

## THE DAREL VALLEY: THE CHINESE SOURCES AND THE FIELD RESEARCH (1998-2004)

Haruko Tsuchiya

This paper begins with the elucidation of the historical accounts of the Darel Valley in Chinese sources and then highlights the fieldwork at the Darel Valley, conducted during 1998-2004 as part of Tsuchiya/Amjad field research over the last decade tracing Fa Hsein's route.

Fa Hsein, a Chinese monk of the Dong Jin Period (317-420 A.D.), traveled from Loyang in China to India during 399-415 A.D., and on his way to India, he went by way of present-day Chinese Turkistan, Pamir and Gandhara. His travelogue "The Records of the Buddhist Countries" (Legge 1886) is the earliest known written record by a Chinese monk who travelled to India. In this travelogue he described his trip from Tashqurghan through Pamir to Darel as follows:

"From Tashqurghan [the travelers] went westward towards North India, and after being on the way for a month, they succeeded in getting across and through the range of the Onion Mountains [Pamir]. The snow rests on them both winter and summer....

The people of the country call the range by the name of "The Snow Mountains." When [the travelers] had got through them, they were in North India, and immediately on entering its borders, found themselves in a small kingdom called T'o-leih, where also there were many monks, all students of the hinayana." (Legge, 1886 [Reprint 1965], 24).

Attention must be given here that after crossing Pamir and immediately on entering the border of North India, Fa Hsien found himself in T'o-leih, the present-day Darel, meaning that the first country he arrived after Pamir is Darel.

Fa Hsien continued to state that in the Darel Kingdom:

"there was formerly an Arhan (Lohan) who by his supernatural power took a clever artificer (sculptor) up to the Tusita Heaven, to see the height, complexion and appearance of Maitreya Bodhisattva and then return and make an image of him in wood. First and last, this was done three times, and then the image was completed." "The statue was eight zhang or eighty cubits in height. [ten cubits are about three meters, and therefore eight zhang is about 24 meters] and eight cubits at the base from knee to knee of the crossed legs. On the fast-days it emits an effulgent light. The kings of the [surrounding] countries vie with one another in presenting offerings to it. Here it is -- to be seen now [401 A.D.] as of old" (Legge, 1886 [Reprint 1965], 26-27).

From this account, it should be noted that the image of Maitreya was in wood and it was 24 meters high, and Fa Hsein visited Darel in 401 A.D. and the image of Maitreya is the first colossal image of the Buddha known historically.

Besides Fa-hsien, two Chinese monks of that time, Bao-yun and Fa-cheng, also left records on Darel. Bao-yun, most probably traveling with Fa Hsein, described "At Darel Kingdom, saw the gilt Maitreya Buddha statue. Its height is eight zhang. Clouds descended along the statue. For fifty days ardently prayed with all my concentration. The divine light in the night shone like that of a dawn. Worshippers filled the road" (Miyaji, 1992, 402).

Bao-yun explicitly stated the image he saw was Maitreya Buddha, gilt and 24 meters high or eight zhang. He dramatically narrated how clouds descended on the tall image, and how long and how

intensively the pilgrims crowded in adoration of the image covered by divine light, the expression closely corresponding to Fa-hsien's description of an effulgent light.

Fa-cheng, on the other hand, left China most probably in the second quarter of the fifth century, more than 25 years after Fa-Hsien and Bao-yun. Before his departure he met Shi-meng, who came back from India around 424-437 A.D. Fa-cheng left this observation of the Darel Maitreya: "At the north east of Swat, saw a wooden statue of Maitreya Buddha. Its height is eight zhang" (Miyaji 1992, 402). Fa-cheng tells about an Arhan Kalinada, who went to the Tusita Heaven 480 years after the nirvana of Sakyamuni to observe first hand the appearance of (Maitreya) Buddha and carved his statue. "It constantly emits light. People dedicate music which is always played. People coming long distance gather and devote themselves in ardent prayers" (Miyaji 1992,402).

From Fa-cheng's account, it is evident that even almost fifty years after Fa Hsien's visit, the Maitreya statue was still attracting pilgrims from distant places dedicating themselves by worshipping this colossal statue.

About 245 years after Fa Hsien's visit to Darel, Hsuan Tsang described Darel or Ta-li-lo in his *Ta-T'ang Siyuchi* (Buddhist Records of the Western World, ) in the chapter of Udayana or Swat, where he visited in 631A.D (Beal 1884 [Reprint 1981], 133-135).

