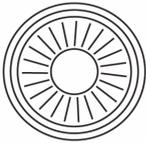


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## JOURNAL OF BHUTAN STUDIES

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# **Guru Padmasambhava in Context: Archaeological and Historical Evidence from Swat/Uddiyana (c. 8th century CE)**

*Luca Maria Olivieri\**

## **Introduction**

In this contribution, which is based on a collection of data that were earlier presented in different fora<sup>1</sup>, I would like to first briefly touch upon the fact that last year the Italian Archaeological Mission in Swat<sup>2</sup>, founded by Giuseppe Tucci in 1955, just celebrated its 60th anniversary. The Mission, which I have the honor to lead<sup>3</sup>, is still in full activity despite the many

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<sup>1</sup> The present contribution is based on the transcript of the lecture delivered at Paro, June 14, 2016, with integrations. The lecture was largely drawn from Olivieri 2010 and Filigenzi 2015. The latter have been integrated with data from Tucci 1940, Tucci 1958, Tucci 1977, Olivieri and Vidale 2006, Filigenzi 2006, Olivieri 2014, Filigenzi 2010, Filigenzi 2015 and Olivieri 2015. In the present contribution, diacritics are omitted, with the exception of quoted excerpts.

<sup>2</sup> I thought it was not necessary to attach a map to this paper. Anyhow, Swat is a long mountain river valley, named from its river, Swat, (Sanskrit: *Swastu*, Greek: *Soastos*; see Olivieri 1996, p.60). The valley is located at the western corner of the Himalayas (at the opposite of Bhutan). Situated at the piedmont of the Hindukush-Karakorum (average altitude 3,000 ft above the sea level), Swat is surrounded by mountains ranging from 9,000 to 18,000 ft high. Administratively, Swat, which was an autonomous Princely State (ruled by the House of the Mianguls) until 1969, is currently a district of the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan (former North-West Frontier Province, N.W.F.P.). The capital of the district (Saidu Sharif) is located at a distance of less than 200 miles from China, and 100 miles from Afghanistan (as the crow flies).

<sup>3</sup> The Mission has been directed by Domenico Faccenna (1956-1997), Maurizio Taddei (1997-2000†), Piefrancesco Callieri (2000-2008), co-directed by Piefrancesco Callieri and Luca M. Olivieri until 2011, and it is currently directed by the Author.

dramatic events that hit the beautiful Swat valley between 2007 and 2010<sup>4</sup>. I also intend to pay tribute to Giuseppe Tucci's seminal essay, *On Swat* (Tucci 1977), which holds a wealth of suggestions and historical hypotheses that are still stimulating research<sup>5</sup>.

Amongst those historical hypotheses, there are some aspects of mutual importance connecting Swat and Bhutan, i.e. the early diffusion of Vajrayana in Swat, the relationship between Swat and the trans-Himalayan regions, and the role of Guru Padmasambhava.

### **Initial decadence of Buddhism in Swat and Gandhara**

In *On Swat*, at the beginning of his chapter "Historical Problems" Tucci wrote<sup>6</sup>:

It is not easy to explain the decrease of monasteries after Fa-hsien (399-414 AD) (1400 monasteries) and the fact that at the time of Hsüan-tsang (he travels from 629 to 645) many of them were in ruins, and monks were no longer interested in study and meditation but specially inclined to Tantric practices. Sung Yün (he travels from 518 to 523) speaks in high terms of the Buddhist community and does not anticipate the statement of Hsüan-tsang. 1400 monasteries [Fa-hsien] imply not only a widespread devotion, but also great wealth for their maintenance [...]

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<sup>4</sup> The anniversary was celebrated with various events, including the publication of a comprehensive volume on the activities of the Italian Mission with reference to the archaeology of Buddhism (Callieri, Filigenzi and Olivieri 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Being basically a field archaeologist, I would like to deeply thank my colleague Anna Filigenzi of the Oriental University of Naples, whose expertise helped me preparing this contribution by adding some punctual insights to my historical reconstruction.

<sup>6</sup> Tucci 1977, p. 68.



Figure 1. The late Buddhist site of Amluk-dara (2nd-9th century CE). Courtesy: Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan.

A plausible answer to this question can be found in the archaeological data from the excavation of the ancient city of Bazira or Vajirasthana, which lies near the present village of Barikot. This is a large fortified city founded in the 2nd century BCE by the Indo-Greeks.

