

1 The Site

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1.1 The Location and the Toponym

The site of Saidu Shafif I lies in the Swat Valley, in the north of Pakistan, and more precisely in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province (previously known as the North-West Frontier Province, NWFP), at the foot of the Hindukush [pl. I]. Saidu Sharif I, henceforth abbreviated as ‘Saidu’, is a Buddhist sanctuary situated at the bottom of a steep valley which bifurcates before the homonymous river, not far from its point of confluence with the Swat River (see Faccenna 1995a, fig. 2) [figs 6-8]. The area lies to the south-east of an ancient built-up area, the great capital, whose remains extend under the urban fabric of the modern town of Mingora (see Iori, Olivieri 2016), known in the early Chinese sources as Mengjieli [pls II-III]. In the neighbourhood of Mengjieli stands the great sanctuary known to both Chinese and Tibetan pilgrims, which according to Giuseppe Tucci (1958) is Butkara I.¹

1 Known as Tuoluo in Song Yun. Xuanzang records that it stood to the north of the city, while evidently it stands to the east. Actually, to the north of Mengjieli (Mingora) flows the river Swat. Xuanzang’s error may be due to the fact that if an observer was approaching the city (from downstream, i.e. from the south-west), he would have the (correct) impression that the site of Butkara I lay beyond the city, and thus, imagining the direction of the river Swat, to the north. Actually, in the stretch at Mingora the river describes a loop to flow south-west, and no longer southwards. And indeed, as I have noted on various occasions, above all in my early years of survey, this sharp change in the direction of the river, if not borne in mind, can lead to an erroneous representation of topographic relations in the memory of directions. In any case, in various contexts the Chinese pilgrim appears to be mistaken or to have inexact information. More important is the information Xuanzang gives on the distance of the sanctuary from the city of Mengjieli, which corresponds to the distance between it and Butkara I.



Figure 6 Aerial view of the inhabited area of Saidu Sharif (from S-SW). 14 April 1930 (Miangul Archive)

The sanctuary of Saidu (1,000 m a.s.l.) was built on two artificial terraces with a 3-metre difference in level. The Monastery - square with a central courtyard - was built on the upper terrace, while the lower terrace shows the sacred area with the central Stupa, standing on a high podium with four columns at the corners, and the minor monuments (stupas, chapels, columns). The installations at the two levels are coeval.

A brief description of the site was provided in 1926 by M. Aurel Stein, recording the place name Kanchai-kandao (Stein 1930, 43), doubtless coined from the bifurcated morphology of the place (Pashto: *kanchi* 'scissors') at the foot of the Shararai mountains (1,400 m a.s.l.).²

Begun by Domenico Faccenna in 1963 and carried on with brief interruptions until 1982, the excavation was published in four volumes (Callieri 1989; Faccenna 1995; Noci, Macchiarelli, Faccenna 1997; Faccenna 2001). On the evidence of the excavation, it was possible to date the foundation of the sanctuary around the mid-first century CE and determine that it remained active until at least the fourth century, when it was abandoned.

² As occasionally happens in sites showing ruins, here the Pashto place name is associated with derogatory terms (vice, villainy; for example, Shararai: wickedness, vice, mischief, depravity, villainy) (De Chiara 2020).



Figure 7 Aerial view of Mingora and surroundings (from SW), 3 May 1926 (Miangul Archive)

The final excavation of the site, carried out intermittently between 2011 and 2014, yielded evidence to define some minor but important points, including the stratigraphic relationship between the sanctuary and the underlying burial necropolis dated to the early fourth century BCE, but also the original area covered by the stupa terrace (Olivieri 2016; Filigenzi, Olivieri 2017). Other important data came with the find of new sculptural fragments from the Stupa Frieze, together with data on one of the columns belonging to the Stupa.

Before entering *in medias res* let me briefly consider the fact that the site cannot be identified with any of the sanctuaries so far known to us from the ancient sources, including the local epigraphic sources of the first century (Baums 2019).

The sanctuary of Saidu might, however, have had an exceptional importance in ancient times, and this might have been acknowledged among the contemporaries. Saidu was a great sanctuary – possibly a royal or princely foundation – equal, as we will see, if not superior in importance to the nearby sanctuary of Butkara I, traditionally attributed to the Maurya king, Aśoka.³

³ The stupas known as *dharmarājikā* are attributed to Aśoka. Butkara I has yielded two inscriptions which mention this term (Baums forthcoming). The first, painted on the outer part



Figure 8 A view of the Saidu River and Saidu Sharif fort (demolished; now Swat Serena Hotel) (from W-NW). 14 April 1930 (Miangul Archive)

Suffice it to leaf through the pages of Xuanzang's travel journal about his visit to Swat in the seventh century to have an embarrassment of choices, so many were the famous sacred places, largely in ruins, that he visited. Unfortunately, the geographical information provided by the Chinese pilgrim is as detailed as it is at times contradictory, to the extent that for many areas he seems to be giving second-hand accounts. The sanctuary of Saidu may well have been among those he visited although when Xuanzang was there it had – as we will see – already been abandoned and deconsecrated.

In the past (Tucci 1940, 43 fn. 2) identification of the site had been proposed as the sanctuary known as Rehobhyara in the account by O rgyan pa, a Tibetan pilgrim of the thirteenth century. A re-examination of the traveller's itinerary (Olivieri 2017) leads me to place it in the area of Manglawar, still in Swat but about 20 km to the north of Saidu.⁴

of a large bowl (B 8000), is from room V associated with the "Great Building" (GB) (phase 4 of the Great Stupa or GSt 4) (part of this inscription was published in Petech 1966). The second is incised on a reused slab on the east side of the stupa 133 podium (phase 3 of the Great Stupa or GSt 3) (Faccenna 1980-81, 287). The GSt 3 phase corresponds to the Saka-Parthian phase of the sanctuary. For an bibliographic updating on Butkara I, see the topographic Catalogue in Filigenzi 2015.

