh of July I was again at Shumari, in the Tangir valley, and there the new A.P.O., Mr. Malik Muhammad Azim Khan, told me that some bronzes had been left behind in the house when he replaced Mr. Ismael Khan. They came from Lower Manikhal and apparently belonged to the things missing at Gilgit. The A.P.O. wanted to present them to me. The lot consisted of four heavily patinated axes. They were broken and the necks were lacking, but it was quite clear

that they had originally been provided with shaft-holes. Their shape was reminiscent of the modern iron axes used today in the Gilgit Agency, but they were clumsier and made of bronze or copper. Their average thickness was between 2 and 3 cms.

Measurements of the fragments:

	length	breadth (on the cutting edge)
No. 1.....	17 cms.,	10.7 cms. (fig. 1)
No. 2.....	16 cms.,	11 cms. (fig. 2)
No. 3.....	15.5 cms.,	11 cms. (fig. 3)
No. 4.....	16.8 cms.,	9.7 cms. (fig. 4).

Ten days later we shifted to Shumari, in Darel, and there I tried to obtain further objects from the same site. On the twenty-first of July, Gafur, a man of Lower Manikhal, came and brought me objects nos. 5-7.

No. 5 is a bronze axe apparently almost of the same shape as nos. 1-4, but more slender. There is a break at the shaft-hole, but no part is missing. The flat neck is still intact. The piece looks old, but is not much patinated. Length 20.2 cms., breadth 9.7 cms. (fig. 5).

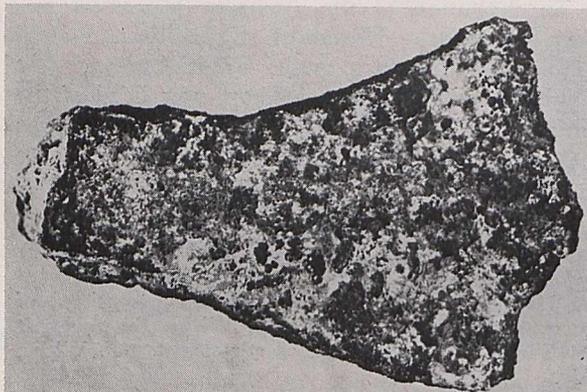


FIG. 2.

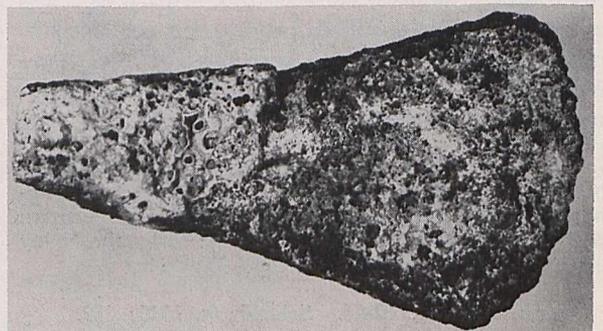


FIG. 4.

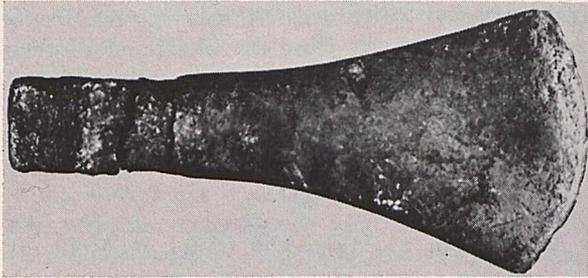


FIG. 5.

No. 6 is a narrow axe with a shoulder behind the shaft-hole. The neck is in the shape of an almost round tap. Length 14.3 cms., breadth 5.3 cms. (fig. 6).

No. 7 has almost the same contour as no. 6 but is a flat trunnion celt. Length 14.2 cms., breadth 4.6 cms. (fig. 7).

Gafur told me the following story concerning the provenance of these objects:

Near the *koṭ*, i.e., the village fortress of Lower Manikhal (Kirinu-Manikhal), a man was repairing his house and made a deep pit. In this pit he found bronzes and pieces of gold. When people ran together and started digging they found copper objects, mainly axes, some vessels made of copper, and golden ornaments and plates. There were no iron objects and no coins. Since Gafur came relatively late he did not get any gold, only the three axes. Most of the copper axes were sold to a merchant at Chilas. The whole lot must have weighed more than a mound, i.e. over 80 pounds.

