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## KARAKORAM HIMALAYAS AND CENTRAL ASIA. THE BUDDHIST CONNECTION

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The Karakoram-Himalayan region is the cradle from where ancient Indian culture including Buddhism spread to different directions in Central Asia, East Asia and South East Asia. Gilgit, Chilas, Chitral, Baltistan, Ladakh, Zaskar and other frontier areas have been important mileposts on the famous Silk Route. Buddhist savants from India contributed to the spread of Buddhism in Central Asia and East Asia. One of the eminent scholars was Kumarajiva (344–413 AD) who broke political, geographical, cultural and linguistic barriers for propagation of Buddhism. Hieun Tsiang mentions four important centres of Buddhism in Central Asia – Shan-shan (Kroraina), Khotan, Kucha and Turfan. Kashmir played an important role in introducing Buddhism to Khotan, which in turn played a key role in the transmission of Buddhism to China. Several important places on the Silk Route system such as Kucha, Balkh, Bamiyan, Khotan, Kashgar etc. developed into important centres of Buddhism when parts of Central Asia and north-western India were integrated into a single kingdom under the Kushans.)

**Keywords:** Karakoram-Himalayas, Gilgit, Chilas, Chitral, Baltistan, Zaskar, Ladakh, Kashmir, Kucha, Kashgar, Khotan, Buddhism, Kumarajiva, Hieun Tsiang, Lotus Sutra, Kanishka, Palola Sahis)

**Introduction.** Abutting the borders of Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and India and being situated in close proximity to Central Asia, the Karakoram-Himalayan region has been an important constituent of India's trans-Himalayan communication network in the continent and beyond. The imposing geographical features and high daunting peaks did not prevent the region from being a complex of cultural interaction, overland trade and communication. This region is the cradle from where ancient Indian culture including Buddhism spread to different directions in Central Asia, East Asia and South East Asia. Gilgit, Chilas, Chitral, Baltistan, Ladakh, Zaskar and other frontier areas have been important mileposts on the famous Silk Route. The Western Himalayan region of India and Central Asia have shared a geo-cultural affinity and a long tradition of historical contacts that dates back to antiquity. The movement of people, trade and ideas and the reciprocal cultural influences enriched the horizons of human development and left a deep imprint on the political, economic and social life in the entire region.

**Study of the Issue.** Buddhist art, culture and philosophy made profound impact in the pre-Islamic Central Asia. Buddhism spread to Central Asia since 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, during Ashoka's time. Buddhist savants from India contributed to the spread of Buddhism in Central Asia and East Asia. One of the eminent scholars was Kumarajiva (344–413 AD) who broke political, geographical, cultural and linguistic barriers for propagation of Buddhism. Son of a Kuchean princess Jiva and Kashmiri Brahman father Kumarayana, Kumarajiva went to Kashmir with his mother and studied Buddhism for five years. On his return to Kucha, he stopped at Kashgar and studied Mahayana texts. On his return from Kashmir to Kucha, many Kashmiri missionaries accompanied Kumarajiva to propagate Buddhism.

Hieun Tsiang mentions four important centres of Buddhism in Central Asia – Shan-shan (Kroraina), Khotan, Kucha and Turfan. Kashmir played an important role in introducing Buddhism to Khotan, which in turn played a key role in the transmission of Buddhism to China. Kucha was one of the most important centres of Buddhist learning. According to Hieun Tsiang, the famous Chinese pilgrim and monk who travelled to India from 629–645 AD, “in Kucha there were more than 100 Buddhist monasteries with above 5,000 priests, who were adherents of the Sarvastivada school and studied in the language of India” [17. P. 60]. From Kucha, Hieun Tsiang visited Aksu (Pohluka), where he found “tens of monasteries with above 1,000 priests, all adherents of Sarvastivada school” [17. P. 64–65].

Hieun Tsiang came to India in 630 AD in search of Buddhist texts after an arduous journey across Central Asia. He spent fourteen years of his life (630–644 AD) visiting Buddhist monasteries on the Silk Route. Knowing both Chinese and Sanskrit, Hieun Tsiang translated 77 texts into Chinese and took back a great corpus of Buddhist texts to China. His itinerary included Balkh, Kafirstan, Swat, Gandhara, Bamiyan, Baltistan, Darel, Gilgit, Kashmir, Poonch, Badakhstan, Ishkashim, Wakhan, Shignan, Pamirs, Yarkand, Khotan, Kucha, Loulan etc. Hieun Tsiang speaks of a “carved wooded image of Maitreya Bodhisatva of a brilliant golden hue, 100 feet high,” in Talilo (modern Darel) describing it to be the work of Madhyantika” [17. P. 239].

