

BUDDHISM AND BUDDHIST HERITAGE OF UḌIYĀNA AS NARRATED BY XUANZANG

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ABSTRACT

Faxian, Song Yun and Xuanzang were among hundreds of Chinese Buddhist monks who made pilgrimages to ancient India in 5th, 6th and 7th century CE respectively. They are more celebrated than others due to the detailed accounts of their pilgrimages. These travel records are significant historical resources for several reasons. Firstly, they provide precise accounts of the nature of Buddhist doctrines, rituals, and monastic institutions in South, Central, and Southeast Asia. Secondly, they contain essential information about the social and political conditions of South Asia and the kingdoms situated on the routes between China and India. Thirdly, they offer meticulous insights into cross-cultural perceptions and interactions. Additionally, these accounts throw light on the laborious nature of long-distance travel and commercial exchanges. The most celebrated among all the Chinese pilgrims was Xuanzang, who prepared a comprehensive account of his travels from China via Central Asia and Afghanistan to ancient India. Xuanzang's pilgrimage served as an authentic historical source for the identification of Buddhist sites in ancient Gandhāra and UḌiyāna by renowned scholars like, Colonel H. A. Deane, Sir Alexander Cunningham, A. Foucher, Sir Aurel Stein, Sir John Marshall, G. Tucci and G. Stacul. The work in hand is based on the pilgrimage of Xuanzang to ancient UḌiyāna (the present Swat Valley in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan) where he visited most of the Buddhist stupas and monasteries and prepared a rich account of the then prevailing socioreligious conditions of the valley. It will highlight the religious conditions of ancient UḌiyāna during the time of Xuanzang's visit as narrated in his account, Si-Yu-Ki or Buddhist Records of the Western World. In this regard, an attempt is made to compare the socioreligious conditions of the inhabitants of UḌiyāna in 7th Century CE with the present population. Attempt is also made to identify, locate and record the present state of preservation of the Buddhist establishments of UḌiyāna as mentioned by Xuanzang in his account.

Keywords: *Udiyana, Buddhism, Xuanag, Gandhara, Buddhisallva*

LIFE AND PILGRIMAGE OF XUANZANG

Hwui-li, a faithful disciple of Xuanzang, wrote the biography of his master long after his death. According to him, Xuanzang was born in a noble family in the town of Ch'in Liu (Kou-Shih), in the province of Ho-nan, in 603 CE (according to some scholars 600 CE) (Beal 1914: vi). He was the fourth son of his parents and from very childhood, he excelled his fellows in pursuit of knowledge. He became a Buddhist monk at the age of thirteen while ordained as a priest at twenty. To quench his spiritual thirst, he visited many renowned scholars of his time. Unfortunately, he found certain contradictions among their religious literature, although they had the same beliefs. He was confused about which one to follow? Like other Chinese pilgrims, one of Xuanzang's main reasons to undertake the arduous journey to India was to visit its sacred Buddhist sites. Dissatisfied with the imperfect translations of Indian Buddhist texts available in China, limited knowledge of the Chinese priesthood, Xuanzang also wanted to procure original works and learn the doctrines directly from the Indian teachers. That is why he decided to go to the Western World (countries located to the west of China), while going abroad was officially forbidden in those days due to strained relations of China with the neighbouring states. He slipped away during the reign of T'ai Tsung (Cheng Kwan) of the great T'ang dynasty in 629 CE at the age of twenty-six (Beal 1914: 1-34).

