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NORTHERN VISITORS IN THE INDUS-VALLEY,
DURING THE EARLY BUDDHIST PERIOD?

The book listing up the petroglyphs of the Altaj, which was published by Kubarev and Matočkin¹ is only modestly illustrated, but very exact and useful. After a bibliography of 12 pages, 172 sites are mentioned, characterized by short remarks. They are arranged according their situation in the basins of the major rivers. Interpretations are only mentioned when they are highly controversial. There is one motif, which was called by one of the colleagues "Gridshaped", although this is correct mostly only for the basis of the figure. Above this basis a smaller cone is raised, with branches on both sides which we could understand as arms. In the site Kalbak-Taš more than forty images of this kind are known (fig. 1).

In other cases the cone is reduced to a central spindle with ribs on both sides. The head is indicated by a rhomboid figure on the top of the spindle, and the arms, with three-fingered hands, are extended over the fringe of the expanding parallelogram, forming the upper part of the body (fig. 2). This variety was observed along the river Čuluutyn-Gol (or Čuluut) in Mongolia. Elena Okladnikova, the daughter of the most famous explorer of the last generations (for a

¹ V. D. KUBAREV, E. P. MATOČKIN, *Petroglify Altaja*, Opytnyj zavod PTS, Novosibirsk, 1992.

long time chief of a large Institute in the Siberian Branch of the Academy at Novosibirsk) was challenged to offer an interpretation. In her early reports she called such signs “log cabins”, “lodges”, “huts”, even “elegant drawings of constructions like a pagoda”. In her later studies Okladnikova² maintained that there is a local development to be observed in Mongolia, in the gorge of the river Čuluut. E.A. Novgorodova had described the same site and she explained it as renderings of male or female shamans, an explanation as well accepted by other specialists³. But Shamans are not clothed in wide aprons or skirts, they wear coats decorated by metallic pendants. Previously even Okladnikov had accepted figures of this kind with the upper part reduced to a skeleton, in the frame of shamanitic beliefs.

In the meantime, the ethnographers had proposed to explain such figures as sledges or dragging implements moved by bulls. The site Tebš had such drawings⁴.

Even distant comparisons were taken into consideration, e.g. the drawings observed in Valcamonica, in Italy.

Kubarev and Matočkin observe that Okladnikova gives not a final decision, she is quoting the different explanations. However it is evident that she believes that we are confronted with wooden buildings, towers forming part of the local sanctuaries.

Evidently, Okladnikova has collected parallels from an enormous area, including the Near East. She is aware of a diachronic extension over several millennia, but she did not stress further relevant observations.

Apart of the frontal structures, which have a clearly female character (because the nipples are visible on the breast) there are other figures seen in profile. They are definitely male, the phallus is accentuated. In several cases we find a combination between the

² E. A. OKLADNIKOVA, *Tropoju Kogul'deja*, Lenizdat, Leningrad, 1990, p. 64-84.

³ E. A. NOVGORODOVA, *Mir petroglifov Mongolii*, Nauka, Moskva, 1984; E. A. NOVGORODOVA, *Drevnjaja Mongolija, (Nekotorye problemy chronologii i etnokol'turnoj istorii)*, Nauka, Moskva, 1989. p. 89-109.

⁴ E. A. OKLADNIKOVA, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

broad (and dominating) female and a slender and demanding male figure⁵. Large series of these “partners” are to be seen⁶. Here such images are presented as figures 3 and 4.

Moreover in some cases the dominant female figure wears a sort of breast-cover⁷. This is not unique, others from Kalbak-Taš are depicted in the booklet of Okladnikova⁸. It is supposed that all these Siberian specimens are from the first half of the second millennium B.C.

Similar peculiarities occur in rockcarvings which are distinguished by the area, the context and the supposed dating. I saw them as the first attentive foreigner in the Indus valley below Chilas and called the site Chilas II. It has so far no convincing explanation and was published in the catalogue for the exhibition in 1985⁹ and again in vol. I(b) of the Series “Antiquities of Northern Pakistan” illustrating the contribution of G. Fussman (text on pages 11, 32, 33 and 1989, Plate 10 and 12). Here it is connected with an inscription translated by Dani¹⁰ as “establishment of Hāriti”. That was not accepted by Fussman, who proposes to consider Hāriti as part of a proper name which indicates a special relation to the female Demon Hāriti which became a deity in the Buddhist pantheon.

The dating is around the beginning of our era. The text engraved on the same rock is a conclusive argument.

As important are the differences. The figure is squatting with widely opened legs ending in large human feet¹¹. The sexual parts

⁵ E.A. OKLADNIKOVA, *op. cit.*, Photo on p. 87; V. D. KUBAREV, *Drevnie rospisi Karakola*, Nauka, Sibirskoe otdelenie. Novosibirsk, 1988, Fig.81.

