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Physical Repatriation: Tucci, the Gilgit Manuscripts, and the Beginning of IsMEO Archaeological Work in Swat

by Luca M. Olivieri

Lo studio prende spunto dal ritrovamento delle copie di alcuni importanti documenti nell'archivio di Domenico Faccenna, primo indimenticato Direttore della Missione Archeologica Italiana in Pakistan dell'IsMEO-IsIAO (oggi ISMEO in collaborazione con l'Università di Venezia Ca' Foscari). I documenti, i cui originali fanno parte dell'archivio IsMEO/IsIAO, riguardano gli anni 1955 e 1956, e comprendono lettere, note, telegrammi scambiati dall'IsMEO e dal suo Presidente prof. Giuseppe Tucci con riferimento alle fasi di strutturazione della Missione nel suo primo biennio di attività nella valle dello Swat. Tra i documenti ve ne alcuni raccolti in un faldone separato, che fanno riferimento all'acquisizione di tre manoscritti provenienti da Gilgit, donati poi al Museo di Karachi e successivamente pubblicati nella Serie Orientale Roma a cura di Raniero Gnoli e altri. Lo studio di questi ultimi documenti chiarisce le modalità di acquisizione dei manoscritti, testimoniando l'attenzione di Giuseppe Tucci e dell'IsMEO alla componente etica della ricerca e degli scambi con il Pakistan in un quadro legale sulla base del quale fu strutturata sin dall'inizio l'attività della Missione Archeologica Italiana.

Preamble

Interest in the history of Italian Orientalist studies, especially in the post-World War II period, has generally been—and justifiably so—recent. Within this new field, little attention has been given to the genesis of Italian archaeological initiatives “beyond the areas in which [the Italian archaeological school] had been traditionally involved” (Olivieri 2006: 23).¹ These include Stefano Anastasio's work on the Italian missions in pre-World-War-II Northern Iraq (Anastasio 2013; Anastasio, Bottarelli 2015), and the renewed interest in the fieldwork of Luigi Pio Tessitori in India (Freschi 2020 with references), while for Achille Vogliano's planned excavations in Iran, interesting information can be found also in Luciano Canfora's work on the *Papiro di Dongo* (Canfora 2005: 335-349). Returning to the post-World-War-II period, Italian archaeological initiatives in Asia were linked to the work of Giuseppe Tucci and thus to the name of the Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East (IsMEO).² In Tucci's case, this expansion did not in fact take the form of a movement towards the East so much as a return (linked to the dynamics of his original intellectual journey) from the East to the West. Tucci initially considered Nepal (see Olivieri 2006: 27, fn. 11; Crisanti 2020: 417, ff.), but then in 1955 he began an archaeological mission in Pakistan,

¹ The Levant, Egypt, Anatolia. Interesting research has been conducted by Oscar Nalesini on the earliest Italian archaeological projects in Yemen (Nalesini 2012).

² On which see the recent accurate biography of Giuseppe Tucci by Alice Crisanti (2020).

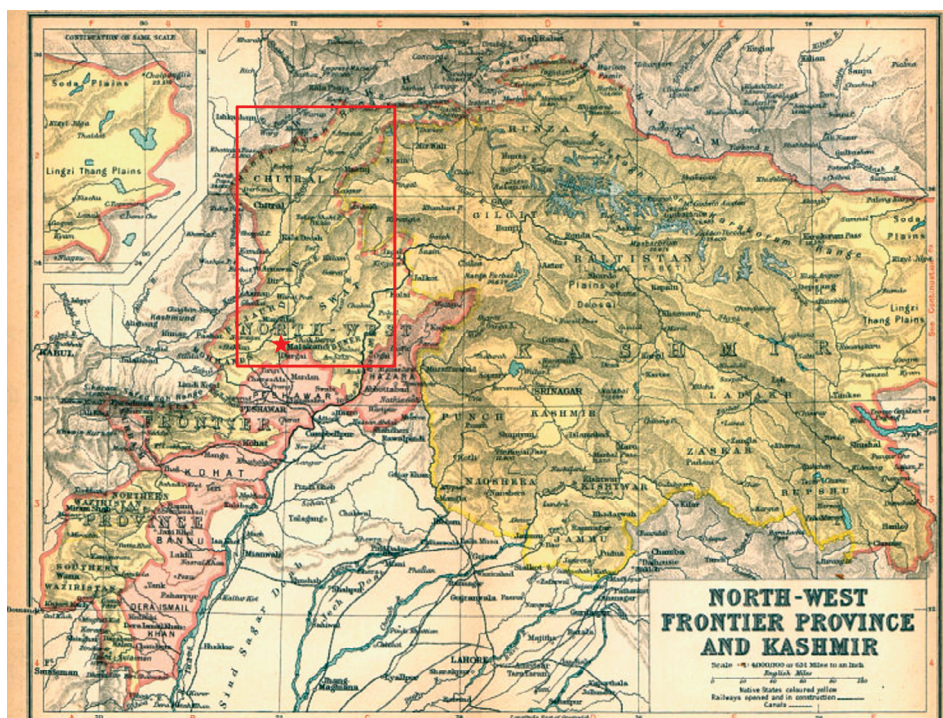


Fig. 1 - Map of the former North-West Frontier Province and Kashmir, with indication of the Malakand jurisdiction area.

in 1957 one in Afghanistan, and in 1959 one in Iran. Also, in 1959 an ISMEO archaeological mission started working at Anuradhapura, Ceylon, but this activity—which was carried out by Pellegrino Claudio Sestieri as UNESCO nominee—was cancelled after one season (Godakumbura 1969: 31; Callieri 2006: 16). Of the first three missions (Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran), only the first has maintained uninterrupted continuity, while the other two closed for security and political reasons in the late 1970s and resumed activities decades later in different forms and ways from those of the early years. The background that made possible the foundation of the Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan (now funded by the new ISMEO and from 2021 also by Ca' Foscari University of Venice), has been analysed in the recent past (Olivieri 2006).³ Yet I am certain that more will have to be written in the future, not least because today we are finally in a position to access new archive documents, correspondence, reports, telegrams, and notes, that—better than any memoir—recount the beginning of that extraordinary study and fieldwork experience, still active today 70 years later.⁴

³ For example, we now know more about Muhammad Iqbal Shedai (Olivieri 2006: 24) and his multiple roles in Italy (he also began teaching Urdu at the University of Turin in 1950; Sheikh 2019).

⁴ Among these memoirs, I would like to mention here a recent work by Ihsan H. Nadiem, a former Director at the Pakistani Department of Archaeology and Museums (Nadiem 2020). Unfortunately the memoir, although interesting, contains too many personal interpretations to be considered a useful document for the historical reconstruction of the events (see in particular chapters 2 and 3, pp. 37-106).



Fig. 2 - The Malakand Fort (1933) (Courtesy of Miangul Archives).

Heritage at the 'Frontier:' the British Colonial Legacy

The material presented in this brief article can be considered both as an outcome and the prosecution of a study which started with the author's discovery of archival material at the Malakand Fort in 2008, in North-West Pakistan, not far from the border with Afghanistan (Fig. 2).⁵

The Malakand papers were published in 2015 (Olivieri 2015a; 2015b; 2019), while a study focusing on a specific set of documents, Harold Arthur Deane's manuscript of his *Note on Udyana and Gandhara*, appeared in 2022 (Morgan, Olivieri 2022). Harold Deane was the first British Political Agent at Malakand (1895), the first Chief Commissioner of the North-West Frontier Province or NWFP (1901) (in 2011 renamed Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, KP).

The first set of the Malakand papers, three folders containing 344 documents of various kinds, refers to an exchange of notes and correspondence on archaeological activities and on the protection of cultural assets between 1896 and 1937 in the area under the jurisdiction of the Malakand Agency, including the neighbouring Native States, namely Dir, Chitral, and Swat (Fig. 1).

The papers include the early exchange of views between the Calcutta headquarters and the British outpost of Malakand (Fig. 3), including the famous 1899 Burgess Report

⁵ These notes were originally presented at the online symposium "Giuseppe Tucci. His Adventurous Life, His Scholarly Legacy" co-organised by the University of Hong Kong and Istituto Italiano di Cultura on 8 August 2022, the organisers of which, Florian Knothe and Yunfei Bai, I thank here.

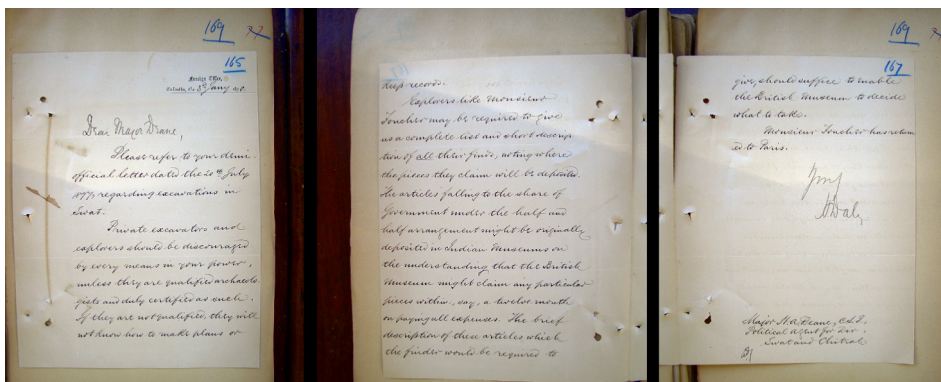


Fig. 3 - 1898: Semi-official letter from Foreign Department to Political Agent Malakand with final guidelines for the archaeological activities in the agency (Olivieri 2015a: Document 18).