It took him a year to reach India, stayed there for about fourteen years, came back from his Indian expedition in 645 CE and died in 664 CE. The success of Xuanzang's mission is evident not only from the 657 Buddhist texts he brought with him back to China, but also from the quality of translations he undertook. In fact, he is considered one of the best translators of Buddhist texts in ancient China. He also brought with him gold, silver and sandal-wood statues of the Buddha (Beal 2004: xix-xx). Xuanzang started his travel from Chang'an (Xian), passed through Gansu, Lanzhou, Dunhuang and from there he took the route to cross the Gobi Desert. He arrived Central Asia and visited many places there like Tashkent, Samarkand, Karshi and Kesh. After crossing the Oxus River (Amu Darya) near Termez, he reached Qunduz (Afghanistan). In Afghanistan, he visited Balkh and made his journey across the Hindu Kush to Bamiyan where he paid reverence to the two colossal Buddha images. After visiting Kapisa (Kabul valley), he reached Nagarahara (Jalalabad), from there he crossed the Khyber Pass to enter into ancient Gandhara. He travelled through all the vital cities of Gandhara like Purushapura (Peshawar), Pushkalavati (Charsadda), Salatura (Lahore) and U-to-kia-han-cha or Udakhanda (Hund). From Hund towards north, Xuanzang travelled for about 600 li (li=500 meters) and finally crossed mountains to reach U-chang-na or Uḍiyāna (Swat Valley) (Beal 2004: 1-118, San 2002: 26-37).

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Like Faxian and Song Yun, Xuanzang wrote a comprehensive note on U-chang-Na (Uḍḍiyāna) in his travel account. He narrates that this valley is about 5000 li in circuit with high mountain peaks, which are thoroughly connected with each other through narrow passes (Map 1. Ancient Uḍḍiyāna and the Swat Valley). It is rich in grains, flowers and fruits as well as gold and silver mines are also found here. The people are soft by nature, crafty and educated but with less implication. They wear white cotton clothes and speak the language of Central India with slight variation. They have great affection and respect for Buddhism and follow the Great Vehicle (Mahayana). During the time of Faxian and Song Yun, Buddhism was flourishing and enjoying its heydays in Uḍḍiyāna but Xuanzang was disappointed to see the deplorable condition of Buddhism here (Map2. Route of Xuanzang's Itinerary). Although, the Buddhist monasteries were many but desolate and with few monks. In this regard, he narrates:

On both sides of the river So-po-fa su-tu, there are some 1400 old Sangharamas. They are now generally waste and desolate; formerly there were some 18,000 priests in them, but gradually they have become less, till now there are very few. They study the Great Vehicle; they practice the duty of quiet meditation, and have pleasure in reciting texts relating to this subject, but have no great understanding as to them. The (priests who) practice the rules of morality lead a pure life and purposely prohibit the use of charms. The schools of the Vinayana traditionally known amongst them are the Sarvāstivādins, the Dharmaguptas, the Mahīśāsakas, the Kāśyapīyas, and the Mahāsaṅghikas: these five (Beal 2004:120-121).

From this passage, it is evident that Buddhist monasteries were quite good in number (though ruined), but the practising monks were less in number. It can be assumed from his eye witness account that Buddhism was on the verge of decline and Brahmanism was reviving and taking over. This phenomenon was not confined to the Swat Valley, but evidenced in most parts of ancient Gandhara (see also Shah 2013: 73-114). The pilgrim has also mentioned about ten Hindu temples. Due to the revival of Brahmanism in the valley, people were practising charms with religious sentences. Using religious words for black magic, sorcery or charms was prohibited in Buddhism but these beliefs were revived with the taking over of Hinduism.

D. Faccena is of the opinion that during 6th and 7th centuries due to natural calamities, probably floods, Buddhist centres and monuments were badly damaged, which resulted in the decay of Buddhism. The aboriginal cults were revived and overshadowed Buddhism and the tendency towards magic was increased. At this point along with Mahayana and Vinayana, a third form of Buddhism came into existence, which is Vajrayana Buddhism: the “Diamond Vehicle” or the “Thunderbolt Vehicle. Vajrayana is believed to be the last form of Buddhism. It got popularity and many

Vajrayanic books were written in Swat during this period. Swat is also regarded as the birth place of the second Buddha or Guru Padmasambhava (lit: “Lotus Born”), a great master of magical enchantments and the founder of Tibetan Buddhism. He was invited to Tibet to assist the king of Tibet in the foundation of the great temple of Samye (8th century CE) (Faccena 1964: 7). Orgyan and Urgyan (in ancient Tibetan literature) can be phonetically transcribed as Uḍiyāna that became a kind of holy land for the Tibetans, where everyone wished to go on pilgrimage (Tucci 1958: 279).

