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THE MAIN BUDDHIST PERIOD AS REPRESENTED IN THE PETROGLYPHS AT CHILAS AND THALPAN

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Comparing the Buddhist monuments discovered in the Swat valley by our Italian colleagues (most useful synopsis in the Catalogue edited by Callieri 1982) with the Buddhist petroglyphs found by the Pak-German Study Group in the Indus valley, we immediately see that we are confronted with separate and only partly contemporary complexes, both of Gandhāran art (cf. Dani 1982, 1983; Jettmar 1980, 1980a, 1980b, 1980/81, 1982, 1982a, 1983, 1984, 1984a, 1984b, 1985; Thewalt 1983, 1984; Jettmar & Thewalt 1985):

In Swat representative strata are arranged, in a coherent sequence, the creative phase ending in the sixth century A.D., or even earlier. This is in accordance with the report of Chinese pilgrims, esp. Hsüan-tsang (A.D. 629-640). He tells us that along the Swat river "there had formerly been 1400 monasteries but many of these were now in ruins, and once there had been 18,000 Brethren but these had gradually decreased until only a few remained." (Beal 1884/1969: 120; Watters 1904-5/1973: 226).

In the Indus valley north of the final part of the Great Himalayan range, i.e., between the gorges formerly skirted by the "Hanging Passages" and the massif of Nanga Parbat, there are two main centres. One centre is situated near Shatial Bridge, the other one in the Chilas/Thalpan area. Here the study of the epigraphic material first by Dani (1983: 91-128), now by Fussman and v. Hinüber (their reports are in print) gives us a reliable chronological framework.

So we may say that Buddhist activities started here in the first century A.D., but then ebbed away. After an intermediate period of conflicting trends, full Buddhist predominance began in the early sixth and ended in the eighth centuries A.D., its demise clearly a consequence of the Tibetan invasions. During the preceding golden age of Transhimalayan Buddhism, Thalpan was the main sanctuary and Chilas the seat of the corresponding political establishment, which too ordered rock-carvings expressing pious devotion.

On both banks of the Indus petroglyphs featuring stupas, Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, adorants, even Jataka scenes and other compositions reveal a great variety of stylistic trends. A part of this production indicates artists of great competence and sophistication. They certainly belonged to several independent, but in some cases contemporary, schools.

This mixed iconography corresponds to the spiritual situation which is reflected in the inscriptions of religious character, many being directly connected with the pictorial works. Artists of diverse extraction were employed and supported by a local élite which was by no means homogeneous. The names once more indicate different ethnicities. Sanskrit and Iranian names prevail, but some are seemingly not Indo-European.

I mentioned already the new readings made by O. v. Hinüber who did a most scrupulous examination *in situ*. His effort helps to clarify the political system of this period, the essential background for understanding its religious and artistic exuberance.

One major power was that of the Daradas. One of their rulers was already named in a Kharoshthi inscription from Alam Bridge (seen by Fussman in 1976, published 1978: 18), partly written in an enigmatic non-Indo-Aryan language, maybe proto-Burushaski.

An inscription at a prominent place below the fort of Chilas, using akṣaras elaborated in an ornamental way, was made on order of the Maharaja of the Daradas, Vaiśraveṇasena. He proclaimed the appointment of his spiritual teacher, Rudraśvarma most probably a Brahman, to some kind of official position in a district which must have included Chilas.

Prof. v. Hinüber rightly asserts that this king had his residence somewhere else, and we may add that it was certainly not in the Gilgit valley where Fussman had looked for the cradle of the Daradas. The original name of this area was Bru-ža (Laufer 1908), it became part of the Kingdom of Balōr (Chakravarti 1953/54 and Jettmar 1977: 425). More probable is that their homeland lay somewhere west of Kashmir, e.g., in the Hazara district. Later on they retreated into a mountain stronghold on the banks of the Kishanganga river, maybe near Gurez.

In those days, the Gilgit valley was under the control of the Paṭola Shahis, a dynasty also ruling Baltistan. Their realm was called Balōr. ("Palolo Shahi", i.e. the local version of the title, is attested by an inscription which I found two years ago.)

