

## GILGIT (AND SWAT)

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The previous issue (Vol VII, No 3) of *Bulletin of Tibetology* has a learned paper entitled "Gilgit in Ancient Times". This study, as stated in its concluding paragraph, "shows how important Baltistan and Gilgit have been in the political, diplomatic and military history of Tibet, China, Kashgharia, Tukharistan, Kapisa, Gandhara, Kashmir and North India in ancient times". Tibet heads the list of countries enumerated here. The reason for this is to be found in the cultural history as recorded in Tibetan tradition and not in the political history as narrated in Chinese *Annals* or in Sanskrit *River of Kings*. I thus propose to present the cultural relations of Gilgit (and Swat) with Tibet in ancient times.

Gilgit as a strategic summit is a comparatively modern affair and may be traced from 1860s when Britain and Russia were nearing each other in Inner Asia. I have no on-the-ground knowledge of Gilgit or Swat; the nearest point I have been towards Gilgit is Leh; the nearest point I have been towards Swat is Taxila. For geographical data of Gilgit and Swat I depend on the observations of explorers and scholars like Alexander Cunningham, Frederic Drew, Reginald Schomberg, Clarmont Skrine, Olaf Caroe, KPS Menon and above all Aurel Stein. Inferences drawn are mine. For cultural history of Gilgit (and Swat), I add my own observations to the findings of authorities like SCHLAGINTWET, FRANCKE, THOMAS, TUCCI, DUTT and STEIN.

### GILGIT LOCATION & AREA

Gilgit township is on the river Gilgit near northern latitude 35.55 and eastern longitude 74.15; Gilgit river joins Indus thirty miles down SE. A much larger area than the township has from time to time been known as Gilgit. Ever since the occupation of Gilgit by Pakistan raiders (1947-48), few scholars have been permitted to Gilgit. Arnold Toynbee visited in 1960. Vide *Between Oxus and Jumna* (Oxford 1961) pp 131-4. Toynbee however is not a specialist in Inner Asia or Buddhism. In 1965 summer, a specialist scholar of Tibeto-Burman languages, Richard Keith Sprigg was issued permit for Gilgit-Baltistan but eventually returned from Rawalpindi. That was on the eve of Pakistan's War on India.

For a description of Gilgit Agency of Kashmir State prior to Pakistan occupation, the account from the then current edition of official publication *Aitchison's Treaties* (Vol XII 1929 in usage till British withdrew in 1947) is extracted:

“The Gilgit Agency comprises the following districts:—

1. The Gilgit Wazarat, which includes the Tahsil of Gilgit (including Bunji) and the Niabat of Astor.
2. The States of Hunza and Nagar.
3. The Shinaki republics of the Chilas district in the Indus valley.
4. The Governorship of Punial.
5. The Governorship of Yasin.
6. The Governorship of Kuh-Ghizar.
7. The Governorship of Ishkoman.

The Gilgit Wazarat is administered by Kashmir State officials. Hunza and Nagar enjoy an internal autonomy which is complete, and the other areas one varying in degree”. These districts “have all acknowledged the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir as their suzerain, and they all pay him some form of tribute”.

Gilgit Agency thus stretches from Baltistan-Tibet in the east to Swat-Dir-Chitral in the west. In layman's language Gilgit Agency is situated between Tibetan and Pathan areas. The political boundaries of Gilgit Agency do not by any means suggest its ethno-linguistic frontiers. From ethno-linguistic considerations it is as difficult to demarcate Gilgit's eastern frontiers as its western frontiers. Eastern parts of Gilgit are in Tibetan world while its western parts are in Pathan world. In ancient and medieval times Gilgit was the transit post between Bhota (Tibet) and Suvastu (Swat). It was a transit post in both commercial and cultural context. Gilgit's strategic importance is a fact of modern history. Alexander of Macedon made a push upto easternmost Swat (Arrian's Aornos identified with Pir Sar by Stein) but had no reason to probe towards Gilgit, though the land of Hyperboreans would be due north of Gilgit.

Though as a place name, either in Sanskrit or in Tibetan, Gilgit is not much ancient, the confluence of the rivers (Gilgit and Indus) obviously made it an important point from ancientmost times; besides

the site was a convenient stage between passes in the north and the south. A part of the Central Asian traffic through the Indus valley would therefore halt at Gilgit. It would not be unreasonable to associate Gilgit with the products and wares of Central Asia (and Tibet) found in the pre-historic sites like Harappa and Mohenjodaro. In later times Gilgit was more important as a transit post in cultural intercourse of peoples. In propagation as well as development of Mahayana, Gilgit (and Swat) had a distinct role. Earlier Asokan missionaries to Khotan possibly passed through Gilgit.