These aboriginal cults are still prevailing in the contemporary Swat, where Hindu minority in Khwazakhela and Mingora city are famous for black magic and charms etc. The illiterate Muslim folk of far-flung villages visit these Hindu magic practitioners (who run their shops in Mingora and Khwazakhela) for obtaining charms (*ta'wiz*) to solve their everyday problems. Although the Muslim clergy highly denounce this act of magic formulae or using charms and a man or woman found guilty of such act is hated by all. Despite these magic formulae and practices, the local people also use to recite specific verses from the Holy Quran or use them as amulets for curing their patients and for warding off evil eye and spirits. The Swati people also use ‘Nazar Panra’ and ‘spelani’, put it on burning coal and the smoke is inhaled by the sick person or any one feared to be caught by evil eye. ‘Nazar Panra’ (Botanical name: *Skimmia Laureola*) are the leaves of an evergreen shrub of very strong aromatic smell (<http://naeemswat.blogspot.com/p/blog-page-23.html>). ‘Spelani’ (Botanical name: *Pergamum harmala*) are the dried seeds of an herb commonly called wild rue (Gazetteer of the Peshawar District 1897-98: 36, N.W.F. Province Gazetteers, 1931: 15). Both these herbs grow abundantly in the mountainous areas of the Upper Swat. Dried and fresh bunches of nazar panra leaves are easily available in the local bazars. In weddings and other family gatherings its smoke is considered as demon repellent.

According to Xuanzang, the capital of Uḍiyāna was Mungali (Mung-kie-li). Cunningham (1979: 69) has identified it with the *Mangora* of Wilford’s surveyor, Mogal Beg and the *Manglora* of General Court’s map. H.A. Deane (1896: 656) wrote that Mungali is undoubtedly Minglaur (Manglawar) and not Mingaur (Mingora). But G. Tucci (1958: 288) strongly believed that Mungali or Ming chie li can be identified as Mingora and not with Manglawar. Today the town of Saidu Sharif is the capital city, although Mingora is the largest city and main commercial centre of the Swat Valley. Xuanzang further elaborates that 4 or 5 li to the east of Mungali is a great stupa, where the Buddha had lived as the ‘Rishi of Peace’ and sacrificed his body organs for Kali-rajā in one of his previous births. Tucci (1958: 288) identified this site with Butkara-I. He opines that Butkara-I is most probably the Ta’lo monastery visited by Song Yun and described by him as embellished with a good number of gold or gold gilded statues. The Italian Archaeological Mission to Swat, while excavating at Butkara-I, found sculptures with traces of gold wash that further supports the pilgrim’s narrative (Fig. 1. Butkara I).

Xuanzang, during his travel in Swat, also visited the fountain of Naga Apalala (for details, see Beal 2004: 121-123), situated about 250 or 260 li to the northeast of Mungali, which might be the source of the River Su-po-fa-su-tu (River Swat). Deane (1896: 656) has identified this place with the junction of Utror and Usho streams in the Kalam Valley from where the River Swat originates. From the fountain of Naga Apalala about 30 li on the north side of the river, there is foot print of the Buddha, carved on a huge rock (Fig. 2 Foot Prints of the Buddha from Tirath, displayed in the Swat Museum). Stein (1972: 86) identified this place with the village of Tirath (Madyan, Jinki khel) in the Upper Swat, and the foot prints bearing Kharoshthi inscription are now on display in the Swat Museum (Rahman 1989: 61). This inscription was translated and published for the first time by Professor Bühler, and subsequently by S. Konow in *Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum* (Vol-II: 8) (Tucci 1958: 302). According to traditions, the Buddha visited this place spiritually when he heard about Naga Apalala, who was responsible for bringing floods in the River Swat. The Buddha left his foot impression on a rock after subduing Naga Apalala, and later people erected stone structure over it. Xuanzang's records that people from far and near come to visit this place with flowers and burn incense here. This foot trace changes its size according to the merit of the viewer. Song Yun has mentioned the presence of a stupa nearby the rock of foot impression and Stein (1972: 86-87) claims that he saw ruins of this sacred structure in the form of a huge mound representing a completely demolished stupa. This is testified by a local tradition of existing a 'Gumbat' there but today there are no surviving traces of its ruins. Tucci (1958: 302-303) and his team were fortunate enough to found some pieces of Buddhist sculptures *in situ* in the surrounding area.