This city lost its military and strategic importance during the 2nd Century CE, when Swat, perhaps for the first time in its history, ceased to be a peripheral territory, and became part of the 'metropolitan' territory, or the *nomos* of the Kushan empire (Olivieri 1996). The excavation data suggests that, in association with the evidence of demilitarization, the city boomed. It developed into a large, lively settlement whose economy was in large part based on agriculture and long-distance trade. Workshops and storage-rooms were crowded around large well-built mansions, side by side with Buddhist urban sanctuaries (Olivieri 2014). This new city pattern therefore suggested that the city was under the political control of local Kushan vassal

chiefs, who were also the patrons of the Buddhist monasteries in the countryside.



Figure 2. The south-western quarters of the ancient Bazira at Barikot site (2nd BCE-4th CE; view from the north). In the background the majestic skyline of Mount Ilam. Courtesy: Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan.

The monasteries were probably the true stimulating factor in the economy of the area. Recent data from archaeological surface research demonstrated that the Buddhist monasteries regulated agriculture through their control over water supplies and irrigation management. Control over the water element was then central in the Buddhist narrative in Swat, both as

a practical issue, as well as spiritual one: control over water reflecting exactly one of the most popular Buddhist stories localized in Swat, the conversion of the *naga* Apalala, whose hectic rule over the wild waters had brought floods and droughts, and led the population into starvation until the intervention of the Buddha.



Figure 3. A Buddhist Gandharan relief with a converted *naga* (detail). From Barikot (3rd century CE). Courtesy: Edoardo Loliva/ACT-Field School Project (after Olivieri 2014, figure 116).

The role of the monastic communities seems decisive with regard not only to agriculture, but also to the management of communication routes, mountain passes, forestry and pastures. However, the economic equilibrium point destabilized in two moments: first after the collapse of the Kushan empire, and again in the period following the end of the Kushano-Sasanian rulership.

The first destabilization moment (which occurred at around mid-3rd century CE) reflected mostly in the collapse of the urban system, while the Buddhist foundations, in overall, managed to overcome the crisis (Olivieri 2014). The second moment (that may have occurred not earlier than the 7th century CE) hit particularly the Buddhist foundations in the countryside. According to the archaeological data, most of the Buddhist monasteries - built in the first two centuries of the Current Era - were abandoned or in deep decline after the 7th century CE. As a consequence, pit-weels, channels, dams and aqueducts - until then run and maintained by the Buddhist community - began to be neglected, a fact that certainly had a decisive effect on agricultural production (Olivieri and Vidale 2006).

Further elements accompany these data, say the diffusion of the Late Historic Buddhist rock sculptures after the 7th century CE (Filigenzi 2015). Their presence can be regarded as the most indicative marker for the development of Vajrayana schools in Swat and the surrounding areas even from the 7th Century CE (see Figure 5-8). If this interpretation is correct, only a small percentage of the hundreds of Buddhist foundations developed into similar schools. In fact, the highest concentration of Late Historic Buddhist rock sculptures was found along the left bank of the river Swat, especially in the left tributary valleys, between Manglawar and Mingora. In the immediate vicinity of Barikot, only 3 (out of 75) Buddhist foundations display the presence of these rock sculptures. In two cases, i.e. Amluk-dara (see Figure 1) and Barikot (a Buddhist centre built on top of the hill, not the city which was already a field of ruins), their chronology is confirmed by Late Historic ceramic data

and by excavation evidence<sup>7</sup>. While in the area surrounding the present city of Mingora late Buddhist communities maintained a wide control of their territory, in the Barikot area control was limited to the bottom of the valley and main roads.

As a consequence, high altitude pastures, springs and passes, as well as the control over forestry resources, changed hands, and were again controlled by local tribes. In time, the tribes, which had probably never been converted to Buddhism, had regained control over their ancestral territory. The reappropriation of the mountain territory by these pastoral communities may have led to gradual deforestation and to soil erosion as collateral effects. This fact might have contributed to the lowering of the water table, which could be considered as another of the side factors of the crisis, which affected Swat in Late Historic times.

