

ART. XXII.—*Notes on Inscriptions from Udyāna, presented by Major Deane.* By M. A. STEIN, Ph.D.

FOR some time back the attention of scholars interested in the history and antiquities of the North-West Frontier regions of India has been drawn towards the remarkable series of inscriptions "in unknown characters" which the zealous search of Major H. A. DEANE, C.S.I., Political Officer, Swat, Dir and Chitral, has brought to light in the territory of the ancient *Udyāna*.

Since the discovery of the epigraphical finds already published by M. Senart and myself,<sup>1</sup> Major Deane, at the cost of no small trouble, has succeeded in collecting a considerable number of new inscriptions of this kind, either in the original stones or in the form of ink-impressions obtained through native agents. In accordance with the practice previously followed, the former were deposited in the Lahore Museum, while the impressions were, through Major Deane's kindness, entrusted to me for publication. In order, however, to make representative original specimens accessible also to scholars resident in Europe, Major Deane decided to present some of the stones more recently collected to the Royal Asiatic Society. Major Deane, by this liberal gift, has given a fresh proof of his eager desire to further researches bearing on the antiquities of those interesting frontier-regions, with which he is so closely connected as a soldier-administrator, and for the archaeological exploration of which he has himself done so much. The permission of

<sup>1</sup> See M. E. SENART'S *Notes d'Épigraphie Indienne.—V. Les Récentes Découvertes du major Deane, Journal asiatique*, 1894, tome iv. pp. 332-353; 504-518.

M. A. STEIN, *Notes on New Inscriptions discovered by Major Deane, Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1898, I. pp. 1-19, with plates i.-vii.

the Government of India having been obtained for this gift, I gladly undertook, at Major Deane's request, the task of selecting suitable specimens and accompanying them with the necessary explanations.

In offering these in the form of the present notes, I may be allowed to refer to my previous publication in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1898, in respect of all general questions bearing on the character and date of these puzzling inscriptions. No advance seems yet to have been made towards the decipherment of any of the scripts which are exhibited by these finds in such striking variety. Nor do the newly acquired materials appear as yet to offer any help in that direction.

In regard to the topographical distribution of the finds, too, the previous observations still appear to hold good. The newly collected inscriptions attach themselves closely, in respect of their characters, to the several local groups or types which M. Senart and myself have been able to distinguish among the earlier series. This is fully illustrated by the specimens presented to the Royal Asiatic Society. It will hence be convenient to describe them in the order of the groups to which they belong.

Nos. i.-iv. (numbered 95, 93, 94, 96 in Major Deane's list) are small stones, all coming from *Darwazgai*, close to the village of *Spankharra* which lies in the territory of the Rānizai Clan, just beyond the northernmost point of the *Hashtnagar Tahsil*, Peshawar District. They exhibit the same curiously twisted and scrawly lines which are characteristic for the inscriptions or rather *sgraffitti* that have previously come to light from the neighbourhood of *Spankharra*. Also in the small size and the irregular shape of the stones our Nos. i.-iv. resemble closely the previous specimens of the *Spankharra* group, as will easily be seen by a comparison of figs. 1-23 on plate I. of my above-quoted paper.

To the second group, that of *Bunēr*, may be attributed with great probability No. v (numbered 25 in Major Deane's list, and previously known to me from an impression).

The place at which this stone was originally found is unknown, as it was brought to Major Deane's agent by a wandering Tālib. But each of its characters can be traced in otherwise accessible specimens of the Bunēr group (compare figs. 24-36, 76-91 of plates accompanying Parts I and II, resp., of my paper in the *J.A.S.B.*). Hence I have little doubt that this small stone, too, was originally brought from some place in Bunēr territory. Its peculiarity is the carefully raised and polished face on which the characters are incised. It suggests that the stone may have possibly been intended for a seal, a supposition with which the remarkably small size of the stone would well agree.