In Polulo (modern Baltistan) he found “some hundreds of Buddhist monasteries and some hundreds of priests” [17. P. 240]. Travelling further to Kashmir (Kipin) Hieun Tsiang informs about the existence of hundreds of Buddhist monasteries and about the people who were fond of learning and followed Buddhism and other religions [17. P. 261]. Describing Kashmir as “one of the most important and most famous lands in the history of the spread and development of Buddhism”, the pilgrim relates the story of Madhyantika's visit to Kashmir, his propagation of Buddhism and building of 500 monasteries [17. P. 265]. Hieun Tsiang throws sufficient light on the holding of Buddhist Council in Kashmir by Kanishka, the ruler of Gandhara. He writes: “The Council composed 100,000 stanzas of *Upadesa* sastras, 100,000 stanzas of *Vindya-vibhasa* sastras and 100,000 stanzas of *Abhidharma vibhasa* sastras. King Kanishka had the treatises written on copper plates and enclosed these in stone boxes, which he deposited in a stupa made for the purpose” [17. P. 271].

On his return journey to Central Asia, Hieun Tsiang found in Kashgar “hundreds of Buddhist monasteries with over 1,000 priests all following Saravastivada school” [17. P. 290]. In Yarkand there were “some tens of Buddhist monasteries and about 100 priests, besides numerous stupas in memory of Indian arhats who had passed away” [17. P. 293]. And in Khotan, “The system of writing was found to have been taken from that of India. The people were Buddhists and there were above 100 monasteries, with over 5000 priests, chiefly Mahayanists. Arhat Vairochana had come from Kashmir to propagate Buddhism here” [17. P. 295].

Charles Willeman, an eminent scholar of Buddhism from Belgium, refers to *Jibin* – a term in Chinese, which according to him has been the territory of Udyanda, i.e., the Gilgit area of pre-Kushan times and which gradually developed to encompass the whole Gandhara cultural area and the northwestern India including Kashmir [18. P. 139]. It was during Kashishka’s rule that Kashmir became the most important part of *Jibin* [18. P.140]. Willeman asserts that “China’s Buddhism mainly came from non-Kasmira *Jibin*, certainly the first centuries CE before Kumarajiva” [18. P. 140].

Palola Sahis, a local ruling dynasty of Gilgit which reigned from sixth to eighth centuries AD, patronized the production of Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts and bronze sculptures and carving of Buddhist images and inscriptions on rocks in the Karakoram Himalayan region. Oskar von Hinuber has reconstructed the chronology and genealogy of Palola Sahis [for further details see: 8]. Names of Palola Sahi rulers, their family members and courtiers are mentioned among the donors in the colophons of Buddhist manuscripts discovered in the Karakoram Himalayan region [8. Pp. 12–27, 77–83]. The dynasty and their court officials would “participate in the Mahayan ‘Cult of the Book’ in which devotees made religious offerings by having many Buddhist *sutras* written down” [11. P. 172]. One Palola ruler Navasurendra had got inscribed his imperial titles in a Sanskrit stone inscription at Hatun in the Ishkoman valley written in the Proto-Sarada script in about 671 AD. [3. P. 226–231].

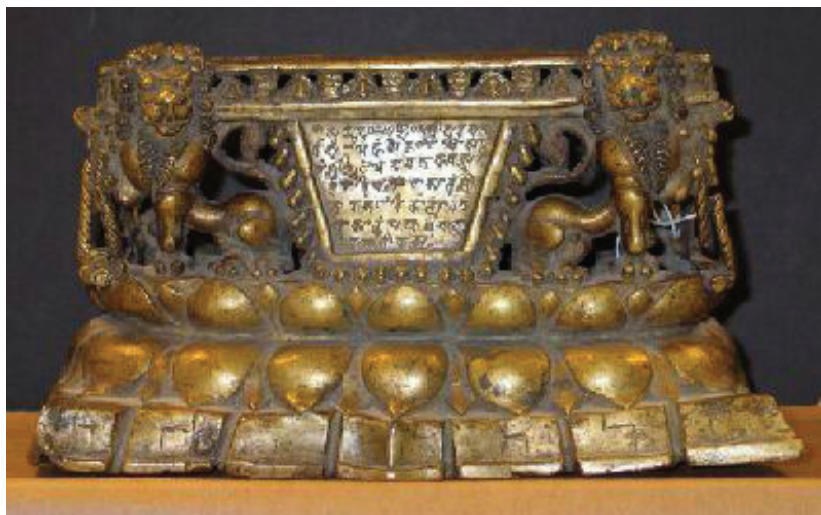


Fig. 1. 7<sup>th</sup> century Gilgit Palola Sahi kingdom lion throne base

Discoveries of Buddhist Sanskrit manuscripts dating between second and early eighth centuries AD in Gilgit region provide evidence of the usage of Sanskrit as the Buddhist literary language during that period [11. P. 46]. That at least eight Buddhist monasteries survived in Gilgit long after the reign of Palola Sahis, is attested in a Khotanese Saka account dating tenth century AD [1. P. 261–262; 9. P. 74–76]. The images of Buddha located along the trade routes in the Karakoram Himalayas and adjoining region served as devotional landmarks for local patrons, devotees, visiting pilgrims, traders and travelers [11. P. 59], who would often make their religious offerings (*devadharmā*) by carving Buddhist images, inscriptions, writing graffiti etc.