⁶ E.A. NOVGORODOVA, *Mir petroglifov Mongolii...* Fig 25; E.A. NOVGORODOVA, *Drevnjaja Mongolija...* p. 96-97.

⁷ V.D. KUBAREV, *Drevnie rospisi Karakola...* Fig. 81.

⁸ E.A. OKLADNIKOVA, *Tropoju Kogul'deja*, Lenizdat, Leningrad, 1990, p. 85.

⁹ K. JETTMAR (mit Beiträgen von Dr.V. THEWALT und Dipl. Ing. R.KAUPER) *Zwischen Gandhara und den Seidenstrassen. Felsbilder am Karakorum Highway*, Ausstellungskatalog, Hrsg.v.d. Forschungsstelle der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften und dem Verlag Philipp von Zabern, (60 S.mit 62 Zeichnungen, 3 Karten und 24 Farb-tafeln) Mainz 1985, Plate 12.

¹⁰ A.H. DANI, *Chilas. The City of Nanga Parvat (Dyamar)*, Ed. A. H. DANI, Islamabad, 1983, p. 114.

¹¹ V.D. KUBAREV, E.P. MATOČKIN, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

are indicated (like in Petroglyph fig. 35 from Kalbak-Taš), the body is seen in a frontal view. There is a breast-cover, formed by pending tassles. There are two super-imposed pairs of arms (?) somewhat reminding fig. 81 in Kubarevs study. Certain the interpretation as a *stupa* is not quite wrong, and that is an agreement with the fact that a pillar is depicted on the right side of the composition - but this pillar might be explained a human figure, with a rather narrow basis and an animal on top. This narrow figure has certainly the function of the male partner, slender and subservient.

It should be mentioned that a certain affinity could be attested to the image of a seal, found in Mohenjo Daro showing a "multifaced anthropomorphic god squatting on a throne that has hooved legs". It is crowned by buffalo horns and a fig branch¹².

Maybe my interpretation is wrong then the result should be a challenge to try other explication.

But, in case that I have made some useful observations, maybe some of the females depicted at Kalbak-Taš in many iconographic variants belong to a much later period. It was like the site Čuluut¹³ a sanctuary where cosmic potencies were venerated. Not even the spread of Buddhistic ideas could destroy this traditional concept.

That the symbols of the new world-religion appeared side by side of the ancient symbols is attested at čuluut. Here near to the carvings, rendering the great female deity there is a drawing, which is explained by Novgorodova as an "anthropomorph figure". But the normal explanation would be that a mchod-rten, an "obok" is depicted here, with the basis, the *anda* and the pinnacle, with three umbrellas (fig. 5).

When such a popular compilation happened in the northern fringe of the Buddhist world, what kind of movement brought this concept into the Indus-valley, where pagan cults were replaced by the world religion hardly before the second century B.C.? There are

¹² A. PARPOLA, *Deciphering the Indus script*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994. p. 250, fig. 14, 16.

¹³ E.A. NOVGORODOVA, *Mir petroglifov Mongolii*,... p. 40-58; E. A. NOVGORODOVA, *Drevnjaja Mongolija*,... p. 89-109.

many renderings of normal *stupas* in the immediate neighborhood, and several drawings show the worshipers, approaching the monument for adoration. They have dismounted from their horses, but they are armed, the weapons are clearly visible. Therefore I am not convinced that Fussman interpreted the situation correctly. He explained Chilas II as a summer camp for merchants and their personal who arrived from the plains, and made a break near to the bank of the Indus, before they perpetuated their journey, maybe leaving precious information about current beliefs in the lowlands.

Maybe for such journeys into the barbaric highlands, the merchants were protected by armed guards, who had arrived together with the Kusāns or their Saca predecessors, who had made as well the way from the northern fringes of the steppe-belt, maybe even from the Altay. They were certainly the best protection, they were familiar with the routes.

Postscript

In the meantime the site Kaibak-Tash was published in the frame of the “Répertoire des Petroglyphs” presented by the “Mission Archéologique Française en Asie Centrale” and the Siberian branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences. More of these schematic females were found here, even the combination with a “specifically phallic” partner is to be seen in several places. The dating is discussed in the “Commentary”. The origin of the complex of iconic aspects may go back to the Early Bronze Age. It persisted for a long time until the Iron Age¹⁴.

However, the use of one motif occurring here in the late period when Buddhism was spread and immediately used in syncretistic combinations (as mentioned in this study) would require the bold thesis that maybe in a restricted area still not covered by

¹⁴ V. D. KUBAREV, E. JACOBSON, *Siberie du Sud 3: Kalbak-Tash I (Republique de l'Altai)*, Répertoire des Petroglyphes d'Asie Centrale, Fascicule No.3, Mémoires de la Mission Archéologique Française en Asie Centrale. Tome V. 3, p. XIII-XIV.

petroglyphic studies the strange basic motif survived a full millennium.