⁴ To this is to be added the fact that in the thirteenth century nothing of the Saidu sanctuary can have any longer been visible. I wonder if the place name given in the Tibetan text may not be interpretable as *rāhoviḥāra*: a 'camouflaged', 'covered', 'concealed', 'rendered invisible

To our present knowledge, then, the ancient name of the sanctuary remains sunk into oblivion.

As for the modern name, the earliest mention of Saidu Sharif, would be C.-A. Court's (1840), who, however, gets the location wrong, placing it on the right instead of the left bank of the Swat. Court (or rather his informants) reports the toponym 'sedougan', which became 'saydúgán' with Raverty (1862; De Chiara 2020, 197).⁵ By hypothesis, we could reconstruct an older Dardic toponym 'sādhugām' (Torwali *gām* = *grām*: 'village'; De Chiara 2020, 35).⁶ The place probably held an ancient and vague tradition of sanctity, to which the Mianguls may have wanted to connect using the role the location played for their dynasty. There is the mausoleum of their ancestor *sayyid* and founder of the dynasty, popular under the name of Saidu Baba. This was the famous Akhūnd Abdul Ghaffūr (1793-1878), 'the Akhund of Swat' (the famous Edward Lear's 'Akond of Swat'). The toponym would then have been 'normalised' on the basis of the Arabic 'sayyid' (Saydugan), adopting and transforming an existing tradition, during the nineteenth century when the term entered the toponymy of Swat (De Chiara 2020, 197). From a semantic point of view, the change from 'sādhū' to 'sayyid' poses no problems, and is part of the 'Islamization' of some Swat toponyms that took place at the beginning of the twentieth century. This process includes the addition of the second Arabic term, 'sherif' (noble), which is already found in a Persian *Jangnāma* of 1863 about British expeditions in Buner and surrounding areas (Zarawar Khan, Numani 2021).⁷ The manuscript, of which the Mission obtained a photographic copy (see Olivieri 2015, 25 fn. 5), reflects the religious and political propaganda of Sayyad Ahmad Barelvi's followers among the Pashtun Khans of Swat, Buner and Dir. The text suggests that the term 'sherif' was added when the Akhūnd chose Saidu as his residence, i.e. as early as 1849. As we have seen, the new name was not fully integrated in the toponymy, and the village continued to be called Sedou/Saydu[gan] by most. The toponym Saidu Sharif, was only made official in the twentieth century, when the locality became the capital of the state of the Mianguls.⁸

The first direct account of the site and monuments, as mentioned above, is to be found in the notes made by Stein on his visit in 1926:

[Butkara] shows everywhere the effects of quarrying operations continued down to quite recent times. Such were actually still in progress at the Stūpa of Kānchai-kanda situated above a small gully which descends from the spur to the east, about halfway between Saidu and the mouth of the Janbil [*sic*] valley. Here, too, all the facing masonry had been removed, but the dome portion was still recognizable with a diameter of some 36 feet and a height of over 30 feet. (Stein 1930, 43)

to the eye', monastery (*vihāra*) (following *rāhu*, the head of the demon that covers the splendour of *candra*) (personal communication with F. Squarcini).

5 We cannot consider Baligram as the ancient name of Saidu (De Chiara 2020, 197) as that is still the name of a separate village.

6 In the Dardic (and Kafir) languages 'sādhū' is attested. For example in the Ashkun language, with the original meaning of 'pious man', 'saint' (personal communication with M. De Chiara).

7 The manuscript bears a dedication by the author, Mirza Abdul Haq, among others to the Akhund of Swat called "Sahib Saidu Sharif" (Zarawar Khan, Numani 2021).

8 For much of the twentieth century, Swat was a semiautonomous state (the Yusufzai State of Swat) ruled as from 1917 by the Miangul dynasty. In 1969 the State was absorbed by Pakistan.