Hsuan Tsang, according to his narratives, crossed a mountain and a valley and went along the craggy and steep road and crossed the Sin-tu River (Indus) by ropes or iron chains and by foot bridges suspended in air and finally reached the river valley of Ta-li-lo and arrived at the temple. He wrote as follows:

"By the side of great sangharama (Buddhist monastery) in this valley of Ta-li-lo, is a figure of Maitreya Bodhisattva, carved out of wood. It is golden coloured, and very dazzling in appearance, and possesses a secret spiritual power (of miracle). It is about 100 feet high and is the work of the Arhat Madhyantika. This saint by his spiritual power caused a sculptor to ascend into the Tusita heaven, that he might see for himself the marks and signs (on the person of Maitreya); this he did three times, till his task was finished. From the time of the execution of this image the streams of the law (religious teaching) began to flow eastward" (Beal 1884 [Reprint 1981], 134).

Aurel Stein referred to the accounts of Hsuan Tsang and Fa Hsien that "the close agreement of what both pilgrims tell us of the miraculous Maitreya here worshipped... and it's location in the present Darel is conclusively proved on topographical grounds by details that both narratives record as to the bearing, distance, and character of the route connecting it with Udayana or Swat" (Stein, 1928[Reprint 1981] Vol.1, 21).

However, the similarity of the description of Darel by Fa Hsien and Hsuan Tsang leave the possibility that Hsuan Tsang never went to Darel, but was much intrigued by Fa Hsien's record of the colossal image of Maitreya, and could not refrain from adding a paragraph on Darel, as if he were travelling from Swat to Darel. Hsuan Tsang normally referred to a country he did not visit as "hearsay country." But in the case of Darel he did not use that title. Probably he made himself pretend to believe that he went to Darel. Had he gone to Darel, the description of the colossal image and the monastery could have surpassed that of Bamiyan, which is based on his own experience and observation (Tsuchiya 2002b, 13).

Among the Chinese sources thus introduced, Fa Hsien's record is the oldest extant literature written by Chinese monks travelling from China to India. The record on Darel by Fa Hsien, therefore, is the oldest account of the Darel Valley.

In Fa Hsien's record it is clearly mentioned that after crossing Pamir, Fa Hsien went directly to the Kingdom called T'o-leih, which is identified as present-day Darel (Cunningham 1924, 82) (Stein 1921 [Reprint 1980], Vol.1,6 & 1928[Reprint 1981] Vol.1, 31)(Kuwayama 1990, 50)(Miyaji 1992, 401). This means that he did not cross Gilgit; the so-called "established route" has Fa Hsien coming through from the Mintaka/Killik Passes and Hunza. (Nagasawa 1979, map) Had Fa Hsien crossed Gilgit, it was inconceivable for him not to leave a record of this renowned city, since Gilgit was already known as a strategic point called Nantou according to the Han Shu (Han Shu, 1977, 963)(Shiratori 1941, 387, 652) of the First Century A.D., the official record of the (Former) Han Dynasty. Fa Hsien's record clearly suggests that he must have taken a route different from the "established route" and headed directly from Pamir to Darel.

Hence, our field research, which started in 1991, has two goals: one is to focus on the possible identity of this route Fa Hsien took from Pamir to Darel and the other is to explore the Darel Valley in order to find traces of sites which could have drawn the pilgrims all over from the Buddhist world.

### **1) Route from Pamir to Darel**

During our extensive fieldwork, we traced all the valleys of the Gilgit River and its tributaries, which connect Pamir and Darel. The field research from 1991 to 1997 gradually collected information on the traffic routes. Historical sites, accidentally unearthed objects, inscriptions, petroglyphs, and local legends provided clues to understanding ancient traffic in this area (Tsuchiya 2000a, 2001, 2002a). Through this effort we could finally unveil a direct route from Pamir to Darel (Map 1), without touching Hunza and Gilgit, as follows: from Tashqurghan, via Wakhjir Pass, enter into the Little Pamir (Wakhan), then via Khora Bhort Pass, Karambar Valley and the Ishkoman Valley to reach the Gilgit Valley at Gahkuch. Then, bypassing Bubur and Glumti, the route goes through the Singal Valley, which reaches the head of the Darel Valley. We discovered evidence of ancient traffic such as numerous petroglyphs (Fig.1) along the route, ancient graveyards (Imit, Dain), fortresses (Bholt (Fig.2), Chatorkhand (Fig.3)), a rhyton and a Chinese jade seal (Imit)(Fig.4), two Khotanese jade cups (Fig.5) in the possession of Karam Ali Shah, the Pir residing in Chatorkhand, the center of the Ishkoman Valley, as the treasures from his ancestors( Tsuchiya, 1993a & b, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998a, b & c, 1999a & b, 2000b, in press a).