About six miles from Gilgit town there is a boulder with an engraving of Buddha carved out of the rock at the mouth of Kargah nullah. Hence it is called Kargah Buddha [10. P. 66]. Near Satpara lake, about eight kms. south of Skardu, is a huge boulder on which meditating Buddha surrounded by Bodhisattvas are carved [10. P. 101]. The preponderance of rock carvings and inscriptions of pre-historic and Buddhist period in Gilgit-Baltistan area provide sufficient evidence of the prevalence of Buddhism in this region in pre-Islamic times. Several rock carvings of Buddha at the sites of Shaital, Thor, Thalpan, Shing Nala, Satpara, Kargah, Chilas etc. still exist.



**Pic. 2. 6<sup>th</sup> century Gilgit-Buddha Shakyamuni  
(Metropolitan Museum of Art)**

Prof. Karl Jettmar and his team in Pak-German Study Group did pioneering work on rock carvings and inscriptions in this region. Five volumes of *Antiquities of Northern Pakistan* (published between 1989 and 2004) provide studies of select inscriptions and petroglyphs in the region. Fifth volume edited by Oskar von Hinuber (2004) is devoted to sources for studying the Palola Sahis. Nine volumes of *Materialien zur Archaeologie der Nordgebiete Pakistans* (MANP) (published between 1994 and 2003) make a detailed documentation of petroglyphs and graffiti at Oshibat, Shaital, Hodar, Shing Nala and Gichi Nala, Dadam Das and Chilas Bridge / Thalpan. The existence of drawings of *stupas*, Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and inscriptions testifies to the established presence of Buddhism in the Karakoram Himalayan region. The world famous Gilgit Manuscripts (*Lotus Sutra*) written on birch bark were first discovered in 1931 just by chance in a ruined stupa near Gilgit by cattle grazers. These manuscripts are the Buddhist texts dating back to 5<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. The second lot of these manuscripts was discovered by Pandit Madhusudan Kaul in the course of his excavations in Gilgit in 1938. A major part of the Gilgit Manuscripts is in the possession of National Archives of India, which in association with Soka Gakkai International recently released on 3 May 2012, the facsimile edition of 14<sup>th</sup> work in the Lotus Sutra series. Some portion of Gilgit Manuscripts is stored in the J&K government Libraries & Research Department at Srinagar, in an unsatisfactory state.

The drawings of *stupas*, Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and narrative scenes, inscriptions on rocks are mainly located at river crossings or on the routes below mountain passes, which were traversed by traders, travelers or devotees. According to Jason Neelis, “the largest concentrations of Buddhist petroglyphs are located south of Hunza-Haldeikish and Alam Bridge in the upper Indus valley between Chilas and Shaital” [11. P. 278]. There are over one thousands inscriptions are seven hundred petroglyphs located at Shaital [11. P. 279], from where paths led through the Darel and Tangir valleys to Gilgit, Chitral and onwards to Badakshan. Whereas drawings of 138 stupas have been found and Shaital, over 130 such drawings at Hodar [11. P. 280–281] are evidence of Buddhist presence in this region. Petroglyphs and inscriptions at Helor Das, Hodar and Dadam Das were made by local devotees as well as travelers and traders, as their religious offerings” [11. P.280-281] Many Buddhist petroglyphs are reported to be “concentrated near the modern bridge between Chilas and Thalpan” [11. P. 283]. The Buddhist petroglyphs, drawings of *stupas* and Buddha narratives at sites around Chilas and Thalpan are ascribed to local patrons named Kuberavahana and Sinhote, who are reported to have donated these “religious offerings” [11. P. 284]. A site at Shing Nala, located about 30 kms. upstream from Thalpan which has a number of Buddhist petroglyphs including 156 *stupas*, is believed to have “functioned as a pilgrimage place,” where devotees would make their own *stupa* drawings [11. P. 284–285]. Existence of many Khorosthi and Brahmi graffiti written on rocks near Alam bridge [11. P.285] indicates that the Buddhist travelers, monks and devotees transited through this area recording their personal names and titles, thereby pointing to the transmission of Buddhism through this re-

gion to Central Asia Notwithstanding its difficult terrain of high and cold mountains and very limited material resources, the Karakoram Himalayan region acted as the transit zone for transmission of Buddhism to Central Asia. The traders, monks and local patrons particularly the Palola Sahi dynasty of 7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> Century AD, contributed to the establishment of Buddhist presence in the region.