The pilgrim mentions another huge rock on the bank of the river, about 30 li downwards from the fountain of Naga Apalala. It is believed that this rock was used by the Buddha for washing and drying up his clothes. Stein claimed that he discovered this sacred rock on the right bank of the River Swat, where the believers can still see the imprints of the Buddha's clothes with their inner eyes. This rock had numerous graffiti in Sanskrit and Arabic characters among which the former was difficult to be correctly deciphered by Stein and the later mostly comprised of the verses of Kalimah (Beal 2004: 123, Deane 1896: 656, Stein 1972: 86-87, Tucci 1958: 302). It is said that this rock has been blasted some years back (Khan 2014: 96-97).

From Mungali about 400 li towards south, the pilgrim reached Mount Hila (Hilo), identified by Stein (1972: 169), Foucher (1915: 53) and Tucci (1958: 312) with Mount Ilam or Elam. Xuanzang has mentioned the beauty of Mount Ilam and its sacred top with great devotion. He says there are clean streams with flowers and fruits on their banks. He has mentioned the flat square shaped rocks on the side of a pool fed by a nearby stream, which he thought were fashioned by human hands. He attributed this place to Tathagata where he sacrificed his life for the sake of listening half of a gatha of

the law of Buddha in ancient times. A gatha is a verse of thirty-two syllables (Beal 2004: 123-124). Abdur Rahman has recorded numerous rock carvings from Shnaisha to Sapalbandai (saparbandai), the area stretching from Mingora to the sacred top of Mount Ilam, still annually visited by a large number of Hindu pilgrims. These remains of numerous rock carvings were also confirmed by Stein during his visit during 1926. He found these carvings very disfigured with heaps of stones lying beneath them which were thrown by passers-by (Rahman 1993: 8-9). When Stein visited the Mount Ilam top, he identified all the features mentioned by Xuanzang, for example, a pool, fed by a nearby stream, surrounded by flat-topped square rocks on its side. This is a sacred site presently known as Jogiyano-sar, Hindu and Sikh pilgrims come here annually for worshipping and purifying themselves by taking a ritual bath in the said pool (Stein 1972: 169-171). Tucci (1977: 52-55) and Olivieri (1996: 65) are of the opinion that Mount Ilam is the possible site of Aornos, mentioned by Alexander's historians (Fig. 1. Jogiyano-sar, Mount Ilam top).

Further 200 li towards south from Mungali, the pilgrim visited Mahavana Sangharama situated on the side of a great mountain identified by Cunningham (1979:69) with the Mahaban mountain in the present Buner area of ancient Uḍiyāna. Deane (1896: 656) has mentioned many ruins in this mountain and also obtained an inscription from this area, which speaks of a deposit of a relic somewhere on the hill. Mahaban was also considered as the probable location of 'Aornos' by General James Abbott (1854: 341) and M. Court in (1839: 312) but Stein (1972: 117) rejected this hypothesis in favour of Pir- Sar which is part of the Mount Una or Una-sar, located in Chakesar (Kana Ghorband) area of Shangla district. The ruins of Panjkotai, located a little north of Sunigram village, in the hilly area of the Mahaban has been identified by Stein with the Mahavana Sangharama mentioned by Xuanzang. About 30 or 40 li towards northwest of Mahāvāna Sangharāma is the Mo-su Sangharāma, where a 100 ft tall stupa is located (Beal 2004: 193, Deane 1896: 656). At a distance of 60 or 70 li towards the west of Mo-su Sangharama is a stupa which was built by King Ashoka. This stupa is known as the Stupa of Dove- ransoming and attributed to Sivi (or Sibi) Jātaka (Beal 2004: 124-125). These two stupas are identified by Stein as Gumbatai stupa of Torwasak village and Girarai ruins respectively (Rienjang 2012 :4). The ruins on Chanai hills located in the Surkhavi village and the Naranji valley ruins have been identified by Deane as the place of the stupa built by Ashoka to the west of Mo-su monastery, mentioned by Xuanzang. But he found no stupa in the surrounding except for some pieces of Gandharan sculptures from the same locality, which he thought might belong to a previously existing Sangharama (Deane 1896: 657).