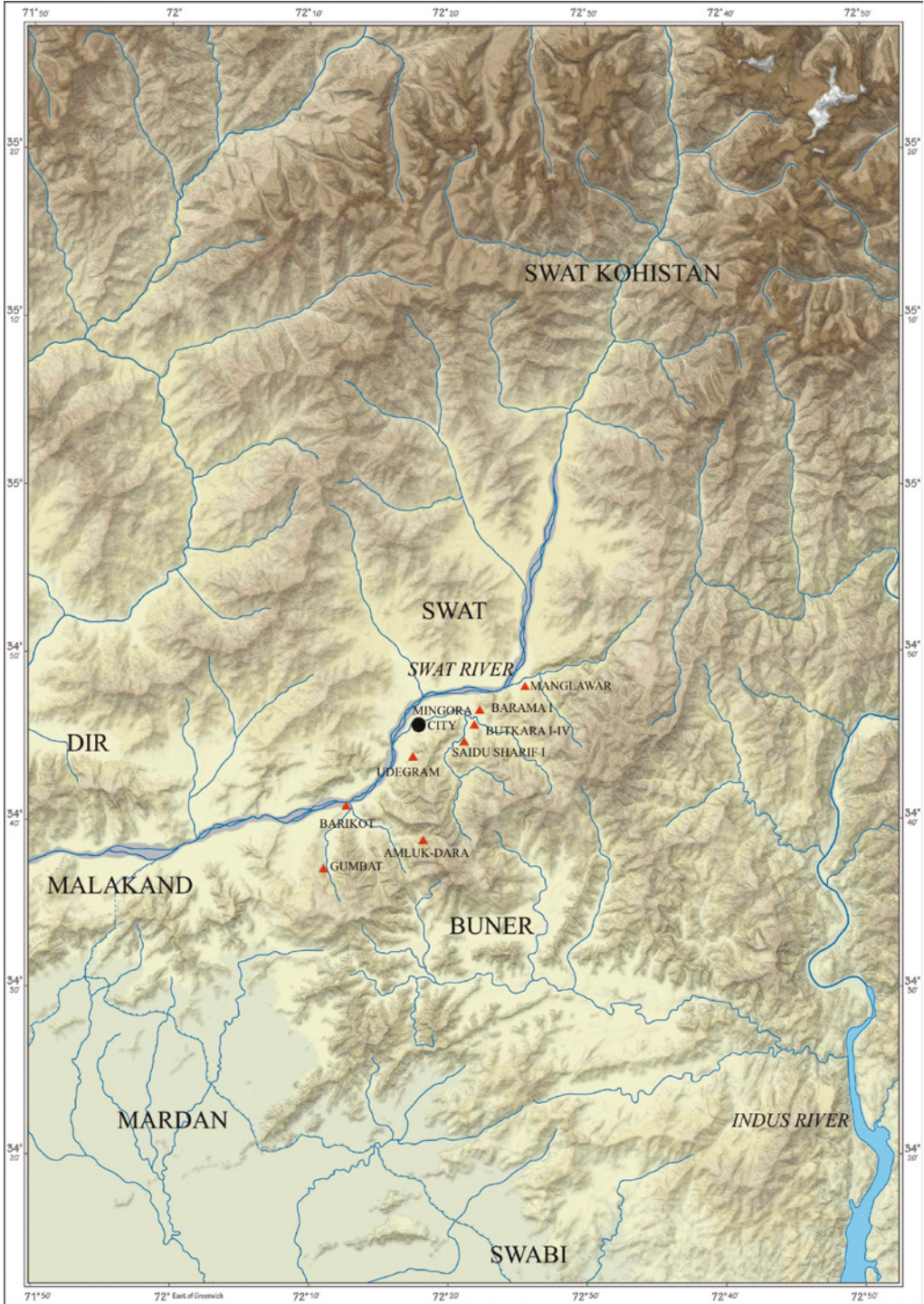


Plate I Map of Swat with sites mentioned in the text (ISMEO/University of Vienna, Department of Geography and Regional Research; by Karel Kriz, Daniel Nell; elaborated by Luca M. Olivieri)



Plate II Map of Mingora and Saidu Sharif area (elaborated by Elisa Iori after Faccenna 1980-81)

According to the evidence offered by Ataullah Khan, at the time Secretary of the Yusufzai State of Swat, the progressive ruination of the site was caused by the plundering of stone for building purposes (Faccenna 1995, 20-1 fn. 4). However, I do not think it is possible for the ruins to have been preserved for over 9 m in height in 1926; taking into account the burial of the podium, such a height would have accounted for nearly three quarters of the monument. Analysing an aerial photo taken in 1930 [fig. 6],⁹ we can distinctly make out the spreading bulk of the Stupa, in height measuring little more than the difference between the stupa terrace and the upper terrace. The maximum height that can be reconstructed on the basis of this photograph is no more than 3 m. Of course we know that in 1930 the Saidu Hospital was under construction a few hundred metres downstream from the site, where part of the material might have been reused, but the possibility remains that Stein overestimated the height or there was some confusion (10 feet rather than 30?), or, more probably, Stein offered an estimate reconstructing the dome on the basis of the visible diameter. When Domenico Faccenna arrived at the site and began work – thirty-five years later – the bulk was much lower and had been largely pillaged.

1.2 The Importance of the Site

Let us return to the monument and its importance in ancient times. In the scenes of the life of the Buddha in the art of Gandhara¹⁰ there are certain recurrent motifs, but in the artwork of the Saidu Frieze there are scenes which we find for the first time at Saidu (the wrestling competition), while others actually appear only at Saidu. These include, besides the scene of the cutting of Siddhārtha's hair (extremely rare),¹¹ the scene of the return of the legendary King of Swat Utarasaṇa (Uttarasena) bringing the relics to Oḍḍiyāna (or Uḍḍiyāna) i.e. Swat. This panel (S 241), following the biographical narrative order, was probably the last in the Frieze [pl. IV].

With one possible exception, the scene is not to be found elsewhere.¹² The relief recalls an earlier one from the *vedikā* of Bharhut.¹³ I believe that Faccenna

⁹ Taken on 14 April 1930, exactly four years after Stein's visit to the site. The photo was kindly provided by the Miangul Family (Miangul Archives).

¹⁰ Note that here the term 'art of Gandhara' also includes the Buddhist art of Swat, although from the geographical point of view Swat (or Uḍḍiyāna, Oḍḍiyāna) is not part of Gandhara (the distinction was clear to the Chinese pilgrims mentioned in this study). Elsewhere for Swat I have used the term "outer Gandhara" (Olivieri 2019b).

¹¹ See the very important article by Antonio Amato (2019) on fragment SS I 66.

¹² In Swat we have a scene of return with the relics that is almost 'Christmassy', with a king, as if one of the Magi, returning as king of the north or west on a Bactrian camel (Victoria and Albert Museum, London, IM 85.1939; Ackermann 1975, 89, pl. XXVib). It could well be Utarasaṇa. Alternatively, these scenes might be considered as depicting a procession, as in the comparable Indian depictions, although the latter emphasise the royal presence. The inscription dated around the beginning of the era of Imḍravarma (Baums 2012, no. 8; CKI 242) seems almost to be telling us that the sovereigns of Avaca took the relics from a stupa of the Maurya period, of uncertain location, and carried it in procession to find a new home in their territories.