**Pic. 3. Petroglyph depicting a stupa with attendant (8th century AD), Chilas**

Gilgit remains an important archeological site and reports of digging the ruins and illicit trading in manuscripts and antiquities have been coming in. When the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK) team visited Gilgit in 2004 to investigate and document the activities of Martin Schoyen, the Norwegian multi-millionaire for its film titled *Skriftsamleren* (The Manuscript Collector), Mozaffar Ali, the representative of the local administration in Gilgit while standing in the Gilgit ruins told the NRK [9. P. 1–8]:

“Everyone knows that this is a historically important area. If the authorities had protected it, we could have had a museum here. But now there is nothing to stop the Pathans, the Europeans and others from enriching themselves. They have destroyed our cultural heritage.”

The diversity and density of rock carvings (about 50,000 carvings and 5,000 inscriptions) [7. P. 1] in Gilgit-Baltistan turned the area into one of the most important petroglyph sites in the world. Unfortunately over 30,000 carvings and inscriptions are doomed to be inundated due to the construction of Diamer-Bhasha dam. According to Prof. Hauptmann of Heidelberg, who has been working on the heritage of the area for quite some time, “37,051 carvings on 5,928 boulders will

be inundated” [15]. The inscriptions are in Brahmi, Sogdian, Chinese and Tibetan languages and some 80 per cent are in Brahmi script. Hauptmann added that some 3,000 stupas and similar number of drawings would be submerged under the dam [15]. That Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) of Pakistan, which is responsible for construction of the dam, and its contractors Rogers Kolachi Khan and Associates (RKK) have realized the intensity of damage to the region’s heritage, there is hope of some arrangements being made to preserve these carvings. Reports have also come in about Pakistan government’s plans to construct two museums to preserve 33,000 rock carvings and Buddhist figures discovered from the site of construction of Bhasha dam [6]. Shakeel Durrani, former Chairman of WAPDA was reported to have confirmed the plan to “construct two museums one each in Gilgit and Chilas to preserve thousands of rock carvings” [6]. However, no such steps have been taken so far.

**Results.** Obviously it was through the Karakoram-Himalaya region, which was the crossroads of ancient routes and cultures and attracted travelers, traders and pilgrims, that Buddhism was transmitted to Central Asia and beyond. Several important places on the Silk Route system such as Kucha, Balkh, Bamiyan, Khotan, Kashgar etc. developed into important centres of Buddhism when parts of Central Asia and north-western India were integrated into a single kingdom under the Kushans.



**Fig. 4. Buddha seated beneath the Bodhi tree, flanked by two attendant monks (in Limestone) Kushan period (1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> century AD) from Fayaz Tepe, Southern Uzbekistan (History Museum, Tashkent)**

Findings of Indian imprint in several other settlements in Chu valley (Sokuluk, Shish Tube, Kara Djigach, Burana etc.) testify to a wide settlement of Buddhists along the Silk Route system. Archeological excavations conducted in early twentieth century in Xinjiang particularly at Yotkan, Dandan Uiliq, Niya, Loulan, Turfan etc. unearthed some of the remnants of ancient Buddhist shrines and stupas with rich treasures of Buddhist images, Brahmi and Kharosthi MSS, wooden tablets and frescoes. The petroglyphs of stupas at Chilas and Thalpan have many similar features such as “hemispherical or parabolic domes on three or four rectangular foundations like those of stupas at Mauri Tim outside of Kashgar, Subashi near Kucha, Niya, Endere and Loulan.” [11. P. 294–295]. The Buddhist settlements extended upto Marghilan, Merv, Sogd, Eastern Turkestan (Xinjiang region of China) (in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD) and beyond in the valleys of Chu, Talas and Ili rivers in the Semirechie (Kyrgyzstan) (in 5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> centuries AD) [5. P. 41–42].



**Pic. 5. The Mauri-Tim Stupa, near Kashgar, Xinjiang**

Buddhist imprint is reflected in the architectural style of Buddhist temples and monasteries, paintings, clay and stone sculptures, bronze pieces, Sanskrit texts etc. [5. P. 41–42]. Buddhists built huge cave monasteries in Bamiyan, Kara Tepe complex in old Termez (southern Uzbekistan, called northern Bactrian Tokharistan in ancient times), Fayaz Tepe – Zar Tepe (about 80 kms. From Termez in southern Tajikistan), Bezeklik in Turfan, Kyzyl, Kucha and Dunhuang. In the Semirechie