### SINDHU सिन्धु

Among the tributaries of the Indus are rivers Gilgit and Swat and the two adjacent valleys were the westernmost extension of Tibetan world till Mahayana came to an end first in Swat and then in Gilgit. For pilgrims from China, Galalata (Gilgit) to Suvastu (Swat) was the convenient route for entry into Gandhara. The "hanging passages" and "impassable gorges" of Chinese accounts may be identified with similar spots between Gilgit and Swat. Vide Petech (L): *Northern India according to the Shui-ching-chu* (Rome 1950). The hazardous journey was obligatory if Uddiyana in Suvastu was not to be omitted.

Indus river has a special sanctity for the Tibetans. Of the four legendary rivers arising near Kailas (Mansarovar), Indus is a constant mention and a firm fact. Vide Wylie (T.V.): *The Geography of Tibet* etc (Rome 1962). The river, or the valley, must have been Tibet's link with Sindhu par excellence, viz, the ocean, from earliest times. Ideas as well as articles might have moved between Indus Valley and Western Tibet. Avalokitesvara as well as Tara could have come to Tibet via Swat and Gilgit.

Avalokitesvara's seat Potalaka, as described in Mahayana Sanskrit literature, is generally located in South India and is so corroborated in Tibetan tradition. There were however several places called Potala. One such was Tatta a town in Sind not far from the mouth of the Indus. Tatta as 'potala' (harbour) could be reached from Western Tibet via Gilgit and Swat. This port of Sindhu Sauvira was earlier known as Patala and was noticed by Greek geographer Agatharchides (c. 110 B.C.). A new name, with perhaps a new site, was al-Daybu at the time of Arab conquest of Sindhu Sauvira. Vide Hourani (G.F.): *Arab Seafaring in the Indian Ocean in Ancient and Early Medieval Times* (Princeton 1951) pp 18-23, 53 and 63. Potala (or Patala) was by then a mystic spot for

those who adored the sanctity of Sindhu. For Patala and Sindhu Sauvira in Saka-Kushana times see Raychaudhuri (H.C.): *Political History of Ancient India* (Calcutta 1953) and Sircar (D.C.): *Cosmography and Geography in Early Indian Literature* (Calcutta 1967).

The northern regions of Indus valley are also known to be the homeland of Tara; Ladakh, Baltistan, Gilgit and Khotan are suggested as the provenance. Vide Hirananda Shastri: *The Origin and Cult of Tara* (Archaeological Survey of India 1925). I would add Swat to this list of sites as Uddiyana was undoubtedly an equally famous centre of Tantra and Tara worship; Uddiyana's antiquity was as great in Tibetan tradition as that of Potala. For Devi (Tara) in Sauvira see Raychaudhuri, *op. cit.*

### URGYAN ཡུ་རྟལ་ ཨོ་རྟལ་

Uddiyana or Urgyan is generally located in Swat valley. In Tibetan tradition the Buddha Sakyamuni made a prophecy at the time of his Nirvana that a much wiser and a more powerful Buddha would be born in a lotus in the Dhanakosha lake of Urgyan. Guru Rimpoche Padmasambhava, who preached Tantrik Buddhism all over the Himalayas and in Tibet in the eighth century of Christian era, is admitted to be the same incarnation. As late as the seventeenth century pilgrims from Tibet did visit Swat valley in quest of Padmasambhava's birthplace. This pilgrimage ceased altogether when Buddhism disappeared from the west of Ladakh, that is, from Baltistan and Gilgit. When active contacts ceased Urgyan or Uddiyana became "a kind of magic-land for many Tibetan pilgrims" not unlike Shambala. Vide Tucci (G): *Travels of Tibetan Pilgrims in the Swat Valley* (Calcutta 1940).

Like Shambala, Uddiyana was "transformed into a fairyland of which the geographical and historical reality faded and decayed" (Tucci). While the historical reality of Uddiyana remained obscure till the archaeological explorations of this century, the geographical reality was alive in Pathan poems of later days. To Khushhal Khan Khatak, Swat was a paradise on earth, lovelier than Kabul and more like Kashmir.

