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# PAKISTAN HERITAGE



Editors

Shakirullah and Ruth Young



Research Journal of the  
Department of Archaeology  
Hazara University Mansehra-Pakistan

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## **Editorial Note**

*Pakistan Heritage* is a double blind peer-reviewed journal, published annually. This volume included the papers on different aspects of archaeology and history of Pakistan and adjacent regions with subject matter ranging from the Prehistoric to the British Period.

We acknowledge the efforts of the members of the Editorial and Advisory Boards, the contributors, the reviewers and colleagues of the Department of Archaeology, Hazara University Mansehra. Special thanks are due to Dr. Abdul Hameed, Assistant Professor, of the department for technical assistance. We are also indebted to the worthy Vice Chancellor and management of Hazara University Mansehra for his support and encouragement.

## **Editors**

# Mount Aornos and the Operations of the Macedonian Army in Swat.

## Sources and Archaeological Data

OMAR COLORU AND LUCA M. OLIVIERI

### Abstract

*The following notes are meant to contribute to the debate on the whereabouts of the Indian Aornos conquered by Alexander the Great. The article presents some new viewpoints from both field archaeology and literary sources. The integrated approach of historical geography, literary exegesis, and field archaeology can be particularly fructuous when the archaeology contribution is based – as in this case - on sound and reliable stratigraphic information. The ancient geography angle is approached in this article from the hodological viewpoint, which may give new answers to old problems.*

**Keywords:** Alexander the Great; Aornos; Arrian; Bazira; Barikot; Curtius Rufus; Ilam; Pir-sar

### Preamble

The reason for this short essay lies in the recent publication in this Journal of a paper on the problematics of the so-called Indian Aornos.<sup>1</sup> Because of this, we thought that it would be useful to contribute to the debate with some new evidence, from both the fields of archaeology and literary sources. We have decided to simply subdivide the text into two parts. One focuses on the analysis of the literary sources, with an emphasis on historical geography and some points that were discussed in the above-mentioned article. The second part is meant to provide the readers with some useful archaeological and topographical information based on the most recent fieldwork. We do not want to stress too much how disappointing the archaeological data collected both on the Pir-sar and Mount Ilam (Jogiano-sar) by recent and previous surveys are, including those carried out by Sir Au-

rel Stein and Giorgio Stacul. It is thus evident that a possible solution of the question, for the time being, cannot be directly inferred from the surface evidence yielded by the two mountains. Instead, we consider the accurate reconstruction of the topographical setting to be more important in terms of how it is revealed by the sources and by the associated archaeological data.<sup>2</sup>

### Sources and topography

In order to understand the location of Mount Aornos in relation to the movements of Alexander's army in Swat, we have three main accounts reported by Arrian, Curtius Rufus, and Diodorus that can be integrated by data provided by other sources. It is important to remember that all of these narratives are the result of the adjustment, merging and sometimes misunderstanding of earlier historical works that are lost to us, and that none of the later authors – even “credited” historians such as Arrian – are exempt from this trend.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Kimotoshi Moritani and Mohammad Zahir, “Alexander the Great at Aornos (Mount Pir-Sar), District Shangla, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan: Report on Historical and Archaeological Field Investigations (2017 – 2018)”, *Pakistan Heritage*, 10, 2018, pp. 161-171 (with seven pages of illustrations).

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2 We also owe our thanks to Lauren Morris (University of Freiburg, Germany) for her precious comments on the draft of this article.

3 Bosworth 1976: 117-139 showed that Arrian was far

## The itinerary (Fig. 1)

Let us briefly review the main events concerning this part of the Indian campaign of Alexander. In the late summer or at the beginning of the autumn of 327 BC, Alexander attacked Massaga/Mazagae (area of Aligrama and Barama, i.e. Mingora), the capital of the Assakenoi, and put it under siege. If one follows Arrian, Alexander – either on his arrival to Massaga or immediately after the siege of the town – sent Coenus to take Bazira/Beira<sup>4</sup> (Bir-kot-ghwandai), while Attalus, Alcetas, and the hipparch Demetrius (with Polyperchon)<sup>5</sup> were entrusted with the task of taking Ora (Udegram). On the other hand, Curtius (VIII, 10, 22) simply reports that Alexander first arrived to Beira

