

IRANIAN MOTIVES AND SYMBOLS AS PETROGLYPHS IN THE INDUS VALLEY

The recent discovery in Pakistan of so many Sogdian inscriptions written in the proper script of their homeland is of great importance for Iranistic studies. At least part of them belongs to the period between the «Ancient Letters» whatever date we propose (Henning 1948 or Harmatta 1979) and the documents of Mount Mug (Livšic-Khromov 1981: 365-366). Even the texts published and interpreted so far representing only a part of the material (Humbach 1980) are of interest for the Historian as well. They prove that the Sogdian trade-system extended right into the lands between Gandhāra and Kashmir and certainly even beyond. Sogdians were also involved in the connections between this «North West Corner» of the Subcontinent and the Tarim Basin as one inscription was observed in Hunza (fig. 1).

Apparently the route between Sogdiana and the «North West Corner» was used by Buddhist pilgrims too. Some inscriptions, especially those translated by Prof. Livšic (who saw and interpreted photographs submitted to him in 1980) are in favour of such a supposition. They are not yet published. Some readings were taken into consideration by Humbach.

On the other hand not all Sogdians attested by inscriptions professed themselves as Buddhists. I would guess that some of them were not on good terms with this religion.

It seems that the Sogdians concentrated their activities in certain parts of the Indus valley. Perhaps in such places they were under the special protection of a foreign state which may have been the state of the Hephthalites (Chavannes 1903a: 221-229). It is quite possible that their satellite called Che-mi (=«Tchitrâl») by Chavannes (also «Shē-mi», Stein 1921: 9-11, *cfr.* Chavannes 1903b: 406) extended right into the Indus valley without including Chilas proper — where Sogdian inscriptions are indeed rare (Jettmar 1977: 416).

Humbach recognized other Iranian inscriptions as well in Parthian, Bactrian, and maybe Middle Persian.

In any case they form a large and important group almost matching the main body of epigraphical material in Indian scripts, namely Kharoṣṭhī and Brāhmī, mostly using Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit (*cfr.* Dani 1983a, 1983b,

1983c, v. Hinüber 1983). Chinese inscriptions are comparatively rare, those in Tibetan restricted to a few places.

The interpretation of the Iranian inscriptions, even their historical exegesis is a task for the philologist. A special volume will be devoted to this work.