“In climate it is glorious, lovelier far than Kabul,  
 Bleak is Kabul, Swat is mild and gentle,  
 Its air and verdure are like unto Kashmir,  
 Though it spreads not out so finely;  
 In every home there are cascades and fountains,  
 Fine cities there are, fine dwellings, and fair markets,  
 Such a country, with such a clime and such streams,  
 Wherein every place is by nature a garden of flowers”

Trans. Caroe

BRU-ZA ལྷ་ཤིང་གི་ ལྷ་ལྷོ་གི་ ལྷ་ལྷོ་གི་ ལྷ་ལྷོ་གི་ ལྷ་ལྷོ་གི་

“Bru-za in Gilgit” is how Ladakhi chronicles would locate another mystic land. Vide Francke (A.H.): *Antiquities of Indian Tibet*, Vol II (Calcutta 1926), pp 172-3. Gilgit in Ladakhi tradition would include besides Gilgit Wazarat, the States of Hunza and Nagar and perhaps even some western States towards Swat. A leading authority on history and culture of Tibet, Hugh Richardson, narrows down the area of Bru-za to Hunza.

Gilgit, spelt Gyl-gyid by Cunningham and Gyl-gyid or Gyi lid by Francke, is derived from the river with same name also spelt Gying-yal. Francke: op.cit, pp 176-7. The river valley has no doubt several times changed its dimensions and terrain through centuries. As a link between Tibetan areas on the east and Pathan areas on the west, the river valley continued its own role till the seventeenth century.

Gilgit was also a link between Tokhar-speaking men in the north and Sanskrit-speaking men in the south. When in Kushana times Buddhism commenced its voyage across the Pamirs, the valleys of Swat and Gilgit were on the route. So Bru-za was a centre for propagation of Buddhism a few centuries before Buddhism established itself in Tibet. Bru-za, along with Zhang-zhung and Li-yul, was an ancient centre of civilization as recorded in pre-Buddhist tradition of Tibet. Before the monks and scholars from Kashmir would begin their missionary travels for Khotan, Kashgar or Kucha they must have made Bru-za itself a centre of Buddhism, In this process many pre-Buddhist ideas and rituals might have been accommodated as did Padmasambhava later. Thus Bru-za, the mystic land, is celebrated both in Bon and Buddhist traditions of Tibet. Thus we are presented with the curious fact that

in the eighth and ninth centuries (Christian era) fugitive Buddhist monks from Khotan as well as fugitive Bon priests from Tibet sought asylum in Bru-za.

Helmut Hoffmann has worked on the literature concerning Bru-za and a part of his work is found in his English publication *The Religions of Tibet* (London 1961). It may be noted here that both Uddiyana and Bru-za are associated with the wanderings of Padmasambhava, that many Nyingma texts are known to be translations from originals in the languages of Uddiyana and Bru-za, that some obscure contents of Kanjur are claimed to be from Bru-za script and that Sakya Pandita (1182-1251) had among his accomplishments "mastery of Bru-za idiom".

Tibetan documents discovered in Tun Huang contain significant references to Bru-za. Vide Thomas (F.W.): *Tibetan Literary Texts and Documents Concerning Chinese Turkestan* 2 Vols (London 1935-1951) *The Prophecy of Samghavardhana* says that the monks of Tokhar and Kashmir being vexed by unbelieving will go to the Bru-za country. *The Mirror depicting the Royal Lineage* refers to the Bon priests of Bru-za and Zhang Zhung. Some references suggest that Bru-za might have extended to Khotan for sometime. There is also reference to Padmasambhava's visit to Bru-za.

#### GILGIT MANUSCRIPTS

Discovery of archaeological objects and antiquities in the State of Jammu and Kashmir began towards the end of the nineteenth century. An account of the archaeological explorations and preserved monuments till 1930 will be found in Kak (R.C.): *Ancient Monuments of Kashmir* (London 1933).

The discovery of the Gilgit Manuscripts was announced by Sir Aurel Stein in the *Calcutta Statesman* of 24 July 1931. Some shepherds "watching flocks above Naupur village, about two miles west of Gilgit Cantonment, are said to have cleared a piece of timber sticking out on the top of a small stone-covered mound. Further digging laid bare a circular chamber within the ruins of a Buddhist stupa filled with hundreds of small votive stupas and relief plaques common in Central Asia and Tibet....In the course of the excavation a great mass of ancient manuscripts came to light closely packed in what appears to have been a wooden box....The palaeographic indications of some of the mss. suggest that they may date back to the sixth century A.D."

The great savant Sylvain Levi evinced much interest in this discovery and another Central Asian antiquarian Hackin visited the spot of finds. The Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Dewan Bahadur (later Sir) Gopaldaswamy Ayyangar, entrusted Professor Nalinaksha Dutt, the eminent Buddhist scholar of Calcutta University, with the work of deciphering and publishing the manuscripts. Dutt's work came out in eight books, *Gilgit Manuscripts* (Srinagar 1939-Calcutta 1959). The contents, with extensive notes, constitute an important source for the history of Buddhism, particularly about the interrelation between Mahayana and Hinayana before the spread of Buddhism in Tibet.