¹³ The scene of the return with the relics (not the war for the relics, on which see the south portal of the great Sanchi stupa 1) is not rare, but nor is it very common. From India I recall observing a relief from the impost of the east entrance from Bharhut (from the *vedikā*, now in the National Museum, New Delhi; Cunningham 1879, pl. XII) with the sovereign on the back of an elephant. The fine reliefs with elephants from Kanaganahalli (see photo no. 37.38 by Christian Luczanits on <http://www.luczanits.net>) evidently depict scenes of a procession and display of the relics (see Skilling 2018, figs 1-3, 5-6). On Bharhut see Hawkes 2008; 2009.

na's identification of the scene as the return of Utaraseṇa with the relics may be taken as certain. It is, of course, a conjecture, but based on a few objective elements that make it not only appealing but convincing. Among these elements there is the fact that there is clearly a king, seated with crossed legs (the royal posture or *sattvāsana*) on a large throne with a broad back on tapered feet, set as a palanquin on a large elephant. Significant, too, is the way the hands are held; on the left hand rests a reliquary, tall, a cylindrical pyx, while the right hand is held in front to protect it.¹⁴ The elephant advances imper- turbably led by its *mahout*, the image enriched by caparisons and harnesses.

Utaraseṇa – as we learn from a dedicatory inscription, the Senāvarma inscription (Baums 2012; 2018) – is considered the progenitor of the Oḍi family reigning in Swat. Oḍi is of course the name of the region of Swat (also known as Oḍḍiyāna or Uḍḍiyāna).¹⁵ According to Xuanzang, Utaraseṇa was a contemporary of the Buddha and a descendant of the Śākya, with whom he shared the solar genealogy of Indra which dated back to the mythical ancestor Ikṣvāku, in Prakrit Iṣmaho (Salomon, Baums 2007).¹⁶ Utaraseṇa, albeit being the last, obtained a proportion of the relics as preannounced by the Buddha himself before the *parinirvāṇa*. Xuanzang recounts that Utaraseṇa came to Kushinagara for the distribution of the relics, arriving from Swat, where he was born. The Oḍi family thus appears to have reigned from an unspecified time in the mid-first millennium BCE to the second half of the first century CE, when the name disappears from the epigraphic evidence.¹⁷

14 The position of the king sitting on the throne recalls here very closely the magnificent relief with the scene of worship of the sovereign from Chirg-patai in Dir (Swat), today in the Peshawar University Museum (Srinivasan 2021, fig. 1). Alongside this interpretation (the return of Utaraseṇa), however, the relatively mundane hypothesis that the scene depicts a generic scene of transport of relics should also be considered. This is usually a scene depicting several kings and always on horseback (as e.g. in the small relief from the British Museum, London, BM 1888.0901.4). Here the presence of the elephant, both compositionally and spatially, suggests that only one king is represented in the panel. As for the hypothesis that the entire story of the sovereign was reconstructed by Xuanzang on later sources, Antonello Palumbo has written to me: “In a study on the tradition recorded by Xuanzang, Sadakata Akira 定方 晟 (1987) argued that the legend related by Xuanzang was of a late date, possibly arising from a paronomastic association between Śākya (the clan of the Buddha) and Śaka (the line of Uttarasena) [on this see Witzel 1997, 313]. Note, moreover, that there are other, similar stories in which Uttarasena has no place: in two Chinese versions of the *Mahāvibhāṣa* (including one translated by Xuanzang himself and an earlier version, of the fifth century), for example, we find the legend of a female elephant that carried the relics of the Buddha as far as the North-West of India, only to collapse in total exhaustion, and be rewarded with rebirth in the body of a man, becoming an *arhat*”. See also Hinüber 2003.

15 See the place name Udegram (Uḍigrām o Oḍigrām) (De Chiara 2020, 229-30). On the subject, see Callieri 2004.

16 For example, in the Senāvarma inscription on gold leaf, see lines 3c and 9a: “[von] der Iṣmaho Königsfamilie” (Hinüber 2003, 21, 31; see also Salomon, Baums 2007). The solar genealogy is one of the two (the other is lunar) which the post-Vedic warrior dynasties of India claim for themselves. It is claimed not only by the Śākya (see e.g. Aśvaghōṣa, *Saundarānanda*), but of course by others: the Ikṣvāku dynasty of Andhra Pradesh (third-fourth century), the Chola, etc. As for Xuanzang, for now I refer to S. Beal's edition (1906), knowing full well that a new edition by Max Deeg is forthcoming.

17 No one has yet addressed this issue. The general impression is that with the seizure of control over the resources of Swat under the Kushana the balance of power changed radically. It will continue in this direction until the point that in the third century CE land and economic power was firmly in the hands of the monasteries, as is also reflected in the cities (Iori, Olivieri 2020). What then happened to the Oḍi? Swat and the western Darel and Tangir valleys (located between that and the Upper Indus) share the mutual role of being a place of refuge for exiled rulers from both sides. Interesting then are the Daradarayas, i.e. the kings of the Daradas, Dards, attested in inscriptions in the Chilas area: their heraldic animal was according to Harald Hauptmann (forthcoming) the lion with raised right paw (Jettmar 1988, fig. 7), the same animal