Xuanzang has also mentioned another great stupa, 60 feet high and located about 60 or 70 li towards southwest of Mungali on the eastern bank of the river. The pilgrim narrates that this stupa was built by Shang-kiun (Uttarasena). According to the will of the Buddha, King Uttarasena of Uḍiyāna got his share at the time of the distribution of the

Buddha's bodily relics among the kings of different states, brought it to his land on an elephant and erected this stupa over it. The elephant died soon after reaching this place and miraculously converted into a rock. One can see a rock resembling the shape of an elephant on the river bank near this stupa (Beal 2004: 126-127). This stupa is identified with Shankardhara stupa (Fig. 2. The stupa of Shingardar) and the elephant rock is situated about 12 km from the village of Thana near Ghaligay, locally known as Hathi-Darra (Deane 1896: 660, Stein 1972: 49-51).

About 200 li to the north-west of dove-ransoming stupa (Girarai of Stein), the pilgrim enters the valley of Shan-ni lo-shi which is identified as the present Adinzai valley, Lower Dir. Deane (1896: 657) suggests Shan-ni-lo-shi of Xuanzang as corresponding to this valley. The pilgrim mentions here a convent of Sa-pao-sha-ti, also called Serpent medicine, and a stupa measuring 80 ft or so in height (Beal 2004: 125). Andan-dheri and Sapar (Saparuna) are believed to be the probable sites for these sacred monuments (Khan 2014: 106).

About 50 li to the west of Mungali, Xuanzang mentions the stupa of Lu-hi-ta-kia (Rohitaka), which is 50 feet high, believed to be made by King Ashoka. Deane (1896: 660) suggests that this stupa is located very close to the village of Hazara, Tehsil Kabal. Another stupa Ho-pu-to-shi is located about 30 li to the north-east of Mungali with a height of 40 feet. It is said that the Ho-pu-to-shi stupa with stone masonry appeared from the earth miraculously after the Buddha preached his law to the people and the devas here. According to Deane, these stupas still exist as he was told by the natives (Beal 2004: 127, Deane 1896: 660). Tucci opines that this miraculous stupa is situated at the village of Shahkhorai, which was a very holy place because of the presence of the huge rock image of the Buddha and other minor carvings in the nearby rocks. Important feature of this village is the presence of a naturally made huge niche (for sheltering an image) in a big stone. Tucci identifies this huge stone niche that looks like a dome-shaped stupa with the miraculous stone stupa. The pilgrim also mentions a vihara with an image of Avalokiteshvara, situated 30 or 40 li to the west of the stone stupa mentioned above across the river. Tucci (1958: 305-306) has also mentioned an image of the Buddha carved in a rock with ruins of a small vihara and the base of a stupa in the same vicinity.

From this point about 140 or 150 li towards northwest, the pilgrim reached the mountain of Lan-po-lu where he saw the dragon lake, which was said to be haunted by the Nagas. Deane has identified this lake and the mountain with the name Saidgai, which according to the local people, was haunted by supernatural beings. Another spur of this mountain is known as Lalkoh, which is not far from this lake (Deane 1896: 661). Today Lalkoh or Lalku is the name of a village in the Upper Swat Valley with snowy mountain peaks and lakes everywhere. Potsherds are scattered everywhere, showing that this area was thickly populated in the past. A recently discovered tourist spot with the name of Gabin Jaba is also in the same area.