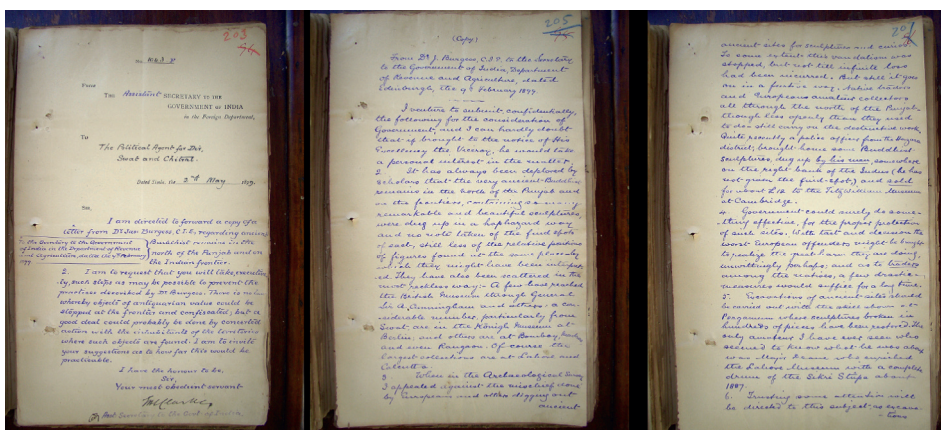


Fig. 4 - 1899: The Burgess Report (copy forwarded to Political Agent Malakand) (Olivieri 2015a: Documents 27-28).

(Fig. 4) which first posed the need to suppress in the words of Marc Aurel Stein the “nefarious traffic” of antiquities from Swat (Olivieri 2015a: Document 113; Fig. 5).⁶

In fact, one of the more interesting aspects of the Malakand papers is the description of how the extraordinary legislative instrument of the ‘Ancient Monuments Preservation Act (VII, 1904)’⁷ came into being and its successive amendments up to 1933 (discussed in detail in Olivieri 2015a).

Actually, the British outpost of Malakand played a very active role in the creation of this legal instrument thanks to the status and position of the Malakand agency, located at the border with the free zone where illegal digging was carried out and from

⁶ James Burgess was the second Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India between 1885 and 1901.

⁷ Abbreviated henceforth as ‘Preservation Act.’

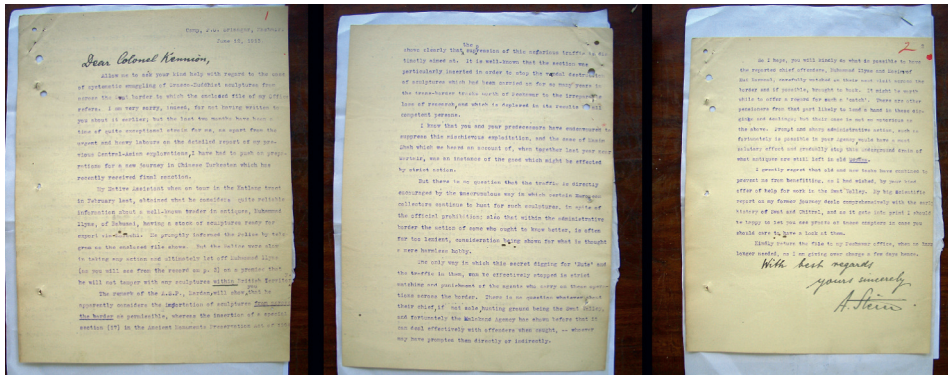


Fig. 5 - 1913: Letter of Aurel Stein to Political Agent Malakand (Olivieri 2015a: Document 113).

where came most of the material smuggled into British India. There is one important detail that we should note in this regard: in the ‘Preservation Act,’ control of illegal excavations in the Native States was thought to be possible if the import of antiquities into British India was made illegal. Aurel Stein noted this in his 1913 letter to the Malakand Political Agent (Olivieri 2015a: Document 113) (Fig. 5).⁸ This clause implied that legally the ‘Preservation Act’ was not applicable to the Native States. This would have had important consequences for the legality of future archaeological activities in Swat.

Field Archaeology and Legalities

One of the issues addressed by the Malakand papers regards the rules of engagement concerning archaeological excavations, in the context of the Native States such as Chitral, Dir, and especially Swat. The basic question was whether the ‘Preservation Act’ could have been considered valid outside the settled territories of British India.’ In other words, was British law applicable outside the frontiers? In the Native States? On this, as we have just seen, the answer is—legally speaking—negative (Fig. 6).

In 1931, while planning his second (later aborted) archaeological campaign in Swat, this time for excavation purposes, Aurel Stein repeatedly asked the British authorities in Malakand what the status of the Native States was with regard to archaeological matters (Olivieri 2015: e.g. Documents 136, 312). He never received a written reply. Even if Stein had received permission from the ruler of Swat, under what legal procedure would he have been able to export his finds from Swat into the British territories? Legally, it would have been impossible. In 1938 Evert Barger and Philip Wright carried out archaeological excavations in Swat. As my colleague Rafiullah Khan has recently demonstrated, on the basis of new documents from Malakand, these

⁸ In this and the following pages, “Document [no.]” means the material from Malakand published in Olivieri 2015a, while “document [no.]” means the letters in the Swat Folder 1955-1956, which are the object of this article.

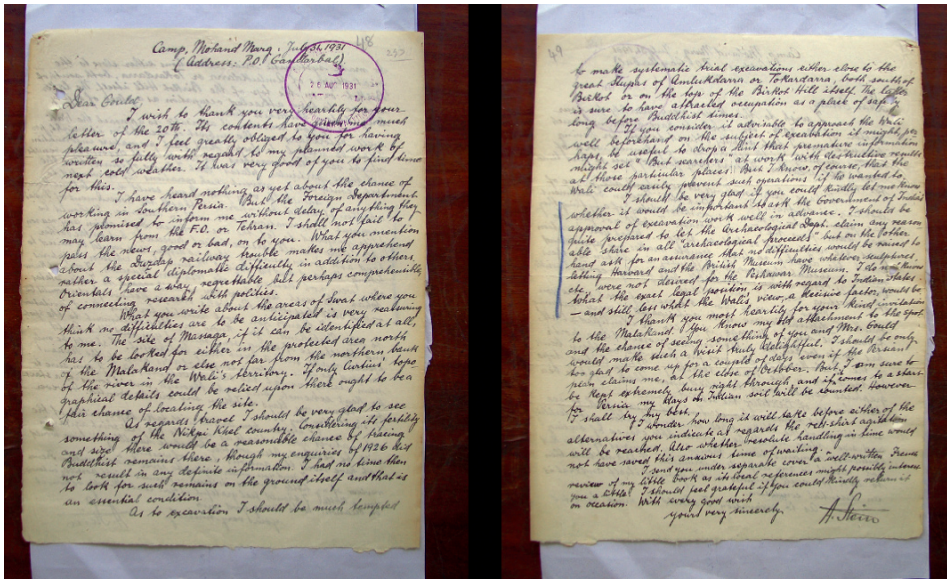


Fig. 6 - 1931: Letter of Aurel Stein letter to Political Agent Malakand (Olivieri 2015a: Document 312).

excavations were not licensed by the Archaeological Survey of India. Again, here the reason was simple: British law did not extend to Swat.⁹

When he started planning his archaeological programme in Swat in 1955, Giuseppe Tucci was aware of these legal problems. The ‘Preservation Act’ was still functioning in Pakistan (it was later replaced by the Federal Antiquity Act). In 1956 Tucci obtained a licence from the Department of Archaeology and Museums, which had inherited the functions of the Archaeological Survey. But Swat was still an autonomous state and Pakistani law on archaeological matters was not applicable to Swat. Italian legal tradition requires that archaeology has a legal framework, which is ultimately represented by the role of the state and the presence of civic museums as repositories of every legally excavated object. Therefore, in October 1958, as attested by documents in the National Archives of Pakistan published by my colleague Tahira Tanweer in 2011, Tucci managed to convince the new Wali to accept that the ‘Preservation Act’ could be extended to Swat.

The issue of the legal legitimacy of the excavations, which had stalled British archaeological efforts in Swat, was thus resolved by Tucci in a brilliant diplomatic stroke, through which everyone gained: the Italians could start exporting sculptures from the excavations that were earmarked for loan to the then established Museo Nazionale d’Arte Orientale in Rome (now transferred to the Museo delle Civiltà, Rome); the Pakistani Department of Archaeology, which had formally entered Swat ten years before Swat was annexed to Pakistan (1969) and could set up the Swat

⁹ Rafiullah Khan presented his notes as a communication to the 2021 Gandhara Connections Conference in Oxford (which was dedicated to “The Rediscovery and Reception of Gandhāra Art:” Rienjang, Stewart 2022). His notes are published in *Modern Asian Studies* (Khan 2023).

