

Buddhism in North-western India and Eastern Afghanistan, Sixth to Ninth Century AD

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North-western India (Maps 1–3) enjoys of, or rather suffers from a peculiar situation in the field of Buddhist and Indian studies. The art of Gandhāra started being known in the second half of the nineteenth century,¹ and soon became the privileged field of research of western scholars. When in 1905 Alfred Foucher published the first volume of *L'art gréco-bouddhique du Gandhāra*, Gandhāra had already been removed from the body of India as a region apart, despite the fact that Gandhāran Buddhism was construed as a paradigm not only of Buddhist art, but of Buddhism tout court, and Buddhism was obviously part of Indian history. In the early decades of the last century, Indian scholars (who were not simply the *babus* who provided western scholars with texts and translations, but independent minds deeply involved in the debate on Indian past)² preferred, with the exception of Bengali intellectuals, to stay away from anything related to Buddhism, a religion that their ancestors had actively opposed.³ Their alienation with regard a 'Greek' Buddhism was obviously even greater. The fact that Foucher's book was written in French further estranged them from the field of Gandhāran studies. The situation became even worse with the partition of India in 1947, when ancient Gandhāra was physically separated from the territory that was, or

¹ The first exhibition of Gandhāran art, the one affected by the fire that destroyed the Crystal Palace, was held in London in 1866. It was followed by the Vienna exhibition of 1873, which displayed the sculptures collected by Gottlieb Leitner. The first exhibition whose composition we can reconstruct (the materials on display were again Leitner's) is that which opened in Florence in 1878 (Errington 1997; also, Taddei 2003b).

² Rajendrala Mitra, though unpopular in British circles, was elected president of the Asiatic Society in 1885 (on R. Mitra's life and contributions, see D.K. Mitra 1978). The involvement of Indian scholars in the modern studies of India's past history went hand in hand with the creation of the early movements for the independence from British rule.

³ On the deep-rooted antagonism of the Brahmans towards the Buddhists, see Verardi (2011: 147 ff. and passim). For obvious reasons, the constant interest of Bengali intellectuals towards Buddhism focused on the late period of the religion of Dharma; only rarely did they discuss its early aspects.

pretended to be, the sole repository of India-ness. The fact that after Partition a number of archaeological missions, both western and Japanese, were established in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and that they were led by scholars who had little knowledge of the Indian world and little or no connections with Indian scholars, further aggravated the situation.⁴

By the end of the nineteenth century, T.W. Rhys Davids, the highest authority in the field of Buddhist studies,⁵ sanctioned the binary interpretive model of the late mediaeval history of India that had taken root in the previous decades—the Muslims from the one side and a unified, non-Muslim India that included Buddhism and Brahmanism, from the other. With regard to the downfall of Buddhism in Magadha and Bengal in the early thirteenth century, he gave full credit to the sources that seemed to document Muslim violence towards Buddhism. At Nālandā, Rhys Davids wrote, the Muslims ‘not only destroyed the buildings—without any military necessity—but burnt the books and murdered the unoffending students. [...] And the signs of murder and arson at Sārnāth are probably due to the same gentle hands’.⁶ Neither thing is true, be it Nālandā or Sarnath, but the scholars who opposed such a distorted view of the events were few. One of them was Alexander Cunningham, who remained always convinced that three conflicting forces had been at work in medieval India, the Brahmans, the Buddhists, and the Muslims.⁷ Regarding the Northwest, pre-Independence historians, conditioned though they were by the political climate of the period, were right in maintaining that all the territories south of the Hindukush were part of medieval ‘Hindu’ India as late as the tenth-eleventh century.⁸ As to modern historians, especially western historians, they no longer see the Muslims as having been the bearers of non-resoluble conflicts when they first entered Sind and Afghanistan,⁹ but still assume that in the Northwest Buddhists and Muslims were the sole protagonists on the field from the seventh century onwards. The Buddhists

⁴ The Délégation Archéologique Française en Afghanistan, the ancestor of the foreign missions of the 1950s and 1960s, had included Alfred Foucher, but was led by archaeologists who were more familiar with classical and Iranian studies than with anything Indian.

⁵ In 1881 he established the Pāli Text Society, which for a long time was the arbiter of how the history of Buddhism should be written.

⁶ Rhys Davids (1896: 91).

⁷ Cunningham noted, and with him other field explorers, that Sarnath had been the object of several destructions over time, the message being that even if the Muslims had ever been responsible for the end of the sanctuary, they could not conceivably be the authors of earlier devastations (Cunningham 1863: cxv–cxvi). On the archaeological vicissitudes of the site of Sarnath see Federica Barba in Verardi (2011: Appendix 2, pp. 417 ff.). On Nālandā, see *ibid*: pp. 363–64.

⁸ See e.g. Vaidya (1926, III: 19).

⁹ On the Islamisation process in Sind, see especially Maclean (1989). Regarding Afghanistan, the process that brought to the final Islamisation of Bamiyan, aptly summarised by Baker and Allchin (1991: 22 ff.), is usually but, as we shall see, wrongly considered paradigmatic for the whole of Eastern Afghanistan.

would have slowly given in until their eventual disappearance from the scene.

If we abandon the binary interpretation and reintroduce the third actor of the play, i.e. Brahmanical power, the scene changes and a new perspective opens before us. Although we are still awaiting a comprehensive study of the Bhāgavatas and Pāśupatas in the North-west, there is a sufficient amount of evidence to reappraise the history of the region, especially from the sixth century onwards. The presence and influence of the theistic groups in Gandhāran society are obfuscated by the imposing remains and overwhelming iconographic output of the Buddhists, made possible by royal patronage and the support of the trading bourgeoisie. For the Bhāgavatas, we go back as early as the images of Kṛṣṇa and Saṃkarṣana on the drachm minted by Agathocles of Bactria, who also ruled on Gandhāra and Taxila,¹⁰ and to the Indo-Greek king of Taxila Antialkidas, either a Bhāgavata himself or close to Bhāgavata circles.¹¹ Gandhāran images of Viṣṇu datable to the second or third century are rare,¹² but a seal of the fourth-fifth century AD executed according to the more Hellenised tendency of Gandhāran art shows a four-armed Viṣṇu to whom a ruler in Central-Asian dress and half his size pays homage (Fig. 1).¹³ For its nature and quality, it is a product of a princely court, and is revealing of the fortunes of Bhāgavatism at the level of the political élite and of patronage. The latter did not necessarily imply the building of monumental religious structures but could be addressed to the improvement of the agrarian infrastructures (canals, tanks, etc.) and to rituals.¹⁴ A most instructive fact regarding the impact of Bhāgavatism is the discontinuity in the series of personal names of the Kuṣāṇa emperors: with Vāsudeva I, the series of Central Asian names



Fig. 1. Seal with Viṣṇu and devotee in Central Asian dress, 4th–5th century AD. (From Callieri 1997: Pl. 57).

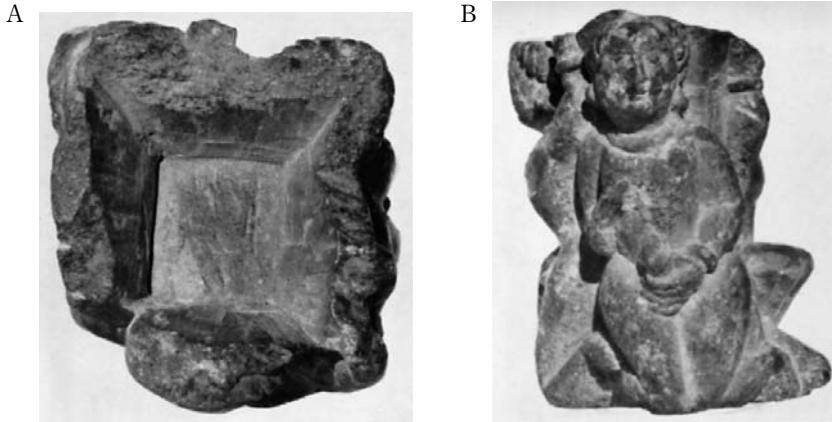
¹⁰ See the find analysed by Filliozat (1973) and Guillaume (1991: 81 ff.).

¹¹ See the famous inscription on the Besnagar Garuḍa pillar erected by his ambassador *Heliodoreṇa bhāgavatena* at the court of Vidiśa (Sircar 1965: 88–89, v. 2–3).

¹² See for instance the small Viṣṇu image seen at the Christie's Sale 2195 (Indian and Southeast Asian Art) of 16 September 2009, New York.

¹³ Callieri (1997: Cat U 7.3, pp. 190–91 and pl. 57).

¹⁴ For the economic impact of rituals as can be reconstructed from the Nanaghat inscription of King Śātakaṛṇi, cf. Verardi (2011: 100). Cf. also the cows, the gold and silver given to the Brahmins by Daśaratha on the occasion of the *aśvamedha* (*Rāmāyaṇa* I.xiv; the *Bālakāṇḍa* is a Bhāgavata addition to Vālmiki's poem).



Figs. 2a–b. Ritual object and *akulavīra* (?) subject on third side, 1st–2nd century AD.
(From Tucci 1968: Figs. 3, 4).

was interrupted in favour of a name that identifies the king as a devout *bhakta*, pointing to a major involvement of the court in the support of the theistic movements. This has obviously to do with the extension of Kuṣāṇa territories well inside the Ganges Valley,¹⁵ but remains nonetheless significant in relation to the Northwest, which remained the pivotal region of the empire.

For what we call Sivaism, the evidence is more abundant. An early (1st–2nd century AD) object like the ritual vessel published by Giuseppe Tucci¹⁶ points to a still unexplored cultural and religious horizon and raises major questions (Figs. 2a–b). There are the well-known Kuṣāṇa coins with Oešo/Śiva standing near the bull and bearing trident and lazo, and the profession of faith of at least one Kuṣāṇa king,¹⁷ as well as early Śiva icons.¹⁸ We should

¹⁵ The inscription of Rabatak (ll. 5–7; cf. Sims-Williams and Cribb 1995–96: 78) has put an end to the discussion regarding the actual control of Madhyadeśa by the Kuṣāṇas, often denied by Indian historians.

¹⁶ Tucci (1968).