No. vi., which comes from *Khudu Khêl* territory, south of Mount Mahāban, shows the characters peculiar to the "Mahāban" type which is so largely represented among the previously published inscriptions. Though this stone is somewhat larger and more regular in shape than those hitherto noticed, we are confronted here, too, by the difficulty of determining which was the position intended for the inscription, i.e. what is to be considered as the top or bottom. The great majority of the inscriptions of the Mahāban group clearly shows the characters arranged in horizontal lines, though we have no certain clue as yet as to whether they are to be read from the right or left. In the case of our No. vi., too, an arrangement in four horizontal lines is unmistakable. The lowest of these lines (taking the stone as shown in the plate) contains a smaller number of characters than the rest, and these more closely placed, evidently owing to want of space. From this we may perhaps conclude that the shortest line contains the last letters of the inscription, and that therefore the position assumed in the reproduction was the one originally intended.

The remaining three inscriptions come from the Upper *Swāt* Valley, and show in their characters a near affinity to the few inscriptions which in the above-quoted paper I distinguished as the fifth or *Swāt* group. This close agreement of the characters is particularly striking in the case of No. vii., which, according to Major Deane's note,

was "found in an old ruin on a hill near *Gogdarra* in Upper Swāt." About one-half of the characters it exhibits can be made out also on the impressions of two rock-cut inscriptions from *Odigrām*, reproduced in figs. 52 and 53 of plate VII., *J.A.S.B.*, 1898. We may lay the more stress on this recurrence of particular characters as the find-places are in close proximity. According to the Sketch Map of Upper Swāt, prepared on the basis of the Field Survey which was effected during the short reconnaissance into the Upper Swāt Valley in August, 1897, *Gogdarra* is a village near the left bank of the Swāt River, only about one mile below *Odigrām*, more correctly spelt *Udegrām*. The distance of *Gogdarra* from the *Landakē* spur, the nearest point of the Swāt Valley at present accessible and the site of a notable engagement during the rising of 1897, is about ten miles.

The *Udegrām* inscriptions are engraved on a rock, and their position, according to the impressions supplied to me, is that shown on my plate. This helps us in determining with some probability the position in which our No. vii. was intended to be read. For it is only when holding the stone in the position indicated by the reproduction that the identity of a number of characters with those of the *Udegrām* inscriptions becomes apparent.

The old ruin to which Major Deane's note refers as the place where the *Gogdarra* stone was found, belongs in all probability to one of those ancient villages and towns which can be traced in so great a number along the hill slopes of the Swāt Valley. The ruins of these old sites consist mainly of fortified dwelling-places such as I have fully described in the case of similar sites examined by me in *Bunēr*.<sup>1</sup> When visiting the heights of the *Landakē* spur at the close of the year 1897, I could with my field-glasses make out a succession of such ruined sites along the slopes of the hills stretching up the left bank of the Swāt Valley towards *Barikōṭ*, *Shangardār*, and *Udegrām*.

<sup>1</sup> See *Detailed Report of an Archaeological Tour with the Buner Field Force*, by M. A. Stein; Lahore, 1898, pp. 5 sqq. (Reprinted in *Indian Antiquary*, 1899, March-April.)

i.  $\left(\frac{13}{25}\right)$



ii.  $\left(\frac{13}{25}\right)$



vi.  $\left(\frac{13}{25}\right)$



viii. Obv.  $\left(\frac{7}{20}\right)$



ix.  $\left(\frac{7}{20}\right)$





iii.  $\left(\frac{13}{20}\right)$



iv.  $\left(\frac{19}{20}\right)$



v.  $\left(\frac{19}{20}\right)$



viii. Rev.  $\left(\frac{7}{20}\right)$



vii.  $\left(\frac{8}{9}\right)$



x.  $\left(\frac{1}{9}\right)$



The most interesting piece of the present collection, and from a historical point of view as yet the most instructive of all of Major Deane's inscriptions in "unknown characters," is the stone No. viii. It was brought to Major Deane early in the present year from Upper Swāt, but its exact find-spot could not be ascertained. Its obverse shows a miniature relievo representation of a column in the Gandhāra style, with a Corinthian capital, placed in a kind of niche. From the foliage of the capital rises the upper half of a small human figure, now much effaced. On the rough back of this small sculpture, which measures about 8 inches in height and  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches in breadth, a number of characters has been incised, some of which resemble closely those found in the Udegrām and Gogdarra inscriptions (for the character curiously resembling the Arabic numeral 3, compare also fig. 54 on plate VII., *J.A.S.B.*, 1898).