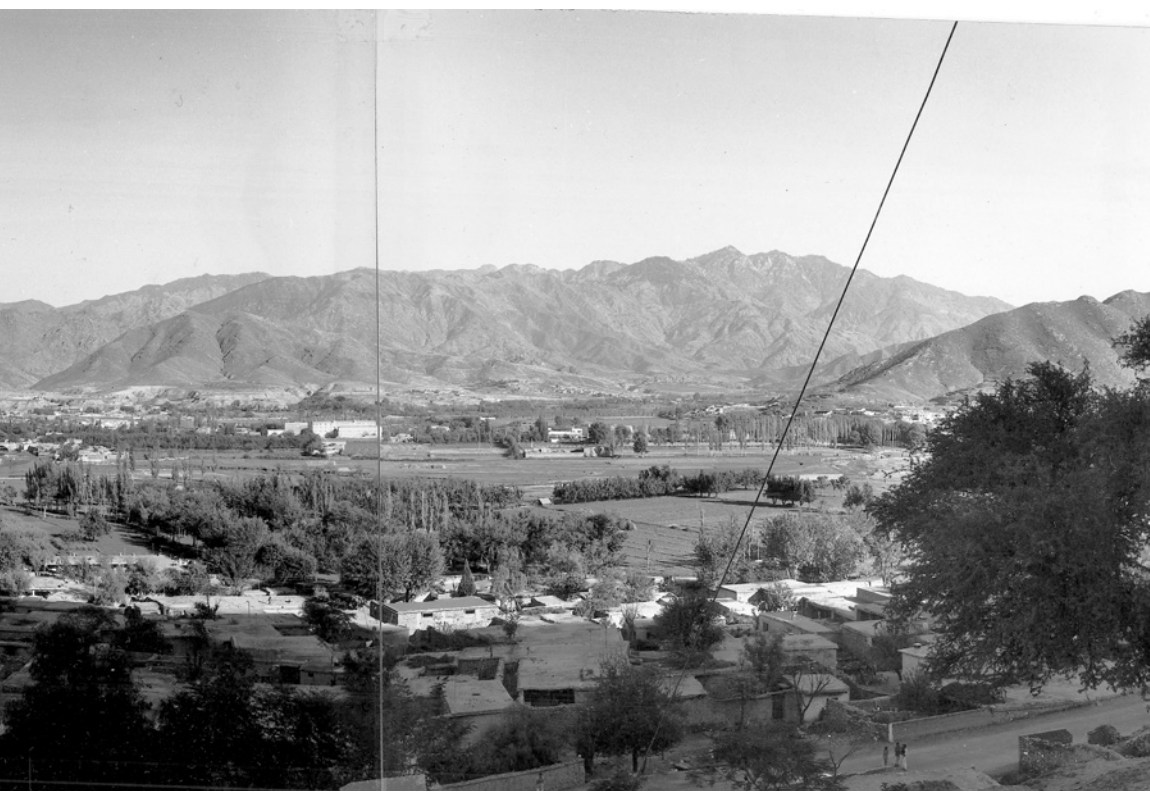


Plate III Late 1950s. A view of Mingora and Saidu Sharif from W (Amankot or Katelai)
(MAIP; photos by Francesca Bonardi)



Plate IV Saidu Sharif I, Frieze, panel S241 (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri)

Utaraseṇa, forefather of the Oḍi lineage, was the son of a Śākya prince who had fled from Kapilavastu at the time of the uprisings that led to the invasion of the Kosalas. So it was that Utaraseṇa together with his family took refuge in Oḍḍiyāna¹⁸ during the early years of the Buddha's preaching.¹⁹ In his wanderings towards the new homeland, guided by a wild goose, the Śākya prince married the daughter of a *nāga*, and acquired from the latter - in accordance with the most classical of Scythian opolatries - a sword that emerged from the depths of a lake. With this sword he then went to Oḍḍiyāna, where he killed the king and took over the kingdom. At this point in the story another *nāga*, Apalāla, enters the scene. The latter dominated the flow of the river Swat and made the lives of the valley-dwellers miserable, bringing about frequent floods and sudden droughts. In an episode in his life, the Buddha - accompanied by the prince of the *nāga* Vajrapani - visited Oḍḍiyāna in spirit to convert Apalāla with the power of the *vājra* (diamond-mace). Before returning in spirit to Kushinagara, where he was to perform the *parinirvāṇa*, the Buddha met Utaraseṇa's mother, a blind widow. He told her to send her son Utaraseṇa, whom the Buddha recognised as a member of his own lineage, to the distribution of the relics which, he foretold, was soon to take place. The same source makes mention of the stupa built on the place where the elephant of Utaraseṇa, who was returning with the relics, met its death.²⁰ This stupa was identified by Aurel Stein as the Shingardar stupa (Stein 1930, 31-2) on the basis of the distances and spatial relations between the various sites recorded by Xuanzang, who located it to the south-west of Mengjieli. There is no proof that Shingardar (a stupa of relatively late construction - late first-early second century) had any connection with Utaraseṇa: the nearby rock allegedly in the shape of an elephant (Stein 1930, 32, fig. 24), although it is not, is no proof, nor is the relief in the nearby cave of Hindu-ghar, which does not depict Utaraseṇa (33) but Surya, as brilliantly demonstrated by Anna Filigenzi (2015, 221-3). Thus Utaraseṇa's stupa has yet to be identified.

The panel fragment with Utaraseṇa shows that the sanctuary of Saidu, founded in a period subsequent to those events, is to be associated with the lineage of that king. Thus, it can be associated with one of the stupas founded by direct or indirect descendants of Utaraseṇa, such as a prince or an important minister, and by their families in the mid-first century CE.

that we find in an unfinished relief, or evidence of workmanship from Butkara I (Faccenna 1997). The heraldic symbol has a clear reference to both Buddhism and the Saka tradition (see the obverse of the tetradrachms of Azes and the gold token of Tillya Tepe). The later Daradarayas had names like Vaiśravaṇasena, and among one of their centres of power the toponym of Oḍi in the Kaghan Valley between the Indus and Kashmir is mentioned (Hauptmann forthcoming).