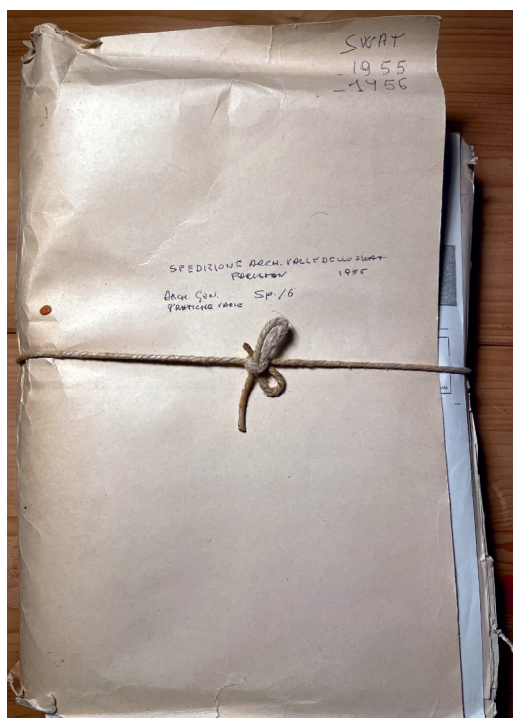


Fig. 7a - 1955-1956: The Swat Folder.



Fig. 7b -1980s: Domenico Faccenna and the former Wali of Swat, H.H. Miangul Jahanzeb (Courtesy Miangul Archives).

Museum in Saidu Sharif; and the State of Swat itself. The latter, in addition to making a good impression on an ultimately not very thorny issue, benefitted by making Swat attractive to tourists not only for its natural beauty, but also for its archaeological remains.

A New Archival Source

In January 2022, a search among the papers of the late Domenico Faccenna, the first Director of IsMEO's Italian Archaeological Mission from 1955 to 1996, unearthed a binder of documents marked "Swat 1955-1956. Spedizione arch[eologica] valle dello Swat Pakistan. Arch[ivio] Gen[erale] Pratiche Varie. Sp./6" (henceforth Swat Folder) (Figs 7-8). The documents contained are photocopies or carbon copies of originals kept in the archives of IsIAO, the body that continued from 1996 to 2011 the work and purposes of Giuseppe Tucci's IsMEO. Today the original archive is part of the IsIAO archive.¹⁰

¹⁰ Therefore the originals should be now in possession of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, where the IsIAO Archive is presently kept.

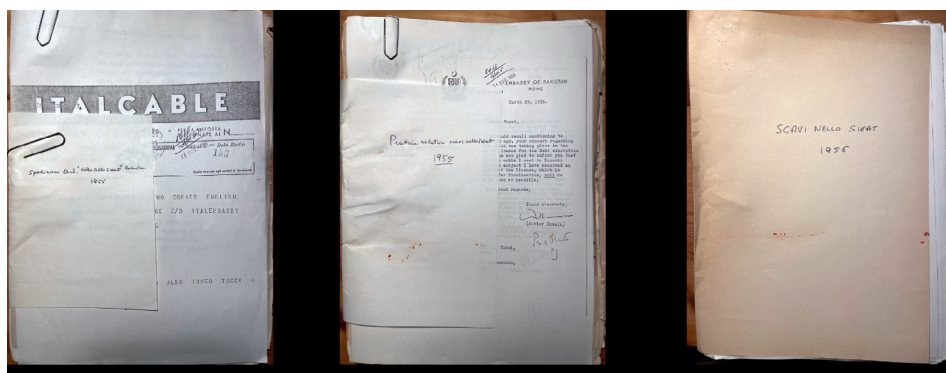


Fig. 8 - 1955-1956: The Swat Folder, some of the subfolders.

The Swat Folder covers the period from April 19 1955 to the end of 1956, and includes documents from Italy, Pakistan and the State of Swat, all concerning the events that led to the establishment of the Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan.¹¹

The folder contains several subfolders. One contains the documents that led to the granting of the Mission House by the Swat State, the same house that Italian archaeologists still use today (Figs 9-10). A second one, named “Archaeological expedition 1955,” together with a further two on the “Excavations in Swat 1955” and “...1956,” collects all documents related to logistics, legal issues, excavation licences, etc. The Swat Folder closes with a thick subfolder with press reviews updated to the end of 1956.

Among the material collected in the Swat Folder are 29 documents, letters exchanged via diplomatic courier between April and September 1956 between the secretary of the commercial attaché of the Italian Embassy in Pakistan, Edmondo Anderlini, and the President of IsMEO, Giuseppe Tucci. Anderlini, whom Tucci already knew, was also the IsMEO correspondent at the Embassy, at that time headed by Ambassador Alberto Calisse. Anderlini was deeply devoted to Tucci, whom he sometimes addressed in the correspondence as his “Master,” his “Guru.”¹² Obviously all correspondence was in Italian (except for two letters: documents 30 and 19); certain passages quoted here have been translated into English.

Another Gilgit Manuscript Surfaces

These 29 letters concern the sensitive issue of manuscripts found in Gilgit that were in the possession of a senior Pakistani army officer. The numbering of the letters (document no.) follows the order in which they were stored in the binder.

¹¹ On the basis of the Swat Folder, autumn 1955 can be determined as the beginning season of the Mission.

¹² After 1942 Edmondo Anderlini was taken as a POW to Northern India. Along with his companion Luigi Gia, he managed to escape to the then Portuguese possession of Daman (see his memoirs in Anderlini, Gia 1978). In 1947 he was repatriated and joined the Italian Foreign Office. In 1955 he was at the Italian Embassy in Pakistan in an administrative position, but he managed to achieve promotion and finally became Consul General at Bombay (Mumbai) until 1976, when he retired.



Fig. 9 - 1956: At the Mission House (front *verandah*), from left: G. Graziani, G. Gullini, D. Faccenna, G. Tucci, H.A. Miangul Aurangzeb the Walia Ahad, F.A. Khan (D.G. Archaeology), F. Bonardi (Courtesy Miangul Archives).



Fig. 10a - The Mission House: the same *verandah* as Fig. 9 in 2021.



Fig. 10b - The Mission House, back gardens and *godowns* (warehouse).

The story begins with a letter from Tucci dated April 17, a copy of which is not preserved in the binder (protocol IsMEO 2371), in which Tucci asks Anderlini for the address of the major in possession of manuscripts from Gilgit. One could easily hypothesise that Tucci had got wind of these manuscripts the year before when he went to Swat for a preliminary reconnaissance. But it is more probable—as we will see—that news about them was already circulating in Europe and India.

Anderlini immediately took action, finding the officer's name and address, writing to him, and then meeting him at his home in Rawalpindi. On April 30 (document 26) Anderlini wrote that the officer, whose name was Agha Muhammad Ali Shah, had been promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and transferred to Rawalpindi (Fig. 11).

This is followed by a second, more detailed letter from Anderlini dated May 12 (document 30) (Fig. 12), which contains a copy of a letter with embassy letter-head sent to the colonel on May 4 (document 29): “I have not had the pleasure of meeting you personally, but I have heard you spoken of as a person well acquainted with Pakistan's archaeological zones and an admirer and connoisseur of antiquities” (Fig. 13).

A letter from Tucci dated June 11 (document 12) clarifies the scholar's plan of action. Tucci's clearly expressed intention is that the manuscripts should not leave Pakistan and that they should be photographed, possibly purchased and then donated to the Pakistani government. The possibility of the possessor travelling to Italy with the manuscripts in order to produce good photographs is aired: “What must definitely be