### **Diffusion of Vajrayana and the revival of Brahmanism and local beliefs**

At the time that Tucci wrote his article there was little evidence of the diffusion of Brahmanism in Swat<sup>8</sup>:

Down to the later general decay of Buddhism, except for the unique image of a goddess and even an image of Siva, there are not many traces of a great diffusion of Hinduism in Swāt, a fact confirmed by the Chinese travelers; Hsüan-tsang speaks of ten *deva* (Hindu) temples, but a very important Saiva school [...] was

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<sup>7</sup> In both cases the archaeological data lead us to conclude that the rock sculptures of these two sites were executed at the very beginning of the 7th century, if not earlier. Particularly important are the evidence from Barikot. The Late Historic Buddhist rock sculptures located at the foot of the Barikot hill (Filigenzi 2015, pp. 224-225), were certainly associated – as everywhere else in Swat – to a Buddhist complex, most probably to be searched on the top of the hill, as hinted at by discovery of several Gandharan fragments (Filigenzi 2015, p. 224, fn. 27). The Buddhist complex was destroyed and a late Brahmanical temple was built probably at its place. The radiocarbon evidence (605-685 CE) related to the construction of the latter is of the utmost importance in that regard (Callieri 2005, p. 423).

<sup>8</sup> Tucci 1977, p. 68.

originated or had some of its most famous authors in Swāt.

The famous Sarada inscription now in the Lahore Museum (Tucci 1958, p. 296, fn. 28) referring to a temple foundation at Vajirasthana-Barikot still in existence at the time of king Jayapaladeva (at the end of the 10th century CE) became significant only after the discovery of a Brahmanic temple on the Barikot hilltop in 1998 (Callieri with others 2000). In the last few years new research has been carried out which renders the religious panorama of Late Historic Swat clearer.

As mentioned above, archaeology in 1998 managed to provide a sound chronological *terminus ante quem* to the spread of the Late Buddhist schools, at least in Barikot. The Brahmanic temple, which was built there in the second half of the 7th century CE, probably obliterated a pre-existent Vajrayanic Buddhist complex (whose existence is confirmed by two rock sculptures, see note 7), thus representing a clear chronological benchmark. In 2006, a second Brahmanic temple was discovered southwest of Barikot (Olivieri and Vidale 2006 pp.119-120). Close to Barikot in 2004 a second rock sculpture with Surya and Ganesa was discovered (a first one was documented inside the nearby cave of Hindu-ghar) (Filigenzi 2006). Again in 2006 new rock paintings that definitely reflect Brahmanic religious symbology were discovered south of Barikot, at Takht-i Gat and at Palangai (Olivieri 2010; Olivieri 2015). Another group of paintings concentrated in the southern watershed of the valleys clearly speaks another language, even though the style is not much different. The paintings depict caprids, horses and highly modified hieratic characters (Figure 4).

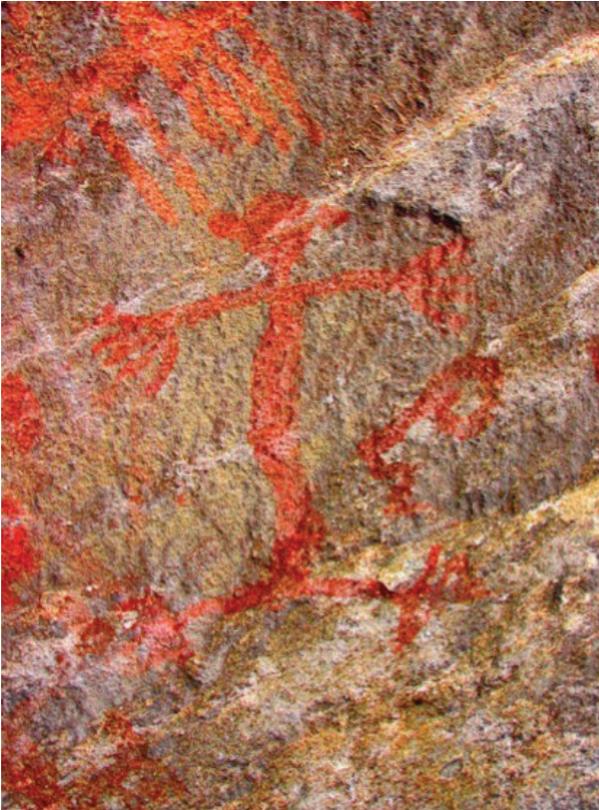


Figure 4. Rock painting of Lal-kamar. Representation of a shaman, or individual in state of trance or “near-death”. Courtesy: Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan (after Olivieri 2015: pl. LXI).

