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THE GILGIT MANUSCRIPTS AND THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF GILGIT

by

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The Gilgit Manuscripts are still the most comprehensive source for a better understanding of the spiritual life of the Buddhists in the areas north of Kashmir. They shed light on the political history as well, therefore scholars of many countries studied them as can be seen, *e.g.*, in the diligent and highly critical summary presented by O. Von Hinuber (1979: 329—337).

The Manuscripts are known to have been found in a stupa (?) on two occasions mainly: in 1931, when a shepherd broke into a small chamber containing manuscripts, and in 1938, when an official but very hasty excavation was undertaken.

Less attention was paid to the place of discovery as well as to the specific, rather strange context. Indian colleagues are excused in this respect as Gilgit is on the other side of the cease-fire line, but specialists of nations not having to fight such odds definitely lost a chance. I was there and duely rewarded by ascertainments which today seem to me

quite simple and evident but apparently were never realized by anybody, at least I did not find them anywhere in print.

I published two reports (1981 in German, 1981a in English) to my regret without response, so a short summary here may be enough: When in 1931 Hackin visited the ruins of the stupa-shaped building which had contained the first cluster of the manuscripts, he found a quadrangular structure with two superimposed storeys. The east side of the lower one had a length of 6.60 metres, the upper one 6.00 metres. In the interior he saw only a round chamber, apparently in bad condition, because the men who had spoiled the monument were mainly looking for any contents but for wood which is scarce just in this area. In the middle there were the “re-ains” of a central pillar and of four pillars to its sides which had supported a wooden ceiling. The chamber was partly filled with stones and mud evidently fallen down when the beams of the ceiling were removed.

In 1938, when the villagers started to dig down inside the chamber, they met another wooden ceiling. Its precious beams being removed, the access was opened to a second chamber below. Then the rubble which had covered the floor of the upper room fell down. Evidently under and among this rubble sheets or even bundles of manuscripts were buried.

Then the authorities of the State of Jammu and Kashmir in Srinagar became attentive and acted immediately as the juridical situation was far from clear. The agreement of March 26, 1935 with the British overlords did not contain any regulation for antiquities found in the Wazarat of Gilgit, henceforth leased to the Government of India (Hassnain 1978: 185-186).

So Shastri suddenly appeared on the scene. He started excavation immediately inside a chamber which had a diameter of almost 5 metres. Apparently he did not realize what becomes evident when comparing his description with that of Hackin (Levi 1932). There a diameter of 2.4 metres is mentioned—and that refers to the upper chamber. Shastri, however, was then working in the chamber of the

lower storey—as anticipated in my text. The wooden construction was more complicated and well preserved. The ground of the room was covered by rubble.

Digging down in a hurry under the suspicious eyes of the British Political Agent, Shastri found manuscripts and other objects as reported in his article (1939). He brought them to Srinagar. Manuscripts which had already been discovered before remained in the house of the Wazir-i-Wazarat posted at Gilgit and were finally taken to Bunji. By chance they escaped destruction during the fighting there in 1947. Some attentive man realized that they were worth a fortune and took them with him, when the files and records were burnt after the conquest by the Gilgit Scouts. Finally they were acquired by Tucci who handed them over to the Government of Pakistan after publication.

From these reports we may learn:

1. The stupa-like building was especially designed to contain religious objects—here the library, charms like *dharanis*, stupa models, perhaps also bronzes.

Locals told me of such bronzes, maybe they are identical with those bearing inscriptions of the Patola Sahis after 1948 sold to American collections. (Pal 1975: Pl. 30a, b and Pl. 31).

There was no access from any side, no door, all objects had been deposited once and for ever. They had certainly not been hidden quickly before the impending attack of an enemy. The construction of such a stupa-shaped container needed time and a considerable labour force. It must have been known to the residents of Gilgit.

2. The main items, the manuscripts, had formed the “working library” of a monastery which had close and direct contact with the Patola Sahi dynasty for several generations. There are later additions to the texts, so they were accessible for some time. For some reason the library must have become obsolete, as after the enshrinement the access was barred completely. The *dharanis* are related to the

Patolas too, as for them V. Hinuber, one of the few scholars who engaged themselves in exploring the history of this dynasty, was convinced that such *dharanis* were produced especially for the beneficial inclusion in the stupa already during the seventh century A.D. (V. Hinuber 1981).

Successive enshrinements would have been impossible in the "main stupa" they were perhaps feasible in three others which were much smaller. As for the manuscripts such a deposition "by instalments" would mean a spiritual break to the monastic community. It is therefore more reasonable to assume that such a complete break had already happened beforehand and the enshrinement took place when the objects had preserved only their "magic functions".