¹⁷ Oešo was particularly popular with Vima Kadphises, who declares himself a devotee of Sarvalokeśvara, and with Vāsudeva I, as appears from Göbl (1984: 72–74; pls. 28 ff.). In *ibid.*: 43–44, the reader will find the typology. On Oešo/Śiva see Cribb (1997: 17–18), Gail (1991–92) and Lo Muzio (1995–96); Pal (1988) has understood very well the need for the Kuṣāṇas to be legitimised in their Indian territories. An altogether different line of research is that of Tanabe (1991–92). On the extent of the involvement of the Kuṣāṇa dynasty with Sivaism, see the nature of the Māt sanctuary (Lüders 1961: 138 ff.) as well as the evidence from Surkh Kotal (Fussman in Schlumberger, Le Berre and Fussman 1983: 149–50, 152).

¹⁸ Marshall (1951, II: 723, no. 151); Härtel (1989); Taddei (2003a, 2003c).

also carefully consider the reason why in the *Mahābhārata* Śiva is called ‘the God from Gandhāra’.¹⁹ An early schist image of Mahiṣamardīnī comes from the site of Muhammad Zai near Peshawar,²⁰ and Sivaite penetration goes as far as Surkh Kotal in Bactria/Tokhāristān.²¹ The latter was a traditionally rich agricultural region²² and was, in my opinion, the ultimate target of Brahmanical expansion and the reason of Brahmanical pressure on Kapiśi (the natural passageway for the plains north of the Hindukush; Maps 1, 5). In addition, for all Indians, regardless of political and religious affiliations, Tokhāristān was a coveted target for another excellent reason: gold, which, as is known, is practically unavailable in India. The relative invisibility of Bhāgavatas and Pāśupatas in early Gandhāra depends on their taking root in rural areas (especially the groups of Pāśupatas) and on the fact that the trading class—an object of scorn for the authors of the early Kali Age literature²³—did not find representation among them. When the role of the agrarian economy grew, the theistic groups became more visible, and the iconographic output increased. Once again, this is better documented by Sivaite reliefs, like the sixth-century Umāmaheśvara stele in the Sherrier collection strongly dependent on post-Gupta models²⁴ and, at a different level of fruition, the image of *devī* from Guligram in Swat discussed by Tucci (Fig. 3; Map 2).²⁵

¹⁹ Cf. Tucci (1963: esp. 159).

²⁰ M.A. Khan and A. Azeem (1999).

²¹ More than one hundred graffiti depicting the *triśula* are incised along the monumental access to the upper terrace of the sanctuary (on this and other evidence, see Fussman in Schlumberger, Le Berre and Fussman 1983: 149–50, 152), but an assessment of the evidence remains difficult because of the little stratigraphic attention paid to the late phases of the site and to the phases of abandonment (this is true for many other sites). Not all the evidence brought forward in Transoxiana points to a Kuṣāṇa or post-Kuṣāṇa horizon, as for instance the Umāmaheśvara painting from Dilberjin Tepe (Kruglikova 1974: 44 ff.), which can hardly be earlier than the sixth century. Images of Śiva and Pārvatī are known from relatively early times, but the iconography of Umāmaheśvara is post-Gupta (the earliest known example comes from Nepal; Pal 1974: pls. 128, 129). It is true that the Dilberjin specimen, displaying the divine couple seated on a huge Nandin, sets a model of its own.

²² Curtius Rufus, in his *Historiae Alexandri Magni*, emphasised the difference between the fertile areas of Bactria, rich of water, fruits, wheat and grazing animals and the arid, uninhabited ones (‘Bactrianæ terræ multiplex et varia natura est. Alibi multa arbor et vitis largos mitesque fructus alit. Solum pingue crebri fontes rigant; quæ mitiora sunt, frumento conseruntur, cetera armentorum pabulo cedunt. Magnam deinde partem eiusdem terræ sterilem harenæ tenent: squalida siccitate regio non hominem, non frugem alit’; VII.4.26–27), and observed that Bactria’s soil fertility not only induced the natives to stay, but also attracted foreigners (‘ubertas terræ non indigenas modo detinet, sed etiam advenas invitat’; VIII.2.14).

²³ See the now classical study by Sharma (1982); cf. also Verardi (2011: 141 ff.) for some additions and clarifications.

²⁴ Sherrier (1991: 623–24).

²⁵ Tucci (1963).



Fig. 3. Goddess from Guligram (Swat), 8th century.
(From Tucci 1963: Fig. 1).

The description of the state of Buddhism in North-western India provided by Xuanzang is well known, but an overall assessment of the evidence that includes the archaeological data and is not inhibited by modern political boundaries is wanting. Two facts are immediately clear: the first is the astonishing distance from the description of the region provided two centuries earlier by Faxian; the second is that the abandonment and ruins described by the pilgrim are the same as those of many other regions of India. We can briefly summarise

Xuanzang's description starting from Kapiśi, which he did not consider a part of India (something that points to its geo-strategic position in relation to the Hindukush and Tokhāristān). A Buddhist king held power, but several groups of heretics were active, easily recognisable as groups of Pāśupatas and probably also as Kāpālikas, both very influential all over India at the highest political level since, at least, Gupta times.²⁶ One of the temples of the heretics was that excavated by S. Kuwayama at Tapa Skandar, situated in Xuanzang's Xibiduofalaci, arguably 'the town where the shrine for Śvetaśvatara was'.²⁷ In Nagarahāra/Jalalabad, '[t]he *saṅghārāmas* [we]re many, but yet the priests [we]re few; the *stūpas* [we]re desolate and ruined'. The famous stūpa with the Buddha's tooth described by Faxian was also in ruin.²⁸ The Buddhists, protected by the king of Kapiśi (Nagarahāra is easily reachable from Kapiśi through the lower Panjshir Valley and Lamghan; Maps 1, 5), were still present in the monastic town of Hadda, but the heretics had already built five *deva* temples. As to Gandhāra proper, the situation was even worse. The stūpa of Kaniška was still standing in Puruṣapura/Peshawar, and the monastery of Kaniška was still in function, albeit with few monks, but for the rest Gandhāra offered the vision of 'about 1000 *saṅghārāmas*, which [we]re deserted and in ruins [...] filled with wild shrubs, and solitary to the last degree'.²⁹ Conversely, '[t]he heretical temples, to the number of about 100, [we]re occupied pell-mell by heretics'.³⁰ When Xuanzang mentions a large, miraculous image of the goddess hewn in the rock in the northern reaches of the region, and reports that people came 'from every part of India' to worship her,³¹ we realise that we are in an entirely new scenario. 'Both poor and rich assemble here from every part, near and distant', insists the pilgrim, revealing the full emersion of the religious trends that had been present in Gandhāran society since long but had remained below the radar. It would be spontaneous to identify the goddess with the Acimā/Gaurī of Kashmir Smast:³² in fact, a temple of Maheśvara rose near her miraculous image, clearly a Pāśupata temple, to which came 'the heretics who cover[ed] themselves with ashes [...] to offer sacrifice'.³³ It might be identified with the Vardhamāneśvara temple, with attached *maṭha*, at Kashmir

²⁶ Michael Willis (2009: 172 ff.) has shown that the *purohita* priest at the Gupta court was a Kāpālika, who performed transgressive but advantageous rituals.

²⁷ Kuwayama (2002: 178–79). The image of Umāmaheśvara found during the excavations was established in a temple at the centre of the site during Tapa Skandar's Period II (ibid.: 176), but it is unlikely that it was already there when Xuanzang visited the place in AD 629. For the image, see ibid.: 227–28 and fig. 31.

²⁸ Beal (1884, I: 98); for Faxian's description of the region, see Deeg (2005: 522–23).

²⁹ Beal (1884, I: 98).

³⁰ Ibid.: 98.

³¹ Ibid.: 113.

³² M.N. Khan (2003: 243 ff.).

³³ Ibid.: 114.

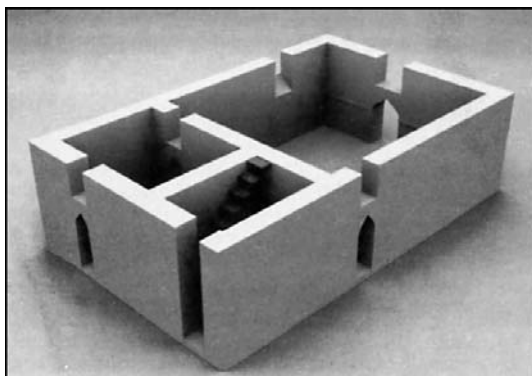


Fig. 4. Kasmir Smast, Maheśvara temple (restitution), 5th century (?).
(From M.N. Khan 2009: 167).

Smast (Fig. 4).³⁴

What had happened in Gandhāra in the two centuries that had elapsed between the visit of Faxian in the early fifth century and that of Xuanzang? We have a clue from the report of Huisheng, who in AD 519 reached Uḍḍiyāna and Gandhāra through the usual Karakorum route as a member of a small group of envoys in search of *sūtras* led by Song Yun. The king of Gandhāra³⁵ received them very rudely. Huisheng says:

All the people in the kingdom are Brahmins and they like to read the *sūtras*. But the king liked killing and was not a follower of the Law of the Buddha and had inflicted war on the territory of Jibin. The king received the imperial letter while seated, in a rude manner and without (keeping) the etiquette. He sent the envoys off to a monastery but offered very little.³⁶

This shows that although the élite was still largely Buddhist (the ‘Brahmins’ mentioned in the text are high-caste, learned Buddhists), the king had sided with the theistic Brahmins. His attack against the king of Jibin³⁷ can be interpreted as part of a strategy aimed at fa-

³⁴ M.N. Khan (2009: 168). On the excavations at Kashmir Smast, see the preliminary report by id. (2001).

³⁵ Kuwayama (2002: 111–12; 275) maintains that the military camp of the Hephthalite tegin was probably located at Jhelum, five days’ march to the east of Taxila, or eight days’ march to the east of the Indus, and that he never resided in the region of Peshawar.

³⁶ Cf. Deeg (2007: 79).