It is reported that the Government of Pakistan found several manuscripts after its occupation of Baltistan and Gilgit. Pakistan archaeologists having no interest in reading such manuscripts, these new finds were handed over to Istituto Italiano per il Medio et Estremo Oriente in Rome. Dr Edward Conze has edited some.

### NOT FOR SILK

In medieval times Gilgit lost much of its importance as a trade post.

There is a current notion that both in ancient and medieval times Gilgit was a point on the famous Silk Road. This notion is altogether due to a misconception about Silk Road: the caravan routes branching out of the Silk Road are often erroneously called Silk Roads. Gilgit-Kashgar (& Yarkand) road was a southern feeder of the Silk Road which crossed through Turkistan, without detour, between Yu-men (Jade Gate) in the east and Marakanda (Samarkand) in the west. Gilgit-Kashgar (& Yarkand) road thrived on wool, dry fruits and stud. Even then Gilgit was not attractive to the British traders in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the opinion of an Indian authority on the British Period of Indian history, explorations of Moorcroft and Trebeck in the Western Himalayas did not promise as much as the earlier probes of Bogle and Turner in the Eastern Himalayas. Vide Sinha (Narendra Krishna): *The Economic History of Bengal 1793-1848*, Vol III (Calcutta 1970), p 50. Right from beginning the British probes for trade across the Himalayas were, in my submission, intended to reach China overland. If Gilgit was on the Silk Road, the East India Company and later the British Crown would not have ignored an opening through Gilgit, Kashgar and Yarkand. Instead the British authorities in India engaged in a systematic penetration through Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan for trade

with China. Much information on this aspect of Anglo-Chinese relations from the middle of the nineteenth century will be found in the forthcoming works of two young scholars of Calcutta University: Arabinda Deb and Jahar Sen. I need not anticipate their findings here in my words. I would however emphasize that Gilgit gained importance in British esteem in the second half of the nineteenth century for strategic reasons and not as an ancient post on the Silk Road.

Russian expansion in Turkistan, followed by Russian visitors to the Pamirs, was not a welcome situation for the British Empire in Asia. In addition to the Resident for Jammu & Kashmir at Srinagar, the British stationed in 1877 an Agent at Gilgit and developed the roads towards Swat-Dir-Chitral. Kashgar and Yarkand routes were also developed. In 1893 a Special Assistant to the Resident for Jammu & Kashmir was stationed in Kashgar. In 1904 the post was upgraded to His Britannic Majesty's Consul; in 1911 redesignated as Consul General. The Consulate at Kashgar continued till the British withdrawal from India.

From 1893 to 1947 Gilgit flourished as a transit post for Central Asian trade but never lost its strategic value. Gilgit was useful for obscure, though disreputable, purpose also. In the third decade of this century, the tribal gunrunners in the pay of His Britannic Majesty's Consul General, reached through Swat and Gilgit, British arms for the Chinese Governor of Sinkiang. These arms were used to suppress the native Moslem rebellion against the Chinese rule. The Gilgit highway had then become so strategic that in 1935 the Maharaja of Jammu & Kashmir was obliged to grant a sixty years' lease of Gilgit Agency to the British Crown.

In 1947-48 Pakistan invaded and occupied Gilgit and Baltistan. The raiders came from Swat-Dir-Dir-Chitral following the ancient tracks improved by the British. The contending World Powers in the Cold War promptly recognized Gilgit as a strategic summit. Its Tibetan past is now recalled in the usage Chos for Islam in certain dialects of Gilgit and Baltistan.

For modern history of Gilgit see Fisher (M.W.), Rose (L.E.) and Huttenback (R.A.): *Himalayan Battleground* (New York 1963) and Banzai (P.N.K.): *A History of Kashmir* (Delhi 1962). For ancient history, the monumental works of Aurel Stein are the indispensable authority; two particularly *The Ruins of Desert Cathay* (London 1912) and *Innermost Asia* (London 1928) describe the routes and passes in a

changing terrain. Menon (K.P.S.): *Delhi-Chungking* (Oxford 1947) is a fascinating account of the route from Srinagar to Kashgar. For Gilgit, Hunza, Nagar, Kashgar and Yarkand see Skrine (C.P.): *Chinese Central Asia* (London 1926) and Schomberg (R.C.F.): *Between the Oxus and the Indus* (London 1935). For Swat-Dir-Chitral and the Pathan tribes, ancient or modern, Caroe (O): *The Pathans* (London 1958) is the authority. Alder (G.J.): *British India's Northern Frontier 1865-1895* (London 1963) gives the inter-connections between Gilgit and Sw at in the nineteenth century.

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