A century later a Shahi, Vajraśura by name, who did not belong to the Paṭolas, ordered a rock inscription below Chilas. Perhaps in those days he was the lord of the Indus valley – either as a governor under the Daradas, or as an independent ruler. Or he was only a pilgrim visiting the sacred precinct. Several of his officials and relatives recorded their names and titles nearby. In any case, there were several political units in the mountains north of Kashmir, certainly more than those mentioned by Huei-ch'ao and other travellers (Fuchs 1939). They coexisted on the same conditions and dangers, and with similar chances:

These highland statelets had good strategic

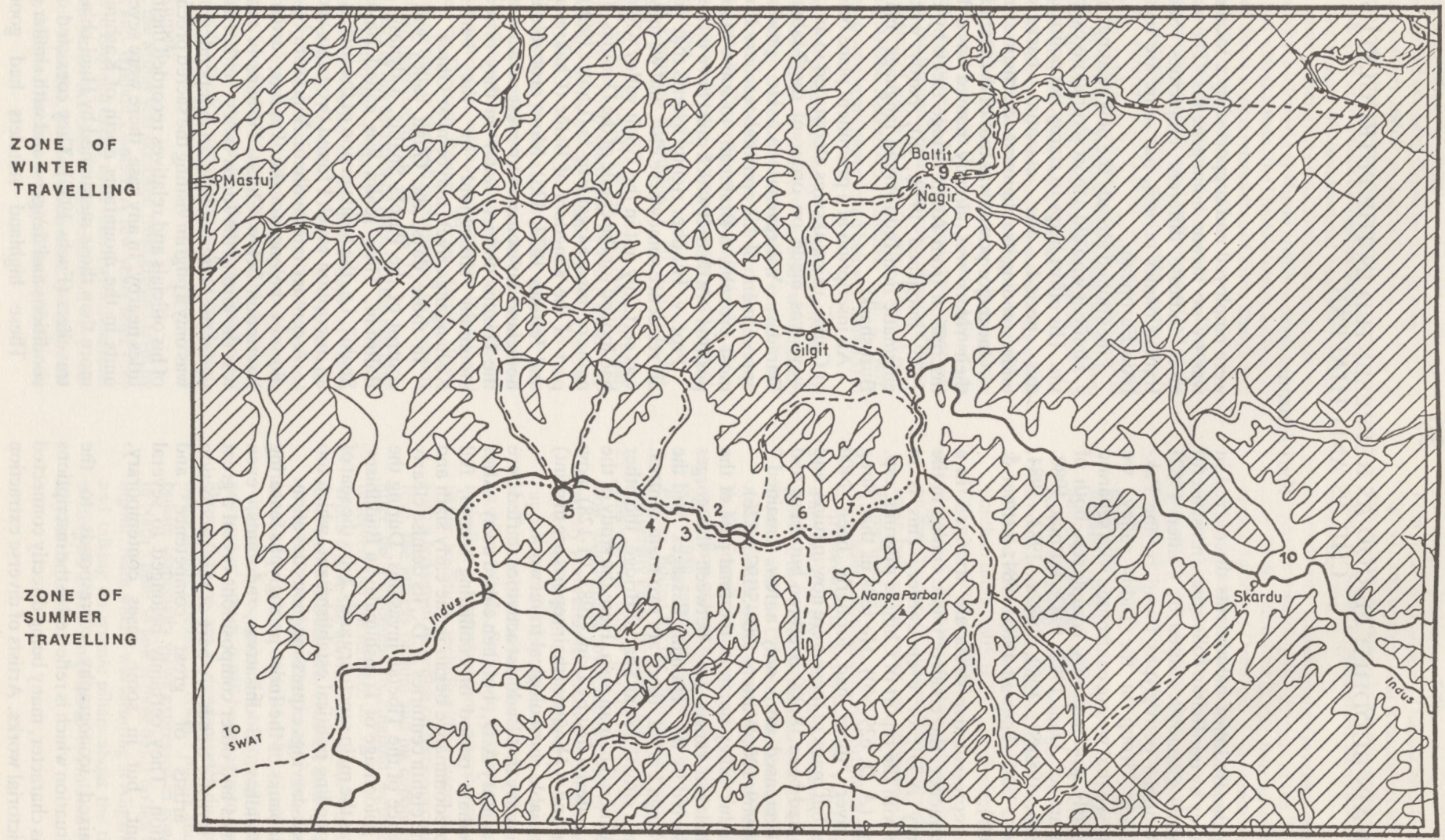

Fig. 1. Clusters of Petroglyphs and Inscriptions Discovered in the Northern Areas of Pakistan up to 1985. 1. Chilas/Thalpan area (altogether 13 clusters); 2. Hodar; 3. Oshibat; 4. Thor (clusters on the southern and the northern bank); 5. Shatial Bridge (4 clusters); 6. Gez; 7. Shingan Gah; 8. Alam Bridge; 9. Hunza Haldeikish; 10. Shigar.
--- Local transit routes (before the building of modern roads); . . . Difficult passage through the gorges of the Indus ("Hanging Passages").

Fig. 2. Petroglyphs Ordered by Kuberavāhana (pertinent votive inscriptions, translated by O. v. Hinüber). 1. Stūpa, Thalpan Bridge; 2. Vyaghri-Jātaka, Chilas I; 3. Śibi-Jātaka, Thalpan Bridge; 4. Ṛṣipañcaka-Jātaka, Thalpan Bridge. Drawings and interpretations by V. Thewalt.

positions to resist the Hunnic/Hephthalite inroads of this period. When all principalities in the southern periphery of the mountains were laid waste and their monasteries became "ruinous and deserted" as in Taxila, Simhapura and Uraśa – even Kashmir was under a foreign yoke for a while (Beal 1884/1969: 37, 144, 147, 156, 158) – they could credit themselves with the preservation of the proud Kushan heritage. So the lords of the mountains used a selection of archaic and pretentious Indian and Iranian titles.

Buddhism was a part of the imperial heritage; and it was not affected here by foreign impacts as it was in other areas.

As a result of this situation, the kingdoms of the northern mountain valleys became not only capable of absorbing craftsmen previously working in the minor centres between Gandhāra and Kashmir (as already seen by Dani 1983: 130), but also provided most welcome areas of exile for so many dignitaries, monks and artists stemming from the destroyed centres.