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from being a reliable source of information: “I shall try to prove that Arrian was prone the errors of misunderstanding and faulty source conflation that one would expect in a secondary historian of antiquity” (117); “There are even more striking examples of Arrian’s maladroit use of sources in the narrative of Alexander’s Indus voyage” (127); “Above all, Arrian is too fallible in his handling of sources for his narrative ever to be dispensed from cross-examination. [...]e requires constant assessment against the rest of the tradition” (138-139). On the problematics concerning the itinerary of Alexander in Central Asia and India see e.g. Olivieri 1996: 45-78; Rapin 2017: 37-121 and Rapin – Grenet 2018: 141-181. The two main traditions on the eastern section of the campaigns of Alexander are the group of authors of the so-called *Vulgata* (which dates back to the IV-III century BC historian Cleitarchus, and was used by Curtius Rufus) and that of Arrian (who draws especially on Ptolemy and Aristobulus). Both traditions present contradictory data, but the *Vulgata* offers a more coherent narrative, while the source of Arrian often merges different geographical data resulting in misleading information. Thanks to the historical commentaries by Atkinson 1980, Atkinson 1994, Baynham 1998, and Atkinson-Yardley 2009, the importance of the work by Curtius Rufus as a reliable source is now widely accepted.

4 According to Arr. IV, 27.5 this happened after the conquest of Massaga, while Curt. VIII, 10.22 states that the column led by Coenus was sent to Bazira before this episode.

5 Bosworth 1995: 177.

where he left Coenus in charge of the siege and proceeded to Mazagae with the rest of his army.<sup>6</sup> However, he omits to give us the details about the end of the siege of Beira. From this point of view, Arrian’s description is more detailed as we learn that Coenus was facing great difficulties in taking the town because of its natural defenses and its fortifications. At this point, Alexander was about to head towards Bazira when he was informed that king Abisares was secretly sending troops in support to Ora. Thus, he decided to march against Ora and ordered Coenus to join him with the bulk of his army after leaving a garrison in a fortified position in order to prevent the inhabitants of Bazira to retake control of the region. Seeing that the greater part of the Macedonian army was leaving, the Bazirenes tried an attack against the garrison but they suffered heavy losses. Meanwhile, Alexander was able to take Ora at the first assault and when the news reached Bazira, the inhabitants left the town at once in order to seek refuge on Aornos. Between the capture of Massaga and that of Aornos, Arrian inserts a passage relating a siege of the town of Peucelaotis, which according to him lies not far from the Indus. From there Alexander moved to the town of Embolima, next to Aornos, which would serve as supply point for the Macedonian army during the siege of the rock. After the conquest of Aornos, Alexander invaded the territory controlled by the brother of king Assacenus, but after reaching the deserted town of Dyrta he learned that most of the inhabitants went to king Abisares seeking refuge. Then, he continued his march towards the Indus. On the other hand, the accounts of Curtius and Diodorus

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6 This information seems to strengthen the reconstruction of the itinerary of Alexander in Swat proposed by Olivieri 1996: pp. 54-57, who thinks that the first military objective of Alexander in Swat was Barikot.

focus on the military operations at Massaga and Aornos, while devoting a few lines to the conquest of Nora (i.e. Ora)<sup>7</sup> and other settlements in the area.<sup>8</sup> In addition, Curtius states that the arrival of Alexander at Embolima followed and did not precede the conquest of Aornos, and contrary to Arrian says that the site was the scene of another fight against a certain Erices who controlled the deep gorges through which the Macedonian had to cross in order to reach the bridge on the Indus. Diodorus, who employs the form Aphrices to refer to the man who controlled the area, relates the same episode in the same chronological order.<sup>9</sup> We can sum up the different itineraries in the following table:

### *Arrian*

Massaga → Ora → Bazira → Peucelaotis  
→ Embolima → Aornos → invasion of the  
territory controlled by a brother of king Assacenus

### *Diodorus*

Massaga → Ora and other unnamed  
settlements → Aornos → fight against Aphrices

### *Curtius Rufus*

Beira → Mazagae → Nora and other  
unnamed settlements → Aornos →  
Ecbolima, fight against Erices

Ilam or Pir-Sar?

The identification of Aornos with Mount Pir-Sar

7 Curt. VIII, 11.1.

8 Diod. XVII, 85.1.

9 On Erices/Aphrices see Heckel 2006: 40

was put forward by Sir Aurel Stein, who based his interpretation on the authority of Arrian. While being richer in details, the description of the itinerary of Alexander in Swat transmitted by Arrian is contradictory both geographically and chronologically because he tries unsuccessfully to conflate sources of different nature. While the itinerary related by Curtius and Diodorus presents a linear structure, Arrian introduces a military detour at Peucelaotis/Pushkalavati (Charsadda) that is incomprehensible in terms of strategy and opportunity as Hephaestion and Perdicca were already in the area and could intervene effectively while Alexander would have been forced to retrace his steps and take the risk of leaving the Swat unpacified.<sup>10</sup> Recent analysis of the historical geography of the area shows that the hypothesis of the existence of a town of the same name in Swat looks more like a stretch in order to preserve Arrian's authority.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, the narratives of Curtius Rufus and Diodorus appear to be more coherent, and one of the sources of Curtius appears to have had firsthand knowledge of local toponymy.<sup>12</sup> Mount Pir-Sar occupies quite an eccentric position once it is put in relation with the accounts of the ancient sources. In general, we see that Aornos is always placed at little distance to or around settlements that undoubtedly belong