One objection was raised by me already ten years ago (1977:426), when I stressed that Gilgit was never the capital of the Patola Sahis, accordingly the Gilgit Manuscripts were written somewhere else. Following the annals of the Tang dynasty and other sources, Bolor, ruled by the Patola Sahis, was divided into two parts: Great Bolor (as for the problems of this term cf. Pelliot 1959:52) was the name of the eastern part (Chavannes 1903:150; Fuchs 1939:444). Most scholars agree that it corresponds to Baltistan (cf. Tucci 1977: 75—78), its capital might have been somewhere in the basin of Skardu. The names of the Kings mentioned in the Chinese texts belong to the same tradition as those mentioned in the colophones of the Gilgit Manuscripts.

Little Bolor is situated in the west. It must correspond to the Gilgit valley and its surroundings.

Giving way to the repeated attacks of Tibetan armies the king of Great Bolor moved towards the west and settled in Little Bolor (Fuchs 1939:444; Tucci 1977:76). But during the Chinese intervention in 747 A.D. (Chavannes 1903: 152-153) the capital was not Gilgit. As already observed by Chavannes (1903, Notes additionelles: 43n.1) the description of the occupation of the capital by a Chinese army rather fits a location in Yasin. Therefore the only chance to maintain that Gilgit had a special connection with the Patolas is by the hypothesis that before these events which caused a farther shift westward, the ruler of a minor

branch of that dynasty was residing at Gilgit (as proposed in Jettmar 1977:426).

The deviant names of rulers in Little Bolor in the Tangshu rendered by Chavannes as Mo-Kin-mang, Nan-ni, Mo-lai-hi could be attributed to the minor branch.

However, the names in the colophones are those of the main line, and the pompous titles reveal superior power, once more connecting the manuscripts with a residence near Skardu and not at Gilgit. The inscription of Danyor which I saw as the first foreigner in 1958 and re-visited on September 4, 1975 (when the owner wanted to blast it and was dissuaded from doing so only by substantial payments) was made by order of a king of the Great Bolor line: Jayamangalavikramadityanandi. But his title is more modest, therefore Prof. V. Hinuber, who will publish this inscription, considers him rather a refugee from Baltistan then under the protection of the established rulers of Little Bolor.

There is an argument more: The Hatun inscription was carved in the name of a high official of one of the Patola Sahis with most prestigious titles, Nava-Surendradityanandideva by name. The high official, Makarasimha, had several functions, and he was the chief of the army at Gilgitta. (cf. Chakravarti 1953/54: 230—232). Evidently this town was not the seat of the government, otherwise that would have been mentioned. Makarasimha is acting as a plenipotentiary of a distant king. When the datings proposed by V. Hinuber prove to be correct, this inscription fell into the time, when the later Gilgit Manuscripts were produced—hardly at Gilgit.

We may wonder whether the Gilgit valley of those days was not just a recently conquered frontier district, where a non-Indo-European language, ancestral to modern Burushaski, was spoken. It got a new name: Little Bolor, not accepted by the indigenous population. Therefore the next conquerors, the Tibetans, avoided this term (Bacot—Thomas—Toussaint 1940—1946: 50, 51, 63). They spoke of Bru-za, and that was the name of the population as well. Perhaps they posed as liberators to the “natives”.

In Baltistan the situation of research has turned to the better. Recent visits together with our Pakistani colleagues led to the discovery of ruins near the main village of the Shigar valley (with at least four stupas). Apparently there was a sanctuary, most probably a monastery from the time when the earlier "roundish" script was still used. Tsa-tsas of superior quality were found near Skardu. Another monastery is mentioned in an inscription to be published soon. So the "infrastructure" for copying manuscripts was certainly available.

Assuming that the so-called Gilgit Manuscripts were produced somewhere in Baltistan in the neighbourhood of the royal court, we have to explain why they were transported to Gilgit.

It is not difficult to find reasons: when the ruler of Great Bolor fled to Little Bolor, he might have been accompanied by the monks of his home-monastery who took their library and their charms with them.

If I want to explain why this library was enshrined, there must be presented the not yet systematically published results of my investigations during the last years:

In the second half of the first millennium A.D., the area called Bru-Za or Prusava (by Iranians in the Saka Itinerary, cf. Bailey 1968:71) became part of the Bolor Kingdom. The situation remained stable up to the middle of the eighth century A.D., when in spite of the Chinese intervention Little Bolor was conquered by the Tibetans. They even included the adjacent areas to the west (present Chitral) into their realm (Jettmar 1977: 421—423). The term Kog-yul (settled by Bru-Za and Gog people) refer to these extended possessions.