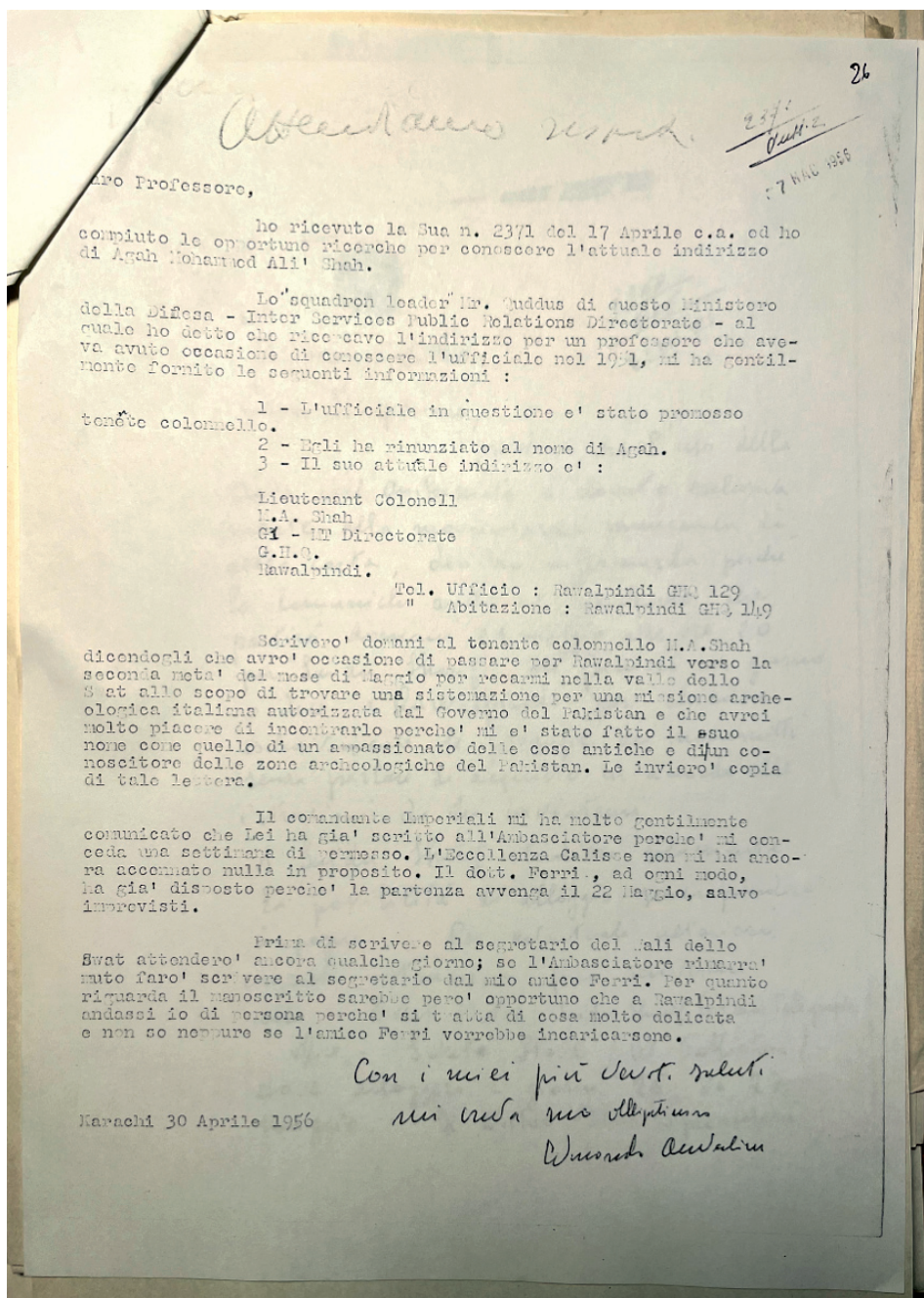


Fig. 11 - Swat Folder, document 26.

achieved is that the photographs of the manuscripts come into our possession and that these fragments be published in Italy, by Italian scholars, in the Serie Orientale Roma” (transl. Olivieri) (Fig. 14).

30

Caro Onorevole,

Le mando, come promesso, copia della lettera da me inviata al segretario del Wali dello Swat.

Come vedrà dalla lettera stessa verrà con me anche il Signor Lizioli suo devoto ammiratore. Naturalmente la spesa resterà quella fissata per una sola persona ed indicata nel preventivo già sottoposto. Ho creduto opportuno accogliere l'offerta dell'amico Lizioli di accompagnarmi a sue spese, perché, a parte la devozione per lui e l'amicizia per me, può essere utile nella scelta della casa ed anche nel rendere il viaggio più rapido dato che è un buon guidatore.

Il Tenente colonnello M. A. Shah non ha ancora risposto alla mia lettera. Mi fermerò a Rawalpindi due giorni (23 e 24 maggio) e farò del tutto per incontrarlo e trattare con lui la questione che le sta a cuore. Ho pregato il Dottor Contarini di mettersi in contatto con lui per spiegarle la questione.

Fig. 12 - Swat Folder, document 30.

A handwritten letter from Anderlini was sent on June 18 and arrived at IsMEO on June 21 (document 11) (Fig. 15). In it the possibility of the trip to Italy is ruled out, due to its formal irregularity, and instead the proposal is made that an Italo-Pakistani study centre supported by IsMEO be created; while not exactly a section of



Ambasciata d'Italia

Karachi, May 4th, 1956

Lieutenant Colonel
M.A. Shah
G.I.M.T. Directorate
G.H.Q. Rawalpindi

Dear Colonel,

I have not had the pleasure of personally meeting you but I have heard you spoken of as a person well acquainted with Pakistan's archeological zones and an admirer and connoisseur of antiques.

Towards the second half of this month I shall be going to Saidu Sharif to make all the necessary arrangements for the accommodation of an Italian Archeological Mission.

On that occasion, as I shall be making the trip by car, I could pass through Rawalpindi and so have the pleasure of personally meeting you.

I would be extremely grateful if you would kindly let me know if you will be in Rawalpindi towards the second half of this month or if you will be coming to Karachi before the 15th.

In either case kindly let me know when and where I could see you.

Looking forward to the pleasure of knowing you, I remain,

Personally yours

(Edmondo Anderlini)
Secretary of the Commercial Attachè
Correspondent of the Italian Culture
Institute for Middle & Far East

My address is:
Dr. Edmondo Anderlini
Commercial Office - Italian Embassy
Eastern Bank Building - 1st Floor
McLeod Road - Karachi

Att
Shah

Fig. 13 - Swat Folder, document 29.

IsMEO in Pakistan, it could be given legal status there and the manuscripts could perhaps be purchased by it.

Tucci's response of June 23 (document 10) reiterates what was said in his earlier letter, first and foremost the intention that the manuscripts should remain in Pakistan—an inten-

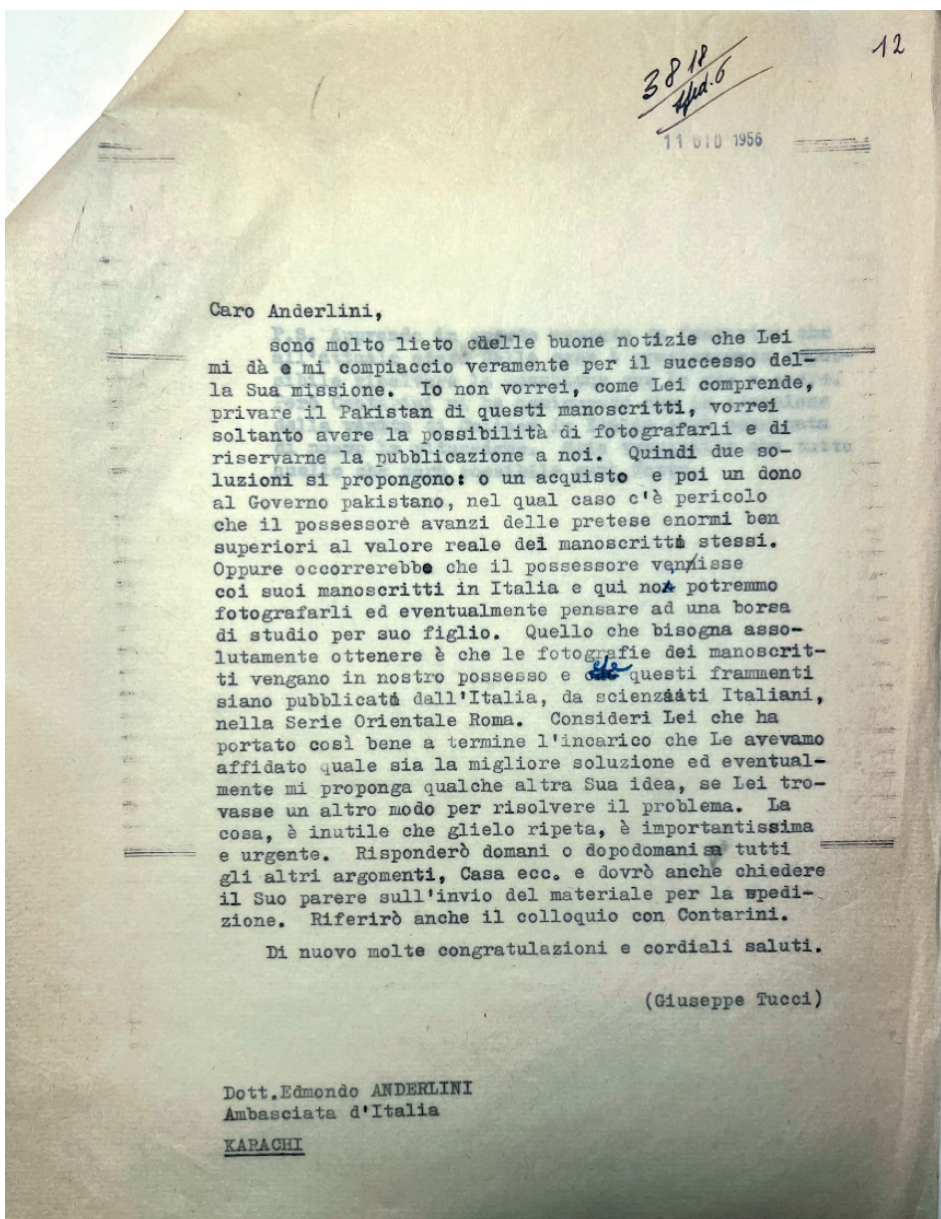


Fig. 14 - Swat Folder, document 12.