Gakuch, on the mouth of the Ishkoman Valley, has yielded a Buddha image (Fig.6) and petroglyphs of stupas, which are slightly later in date than Fa Hsien's time. Bubur, on the left bank of the Gilgit River, 8km east of Gahkuch and 4km west of the mouth of the Singal Valley, seems to have had a Buddhist temple, from where a standing Buddha image (Fig.7) was excavated. Its round, full face with child-like proportions, shows the proximity to that of the Kargah Buddha in Gilgit and is considered to be from the fifth to the sixth centuries, crafted in a unique style prevalent in the Gilgit Valley. Gahkuch and Bubur, with the evidence of the presence of Buddhism at the middle point between Pamir and Darel, must have been on the route which was frequented by Buddhist pilgrims heading toward Darel through the Singal Valley and which Fa Hsien must have taken to worship the Maitreya Buddha statue in the Darel Kingdom.

### **2) The Darel Valley**

When we initiated our field research, it was considered futile even to try to conduct field research in the Darel Valley (Map 2). Due to intermittent internal tribal strife and the prevalence of the external, antagonistic repercussions, the Darel Valley had remained a no man's land. Even the people from the surrounding valleys would never attempt to make a visit, let alone foreigners and particularly a woman. Several times we were forced to consider dropping our field research in the Darel Valley. Patience was necessary. We simply waited for a chance for eight years and finally a breakthrough

occurred and we were invited to come to the Darel Valley by a powerful figure of the valley in 1998. Since then, we have been able to conduct six field research trips in the Darel Valley, covering the entire valley all the way to its head, which had never been scientifically explored before (Tsuchiya in press b).

The Darel Valley (Fig.8) is located on the right bank of the Indus, and is more than 50km long while its width is less than 1km at its widest point. The head of the Darel Valley is south of the Hindu Raj Mountains, a sub-range of the Hindu Kush Range, and its mouth on the Indus, which flows east to west by encircling the Nanga Parbat (8125m)(Tsuchiya 2002b, 11).

The Darel Valley is the northern limit of the monsoon area. The climate drastically changes to the Central Asian arid zone at Chilas, only 50km east of Darel. The moisture of the monsoon air travels along the narrow gorges of the Indus up to the Darel Valley but then is interrupted to move east by the mountain chains of the mighty mass of the Nangaparbat (8125m). The moisture which penetrates the Darel Valley is retained there as the valley stretches from south to north, and is surround by mountain ranges over 4,500. Hence the valley is graced with a thick growth of conifer forests. This unique feature of the valley must have easily offered wooden materials (Fig.9) to conceive an image of a colossal size in wood (Tsuchiya 2002b, 11).

With our interest in finding out the orientation of the Darel Valley, we could cover the Maja Sagar highlands (Fig. 10) which connect the Darel Valley with the Singal Valley by two passes, the Batakhun and the Yajei. The Yajei Pass (Fig.11), which had been left in obscurity and has never been highlighted historically before, was found to be the main route for a normal trail, while the Batakhun Pass (Fig.12) can be considered a strategic route (Tsuchiya in press c).

Where all the routes from the adjacent valleys, Tangir, Batraith, Singal and Kargah, assemble at the head of the Darel Valley, the most important defense system with a gate and wall called Darband was aptly established. Though reduced to piles of rubble, still a portion of an old wall near the gate remains (Fig.13). Darband consisted of a gate and wall on the right bank and a long wall on the left bank of the Darel River along the slope of the mountains reaching to a cliff. The scale of this defensive system suggests that defense was a very serious matter and considerable effort was given to maintain this defensive line as a forward defended locality (FDL) constantly. The discovery of this defense system at the head of the Darel Valley, in contrast to the absence of a similar device at its mouth, testifies that the head is the entrance to the valley.