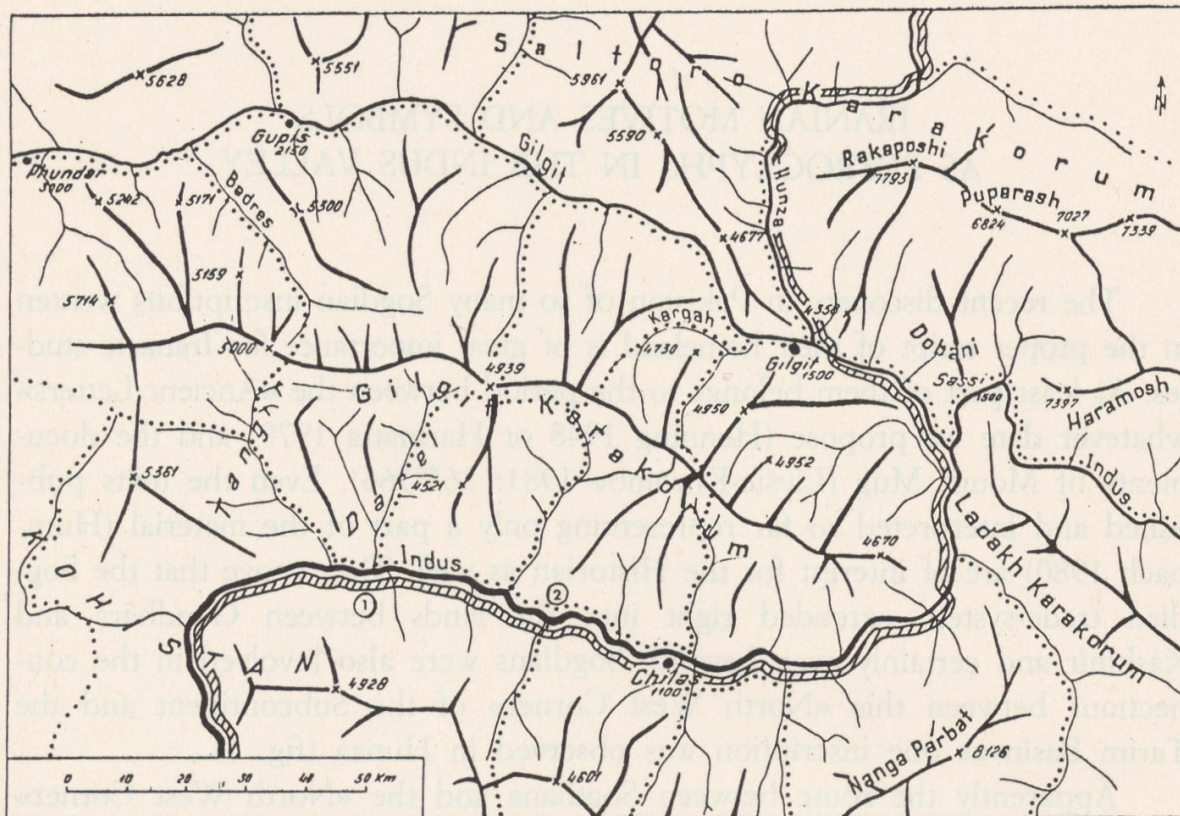


Fig. 1. – Map of the Indus Valley and adjacent areas of North Pakistan. Karakorum Highway.

Traditional tracks for horses and men on foot, now replaced by jeep-roads:

- ① Site Shatial Bridge;
- ② Site Thor, Northern Bank.

However for the historical exegesis the study of the rockcarvings either interspersed by Iranian inscriptions or connected with them by style and content is an absolute necessity. We must try to get their meaning and determine their derivation — fascinating but cumbersome problems. Some preliminary results may be presented here.

1. The most relevant group of objects depicted on the rocks (esp. at Shatial Bridge and Thalpan) are altars. They often consist of a basis, a heavy pillar, a table with horns at the corners and some smaller wedge-shaped object in between. This particular type has a long tradition. It is well represented during the Parthian period (e.g. Schlumberger 1969: 107, fig. 36 [Dura], 143, fig. 50 [Hatra]). Maybe in the Kushano-Sasanian period such altars became

fashionable in the areas farther east (Göbl 1984, Typologie VII-502, 521, 593, 705). Related symbols were used in the coinage of the Iranian Huns (Göbl 1967: VI, Tafel 18 - Altäre) (fig. 2).



Fig. 2. – Horned altar, rockcarving in the site Shatial Fort. Height approximately 40 cm.
(all photos K. Jettmar and V. Thewalt).

But there are other forms as well, *e.g.*, in shape of portable stands. A separate study will be needed for their analysis.

2. In the site Thor, Northern bank, near to an altar of the «horned pillar» type there is a monument to be seen in the shape of a round column on a

square basis. The rounded end is divided into two shields. Some object, maybe the sprig of a tree, is fixed on top of it. Certainly this must be a shrine because a worshipper is kneeling next to it. He holds a fork-shaped implement, not too different from symbols used in the pre-Islamic cults of Arabia, perhaps some sort of caduceus (Gese etc. 1970: 212, 296-317) (fig. 3).



Fig. 3. – Religious monument (baitylos) with horned altar and adorant. Rockcarving in the site of Thor, Northern Bank. Size of the scene approximately 30 × 30 cm.

A drawing of a similar column but without altar and worshipper occurs in Hunza-Haldeikish. Since there are Brāhmī inscriptions not far from it I was induced to try an *Interpretatio Indica*, i.e., to explain the monument as lingām. But here we should also refer to the fact that sacred stones, «shaped like a sugar loaf» were venerated as cult symbols in the Elymais. They represent Bēl, the Semitic «equivalent» of Ahuramazdāh, the protector of local kings. They are depicted in the reliefs of Tang-i Sarvak and were correctly interpreted by Aurel Stein (1940: 103-113) who called them baetyls (= bēt-Ēl = House of God) and Henning (1951/52: 157, 160) who uses the term «massēbā». Of course the Elymais had Semitic as well as Iranian settlers, but the symbol was

certainly known in many parts of Iran and beyond. We do not know by which route it reached the Indus, but we cannot exclude that Sogdians were the transmitters. However in the valleys of the Hindukush (apparently since pre-historic times) there existed beliefs that the highest mountain peaks are the abode of deities, fairies and demons as I have shown in a book on the pre-Islamic religions of this area (1975: 212). Prominent pinnacles, either natural or man-made, in the fields or near human habitations are considered as «miniature mountains», *i.e.*, permanent or transitory homes and sitting-places for the supernatural beings. The idea is related to one cherished by the Lepchas of Sikkim where by arranging larger and smaller stones to a shrine a «mountain panorama» is created inviting the deities to come down and to pour out their blessings over the community (Siiger 1955: 186-189).

