



RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The grey zones of antiquarian pursuits: The 1938 Barger expedition to the princely state of Swat

Rafiullah Khan 

<sup>1</sup>Classical Art Research Centre, University of Oxford, Oxford, United Kingdom and <sup>2</sup>Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan  
Email: [rafi.ullah@classics.ox.ac.uk](mailto:rafi.ullah@classics.ox.ac.uk)<sup>1</sup> and [rafiullah@qau.edu.pk](mailto:rafiullah@qau.edu.pk)<sup>2</sup>

(Received 7 April 2021; revised 24 May 2022; accepted 26 May 2022)

## Abstract

This article discusses and analyses the Barger archaeological expedition of 1938 to the princely state of Swat. It argues that archaeology in princely, as well as in British, India did not originate and develop in a unilinear manner. This understanding is in line with the recent realization of variations in the historiography of native India. Given this, an attempt has been made to situate the Swat state in relation to British paramourcy. Miangul Abdul Wadud, the first British-recognized ruler of the state, was aware of colonial power relations and had a friendly attitude towards the British. He dealt with Swat's archaeology with political and dynastic expediencies in mind. Since there was no proper legal and institutional dispensation in place in the area, the Frontier government officials and the political administration at Malakand treated the Barger expedition as a local matter, beyond the legal jurisdiction and disciplinary apparatuses of the colonial state. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and the related laws were, thus, kept out of the entire enterprise. All this ensured a smooth transfer of antiquities to England at a time when strong legal-institutional and ethical dimensions to archaeology were in place within British India and in some princely states.

**Keywords:** Malakand; Cobb; Barikot; Wali; princely states

## Introduction

Archaeological activities in colonial India took place within the two different political and administrative frameworks of British and princely, or native, India. Historiographical investigations concerning the former have, so far, reached valuable conclusions, but focused scholarly attention is still awaited with respect to the latter. It may also be pointed out that it was not always easy to undertake archaeological, and other, research in the princely areas owing to the complex nature of their relationship with the British. In spite of British paramourcy, princely affairs were not invariably dealt with in an identical way. With this context in mind, this article deals with a specific instance of archaeological work—the Barger expedition of 1938—in the princely state of Swat, the youngest of the Indian states. It addresses itself to some fundamental

© The Author(s), 2023. Published by Cambridge University Press. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution and reproduction, provided the original article is properly cited.

issues—legalities, transactions in art, and indigenous interest and involvement—in South Asian archaeology during the British overlordship.

Considering the significance of the recent realization of the regional differences between the princely states,<sup>1</sup> we also need to be conscious of variations in archaeological historiography. Though such a history, or histories, of archaeology/archaeologies in princely India are greatly lacking, still there are some studies that shed considerable light on the subject.

An early overview of the states' archaeology is available in *Revealing India's Past* edited by John Cumming. It gives a straightforward account of the birth and development of archaeological activities in the states of Hyderabad, Mysore, Baroda, Jammu and Kashmir, Gwalior, Travancore, Jaipur, Bhopal, Nagod, and Mayurbhanj.<sup>2</sup> Upinder Singh also gives the issue attention in her significant work *The Discovery of Ancient India*. She has shown how misguided the British officials' and archaeologists' attitude was towards the natives' response to archaeology. They were unnecessarily critical of the locals' involvement in archaeological research and conservation. She also reflects on the issue of collaboration in the field of conservation between British officials and the princes. It was characterized by a sense of 'certain limits of propriety and decorum. ...'<sup>3</sup> Nayanjot Lahiri similarly demonstrates how the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) repeatedly attacked the site of Sanchi and how the rulers of Bhopal asserted themselves throughout. She illustrates how the early colonial archaeologists practically destroyed the site and took its relics to England. Later on, the ruling house strongly claimed their rights to the artefacts which were, finally, restituted on the eve of the partition. All this is of particular importance in the development of archaeology in colonial South Asia, especially amid the communal crisis.<sup>4</sup> Another important study concerning the state of Jammu and Kashmir investigates the politics around archaeology marked by communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims in the early twentieth century. The former tried to use archaeology for princely legitimacy, while the latter made it an axis of their resistance against the Dogra dynasty. It is argued that archaeology per se was hardly of any real interest to any of them; rather, it was just used for the sake of political expediency.<sup>5</sup> These last two works are significant to us as they articulate approaches to archaeology in specific local political contexts. Of immediate relevance here are also Luca Maria Olivieri's investigations. He has published a summary catalogue of official correspondence, along with many explanatory notes, dealing with the archaeology of Malakand, Swat, and Buner.<sup>6</sup> He also studies Aurel Stein's works in the area with a focus on some historical, legal, and political problems

<sup>1</sup>W. Ernst and B. Pati (eds), *India's princely states: People, princes and colonialism* (London: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>2</sup>J. Cumming (ed.), *Revealing India's past: A co-operative record of archaeological conservation and exploration in India and beyond* (London: The India Society, 1939), pp. 253–324.

<sup>3</sup>U. Singh, *The discovery of ancient India: Early archaeologists and the beginnings of archaeology* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), pp. 290–304.

<sup>4</sup>N. Lahiri, 'From ruin to restoration: The modern history of Sanchi', in *Belief in the past: The proceedings of the 2002 Manchester Conference on Archaeology and Religion*, (ed.) T. Insoll (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2004), pp. 94–114.

<sup>5</sup>M. Rai, 'To "tear the mask off the face of the past": Archaeology and politics in Jammu and Kashmir', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 46, no. 3, 2009, pp. 401–426.