The pilgrim states that towards northwest of the Mungali town, after crossing mountains and reaching a valley, he came through Sin-tu (the Indus). This area is very hard to travel because of the rugged mountains with dark and gloomy valleys. After travelling for 1000 li, he reached the Ta-li-lo valley, which was once the capital of Uḍiyāna. Ta-li-lo can be phonetically transcribed as Daril or Darel valley on the right bank of the Indus which is inhabited by the Dard people (Tucci 1977: 9-103). In this valley, Xuanzang saw the majestic figure of Bodhisattva Maitreya carved out of wood, from which golden rays were spreading everywhere that rose to a height of 100 ft. This wooden figure was erected by an arhat Madhyantika, who empowered a sculptor with his spiritual powers to ascend into Tushita heaven for three times to observe personally the characteristic marks of Bodhisattva Maitreya's body, in order to carve him out with correct proportions (Beal 2004: 133-134, Cunningham 1979: 70). The story behind the meritorious carving of this majestic image is also told in detail by Faxian and Song Yun, almost in the same locality. A gold necklace, weighing about 16 kg, was discovered from Pattan (the Indus Kohistan) by a shepherdess, which was previously housed in the Peshawar Museum, now shifted to the State Bank of Pakistan. Scholars like Farooq Swati and Nasim Khan are of the opinion that this heavy gold ornament most probably belonged to this wooden figure of Bodhisattva Maitreya which has perished long before. As Faxian has mentioned that the kings of the neighbouring countries competed with one another in presenting offerings to it. The emission of golden rays from this image is mentioned by both the pilgrims that supports the hypothesis that this huge image was adorned with some heavy gold ornament used to emit golden rays in daylight. The archaeological evidence of this gold neck girdle thus attests the presence of this colossal wooden image of Maitreya in the locale of the Indus Kohistan (Khan 1997-98: 127-138). (For details, see Rahman 1990: 5-17, Sobia zaman 1997, Hameed 2015: 73-95).

Xuanzang further travels from this region towards east for 500 li or so and enters Po-lu-lo or Bolor (Beal 1884: 135). This snowy mountain valley is identified by Cunningham (1979: 70) as Baltit valley or Baltistan. From here the travel of Xuanzang in U-chang-na or Uḍiyāna comes to an end.

CONCLUSION

The seventh century CE is regarded by some scholars as the beginning of the decline of Buddhism in some parts of India. It is a known fact that no religion can prosper and remain alive without the active support and patronage of the kings and nobility of the time. Buddhism progressed and attained popularity due to Ashoka, Kanishka, Harshavardhana and other powerful kings. It no longer received patronage from any other ruling power after them. Its influence gradually decreased and came to be absorbed into the reviving Hinduism. With the introduction of Vajrayana, the demarcation line between the Buddhists and the Hindus began to narrow down and got more and more blurred. Vajrayana came into existence with the introduction of aboriginal cults of magic and

charms. In Uḍiyāna, the decline of Buddhism was seen very pronounced and in the days of Xuanzang the faith was literally extinguished. His account throws sufficient light on the religious conditions of this part of ancient India. The inhabitants were following Mahayana, Vinayana and Vajrayana forms of Buddhism. They were highly expert in magical exorcisms and having no more reverence for the law of the Buddha, magic was replacing logic. Like Gandhara, here too, the pilgrim noticed Brahmanic Hindu temples and the adherents whom he called the ‘heretics’ everywhere outnumbered the Buddhists. He speaks ruefully of a time when there had been 1400 monasteries and 18,000 priests in Uḍiyāna, but now they are very few and have no great understanding of the Great Vehicle that they follow. Although Brahmanic Hinduism was reviving and taking over Buddhism at the time of Xuanzang’s travel, but the rich Buddhist heritage in the form of stupas and monasteries was still surviving in Uḍiyāna.