There were two distinct sites in the Darel Valley noted during our fieldwork, namely Rajikot Fortress and Pouguch “university” sites.

### **Rajikot Fortress City**

Rajikot, a remarkable fortress city, well constructed and impregnable, is located on a large and high hill (500m high) in the middle of the valley (Fig.14). It was the seat of the ruler of Darel. Its panoramic view (Fig.15) covers the distance of about 24 km towards the north and the south of Rajikot and any hostile movement could readily have been observed. The scale and skillful layout of the city testify to the sophisticated know-how and the wealth of the fertile land of the Darel Valley. The residential quarter on the top of the hill is well protected by two stone walls (Fig.16) and was served by a water supply system, skillfully siphoned from an adjacent Kotgah stream. The residential quarter is quite crowded, not leaving space for a large temple compound to receive pilgrims. A large polo ground (Fig.17) is located on the lower, northern terrace, still in good condition.

### **Pouguch “University Site”**

In search of any clue to Fa Hsien’s visit in the Darel Valley, we came across a site called “university” by the villagers of Pouguch which lies on a narrow plateau, 125m above the village of Pouguch, 15.3km from the mouth of the valley. A large compound on an incline, highest at the southern end and sloping down for about 20m towards the north, in trapezoidal in shape 97.6m long (NNW to SSE) x 43m across in the longest length, is surrounded partially by the remnants of thick red clay walls (Figs.18 & 19) standing in various spots. The red clay is only available at Atth and beyond at the upper valley (as well as on the Maja Sagar Plateau), more than 40km north of Pouguch. This implies that special attention was paid to construct the site, not using stone like in Rajikot Fortress, but clay, which is less defensive material, suggesting that the site was not meant to be a fortress as Stein suggested (Stein 1928 Vol.1, 34 ) but was originally designed to be a religious site. At the southern center of the compound, there are large mounds of cut stones, probably parts of monuments which once stood within the compound. It could have been the major temple site, in front of which the colossal image of Maitreya stood (Tsuchiya 2005b). The main gateway was located in the middle of the eastern wall. Only bases of pillars of the gate (Fig.20) are discernible. In front of the gate, a cistern protected under a large boulder was clearly definable. An ancient well-rounded stone stairway on the way to the site from Pouguch shows much wear.

Local legends collected from the villagers of Pouguch revealed a striking affinity with Fa Hsien’s description of Darel. They understood that this site was a place of assembly, worship and learning, where people from all over the world gathered to study and worship. The most notable comment was that a colossal image of a wooden “buth” (image of Buddha) was carved by Chinese. Although Fa Hsien and other Chinese monks actually came to worship the Buddha Maitreya, and did not engage in creating the image, it is striking that the local legend indicate the “Chinese” presence on the site.

It is striking that these three elements – colossal Buddha image in wood and a Chinese involvement in the site – were handed down in local legends, though the villagers do not have the slightest idea about Fa Hsien’s visit or the Chinese sources.

The location of the “university site,” near the mouth of the Darel, was confirmed to be the safest point in the valley, since our research revealed that the orientation of the valley was toward the head of the valley. The hostile Indus River, where the Darel River flows in, guarded the valley and kept it inaccessible. With our discovery of the elaborate defense system at the head of the valley, the “university site” is located at the remotest strategic depth, the most protected place in the valley to be a major Buddhist temple site of the Darel Valley.

The findings of the “university” site, its location, scope, plan and legend endorse our hypothesis that there is a great possibility of the “university” site being the Buddhist site where Fa Hsien visited in order to worship the image of Maitreya Buddha.

### **Bibliographic References**

- Adachi Kiichi, 1940, *Hokken-den -- Chua· Indo· Nankai Kiko no Kenkyuu* (A Study of Fa-hsien’s Travel), Houzou-kan, Tokyo.
- 1936, *Koushou Hokken-den Annotated study of 'A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms' by Fa Hsien*, Sanseido. Tokyo.
- Han Shu (2), 1972 (Reprint 1983) *Hanko Shoin*, Tokyo
- Legge, James. 1886, *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms*, Clearemdom Press. London. Reprint 1965, Dover

Publication, New York.

Nagasawa, Kazutoshi. 1979, *Hokkenden A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms by Fa Hsien*, Toyo Bunko, Heibonsha, Tokyo.