³⁷ In Chinese sources, Jibin was a political rather than geographical name, indicating *grosso* ↗

vouring the settlement of Brahmins in new territories.³⁸ As for Kapiśi, Brahmanical colonisation was much advanced in the early seventh century, although political power was still in Buddhist hands.³⁹ Kapiśi was the earliest region of eastern Afghanistan to be colonised because, besides being suited to improved agrarian exploitation, was the region that, through Lamghan—the latter contiguous to the plain of Nagarahāra—connected Gandhāra with the territories north of the mountains.⁴⁰ As already mentioned, the real objective of Brahmanical expansion were not just the eastern Afghan valleys, fertile as they may have been, but Tokhāristān, tested by theistic Brahmins on several occasions.⁴¹ From Kapiśi, Tokhāristān could be reached through the line of least resistance going up the Panjshir river and over the Kotal-e Khawak, where the Andarab starts its course to meet soon the Surkhab (Map 1).

The once widely accepted idea that the Hephthalites, to be perhaps identified with Iranian Huns who entered north-western India in the last decades of the fifth century,⁴² were responsible for the destruction of the Buddhist sites of Gandhāra and Uḍḍiyāna, has been proved wrong, at least in the terms proposed by the scholars of two generations ago.⁴³ It is possible

modo North-western India (Petech 1950: 64; cf. also Enomoto 1994). It was identified with a specific region, including Gandhāra, according to political circumstances (Kuwayama 2002: 23 ff., 142 ff.).

³⁸ Cf. below. In the early sixth century, Jibin was identified with Kashmir, as from the *Luoyang Qielan ji* (cf. *ibid.*: 271).

³⁹ As observed by Kuwayama (2002: 11), the revival of Buddhism in Kapiśi came under the hegemony of the local Khingala dynasty from the mid-sixth to the mid-seventh century (see *ibid.*: 211 ff.; 253 ff. for political and territorial questions). The Turkī Šāhīs would rule the region only later on. Cf. also Inaba (2010b: 193).

⁴⁰ On the basis of Pei Ju's account, Kuwayama (2002: 152) has shown that around AD 606 this was the only route that, passing through the western foot of the Hindukush, connected Central Asia to India. We may add that Kābul was accessible from Kapiśi rather than from Nagarahāra, as the modern Tang-i Garu/Sarobi road may lead one to believe, although the latter could be reached via Gandamak (where the British were routed in January 1843).

⁴¹ Besides the evidence from Surkh Kotal and Dilberjin Tepe (above, note 21), see the painted panel with Oešo-Śiva now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, tentatively date to the sixth century AD (Behrendt 2007: no. 66; cf. pp. 86–88).

⁴² The question of the Hephthalites in Gandhāra and south-eastern Afghanistan is much debated, and we are still uncertain about their identity and presence in the regions south of the Hindukush. The debate was reopened by Kuwayama (his contributions are now available in Kuwayama 2002: 102–39, 208–21) and has been joined by numismatists and linguists (see recently Alram 2010: esp. 25–27; Inaba 2010b).

⁴³ Kuwayama (2002: 38 ff.; 103–4). Kuwayama's reassessment of the evidence has provided us with new, important details; however, he is led to consider the situation in the Northwest as relatively stable by sharing the idea that, even when rulers gave no support to Buddhism, it could flourish anyway in Gupta time (Kuwayama: 2002: 39). On the actual situation of Buddhism under the Gupta rulers, see Verardi (2011: 128 ff.).

that not all the local rulers of Gandhāra were the like of the king who received Song Yun and Huisheng in AD 519. Unsympathetic attitudes may have not yet turned into warred hostility against the Buddhist institutions in every corner of the region, but the policy followed by Mihirakula, the king who was in power from ca. 513 to 542 AD, is an important clue for understanding what was taking place. The *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* seems to preserve two distinct traditions regarding Mihirakula—the first, that of a ferocious king whose inhuman acts Kalhaṇa even refuses to narrate, the second, that of an oikistes who established Mihirapura and of a devout king who founded the Sivaite temple of Mihireśvara in Srinagar.⁴⁴ He would have also favoured the import of Gandhāran Brahmins into Kashmir, where he established for them one thousand *agrahāras*, i.e. royal donations of land.⁴⁵ If Kalhaṇa is dependable, we must assume that Gandhāra was already deeply brahmanised for allowing newly formed Brahman families to move and settle in new territories. As Mihirakula appears to have been a Sivaite also from his coins,⁴⁶ and as he says of himself in the Gwalior inscription to be incessantly engaged in the worship of Paśupati,⁴⁷ the second tradition reported in the *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* becomes credible, although some specifications are necessary to account for the first tradition as well. The very name of the king, Mihira, is homage to Kārttikeya: from the Rabatak inscription we know that the Iranian god Mihr was identified with Mahāsena and Viśākha,⁴⁸ which are two names of the warrior God. Mihirakula was obviously one of those Indian rulers devoid of any acceptable social status, be they native of India or of foreign origin, frequently utilised by the Pāśupatas and Bhāgavatas to strengthen their power. These rulers were legitimised in exchange of the support they gave to the settlement strategy of the Brahmins, aimed at occupying all the fertile areas to the detriment of the hegemonic trading community and of the previous occupants.⁴⁹ The destructions brought to India by the Hūṇas, described at length in a number of books of Indian history, are nothing else than the dev-

⁴⁴ *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* I.304, 306 (cf. Stein 1961–88, I: 45, 46).

⁴⁵ Ibid.: I.307.

⁴⁶ Among the coins issued by this ruler bearing a humped bull on the reverse, some also show the trident and the legend *jayatu vṛṣa*, ‘may the Bull be victorious’. Cf. A.H. Dani in Litvinskij, Zhang Guang-da and Shabani Samghabadi (1996: 175–76).

⁴⁷ Sircar (1968: no. 57, l. 3; cf. p. 425).

⁴⁸ As from the explaining note written above l. 9–10, of which the last part is preserved, in correspondence with the name Mihr (Sims-Williams and Cribb 1995–96: 79, n. 1). Viśākha was an independent deity that came to be identified with Kārttikeya, of whom he is the brother in some sources (Chatterjee 1970: 90–91); the three or four gods who would be integrated into the Sivaite warrior god still preserved their separate identities in Kuṣāṇa coins (Banerjee 1956: 144–46; cf. also L’Hernault 1978: 29–30). See Huviška’s coins with the legend Skando Komaro-Bizago and Skando Komaro-Maasēno-Bizago in Göbl (1984: pl. 13, nos. 156, 157; cf. pp. 69–70).

⁴⁹ We have some knowledge of the social mechanisms through which lands were brahmanised from South India, where both written and iconographic-allegoric evidence allow us to recreate the ↗

astations inflicted on Indian adversaries by increasingly confident Brahmans who recruited anyone on whom they could exercise their influence. Sophisticate system of legitimisation had been developed since an early age. The Bhāgavatas, for instance, had created special rituals to integrate *mlecchas* into Indian society since at least the first century BC resorting to an initiation centred on Narasiṃha,⁵⁰ not accidentally the *vāma*, destructive aspect of their God(s). An inscribed, fifth-century image of Narasiṃha, probably the most disturbing deity of the Brahmanical pantheon, comes from Chiniot on the Chenab, in Western Panjab (Map 4).⁵¹ Similar rituals certainly existed also in Sivaite milieus, if Vima Kadphises could declare himself a devotee of Śiva and if it is Śiva who proffers his hand to anoint Kaniṣka and the same God offers the monarch a wreath on later Kuṣāṇa coins.⁵²

The new Hindukush route to India, followed by Xuanzang to reach India from Central Asia, was opened sometime in the second half of the sixth century,⁵³ and we must assume that serious events had taken place in Gandhāra that caused the old Karakorum route to be abandoned. A trading network does not change without reason, and the blockade of the commercial activity is arguably the consequence of the agrarian, anti Kali Age policy inaugurated in Gandhāra and Uḍḍiyāna by the theistic groups.⁵⁴ Around AD 630, at the time of Xuanzang's journey,⁵⁵ the Buddha's bowl, the most famous relic of Gandhāra, which in the 540s was still in its place, was no longer there.⁵⁶ The disappearance of a relic of such importance, obviously an episode of the disintegration of the monastic and trading network, points to a climate of attacks on the Buddhist institutions. These must have taken place with particular vigour between, approximately, AD 550 and 580.⁵⁷ As had happened elsewhere in India, monks had to depart en masse, and the merchant class had to pack and move westwards

social context of the seventh-ninth century. See Verardi (2011: 221–28). Veluthat (1993: 196 ff.; 221 ff.) makes interesting reading and helps for the tentative creation of a model.

⁵⁰ Hudson (2002: 145).

⁵¹ M.N. Khan (1998).

⁵² Pal (1988).

⁵³ Kuwayama (2002: 20, 149 ff.).

⁵⁴ A political block, of the kind we know from modern history, is the more likely reason for the Karakorum route having become inaccessible. In Europe, in the late 1940s, it became impossible, all of a sudden, to travel from Nuremberg to Leipzig or from Thessaloniki to Sofia; most communications were interrupted for decades and what remained of inter-regional and long-distance trade came under a very strict control. For Kuwayama (ibid.: 154), the insecurity of the routes were at least partly responsible for the decline of Buddhism in Gandhāra, but he ascribes this insecurity to the situation that followed the disintegration of Hephthalite power in the region.

⁵⁵ Regarding the date of departure of Xuanzang for India, see de la Vaissière (2010b), who shows that it took place in AD 629.

⁵⁶ Ibid.: 143–44.