<sup>6</sup>L. M. Olivieri, *Sir Aurel Stein and the 'Lords of the Marches': New archival materials* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2015).

concerning field archaeology.<sup>7</sup> Social and political dynamics in all the princely states, no doubt, varied tremendously<sup>8</sup> and these determined the different courses and trajectories taken by archaeology in native India. The present article demonstrates this variation, keeping in mind the need to sort out various ‘histories’ of ‘archaeologies’ informed by critical and historiographical considerations.<sup>9</sup>

Against this backdrop, this article explores and analyses archaeological activities in the Swat state. The friendly and submissive approach of Abdul Wadud, the ruler of Swat, played a significant role in the area’s archaeology. It added positively to the British view of his enlightened spirit and powerful leadership. The concept of *enlightened despot/ruler* is especially vital for explaining, among other modernization efforts, Abdul Wadud’s role in the development of archaeological work in the state. In this context, the seminal work of Sir Aurel Stein hardly needs any introduction. He traversed most of the state in 1926 and published a comprehensive report of his reconnaissance.<sup>10</sup> The second important expedition to Swat, and the object of investigation in this article, was led by Evert Hugh Barger in 1938. Barger (1910–1975), the leader of the team, was a lecturer in medieval history in the Department of History, Bristol University in the United Kingdom. Although not formally trained in archaeology and excavation, he seems to have been an expert in the historical geography, including that of Central Asia. Alongside him was Philip Wright who worked as assistant keeper of the Indian Section at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. The other two members of the team were T. D. Weatherhead, surveyor and photographer, and W. V. Emanuel, whose role was to take care of transport, equipment, and so on.

Until now the sole source of our information for this work has been the few published works, foremost among them Barger and Wright’s report.<sup>11</sup> Though scholars of the archaeology of Swat have long been critical of this expedition’s work, this article will for the first time present a rigorous historical reappraisal. The archival data come from the Office of the Political Agent, now Deputy Commissioner, at Malakand, Khyber Pukhtunkhwa. It is a rarely accessible depository containing the colonial period records of the affairs of the Political Agency of Dir, Swat, and Chitral. Files on archaeological subjects in this archive were first noticed by Olivieri in 2008, which led to numerous subsequent publications.

In order to better grasp the situation, this article first explains the nature of the political and suzerain relationship between the Swat state and British India. At least three elements of Benjamin Hopkins’ concept of ‘frontier governmentality’—indirect rule, sovereign pluralism, and economic dependence—were operating in Swat as well as in other adjacent frontier states. The notion of the power and imprimatur of the

<sup>7</sup>L. M. Olivieri, “‘Frontier archaeology’: Sir Aurel Stein, Swat and the Indian Aornos”, *South Asian Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2015, pp. 58–70; L. M. Olivieri, ‘Early archaeology in a “native state”: Khans, officers, and archaeologists in Swat (1895–1939), with a digression on the 1950s’, in *Masters’ and ‘natives’: Digging the other’s past*, (eds) S. Gorshenina, P. Bornet, M. E. Fuchs and C. Rapin (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), pp. 213–236.

<sup>8</sup>B. N. Ramusack, *The Indian princes and their states* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 170–244.

<sup>9</sup>S. Guha, *Artifacts of history: Archaeology, historiography and Indian pasts* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2015).

<sup>10</sup>A. Stein, *An archaeological tour in upper Swat and adjacent hill tracts* (Calcutta: Government of India, 1930).

<sup>11</sup>E. Barger and P. Wright, *Excavations in Swat and explorations in the Oxus territories of Afghanistan* (Calcutta: Government of India, 1941).

'man on the spot', namely, the political agent, is vital to the present work.<sup>12</sup> Political officers, almost throughout the British Indian 'imperial sphere', were active in archaeological activities. They, along with the native royal houses and local governments of British India, often made up a trio of actors in the field of historical and archaeological research. This is an important contextual framework for this article, focusing on the role played by the government of the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP),<sup>13</sup> the political administration at Malakand, and the ruler of Swat. In this way, long overdue attention will be given to the course and nature of colonial archaeology, in terms of the position and relevance of legal matters, in the princely space. The second problem this article addresses is illegal trafficking and trade in antiquities. The economic dependence of the Indian north-west frontier on the extended British 'imperial sphere', according to Hopkins, can be explained in terms of military and migratory labour markets. What is crucially important in his analysis is what he calls 'the development of "illicit" economies', a phenomenon stemming from the frontier's economic reliance on the colonial state system. Like other illegal activities and felonies,<sup>14</sup> unlawful transactions in art may also be seen in this framework. Moreover, Eric Beverley's discussion of 'frontier as resource', where opportunities could be available to those associated with the colonial and local authorities and the frontier dwellers, is also insightful.<sup>15</sup> '[... T]he Frontier provided access to jurisdictional difference and spatial distance from the colonial state's disciplinary apparatuses.... Nevertheless, the frontier zone was productive of possibilities, different in degree if not in kind from those available in spaces firmly within British Indian terrain.'<sup>16</sup> European adventurers, scholars, and antiquarians could also avail themselves of such opportunities. The Barger expedition is a beautiful illustration of such a characteristic of frontier zones. It was claimed that the expedition, sponsored by the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Indian Research Committee, was concerned mainly with promoting scholarship about India and addressing the wider interest in Indian art and history. Whatever the veracity of this position, it was only possible to meet this target on the outer frontier of British India. A huge collection was acquired and transferred, ostensibly to England (see below). Still another significant issue this article reflects upon and analyses is the princely response to archaeology. In particular it focuses on royalty's 'role

<sup>12</sup>B. D. Hopkins, *Ruling the savage periphery: Frontier governance and the making of modern state* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020), pp. 5–6.

<sup>13</sup>In 1901, the five settled districts of Peshawar, Kohat, Bannu, Dera Ismail Khan, and Hazara were detached from the Punjab so as to constitute a separate province called the North-West Frontier Province. Together with the five political agencies of North Waziristan, South Waziristan, Khyber, Kurram, and Malakand, it was headed by the chief commissioner who, as agent to the governor general, was also responsible for dealing with matters in the agencies. Pukhtun nationalists since 1947 remained very critical of the colonial nomenclature of their province and made efforts to rename it. Finally, it came to be called Khyber Pukhtunkhwa through the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan in 2010. The Malakand Agency was made part of the NWFP in 1970, while the area consisting of the rest of the four agencies and Frontier Regions merged in the province in 2018. In this article, the old name is retained for some practical reasons.