region, archeologists excavated several Buddhist sites at Suryab in Ak Beshim, Naveket (Krasnaya Rechka), Sangarma Julya (Kluchevskoye site of ancient settlement in Bishkek), all of which are reported to be dating back to 7<sup>th</sup>–9<sup>th</sup> centuries AD [5. P. 46]. Kyrgyz archeologist Valentina Goryacheva describes the three temple sculptures of Buddha (7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> centuries AD) from Kuvinsky (Farghana, Uzbekistan) and Krasnorechensky (Semirichie, Kyrgyzstan) as “the most monumental ones” [5. P. 47]. However, small bronze images of Buddha Sakyamuni, Maitreya, Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara were quite popular among the common people, at that time. Indian Buddhist texts/manuscripts written on birch bark were found in Merv (Gaur-Kalya, Turkmenistan 5<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> century AD) by M.E. Masson and G.A. Koshelenko in 1962 and 1965, in Kafir Kala (southern Tajikistan) in 1968 by B.A. Litvinsky, in Zang Tepe (Uzbekistan) in 1961 by L.A. Albaum, in Krasnaya Rechka (Kyrgyzstan) in 1983 by V.D. Goryacheva [5. P. 54, 55]. Such a rich heritage of Buddhist heritage in Central Asia was destroyed by the Turks and Arabs.

Whereas the sculptures excavated at Khalchayan and Dalverzin-Tepe (both in Uzbekistan) depict the influence of Indo-Buddhist traditions, the discovery of a Buddhist cave monastery at Kara Tepe [2. P. 101] and the existence of lotus flowers and Brahmi inscriptions on the artefacts clearly demonstrate Indian cultural influence in this area. Frescoes found in Panjikent and Varakhsha also bear testimony to this effect. For instance, a painting depicting a blue dancer with a trident and body draped in tiger skin, is linked to the legend of blue-necked Shiva (*Nilkantha*). Another painting shows a king hunting a tiger on elephant-back, which is obviously based on Indian experience. The discovery of large number of manuscripts and archeological remains depicting Indian traditions in the oasis settlements of Kucha, Khotan, Kashgar, Dunhuang, Panjikent, Varaksha, Khalchayan, Dalverian, Ajina Tepe etc. testifies to the wide diffusion of knowledge and culture from the Western Himalayan region to Central Asia and onwards since ancient times. The existence of terracotta tiles in Harwan near Srinagar depicting figures in the Central Asian ethnic type and dress style and also containing Kharoshthi numerals of about 300 AD [12. P. 179], testifies to the Central Asian connection.

Being situated in the very center of Central Asia and deriving its name from Sanskrit word *Vihara* (monastery), Bukhara retains its reputation as the holiest city with hundreds of mosques and *madrasas*. The Chor Minar *madrasa* at Bukhara is a crude and miniature form of Indian Char Minar at Hyderabad. Masjid Kalyan and Mir Arab *madrasa* in Bukhara continue to be the centers of important religious and social activity. Kalyan Minar is a prominent feature of Bukhara. One tall pole with a yak tail in the Kalyan minaret is reminiscent of old traditions.

Similarly Samarkand, situated on the bank of the Zarafshan river, was the very center of Silk Route system and a major urban center of erstwhile Soghdian empire. It was the capital of Tamerlane (1372 to 1402 AD). The Registan Square at first sight evokes the feeling of awe and splendour. The grand and imposing scale of three *madrasas* that form the three sides of the square, their exteriors decorated by intricate calligraphy and mosaic, make Registan a unique sight in Central Asia. That

the main gate having two lions with sun painted on its top, is still called *Sher Dor*, is ample testimony to close historical ties with India. In the Bibi Khanam mosque, in Samarkand people are still seen to be tying cotton tags to the mulberry tree asking for a boon, reminding us of similar practices in India.

The local museum in Chimkent, a town in southern Kazakhstan has a number of artifacts, particularly farming tools, household items, yurts, stone items etc. which demonstrate close resemblance to the lifestyle in the Western Himalayas. Some Zoroastrian artifacts are also preserved here. It would be relevant to mention about the artifacts preserved in Sairam, another ancient Kazakh town on the Silk Route. There is an ancient pillar with Sanskrit inscriptions in Brahmi and Kharoshthi script in a local mosque at Sairam, which is also a mausoleum of the mother of the famed saint of Turkestan, Ahmad Shah Yasavi. In the small local museum, one found another such pillar, old plough, spinning wheel, old MSS in Arabic script and other antiquities. One such pillar is reported to be in the Hermitage Museum, Leningrad. Recently an ancient Buddhist site has been discovered in Sairam, where a lamp of XII century was found. The mausoleum of Aisha Bibi (12th century) in Dzhabol (Taraz) has a twelve-cornered dome like the Indian temple roof tops. Symbols of octagon and swastika are found to be engraved in some stone pillars. At another mausoleum of Karakhan (in Taraz), stone images and human figures were stored.