These late pictorial documents emphasize the possession of cattle and the consequent management of grazing land and control of the passes. The typical style of the caprids - schematic and linear, with their body rendered through the use of a single curving line, is the same as in the paintings of the Kalash peoples of Chitral (see Olivieri and Vidale 2006, pp. 138-146).

As previously mentioned, the lower city of Barikot was definitively

abandoned in the 4th century CE. This phase saw the beginning of a process of mountain fortification, which is typical of Late Historic Swat, i.e. 7th-8th century CE. This typology of tower-house development is frequent in the valleys South West of Barikot. In general, it seems that this new settlement process was concentrated in the lower part of the Swat valley, and did not extend upstream to Barikot. Tower-house complexes are widely documented – until modern times – in the Kafiro-Dardic cultural areas, in Chitral, Gilgit and Hunza.

During our survey campaigns in the Barikot valleys another interesting new element emerged. Dozens of tanks of various typologies, all carved onto granite and gneiss boulders, were documented. Their study has unequivocally shown that for the most part such devices were used for pressing grapes. Comparison with the wine-presses used in the Kafir and Upper Indus regions is convincing. The number of these devices found also suggests that they might not have been merely used for occasional production, but instead were an ample part of the agricultural or cropping economy of some areas of the Swat valley. This fact is also supported by a relevant witness, Xuanzang, who speaks of abundant grape production in Swat.

When comparing this architectural and archaeological evidence with the data provided by some Late Historic rock-paintings, it appears clear that the area southwest of Barikot in particular, shows a coherent horizon, which shares many features with the Dardic, if not Kafir, cultural milieu. Vice versa, to the north of that cultural border, Late Buddhist schools (Vajrayana) appear to be dominant (see again Olivieri and Vidale 2006, pp. 138-146).

We do not know whether or not this apparent, but convincing, division of the territory after the 7th century CE, was the result of a political division. Tucci (1977)<sup>9</sup> underlined that both Tibetan and Chinese sources of the 8th century CE describe Swat as split into two political entities: a northern one ruled -

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<sup>9</sup> See also Kuwayama 2002, especially, but not only, Chapter XV.

per *antonomasia* - by the Buddhist king Indrabhuti (to whom, according to the legend, the Tantric teachings were first given), and a southernmost one, which was politically dependent on the Laghman-Kabul-Gardez area. The latter evidence appears to be soundly demonstrated by the ruling presence of Turki-Shahi, or Shahi of Kabul, as possible donors of the Brahmanic temple of Barikot. It is also interesting that, in connection with the Eastern Afghanistan political and cultural predominancy, we have noted the diffusion of Kafiro-Dardic elements. Both in Swat and Laghman, this cultural horizon survived the early Islamization (11th-13th centuries CE), and possibly lasted through the 17th Century CE, according to the information provided both by Tibetan and Islamic accounts (Olivieri 2010).

### **Padmasambhava in Swat**

The trans-Himalayan connection is so deeply part of the Swat history that no one would be surprised by the long threads of trans-Himalayan pilgrims who planned to visit Swat, believed to be the true Uddiyana. Recently I learned that the very last traditional pilgrimage to Swat was probably the one performed by Khyung Sprul. According to his biography (see Kværne 1998), he should have visited Swat before 1935, which is the year when he met Tucci in Tibet (Alay 2011, p. 206). Did the two talk about Swat and Uddiyana? We don't know. Anyhow, no one would be surprised to find trans-Himalayan characters, monks and pilgrims portrayed in the Swat Pashto folklore and toponyms<sup>10</sup>. Maybe it would be a bit more surprising to find - as hinted at by Tucci - a possible allusion to Guru Padmasambhava, in one story telling of a *yogin* who went to Tibet to get a magic stone in possession of a Tibetan princess (Tucci 1971, p. 551).

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<sup>10</sup> The major mountain of the Barikot area, the mount Ilam (c. 3,000 ft asl; see Figure 2), known as the *Ram-thakht* or the "Throne of Rama" of the Hindu tradition, still preserves the Tibetan toponym *Hilo* (see Olivieri 1996, p. 69, fn. 33). Interestingly, the mountain is known in Pashto also as *Jogiano-sar*, or "*Yogin's peak*". That name is linked to the very interesting folk tale of a Buddhist master and his pupil, and the teaching of the art of flying. The pupil, tried to prematurely imitate his master. He secretly drank the blood of a serpent and died, like Icarus, after trying to fly from the top of Ilam.