18 The term certainly has to do with the Oḍiraja, possibly as "way of the Oḍi". Only subsequently, through pareymology and correspondence with the agricultural wealth of Swat, was the place name Oḍḍiyāna attributed with the meaning of "garden".

19 According to Xuanzang in the same circumstances other Śākya families sought refuge in the mountainous lands of the far west - Śāmbhī (Chitral? Wakhan?), Himatāla (Paropāmisō, Hindukush?) and Bamiyan; at the other end of ancient India, the early Tagaung dynasties also claimed to be of Śākya descent.

20 The best synopsis of the legend of Utaraseṇa was written by Martha Carter in a study on what the author aptly called a "Scythian Royal Legend" (Carter 1992). On the entire topic and its historical implications, see Deeg 2011, 194-7 and Albery 2020. On the various hypothesis on the whereabouts of the Utaraseṇa stupa, see Salomon 1980, 289-90.

1.3 The Site and the City

Mengjieli thus corresponds to the modern pronunciation of the transcription of the name of the ancient capital as recorded by Xuanzang. We do not know the original name, but it must have been very close to the modern one, Mingora (*Mingawəra*), which has origins prior to the arrival of Pashto spoken by the Yusufzai in Swat as from the sixteenth century (De Chiara 2020).²¹ The earliest known form of the place name is 'Minkrawara' (found in Court 1840, map).

Xuanzang, who does not seem to be exaggerating the distances here, records that at a few *li* (miles) from Mengjieli, "the royal town of Oḍḍiyāna", there was a famous sanctuary which stood on the place where the Buddha lived in one of his previous lives as the patient Kṣānti-rṣi.²² On the basis of topographic reconstruction we can state here that this was the sanctuary of Butkara I.²³ Butkara I, as we learn from the excavations, was still a more or less active cult centre in the seventh century, albeit in decline – its ruins were still visible to the eyes of the Tibetan pilgrims in the thirteenth century (Tucci 1940). As for its position, without returning to the question of the cardinal direction considered above, we still have to consider the fact that the sanctuary appears located outside the city while, as we shall see, other data locate it within the urban fabric. We must take into account the fact that at the time of Xuanzang's visit, in the seventh century, the city had shrunk considerably, and it is certain that Butkara I, once situated within the city, then lay at a distance from it. In fact, the excavations demonstrate that both the inhabited areas in the plain and the fortress of Barama on the heights, guard, had by then been abandoned for centuries (Faccenna 1964–65; Iori,

²¹ For a list of the place names ascertained in the epigraphic documents, see Baums 2019.

²² According to the inscription on gold leaf of Seṇavarma (CKI 249; Baums 2012, no. 24), the stupa called Ekakūṭa stupa ("Ekaūḍa": "with a recess", "with a peak"?), perhaps a wooden chapel with a stupa inside the cell, or a stupa with a wooden pinnacle-*chattravali*, containing relics of the Buddha and built by Vasuseṇa, son of Utarasēṇa, had been damaged by a thunderbolt. During the reconstruction works decreed by Seṇavarma, which radically changed the dimensions and form of the stupa, a dedicatory inscription was found referring to Vasuseṇa. If the latter is the son of the same Utarasēṇa who lived at the time of Buddha, the foundation of the Ekakūṭa stupa should be dated back to around the early third century BCE. If the entire account set out in the long inscription of Seṇavarma is true, and if Utarasēṇa lived at the time of the Buddha, it would mean that there had been a stupa prior to the times of Aśoka (a stupa of Mauryan times is mentioned in the inscription of Iṃdravarma of the dynasty of the Avaca, CKI 242, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). As for the stupa called "Ekaūḍa", it could not have been the Stupa of Saidu since we know that at that time the area subsequently occupied by the sanctuary was occupied by a burial necropolis. On the whereabouts of the Ekakūṭa stupa (located in Swat) see Salomon 1986, 289–90. There is a very interesting hypothesis by Henry Albery: "Thus, for architectural, chronological and epigraphic reasons, the location of Vasuseṇa and Seṇavarma's Ekaūḍa could well be Butkara I, near the Oḍḍirāja capital, Mingora. One may expect that this site, representing the fulcrum of the region and the likely capital of Oḍḍiyāna, would be a good candidate for the location of these rulers' stupa establishments" (2020, 249). We must, however, point out that if we place the inscription of Seṇavarma around 60–70 CE, the event described cannot refer to the great stupa of Butkara I (GST) either, for its stratigraphic data tell us that the reconstruction closest in time (the phase labelled GST 3) had already been accomplished at least half a century before. No evidence of a destructive event such as the one caused by the thunderbolt, nor of the subsequent excavation and restoration work as reported in the inscription, was therefore found (assuming archaeology could record it). The inscription was first presented by H. Bailey in 1980, then studied by G. Fussman in 1982, R. Salomon in 1986, and by O. von Hinüber in 2003 (see references in Baums 2012).

²³ At the time of Xuanzang a *li* corresponded to just over 300 m. In the account by Song Yun, Butkara I was evidently mentioned as Tolo, and as Dhumat 'ala in the Tibetan accounts (Olivieri 2017 with preceding bibliography, in particular Tucci 1958).

Olivieri 2016).²⁴ At that time the cities of the region, as we can infer from Xuanzang, were mostly castles. The ancient Bazira and Ora (Barikot and Udegram), as the excavations show, remained alive only on the high ground, while the built-up areas in the plains had for centuries been abandoned. Xuanzang visited a region showing every sign of decline – monasteries abandoned and in ruins, the flourishing agriculture wilting away, as again confirmed by the archaeological data (Olivieri forthcoming).