In this story many points are not clear, especially why the man was making such a pit for a house. The common Dareli house is not subterranean and has no solid foundations.

When we reached Lower Manikhal this problem was solved. The *koṭ* lies on a low hill and is easily accessible from three sides. On the fourth side there is a steep slope leading down to the Darel River. As the river gnaws at the foot of

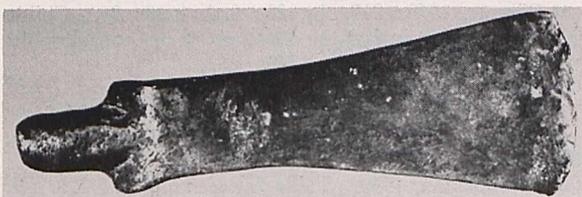


FIG. 6.



FIG. 7.

the slope, each year big avalanches of stone and gravel go down. In a few decades all the houses which lie just on the rim of the slope will have disappeared. The owner, who wanted to delay this process, cut a step into the slope a few feet below the corner of his homestead in order to build a buttress. In this step he found the objects. When he worked here, plenty of people were around because this place, in spite of the gaping abyss, was used as a latrine by the whole village.

Two days later another man appeared and brought a bowl (no. 8) which he pretended to have found at the same spot. It was not patinated but strongly greased and dark, because it had been used as a kitchen pot. It is a bowl of bronze or copper. Beneath the lip there are two circular flutes. There are some traces of a plating made of a light-colored metal (tin?). The piece is quite similar to modern metal vessels still used in the Punjab. Diameter (on the rim) 13.3 cms., height 6 cms. (fig. 8).

I took the objects to Karachi and, conforming to the law, handed them over to the Archaeological Service of Pakistan for the National Museum of Karachi. By courtesy of Mr. Khan, chief of the Department of Archaeology, I got the photographs which are the basis of my description. I hope that further examinations, chemical analysis of the bronze, and perhaps excavations on the site will be made by Pakistan specialists.



FIG. 8.

## II

In view of the circumstances of discovery it appears by no means sure that the objects really belong to one complex.

Most dubious is object no. 8 (fig. 8). It was brought to me when there was already a rumor abroad that I would pay for pieces like that. It could be a relatively modern object. Similar bowls made of wood are still used in Eastern Turkestan and in Tibet.

We may be more hopeful as regards the objects nos. 5-7 (figs. 5-7). Any comparable bronzes are missing from modern inventories, and yet nobody would think of making fakes intentionally. But since their patination is quite different from that of nos. 1-4 (figs. 1-4) we may assume that they need not belong to the same hoard, but were perhaps found at some other place in the valley.

The axes nos. 1-4 were collected by the A.P.O. immediately after the discovery of the hoard. As far as I can see, the locals had no prospect of getting paid for them. So there is no reason why they should not have come from the place designated. According to their heavy patination they cannot be modern or even of a relatively recent date.

It is quite possible that there were more bronze or copper objects, but we have not the slightest indication whether we are faced with a place for offerings, or a graveyard for ashes after cremation (the people said that they found "coal"<sup>6</sup>) or a depot. The terminus ante quem is surely given by the time when bronze was replaced by iron for the daily use. The Shina word for iron "čimer" (from Burushaski "čhuma'r," cf. Turkish "timur," "temir") may indicate its introduction not from India but from Central Asia.<sup>7</sup> Here as attested by Herodotus<sup>8</sup> and by the excavations in the Minussinsk Basin, bronze for weapons and tools were used during the Scythian period,<sup>9</sup> partly side by side with iron. Even in the armories of Achaemenid Persia there were still bronze weapons.<sup>10</sup>

Anyhow, we are justified in summarizing that the objects really date from the Bronze Age or

<sup>6</sup> Cremation was prevalent in the valley during the pre-Islamic period. Cf. Biddulph, 1880: 113/114.

<sup>7</sup> Morgenstierne, 1926: 68.