That is not as improbable as it seems. One of the possible explanations was just mentioned and another one should be added. Petroglyphs are almost eternal, they were seen by later visitors, admired and interpreted by them according to their own spiritual background. Most probably the actual meaning was forgotten since many centuries. Sometimes the re-acceptance is attested by the addition of new traits incompatible with the original idea. In the Hindukush, the Lord of the Valley who provokes the earthquakes was certainly conceived as a male deity - but in the later period this deity was considered as a female in the process of childbirth. It is one of the more sophisticated tasks of the investigator to recognize such perverting changes.

Illustrations

- Figure 1 - Schematic females as rendered in the site Kalbak-Tash.
 Figure 2 - Schematic females and their male partner. (Chuluut)
 Figure 3 - Schematic female and ityphallic male at Kalbak-Tash
 Figure 4 - Male partners as presented in the book of Novgorodova.
 Figure 5 - Stupa - under the influence of the image of the schematic Females, after Novgorodova.
 Plate I - Petroglyph in the site Chilas II: Demonic figure with pillar and *stupa* with a circular dome , so called *Hārīti* ANP I. PI. 10.

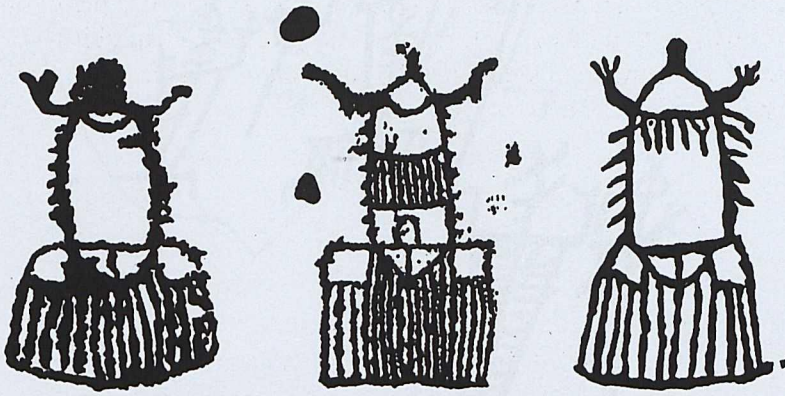


Fig. 1

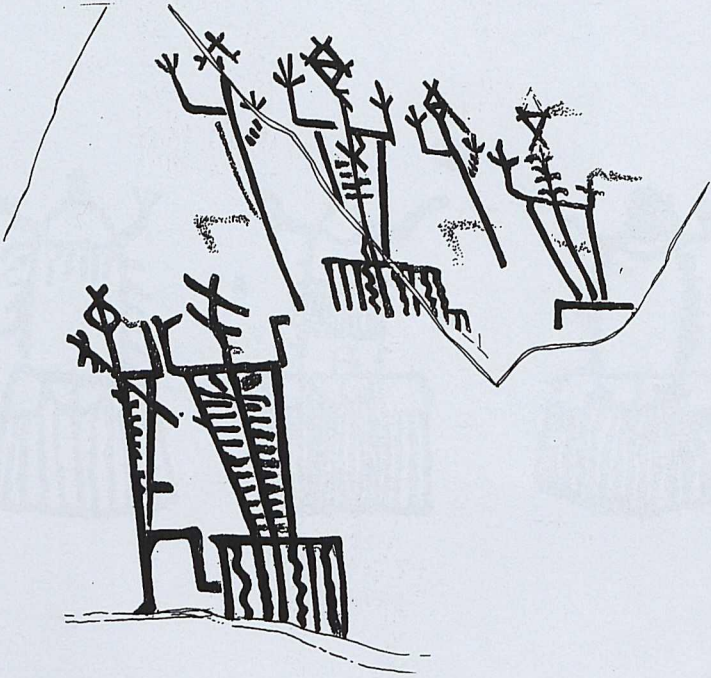


Fig. 2

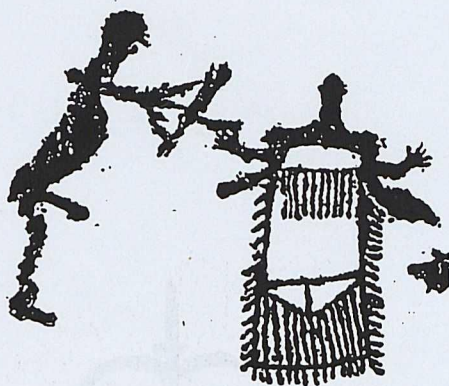


Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Plate I