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New Areas of Research For Archaeologists and Buddhologists

by G. Tucci

Up to now the mountainous area of the Pamirs, the Hindukush, the Karakorum and Ladakh, has stimulated alpine climbers to undertake wonderful and extremely perilous expeditions. I think that now the archaeologists should follow on their tracks, because there is no doubt that in the valleys enclosed between the snowy peaks and the glaciers many cultures developed from ancient times, and later on Buddhism too spread widely, as I hope to have shown in an article in *East and West*.¹

Buddhism, first introduced in Uḍḍiyāna (Swāt) and Afghanistan at the time of Aśoka or immediately after him, extended eastwards as far as Ladakh. The inhabitants of those places east of Kafiristan were mainly Dards or people speaking Dardic dialects who had settled there in sites whose previous inhabitants have not yet been firmly identified. The introduction of Buddhism into Baltistan took place before the occupation of Ladakh by the scions of the Tibetan dynasty after the death of Glan-dar-ma (842 A.D.) and the following so-called second diffusion of Buddhism in Guge (late 9th century). Buddhism was already flourishing in Baltistan in the eighth century. In fact there is a very important statement of the Chinese pilgrim Hui-ch'ao, travelling about 726, who states that north of Kashmir there was Great P'u-lü, Gilgit, and that the people of Baltistan were Buddhists and in their land were temples and monks. At that time the Tibetans were not Buddhists, he says; in fact in 726 Buddhism had not yet penetrated Tibet on a large scale, but it is certain that knowledge of it had reached some sections of the society and it had attracted its first followers. Sroṅ-btsan sgam-po married the Chinese princess Wen-ch'eng in 641 A.D. and Mes-ag-tsom married princess Chin-ch'eng in 710 A.D. The Tibetans had made many incursions into Central Asia; at the end of the 8th century they "controlled the

four garrisons." At that time relevant contacts must have taken place between the Tibetans and Buddhism not only as a religion but also as an inspiring mode of life. We know² that mÑah-ris, now Western Tibet, included some districts in which Buddhism was accepted: some of those districts were Li (Khotan), Gru ža = Bru ža³ (Gilgit or Little P'u-lu), sBal-te (Baltistan). The capital of Great P'u-lü was called in Chinese Ye-to (old pronunciation according to Karlgren *ngiät-t'a*): to my mind this is the transcription of a local (Dardic?) word which is at the basis of the Tibetan sKar-rDo. That Skardo was a very important Buddhist centre is testified by a famous book, the *Description of Li-yul* (Khotan);⁴ in this book Skardo is said to be not only a realm, but also the capital of many realms; there is mention in it of a donation of Buddhist books to Skardo from Khotan. The fact that Skardo enjoyed great prestige among Buddhist communities of Khotan is testified by the story told in the same text of how in a former birth Vimala-prabhā made the vow to be reborn in a future life as the daughter of the king of Skardo.

Moreover when I was there in 1930 I admired huge boulders on which were engraved most beautiful bas-reliefs representing rows of Buddhas and portraits of donors; other sculptures were scattered on the rocks. I also bought a small gilt image of Lokeśvara. I took photos of them as well as rubbings of some inscriptions nearby;⁵ I put the rubbings, the photos and the image in a box which fell into the river with the pony who carried it. From the literary documents as well as from the stone reliefs we may draw the conclusion that Skardo is a place which deserves thorough investigation; the image I found had a peculiar look which certainly showed the influence of Kashmir art, but it had also some peculiarities of modelling which led me to think that in Skardo were gifted artisans influenced by the art of surrounding cultural areas; the latter perhaps failed to suppress completely the trends and traditions of the local people.⁶ When investigation is undertaken in Baltistan I suppose that we shall be in a condition to collect richer material than that so carefully studied by Doctor Pal.⁷

While the Buddhist art of Ladakh was mainly influenced by Kashmir (and even by real Indian schools such as the paintings of Mangnang), especially at the time of Rin-chen bzañ-po (958-1055) and later on by Nepalese artists, the Buddhist culture of Baltistan reached this country not only from the South (Kashmir, via Dras

etc.) but also and especially from the North, e.g., Gilgit, and through Gilgit from Khotan and Eastern Turkestan, in general. Of course Buddhism was not the only religion which penetrated into those parts; in Gilgit some inscriptions have been found which testify to the presence of Hinduism there; they contain names of kings which have certainly no Buddhist look: Adityavarman, Sur-endrāditya, Makara(pura), Vikramāditya etc. The discovery of Buddhist texts by Sir Aurel Stein in Gilgit, and that of the *Saṅghabhedavastu* which I found in Pakistan and which certainly comes from the same locality, indicates the presence of learned communities in Gilgit and Hunza. Nor do I exclude the possibility that some stupas may still be discovered in Baltistan containing other books or at least *ts'a-ta*.

One may even ask if the magnificent temple of Alchi,⁸ which has been the object of a very detailed and most accurate study by Snellgrove, has preserved, in some of its paintings, examples of the last descendants of the Baltistani Buddhist artists.

For these reasons, therefore, I am sure that Karakorum, Hindukush, and the Pamirs represent a still unexplored field of research not only for archaeologists interested in prehistory and protohistory, but also for those who are anxious to find out what is left of Buddhist centres scattered in that isolated and inaccessible part of the world.

The Sakā itinerary from Gilgit to Chilas⁹ indicates that along the track from Gilgit to Chilas there were some Saṅghārāmas: Sarakūgi (according to Morgenstierne: Sarikol); Ichanagari, three Saṅghārāmas; at Syadim near the Indus, three Saṅghārāmas; near the bridge on the Indus, four Saṅghārāmas; in Giḍagitti (Gilgit: Hatun Inscription Gilagitta), four stone Saṅghārāmas.

NOTES

1. "On Swat. The Dards and Connected Problems." *East and West*, N.S. vol. 27, 1977 pp. 9 ff.

2. Tucci G., *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* 1949, I, p. 252, note 2.

3. But Bru ṣa is better known as the place from which masters of Bon po religion penetrated into Tibet.

4. Thomas F. W., *Tibetan Literary Texts*, London 1955-65.

5. Photo of some of these bas-reliefs can be found in Biasutti R. and Dainelli G., *Spedizione Italiana de Filippi nell'Himalaya, Caracorum e Turkestan*. Bologna 1925.

6. I may call the attention of the reader on the painted book covers from Gilgit published by Banerje R. D. in *Oriental Art*, N.S. 1968.

7. Pal P., *The bronzes of Kashmir*, Graz, 1975.

8. Snellgrove D. and Skorupski T., *The cultural heritage of Ladakh*, vol. I, Warminster 1977.

9. Bailey H.W., "An Itinerary in Khotanese Saka." *Acta Orientalia*, XIV, 1936. Morgenstierne G., *The Saka Itinerary*, N.T.S., 1942.