**Pic. 6. Buddha images and inscriptions, Tamgaly-Tas, Kazakhstan  
(Drawing by Chokan Valikanov, 1856)**

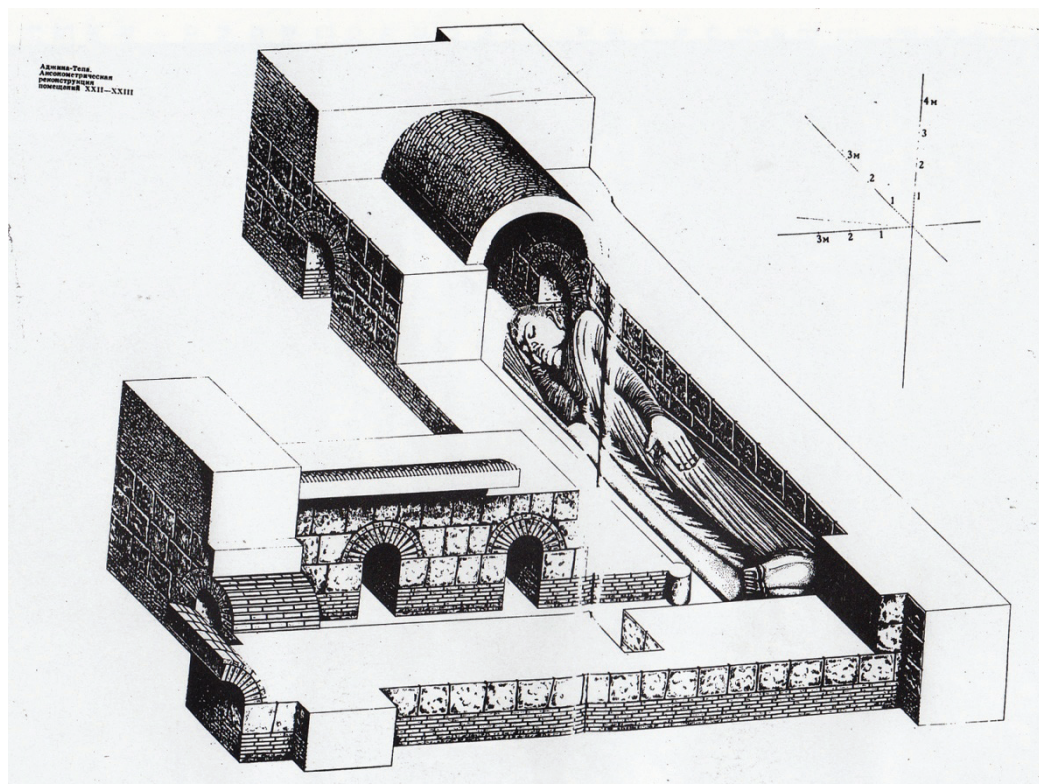
Talas is the birthplace of Kyrgyz epic hero Manas and famous Kyrgyz winter, Changiz Aitmatov. Large stone pillars and some stones with human figures locally known as Bal Bals which have been preserved in the Manas precincts, stand tes-

timony to the pre-Islamic heritage of Kyrgyzs. Manas has become the symbol of renaissance of the Kyrgyz cultural and historical heritage in independent Kyrgyzstan. The hillock locally named Karal Chaku overlooking the Manas mausoleum is considered sacred by the Kyrgyzs universally. Top of the Manas mausoleum is also like that of Indian temple top rather than being dome shaped. Large number of local people, both young and old, throng the place as pilgrims and climb the hill top. No alcohol is served or taken within the Manas complex. Ancient tradition of worshipping hillocks, trees, rivers, sun, images and legendary heroes continues in Kyrgyzstan. Buddhism was prevalent in Kyrgyzstan mainly in urban centers and towns along the Silk Route. That the symbol of sun occupies a central place in the national flag of Kyrgyzstan, only reinforces the view that Kyrgyzs continue to rever nature and its elements. Ancient town of Tokmak is the site of 21 metre high Buran tower. Here one comes across the remnants of pre-Islamic and Buddhist heritage of Balasaghun which used to be a flourishing trading and cultural center on the Silk Route. This historic site, spread over an area of 36 sq. kms. was declared as the Balasaghun National Park in 1977. The Buran tower was first restored in 1967–1968 and again in 1978. Whereas this tower was constructed in 11th century AD to commemorate the ascendancy of Islam in the region, the totems (stone figures locally called Bal Bals) lying throughout this area act as a reminder to the pre-Islamic past. These totems, the sculptures carved out in the likeness of the deceased persons, were erected in the memory of the dead. Interestingly, this tradition still continues albeit in a modernized form of erecting concrete graves with stone pillars carrying portraits of the dead. This peculiar tradition would be an anathema in the puritan Islamic countries. About 8 kms. away from the Buran tower, there is the Ak Beshim archeological site standing testimony to the ancient Buddhist settlements in this area.