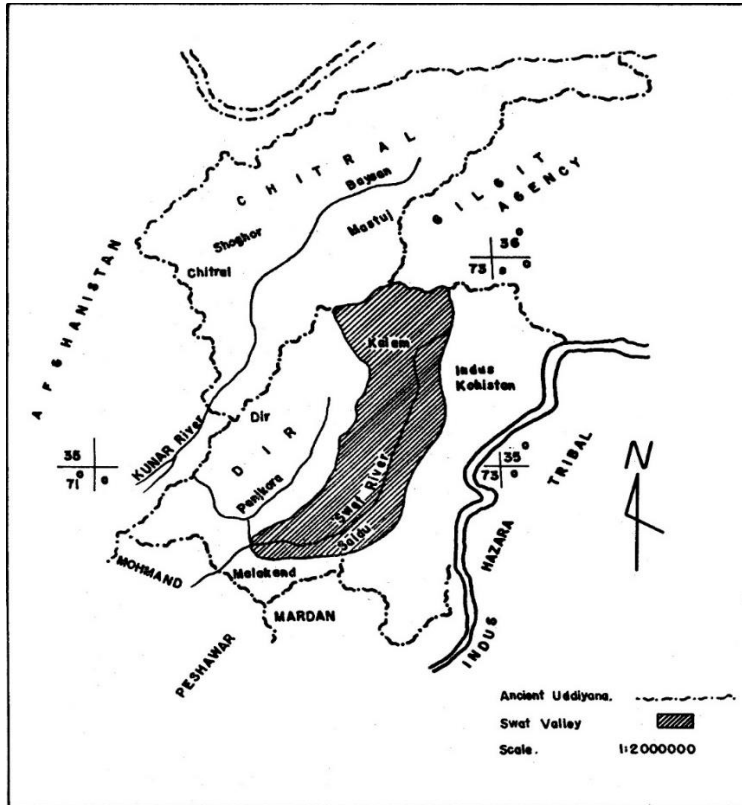
Xuanzang’s arduous journey to Uḍiyāna is of great significance for the understanding of Buddhist doctrines, rituals and built heritage of this area. He visited monasteries, stupas and various sites of miraculous appearances of the Buddha in Uḍiyāna with great devotion and narrated different episodes from the Buddha’s previous life. Almost all these Buddhist sites and ruins are identified by scholars like Sir Aurel Stein, Sir Alexander Cunningham, Sir John Marshall, Colonel H.A. Deane, A. Foucher, G. Tucci and G. Stacul. Majority of these sites have been unearthed and excavated by the Italian Archaeological Mission to Pakistan since 1956. The Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan, actively participated to discover these past vestiges. The Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar, also contributed by discovering and excavating many important sites in Swat since 1968. The discovery and excavation of these Buddhist sites helped in the reconstruction of cultural history of the region. A good number of sculptures were retrieved from secure archaeological contexts. The study of these sculptures helped immensely to throw ample light on the chronology of the Buddhist Art of Gandhāra.

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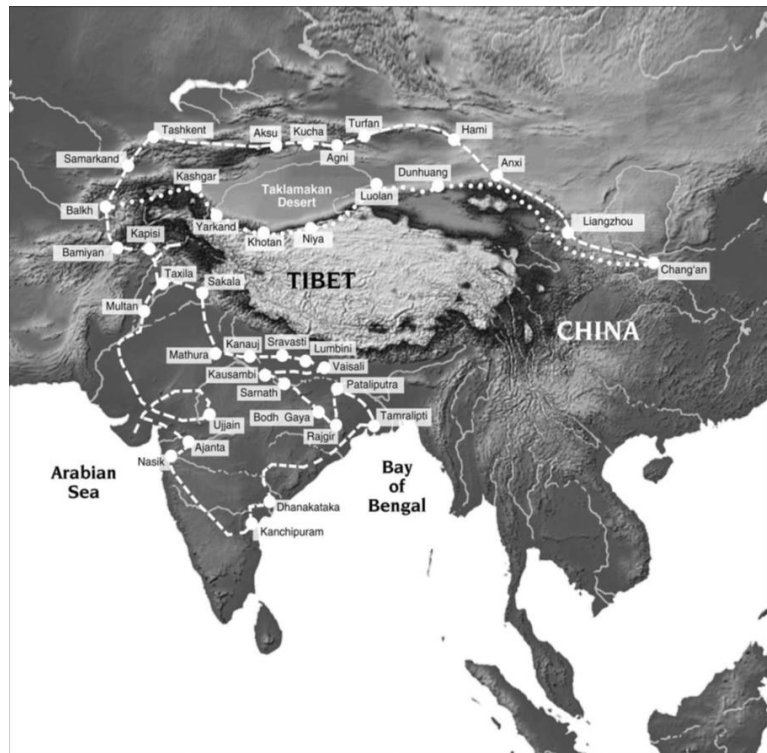
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ILLUSTRATIONS