Basing on this conception menhirs and baetyls as well as stupas can fulfil the same task. They are what in Tibet is called «lha-tho» offering a homestead and a place of worship to the local deity (Tucci 1956: 38, 1970: 272).



Fig. 4. – Sheep with a scarf around the neck, Brāhmī-inscription. Chilas V. Height of the animal 20 cm.

This may explain why there is no clear demarcation between originally heterogenous kinds of monuments. Next to degraded stupas drawings appear more similar to baetyls.

3. Near Chilas there is the carving of a ram with a scarf around his neck. Maybe this specific kind of distinction was originally restricted to animals personifying the *farn* (< *xvarnah*) translated as «splendour of good luck» (Widengren, 1965: 332, Lukonin 1977: 207, plate). But the same motif was used as design on lavishly decorated textiles produced by Sogdians under Sasanian influence as can be seen on their wall-paintings (Al'baum 1975: Pl. LIV). Such fluttering scarfs are known from Oriental metal work too, on the famous plates and vessels preserved in Soviet collections (Darkevič 1976: Pl. 5, 1, fig. 8) (fig. 4).

Nevertheless the meaning as a religious symbol was not entirely lost, and that may explain the carving made by a transient visitor (?) in the Indus valley.

4. In the rockcarvings of Shatial bridge however we see phalli decorated with the same sort of scarf worn like a necktie at the proper place. In Tang-i Sarvak the baetylos is encircled by a diadem, the two ends of the bandeau clearly visible. Henning (1951/52) explains that here the presence of the Supreme God is indicated who confirms kingship to humans. Maybe this «royal baetylos» was the deliberately misinterpreted prototype of our carving (fig. 5).



Fig. 5. – Carving on the rocks near Shatial Bridge. Sitting figure (Buddha) with nimbus. Kharoṣṭhī-inscription and lingam-baitylos (height ca. 30 cm.) with scarf.

5. I was rather amazed when I found a carving near Chilas representing an emblem which appears as topping of the crown of Sasanian kings: Xusro II (591-629), Hormizd V (631/32) and Xusrō V (631-633?) (Göbl 1968: 100, Tabelle XIV). A similar emblem combining the symbols of several deities was painted on the cover of an ossuary found in Tok-Kala (Gudkova 1964: 96). It is to be seen over the frame of a door leading into the room where ceremonies were performed which were intended to take the deceased into the realm of the celestial bodies — if not into the final paradise as aptly explained by Rapoport (1971: 105-106) (fig. 6).



Fig. 6. — On top a combination of wings, lunar symbol and star, below a man holding a club (?). Site Chilas III. Height of the drawing 60 cm.

6. On vessels, mostly in silver and of Sogdian origin, partly produced and exported already under Muslim rule, we find representations of lions, the most noble prey of the royal hunter, attacking other animals, or two lions entwined on each side of a ewer, on the frontside decorated with a «tree of life» of archaic design. Just this vessel shows stars with curved rays forming a sort of whirl on the shoulders of the lions (Darkevič 1976: Pl. 3, 1-5, fig. 9, 2 No. 116). The same emblem appears on the shoulders of a lion attacking the mounted king. The lion appears once more lying defeated under the horse (Pl. 6, 1, fig. 9, 5, No. 69).

Only one plate has whirls on shoulder and thigh (Pl. 4, 2, fig. 9, 3, No. 24). The prey, a bull, is decorated in the same way. In post-Sasanian silver work, lions appear mostly with a raised paw.

At the site of Hodar, one of many clusters of rockcarvings not far from Chilas, we see a great number of animals which after some deliberation I interpreted as lions (cf. Dani 1983a: 176 No. 150). They are repeated again and again sometimes connected with inscriptions (from the sixth century A.D. onwards). The texts mention by name people of rank, evidently relatives. (The readings by O.v. Hinüber will be presented soon). I already interpreted such carvings as the heraldic symbol (of foreign origin) belonging to a lineage which dominated the valley of Hodar (Jettmar 1980a: 181).

Nearly all lions at Hodar known to me are decorated on the shoulder by a star or a flower, certainly related to the whirls or whirl-stars on Sogdian silver ware. This sign must have a special meaning. The «raised paw» is another linking feature (fig. 7).