tion which, expressed in a semi-official letter, must be considered entirely genuine (Fig. 16). The other aspect concerns the establishment of a centre (which Tucci here calls the "Italian-Pakistani House"), which Tucci sees as imminent but not immediate.¹³

¹³ This idea of Tucci's was never realised, but never abandoned. For a few years, until its closure in 1964, Tucci transferred this idea of a "Casa" to the Istituto Italiano di Cultura in Karachi (whose direction

11

Caro Professore, 3818
Muz. 6
21 GIU 1956 *De Muzes*
ho ricevuto Sabato 16 la sua
lettera n. 3818 dell'11 giugno 1956 ed
oggi mi è pervenuta l'altra n. 3837 del
14 giugno. Le sono grato delle gentili
espressioni che usa nei miei riguardi e della
fiducia che mi dimostra, in verità non
esagererei dicendo che le sue lettere mi hanno
perodotto lo stesso piacere che provai bevendo
ad una sorgente montanica nella Valle
dello Swat. Nell'ufficio commerciale dove
lavoro non sono più abituato né a
l'imprudenza di lingua, né a diavreria di pensiero,
né a fineria di sentimenti.
Da due giorni sto riflettendo per trovare
la miglior soluzione circa i manoscritti.
Se proponiamo al possessore di venire con

Fig. 15 - Swat Folder, document 11.

at a certain point was requested of Giorgio Manganelli) (Salvatore Silvano Nigro recalls this in his afterword to Manganelli 2013). The idea of the “Casa” was later taken up in the project to create an Italian-Pakistani study centre into which the Italian Archaeological Mission should be transformed in the near future (first as part of the ‘ACT Field School’ project [2011-2016] financed by the Pakistani Italian Debt Swap Agreement (PIDSA) programme; now as the new ‘Heritage Field School’ proposed by the KP government in connection with the Italian government’s soft loan programme; the project is currently under development).

W. 10/8
 H. 6
 23 GIU 1956

Caro Anderlini,

ricevo la Sua lettera. La ringrazio per le Sue affettuose parole e mi congratulo con Lei per quanto sta facendo. Vedo che la cosa sta molto a cuore anche a Lei e mi fa molto piacere di averé un alleato nel suo impegno. Quello che io vorrei fare è di avere al più presto le fotografie di tutti i manoscritti perchè mi sarebbe spiacevole contribuire a che dei documenti anche se non proprio di grande interesse per la cultura pakistana venissero sottratti al paese. D'altra parte non vorrei che il possessore credesse di avere dei grandi tesori. Bisognerebbe forse fargli comprendere che la fotografia renderebbe più facile per lui il collocamento o la vendita del manoscritto stesso. La soluzione della Casa Italo-pakistana è ottima, e come Lei sa è proprio questo il mio progetto, però è cosa che andrà molto per le lunghe per le solite lentezze burocratiche. Quindi bisognerebbe davvero studiare il modo di avere le fotografie. Nessuna difficoltà a dare una borsa di studio al figlio ed eventualmente a dare a lui qualche migliaio di rupie perchè ci conceda il permesso della fotografia. Lancio così queste idee perchè Lei ci pensi e si regoli come meglio crede. Non ho bisogno di spendere altre parole con Lei perchè uomo di studio come è stato e mi auguro ancora resta e soprattutto come persona che ha grande cura perchè l'Italia conservi il suo prestigio nella scienza non credo abbisogni di speciali raccomandazioni.

Dopo domani sto a cena con Calisse e Contarini. Vedrò Chigi entro i primi di luglio. La terrò informato di come vanno le cose. Il 26 farò partire da Roma le casse con una parte del materiale indicando per ciascuna il contenuto. Dovrebbero lasciare l'Italia col piroscafo che salpa da Napoli il 30. Mercoledì Le manderò la distinta e un'altra lettera.

Molti cari saluti,

(Giuseppe Tucci)

Dott. Edmondo ANDERLINI
 Ambasciata d'Italia KARACHI

Fig. 16 - Swat Folder, document 10.

The correspondence increased. On July 3 (document 6; arrived at IsMEO 03.07.56) Anderlini proposes to Tucci preference for the direct purchase of the manuscripts in Pakistani rupees with immediate gift of the same to the government of Pakistan, acquiring in return permission for IsMEO to be able to publish them in Italy

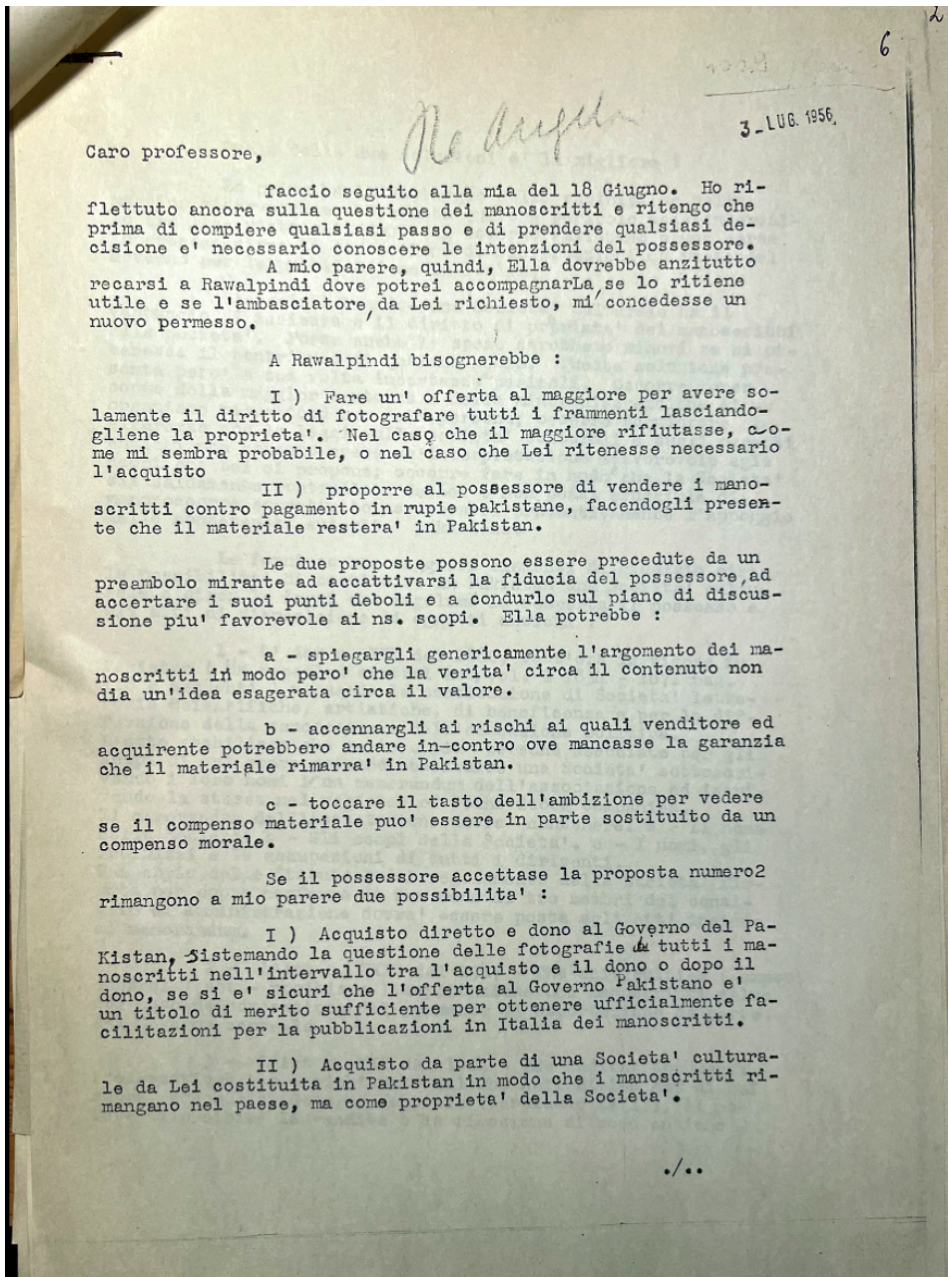


Fig. 17 - Swat Folder, document 6.

(Fig. 17). Anderlini lists below the legislative background, a copy of which he encloses, and the main points, which I summarize below:

- 1) Export Control Act XXXI of 1947 prohibits the export of artefacts and manuscripts subject to government permission;

- 2) Ancient Monument Preservation Act VIII of 1904 prohibits the sale of artefacts and manuscripts if it would cause harm to Pakistan—but which in fact, subject to this caveat, does not hinder their sale.¹⁴

The matter was again dealt by Anderlini on July 13 (the letter is mentioned in document 2), when negotiations concerning the manuscripts were postponed until Tucci's arrival.

On July 19, Anderlini wrote a long hand-written note to Tucci from Saidu Sharif on Swat Hotel paper (document 19) (Fig. 18).