A century before, when Song Yun was writing, evidently the city was smaller than it had been five centuries before, but it still had a life of its own and contained the court of the local king,²⁵ who received the pilgrim and his fellow traveller Huisheng with the protocol reserved for ambassadors (of the dynasty of the Northern Wei: the court provided a local interpreter who spoke Chinese). The sanctuary (of Butkara I), Song Yun tells us, was the royal sanctuary where the king held an assembly in the presence of the Buddhist clergy every year.

Returning now, however, to the golden age of urbanisation in Gandhara and Swat, in the first-second century, the dimensions of the city and the spatial relations between the city and the sanctuaries must have been very different and better defined. Both Saidu Sharif I and Butkara I were sanctuaries belonging to the city, the former in the periphery but dominating the city, while the latter was integrated into the ancient urban fabric. Moreover, the former had a monastery [pt. V] while the latter was surrounded by residential structures from which it was separated by perimeter walls with openings for access. Butkara I was situated in the heart of a closely developed urban fabric of dwellings, both small and large, while Saidu dominated the built-up area, being separated from it. Its community dwelt in a monastery, perhaps one of the first and certainly the earliest of those we know of. Around it there are no dwellings apart from the three small cells for solitary meditation identified above the monastery terrace in Area D (Callieri 1989, 47), nor are there other sanctuaries but only infrastructures to channel the water of the streams in the Kanchai Valley (47). Other structures must have been located below, in the area now between the Saidu Hospital and the Swat Museum.²⁶

Thanks to the aerial photography carried out at Mingora for the Archaeological Mission [pt. VI],²⁷ we know that the city centre lay close to the confluence of the rivers Jambil (flowing from the east) and Saidu (flowing from the south). The two rivers then flowed in a north-west direction, and thence into the river Swat. The fact that the isthmus of land between the two rivers lay by the city centre is confirmed by ample archaeological evidence. Here we will focus only on the evidence coeval with the phase of construction of the sanctuary of Saidu.²⁸

24 The latest period of Barama I corresponds to period 4/5-6 of Butkara I (= Sacred Precinct), but above all to the final phase of the built-up area around the sanctuary (= Inhabitated Area, period 5) (Iori, Olivieri 2016, tab. 1).

25 Apparently not a descendant of the Odi family, whose memories have been lost since the end of the first century.

26 The site known as Saidu Sharif II (Faccenna 1995, 21 fn. 1, fig. 3).

27 On 26 May 1959.

28 Thus I do not take into account the earliest Butkara II necropolis (1200-800 BCE), nor the Buddhist sacred area of Butkara III, which was built towards the end of the first century (see Olivieri 2019b, 232).

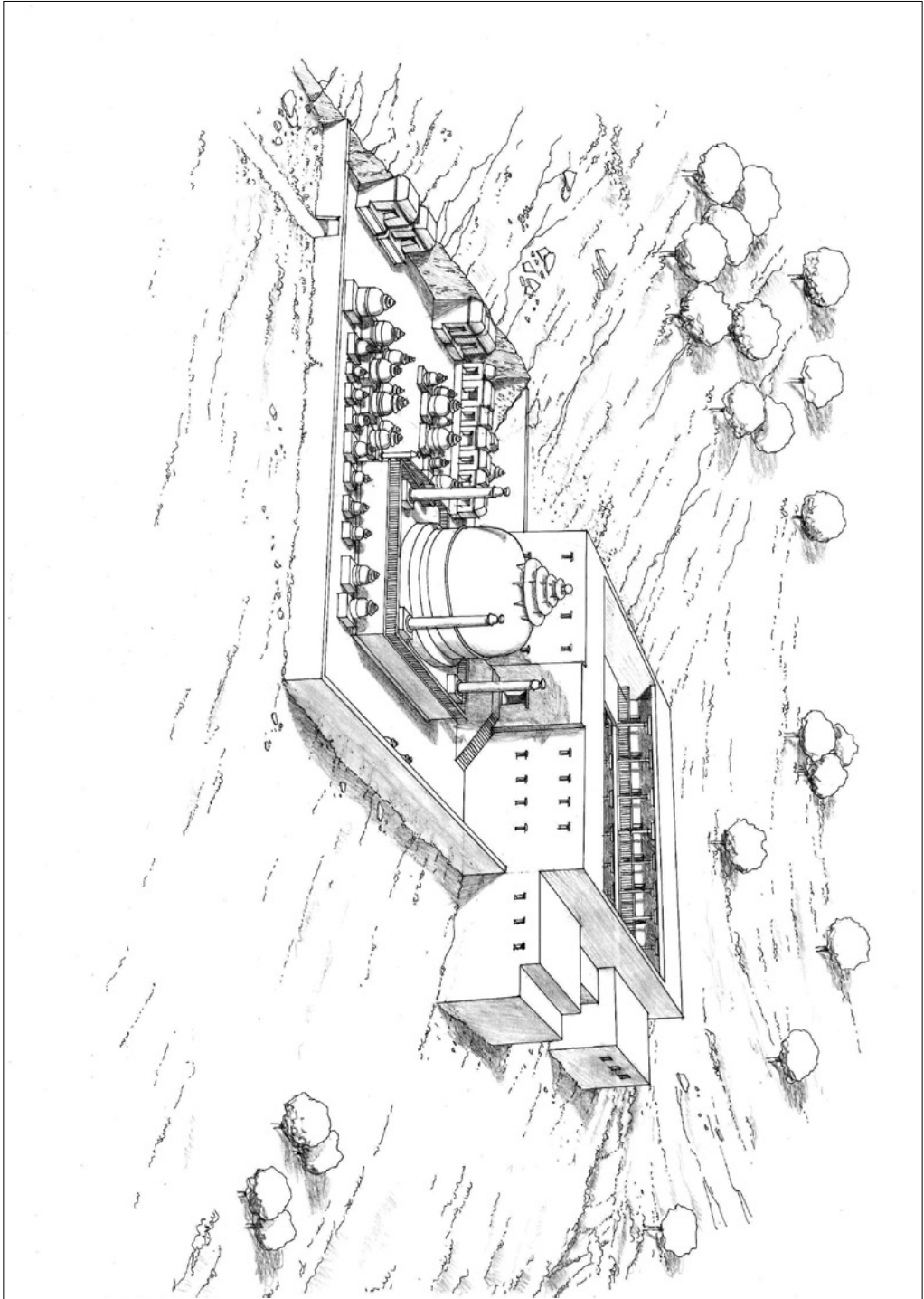


Plate V Saidu Sharifi, stupa terrace and monastery, ideal reconstruction (from SW) (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)