In Balōr (cf. Pelliot 1959: 91-2), the Gilgit Manuscripts were produced by such displaced religious persons. Around Chilas, rock-carvings were made by people otherwise working as painters, but here accepting a more barbarous technique as a local substitute. Therefore we find the final stages of several lines of development, all of them ramifying from Gandhāran art.

Here I see a major challenge to the art historian. But the aim of my present reasoning is different. As I tried to show in my previous reports (e.g. 1982a, 1984), there had been several earlier sanctuaries of the local, seemingly non-Indo-European religion. Thalpan was just one of these localized shrines with a tradition leading down from the Bronze Age. Tradition favoured the utilization of natural rock formations: platforms, abris, gorges of rivulets, open places encircled by rocks, as ceremonial centres. The flanking walls of such cult places were decorated by carvings creating an aura of sanctity lingering on to the present day. This indigenous religion was able to integrate many foreign impacts, also offering the basis of a technical means of expression in petroglyphic art to the first and the later Buddhist waves.

For a while local interpretations of the Buddhist symbols became popular: stupas were understood as mountain symbols or as supernatural beings. Sporadic inscriptions indicate some coexistence of these "folk Buddhist" cults with orthodox iconography.

But then we see an antagonistic movement: an active repugnance against the Buddhist inundation favoured by foreign lords, whose values would have proved incompatible with a way of life based on hunting and herding.

After the collapse of the political system during the Sino-Tibetan wars, a reorganized cult combining the ancient pastoral-hunting motifs with new martial symbols emerged – a syncreticism that would have been congenial to the Bon-pos of Tibet. There is, however, no evidence of any invasion of a "battle-axe people" in this period as has been suggested by Dani; rather we witness the development of indigenous traditions with greater emphasis upon "warrior-ceremonial" symbols (axes, shields, mounted hero figures) but otherwise showing no radical discontinuities in culture, as I have demonstrated in recent papers (cf. Dani 1983: 185-231; Jettmar 1984a).

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