⁵⁷ Kuwayama (2002: 153) has clearly seen that 'The desolation of Buddhism in Gandhara therefore chronologically falls in a time between visits of Song Yun and Xuanzang'.

to carry out business. This brought to the creation of a new Gandhāra, so to say, at the foot and within the Hindukush range, a rehearsal of the migration towards Tibet from Magadha and Bengal that took place a few centuries later under even more dramatic circumstances. Once we start considering Gandhāra a region of India among many others, there is a lot to learn and reconsider. We observe an unfavourable climate towards the *śramaṇas* at Valabhī in Saurashtra between AD 525 and 590, when the support provided by the Maitraka kings to the Brahmins reached its peak,⁵⁸ and at Badami (Vātāpī) in western Karnataka. Here, at the time of King Kirtivarman (AD 566–597), it was visually recorded that the local, Buddhist king had been forced to cede the lands to the Bhāgavatas and become a convert, as allegorically narrated in the myth of Vāmana-Trivikrama and Bali.⁵⁹

In the lands where they settled, the Brahmins introduced an efficient management of the agrarian resources, the price being the imposition of *varṇāśramadharmā* or caste society and the liquidation of the capitalist mentality of the trading class. The process of agrarian transformation was slow but steady, with sudden accelerations. Political and social control over society was exercised through a network of temples, and the rulers were often figure-heads with little real power.⁶⁰ This model, implemented by the Guptas in the fourth and early fifth century was revitalised and optimised in the South,⁶¹ whence it was exported, through a long, indefatigable process, in every corner of India, often encountering a strong opposition. The imposition of *varṇāśramadharmā* often meant a violent clash with the former owners of the land and/or with the non-agricultural natives who, against their will, were downgraded to the lower peasantry ranks.⁶²

Regarding Gandhāran Buddhism, its collapse can be hardly attributable to other reasons than the profound change introduced in the economy and policy of the region by the process

⁵⁸ Njammasch (2001: 279, 281); cf. Verardi (2011: 174–75).

⁵⁹ In a relief of Cave 2, Vāmana presents himself to Bali grotesquely disguised as the Buddha, the Deluder, and is obviously welcome by the pious king. See the matter discussed by Verardi (2011: 162–64).

⁶⁰ M.G.S. Narayanan (2002), with reference to Kerala, has recognised the existence of ‘a bold and visible Brahman oligarchy, thinly disguised as a monarchy’.

⁶¹ The crucial importance of South India in the brahmanisation of the whole country is generally overlooked by historians. Whereas in northern and central India the anti-Brahmanical forces reorganised themselves after the end of Gupta rule, and with Harṣavardhana in the first half of the seventh century and, later on, with the Pālas, kept Brahmanical power at bay, in the South the Brahmanical model implemented by the Guptas held fast. From there it was imposed, step by step, on the rest of the country and eventually, with the Senas (not accidentally from Karnataka), even in Bengal and Magadha. This process was interrupted and modified by the Muslim irruption and conquest.

⁶² Verardi (2011: 227, 345, 347).

of brahmanisation. The presumably serious impact caused by Justinian's plague⁶³ cannot be held responsible for the shifting westwards of the economic axis, because the distance between the Karakorum and the Hindukush routes is irrelevant from the point of view of such a devastating plague. What took place was a political and economic strangulation of the religion of Dharma, according to a process that implied intimidation and violence. The *deva* temples mentioned by Xuanzang were not just places of worship among others, but essentially organisational and economic structures ideally placed at the centre of *kṣetras*—well-defined territories over which the Brahmans would exercise political power through social pressure and economic transformation. Kapiśi was, and is, a large, fertile plain, an ideal *kṣetra*.⁶⁴ The conflict opposing Kapiśi and Kābul in the seventh century, which ended with the fall of the Khimṅala dynasty and the emergence of Kābul as the seat of the Turkī Šāhīs, is probably to be seen in this light, at least in part.

In the early seventh century, Turkic people had entered south-eastern Afghanistan, and in AD 666 established the dynasty.⁶⁵ The Turkic élite supported Buddhism, but whereas the branch ruling in Zābul continued to do so for a long time, elsewhere they became increasingly subject to Brahmanical pressure. The whole set of Brahmanical marble sculptures from eastern Afghanistan dates to the period of their rule. Marble images were foreign to these regions, where stucco and clay were used in Buddhist sanctuaries. The break with tradition betrays the arrival of new settlers with a strong identity and a clear political agenda. The finds are mainly from Lamghan, Kapiśi and Logar, and date mostly to the eighth century. Among them, the marble image of Gaṇeśa, dedicated by the Šāhi Khimṅala of Kābul in AD 765,⁶⁶ is notable. It shows the extent to which the rulers were involved in temple patronage—a trend that had become the rule throughout the whole of India. The protection of the Buddhist community—if this was the case and if the pursuit of balance between the forces in the field was a viable political option—was delegated to their queens, according to a well-established model.⁶⁷

⁶³ It is the first large, well-documented epidemic of bubonic plague, whose strongest wave affected the Mediterranean and the Red Sea from AD 540 to 594 causing the death of a considerable part of the population. Quantitative data are provided by Stathakopoulos (2004: 110 ff.; 155 ff.).

⁶⁴ The separation of Gandhāra and Greater Gandhāra from the rest of India discussed above is also cause for a sort of conditioned reflex as regards the alleged 'natural' habitat for Brahmans: Kapiśi and Logar would thus seem unlikely places for Brahmans to settle, forgetting that climatic conditions in Kashmir are harder, and its geographical seclusion greater.

⁶⁵ Rahman (1979: 47). Kuwayama, who has discussed at length the dynamics of the change of regime in Kapiśi, places the advent of the Turkī Šāhīs between AD 658 and 710 (Kuwayama 2002: 195).

⁶⁶ On this image, its inscription and date see *ibid.* 249 ff. It is generally assumed that the statue was found in Gardez, but Petech (1988: 187) maintains that the information is not certain. For the whole set of Brahmanical sculptures, see Kuwayama (2002: 222–48).

⁶⁷ At the beginning of the second decade of the eighth century, the Buddhist master ↗



Fig. 5. Shahji-ki-Dheri, votive Brahmanical temple.
(From M.N. Khan 2009: 164).

The backline of these new developments in eastern Afghanistan was, naturally, brahmanised Gandhāra, to which Uḍḍiyāna to the north and the Salt Range to the south are to be added (Map 4). For the situation in Gandhāra proper, Xuanzang is not our sole guide, because we have the evidence of the early Sivaite temple and *maṭha* at Kashmir Smast, already mentioned. The very existence of a *maṭha* may convince us of the duress that the Buddhists had to endure, because it was in such institutions that the young Brahmins were trained in both philosophy and armed struggle.⁶⁸ The existence of early Brahmanical temples in the rest of Gandhāra can be reconstructed, besides Xuanzang's testimony, from the clay models, or miniature votive copies, of Brahmanical temples. Though only a few in number, they come from different Gandhāran sites.⁶⁹ Two of them have been found in Buddhist sanctuaries (Fig. 5), which may either point to the appropriation of the latter by the theists (a common occurrence throughout India) or to a reoccupation of the site after a phase of abandonment. The same can be said a propos of the small image of

Śubhākarasiṃha was apparently requested by the queen of the Turkī Śāhī court in Uḍḍiyāna to teach the Law (Inaba 2010a: 445–46). The division of tasks between the male and female representatives of a dynasty was traditional in India when necessary. In general, the king was a self-declared Sivaite or Bhāgavata, while one of his queen (or his sister or mother) would represent the *śramaṇa* front. An early example is that of the Ikṣvāku rulers of Nagarjunakonda, all Sivaite: it is to Cāṃtaśrī, sister of Cāṃtamūla I (AD 210–235) that the patronage of the *mahāstūpa* was due (Vogel 1929–30: 16–17). One of the latest examples is that of the Gahādāvāla king Govindacandra and two of his queens, one of whom, Kumāradevī, donated a *vihāra* to the *sthavira* of the Buddhist community of Sarnath to honour the Dharmacakra Jina, whose image was also restored by her (Konow 1907–08: v. 20–23). The Buddhist queens of Govindacandra, a Sivaite, were not endowed with all the royal prerogatives (Niyogi 1959: 199). The occasional inversion of roles indicates that the king was Buddhist or was leaning towards Buddhism (or Jainism). In seventh-century Jajpur, ruled by the Buddhist Bhaumakaras, Sivaite patronage was assigned to the female representatives of the dynasty: it was Mādhavadevī, wife of king Śubhākara I, who caused the temple of Madhaveśvara to be built (Sircar 1949–50: vv. 3–45 and p. 182). Mahāśivagupta Bālārjuna of South Kośala discontinued the religious policy in favour of the Bhāgavatas pursued by his mother Vāsatā and protected the Sivaite and, aligning himself to the policy of the Pālas, his powerful neighbours, the Buddhists (Verardi 2011: 311).

⁶⁸ Verardi (2011: 231 ff.).

⁶⁹ M.N. Khan (2009).

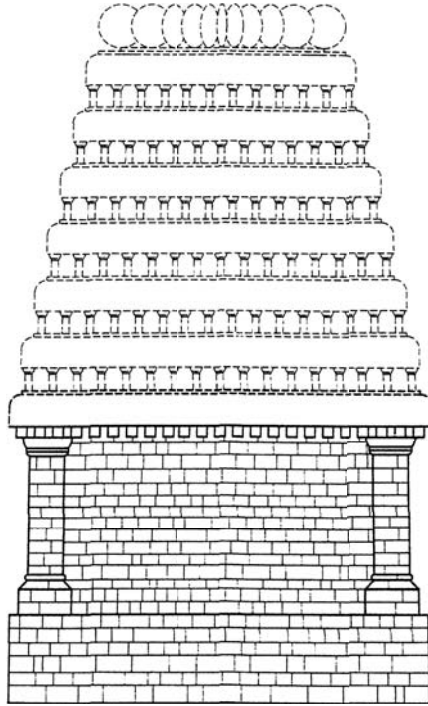


Fig. 6. Katas (Salt Range), Temple B, 7th century.
(From Meister 2010: Fig. 8).

Durgā found at the Buddhist sites of Kharaki, north-east of Takht-i Bahi.⁷⁰

Regarding the regions adjoining Gandhāra, the process of brahmanisation is documented by both architectural and archaeological evidence. Temples started being built in the Salt Range between the late sixth and the early seventh century, as for instance the temples of Katas (Temple B; Fig. 6), Bilot (Temple D) and Kafirkot (Temple B). Throughout the seventh and eighth centuries, several other temples were added to the already existing ones at Kafirkot, Bilot, Mari and Kalar.⁷¹ In Uḍḍiyāna, where the disintegration of the ancient monastic network took place, as in Gandhāra, in the fifth-sixth century, a Brahmanical temple was built uphill at Barikot, marking the end of the urban phase in the valley, which it dominates. It is datable to the second half of the seventh century.⁷² Proceeding westwards, we must as-

⁷⁰ M.A. Khan, M.B. Khan and A. Azeem (1999–2000).

⁷¹ Meister (2010: 36–37).