Plate VI 1959. Mingora urban area, aerial view (N to the left) (MAIP)

We will start from the outskirts. Saidu clearly lay beyond the southern limits of the city, while Butkara was still within the urban fabric. In the neighbourhood of this site, a little to the north, there is an area of burials, the one best known to us being known as Butkara IV, a tripartite family mausoleum covered by a mound, excavated in 1963 by Maurizio Taddei (Olivieri 2019b). Around it there are other tombs and cenotaphs, documented in part. On the other side of the river Jambil, directly facing Butkara I, a defensive fortress, Barama I (Faccenna 1964-65), was brought to light, doubtless guarding the eastern entrance to the city.

Clear evidence of a built-up area was observed in the vicinity of the confluence of the Jambil and Saidu. Detailed evidence emerged far more clearly in one of the aerial photos in a sector of the modern built-up area called the 'grassy ground', now occupied by the football pitch and cricket field of Mingora and Saidu Sharif. Today political meetings and assemblies are held here, while at the time of the Yusufzai State of Swat it was the 'Champ de Mars' of the capital of the state (Saidu Sharif). Obviously, we cannot tell whether the structures were all coeval with the phase we are concerned with here. Although Faccenna conjectured three superimposed phases of construction (Faccenna 1980-81, 4: pl. XXVIII),²⁹ on the evidence of the urban excavations carried out in Swat, like Barikot and Udegram, where the urban fabric for centuries covered the same area (in particular between the second century BCE and the third century CE), we can be quite sure that the structures which can be made out in the aerial photograph, if not coeval, certainly reflect the area occupied by buildings in the mid-first century. Even more telling in the photo is what is missing. I believe that with this photo we have had the luck to capture the south-west limit of the ancient city.

The aerial photo shows a very regular road system and built-up area. The axis of the main north-south road, which is about 6 m wide, lies along the east side of the urban fabric. Opening on it are long rectangular buildings with very elaborate internal layouts, separated by narrow lanes. The back end of these buildings is lined by a service road only roughly aligned in a north-south direction, measuring about 2 m in width. The main axis seems to be delimited by a structure of just under 6 m in width, which runs along the entire length of the road. It may be the west sector of the city wall or defensive rampart. Beyond lies an empty space stretching as far as the 'grassy ground'.

The intermediate axial east-west road is narrower (about 4 m), while the southern one - apparently the main one visible - is 6 m in width. Facing it is a building of large proportions, behind which runs a lane parallel to the intermediate axis with a series of rooms of decidedly small proportions opening on it. The large building is made up of a number of rooms marked by central pillars and open courtyards, without any apparent order. On the other side of the road runs the structure of about 6 m in width and as long as the blocks built within. Beyond, again, there is an empty stretch running as far as the 'grassy ground'. This structure, too, may have to do with the city wall or defensive rampart on the south side (there appears to be a postern slightly out of axis but at the level of the north-south service road). What the aerial photo shows should, therefore, be the south-west corner of the ancient capital. The visible surface appears to cover just over a hectare.

29 My approach leads me to exclude certain evidence like modern structures.

If we take Butkara I as possible opposite end of the city, the long side of the city should have measured about 1 km.

On this side of the city, an evident limit in the first century was represented by the funerary area of Butkara IV, which must have been situated outside the city limits. The subsequent Buddhist sanctuary of Butkara III also stood *extra muros*.

Running to the east and south, the two valleys of the Jambil and Saidu represented the city's agricultural area, as well attested since the proto-historical period with the farming villages of Loebanr III and Kalako-dhe-*rai*.³⁰ Along these two valleys also lay the routes for access to the southern plains, and to the Indus. In particular, the Saidu valley afforded one of the two major routes for mount Ilam, the Aornos of the early writers on Alexander's feats, and on to the Indus plain (Coloru, Olivieri 2020).³¹ From the second century on, both the Saidu and Jambil valleys were colonised by a great many Buddhist monasteries and sanctuaries, many of which were still functioning around the seventh-eighth century, and most certainly were at the time of Xuanzang's visit.

As for the other direction in which the city extended, towards the north, we must take into account the river Jambil flowing at the centre. If this is the case, in the other direction the city could have extended for over 1 km before running onto the spur of the Mingora hills.

In conclusion, in area the city may well have covered over 100-120 hectares, which would have made it a city as large as Puṣkalāvati (including Bala Hisar) and Sirkap/Taxila (including the Mahal high ground).³²

30 For a bibliography on these sites, see Olivieri 2011a.

31 The other route runs from Barikot (Bazira) to reach Amluk-dara or the Karakar pass (Coloru, Olivieri 2019). A side note: the earliest mention of Barikot is found in Court 1840, "Berikoot" (307), "Berikout" (map).

32 According to my calculations (based on Schlingloff 2013), a town of 15 hectares like Barikot could have had about 5,000 inhabitants. Ancient Swat must not have had more than 300,000 inhabitants (Olivieri forthcoming). Mengjieli could have had 50,000 inhabitants, almost a sixth of the entire population of Swat.