Fragments of Brahmi and Kharosthi script on birch bark were found in Krasnorechensk temple. These texts are believed to have originated from Kashmir – the main center for copying of Sanskrit MSS. Significantly birch bark MSS in Brahmi/Kharosthi found throughout Central Asia (Kafyr Kalan in southern Tajikistan, Merv and Bairam Ali in southern Turkmenistan and Zang Tepe in southern Uzbekistan) are reported to have similar handwritings [16. P. 79]. Similarly, Naveket temples are similar to sites discovered at Ajina Tepe, Fayaz Tepe, Kara Tepe and Merv in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Findings of bronze and stone artifacts, ceramic bowls modeled with Boddhisattvas etc. in ancient sites, testifies to the location of monasteries along the Silk Route and also to the constant flow of Indian traders, artists, craftsmen, monks and exponents from the Indian Himalayas [16. P. 80].

According to Kyrgyz archeologists, Voropoeva and Goryacheva “direct contacts between northern India and Tien Shan in VIII–IX cc, represented the golden age of Buddhist-Hindu culture in medieval Kyrgyzstan” [16. P. 73]. Soviet archeologist, Bernshtam discovered (1933–1954) at a number of “ancient sites of Chui valley – Ak Beshim, Krasnaya Rechka, Karadjigach, Novopavlovka, Sokuluk etc., works in the style of Gandhara art, which indicate the main contours of historical-culture relationship among Tein shan, Eastern Turkestan and India since first

century upto XII century” [16. P. 74–75]. Bernshtam found “powerful influence of Buddhist culture of northern India on the culture of Semirechye” [16. P. 75]. Other Soviet archeologists, Kyzlasov and Zyablin excavated in 1950s two Buddhist temples in Ak Beshim [16. P. 75]. Both temples were found to be burnt and their sculpture destroyed around VIII century, after which they were not restored [16. P. 76]. Kozhemyaho (1961–1963) and Goryacheva and Peregudova (1980–1988) carried investigation of two other temple sites dated VIII century in Navekat (Krasnorechensk) settlement [16. P.75]. In 1961 a sculpture of sleeping Buddha was excavated here, which is reportedly lying at a museum in Moscow. A Kashmiri bronze sculpture of Buddhisatva Avalokiteswara of VIII century was also reportedly found here [16. P. 77]. Many such Buddhist images (VII–VIII century) and Brahmi/Kharosthi MSS found in Naveket are housed in the Archeological Museum in the Kyr-gyz Slovanic university, Bishkek and Museum of Institute of History, Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences, Bishkek. However, the ancient sites at Ak Beshim and Naveket, need urgent attention as these are lying unprotected with adjoining lands being used for agriculture. These ancient ruins need to be restored and conserved properly.



**Pic. 7. Sleeping Buddha (7th century AD) in monastery of Ajina-tepe, Tajikistan**  
(Courtesy: K. Warikoo (ed.), *Bamiyan: Challenge to World Heritage*. New Delhi, 2002)

Archeological finds in Kazakhstan point to the introduction of Buddhism in southern Kazakhstan around 7<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> century AD and its spread in different parts of

the country upto 18<sup>th</sup> century AD. A European scholar Dr. Jean-Marc Deom, has drawn attention to the risk of damage to the petroglyph rock engravings of Buddha images and inscriptions at Tamgaly-Tas, about 25 kms north of Lake Kapchigai along the right of the Ili river. There are three main stone blocks which have large size images of Buddhist deities and inscription in Tibetan, Pali and Mongol scripts. Kazakh ethnographer and writer Chokan Valikhanov, who visited the site in 1856 was the first to study and document the Tamgaly-Tas petroglyphs by drawing some sketches of these rocks [for further details see: 4]. In 1981, the Alma Ata Regional Council of National Deputies decided to recognize and protect the Tamgaly-Tas petroglyphs. However the site remained vulnerable to vandalism, as some parts of the figures are reported to have been damaged by throwing stones [4].

There are several other archeological sites pointing to the existence of Buddhist monasteries in various parts of Kazakhstan. Antonovka, which is located some 500 kms. from Almaty towards the east, near the Jungarski Alatau mountain, was excavated by K.M. Baipakov in 1998–1999. This Buddhist monastery is in ruins now. Other sites include monasteries of Sumbe (in Kegen district), Ablakit (in Semipalatsk province) and Kyzilkent located 250 kms. east of Karaganda [14. P. 11].