10 See also Olivieri 1996: 71-72.

11 The existence of two Peucelaotis was put forward by Bosworth 1995, 183-184, but see in particular Rapin-Grenet 2018, 165-167. Both Strabo and Arrian, possibly following Megasthenes, thought that Peucelaotis was close to the junction of the Cophen and the Indus, while in reality it is located at the junction of the Swat and the Kabul rivers.

12 See below (Olivieri, this article).

to the Swat area: the Bazirenes abandoned their town at midnight and fled to the rock. The other barbarians did the same; after leaving their towns, all of them fled to the rock called Aornos (Arr. IV, 28.1). In this regard, it is worth noting that the later Metz Epitome (46) conflates Bazira – the toponym is corrupt in bagasdaram – and Aornos,<sup>13</sup> an error that can be easily understood if we assume that in the original sources the two toponyms as well as the events related to them were mentioned as being spatially and chronologically close to one another. After the conquest of Nora/Ora many strongholds were abandoned by their inhabitants who occupied in arms the rock called Aornos (Curt. VIII, 11.2). After the conquest of Massaga and a number of other cities Alexander came to the rock called Aornos. Here the surviving natives had taken refuge because of its great strength (Diod. XVII, 85.1). Today, Mount Ilam remains a significant landmark in Swat, visible from positions throughout the Swat valley, a point which I observed during my recent survey in 2019. Even Arrian (IV, 28.1) states that Aornos was a large mountain located in that very region [i.e. Swat]. On the southern side, Ilam dominates Buner with its freestanding 6,000 ft granite cliff. The mountain, with good weather, is clearly visible even from Swabi (which means from below the Ambe-

13 Metz Epitome, 46, *Hinc profectus †bagasdaram† oppidum devenit, quod dicebatur Hercules expugnare non potuisse. Hunc ubi barbari conspexerunt, in montem Aornum confugerunt...* “From there [i.e. Massaga] he [Alexander] arrived to the stronghold of *Bagasdaram* that even Hercules – so they say – was not able to conquer. When the barbarians saw him, they took refuge on Mount Aornos...”. Despite being a later document, the *Metz Epitome* draws on material from the first generation of the Alexander’s historians (for example, the work of Onesicritus, the eyewitness of the campaign of Alexander, is mentioned at §97). See Baynham 1995: 60-77; Bosworth 2000: 207-241; Baynham 2003: 15-16.

la pass, see below fn. 19). From Swat, Mount Ilam is reachable through different paths from Barikot, Udegram and the other settlements of the region (see Olivieri, this article). Thus, the sources show that the Bazirenes took refuge on Aornos together with the other inhabitants, and it is quite improbable that they went so far to the Pir-Sar (more than 60 km as the crow flies => 5 walking days). Nowhere it is said that the local inhabitants chose to go to Aornos because of its being far away from the advancing Macedonian army, nor that the Bazirenes escaped to their own rock (Mount Ilam) while the other people went to another one located on Aornos/Pir-Sar.<sup>14</sup> Utilizing the old edition of Arrian by Gronovius (1675),<sup>15</sup> Bosworth assumed that the sentence “[the Bazirenes] ... fled to the rock (ἔφυγον δὲ ἐς τὴν πέτραν)” was a gloss, but even if this was the case, the text does not imply that the rock chosen by the people of Bazira was different from that occupied by the other natives. Moreover, the text of Arrian does not make any distinction between the Bazirenes and the people of upper Swat valley. Quite the contrary, even after eliminating that sentence, the text confirms that the entirety of the survivors of the area went to one and the same place: they [i.e. the Bazirenes] abandoned their town. The other barbarians did the same: after leaving their towns, all of them fled to the rock called Aornos. Arrian insists on the fact that the totality (ξύμπαντες) of the inhabitants of the neighborhood went to Aornos, and immediately after he states that the rock is locat-

14 Arr. IV.28.1 ἀμφὶ μέσας νύκτας τὴν πόλιν ἐκλείπουσιν, ἔφυγον δὲ ἐς τὴν πέτραν. ὥς δὲ καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι βάρβαροι ἔπραττον: ἀπολιπόντες τὰς πόλεις ξύμπαντες ἔφευγον ἐς τὴν πέτραν τὴν ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ τὴν Ἄορνον καλουμένην. It is evident that the solution of the two rocks, proposed by Stein 1930: 30 has to be seen as a stretch of the Arrian text.