<sup>14</sup>Hopkins, *Ruling the savage periphery*, pp. 21–23.

<sup>15</sup>E. L. Beverley, 'Frontier as resource: Law, crime, and sovereignty on the margins of empire', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 55, no. 2, 2013, pp. 241–272.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 268–269.

in the construction of Indian history' and archaeological research<sup>17</sup> and delves into the complex context of their interest or lack of interest in such pursuits. Recent studies have questioned the long-held colonial view of history and archaeology as being divided along communal lines. The sponsorship and conservation of archaeology and monuments by the rulers of Bhopal, Hyderabad, Dhar, Dholpur, and so on, beyond a religion-based partisan divide, show a more inclusive approach. However, this article, by taking account of the nature of the non-uniform relationship of the paramount power with the princes, presents a reappraisal. It cautions against any general statements about either perspective. The Barger expedition tells a different story from the ones we know from Kashmir, on the one hand, and from Bhopal and Hyderabad, on the other.

### Situating the Swat state in a colonial context

Recently there have been calls to integrate the Indian states into wider debates in South Asian historiography. There has been an increasing realization that the 500 plus states were marked by numerous internal and external dissimilarities, such as relative size of a state, composition of its population, dynastic history, natural resources, and geo-strategic importance. British relations with the princes were also conditioned by these internal dynamics. Considering this, it is important to situate the Swat state with reference to British paramount control. The first Wali of the state, Miangul Abdul Wadud, following his recent and insecure creation, made conscious efforts to make British officials trust him.

The Swat state, in contrast to the rest of princely India, came into being in 1915. It was primarily a people's response to the neighbouring Dir state repeatedly invading the territory of the tribes on the right bank of the Swat river. The Nawab's forces were defeated for the last time and driven out at the beginning of 1915. Subsequently, the rulership was offered to Abdul Wadud and, on his refusal, to an outsider, Sayyid Abdul Jabbar Shah of Sithana who was installed as king on 24 April 1915.<sup>18</sup> The situation, however, did not stabilize and continuous wars and intrigues resulted in his deposition in September 1917. This was immediately followed by the installation of Abdul Wadud, the grandson of Akhund Abdul Ghafur, the nineteenth-century spiritual leader of the area.

Abdul Wadud astutely strengthened his position and ruled from 1917 to 1949, when he resigned in favour of his son, Miangul Abdul Haq Jahanzeb. Jahanzeb ruled over Swat until the merger of the state into Pakistan in 1969. This shows that the Swat state survived for more than two decades after the creation of Pakistan (the first two years of which coincided with the reign of Abdul Wadud).

The expansion and consolidation of the Swat state under Abdul Wadud is an intriguing story. He had to manoeuvre on at least three different fronts. He surpassed rulers of the neighbouring princely states, namely, Dir, Chitral, and Amb. He was also urgently required to dispose of the local power centres represented by Khans, saints, and others; and last, but not least, it was of tremendous importance to maintain a prudent policy

<sup>17</sup>Ramusack, *The Indian princes and their states*, p. 145.

<sup>18</sup>Sultan-i-Rome, *Swat state (1915–1969): From genesis to merger. An analysis of political, administrative, socio-political, and economic developments* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 52–56.

towards the British. The British power base was situated close by—at Malakand—and it would have been extremely naive if Abdul Wadud had thought that he could overcome his multiple problems without their overt or covert support. Thus, his success largely rested upon his friendly relationship with the paramount power, represented by the political agent at Malakand.<sup>19</sup>

The concept of ‘enlightened despotism’ can explain this complex situation. Like other enlightened despots, Abdul Wadud responded to many internal and external problems through a strategy of modernization and development. It certainly would have been very difficult for him to rely only on brute force if he were to gain legitimacy in the eyes of his people. His public works initiatives, such as a modern communication system, education, and so on, may, therefore, be seen as intended to expand and secure a power base within his territory. However, at the same time, this modernization programme only makes full sense if it is contextualized against British paramountcy.<sup>20</sup> All the Indian states, irrespective of their size and strength, were connected to the British suzerainty through an elaborate colonial tutelage. And this unequal relationship was represented by legal instruments that ensured arrangements of mutual obligations. The British had the power to intervene in any state. Similarly, political and military affairs, including communication, were relegated to the Crown. In return, the princes enjoyed guaranteed security, settlement of mutual disputes, and so on. They were considered as natural allies but, at the same time, distinct from the Western-educated intelligentsia of British India.<sup>21</sup>

In this overall context, princes, especially those of lesser rank and importance, tried to persuade the British of their loyalty and vitality. Abdul Wadud had always been conscious of this. Ambitions that might have enraged the British were left unpursued. With respect to Dir, the British intervened to settle the border disputes between the two rivals. The Adinzai Agreement, dated 20 June 1922, instructed the Wali to cede the Adinzai area to the Nawab of Dir who, in turn, refrained from unnecessary interference in Swat.<sup>22</sup> Abdul Wadud was also stopped, despite his aspirations, from crossing the Indus into the Amb state, Alai, Tangir, the area of the Khan of Thakot, and so on.<sup>23</sup> When the ruler was being recognized in 1926, the British took exception to his title, namely, Badshah (king). They contended that since it was the prerogative of the Crown to use the title, there could not be other kings within the empire. This angered Abdul Wadud but, finally, he forsook the title of Badshah and, instead, conceded to be called ‘Wali’. In his discussion of the Wali’s relations with the British, Sultan-i-Rome observes that his policy towards the colonial administration ‘was more than friendly and cordial,

<sup>19</sup>In 1895, after the successful operations of the Chitral expedition, the Agency of Dir and Swat, commonly called and referred to as the Malakand Agency, was constituted, to which Chitral was added in March 1897.

<sup>20</sup>For general issues concerning modernization and legitimation in the context of princely India, see W. Ernst and B. Pati, ‘People, princes and colonialism’, in *India’s princely states*, (eds) Ernst and Pati, pp. 1–14 [pp. 6–8].