Shiratori, Kurakichi. 1941, *Saiiki no Kenkyu A Study on the Western Region*, Vol.1. Iwanami Shoten, Tokyo.

Stein, M.A. 1928 *Innermost Asia*, Vol.1, Reprint 1981 New Dehli, 13-32.

Tsuchiya, Haruko 2005a, *The Singal Valley as Fa Hsien's route from Pamir to Darel*. Field Research in the Northern Areas of Pakistan 2001-2002. South Asian Archaeology 2003, Proceedings of the Seventeenth Association of South Asian Archaeologists (7-11 July 2003, Bonn). Edited by Ute Franke-Vogt & Hans-Joachim Weishaar, Deutsches Archologisches, Aachen, 261-269.

— 2005b, *The Darel Valley: Fa-hsien and a Colossal Statue of the Maitreya*; Field Research in the Northern Areas of Pakistan: 1998(I)(II) and 1999(I). "Art et archéologie des monastères greco-bouddhiques du Nord-Ouest de l'Inde et de l'Asie centrale. Actes du colloque international du Crpoga (Strasbourg, 17-18 mars 2000) édité's par Zemaryalai Tarzi et Denyse Vaillancourt, Collection de l'Université Marc Bloch-Strasbourg, De Boccard, Paris, 187-208.

— (in press) 1999, *The Darel Valley on the Indus and T'o-li and Fa Hsien: 1998(I)(II) and 1999(I)*: Field Research in the Northern Areas of Pakistan, Proceedings of Fifteenth International Conference on South Asian Archaeology, July 5th -9th, 1999, Leiden.

— 1999a, Preliminary Report on Field Research along the Ancient Routes in the Northern Areas of Pakistan and Related Historical and Art Historical Information 1995(I)(II), 1996(I)(II), 1997(I)(II), 1998(I). Sophia International Review vol.21. Tokyo, 39-72.

— 1999b, *Tracing Ancient Routes in Northern Pakistan: Field Research (1991-1996) Preliminary Report*. Proceedings of International Symposium on "Weihräucher und Seide", Wien, April 11-13 1996, Coins, Art and Chronology, Ed. By Alram M. and Klimburg-Salter D. E. Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien, 353-390.