15 Bosworth 1995: 175.

ed in that very region (μέγα γάρ τι τοῦτο χρῆμα πέτρας ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ ταύτῃ ἐστὶ), not elsewhere in a far secluded area. Paradoxically, the first who elaborated this point was Aurel Stein, whose hypothesis on Pir-sar looked weaker to himself after his own tour in Swat: “In view of these local observations the suggestion appears to me justified that the place of safety sought by the fugitives from Bazira was much more likely to have been Mount Ilam than the distant Aornos by the Indus.”<sup>16</sup> About the feasibility of reaching the Pir-sar from Swat, Miangul Badshah wrote to Aurel Stein that “Swat was not the best and shortest way to reach the mountain.”<sup>17</sup> As for the identification of Aornos/Pir-Sar, the only element that the sources have in common is that the Indus would flow at its foot, more precisely next to its southern side.<sup>18</sup> However, Curtius contradicts this statement when he relates that it took 15 stages for Alexander to reach the Indus once he left the site of Embolima, a place which is said to be close to Aornos.<sup>19</sup> If the Indus really flowed at the foot of Aornos, Alexander’s itinerary towards the river would not be that long. The alleged proximity of Aornos to the Indus could be understandable if we took it metaphorically, as Aornos was the gate that allowed reaching the Indus Valley via Buner without encountering

any geographical obstacle.<sup>20</sup> Such a solution does not sound too farfetched in the light of the new studies of Common Sense Geography that focus on the perception and representation of space in Antiquity.<sup>21</sup> In this regard, Xenophon provides an interesting parallel when describing the 10.000 Greeks shouting in joy “The Sea! The Sea!” as they catch sight of the Black Sea.<sup>22</sup> As Thomas Poiss points out “The spot where all this happened never has been identified exactly, although behind Trabzon there is only one pass (2036 m, at Mt. Zigana Dag, 2650m) through the Pontic mountain range raising up to a height of 3000 m. But the coast is 50 km ahead and can be reached from there only after five days of marching. Xenophon gives us not the least hint how far away, narrow and barely distinct was the shimmering stretch of the horizon, which caused such joy to the Greeks”.<sup>23</sup> Thus, while the sea in Xenophon’s account seems to lie very close to the mountain, it was actually much farther away. On the other hand, Common Sense Geography could offer an alternative explanation of why Arrian and others said that the Indus flowed close to Aornos. In fact, we have to keep in mind that the map of the Alexander’s itinerary in Central Asia and India as reported by the Classical sources underwent a series of significant deformations and duplications in local toponymy

16 Stein 1930: 30.

17 Olivieri 2015a: 59.

18 Curt. VIII, 11.7; Diod. XVII, 85.3; Strabo XV,1.8.

19 Embolima (skt. *Ambulima*) could be identified with modern Ambela, see Eggermont 1970: 90-94 (see below, Olivieri, this article). Even Bosworth 1995: 185 admits that this would be a suitable location as provisioning centre for the army of Alexander if Aornos was located at Mount Ilam but this argument would mean contradicting Arrian’s tradition about the proximity of the Indus to Aornos as well as Stein’s identification of Aornos with Mount Pir-Sar. Thus, he opts for Kabulgram at 30 km NE of Ambela.

20 See Olivieri 1996: 65.

21 See Geus – Thierin 2014: 2-10, especially 4: “We may cite the following as examples of particular human perceptions: the so-called ‘hodological’ orientation according to routes and streets; the alignment of administrative and religious buildings according to cardinal or compass points and sacral axis; or the negligence of the third dimension, the height, in our everyday experience of space; or the impact of insularity, the real or felt isolation of peoples and individuals who inhabit islands.”

22 Xen. *Anab.* 4.7.19–25.

23 Poiss 2014: 147.

and hydronymy,<sup>24</sup> so it is plausible to posit that the river flowing in proximity of Aornos was not the Indus but another one. A quick look to a map of the area of Mount Ilam will reveal the existence of a major watercourse flowing close to the mountain, i.e. the Barandu (Buner). This river, which flows south and south-east of the Ilam (as Diod. XVII, 85.3 and Strabo XV, 1.8 say of the Indus) and almost at its foot (radices eius, to say it with Curtius' words), is an important affluent of the Indus that ends its course above Amb.<sup>25</sup> It is possible that the course of the Barandu was considered identical to that of the Indus already at the time of the march of Alexander or later. This solution would be coherent with Eggermont's identification of the city of Dyrta (Arr. IV, 30.5) with modern Daggar, south-east of Ilam.