<sup>21</sup>C. Markovitz (ed.), *A history of modern India, 1480–1950* (London: Anthem Press, 2004), pp. 386–409; cf. H. Singh, ‘Colonial and postcolonial historiography and the princely states’, in *India’s princely states*, (eds) Ernst and Pati, pp. 15–29.

<sup>22</sup>W. R. Hay, ‘History of the descendants of the Akhund of Swat and of the formation and development of Swat state’, unpublished, *personal collection of the author*, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup>Sultan-i-Rome, *Swat state (1915–1969)*, pp. 120–123.

and was based on conciliation and submission.... He had to remain subordinate and obedient to the Paramount Power if he had to achieve his own objectives and goals in relations to his internal and external enemies.<sup>24</sup>

### The Barger expedition

In this historical climate, Barger and his party made a successful entry into the Swat state. Their claimed purpose was to undertake the first scientific excavation in the area. The context of the expedition, which led Barger to make desperate efforts to win favour (for example, through contacts with the NWFP government and political agent at Malakand), needs to be discussed. Moreover, a comprehensive account of the field activities is also needed, especially considering the fact that the history of Gandharan archaeology is still a largely unexplored terrain.

### The context and preparations

The original aim of the Barger party was to explore Central Asia, especially Chinese Turkestan. They procured sufficient resources from a number of cultural and academic societies and institutions. However, the party was prevented from going ahead due to severe political tensions in the area. In January 1938, Barger was, at last, sent the disappointing news that there was no possibility for work in Chinese Turkestan. Soon afterwards, he approached the Afghan government via the British minister at Kabul, seeking permission to conduct archaeological research in the Oxus territories.<sup>25</sup> But the situation here was also complicated. We know much about the strained political and frosty diplomatic relations between London and Kabul.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the *Délégation archéologique française en Afghanistan* (DAFA) had had a practical monopoly over archaeological research in the country since 1922.<sup>27</sup> Both these facts acted as potential barriers not only for the Barger expedition, but also, previously, in the case of Aurel Stein.<sup>28</sup> However, Barger was fortunate that soon after, in April 1938, he met M. Joseph Hackin, head of DAFA, in Paris. Both agreed on a certain type of research collaboration in Afghanistan but still failed to elicit the Afghan government's consent to welcome a British party. The rejection came in June. In the meantime, Barger had also asked the Indian government for permission to work in the NWFP and the adjacent tribal areas. The government's response was, however, categorical on the

<sup>24</sup>Sultan-i-Rome, 'Swat state's relations with the British: An appraisal of Miangul Abdul Wadud's reign', *Pakistan Historical Society*, vol. LIII, no. 2, 2005, pp. 65–85 [p. 79].

<sup>25</sup>Barger and Wright, *Excavations in Swat*, p. 7.

<sup>26</sup>L. Dupree, *Afghanistan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973 [1978]), pp. 441–498.

<sup>27</sup>For this formative phase, see A. Fenet, 'Archaeology in the reign of Amanullah: The difficult birth of a national heritage', in *Afghan history through Afghan eyes*, (ed.) N. Green (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 131–160, 297–301.

<sup>28</sup>Stein made repeated abortive attempts to enter Afghanistan around 1920. His French friend, Alfred Foucher, however, succeeded in this regard in the early 1920s, prompting the beginning of long-lasting French archaeological activities in the country. It resulted in a strong rivalry between the two scholars and Stein always considered Foucher's activities as his friend's insinuation into his plan. R. Khan, 'Beginning of archaeology in Malakand-Swat (1896–1926): Protagonists, fieldwork and the legal framework', PhD thesis, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, 2014, pp. 68–69; H. P. Ray, *Colonial archaeology in South Asia: The legacy of Sir Mortimer Wheeler* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 223–224.

impossibility of such an activity due to the political crisis in the Frontier areas.<sup>29</sup> In May 1938, Barger was informed that '[t]he Government of India agree with the views of the North West Frontier Province and regret that they cannot permit your expedition to carry out archaeological work in any of these areas this summer.'<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, Barger was determined to succeed.

Barger, K. de B. Codrington, keeper of the Indian Section of the Victoria and Albert Museum, and others discussed the matter extensively. They sent letters to E. H. Cobb, the political agent (PA) at Malakand. Barger, in a letter dated 1 June 1938, explained to Cobb that his expedition originally aimed at 'an archaeological reconnaissance in the North of Afghanistan', a topic under serious discussion between the Afghan government and Colonel Fraser-Tyler. The final permission, he further writes, would not have reached him until after the party entered India.<sup>31</sup> In the case of any failure, the alternative was to embark on work in the NWFP. But this plan did not meet with the Indian government's approval. Barger still envisaged that there could be alternative prospects in the area for his party.<sup>32</sup> He wrote to Cobb:

The observations of the Government of India are, however, confined to Swat, Buner and Hazara. The plan that we should really like to have fallen back on, if we cannot go to the North of Afghanistan, is that of proceeding direct via Dir to Chitral valley, visiting Mastuj. I believe that this plan might present less difficulty from the point of view of protection, for we could travel from Malakand to Chitral with any party that happened to be going up, and I believe that conditions in Chitral might permit of our working there.<sup>33</sup>

The party was 'lightly-equipped', aiming at a reconnaissance 'to find out what there is and make an accurate photographic record, rather than anything in the nature of systematic excavation.'<sup>34</sup> Settled on this plan, they left England and reached India some time later in June. In the same letter, Barger says that they were leaving the same day (1 June) and would reach India around the 19th of that month.

Cobb informed A. D. F. Dundas, chief secretary to the government of the NWFP, of Barger's plan. Since it was not certain if the party would be able to proceed to Afghanistan, the proposed alternative visit to Chitral seemed similarly unproductive to the PA. There was nothing, wrote Cobb, of archaeological interest in the valley except the two inscribed stones already reported by Stein. Barger, therefore, should not be allowed to visit passes such as Baroghil or others into Sinkiang, especially when

<sup>29</sup>File No. 1-A, Subject: archeology of the Swat valley, rules regarding, Vol. III, Office of the Political Agent Dir, Swat and Chitral, Malakand, Crombie to Barger, 27 May 1938. (All official correspondence referred to in this article belongs, unless indicated otherwise, to this file.)