⁷² Callieri, Colliva and Nasir (2000–01: 226); Callieri (2010: 376).

sume the existence of Brahmanical temples in Lamghan, given the marble sculptures found at Tagao, and then we have the evidence from Kapiśi—from both Tapa Skandar, already mentioned, and Khair Khane.⁷³ Logar was easily accessible from the Salt Range, and the Brahmanical sculptures found in this province⁷⁴ imply the existence of temples.

The settlement of Brahmans in the plain of Kābul, easily reachable though it was from both Kapiśi and Logar, was apparently slower, and they do not seem to have been able to exercise the same pressure on the political élite as elsewhere until the eighth century. It remains difficult, however, to make an assessment on the date of abandonment of the Buddhist sites of the region (Map 3), as for instance that of the sanctuaries of Shevaki and Kamari.⁷⁵ However, Shevaki 1 seems to have been abandoned between the fifth and the seventh century;⁷⁶ Shevaki 4 was never completed;⁷⁷ Seh Topan 4 probably does not go beyond the seventh century;⁷⁸ Gul Dara, arguably built in the fifth century,⁷⁹ seems to have had a short life,⁸⁰ and Tepe Maranjan remained active between the fifth and the seventh century.⁸¹ In Logar (but not far from Ghazni as the crow flies), the very large site of Kafirkot in the Kharwar plateau does also not go beyond this date.⁸²

A few sites testify to the revival of Buddhism between the end of the seventh century and *c.* AD 750, ignited by the expansionistic policy of Empress Wu Zetian in Central Asia. For a brief season, they flourished under the protection of the Zhou dynasty and, after AD 711, under that of the still powerful Buddhist lobbies at the Tang court and the Buddhist network of Tokhāristān, where Brahmanical pressure had been checkmated.⁸³ Tapa Sardar near Ghazni (Map 3) was entirely rebuilt towards the end of the seventh century thanks to the patronage of the rulers of Zābulistān, Khuras and Alkhis.⁸⁴ I have already drawn attention

⁷³ Khair Khane was excavated in 1934 by Hackin (Hackin and Carl 1936), while a large image of Sūrya came to light in 1980 (Bernard and Grenet 1981). From Shakar Dara comes an image of Gaṇeśa (Kuwayama 2002: 224).

⁷⁴ See them in Kuwayama (2002: 222 ff.).

⁷⁵ Fussman in Fussman, Murad and Ollivier (2008, I: 53).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*: 34–35.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*: 37.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*: 60.

⁷⁹ Fussman (Fussman and Le Berre 1976: 51) dates the construction of this complex to the fifth or sixth century.

⁸⁰ Fussman in Fussman, Murad and Ollivier (2008, I: 75).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*: 98–99.

⁸² Some information on Kharwar are found in Verardi (2007: 240 ff.).

⁸³ By the beginning of the eighth century, the whole oasis of Balkh was owned by a monastery, the Nowbahār, mentioned by the early Islamic sources (de la Vaissière 2010: esp. 519–20).

⁸⁴ As from the inscription of Tang-e Safedak (Lee and Sims-Williams 2003); cf. Verardi and Paparatti (2005: 433).

on the sculptural production characterised by a stronger and stronger degree of sinicisation, which is to be probably understood not so much as a reflex of Tang art (the models at Ghazni were post-Gupta) but of the actual presence of Chinese individuals.⁸⁵ Buddhist revivalism under Chinese influence is also documented at Tepe Khazana in Kābul,⁸⁶ and, in places, in the Hindukush and Tokhāristān, as well as in Kashmir.⁸⁷ In the second half of the eighth century, the majority of these sites were abandoned. This also happened in Nagarahāra, where the majority of Buddhist monasteries had been built between the fourth and the sixth century:⁸⁸ monastic life ended in the seventh century at Tapa Shotor, and at the end of the eighth century at Tapa Top-e Kalan.⁸⁹

There is not enough evidence to associate the end of the Afghan sites with Ya'qūb b. Lais's campaign, and recurring to some other military action carried out by the Muslims is also doubtful. Khwaja Safa and Tepe Narenj near Kābul are a case in point, and Tapa Sardar can also be mentioned in this regard. It has been assumed that the end of Khwaja Safa came with the temporary conquest of Kābul in 867–879, but G. Fussman doubts the conclusions arrived at in this regard by the excavator of the site.⁹⁰ Fussman is equally doubtful about the nature of the fire that, according to M.Z. Paiman, would have been wantonly set at Tapa

⁸⁵ The sinicisation process is particularly evident in the production of Phase 8 (c. AD 720–750); cf. Verardi and Paparatti (2005: 438–40). The Chinese established themselves in Central Asia, outside present-day Xinjiang, in AD 692, when Qarashahr was replaced by Suiye/Ak Beshim as the fourth garrison. Forte (1994) has shown, independently from the archaeological evidence, that the larger of the two Buddhist temples of Ak Beshim, first identified by Clauson (1961: 8), was built at the time of Wu Zedien (Zhou dynasty, AD 690–705) and was officiated by Chinese monks for a long time (ibid.: 54). The influence of Chinese Buddhists in Kashmir is observable thanks to the sculptural evidence (first pointed out by Goetz 1969: 105; see also Rhie 1988: 34–37) and thanks to the presence at the court of Srinagar of Caṅkuṇa, the Tokharian minister of King Lalitāditya Muktāpīḍa. He erected a famous stūpa (*Rājatarāṅgiṇī* IV. 211; cf. Stein 1961–88, I: 143) and his name is the Sanskrit rendition of the Chinese title *jiangjun* ('general').

⁸⁶ Tissot (2004: esp. nos. Tkh 913.12a, 914.13 on p. 348). The production at Fondukistan also shows similar developments, although the degree of sinicisation remains considerably lower than at Tapa Sardar. Its sculptural production would thus correspond to Tapa Sardar's Phase 7, c. 680–720 AD, for which see Verardi and Paparatti (2005: 434–38).

⁸⁷ See the wooden Buddha head from Cave G in Bamiyan (Klimburg-Salter 1989: 142; fig. 56; cave G is numbered 51 in Higuchi, 1983–84); for Tokhāristān, see Litvinskij and Zejmal' (1971: figs 46–47 on pp. 192–93; 2004: fig. 79 on p. 109); for Kashmir, besides the Caṅkuṇa stūpa, see the clay images from Ushkur (Kak 1923: 11 ff.; cf. esp. nos. Bc 2, Bc3, Bc 9, Bc10, Bc 19; also, id 1933: 152 ff., pl. LVIIIa).

⁸⁸ Fussman and Le Berre (1976: 49).

⁸⁹ Tarzi (1976: 384; 2005: 216).

⁹⁰ Fussman in Fussman, Murad and Ollivier (2008, I: 82). Khwaja Safa's late production mirrors that of Tapa Sardar and Fondukistan.

Narenj by the invading forces of Ya'qūb b. Lais causing the end of the site.⁹¹ Regarding the abandonment of Tapa Sardar, the ninth-century (Ya'qūb b. Lais again) is too late a date, and that it was caused by the inroads of Ibrāhīm-b Jibrīl in AD 795 is equally uncertain, though possible.⁹²

To get a better understanding of the events, it is necessary to introduce yet another variable in the picture—the emergence of Vajrayāna Buddhism in the eighth century. The Vajrayāna originated in Uḍḍiyāna⁹³ and, surprising as it may seem (this depends on the limited evidence at our disposal) its fallout is first observable in Zābul. When we look for a setting for king Indrabhūti, Padmasambhava and the early *siddhas*, as well as for the author of the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, we think of a landscape with residual monastic presence and a limited number of followers up valley to whom the new teachings were imparted. An assessment on the end of monastic life in Gandhāra is even more difficult than assessing its end in eastern Afghanistan because past excavators completely overlooked the evidence from the phases of abandonment. Suffice it here to mention, in relation to Taxila, the chronology of events provided by Marshall at the beginning of his report, where only a few lines are devoted to what happened after Xuanzang's visit.⁹⁴ Excavations were carried out hastily removing the upper layers in order to reach the 'worthy' structures, overlooking the importance of late structures and materials (but for the coins).⁹⁵ Among the recently excavated sites, the evidence fluctuates between two extremes: I will mention two sites in the Swabi district, Bisak Banda and Ranighat. The former seems to have been abandoned in the fourth century,⁹⁶ whereas Ranighat, up valley, includes late structures that transformed the site into a fortress.⁹⁷ These

⁹¹ Analysing various possibilities, Fussman thinks of an accidental fire that may have broken out before the Muslim invasion (ibid.: 92–93). He does not mention the Šāhīs, who were ruling in Kābul at the time. Rahman, who originally dated Kallar's coup in AD 843, prefers now to place the change of regime in AD 820 (see below).

⁹² The military events of AD 795 would be a more likely date for the end of the site because there are no images datable to the ninth-century (Verardi and Paparatti 2005: 441–42). Here we would be again within a binary paradigm were it not for the fact that, as explained elsewhere (Verardi 2010: 343), Tapa Sardar has always been a coveted military position.

⁹³ Tucci (1949: 212 ff.), now followed by the majority of authors.

⁹⁴ Marshall (1951, I: 86).

⁹⁵ The meagre evidence provided by Marshall has obviously had repercussions on the work of later scholars. Dani, for instance, devotes only a couple of paragraphs to the late history of Taxila (Dani 1986: 77–78), although he doubts Marshall's interpretation of the Giri fort, which he rather ascribes to the the Hindū Šāhīs.

⁹⁶ M.B. Khan and Azeem (1996: 227).