OC

### Archaeology, topography and the sources

Barikot plays a key role in the theatre of the Macedonian operations in late summer of 327 BC. The importance of the site, where the Italian Archaeological Mission has been working since the 70s, has been growing year by year, and it is now regarded

24 Among the many examples of misplacement/confusion of rivers of Central Asia, we may cite the cases of the Oxus, the Ochus, and the Dargomanes in Bactria-Sogdiana (Rapin 1998: 203-204); as for the confused hydrography of Swat in Arrian see Olivieri 1996: 58-61.

25 It is worth noting that Amb was the place that according to Stein 1930: 71 could be identified with Embolima, but Bosworth 1995: 185 realized that this would mean to put in question the identification of Aornos/Pir-Sar because: "Amb is too far south (about the same distance as Ambela)". Amb, until 1969 the capital town of the homonymous Princely State, was a major fording-place along the Indus until the construction of the Tarbela dam in the 70s of the last century (Olivieri, pers. comm.).

as the key site not only for the sequence of Swat, but more generally for the whole of Gandhara. In December 2019, the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Govt of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, has acquired all of the available land (6.2 ha) of this precious site against the considerable sum of Pak Rs 164m. The acquired land corresponds to approximately half of the surface of the ancient site. The protected area is even larger and it includes the acropolis (for a total of 8 ha.).

### The role of Barikot

The archaeological and chrono-stratigraphic evidence of the site is based on an accurate excavation methodology and on a sound sequence of radiocarbon dates.<sup>26</sup> These data are becoming even more relevant when seen in light of the now certain identification of Barikot with the ancient city known as Bazira (Arr. IV 27, 1-3) or Beira (Curt. VIII 10.22).<sup>27</sup> The first to associate the latter with Bazira/Beira was Sir Aurel Stein (Stein 1930: 28-29), who visited Swat in March-May 1926 (on this see Olivieri 2015a). The name of the ancient city, Vajirasthāna, was later reported in a Brāhmī-Śāradā inscription (c. 10th century) from Barikot hilltop (studied by O. von Hinüber in Callieri and Olivieri 2020). The medieval toponym can be interpreted as "the sthāna ([fortified] place) of Vajra/Vajira" (ibid.). It was then Giuseppe Tucci who convincingly associated the late toponym "Vajirasthāna" with the Greek form Βάζιρα (Tucci 1958: 296, fn. 28; Tucci 1977).

26 The new radiocarbon dates (26 new AMS-C14 dates) are published in Olivieri *et al.* 2019.

27 In contrast with what I too earlier thought (Olivieri 1996: 50). The new archaeological and archival data (e.g. Olivieri 2015a) became available after 2015. That explains why R. Rolliger did not include them in his erudite study on the Aornos (2014).

The apparent diglossia reported by the two Classical authors can be explained as the local Gandhari (Prakrit) version (“va(y)ra”) of the official Sanskrit name “vajra”. Curtius informed us that “Beira” was how actually the locals pronounced the name of their town: “Beira incolae vocant” (Curt. VIII 10.22). This reveals that Curtius had some first-hand source at his disposal. This point makes especially significant the connected information that Beira is defined as “urbs opulenta” (ibid.), as we will see shortly. The missing element for the association between Βάζιρα and Beira was given by Stefan Baums: “Given that the best approximation for the pronunciation of va(y)ira is [ve(j)irə], the information provided by Curtius Rufus on the pronunciation of the local name [Beira] seems extremely precise, thus revealing that the source that he used was particularly reliable on this point” (Baums in Tribulato and Olivieri 2017: 129; see also Baums 2019: 169-170). One should note that the relevance and consistency of Curtius Rufus as a source for Alexander’s movements in Swat is extremely strong. Without knowing how true these details were, Curtius’ potential reliability was even admitted by Sir Aurel Stein in his letter written in 1933 to B.J. Gould, Malakand Political Agent (Olivieri 2015a: 63).<sup>28</sup>

But why did Alexander go to Swat and besiege Bazira/Beira? Recent archaeological fieldwork has revealed that the foundation at Barikot of a proper city, interpreted now as the centre of an

agrarian colony, occurred as early as the 6th century BC (Olivieri et al. 2019). That was the period of the development of the early historic polities of NW India within the expanding dynamic trading/excise policy of the Achaemenids, when Taxila and the trans-Indus became an integral part of the Indian heartland (Salomon 2019: 15). The foundation of the early city at Barikot, with its specialized industries (agriculture and glass-production are well documented<sup>29</sup>), saw also the presence of both Iranian and Indo-Gangetic ceramic forms locally produced at the site (Iori 2019). The wealth of these agrarian colonies, such as Barikot, although directly linked to the strength of the empires or regional powers, did not depend totally on them. At Barikot, Iranian pottery forms disappeared completely after 350 BC, a fact that must be paralleled with the progressive collapse of the Achaemenid system of power at the eastern fringes of the Empire.<sup>30</sup> Although the archaeological evidence shows a temporary contraction, crops at the site should have been copious as usual, since the city is described by a first-hand source of Curtius Rufus as opulenta, a term clearly indicating agricultural wealth, which is otherwise very parsimoniously utilized in his *Historiae*.<sup>31</sup> On the basis of the economic importance of the Swat valley, the detour of Alexander in Swat can be explained primarily by the necessity of providing his army with food resources. He entered Swat at the time of the second (kharif) yield, when rice was harvested. Moreover, we know from a first-hand source of