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Barger and Wright, *Excavations in Swat*, p. 8, write that their party sailed for India in the last days of May. However, a letter of 1 June 1938, from Barger to Cobb, states that they were to leave London the same day and would 'arrive at Nowshera (c/o Lt. Col. D. H. Gordon, 10the/11th Sikh) on or about June 19th.' (Barger to Cobb, 1 June 1938.) So they were certainly in England until 1 June.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

there was severe crisis in Gilgit and Kashghar.<sup>35</sup> Since Cobb was now on leave, the chief secretary sent a very strong letter to the assistant political officer, Malakand, instructing him not to provide any special facilities to Barger. It clarified that Barger's contention that the Indian government's rejection of his application did not apply to Chitral was unfounded. The Malakand administration was also instructed not to provide any facilities to Barger 'beyond those normally allowed to visitors, namely a trip as far as Chakdarra with the restrictions of not being allowed to go off the road. You should not allow him anything more than this without previous reference to the Local Administration.'<sup>36</sup>

In the meantime, however, Barger's focus seems to have switched from Chitral to Swat. He managed to visit Dundas at Nathiagali, the summer headquarters of the NWFP government. Here he presented an exposition of his plan. 'There had been some misunderstanding about the nature of our proposed work in Swat, which a visit to ... Nathiagali was able to remove.' When Dundas realized that 'we proposed to establish a permanent camp in Swat, and not to strain the resources of the Ruler's levies by requiring protection for a mobile caravan, a satisfactory plan was sanctioned.'<sup>37</sup> My calculations show that the meeting took place on 28 June. Once back in Peshawar, Barger wrote a detailed letter to Major Cobb explaining everything about his work in Swat. Given that there were no prospects that the Afghan government would welcome the party, Barger modified his original plan about Swat so as to ensure its full success. It seems that in his original application he had suggested work along the lines of a general survey, which could hardly be acceptable to the authorities, owing to Stein's extensive explorations in 1926 as well as added security risks. Barger tried to rectify the situation. He argued that it had inadvertently crept into the draft of his original proposal from the text of the proposal for Afghanistan. They did not intend 'an extensive traverse' which would require arduous security. Rather, a permanent camp would be established for excavations at numerous sites.<sup>38</sup> 'After discussing the matter with General Haughton and communicating with Codrington, I came to the conclusion that the most important work that we could do on this side of the frontier would be *the systematic excavation of one or more sites in Swat*' (my italics). This was, no doubt, in response to Cobb's suspicions about the value of any new work in Swat after that undertaken by Stein. Such work was justified by contrasting it against Stein's 'general reconnaissance' which did not include excavations and thus he was unable, Barger hastily remarks, to date a single site (see below for a critique of such bizarre remarks). It is further maintained, 'The next stage for archaeological work in Swat is, I have little doubt, the systematic excavation of a selected site, something more fundamental than the recording of ruins and the measurement of stupa bases which must necessarily be the work of a pioneer.'<sup>39</sup>

That the party would permanently camp at a safe place was bound to allay the security concerns of the authorities. Now Dundas left it up to Cobb to account for a feasible and calculated arrangement for the mission's intensive work. Stein's report

<sup>35</sup> Cobb to Dundas, 22 June 1938.

<sup>36</sup> Dundas to K. B. Arbab Khanan Khan, 27/28 June 1938.

<sup>37</sup> Barger and Wright, *Excavations in Swat*, p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> Barger to Cobb, 30 June 1938.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

helped Barger to identify potential sites for excavation and ‘the choice [was] to lie between Kanjar Kote, Barikot itself, the site on the spur above Haibatgram [Topdara stupa?], Charbagh acropolis and Kalungai.’ Barger also clarified that the party itself would take care of all its needs and it would not cause any trouble either to the Swat or the provincial authorities. It even hired two Pashto-speaking servants.<sup>40</sup> A letter of nearly similar contents was sent to the PA by the chief secretary. Nothing was committed to Barger on the part of the local government. Dundas, however, expressed his worries about work at Kalungai, which was not part of the Swat state, but thought that in other respects the mission’s engagement would not cause trouble. Dundas also did not concede to the proposed visit to Chitral. So preoccupied were the authorities by the security concerns that Dundas particularly pointed out that he had clearly told Barger that ‘nothing in the nature of roving expedition all over Swat, away from the road or in areas in which there is the slightest risk of disturbance, would be permitted by the Local Administration, even if the Wali and the Political Agent had recommended it.’<sup>41</sup> The provincial government left it to the PA to deal prudently with the expedition. Dundas writes to Cobb:

I concluded by telling Mr. Barger that his best course was to get into touch with you as soon as you return from leave, to get your permission to motor along the road and see from the road one or two Buddhist sites such as those which I have mentioned and also, if possible, Kalangai [Kalungai], and then after explaining his plans fully to you, to get your views on what could safely be allowed.<sup>42</sup>

In the meantime, Major Cobb had approached the Wali and explained the Barger expedition to him. He (mis)states that though the party had *the permission to work in Afghanistan*, due to recent disturbances in the country it could not move there. Moreover, he mentioned the team wanted to investigate and excavate sites ‘which Sir Aurel Stein had not sufficient time to explore thoroughly.’ Barger was ‘a good and reliable gentleman’ (see below for the contradiction in Cobb’s own views about Barger) and deserved to be assisted by providing ‘facilities for examining the sites in the vicinity of Barikot and if necessary carrying out excavations.’<sup>43</sup> The Wali, as usual, quickly granted unconditional permission followed by the provincial government’s affirmation, on the condition that the party would keep itself restricted to selected sites. The final permission offered by the PA, however, included some highly important and sensitive terms of reference.