⁹⁷ Only the volume of plates has been published to date (Nishikawa 1994), but from the attached leaflet it appears that the author establishes the *post quem* at 'the end of the Ephtalite Era'—auguably too early a date.

extremes may depict the multifarious reality of the region: Bisak Banda would have been abandoned as soon as the Buddhist network started collapsing as a consequence of the agrarian policy of the Brahmans-settlers, whereas Ranighat, located in a secluded area, survived for a much longer time. Information on the late phases of the Buddhist sites is scarce in Swat, too, the better evidence coming from Butkara I. The fifth stūpa, built at the end of the seventh or the beginning of the eighth century, passed through intensive changes mirrored by three phases, its appearance growing ever shabbier and its workmanship coarser. It perhaps crumbled wholly or in part and was abandoned, and its life ended in the tenth century.⁹⁸

Was the landscape where the Vajrayāna teachings were imparted the one we have hypothesised? Between the sixth and the early eighth century, the Buddhists of Uḍḍiyāna must have experienced a period of extreme duress, but were certainly aware that in Zābul and Bamiyan (and, partly, also in Kābul), structured Buddhist communities and monasteries were still in existence. With the rise of Pāla power around the mid-eighth century, and especially with the northern Indian campaign carried out by Dharmapāla (AD 770–810), during which the Panjab and Gandhāra were overrun and conquered⁹⁹ (though not annexed), the Buddhists of Gandhāra and Uḍḍiyāna had to overcome the sense of isolation and abandonment. A channel of communication opened between the western regions and the eastern Ganges valley, where Buddhist rule was undisputed. If we want to understand the Vajrayāna reaction, we must set it within a political perspective, because what has been called non-institutional Buddhism¹⁰⁰ would have never had the force, alone, of fuelling a powerful, revolutionary movement that checkmated the Brahmanical social order for centuries. If one king Indrabhūti ever ruled in Uḍḍiyāna, this probably happened at the time of Dharmapāla or his successor Devapāla.¹⁰¹ The control of mountain and forest areas was traditionally loose in Brahmanical kingdoms,

⁹⁸ Faccenna (1980–81, I: 126–27, 173). Much uncertainty remains on the last phases of the monasteries of Panr I, whose life span, however, seems to have been much shorter than that of Butkara (id. 1993, I: 130).

⁹⁹ On Dharmapāla's *abhiṣeka* at Kanauj and his other conquests, see Majumdar (1943: 106 ff.). The submission of Gandhāras and Yavanas are recorded in the Khalimpur plate (Kielhorn 1896–97: v. 12). A reassessment of Pāla history is much needed, not only to have the new important material that is now at our disposal included in the picture, as for instance Mahipāla's Jagjibanpur plate (Bhattacharya 2005–06; Pāla power remained strong longer than previously believed), but for evaluating anew the impact that a strong Buddhist power had in Indian policy.

¹⁰⁰ Davidson (2002: *passim*).

¹⁰¹ If he succeeded, taking advantage of the weakening of Śāhī rule, in carving out a territory of his own (see of late Olivieri 2010: 360–61), it was thanks to the capacity of the Vajrayānists of addressing the natives and outcastes inhabiting marginal territories (marginal for the *varṇa* state society) and organising their defense on the basis of a guerrilla war. We know of many forest kings for whom Buddhism was a political option in eastern India, and who fought until the very end (cf. Verardi 2011: 287–88).

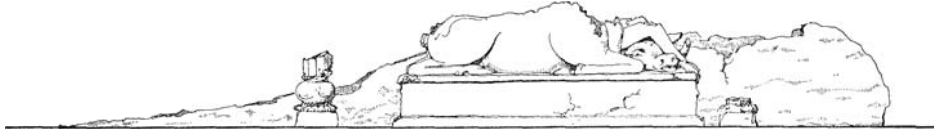


Fig. 7. Tapa Sardar (Ghazni). Pedestal of 'Durgā' image, 8th century.
(From Taddei and Verardi 1978: 54, Fig. 12).

and in that period it must have loosened in the intensively cultivated valleys, too. It is probably in this context that we can explain the miniature eighth-century clay stūpas containing inscribed tablets found at Hund, the eastern Śāhī capital.¹⁰²

The Durgā image of Tapa Sardar (pedestal on Fig. 7), created in the second half of the eighth century,¹⁰³ is an early testimony of the Vajrayāna reaction at the level of monastic, institutional Buddhism. The Brahmanical goddess has been subjugated by the powerful Vajrayāna gods and has been put at the service of Buddhism with a different name. The model is the story of the subjugation of Mahādeva found in the *Sarvatathāgatātattva Saṃgraha*, a text codified in the eighth century. Vajrapāṇi warns the Tathāgatas against the existence of criminals such as Maheśvara and other Brahmanical gods. Summoned by a *mantra*, they appear on Mount Sumeru, where Śiva displays all his fury but is annihilated by Vajrapāṇi, by whom the other gods take also refuge. Brought back from the dead, Maheśvara again opposes Vajrapāṇi's attempt at subduing him, until when he abandons his form of Mahādeva and is reborn, entering the *maṇḍala* with another name.¹⁰⁴ The *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, besides inciting to disaggregate society (the *varṇa* society), invites the adept to concentrate on the three-pronged *vajra* 'that paralyzes all the non-Buddhist teachers'¹⁰⁵ projecting it on the head of the enemy, which will not prevail against the *buddhasainya*, the Buddha's army. We ignore the steps taken by the Vajrayānists in the Northwest, but we can be certain of the fact that the symbolisation and ritualisation of the various stages of the anti-Brahmanical revolt were not symbolic. The Buddhist *maṇḍala* is the conceptualisation of a physical, territorial space where the Brahmins and their allies are reduced to impotence to allow the Buddhists to survive and hopefully recreate that Dharma Kingdom that lies at the root of Buddhist political thought since the time of Aśoka. This is probably the reason why the Durgā of Tapa Sardar was placed in front of an already existing image of the Bejewelled Buddha, who presides

¹⁰² Ali and M.N. Khan (1997–98).

¹⁰³ For chronology and archaeological context, the reader is referred to Taddei and Verardi (1978: 54–57) and to Verardi and Paparatti (2005: 441).

¹⁰⁴ The passage was first made known by Tucci (1932: 135 ff.; 140 ff.); cf. Davidson (2002: 150–51).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.: 193.

over the Dharma Kingdom to whom the subjugated goddess now also belongs.¹⁰⁶

The Vajrayāna reaction is the most probable reason that determined the coup of c. AD 822 in Kābul¹⁰⁷ and brought to the establishment of the Hindū Śāhīs or, more correctly, Oḍ Śāhīs.¹⁰⁸ Kallar, the chief minister of the last Turkī Śāhī king of Kābul, Lagaturmān, perhaps a Brahman,¹⁰⁹ dethroned him and—a couple of generations had passed from the dedication of the Gaṇeśa statue by Khimṅila—established the new determined, orthodox dynasty. The revised date of Kallar's coup makes it less likely that it came as a consequence of the bankruptcy policy of the Turkī Śāhīs vis-à-vis the Arabs. The increasing pressure of the Muslims was naturally a serious problem for the Śāhīs but, according to a scheme that was to occur repeatedly in northern India until the thirteenth century, the rulers of Kābul had even more serious troubles in home affairs. If anything, they had to contrast the Buddhist-Muslim entente.

Regarding this, the situation in the Northwest can be clarified, to a certain degree, looking at what had happened and was happening in Sind, where, as analytically shown by D. Maclean, the Buddhists always sided with the Muslims in that game of three. In primary Arabic sources, the Buddhist communities are mentioned without exception in terms of collaboration, and there are no examples of individual Buddhists or a group of Buddhists who did not collaborate with the Arabs. Conversely, Hindu communities rarely collaborated until after the conquest of Brahmanābād, and even then only sparingly:¹¹⁰ the Brahman kings of Sind, who received their primary support from rural areas,¹¹¹ showed little understanding of regulated inter-regional commerce.¹¹² Although Sindhi Buddhists, who are recorded either in a list with merchants and artisans or in connection with commerce, used their financial expertise for the benefit of the Arabs,¹¹³ their expectations for a share in the inter-regional trade were only partly fulfilled. The capital generated in Arab Sind was substantial,¹¹⁴ and

¹⁰⁶ See also Verardi (2010: 347–48).

¹⁰⁷ Rahman (1993; 2005: 417).

¹⁰⁸ Id. (2005: 418).

¹⁰⁹ Rahman (1979: 51–52; 2005: 418) has raised doubts on Kallar's alleged status of Brahman. If tradition has considered him a Brahman, this is likely to depend on the frequency with which political vents of the same nature took place in Indian courts and on the policy he inaugurated. Kallar is no longer identified with the Lalliya Śāhī of the *Rājatarāṅgiṇī*, who was the fourth king of the dynasty (id. 1993; 2005: 417).

¹¹⁰ Maclean (1989: 51–52). Maclean subscribes to the hypothesis that the shaven-headed monks of Brahmanābād were Brahmans, but I consider this interpretation unlikely.

¹¹¹ Ibid.: 60.

¹¹² Ibid.: 65.

¹¹³ Ibid.: 58.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.: 68.

the Buddhists were waiting for some action that would improve their fortunes,¹¹⁵ but this did not happen. The point was that, even though Arab conquest and settlement did not imply conversion but, rather, submission, the Buddhists were *dhimmīs*, second-class citizens:¹¹⁶ the Buddhist merchants were not in the position to compete with Muslim merchants on an equal footing. Within a relatively short time, the Arabs not only gained their own expertise in eastern commerce, but displaced the Buddhists as the dominant urban, mercantile class, settling in the already existing towns and building new cities such as Maṇṣūra. The mechanisms observable in Sind would be reproduced, in part, in the eleventh-twelfth century in the Ganges Valley and Central India, where the Muslim-Buddhist entente was got over only when the Brahmins accepted Muslim suzerainty in exchange of Muslim support in annihilating the revolt of the outcastes ignited by the Vajrayāna.¹¹⁷

In Afghanistan, the Muslims had initially been opposed by the rulers of Zābul and Kābul, who often succeeded in blockading the routes,¹¹⁸ but when in the second half of the eighth century things turned difficult for the Buddhists because of the increased Brahmanical pressure, the Muslims probably started absorbing the trading community. The Šāhī control of Kābul, easternmost Afghanistan and Gandhāra caused a third, westernmost route to be opened connecting the Muslim towns of Sind with those of Tokhāristān (Bukhāra). Zābul and central Hindukush were situated exactly along this route, this being the reason why what was left of the trading community and Buddhist clergy could survive for some time in Jaghuri-Qarabagh in the province of Ghazni (where the last, often unfinished Buddhist monuments of southern Afghanistan are situated),¹¹⁹ in the Bamiyan Valley¹²⁰ and, north of the mountains, at Haybak (Map 1). Cave 2 at Haybak (Figs. 8a, b) is strictly related, from the typological point of view, to the caves of Tapa Zaytun just south of the Lake of Nawor (Fig. 9).¹²¹ For the Šāhīs, the real divide was easternmost Hindukush, and they would repeatedly try to prevent the Muslim from establishing a strong power there.¹²²

In rejecting the binary paradigm discussed in the beginning, we should not comply with the irenic approach, typical of modern historians, to the question of the Buddhist-Muslim relationships. As seen for Sind, this approach ignores the fact that vis-à-vis the Muslims the Buddhists faced a number of handicaps. It remains true that in the Northwest, differently

¹¹⁵ Ibid.: 67.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.: 49–50.