28 “[...] If only Curtius’ topographical details could be relied upon there ought to be a fair chance of locating the site [of Massaga]”. In the same article (Olivieri 2015a) I showed beyond any doubt that Sir Aurel Stein was convinced that Pirsar was the Aornos, years before he actually saw the mountain (*infra*: 58-59). It is not necessary to reiterate here that the entire reconstruction of the events made by Stein is based on the text of Arrian (see above).

29 Ongoing studies by a team directed by Ivana Angelini (University of Padova).

30 See e.g. Curt. VIII 10.1: “*gentium finitimarum reguli*”.

31 Only for Tarsos, Babylonia, Persepolis, and Bactra. I owe this information to our colleague Luisa Prandi of the University of Verona.

Arrian –Alexander’s general and future king of Egypt, Ptolemy I Soter – that c. 230,000 oxen were seized in Swat by the Macedonians (Arr. IV, 25.4).

Clearly in Alexander’s mind the establishment of Macedonian control was not going to be ephemeral. According to Arrian (IV, 28.4) Alexander built fortresses (phouria) at Ora (modern Udegram, see below) and Massaga for the defence of the region, and fortified the city of Bazira (τὰ μὲν δὴ Ὀρα καὶ τὰ Μάσσαγα φρούρια ἐποίησεν ἐπὶ τῆ χώρᾳ, τὰ Βάζιρα δὲ <τῆν> πόλιν ἐξετείχισε).

On that regard, one should note that at Barikot, the abandoned remains of the earlier Iron Age settlement were sealed, in trench BKG 12 (see Olivieri 2015b), by a thick deposit, interpreted as the levelling of a large rammed earth structure upon which the Indo-Greek defensive wall was built. This deposit, dated 369–201 100% 2σ cal BC [BCE], was spread over the upper edges of the defensive ditch, suggesting that the area was already fortified with a ditch before the construction of the Indo-Greek urban fortification (c. 150-120 BC).<sup>32</sup>

### “Gradus ad Aornon”. The paths to the mountain

Once the position of Bazira/Beira is established, the sequence of the events narrated by Curtius Rufus can easily be followed as proposed above (Coloru, this article). However, one point should be noted on the routes taken to Aornos (gradus ad Aornon) by the inhabitants of Bazira/Beira and the upper Swat valley.<sup>33</sup> First, it is evident that the

inhabitants of Bazira/Beira and those of the other towns escaped to Mount Aornos in two different – albeit consecutive – moments. It is also clear that the inhabitants of the towns upstream of Bazira/Beira had to choose a different path to reach that safe place.

Most probably the inhabitants of Bazira/Beira might have reached the mountain following the shortest route from the town along the Karakar valley (10 km = > 1 walking day). The “other Asakenoi” would have been prevented from following the same route because of the presence of Alexander’s army in the Swat valley between Bazira/Beira and the possible location of Massaga (i.e the area around Mingora). From here there is actually a second path through which the mountain can be easily reached. That path follows the Saidu valley, and steadily reaches the village of Ilam and the peak of the mountain. I have tried both paths and found the second one even easier and faster than the first one, although it is twice as long.<sup>34</sup>

Another source, which is generally not considered in dealing with these questions, should be discussed here as the information it provides may be extremely useful. The itinerary of the Tibetan pilgrim O rgyan pa in Swat/Uddiyana (second half

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versity of Oxford, who is the re-discoverer of this fortunate paraphrase (“Steps toward Aornos”), which was first coined by James Abbot for his article on Mount Mahaban/Aornos in the *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal* (1854) “on the title of an aide to Latin verse composition, *Gradus ad Parnassum*, “Steps toward Parnassus”, that the young Abbott would certainly have encountered at school in Blackheath” (Morgan, see below). L. Morgan used the paraphrase as a title for his masterly analysis on Mount Ilam and Aornos posted on his web site (at the following link: <https://llewelynmorgan.com/2017/05/08/%EF%B%BFgradus-ad-aornum>).