Judging from a comparison of numerous similar pieces in the great collection of Gandhāra sculptures now in the Lahore Museum, I believe there can be little doubt that this small relievo fragment formed part of a panel adorning a small votive Stūpa. As one flank of the piece (on the proper left) shows a carefully smoothed surface, it seems probable that it occupied the corner in one of the courses forming the square base of the Stūpa. The dovetail on the top shows that there was probably a similar course above it. The back of the relievo is left perfectly rough and uneven, which proves conclusively that it was not originally intended to be exposed to view. It is, in fact, clear that the back of the relievo panel must have been attached to the structure of stone or plaster which formed the interior of the small Stūpa.

Finding then characters cut into the rough surface of the back of this fragment, we are led *à priori* to conclude that this inscription or rather *sgraffitto* was made after the relievo had been destroyed or removed from its original position. The only other supposition would be that the inscription, if coeval with the relievo, was directly intended to be hidden from view. Such an assumption, however,

is in itself very improbable, and a careful examination of the characters suffices to dispose of it. The stone on the back of the relievo has suffered considerably, and pieces both at its top and bottom have been chipped off. Yet none of the incised characters shows any trace of injury. This fact scarcely admits of any other explanation than that they were engraved at a later date when the fragment had already been reduced to the form in which we now see it.

The observation here indicated possesses considerable interest with reference to the question of the date and origin of these puzzling inscriptions. The chronology of the so-called Graeco-Buddhist art represented in the sculptures of the Gandhāra and Udyāna monasteries is still obscure in many respects. But there are strong grounds for the now generally accepted opinion which looks upon the first four centuries of our era as the period when the sculptural art of Gandhāra developed and flourished.<sup>1</sup> Hitherto we have been without a single piece of definite evidence as to the date of any of Major Deane's inscriptions "in unknown characters." The small stone we have now examined supplies such evidence at least in one direction. It is impossible for us to judge how long after the original date of the relievo the latter was destroyed and the characters now seen engraved on its reverse. But we can safely assert now that this inscription itself cannot be older than the period to which the sculpture belongs, and that it probably dates considerably later.

We might draw the lower chronological limit somewhat more closely if the indication furnished by a detail feature of the little sculpture could be considered quite certain. I mean the small human figure rising from amidst the foliage of the capital. This decorative motive, which is frequent enough in the capitals of the Gandhāra style, was in all probability, like the great majority of the formal elements of the style, borrowed from the West. There, according to Mr. Fergusson's statement, it makes its first

<sup>1</sup> Compare A. GRÜNWEDEL, *Buddhistische Kunst in Indien*, 1893, p. 79.



prominent appearance in late Roman art (*Baths of Caracalla*, A.D. 312–330).<sup>1</sup> If this observation is correct, it seems unlikely that this particular ornament could have found its way into Gandhāra architecture much before the fourth century of our era. But I am unable at present to verify Mr. Fergusson's opinion or to follow up this interesting question with the help of fresh materials.

Chronological evidence of some kind is furnished also by the last piece of the present collection, No. ix. The note with which it was forwarded to me in August, 1898, describes the origin of this stone as follows: "Inscribed stone said to have been found in an old fort which stands on a hill called *Kahun* about 3 miles to the south of the village of *Gabrial* in *Kandia* in Upper Kohistan of Swat. This inscription is said to have been found originally 3 years ago, by a Zamindar of *Gabrial* who made it over to one Mulla Rajab Ali. The Mulla made it over to a Talib named *Muhibulla* who gave it to *Abul*" (Major Deane's agent).