As already discussed, according to the available data from the field, Swat had undergone a remarkable decay in the post-Kushan period, that is, after the 3rd century CE. Probably following serious natural and political disasters, cities were abandoned by the 4th century, and the Buddhist monasteries, certainly after 5th-6th centuries, with only a few exceptions, started being abandoned or only modestly repaired. However, if we credit Tibetan sources, Swat must have continued to develop doctrines and practices, which eventually earned it a reputation as a famous cradle of Vajrayana. An unexpected glimpse into this nebulous phase of Swat history is provided by the rock sculptures that flourished in Swat in the 7th to 8th centuries, when Buddha and bodhisattva figures started populating the region. Several years of surveys led my colleague Anna Filigenzi and me to recorded more than 200 carvings and stelae in the mountains of Swat. Some of them are no longer extant and only retrieved from old photographic documentation<sup>11</sup>.



Figure 5. Rock sculpture from Jare, Swat. Courtesy: Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan.

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<sup>11</sup> These historical considerations are thoroughly elaborated in Chapter 6 of Filigenzi 2015.



Figure 6. Rock sculpture from Arabkhan-china, Swat. Courtesy: Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan. (after Filigenzi 2015, figure 29 a).



Figure 7. The stele of the siddha (Swat Museum). Courtesy: Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan (after Filigenzi 2015, figure 140).

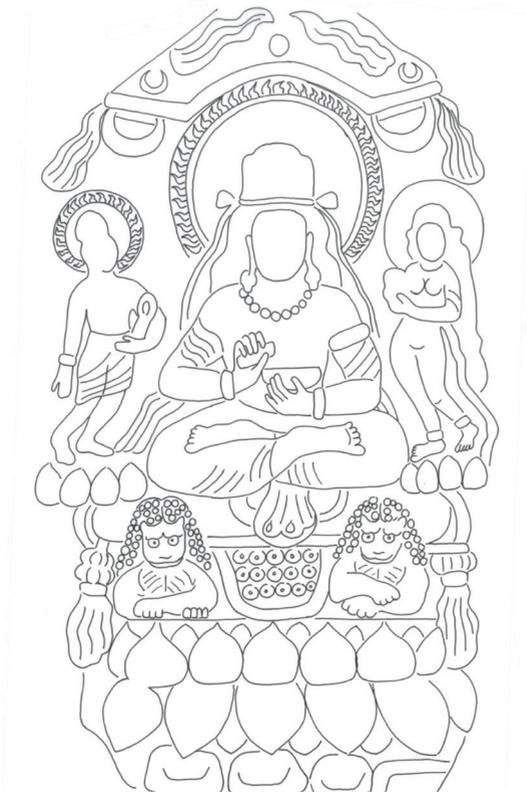


Figure 8. The stela of the siddha (Swat Museum). Courtesy: Bernardo Velletri (after Filigenzi 2015, figure on p. 162).

Due to their unusual features, poor preservation state and blurred cultural context these sculptures have long remained almost ignored or underestimated. At first glance, rock sculptures may appear as a product of popular art. However, under close scrutiny, the sculptures appear as parts of a visual strategy aimed at achieving a calculated effect. Forms, dimensions, positions, and even lines of stratification of the rocks, suggest a constant compositive rule, which consists of the adaptation of the sculpture to the physical characteristics of the natural rock.

According to my colleague Anna Filigenzi, the reason behind such a concern was the illusory evocation of the images being self-existent. In short, the images do not look as something artificially created, but rather as forms spontaneously emerging from the rock, as if the artistry lay simply in unveiling or giving comprehensible form to that which was already in existence. The entanglement of the sculptures with the natural landscape appears even more significant when considered together with their topographical distribution.

They are spread along the paths leading to Buddhist sacred areas that, at the time of this artistic flowering, in the 7th-8th century CE, were still in use. The attention the artists put in fitting their works into the appropriate natural theatre is revelatory of a precise inspirational motive: these images were meant to convey the geomantic idea that the sacred place was entirely a work of nature, an immanent manifestation of the divine which stays immutable despite the ravages of time.

We can only imagine the monastic communities being behind such an ambitious and wide-ranging project. Specialized monks may well have directed the process, from the general conception to the specific selection of sites and subjects, and perhaps even undertaken the actual execution of the reliefs.