¹¹⁷ Verardi (2011: 357–58; 368–69); on the Vajrayāna and the outcastes, cf. ibid.: 346–48.

¹¹⁸ This had been cause of occasional accidents like the destruction by fire of the monastery of Tapa Sardar in AD 671 when 'Ubayd Allāh succeeded in controlling the whole territory from Bost to Kābul (Kuwayama 2002: 182; Verardi and Paparatti 2005: 432).

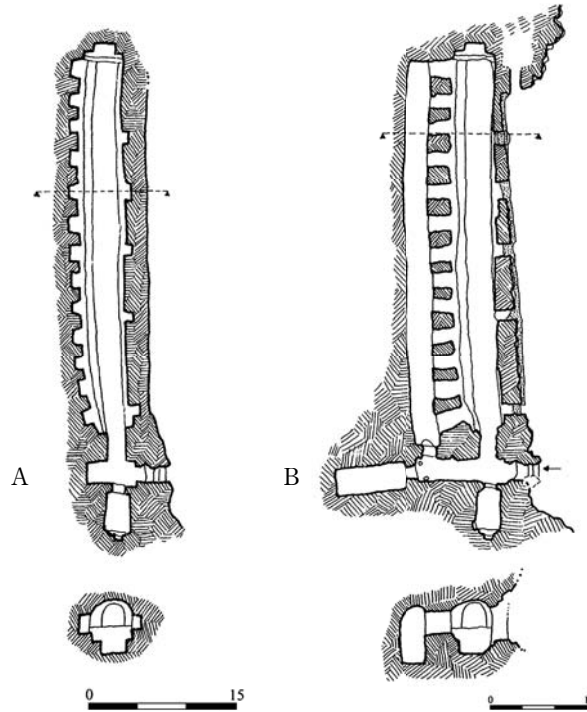
¹¹⁹ Id. (2004).

¹²⁰ Especially at Foladi; cf. Cave 23, clearly unfinished, in Higuchi (1983–84, IV: plan 49).

¹²¹ Verardi and Paparatti (2004: 87–88).

¹²² D.C. Ganguly in Majumdar (1966: 3).

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Figs. 8a–b. Haybak, early state of Cave 2 (8a) and present-day state of Cave 2 after enlargement, de-functionalisation and reshaping (8b), 9th century.
(From Verardi and Paparatti 2004: 88, Fig. 103).

from Sind, for at least two centuries there was no question of the Buddhists being given the status of *dhimmīs*, because there was no Muslim state yet, and even less a Muslim society, although ‘Yaqub-b Lais’s campaign laid the foundations of such a society. When Muslim power established itself, it did so not in relation to the Buddhist powers, vanished since long, but to the Brahmanical state that in Eastern Afghanistan the Oḡ Šāhīs, with the exception of the Hindukush region, had created at the expense of the Buddhists. Like the Turkī Šāhīs, the Oḡ Šāhīs paid tribute to the Muslims, as would happen to all Brahmanical powers in the Ganges valley in the eleventh and twelfth century, yet the society continued to be ruled by Brahmanical laws, not by Shari‘a. Even after the campaign of Ya’qūb b. Lais, who, after taking Bāmiyān in AD 870, entered Kābul and robbed the temple where the Šāhī rulers were crowned kings,¹²³ the latter were not driven out from the mountainous part of their terri-

¹²³ Rahman (1979: 103–04).

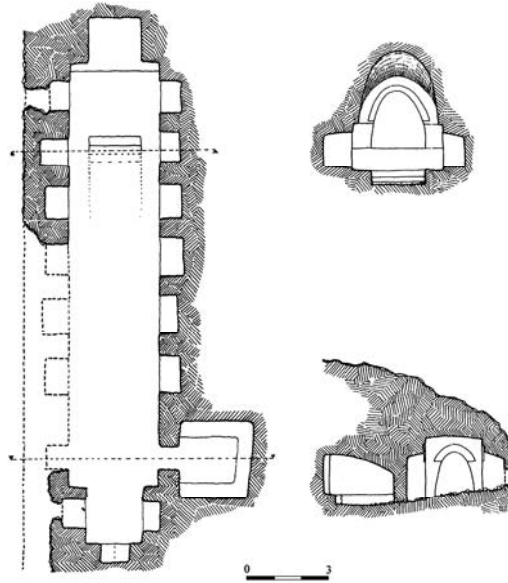


Fig. 9. Tepe Zaytun (Jaghuri), Cave 23, 9th century.
(From Verardi and Paparatti 2004: 84, Fig. 98).

tories.¹²⁴ Pre-Independence historians were right in emphasising the central role played by Kābul in the strategy and identity of the Oḡ Šāhī state.¹²⁵

The Šāhīs, as a northern Indian middle power provided with a vast hinterland vis-à-vis the invading forces, were optimistic to prevail in the end. A number of temples continued to be built in the Salt Range, often within fortified compounds, as would happen in Central India some time later. Kafirkot, Bilot, Amb and Nandana, where new temples were erected between the mid-ninth and the early eleventh century, are fortified sites.¹²⁶ A ninth-tenth century date may also be attributed to the temple that once rose at Chiga Sarai in Kunar (the Afghan province bordering with Bajaur and Dir in Pakistan), known to us thanks to the drawings of its few remains reused in the local cemetery in the nineteenth century (Fig. 10).¹²⁷ To the ninth century dates the fragment of a Viṣṇu stele representing Gadādevī from Tagao

¹²⁴ I follow Rahman (1979: 105), but the sequence of events is to be partly revised in consideration of the fact that Kallar's coup has been antedated to c. AD 822.

¹²⁵ Vaidya (1926, III: 20).

¹²⁶ Meister (2010: 37–38; see the plans of the Kafirkot and Bilot compounds on fig. 64).

¹²⁷ van Lohuizen-de Leeuw (1959).

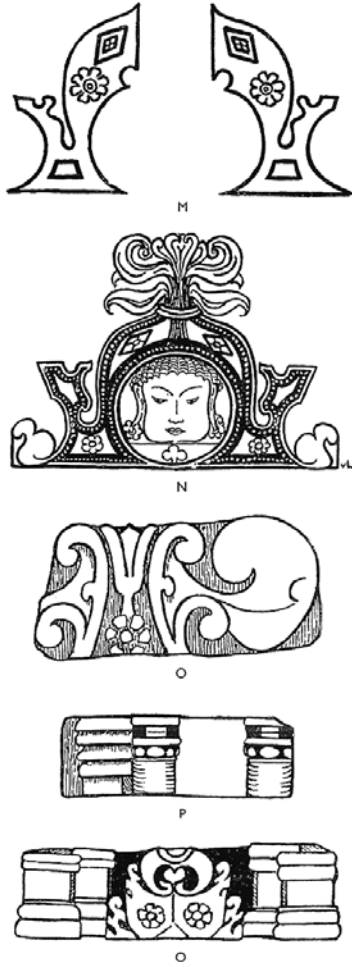


Fig. 10. Chiga Sarai (Lamghan), architectural fragments from Brahmanical temple, 10th century.
(From van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1959: 67).



Fig. 11. Tagao (Lamghan), Gadādevī, 9th century.
(From Taddei 1973: Fig. 1).

(Fig. 11),¹²⁸ whose interest lies in the fact that it is made of a local marble and not of the white, presumably imported marble into which the Turkī Śāhī statues were carved. To the same period have been dated the two wooden architectural features found at Kashmir

¹²⁸ Taddei (1973).



Fig. 12. Kashmir Smast (?), Tāṇḍava dance of Śiva, 8th century.
(From Goetz 1969: Pl. XXVIII).

Smast:¹²⁹ one of them frames a scene with Śiva performing the *tāṇḍava* dance (Fig. 12), which the God begins after defeating the *asuras*-heretics.¹³⁰ To the tenth century or later belongs a wooden baby Kṛṣṇa from Gandhāra,¹³¹ and to the eleventh century the fragments of a large Viṣṇu stele, presumably coming from eastern Afghanistan or northern Pakistan now kept in Naples.¹³² In Logar, as we learn from the Muslim sources, rose the great temple of Sakāwand, where pilgrims from every part of India gathered.¹³³

The Oḍ Ṣāhīs and the other Indian dynasties were wrong in thinking that they would be eventually able to get rid of the Muslims, and for long they took advantage of the limited interest shown by the Samanids towards Zābul and Kābul. The turning point came with the advent of the Ghaznavids: before the establishment of Sabuktigīn's reign, the Ṣāhī kingdom may not have suffered any material loss. The Ṣāhī king Jayapāla had assisted Abū 'Alī Lawīk against Pīrī, the *amīr* of Ghazni,¹³⁴ considered, in all evidence, the representative of a really

¹²⁹ I thank M. Nazim Khan for informing me that Kashmir Smast, where other wooden fragments were found during the excavations, is indeed the most likely finding place of these panels, on which see Agrawala (1967) and Goetz (1969: 96).

¹³⁰ Verardi (211: 271–72). The other panel represents Śiva Bhikṣatanamūrti (Goetz 1969: pl. XXVIII).

¹³¹ M.N. Khan and M.B. Khan (1999–2000: 29).

¹³² The fragments were purchased in Kābul in 1971 and are kept in the Università 'L'Orientale' of Naples.

¹³³ Elliot (1869: 172).

¹³⁴ Rahman (1979: 133).

menacing power which would put an end to the status quo. Jayapāla's troupes were routed by Sabuktigīn at Charkh in Logar in c. 977. Ten years later, the Šāhī king attempted to recapture Ghazni but was again defeated by Sabuktigīn, who routed him in AD 988 in Lamghan.¹³⁵ It is at this point that the mountainous territories of the Šāhīs can be unquestionably considered to have been lost to the Muslims. Jayapāla, who was obliged to retreat to the plains of Gandhāra and the Panjab was then repeatedly defeated by Maḥmūd of Ghazni, who took him prisoner. After paying an enormous sum to be released, considering himself unworthy of the throne, he burnt himself on a funeral pyre in AD 1001.¹³⁶

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¹³⁵ For all these events, see *ibid*: 133 ff.

