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TOPONYMY OF THE SWĀT VALLEY

LINGUISTIC ARCHAEOLOGY

MATTEO DE CHIARA

PRESENTATION BY

ADRIANO V. ROSSI

WITH A NOTE BY

LUCA M. OLIVIERI

CREDITS

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LINGUISTIC ARCHAEOLOGY
Matteo De Chiara

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A SHORT NOTE ON THE FORTUNE OF TOPONYMY STUDIES IN SWĀT AND GANDHĀRA

By Luca M. OLIVIERI

*We know that the Greeks were not exact in their mode of spelling the names of the towns and countries
which they invaded [...]
(COURT 1836: 395)*

In the early years of the antiquarian research into Gandhara, interest of the scholars – in many cases adventurous *dilettanti* – was driven by the possibility of locating ancient toponyms whose exotic whereabouts were long coveted. For example, Bazira, Massaka, Aornos, to name just some of the locations mentioned by the Alexandrographers. To the best of my knowledge, the earliest of these studies, all conducted partly in the field, partly from second-hand information obtained from local spies, informants or agents, was the memoir published by general M. COURT in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, July 1836, pp. 387-395. It was soon followed by many others. The quest for the Aornos occupied many people for more than a century, for example: A. CUNNINGHAM (1848), J. ABBOTT (1854), O. BARATIERI (1879), A. STEIN (1898, 1899, 1905, 1929, 1930), O. CAROE (1958), Ph. EGGERMONT (1970, 1984), and TUCCI (1958, 1977). We hope that this endless gradus ad Aornon can be finally considered as concluded with the recent reassessment by O. COLORU (in COLORU/OLIVIERI 2019).

The search for toponyms was driven by two major questions, and by a third minor one. On one side the “quest for Alexander”, which was particularly attractive for military officers, adventurers and political agents. On the other side were the descriptions of “Western world” as left by the triad of the Chinese pilgrims, the last, most productive and, therefore most studied, being Xuangzang. The tradition of that specific branch of toponymy studies reached its climax pretty early as it was initiated by a connoisseur like A. FOUCHER in 1902, whose map further elaborated in his 1942 work on the *vieille route de l’Inde* is still reproduced in many modern studies. The location of the early development of the itineraries of Xuangzang and the other Chinese sources was the Malakand Fort. We know this from the many documents discovered in 2008 and published a few years later (OLIVIERI 2015a). The office of the Political Agent H. DEANE and the guesthouse, where both A. STEIN and A. FOUCHER spent Christmas in 1896, were the *aulae* where these locations were debated, after and before hard days of walking and climbing in the wilderness. The result of those adventurous days were the cited works by STEIN, FOUCHER, and the DEANE’s *Notes on Udyāna* (1896; the critical edition based on the Malakand manuscripts will soon be published by LI. MORGAN). This approach turned out to be very lucky. In 1932, a late epigone of DEANE, E.H. COBB, Political Agent at Malakand, wrote to MARSHALL, the then don of Indian archaeology, about the discovery of a superb statue of Bodhisattva (OLIVIERI 2015a: Doc. 325). His letter is richly flavoured with identification of local villages with the *loci* found in the translations of the travelogues of ‘Hinan-Tsang’ and ‘Sang-Yan’.

The third question (the “quest for Uḍḍiyāna”) led TUCCI, before visiting Swat, to establish the itinerary of some Tibetan pilgrims who had visited Swat in late 13th century and later (TUCCI

1940). It had been the discovery of these manuscripts in Tibet that eventually led Tucci to initiate his first surveys of Swat in 1955 and 1956. TUCCI's first report (1958) is full of interpretations and identifications of modern toponyms. A few years later this approach was imitated by A.H. DANI in his pages on Dir (1967). But, with the advent of proper archaeology, toponyms became a secondary target and were slowly forgotten. It was only later, with the second phase of the excavations and fieldwork of the Italian Archaeological

Mission in Swat, around the 1990s, that these studies became more cogent, less occasional, and more fruitful. The study published on the previous page, which in my view can be considered a masterwork in its genre, was generated in that environment. For the first time in Gandhara, the study of the toponyms was taken as a systematic survey of the more or less erratic data of a linguistic stratification. In this context, important key-points, which were debated for a century, are now a *fait accompli*: Bazira (BAUMS 2019; VON HINÜBER 2020) and Ilam-Aornos (cit. above). Other research is expected soon: on the toponyms of the Oḍirāja dedicatory inscriptions, as well as on the small amount of pre-IA evidence still preserved in the toponymy of the region.

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