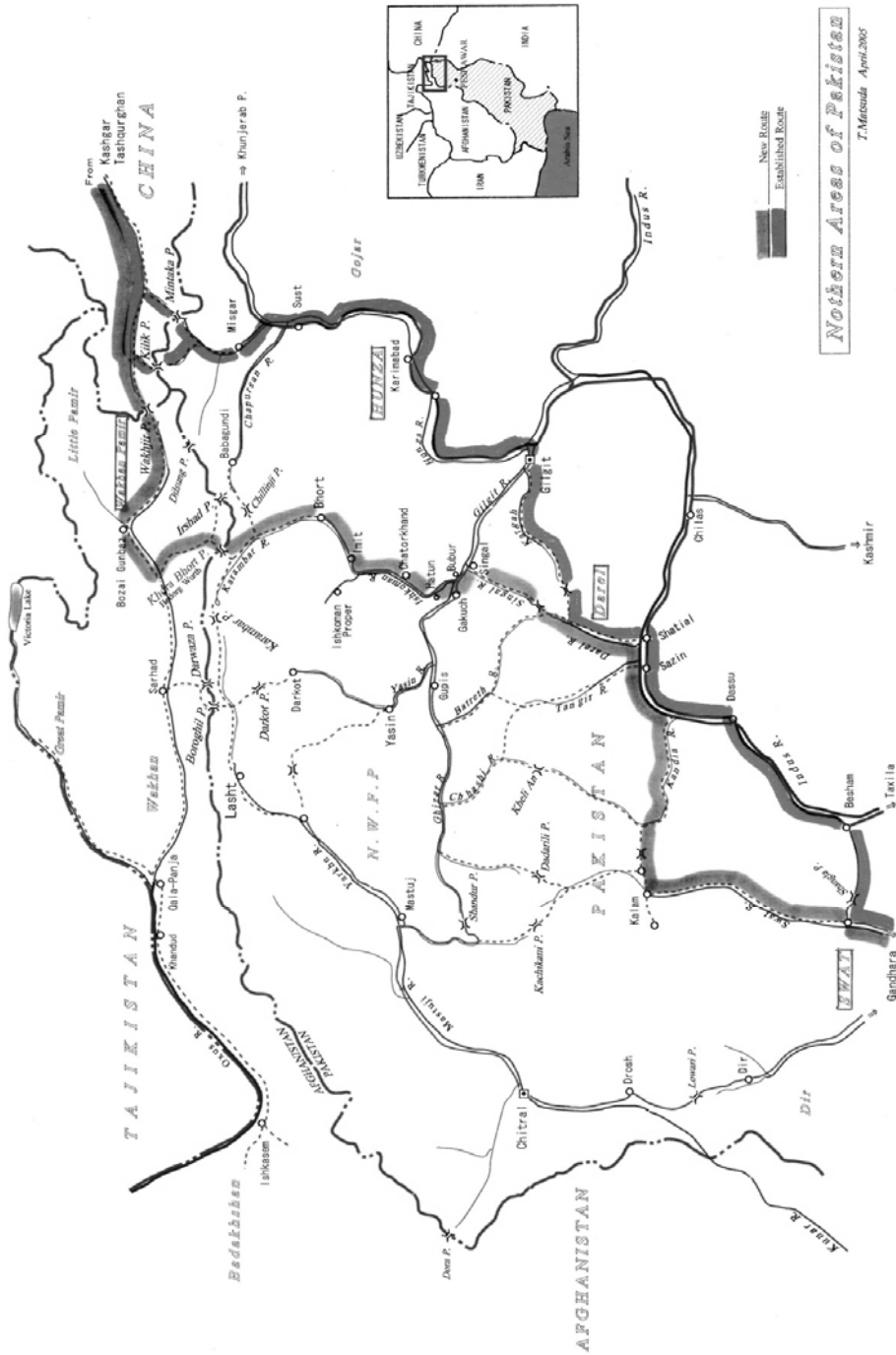
— 2000a, *Pamir to Swat: Tracing Ancient Routes along the Gilgit River Valleys in the Northern Areas of Pakistan; Field Research (1991-2000) Part 1*. Journal for the Comparative Study of Civilizations. Center for the Comparative Study of Civilizations, Reitaku University, Kashiwa, Chiba Prefecture, No.5, 87-120.

— 2000b, *Ancient Routes in Northern Pakistan, 1996(II) and 1997 (I)*. Proceedings of the Fourteenth International Conference of the European Association of South Asian Archaeologists, 7th -11th July 1997, Rome, Ed. By Taddei, Maurizio and De Marco, Giuseppe, South Asian Archaeology 1997, Rome, Vol.II, 889-902.

— 2001, *Pamir to Swat: Tracing Ancient Routes along the Gilgit River Valleys in the Northern Areas of Pakistan; Field Research (1991-2000) Part 2*. Journal for the Comparative Study of Civilizations, Center for the Comparative Study of Civilizations, Reitaku University, Kashiwa, Chiba Prefecture, No.6, 57-110.

— 2002a, *Pamir to Swat: Tracing Ancient Routes along the Gilgit River Valleys in the Northern Areas of Pakistan; Field Research (1991-2000) Part 3*. Journal for the Comparative Study of Civilizations, Center for the Comparative Study of Civilizations, Reitaku University, Kashiwa, Chiba Prefecture, No.7, 47-118.

— 2002b, *The Darel Valley as Explored in 1913 and in 1998-2000*. Indo-Koko-Kenkyu [Indian Archaeological Studies]. Tokyo, Vol.23, 1-24.