Map 3. Ancient Uddyāna and the Swat Valley (after Swati 1997a: 33)



Map 4. Route of Xuanzang's Itinerary (after Sen 2006: 28)

FIGURES



Fig. 3. Butkara I, Photo Courtesy Majid F. Masaud

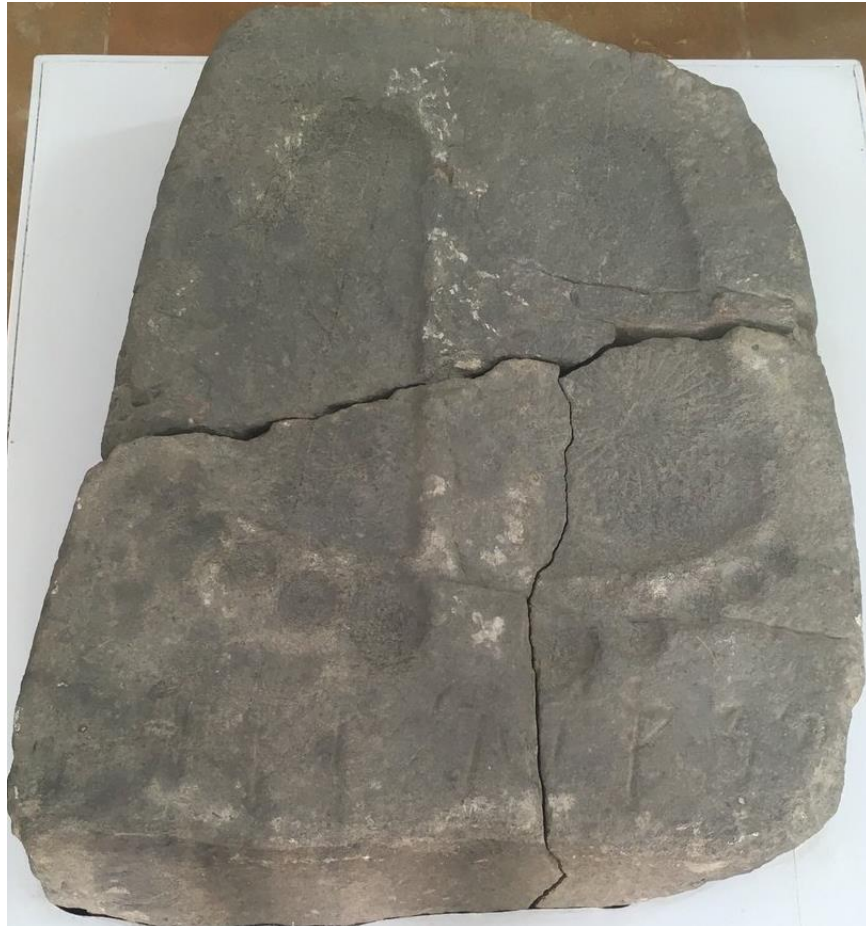


Fig. 4. Foot Prints of the Buddha from Tirath, displayed in the Swat Museum



Fig. 5. Jogiyano-sar (Mount Ilam top)



Fig. 6. The stupa of Shingardar, Photo Courtesy Majid F. Masaud