<sup>8</sup> I/255. Cultural influence from the north is attested by the find of Ishkumān. Stein, 1944: 14-16. Litvinsky, 1960.

<sup>9</sup> Kiselev, 1951: 275.

<sup>10</sup> Schmidt, 1939: 50, fig. 30.

from a period which was still carrying on Bronze Age traditions. At least the likelihood of their doing so is no less strong than with other bronzes found by chance in Pakistan (for instance the famous trunnion celt of Shalozan).<sup>11</sup>

## III

In spite of a clay model found at Mohenjodaro which, according to Piggott, "seems to represent a form of shaft-hole axe," flat copper and bronze axes or adzes were typical of the Harappa civilization. Apparently they were inherited from some early Iranian culture. The perseverance of the form was due to the "inherent conservatism" of India and "partly to the lack of effective contact with Mesopotamia or immediately adjacent Elam."<sup>12</sup>

When, probably in post-Harappa times, shaft-hole axes appeared on the Indian subcontinent, they were very rare and remained like foreigners near the threshold.

One axe was found in Burial B of the Shahitump Cemetery in South Baluchistan. It was compared with those from Maikop and Tsarskaia in South Russia.<sup>13</sup>

Another axe was found in the Jhukar levels at Chanhu-daro.<sup>14</sup>

A ceremonial axe with a shaft-hole was found in a burial place at Khurab in Persian Makran not far from the border of Pakistan.<sup>15</sup>

The famous copper axe-adze from Mohenjodaro may be mentioned, with some reservations. It can be compared to pieces from Hissar III, Shah Tepe, Turang Tepe, Sialk cemetery B<sup>16</sup> (and perhaps also Maikop).<sup>17</sup> A similar object found in Sogdiana<sup>18</sup> has never been mentioned in this connection up till now. A pick-axe from Faskau, in the Vienna Museum of Ethnology, may be a derivative of this type.<sup>19</sup> There is a useful map of the finding places in the paper of Bongard-Levin and Deopik.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>11</sup> First indicated by Ann. Rep. Archaeol. Survey of India, 1913-1914, reproduced by Heine-Geldern, Lal, and others.

<sup>12</sup> Piggott, 1950: 198-199.

<sup>13</sup> Piggott, 1950: 219, fig. 2b; Lal, 1953: 90. Childe has protested, but in fact the difference is not considerable.

<sup>14</sup> Lal, 1953: 90, 89, fig. 2/8.

<sup>15</sup> Gordon, 1954/55: 169, and pl. LXVI.

<sup>16</sup> Piggott, 1950: 228. Heine-Geldern, 1936: 93-94.

<sup>17</sup> Hančar, 1937: 251, pl. XLIII/2, and Heine-Geldern, 1936: 93.

<sup>18</sup> Terenozhkin, 1950. Table between pp. 154-155.

<sup>19</sup> Heine-Geldern, 1936: pl. XVII, fig. 12.

<sup>20</sup> Bongard-Levin, G. M., i D. V. Deopik, 1957: 48/49.

Our axes of Darel fit perfectly into this map, since they, too, were found in the northwestern corner of the subcontinent. The same applies to the trunnion axe (obj. 7, fig. 7). It has only one actual parallel in the Indian subcontinent: the axe found at Shalozan in the Kurram valley.<sup>21</sup> (The Kurram is a tributary of the Indus River, not very far from Darel, just on the border of the subcontinent.) Evidently the pieces are related, but the Darel one is more slender, indicating perhaps a later date. If we look for further relatives we have to go to Western Asia and Europe.

The small shaft-hole axe no. 6 (fig. 6) evidently belongs to a type of western origin. The hammer-shaped neck makes us think of the picks of Achaemenian times.<sup>22</sup> Similar weapons were used in the steppe-belt, e.g. in Minussinsk.<sup>23</sup>

We have already mentioned that the shaft-hole axe (no. 6, fig. 6) and the flat trunnion celt (no. 7, fig. 7) have the same outlines. Corresponding phenomena can occasionally be observed among Caucasian materials, for instance, in the shaft-hole axe of Gagry<sup>24</sup> and the flat celts from the museum at Krasnodar.<sup>25</sup> Obviously, the co-existence of types of flat axes and shaft-hole axes related to one another is common in this western area. The hammer-shaped neck appears there in the last centuries of the second millennium.