Map 1: Northern Area of Pakistan



Map 2: Around Darel Valley



Fig. 1 Petroglyph of an ibex, Majaver, Imit, Karambar Valley



Fig. 2 Fotress site on the right, Saizankhela, Bhort, Karambar Valley

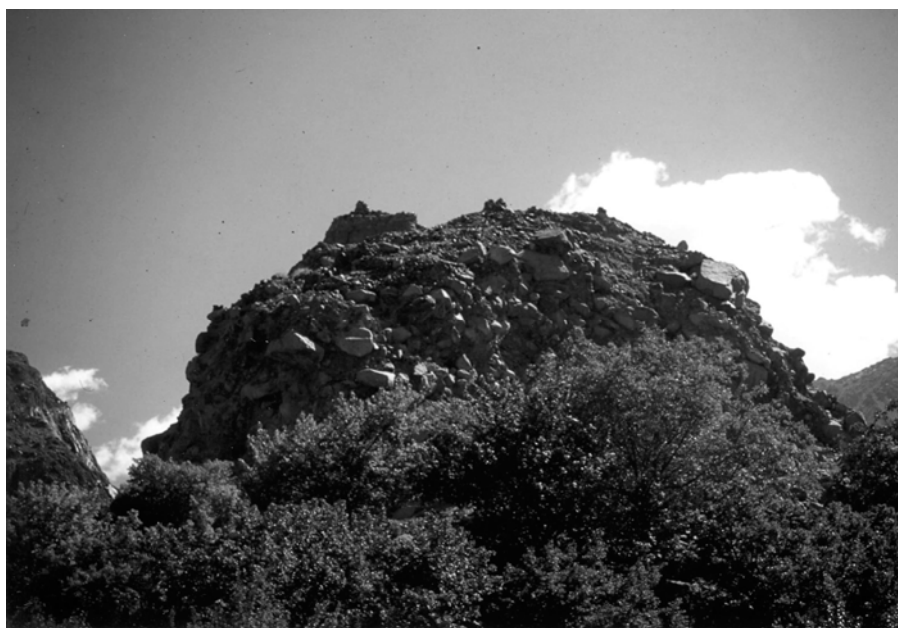


Fig. 3 Fortress site, Chatorkhand, Ishkoman Valley



Fig. 4 Chinese jade seal found at Imit, Karambar Valley



Fig. 5 Jade cups from Khotan, Chatorkand, Ishkoman Valley



Fig. 6 Buddha, seated, unearthed at Upper Gakuch, Gilgit River Valley

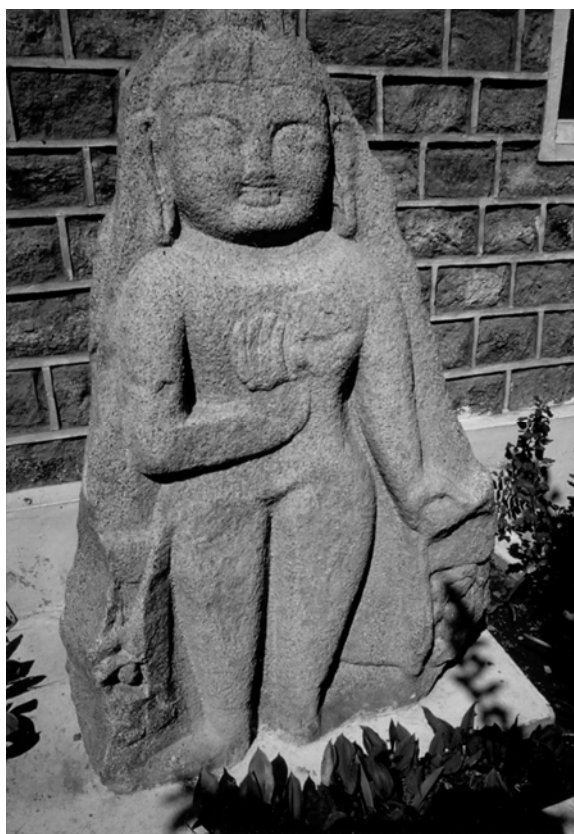


Fig. 7 Buddha, standing, unearthed at Bubur, Gilgit River Valley



Fig. 8 The Darel Valley



Fig. 9 Lumberyard, Darel Valley



Fig.10 Maja Sar Lake, Maja Sagar Highland



Fig.11 Yajei Pass in the background & Gali Sar Lake on the left, Koibali Valley, near Maja Sagar



Fig.12 View from the Batakhun Pass toward the Darel Valley



Fig.13 Darband site,, Darband, Darel Valley



Fig.14 Rajikot fortress site in the distance, Darel Valley



Fig.15 Panoramic view from Rajikot, Darel Valley



Fig.16 Stone wall, Rajikot, Darel Valley



Fig.17 Polo ground, Rajikot, Darel Valley



Fig.18 The western wall in red clay, Pouguch “University” site, Dare; Valley



Fig.19 The northern wall in red clay,Pouguch “University” site, with the upper Darel in the distance



Fig.20 Bases of pillars of the main gate, as marked: the eastern view of Pouguch “University” site, Darel Valley