32 These radiocarbon data were first communicated to the scientific community at the EASAA Conference held in Cardiff in 2016 (Olivieri and Iori 2020).

33 I thank our colleague Llewelyn Morgan of the Uni-

34 With this path, in three instances I could reach to the top of Mount Ilam and come back to Mingora in the same day.

of 13th Century) is described in his travelogue translated by Tucci (1940<sup>3</sup>; see also Id. 1977). O rgyan pa's itinerary started from Tibet, passed through the valleys of Lulu-Lahul-Chamba and reached the Punjab plain near Jhelum. There, he crossed that river and headed towards the modern Malot in the Salt Range. Once O rgyan pa crossed the Indus he believed that he had entered Uddiyana, then after c. 15 km (= 1 walking day; Tucci 1940<sup>3</sup>: 14) he stopped first near Kalabur/Kalapur, then near Kaboko (both towns are unidentified). Then he entered in Buner (in the text: "Bhonele"), and, forded a river (Barandu?), halted at Siddhapur (Daggar?). From there in one day he reached K'a rag k 'ar (Karakar) where there was (as there is today) a boundary limit.

According to my reconstruction (see Olivieri 2017) from the Karakar top O rgyan pa – having Mount Ilam (Ilo) to his right-hand side – contemplated the green valley of the Kodambhar, which should be the ancient name of the Karakar River.<sup>35</sup> From the Karakar top he moved to the core of Uddiyana. Since in the itinerary it is evident that O rgyan pa did not enter the Karakar to reach the Swat valley (which is not mentioned), it is certain that O rgyan pa followed the traditional eastern route which, from Karakar, reaches Saidu via Sarbab. From there he must have descended into the Saidu valley where he easily reached the sanctuary of Dhumat 'ala, which was "the core of the

miraculous country of U rgyan [Uddiyana]". This place was identified by Tucci with Butkara I (Tucci 1940<sup>3</sup>: 29, fn. 103; Id. 1958: 65, 78, fn. 12; Id. 1977: 177, 227, fn. 19), the great Buddhist sanctuary excavated by D. Faccenna in the outskirts of Mingora (Faccenna 1980-1981; Iori and Olivieri 2016). From Dhumat 'ala the pilgrim could quickly reach Manglawar (Maṅgalaor), where once was the "temple founded by king Indrabhoti [Indrabhuti]", which was the final destination of his journey.

In practice, O rgyan pa must have followed the same route which was chosen, in the opposite direction, by the other Assakenoi "after leaving their towns". On the greater scale, the Tibetan pilgrim, on his way to Swat from the Indus, followed the same itinerary that Alexander's army might have also followed to reach the Indus from Swat. This was certainly (and still is) the most natural and direct route to the Indus: it crosses first Buner and then the Ambela pass, where Ecbolima – another step on the Alexander's march to the Indus – should certainly be located (see ref. in Olivieri 1996: 69, fn. 34).

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35 Standing on the top of Karakar, O rgyan pa says that "to the east there is the mountain Ilo [...] the foremost of all mountains of Jambudvīpa. There is no medical herb growing on the earth, which does not grow there. It is charming on account of its herbs, stalks, leaves and flowers. *Sarabhas* [a mythological animal, similar to a gryphon] and other antelopes wander there quite freely. There are many gardens of grape, beautiful birds of every kind and of gracious colours make a deep chattering" (Tucci 1940<sup>3</sup>: 28)".