The inscription is engraved on the carefully polished flat surface of a black marble-like stone, which measures on its top about 12 inches by 6 inches. The edge along one long and one short side shows a diaper ornament, which is reproduced also on three sides of the thickness of the stone (about  $1\frac{3}{8}$  inches). The smooth flat bottom of the stone, without ornament or writing, shows a square hole evidently intended for the insertion of a clamp.

Some of the characters of the inscription resemble those found on the stones from the Swāt Valley above discussed, while others reappear on the curious inscribed stones which were obtained from ruined sites near *Zangī Khān Banda* and *Kharapa* in *Bunēr*, and are reproduced in figs. 49–51 of plate VII., *J.A.S.B.* With the last-named inscriptions our No. ix. shares a striking irregularity in the position of the letters which seems scarcely compatible with the intention of a lineal arrangement.

<sup>1</sup> Compare FERGUSSON, *History of Indian Architecture*, p. 178.

A glance at the stone or its reproduction shows that the carved diaper ornament which encloses the inscribed surface on two sides, could not possibly be of a later date than the inscription itself. For though the characters are placed close enough to this ornamented edge, yet they are nowhere cut or otherwise effaced by the latter. The ornament must, therefore, be either anterior to, or coeval with, the inscription. On this account the style and design of this ornament deserves our attention.

The ornament consists of a rather coarsely executed diaper, which shows four-leaved flowers in diagonally placed squares, the triangular spaces left outside the squares being filled up with halved flowers of the same shape. This design bears the closest resemblance to a diaper frequently found in the ornamental carving of Gandhāra sculptures. It is enough to compare the decoration of our stone with the diaper ornament of a sculptured fragment excavated in 1895 from the site of an ancient Vihāra at *Dargai* (below Malakand), and now in the Lahore Museum (see fig. x), in order to realize the relatively late date of the former. Here, too, it is impossible to fix the upper limit of the possible range of dates. But judging from the general appearance of the design and its coarse execution, I can see no reason why the stone with its inscription might not belong to one of the centuries immediately preceding the Muhammadan conquest.

The indications furnished by the two inscriptions last discussed leave still a wide chronological margin. They are nevertheless of special value when considered with reference to the suggestion—first made by Messrs. Lévi and Chavannes and discussed in my former Notes—as to the possible connection between these inscriptions “in unknown characters” and the rule of a Turkish dynasty in Udyāna.<sup>1</sup>

We have the testimony of the Chinese pilgrim *Ou-k'ong*

<sup>1</sup> See *J.A.S.B.*, 1898, pp. 13 sqq.; *L'Itinéraire d'Ou-k'ong, traduit et annoté par MM. SYLVAIN LÉVI et E.D. CHAVANNES, Journal asiatique, 1895, pp. 383 sq.*

and of the *T'ang* Annals for the fact that Udyāna and Gandhāra were subject during the eighth century of our era to a dynasty of Turkish nationality and language. From an important notice of *Albērūnī*, which I have fully discussed elsewhere, we must conclude that these rulers belonged to the dynasty of the "Turkish *Shāhiyas* of Kābul" which continued to hold those territories down to the end of the ninth century.<sup>1</sup> It is an acknowledged fact that none of the scripts in Major Deane's puzzling epigraphical finds are related to any known Indian systems of writing. On the other hand, it appears possible that they are connected in some way with alphabets used about the period indicated by Turkish tribes in Central Asia.

I regret that the hope I had expressed in my first Notes on Major Deane's inscriptions for a closer examination of these relations by a competent Turkish scholar has not yet been realized. Until this is done the above suggestion as to the origin of the inscriptions "in unknown characters" must be considered a mere conjecture. It is, however, in the meantime reassuring to find that the chronological evidence gathered from Major Deane's latest discoveries is in no way opposed to that conjectural dating.

<sup>1</sup> See my notes "On the history of the Sāhis of Kābul" in *Festgruss an Rudolf von Roth*, 1893, pp. 200 sqq.; and Note J ("The Sāhi of Udabhāṇḍa") in my forthcoming translation of *Kalhana's Rājatarāṅgi*, vol. ii, pp. 336 sqq.