Summing up, we may say that all the Darel axes have definite western, possibly Caucasian, affinities. It is somewhat surprising that in a forlorn valley of the Karakoram more shaft-hole axes of bronze have been found than were ever discovered in the soil of the Indian subcontinent.

#### IV

In this connection, I may be allowed to point out that the pre-Islamic spiritual inheritance of the Dardic peoples differs in many respects from that of the other Indo-Aryan groups and has peculiar affinities to the traditions of the highlanders of Western Asia, in Anatolia, the Zagros mountains, and particularly in the Caucasus.<sup>26</sup>

The holy animal of the Dards is not the cow, but the wild as well as the domestic goat, i.e.,

<sup>21</sup> Heine-Geldern, 1936: 87; 1956: 137; Lal, 1953: 90, fig. 4.

<sup>22</sup> E. F. Schmidt, 1939: 49, fig. 14 and 30.

<sup>23</sup> Kiselev, 1951: 241, pl. XXIV.

<sup>24</sup> Iessen, 1951: 81, fig. 3. Among Chinese Ko-weapons as well.

<sup>25</sup> Iessen, 1951: 63, fig. 22.

<sup>26</sup> Jettmar, 1957a and 1957b, 1958a, and 1958b.

the holy animals of the Luristan bronzes. We meet with a special correspondence between goat and tree, as depicted in so many West Asiatic seals.

The chief female deity of the Dards, the Murkum, not only gives easy childbirth to the women-folk like Artemis, but she is also the owner of all wild animals, especially the ibex and markhor. Her residence is on the top of the highest mountain. She can restore to life animals killed and eaten up by putting their bones together. If there is a rib or any other bone lacking, she will replace it by a twig or wooden stick.

This conception is rooted in a special kind of hunting-magic which is widely distributed in time and space.<sup>27</sup> But the nearest parallel can be found in Caucasian lore. Even the characteristic trait of the missing rib is present.<sup>28</sup> It was presumably from the Caucasus that this motif came into the tales of the Alps.<sup>29</sup>

In modern Karakoram the axe is still a highly venerated instrument used in religious ceremonies by the pagan Kalash-Kafirs. Only ideas like these can explain the amazing evolution, rich in fancy, which the axe underwent in Prehistoric Caucasia.

From the linguistic point of view it must be said that only one part of the Dardic vocabulary is Indo-Aryan. Some roots of the rest can be explained by Burushaski, but others are still obscure.<sup>30</sup> The Dards certainly contain a considerable alien element of unknown origin.

I think when we have an anthropologic analysis of the Dards, we shall see that their nearest relatives are not other Indian peoples but the mountain folk of Western Asia.

When I came to the conclusion that so many Caucasians or, at least, West Asiatic traits were included in the old Dardic pattern, I was not able to say in what way and at what time they were imported. Now there is at least a faint possibility that they were brought by the same wave of men and ideas which carried the shaft-hole axe and the trunnion celt into the borders of the Northwest Frontier Province. As Heine-Geldern

<sup>27</sup> Friedrich, 1943: 193-218; Nachtigall, 1952; Meuli, 1946. Beninger observed this connection already in 1934. Cf. Beninger, 1958/59: 80.

<sup>28</sup> Dirr, 1925: 140-143.

<sup>29</sup> L. Schmidt, 1952: 520-524. Finally it reached the Germanic peoples of Scandinavia.

<sup>30</sup> Morgenstierne, 1932: 48. Burushaski is an enigmatic language unrelated to any of the great families and spoken today only in the most inaccessible valleys of the Karakoram (Yasin and Hunza). Cf. Lorimer, 1955a and 1935b. Lorimer, 1938.



MAP 1. Main area of the Shina language and adjacent regions. X denotes site of the hoard.  
 ///// denotes altitude over 2,500 meters.

pointed out tribes of Caucasian origin may have joined the Aryans in their migration to India.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Heine-Geldern, 1956: 139. For other explanations see my second article in this book.