The note lists the manuscripts by reporting what the colonel himself wrote:

- Manuscripts written in old Prakrat [sic] which script is undecipherable and are written on birch bark leaves
- Serial no. 1 dates back to 300 BC
- Serial no. 2 dates back BC [sic]
- Serial no. 3 dates back 100 AD (on coarse paper)
- No. 2, which is 20 inches × 5 inches, is the book “Vinayavastu” this was revealed by the late sir Auriel Stien [sic] the budhist [sic] scholar of international fame who was the curator of the british Museum [sic].¹⁵

To these are added some clay seals contained in a cigarette tin. The condition of the manuscripts is not good, and there are also, according to Anderlini, perhaps fragments of other manuscripts. Manuscript 1 is in very poor condition; manuscript 2 contains 250 folios. The value of the manuscripts is estimated by the colonel as 30,000 Pakistani Rupees, which then corresponded to the value of a house in Rawalpindi. In the past an offer had been made by a representative of the British Museum for 1,000 pounds sterling;¹⁶ according to him, intermediaries from the Indian government had also been in touch, if only by correspondence. The colonel, who boasts Azerbaijani family ancestry and claims to be pro-British, says he would never want to sell his treasures to India, and never to a communist country.¹⁷

¹⁴ Details on these two legal instruments can be found in Olivieri 2015a: 178-182.

¹⁵ We know that Tucci purchased all three manuscripts (I thank here Francesco Sferra for confirming this in a personal communication on 3 September 2022). Following the list provided in Hinüber 2014, manuscript serial no. 3 corresponds to No. 24, 25, 28: *Prajñāpāramitā*: “Folios 218-263 were in the possession of Agah Mohammad Ali Shah and handed over to Giuseppe Tucci. They were published by E. Conze (1962) [and 1974], together with some unspecified fragments” (*ibid.*: 102); no. 2 was “the second extensive part of the Vinayavastvāgama manuscript from Gilgit. It comprises 182 leaves from the last three vastus, the Śāyanāsana-, Adhikaraṇa- and Saṅghabhedavastu (leaves 323-397 and 406-512), as well as a leaf fragment from the Bhaisajyavastu [Bhaiṣajyavastu] (sheet 228). This part has been published by R. Gnoli [1977-1978; 1978]” (Wille 1990: 25, transl. Olivieri).

The third manuscript was of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*: “Twenty additional folios of this manuscript were published later also by H. Toda: Gilgit Manuscripts (Tucci's Collection) Group C, in: Tokushima Daigaku Kyōyōbu Rinrigakka kiyō 15. 1988. This transcript is based on photographs preserved in Rome and published by Raniero Gnoli [1987: 533, pls I-XX]” (von Hinüber 2012: 53) This corresponds to manuscript serial no. 1 (seven folios of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* were sent by Stein to the British Museum).

¹⁶ I was told that today it should correspond, without considering purchasing power, to about £23,000.

¹⁷ Wille previously investigated the possible presence of fragments of the colonel's collection (a.k.a. the “Sammlung Shah”) in Pune at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute. Wille writes: “Among some leaf fragments that belonged to the Shah collection and were sent as specimens to the Bhandarkar Oriental

(Lettera consegnata
il 29/7/56,
dalla signora Branghi)

4445
1
SWAT HOTEL,
SAIDU.

Caro Professore,

Le invio le prime
informazioni e notizie da me
raccolte.

L'indirizzo fornitomi dal Ministero
della Difesa del Gallistan era esatto.

È superfluo che io Le descriva
quante difficoltà ho dovuto
superare per ritrovare il possessore
dei manoscritti che d'interessano.

Lo stesso possessore mi ha chiesto
se per caso prima di venire
in Gallistan avevo fatto parte
della polizia segreta perché a mio
parere con i dati fornitimi dal
Ministero solamente un uomo
vigilante specializzato poteva ritrovarlo.

Ad ogni modo eccole l'indirizzo
esatto: Major Agha Mohammed
Ali Khan. P. Signals

Fig. 18 - Swat Folder, document 19.

This letter is followed by a long type-written letter (document 17; arrived at IsMEO 17.7.56; Fig. 19), in which Anderlini, returning from Swat, succinctly discusses various issues. These include the issue of the Mission House, in which the building later chosen as the headquarters and still used by the Mission at 31-32 College Colony in Saidu Sharif is identified, the temporary rental of two rooms at the Swat Hotel (now the Swat Serena Hotel) for archaeologists in preparation for the imminent first excavation campaign (scheduled to begin on August 18), the issue of banking, clothing, medicines, workers and their insurance, even the availability of coffee at the bazaar in Mingora. Most importantly, with this letter Anderlini also sent a set of photographic negatives and prints of details of the manuscripts.¹⁸ Our documents stop here. As planned, on August 18 Tucci with F.A. Khan, the first Director General of Archaeology in Pakistan, arrived in Swat. Along with them and the other Pakistani representatives (see Nadiem 2020: 37-106), the Italian team arrived: archaeologists D. Faccenna and G. Gullini, photographer F. Bonardi (then Bonardi Tucci) and assistant G. Graziani. After the survey carried out by Tucci, Faccenna and Bonardi in 1955,¹⁹ the first official excavation campaign finally started: Faccenna at Butkara I, and Gullini at Udegram—but this is history now.

A Little-remembered Affair?

Sometimes the history of these manuscripts has been unintentionally recalled in a hazy manner. The account that Tucci purchased the manuscript “from a street vendor,” which may still be read on the Internet, of which I do not know the original source, perhaps Tucci himself, is therefore incorrect.²⁰

As we know, the manuscript was instead purchased from a military man who must have been in Gilgit in the turbulent months leading up to Partition in 1947. This part of the story was already known to Karl Jettmar. Jettmar, who had a deep and first-hand understanding of the Gilgit matter, wrote in his 1983 article that

Research Institute (O. von Hinüber 1979: 334-335) are two leaf fragments of the Vinayavastu-āgama that were found and published by P.V. Bapat (1949). These are fragments from sheets 228 and 512, which supplement the fragments in the Shah collection.” (Wille 1990: 25, transl. Olivieri). It is possible that the Colonel had sent a few samples just to assess their interest and value. In document 19 Anderlini writes: “L’idea del grande valore gli è venuta [al Colonnello] perché molti indiani gli hanno scritto perché donasse i manoscritti al Governo Indiano e lo hanno colmato di lodi e di gentilezze” (“The idea of great value came to him [the colonel] because many Indians wrote telling him to donate the manuscripts to the Indian Government and showering him with praise and kindnesses;” transl. Olivieri). The next sentence where Anderlini says that the colonel definitely does not want the manuscripts to go to India, seems an *excusatio non petita* on the part of the colonel.

¹⁸ As “allegato 2” and “allegato 3.” It is possible that these photographs correspond to the set of 15.6 × 6 cm photographs taken in Rawalpindi, cited as 3.3 in the “Annotated List” (Sferra 2008; see also p. 25).

¹⁹ In 1955 Tucci and the team were introduced to the authorities of the then State of Swat by the Italian diplomat Felice Benuzzi and the advisor in charge of Pakistani archaeology, Raoul Curiel (see Olivieri 2006: 26, fns 7, 9, fig. 1).

²⁰ Many of us have heard the “street vendor” version directly from Raniero and Gherardo Gnoli, and Maurizio Taddei (Francesco Sferra and Adriano V. Rossi, pers. comm.). A different version of the story (“the merchant from Islamabad”) is mentioned in an interview published in the magazine of the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* (Antonio Gnoli, “Interview with Raniero Gnoli,” *La Repubblica-Robinson* 22th July 2018, pp. 64-65).