It should be kept in mind that already in Nimrud Dagh there is the picture of a lion sprinkled with stars interpreted as celestial conjunction, especially auspicious for the king (Schlumberger 1969: 46, fig. 20). We can take one thing for sure: this motif has an Irano-Hellenistic background. Not even the fact that we find Indian names in Hodar, not Iranian ones, are an argument against this supposition.

7. In the site of Shatial bridge, where we find the bulk of the Sogdian inscriptions, I observed characteristic signs which I interpreted as tamgas. Maybe the Hephthalite and the Turkish nobility established in many of the Sogdian towns (Livšic 1979) had them imported (Jettmar 1980b: 175). This interpretation was no great intellectual achievement as the rocks around such tamgas are covered by Sogdian inscriptions. There is a sitting deity nearby with the nimbus evolved into petals indicating solar affinity (D'jakonov 1954: Pl. VI) (fig. 8).



In the meantime a catalogue of the Sogdian copper coins appeared (Smirnova 1981) with a carefully written text, useful drawings and rather poor photographs. In fact, the sign ( , ) most frequently represented at Shatial



Fig. 7. – Two lions with stars on the shoulders, Brāhmī-inscription on top. Site Hodar. Height approximately 1 m.



Fig. 8. – Tamga-shaped signs indicating the travellers' place of origin. Shatial-Bridge. Height 35 cm each.

bridge (Smirnova 1981: 22-24, 538. Typus 1-5) appeared already on silver coins with Bactrian script of the fourth or fifth century A.D. But later on it became characteristic for the coinage of Samarkand when it was accepted as a symbol not only for the dynasty but for the whole community. Soviet scholars call it «nišan». According to the Tadžik-Russian dictionary (ed. E. E. Bertel's, Moscow 1954) «nišan» means «sign, mark». I think we should accept the term just to differentiate from the more individual «real» tamgas which can be seen in Shatial bridge on the same rock together with a Bactrian inscription. So the nišan means simply that the traveller came from Samarkand or from another place in the Zeravšan valley (cf. Smirnova 1981: 538, map on p. 543).

Another nišan (type 9, 13) observed in Thor, Northern Bank, is a whirl of three hooks (not a svastika but a «triskele»). In the North this sign is typical for the Samarkand region too (fig. 9).



Fig. 9. – Triskele, also used as heraldic sign in Sogdiana. Height 15 cm. Thor, Northern Bank.

Sogdian coins did not only imitate Chinese prototypes — with a quadrangular opening in the middle — they eventually used Chinese characters as nišan, especially 天 (tien?). So we get an explanation why this sign near Chilas appears without further inscription (fig. 10).



Fig. 10. – Chinese character on a rock near Chilas used as a heraldic symbol. Chilas VI. Height 15 cm.

8. Some carvings which at first glance I recognised as depicting Sogdian objects or persons may appear even more complex after careful checking. The dress of a man venerating a fine stūpa which can be seen on a large boulder at the site of Ziarat was identified by me as Sogdian (1983a: 163). Since a Sanskrit name written in Brāhmī appears on top of this person (Dani 1983a, Pl. X, No. 182, 184). I concluded that not the depicted devotee but the artist might have been a Sogdian. He used a pre-figured motif, namely, the well-known, scene visible at Pjandžikent, object I, room 10 (D'jakonov 1954, Pl. VII): A long-haired priest kneeling beside a fire-altar throws incense with a



Fig. 11. – Man in Middle Asiatic costume, venerating a stūpa. The whole scene is 1.50 m high, with Brāhmī-inscription. Site Ziyārāt.

spoon into the flame. In the rockcarving the spoon is interpreted as an incense burner (?) with a rather strange handle, and the personal emblem, the protecting spirit visible over the priest's left shoulder becomes a flower in the devotee's hand. The costume of the man is known from Sogdiana (Belenickij 1973: 30, room VI/24), but also from Bamiyan, Fondukistan and Eastern Turkistan (Lobačeva 1979, fig. 3/3, 4, fig. 5/4). The costume alone would not have rendered the basis for an identification (*cfr.* Jettmar 1983a: 163) (figs. 11, 12).



Fig. 12. – Local but almost contemporary imitation of the scene of fig. 10 in the immediate neighbourhood.

Anyhow I want to emphasize that Iranian elements occur even outside the area in which Sogdian inscriptions are confined. But we have still new discoveries ahead. V. Thewalt lately found Sogdian inscriptions east of Thor where they were rather rarely seen during earlier expeditions.

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Fig. 1. - Porta del fianco destro, Sant'Antonio.