At Hazrat Afak Khoja's shrine, situated about 5 kms. away from Kashgar, which was built around 1639–1640 AD and constructed in Uyghur style, one finds extensive usage of Swastika and lotus symbols in tile work on the exterior of this shrine. It was declared as a Special Protective Site of Historical Relic of China on 13 January 1988. Robert Shaw who visited Kashgar in 1868–1869 AD, had found the popular shrine of Hazrat Afaq decorated with yak tails, flags and numerous huge horns of ovis poli [13]. During this author's visit to this shrine in June 2010, I found a Muslim priest with some of his devotees lighting a lamp and performing some traditional rituals and lighting lamps. Khotan has been the most important commercial and Buddhist center on the southern limb of Silk Route having had strong connections with India. Khotan has three main ancient sites – Ak Sepul, Yotkan and Malik Awat. Relics and artifacts found by Stein in Yotkan are now lying in the British Museum. However, some antiquities from Yotkan and some other sites are placed in a shabbily arranged local museum at Khotan. Major Buddhist sites in Xinjiang have been stripped of their treasures, which were carried away by foreign archeologists to museums outside China. On a visit to a small local museum in Bachu (Maralbashi), one found antiquities discovered in the desert between Maralbashi and Aksu, stored there. These relics included Buddhist figures, statues of monkey god, wooden tablets with Brahmi inscriptions etc. About 45 kms. further from Bachu, one saw remains of ancient Buddhist site on the Tok Serai hills. There are still existing 3 to 4 stone images of Buddha (2×1), though lying defaced. Kucha has been yet another important center of Buddhism in Central Asia. On a visit to the famous Buddhist caves at Kumtura, Kyzyl and Kyzyl Gaha, one found paintings and frescoes of Buddha in different forms, monkey gods and a figure with a flute. Only 230 Buddhist caves out of original 330 are still in tact in the Kucha complex. The British and German archeologists having removed the paintings in these caves

to their respective countries, only 8 caves are now open to public view. Cave No. 17 has elaborate murals depicting Indian characteristics. A statue of Kumarajiva is erected in the Kucha cultural complex, which is well maintained. These frescoes need to be reconstructed and preserved.



**Pic. 8. Kumarajiva statue, Kucha cultural complex, Kucha, Xinjiang  
(Photo: K. Warikoo)**

Korla, which is the new and modern oil city of Xinjiang, was an important trading center having economic links with both China in the east and Central Asia in the west. On a visit to the local museum in the Korla town, one found several Buddhist artifacts, an image of Tara which was excavated in Yenchi county of Korla and also several folios in Mongolian, Tibetan and Kharosthi scripts. There was one round stone with inscriptions of Om Mane Padma Om, still preserved here. In Turfan lie the ancient cities of Jiohe and Gaochang, where one can see the traces of ancient Buddhist monastic establishment. In the famed Bezeklik caves of Thousand Buddha near the Flaming Mountains in Turfan, there are few remnants of the paintings of Buddha. Images of Buddha, monkey gods etc. have now been recreated by the Chinese authorities to attract tourists. The local museum at Turfan contains some painted pots, two small Buddha statues and some mummies.

**Conclusion.** The task of identification, location, documentation and dissemination of such a rich historico-cultural legacy, therefore, assumes a priority. It is high time that concrete steps are taken towards the preservation of thousands of rock carvings, petroglyphs, inscriptions and images in the Karakoram Himalayan region to save them from being obliterated.

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## КАРАКОРУМ, ГИМАЛАИ И ЦЕНТРАЛЬНАЯ АЗИЯ: БУДДИЙСКИЕ СВЯЗИ

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Каракорумско-Гималайский регион является той колыбелью, откуда древняя индийская культура, включая буддизм, распространилась по разным направлениям Центральной, Восточной и Юго-Восточной Азии. Гильгит, Чилас, Читрал, Балтистан, Ладакх, Занскар и другие приграничные районы были важными опорными пунктами на знаменитом Шелковом пути. Буддийские ученые из Индии способствовали распространению буддизма в Центральной и Восточной Азии. Одним из видных ученых был Кумараджива (344–413), который разрушил политические, географические, культурные и языковые барьеры для распространения буддизма. Сюаньцзян упоминает четыре важных центра буддизма в Центральной Азии – Шан-шань (Крорайна – Лоулань), Хотан, Кучу и Турфан. Кашмир сыграл важную роль в распространении буддизма в Хотане, который, в свою очередь, сыграл ключевую роль в передаче буддизма в Китай. Несколько важных мест в системе Шелкового пути, такие как Куча, Балх, Бамиан, Хотан, Кашгар и др., превратились в важные центры буддизма, когда части Центральной Азии и северо-западной Индии были объединены в единое государство под Кушанами.

**Ключевые слова:** Каракорумско-Гималайский регион, Гильгит, Чилас, Читрал, Балтистан, Занскар, Кашмир, Куча, Кашгар, Хотан, буддизм, Кумараджива, Сюаньцзян, Лотосовая сутра, Канишка, Палола сахис

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