¹³⁶ D.C. Ganguly in Majumdar (1966: 6–7); Rahman (1979: 146–47).

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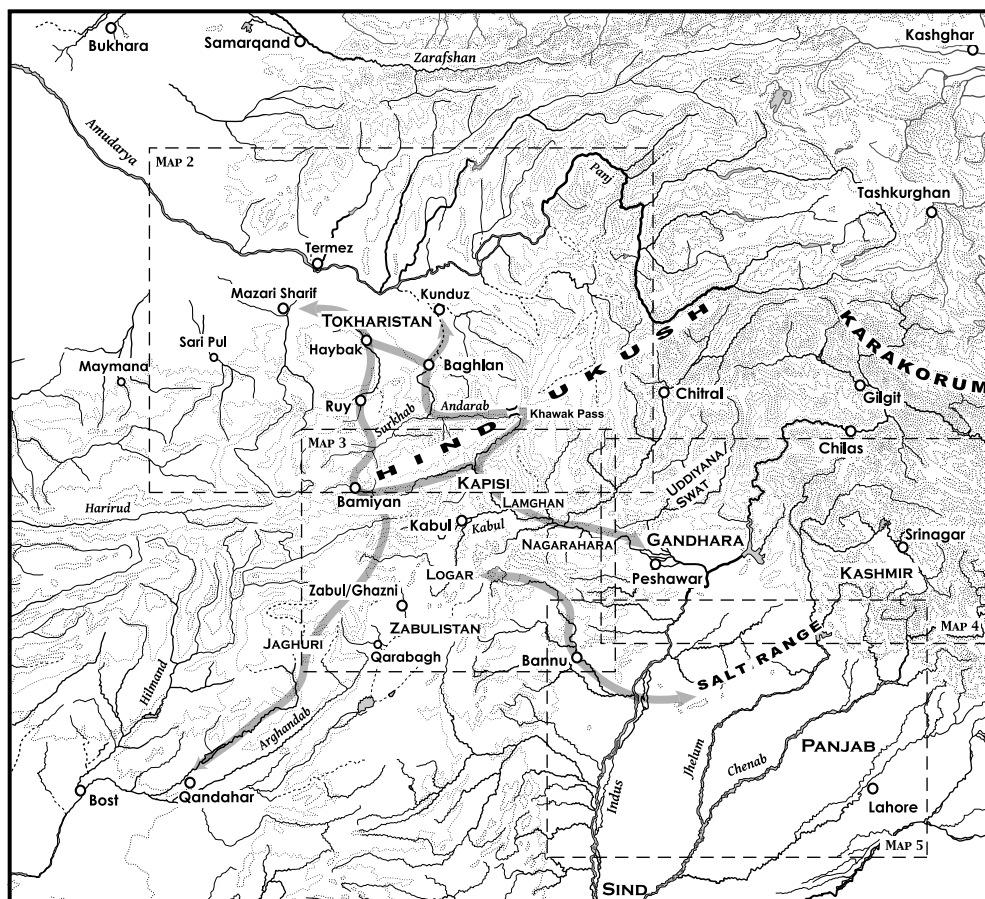
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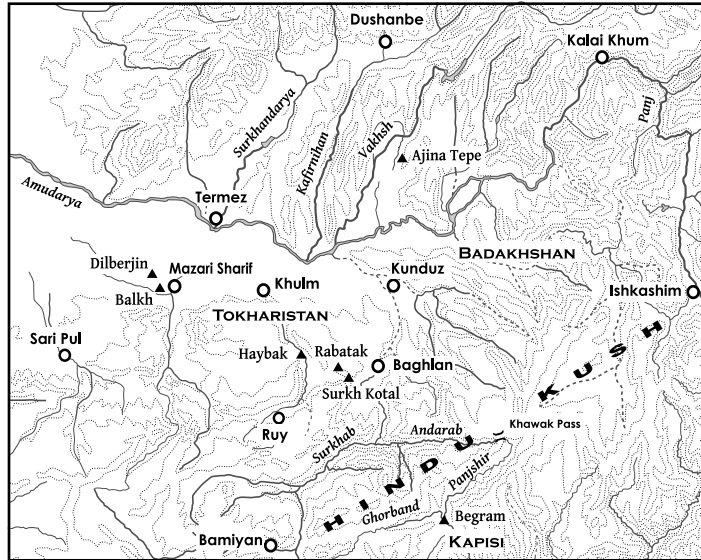
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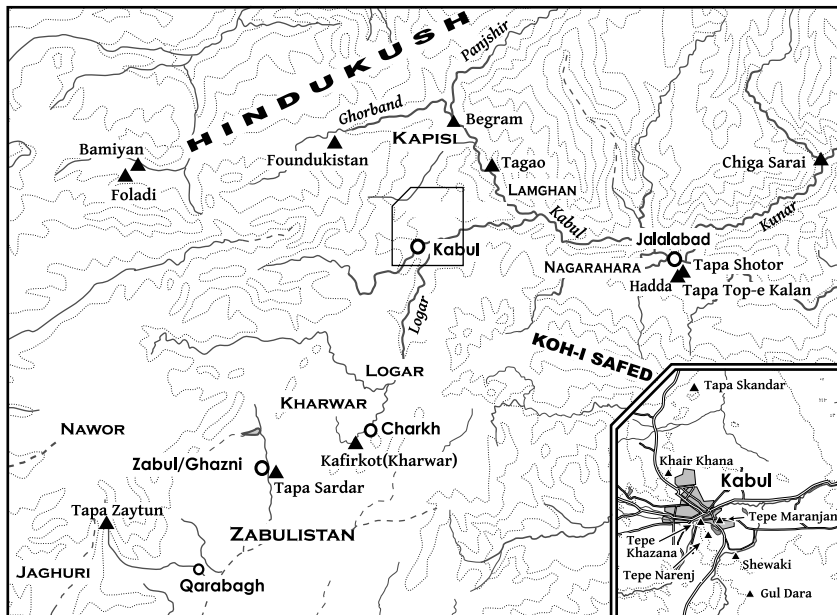
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Map 1. North-western India and Tokhāristān. (M. Inaba).

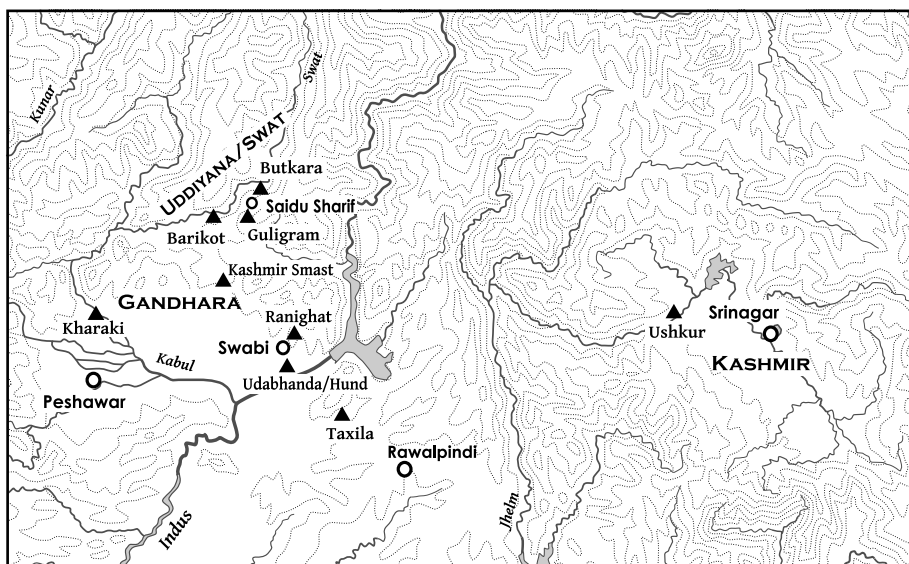


Map 2. Gandhāra, Uḍḍiyāna and Kashmir. (M. Inaba).

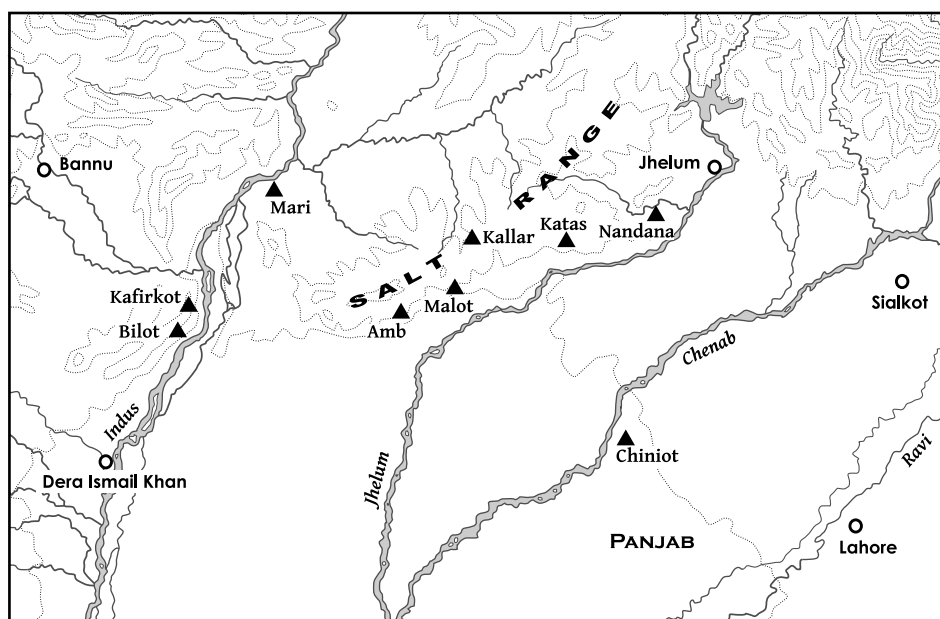


Map 3. Eastern Afghanistan. (M. Inaba).

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Map 4. Salt Range. (M. Inaba).



Map 5. Tokhāristān. (M. Inaba).