It seems that Cobb did not want to give a completely free hand to Barger in Swat. That he and the provincial authorities were of the same opinion concerning the party’s permanent camp near to the Wali’s forts has been discussed above. Cobb went even further by suggesting to Dundas that the permission should include other specific terms. The reason for this was that he had come to know, through Colonel Collingridge, that Barger should be carefully watched and treated accordingly.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Dundas to Cobb, 29 June/4 July 1938.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Cobb to the Wali of Swat, 5 July 1938.

<sup>44</sup>Cobb to Dundas, 11 July 1938.

The permission letter prescribed that the expedition's camp should be pitched within the premises of Barikot and the work be done on the selected site of Kanjar Kote. The Wali's wishes were to be respected, keeping in mind the help and facilities provided by him. The most important terms of reference, however, included the following:

2. The conditions on which you are to be permitted to conduct these excavations are (1) That any find so discovered will be liable to be examined and retained if so desired first by the Swat State and secondly by the Government of the North-West Frontier Province.

(2) That copies of all material relating to these reports such as maps, photographs and reports should be given to Swat State as well as to the North-West Frontier Government through the Political Agent, Malakand.<sup>45</sup>

The importance and legal soundness of these terms vis-à-vis the Indian antiquities laws need no explanation (see below). Still another crucial point which had been mentioned before to Dundas in a letter was expunged from the list of conditions. It was that, as per institutional practice, a trained employee of the ASI, to be made available by its director general, should be attached to the expedition.<sup>46</sup> On another occasion, the PA wrote to Dundas: 'I propose to take an undertaking from them that Swat State and Archaeological Department will have a prior right to take any of the finds procured without payment.'<sup>47</sup> It is, however, intriguing that in the course of one week the Archaeology Department (denoting the ASI) was replaced with the government of the NWFP.<sup>48</sup> Our sources are silent about how this impactful change of mind took place. I believe, as can be surmised from scrutinizing the complex data, that there was a preference for discussing many issues of such a serious nature by telephone. No doubt, all this was perturbing to Barger. We will discuss later in this article the way in which these conditions were mitigated; let us turn for the moment to narrating the Barger party's operations in Swat.

### *The operations*

The entire background of the Barger expedition makes it clear that it was not genuinely shaped and guided either by any broader scholarly concerns or specific research questions. However, in the process of saving the party from a complete collapse, some strategy for the work was devised. On the whole, as it appears from the text of the report authored by Barger and Wright, the aim was to explore the cultural history of Gandhara with a focus on working out a chronology for Gandhara art and delineating the contours of its diffusion from northern India through Afghanistan to China. For this, excavation, rather than an archaeological survey, was seen to be fruitful. Barikot and Charbagh, quite distant from each other, were thus selected for monastic and settlement sites respectively. Both were supposed to provide data of the sites' domestic and religious character. It was hoped that a synthetic analysis of the material

<sup>45</sup>Cobb to Barger, 13 July 1938.

<sup>46</sup>Cobb to Dundas, 11 July 1938.

<sup>47</sup>Cobb to Dundas, 5 July 1938.

<sup>48</sup>Cobb to Dundas, 11 July 1938; Cobb to Barger, 13 July 1938.

would potentially help replace Alfred Foucher's stylistic chronology with an archaeological chronology<sup>49</sup> for Gandhara art. Chinese pilgrims' accounts and Aurel Stein's pioneering work were potential sources of guidance for the party. Instead of intensive excavation of a single site, and in view of the limited resources available, trial digs were made. It is, therefore, understandable that more than half a dozen sites were hunted at Barikot in a span of less than two months.

Following this scheme, the Barger party reached Barikot on 13 July 1938 and settled near the river. The following day, the site of Kanjar Kote was surveyed and the digging started on 15 July. The tahsildar of Barikot assisted with the work. The party was busy in excavating Kanjar Kote and Gumbat until the end of the third week of July. At Kanjar Kote remains of 'walled terraces', high niches, 'vaulted chambers', and a courtyard were found. In the courtyard area, one main and some small stupas were excavated. Panel reliefs and fragments of different types were found. Two small heads of the Buddha and one of a lion were also recovered. A standing vihara and two stupa mounds were seen at Gumbat. The mound on the north of the vihara was dug. Architectural and narrative reliefs, heads and hands of the Buddha, and heads of Bodhisattvas were found. A cylindrical shaped bell was also recovered.<sup>50</sup> Amid these activities, some dramatic developments occurred, notably the discovery of a site, up above the steep mountains, called Amluk. Amluk seems to have diverted the party's attention away from other sites. It was the shepherds spending the summer in the area who reported this *butkhana* (treasure/idol house). At about six kilometres from Barikot through the Kandak valley there was/is a small graveyard and thence 'to the shepherds' site, 4,000 feet above the valley floor, was a stiff four hours' climb in a westerly direction, over salty boulders and through thick shrub where even the local guides sometimes lost the indistinct track.'<sup>51</sup> On top of the hill, where the valleys of Kotah and Kandak meet, the prized site of Amluk was situated. It had escaped Stein's gaze. Immediately after getting the fascinating information, Barger, in the company of the tahsildar's son, visited Amluk on 23 July. He found it very promising. The next day the PA was informed that the site was a huge monastic complex comprising three stupas spotted with fragments (the result of recent digs). 'Their depredations had, however, only assumed a very small extent, and from the fragments we found and the general lay-out of the place, I should say that it is a treasure-house with no equal at all among those I have seen.'<sup>52</sup>

The tahsildar, after consultation with the Wali, made all arrangements for two days' trial work at Amluk. As the site was situated along the boundary between Swat and the British tribal area, far away from the Wali's forts, the tahsildar and his son suggested that Barger seek the PA's permission for a longer stay.<sup>53</sup> Barger, accordingly, planned to send Wright and Weatherhead to Amluk for two days with the permission of the Wali.