Forms, subjects and physical setting of the sculptures are thus indissolubly linked with pilgrimage routes and their metaphorical re-enactment of the spiritual journey. This explains, for instance, the ubiquitous presence of Avalokitesvara/Padmapani, whom the Swat rock sculptures present as a true “God of the Path”, the Great Helper who frees the way of obstacles, both along the physical and the spiritual journey, and offers guidance to a higher goal. Thus, in the rock sculptures of Swat we can detect not only close affinity with the Indian concept of *svayambhu* (*svayambhū*) or self-existent images, but also, in their acting like a visionary revelation which punctuates the pilgrim’s pathway, an anticipation of the *rang byung*, so deeply embedded in Tibetan mysticism.

Notwithstanding the bad state of preservation of most of the sculptures, it has been possible to recognize almost all the iconographic subjects and calculate their percentage frequency of occurrence:

- a) Avalokitesvara/Padmapani,
- b) different forms of Maitreya, with two or four arms,
- c) Vajrapani/Vajrasattva,
- d) possibly Manjusri, and a series of unique or rare presences.

Among these, particularly worthy is the earliest representation of a *siddha*, that is, a key figure of Vajrayana and pre-eminent model of perfect accomplishment (Figure 7 and 8). The relief shows a central figure enthroned accompanied by two standing ancillary figures of appreciably smaller dimensions. The central figure is seated in *vajraparyankasana* on a lion throne of a quite complex type. The figure is dressed as one of the many bodhisattvas appearing in rock sculpture: a crown tied at the sides of the head with ribbons hanging down, a shawl draped over the arms, *paridhana* and jewels. The right hand shows an unusually elongated silhouette, which suggests the presence of a small *vajra*, while the left holds a rather flattish object, which can be identified as a *kapala*.

The two figures at the sides, a man and a woman, are also characterised by a nimbus and are borne on lotus flowers. The hieratic character of these two minor characters conveys the impression that these are not simply donors but rather a symbolic couple. They also bear attributes that are hard to identify but whose forms appear compatible with two objects well known to us from Tibetan iconography and liturgy, namely *vajra* and *ghanta*. The complementary *vajra/ghanta* union, expressed here in the physical presence of the couple, is conserved in Tibetan iconography stripped of any accessory form, where the lotuses do not support the humanized hypostases of the symbols but rather the symbols in all their essential nature.

We cannot give a name to the anonymous *siddha* depicted in the stela. What is really important, however, is the embedded information about the existence, in the Swat of the 7th-8th century CE, of a spiritual model of accomplishment that is already perfectly delineated from the conceptual viewpoint and on the way to attaining a fixed iconographic formula. This offers another first concrete link between Swat, Uddiyana and Padmasambhava, the great *siddha* who, according to tradition, was born in this region and from this region, introduced Buddhism into Tibet. Of the “eight aspects of Guru Padmasambhava”, the first (and presumably most archaic) describes him as seated on a lotus, having two arms and holding a *vajra* in his right hand and a *kapala* in the left, just as the central figure does in our stela. Moreover, among the various *siddha* figures, Padmasambhava is often distinguished by sumptuous cloaks, in which we may discern the reflection of some relationship with the bodhisattva figure.

If any historical background exists of the legendary biographies of Guru Padmasambhava, this should have been represented by the settled orientation of the religious culture of his homeland. Visual and material evidence now start shedding some light on this issue. The rock sculptures, in particular, of Swat depict a scenario fully compatible with the biography of Padmasambhava, thus providing a firmer factual foundation for the fame that Swat’s Buddhism had reached by the mid-8th century, to the extent indeed that it could constitute a driving force for the spread of Buddhism across the Himalayas. In this context, Padmasambhava appears as the epigone of a chain of unnamed masters in a consolidated tradition that preceded him and found in him its first recorded exponent. Many others will follow after him as his disciples till the dawn of modern times. Viewed in this light, legendary accretion is as historically significant as the identifiable historical core.

### **Conclusions**

At this point the reader will find useful the following lines, which in my view are the best ones to recapitulate the various

points touched *en passant* in this contribution<sup>12</sup>.