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Figures

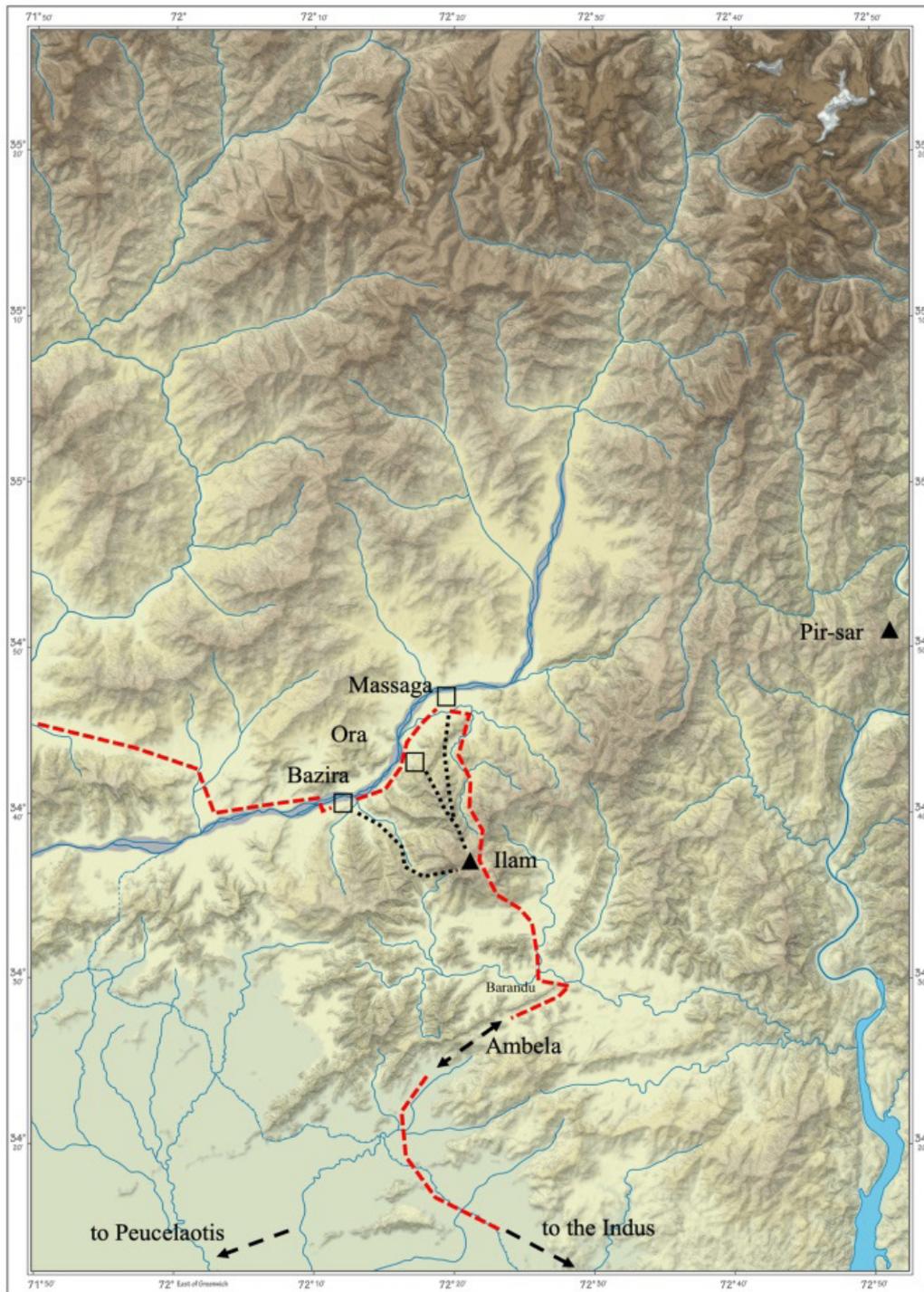


Fig. 1 – Map showing the sites mentioned in the article, the two paths to Mount Ilam (dotted line, black), and our reconstruction of the Macedonian army operations in Summer/Autumn 327 BC(dashed line, red) (Map: Courtesy ISMEO/University of Vienna; K. Kriz and D. Nell, elaborated by LMO).

Plates



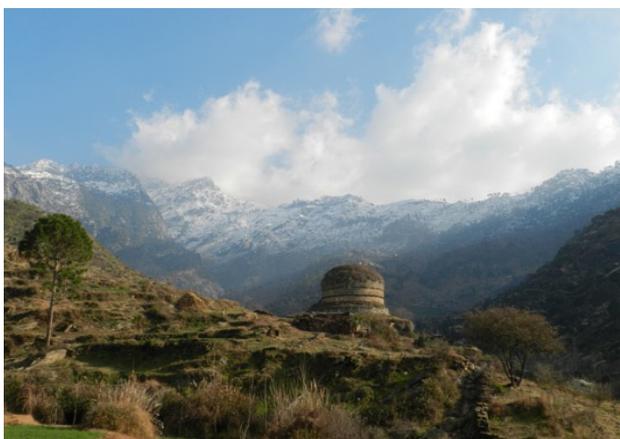
Pl. 4 – The peak of Mount Ilam, SW side (Buner), seen from below (Photo: LMO 2012).



Pls. 1-2 - Mount Ilam, N side, as seen from Bazira/Beira. (Photos LMO 2016 and OC 2019).



Pl. 5 – In the background the Ambela Pass (from the SW side of Mount Ilam) (photo: LMO 2012).



Pl. 3 - The peak of Mount Ilam, NW side (Amluk-dara), seen from below (Photo: LMO 2012).



Pl. 6 - The Swat Valley and the acropolis of Barikot seen from WSW. In the background the plain area of Mingora where Massaga was probably located. In between, on the right side (left bank) lies Udegram (Ora) (see Fig. 1) (Photo: Carla Biagioli 2016).



Pl. 7 - The acropolis of Barikot seen from SSE, from the N side of Mount Ilam (Photo: LMO 2012).