<sup>49</sup>By archaeological chronology Barger seems to have meant the dating of Gandhara art as warranted by stratigraphic analysis. Since Mortimer Wheeler was already known to him, it is reasonable to assume where the inspiration would have come from.

<sup>50</sup>Barger and Wright, *Excavations in Swat*, pp. 15–18, 57–59.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 18–19.

<sup>52</sup>Barger to Cobb, 24 July 1938.

<sup>53</sup>Muhammad Humayun to Barger, 24 July 1938.

They were supposed to properly assess if the site was suitable for ‘extensive excavation’. Barger requested that Cobb agree to a new arrangement which divided up the camp, keeping one at Amluk. He was told that ‘it would be an excavation of very great importance—one of the few unchronicled and untouched sites.’<sup>54</sup> Barger dispatched another letter the following day seeking the PA’s cooperation in the matter. He elaborated that a ‘stay for a little longer than two days for which the Wali has in the first instance agreed would be appreciable.’ He also instructed Wright and Weatherhead ‘not to wander about on the mountain top or to impinge on British territory’ and to restrict themselves just to their camp and site.<sup>55</sup> Major Cobb, however, was unequivocal in not conceding to the request. He wrote back to Barger that the idea of dividing up the camp, and pitching it away from Swat forts, was neither acceptable to the chief secretary nor convenient to the Wali.<sup>56</sup> A message was also sent to the Wali’s chief secretary saying that it had been categorically clarified to Barger that he should remain near to the forts. The PA opposed the division of the camp. The ‘Wali must use his own discretion about sites for their camp if they wish to move, but PA does not approve of suggestion to camp close to Border [at Amluk].’<sup>57</sup>

Despite Cobb’s repeated refusal to allow a camp to be set up at Amluk, it is plainly evident that Barger could not resist the site’s richness. On 27 July, he sent another letter to the PA emphasizing the significance of Amluk. He wrote that on the expiry of his two days’ permission, the Wali had extended it for another two days. He construed the Wali’s favour as his consent for detailed work at the site. The state authorities were ‘only awaiting your formal consent to our having a camp there. I think they would not have suggested an initial stay of two days, and extended it by a further two days, if they had any objection to our working there.’<sup>58</sup> Cobb’s response was typical: both Dundas and the Wali did not want the party, so unfamiliar to the area, to camp away from the Swat forts. He was clear and sharp in his rebuke: ‘The question of whether the site is good or otherwise is subsidiary to the question of protection.’<sup>59</sup>

In the meantime, Barger and Emanuel received permission to visit Afghanistan. Barger communicated this to Cobb on 31 July. They were to leave the next day while Wright was to lead the ongoing work in Swat. Barger gave him instructions about how to live and work.<sup>60</sup> And it is astonishing that Wright in his first letter, on 5 August, informed the PA that he had petitioned the secretary of the Swat state for the Wali’s favour in moving the camp to a site en route to Amluk. The suggested date for abandoning the Barikot camp was, probably, 8 August.<sup>61</sup> It seems that this time Cobb was supportive of the proposal as on 10 August Wright wrote to him: ‘I am very grateful to you for asking the Wali’s Secretary to make arrangements for our move

<sup>54</sup>Barger to Cobb, 24 July 1938. Barger further observes, ‘Its extreme isolation should have been responsible for the preservation of large and important sculptures such as we are hardly likely to find round here. The masonry is also of a most remarkable pattern.’ Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Barger to Cobb, 25 July 1938.

<sup>56</sup>Note by PA, 26 July 1938; Cobb to Barger, 28 July 1938.

<sup>57</sup>PA’s message to the Secretary to the Wali of Swat, 27 July 1938.

<sup>58</sup>Barger to Cobb, 27 July 1938.

<sup>59</sup>Cobb to Barger, 28 July 1938.

<sup>60</sup>Barger to Cobb, 31 July 1938; see also Barger and Wright, *Excavations in Swat*, p. 38.

<sup>61</sup>Wright to Cobb, 5 August 1938.

of camp....<sup>62</sup> The camping site at Amluk, perhaps, was the one that is mentioned by Barger and Wright as ‘a camp some 1,000 feet lower down the hill.’<sup>63</sup> Perhaps, a consideration in this relaxation was the reduced strength of the party after Barger and Emanuel had left for Afghanistan.

It seems that around two weeks, sometime between 8 and 23 August, were spent at Amluk. Stupa remains and a monastic complex were quarried for sculptures and other valuables. The site provided more large-sized stone sculptures<sup>64</sup> as compared to relief panels. Unlike Kanjar Kote, no stucco objects were found here. Two other sites in the vicinity—Chinabara and Shaban—were also trenched which provided some images, sculptural fragments, terracotta figurines, earthen and schist lamps, and so on.<sup>65</sup>

On 23 August, we hear from Wright that he intended to coordinate his march to Charbagh with the Swat authorities. The site for their two- or three-week operations had already been singled out, namely Jampurā Dherai. It was a settlement site that was expected to render data for understanding a socio-cultural landscape.<sup>66</sup> By now, Wright believed, they had ‘exhausted the digging possibilities of the sites in this [Barikot] neighbourhood....’<sup>67</sup> We know for certain that the party had reached Charbagh some time before 1 September 1938. Cobb was informed, on 1 September, about the progress of excavations at Jampurā Dherai. The tahsildar was caring. ‘Excavations on Jampure Dherai [Jampurā Dherai] have not yet brought up very much, though there are plenty of signs of ancient habitation, in the way of bones, pottery, small ornaments etc. This is an interesting site.’<sup>68</sup> Jampurā Dherai was subjected to trial diggings. A number of trenches were made. The recoveries from the site included terracotta figurines, coarse red pottery, animal bones, clay beads, iron objects, and so on. The site was, in fact, of considerable importance as the discovery of a ‘complex of walls’ shows. But, unfortunately, owing to a lack of time, the excavators would have us believe, the work could not be pursued for long.<sup>69</sup> Almost a week later, Wright wrote to the PA that they would like to pay a courtesy visit to Saidu to thank the Wali. He also expressed desire to spend the last week or so of September in Buner to work on a site.<sup>70</sup> Cobb, however, did not concede to this request. He politely instructed the Wali’s secretary that he did not ‘think there are any archaeological sites in Buner and protective arrangements will be difficult. Please will you communicate the Wali’s views

<sup>62</sup>Wright to Cobb, 10 August 1938.