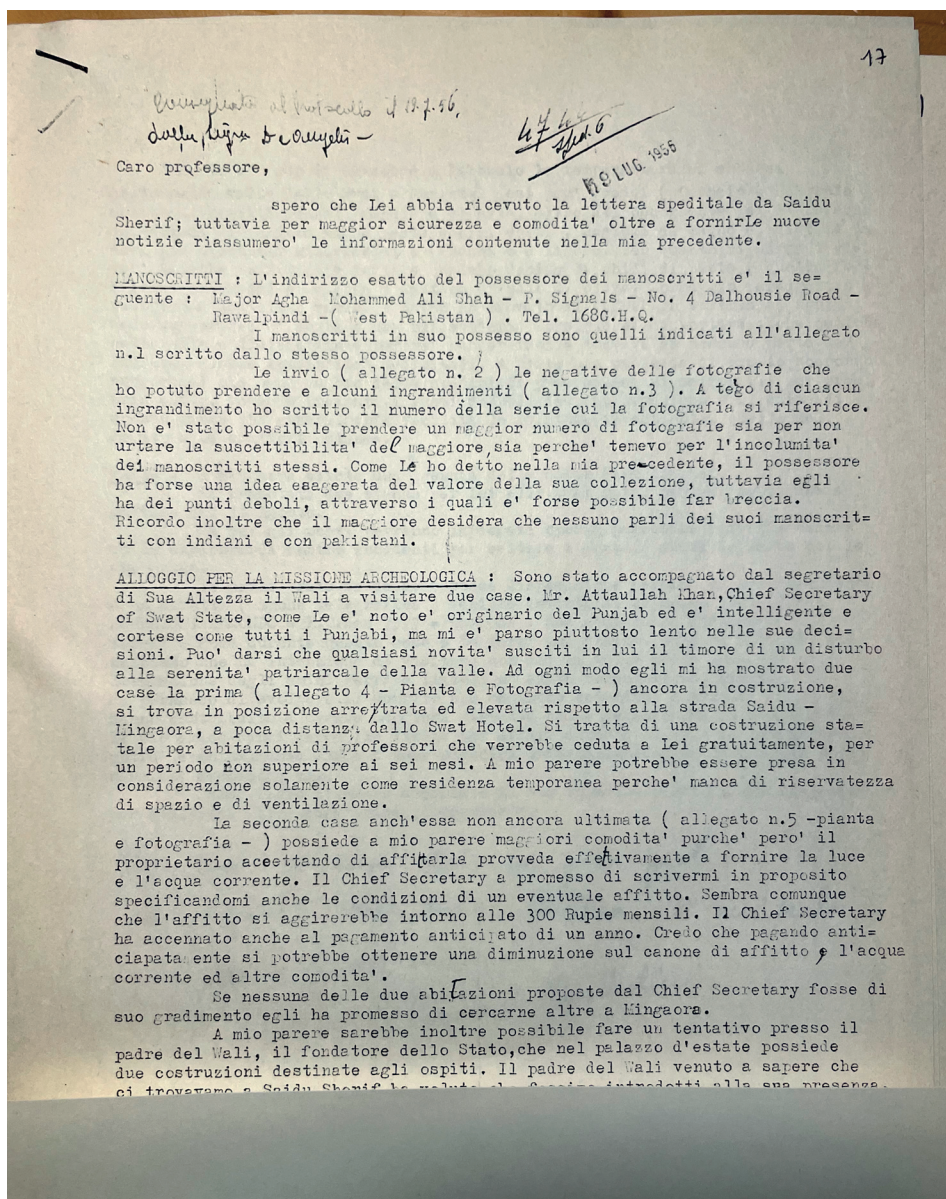


Fig. 19 - Swat Folder, document 17.

appeared in *Pakistan Archaeology*, the official journal of the Department of Archaeology:

Digging down in a hurry under the suspicious eyes of the British Political Agent, Shastri found manuscripts and other objects as reported in his article (1939). He brought them to Srinagar. Manuscripts which had already been discovered before [in 1931] remained in the house of the Wazir-i-Wazarat posted at Gilgit and were finally taken to Bunji. By chance they escaped destruction [sic] during the fighting

there in 1947. Some attentive man realized that they were worth a fortune and took them with him, when the files and records were burnt after the conquest by the Gilgit Scouts. Finally they were acquired by Tucci who handed them over to the Government of Pakistan after publication. (p. 307; my italics)²¹

The last part of Jettmar's sentence ("... after publication") is obviously wrong: as we will see the manuscripts were returned to the Pakistani authorities before their publication (which started with Conze 1962).²²

Overall, the information collected by Jettmar was spread and picked up by some attentive scholars and reiterated in some publications, starting with the work of Oskar von Hinüber (and Wille 1990). Recently Noriyuki Kudo gave more detail on the chain of events following Tucci's acquisition of the manuscripts. On the basis of the catalogue published by Francesco Sferra in 2008 and his own pre-2014 investigations at the Karachi National Museum, Kudo wrote these lines in 2019:

Some of the manuscripts were in the possession of Agah Mohammad Ali Shah, Captain, Northern Command, Pakistan Signals, Rawalpindi. Giuseppe Tucci successfully brought back a majority of them to Italy (1956) and later returned them to the government of Pakistan (now deposited at the National Museum of Pakistan, Karachi)." (Kudo 2019: 174)

As we shall see, this latter information is only partially correct.

Francesco Sferra, who has been just cited, wrote in 2004:

Lastly, we are justified in saying, at least in one case, that Tucci's photos are more useful to scholars than the original manuscript. I am referring specifically to a photograph and a microfilm of a portion (about 200 folios) of a manuscript from Gilgit (Pakistan) written on birch bark leaves and containing uniquely preserved Buddhist texts. Tucci acquired this manuscript in Rawalpindi in 1956, gave it to the Pakistani Government, brought it to Italy for restoration by the Istituto Centrale per la Patologia del Libro (Italian Office for the restoration of Books) and for publication, and then returned it to the Museum of Karachi. The latter manuscript was laminated, a technique that subsequently proved inadequate. (Sferra 2008: 29)

And a Long-known Manuscript?

Leaving aside the "street vendor" story, it therefore remains to be understood how and when Tucci learned of the existence of these manuscripts. The report of the interview

²¹ Madhusudan Kaul Shastri was the Indian archaeologist who excavated there in 1938. S. Baums writes: "In 1938, Madhusudan K[a]ul carried out a more formal excavation of the Naupur building and brought to light further manuscripts on birch bark and one on palm leaf (now kept at the Central Asian Museum of the University of Srinagar)" (Baums 2017: 495).

²² C. Ishida writes (2016: 486): "In a separate development, Giuseppe Tucci (1894-1984) located in 1956 a group of SP [Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra] manuscripts in the Northern part of Pakistan. The background of these manuscripts has not been fully determined—they may represent an entirely new discovery, or, since it has been established that they belong to text C, they may have been part of the original 1931 find that was examined by Stein and later lost track of. After their discovery (or perhaps rediscovery), Tucci identified them, and they were published by Raniero Gnoli in 1987, and in a romanized edition by Toda in 1988." See also Baums 2017.

with the colonel transcribed by Anderlini (document 19) tells us that Aurel Stein knew about the manuscripts: at least he saw manuscript serial no. 2, which he identified.

The history of the events and excavations that led to the discovery of the manuscripts in Naupur near Gilgit (in 1931 and 1938) has been the subject of much attention by many scholars.²³ Nonetheless, the facts are still not entirely clear.²⁴ We owe to Aurel Stein and Joseph Hackin the first (and first-hand) information on the accidental initial discovery of the Gilgit manuscripts.²⁵ In May 1931 Aurel Stein, on his way back from his unsuccessful Fourth Central Asian Expedition, stopped in Gilgit, before reaching his *buen retiro* in Srinagar. It was then that he saw the manuscripts and purchased some folios that were later acquired by the British Museum.²⁶ S. Baums added:

Soon after the [1931] discovery, Aurel Stein (returning from his last Central Asian expedition) and Joseph Hackin (as part of the Mission Citroën [= Haardt-Citröen Expedition (La Croisière Jaune)]) passed through Gilgit and acquired some manuscript leaves that the villagers had retained (now kept in the British Library in London and in Paris—note Lévi 1932: 16). (Baums 2017: 495)

Let us leave aside the role of J. Hackin, who was neither a British citizen, nor a former official of the Archaeological Survey of India, nor an outspoken champion of India's archaeological heritage, as Stein was. Considering therefore the former role, fame and position of Stein, two further questions arise. On what legal basis could Stein export such protected material? Why did Stein not simply hand over these manuscripts to the Archaeological Survey of India, then headed by John H. Marshall? A potential answer to the latter question can be proposed if one considers that the area of discovery was not, legally speaking, British India. In fact, the manuscripts were later put under the control of the state of Jammu and Kashmir.²⁷ "The manuscripts discovered in 1931 were placed under the control of the state government on the orders of Raja Hari Singh of Kashmir in 1933" (Kudo 2019: 170).²⁸

²³ In addition to the works mentioned in this paper, G. Fussman and G. Schopen (references in Kudo 2019). The most detailed research on the various parts of the Gilgit library scattered in various collections in Europe and Asia was initiated by Oskar von Hinüber (1979), with updates. A general analysis can be found in Wille 1990, more recently in von Hinüber 2012 and 2014.

²⁴ This seems to be a common fate of Buddhist manuscripts from Pakistan and Afghanistan: that of always being shrouded in a cloud of uncertainty regarding their discoveries, locations and vicissitudes. Think also of the various collections that have appeared in recent times. These have sometimes been the subject of controversy, most of which has quickly died down. Much more frequently, however, everything that is passed on about these collections (the shared *tradition*) is accepted as factual, including their supposed provenance.

²⁵ Stein reported on 24 July 1931 in *The Times*.

²⁶ Whether or not an economic transaction was involved is unknown, though to my mind it seems likely. "Eleven folios [of] a magnificent and well-preserved birch-bark manuscript, written in Gupta majuscules of the sixth or seventh century [...] Presented by the Executors of the late Sir Aurel Stein, K.C.I.E., and published by Sylvain Lévi in *Journal Asiatique*, tome 220 (1932), pp. 22-44, 66 by 12 cm. [Or. 11,878. A.]" (Barnett 1951: 68-69). "The British Library: Or. 11878A-G. Eleven folios of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda*vinaya (Pravrajyāvastu), folio nos. 43–53 (= A) and seven folios of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*. These folios were acquired by Stein and sent to the British Museum." (Kudo 2019: 173).

²⁷ Gilgit was a territory ruled by the Raja of Kashmir, put *pro tempore* under the vigilance of a British Political Agent, but legally not under direct British colonial jurisdiction.

²⁸ That is after Stein bought the folios.

