

A GLIMPSE

OF THE

ITALIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS

IN SWAT - PAKISTAN

they were discovered, permit one to reach an absolute chronology', which is extremely important for the historical knowledge of these regions, and also for dating the very rich ceramic material. We are thus in a position to state that life in this quarter of the city started in about the 4th century B. C. and lasted up to the 4th century A. D. At the end of this period new devastations and the increasing insecurity of the land caused a retreat towards the mountain that rises to the East. Another important result was the individuation of the urbanistic net-work, the plan of the buildings and the layout of the roads. In general, all the houses were built on a similar plan. There was an entrance of small proportions which opened into a courtyard serving the real residential part. In some cases it has been possible to recognize the old wooden structures. Along the roads there were rows of single rooms of an elongated rectangular plan which were most probably shops. From this fact is derived the conventional name 'bazar', by which this particular place of excavation is distinguished. The ceramic material unearthed in the last layer of this place finds correspondence with the first layers of the third locality of the excavation that was conventionally called the 'Castle'. From the slope of the hill which closes the plain of Udegram on the East, there rises a rocky pyramidal spur covered with the remains of many buildings at the top of which are very interesting works of elevation now partially demolished or collapsing. They represent the remains of a complex building of particular importance. Scientific investigation here has been particularly difficult, on account of the sloping nature of the site and because of the condition of the structures which wind up in an unusual succession of phases and levels. Eighteen layers have been identified, corresponding with as many building-periods the absolute chronological time of which have been fixed through coins and a very rich ceramic documentation.

We may say that life here started towards the middle of the 6th century, when the 'bazar' came to an end and life moved to the slope of the mountain. However, the greatest development of the 'Castle' may be placed between the 7th and the 10th

centuries, when the biggest entrance staircase was built which represented one of the more spectacularly and significant parts of the castle. Then there was the occupation of the place by Mahmood, documented archaeologically by coins, glazed ceramics and other finds of the Ghaznavid period. After this there appears to have been a new devastation followed by the return of the population which was not totally converted to Islam.

Near Mingora, the diggings took place in a locality called Butkara where there existed the largest Buddhist settlement of the country. Here more than 7,000 pieces of sculpture were discovered which form one of the most imposing collection of Gandhara art. They come, for the most part, from the fourth layer, formed by the general and final collapse of all the monuments consisting of both the central stupa and the minor stupas surrounding it, amounting to more than 200. The probable date of this collapse can be placed between the 6th and the 7th century A.D.

The sculptures belong to that form of art which is generally known as Gandhara Art. It is also called by some authors Greek-Buddhist or Roman-Buddhist art with an attempt at a stylistic classification that shows the unreliability of an effective historical framework. However even if its form is principally Western, so much so that it may be considered an artistic manifestation within the limits of the classical world, there is always within it a content decidedly Buddhistic. This art depicts events in the life of Buddha and was meant to decorate the sacred monument with images and to fill the souls of the devotees walking round the stupa with spiritual exaltation, so as to accomplish the ceremony of his worship. Here are the scenes of the birth of the Bodhisattva, his childhood, the renunciation, the departure from his town, the march towards illumination which he reached under the Bodhi tree. Then the first preaching, the many miracles and the various events up to his death and the scattering of his ashes. Unusual touches exist however, which defy an easy comparison with what we already know of this art. For instance, a profane character occasionally appears which shows up in its iconographic scheme



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