Then the Darada Sahis, who had their centre in the Nilum/Kishanganga valley and had extended the limits of their power into the Indus valley around Chilas in earlier centuries, became their successors in Bru-Za (Jettmar 1984: 209—212). Maybe the Tibetans had appointed them as local governors beforehand; after the collapse of the Central Monarchy in 846 A.D., they certainly became independent rulers.

The state of affairs is reflected by three independent sources: the Saka Itinerary (Bailey 1968:71), the *Hudud-al 'Alam* (Minorsky 1970:171, 261) and Biruni's works, on India (Sachau 1888/1962: 278), and especially in his *Mineralogy* (Belenickij 1963: 221-222). This state and its kings—with Sanskrit names—are mentioned repeatedly by Kalhana until the middle of the twelfth century A.D., but very little is said by later historians of Kashmir, *e.g.*, Jonaraja (Dutt's translation, reprinted 1986). Since Kalhana had to mention them so often due to their habitual plunderings in Kashmir, silence means that they were facing difficulties in their own country, perhaps with their former allies, the Turuskas—warriors of Turkish origin who had immigrated via Baltistan. In any case the next dynasty of Gilgit, the Trakhane, came from this side.

Buddhism certainly had its spiritual culmination before the Tibetan invasion as attested by numerous inscriptions in Great Bolor (Baltistan) and Shamil (*i.e.*, the Indus valley between the gorges and Chilas (cf. Jettmar 1984: 213). But even there it remained the religion of the ruling elite supported by cooperative refugees. Tension resulted with the local tribes, some of them hunters and herdsmen. They preferred their own interpretation of Buddhist symbols. So the carvings hint to the rise of a co-existing "nameless religion".

Such resistance movements got their chance during the turmoils of the eighth century A.D. following the Tibetan invasion. Then they led to local revolts expressed by martial cults combined with the revival of traditional beliefs. That was later on interpreted as a turning to the Bon religion (Hoffmann, 1969). Rock-carvings near Chilas are imposing documents of this nativistic wave.

Before the tenth century the situation changed once more: Buddhism came back under the protection of the Darada Sahis. Fifteen monasteries are mentioned in the district of Prusava (but not so in Shamil). At that time finally Gilgit was royal residence. During this period not carvings but rock-reliefs were made. We know them from Domot (in the Sai valley, badly mutilated), from Bubur in Punyal (in the meantime mutilated and removed), and from the mouth of the Kargah

valley near Gilgit (well preserved because of its high position on a rock face). They fit into a practice spread over Baltistan and Ladakh (Snellgrove—Skorupski 1980, I, Fig. 4, 5, 109, II Fig. 2, 7, 8, 19; our recent discoveries in Baltistan are not yet published). The artists working in Prusava may have come from the east, the centre of diffusion is still unknown. Maybe the Tibetan inscriptions discovered in Punyal (Gakuch, not yet published) belong to this period.

Some late carvings of Chilas (Jettmar 1984, Pl. VI) render stupas related to those known from the paintings at Alchi, they are connected with a “new” type of script (Jettmar 1984: 213—215).

The Tibetans, masters of the country for almost hundred years, acquired a habit of hoarding Buddhist scriptures and sacred objects even before they were converted to this prestigious religion (Dargyay 1977:4). Such items were considered as powerful charms protecting the country and its inhabitants in the same way as treasures deposited in the royal tombs (Tucci 1950: 9—11).

The Darada Kings had laid claim to the former lands but also to the spiritual heritage of the Patolas represented by the manuscripts and charms, but such heirlooms had become incomprehensible. So the best they could do was to enshrine them as seeds of prosperity and blessing. This could be done without haste and camouflage. So the “hollow stupa” with a complicated construction in its interior was erected—in the immediate neighbourhood of the royal palace.

If the hypothesis presented proves to be correct, then the so-called Gilgit Manuscripts are not a source for the spiritual history of Gilgit. They reflect the religious situation and—as far as the colophones are concerned—the ethnic diversity of the dominant elite of Baltistan. Maybe we can even deduce from them what type of language was spoken by the basic population, a still unsolved riddle.

The establishment of an Iranian-speaking dynasty so deep in the mountains is not unlikely. Recently Animal Style carvings were observed even farther to the east. But that is beyond the scope of this lecture.

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