However, the problem posed by the first question (the export issue) would remain unresolved. In Kashmir, a specific law had been in force since 1920: ‘The Jammu and Kashmir Ancient Monuments Preservation Act, 1920.’ Here, Section 17, Clause 1 reads as follows: “If His Highness [the Raja] apprehends that antiquities are being sold or removed to the detriment of the State or of any neighbouring country, it may, by notification in the Government Gazette, prohibit or restrict the bringing or taking of any antiquities or class of antiquities described in the notification into or out of the State or any specified part of the State.”²⁹ We do not know whether Stein obtained an export permit from the authorities in Jammu and Kashmir. If not, we might ask whether he was aware that he was in any way contributing to the “nefarious trafficking” of antiquities, as he had called the looting of Swat (Olivieri 2015a: Document 28).

Returning to the manuscripts, it has been said that, on the orders of the Raja, the manuscripts were transferred to Srinagar in 1933 (Kudo 2019: 170).³⁰ I do not think that this information is correct, or at least not for the part of the manuscripts subsequently in possession of the colonel. According to Jettmar, although placed under the control of the Kashmir State, at least a part of the 1931 manuscripts never left the Gilgit administrative area, and were first stored in the Wazir-i-Wazarat at Gilgit, and later in a state repository at Bunji (an administrative centre on the Indus between Gilgit and Chilas) (Jettmar 1990: 307).³¹ It was in fact from Bunji that our colonel might have taken “his” manuscripts before the Raja’s buildings at Bunji were set on fire during the turmoil that followed the 1947 Partition (Fig. 20).

But when did Tucci first come to know about the manuscripts? We cannot exclude the possibility that Tucci might have been aware of the existence of this group of manuscripts since his trip to Ladakh in 1931, due to the inevitable fanfare surrounding the Citroën Expedition, or from local rumours. Tucci passed by Srinagar in early July when Stein also happened to be there,³² but the two never met each other before 1935.

Stein visited Rome in 1935. He wrote to Helen Allen from the Hotel Elysée: “Then yesterday [27th February 1935] I enjoyed a delightful lunch at Prof. and Mrs Tucci’s charming flat [...]. They had been in Kashmir for some months and knew all about my ways.” From these lines we understand that Tucci and Stein had never met before.³³ The other question is when Tucci was informed that the manuscripts were in the colonel’s possession. The obvious answer is that this happened in 1955 and that Tucci made enquiries on what he had perhaps known since 1931 with his new Pakistani and Italian friends in Karachi (including the architect and art collector Emanuele Lizioli). The other possibility is that rumours of British and Indian attempts to contact the owner had emerged through the network of Tucci’s colleagues and friends before his first trip to Pakistan. Whatever the answer to this question, it is certain that the rest of the story sees Edmondo Anderlini as the main protagonist, and we

²⁹ See also Section 18 (1), (4).

³⁰ “However, a substantial part of them seems to have gone missing during this period [1931-1933]” (Kudo 2019: 170).

³¹ It seems that Jettmar had first-hand information about this, which is more consistent with what we know about the events of 1947.

³² Combining the information contained in Wang, Perkins 2008: 49; Klimburg-Salter 1994: 14; Nalesini 2011: 25.

³³ I have not found any written correspondence between the two. The letter is from Stein’s papers at the Bodleian Library, Oxford: MSS Stein 26/ff. 69-70, noted by Susan Whitfield.

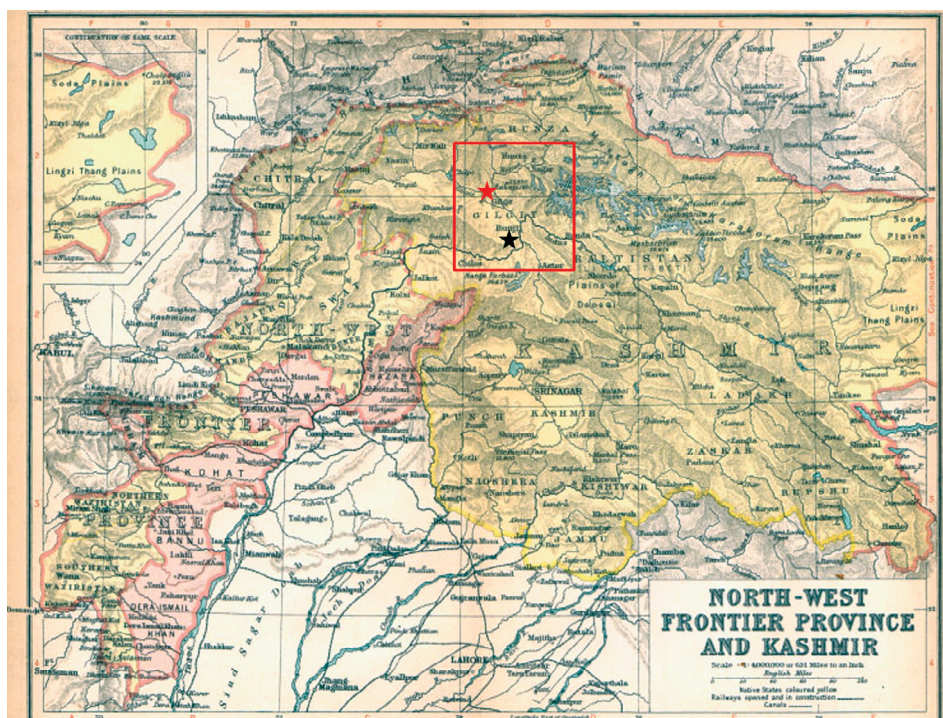


Fig. 20 - Map of the former North-West Frontier Province and Kashmir showing the position of Gilgit (red) and Bunji (black).

owe it to his sagacity that the negotiation was taken so far that Tucci was able to easily close it in 1956.

The End of the Story and What It Teaches Us

What is certain is that Tucci later travelled to Pakistan in August 1956, when the negotiation had evidently been successful, acquired the group of manuscripts and donated them to the Department of Archaeology of Pakistan; they were deposited at the Karachi Museum.³⁴

The handwritten accessions register of the Karachi National Museum helps us to understand the final sequence of events. The documentation says that the three manuscripts entered the Museum on “29.XI.56 no. NM395 Dr. E. Anderlini for the President of ISMEO c/o Embassy of Italy in Pakistan Karachi (he purchased [them] from Agha Mohammed Ali Shah, Rawalpindi).” The record includes a note that says “Rs 10,000. With Dr. Tucci vide <Sl.> No. 102 <alt> 24/3/59 & Movement Register duly signed by Mr. Fazal <Qader> Mr. S.A. <Napri>.”³⁵ It is therefore my understanding that the

³⁴ Tucci writes “in 1957” in the Introduction to his *Il Trono di Diamante*.

³⁵ I thank my colleague Muezzudin Hakal for bringing this information to my attention. Angle brackets indicate uncertain transcriptions.

manuscripts were delivered to the Museum by Anderlini on behalf of Tucci on November 29, 1956. The manuscripts were then loaned to Tucci on March 24, 1959.³⁶ The indication of 10,000 rupees could refer to a security deposit.

The publication schedule planned by Tucci was maintained: Conze 1962; 1974; Gnoli 1977-1978; 1978; 1987, all but the last published in the *Serie Orientale Roma*. The list of publications was enriched with other texts attributed to Gilgit (Chakravarti 1956; Conze 1957). Thus, until the early 1980s the *Serie Orientale Roma*, after the Dutt edition of the Gilgit Manuscripts (1939-1959), was the second most important point of reference for editions of the Gilgit manuscripts as a whole.

The important thing that should be noted here is Tucci's foresight in establishing the foundations of the Italian Archaeological Mission's activities in Pakistan, first and foremost with the diplomatic and legislative solution that extended the validity of the Pakistani law on archaeological activities to Swat, a solution that resolved a conundrum that had plagued early British archaeological research. The second issue was the wise management of the acquisition of the manuscripts, bought in accordance with current regulations and in agreement with the authorities to then make a gift to them, securing the right to publish them first. Today, seventy years later, when the issue of important and recent manuscript collections stored outside Pakistan is increasingly being discussed, we cannot but look at the arrangements put in place by Tucci with admiration.³⁷

There is a third issue, which is somehow connected to the previous two. In 1976 the export of archaeological material to the Rome National Museum of Oriental Art were unilaterally discontinued with anticipatory wisdom by Tucci. The rationale behind the decision was the concept that heritage should remain in the source countries. With hindsight, this was a courageous decision and ahead of its time. The decision certainly contributed to the continuity of Italian archaeological work in Swat, which in 2025 will celebrate its 70th anniversary of uninterrupted archaeological activity.

³⁶ It is also possible that 24 March 1959 was the date the manuscripts were returned.

³⁷ Perhaps it is beyond the scope of this article, but I believe there are two aspects of Tucci's actions in the 1950s that in 2023, at least for some, would not be considered ideal. Firstly, there is the fact that by giving money to the illegal holder of the manuscripts, he would have indirectly endorsed his 'ownership' and the very act from which it derived. Secondly, there is the idea that one might rather have thought of having the authorities move directly. As for the first point, let us remember the historical context in which these things occurred; indeed, one might think that compared to Tucci's time, things have not progressed much in this respect. As for the second point, if one reads between the lines of the documents presented here, it is in fact clear that the entire purchase procedure was certainly coordinated with the Department of Archaeology.

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