Uḍḍiyāna is mostly known as the legendary homeland of Padmasambhava, the great teacher who, summoned to Tibet by the king Trisong Detsen in the mid-eight century CE, introduced there an esoteric form of Buddhism – an inextricable melding of magic and mysticism – which is thought to be at the roots of Vajrayāna. Much less is known about Uḍḍiyāna as a historical region, which archaeology has long since identified with an area centred on modern-day Swat (north-western Pakistan). Excavations and surveys revealed here an astonishing wealth of Buddhist remains and civil settlements that to a large extent match the ancient topography of Uḍḍiyāna as described in ancient sources.

The favourable geographical position with relation to ancient communication routes between India and Central Asia and a long-lasting fame as one of the most sacred lands of Buddhism – still intact centuries after the Islamization of the country – ensured to Uḍḍiyāna economic and cultural prosperity, at least until the first decades of the sixth century CE. The words of the Chinese pilgrim Songyun, who visited the country in 520 CE, convey to us a vivid picture of Uḍḍiyāna: the pleasant weather, the abundance of crops, the sound of the bells that in the evening clang from the many Buddhist monasteries, the colours of the flowers that, everywhere and in every season, the land produces and people offer to the Buddha. Much different, one century later, are the words of another famous Chinese pilgrim, Xuanzang. He describes scarce crops, ruined monasteries, and a small population of monks who, incapable of understanding the true meaning of the

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<sup>12</sup> This is the abridged version of a text authored by my colleague Anna Filigenzi from the Uḍḍiyāna website (<http://www.oeaw.ac.at/uddiyana>) (reprint authorized).

doctrine, seem to be instead committed to magic and charms.

A dramatic change is also witnessed in Swat by the archaeological landscape of the second half of the first millennium CE. Research brought to light ample evidence of a general decay, possibly connected to some natural catastrophe (floods and earthquakes are not a rare occurrence in the region). At that time both Buddhist sacred areas and urban settlements show signs of decline, ill repair or even definitive abandonment. If the statement of Xuanzang about the “cultural” decay of the Uḍḍiyāna monks may sound like indirect evidence of a different form of Buddhism that we can dare label proto-Vajrayāna, more difficult to understand is how the famous doctrinal centre we know from Tibetan tradition could grow amidst the gloomy ruins of the past. Moreover, if we may give any credit to the legends about Padmasambhava and his homeland, we have to assume that Padmasambhava himself was the epigone, either real or fictitious, of a chain of anonymous masters who cultivated in Uḍḍiyāna, along with new doctrinal orientations, a related corpus of ritual practices and visual imagery. Thus if Uḍḍiyāna was so influential in the spreading of Buddhism across the Himalayan regions, it must have also been influential in the profuse artistic and cultural blossoms that grew out of this [...].

Particularly enlightening in this regard are the Buddhist rock sculptures. They long remained almost ignored or underestimated, and in any case regarded as having little artistic value and vague theoretical foundations, until analytical study highlighted how, with their refined aesthetics and innovative iconographic character, they can be considered the forerunners of themes which blossomed later in Himalayan art. Moreover, the seventh to eighth century is also the chronological frame of another

sophisticated artistic production, closely related to the rock sculpture: the bronze sculpture from the Swat/Gilgit region. When analyzed together, these two artistic phenomena outline a different picture of late-antique Swat, which starts convincingly matching the legendary Uḍḍiyāna [...].

At this stage, I would like to conclude my contribution with three statements, which derive their apodictic formulation from the solid ground of the archaeological field research. Therefore, they might be considered the best starting points for future discussions<sup>13</sup>:

- 1) Archaeological research in Swat has amply demonstrated the existence of a strong Vajrayanic background already in the 7th century CE.
- 2) Textual evidences show that from 5th Century CE, Chinese and Tibetan travelers and pilgrims for more than thousand years visited the Swat valley believing that it was Uddiyana (Figure 9).
- 3) If the true Uddiyana, as physical realm, should have been searched elsewhere than in Swat, we ought to conclude that those venerated pilgrims and travelers were wrong.

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<sup>13</sup> Besides the classic works by Giuseppe Tucci, further data to confirm the identification of Swat with the ancient Uddiyana can be found for example in Kuwayama 2002 (in particular Chapter XV). See also Davidson 2002, and the recent McDougal 2016, fn. 19.



Figure 9. The Swat Valley and the hill of Barikot seen from south-west. In the background the skyline of the Swat Kohistan Range. Courtesy: Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan.

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