<sup>63</sup>Barger and Wright, *Excavations in Swat*, p. 19.

<sup>64</sup>See, for example, the Amluk Buddha captioned in an interesting way: ‘one of the most prized discoveries. One of the problems which faced the expedition was to transport these heavy sculptures from the mountains to the plains. It was solved by relays of porters, one of whom, a sturdy hillman, brought the large Amluk Buddha down on his back.’ (‘Shepherds help archaeologists in historical excavation at Amluk’, in *Indian information: With which is incorporated the ‘Indian Information Series’, index, January–June*, vol. VIII [Government of India, Bureau of Public Information, 1941], pp. 172–173, 175 [p. 172].)

<sup>65</sup>Barger and Wright, *Excavations in Swat*, pp. 18–23, 59–61.

<sup>66</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 29–37.

<sup>67</sup>Wright to Cobb, 23 August 1938. Other sites excavated in Barikot included Tokardara (Tokargumbat), Aba Saib China (Abarchinar), and Nawagai. Two sites, Gumbatuna and Parrai, were dug on the right bank of the Swat river. Material of a similar nature was found at these sites (Barger and Wright, *Excavations in Swat*, pp. 24–28).

<sup>68</sup>Wright to Cobb, 1 September 1938.

<sup>69</sup>Barger and Wright, *Excavations in Swat*, pp. 29–31, 62–63.

<sup>70</sup>Wright to Cobb, 7 September 1938.

to Mr. Wright. If convenient they should be invited to stay for a night or two before they leave Swat.<sup>71</sup>

Dundas was also kept informed about Wright's Buner proposal, which he deplored,<sup>72</sup> as well as other matters of interest.<sup>73</sup> The state authorities told Wright that there were no prospects of archaeological finds in Buner; however, an invitation for visiting Saidu was extended to him.<sup>74</sup>

Around this time, Barger's letter from Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan, reached Malakand, informing the PA that, unfortunately, he would not be able to return to Swat. It was thus left to Wright to wind up the work, especially for arrangements for disposing of the discoveries with the Swat and the NWFP authorities<sup>75</sup> which finally took place at Barikot on 27 September (see below).

Wright and Weatherhead left Charbagh on 25 September and stayed at Saidu for two days before leaving Swat on 27 September.<sup>76</sup> They seem to have left Malakand on 30 September and were joined by Barger at Peshawar on 3 October.<sup>77</sup> Between 4 and 6 October, the party was definitely in Delhi where some important things took place (see below). On their way back to Delhi, they also visited Taxila. Barger was soon to leave on the *Cathay* from Bombay, while his other team members moved to Banaras via Agra to sail in the *Narkunda* after some days.<sup>78</sup>

### Within British paramountcy, beyond the ASI's domain

The Barger expedition exposes the nature and character of colonial archaeology in South Asia. It allows for a critical evaluation of the role of the colonial political service, local ruling elites, and the NWFP administration in archaeology. The benign exclusion of the ASI is, thus, understandable. Similarly, Barger's handling of the situation is central to our analysis. Legal-institutional matters, the nature of local involvement in research, and antiquities trafficking can be better explained within the framework of periphery, 'frontier governmentality', and 'frontier as resource'.

### Exploring the illicit connections

Colonial legalities and extraterritorial jurisdiction vis-à-vis the princely states have recently been the object of scholarly investigations. However, such attention has not

<sup>71</sup>Cobb to the Secretary to the Wali of Swat, 13 September 1938.

<sup>72</sup>Dundas was of the view that as it had been rejected by the Frontier government at the start, the Buner visit 'will be the most undesirable' unless the Wali 'particularly desired' it to happen. (Dundas to Cobb, 15 September 1938.) It must be said that the Wali's reply that Buner lacked anything of archaeological significance would also have astonished Wright. I believe that he would not have been unaware of Stein's rich description of the area's archaeological wealth (see Stein, *An archaeological tour in upper Swat and adjacent hill tracts*, pp. 94–104). It may also be noted that this proposed week-long visit to Buner should not be confused with the party's one 'day's motor-tour of Buner' (Barger and Wright, *Excavations in Swat*, p. 13).

<sup>73</sup>Cobb to Dundas, 13 September 1938.

<sup>74</sup>Secretary to the Ruler of Swat to the Political Agent, 16 September 1938.

<sup>75</sup>Barger to Cobb, 9 September 1938.

<sup>76</sup>Wright to Cobb, 18 September 1938.

<sup>77</sup>Barger and Wright, *Excavations in Swat*, p. 56.

<sup>78</sup>Barger, Delhi, to Cobb, 6 October 1938.

been paid to archaeology and its laws. We are sufficiently informed about the institutional dispensations of archaeological and monumental care and research in some states, but are almost completely ignorant of their legal mechanisms. In the Swat state, as we know, the departmental and legal infrastructure for archaeology was lacking, a situation which greatly worked in the favour of the Barger expedition.

Following the failure of his original plan—due to the security situation in the NWFP and its adjacent frontier areas,<sup>79</sup> as discussed above—Barger succeeded in manipulating the circumstances around his Swat expedition.<sup>80</sup> It was the provincial government, which did not take the central government into consideration, that allowed the expedition to move into Swat.<sup>81</sup> As we already know, the Wali's consent was obtained very easily as Cobb informed the provincial authorities that hopefully he would not object to the proposed work.<sup>82</sup> Given this, all legal, institutional, and ethical issues were relegated to the sidelines.

The legal-institutional aspect of archaeology in the native states<sup>83</sup> still eludes historians of South Asian archaeology. This is especially valid in the case of the Swat state (see below). Until very recently the Barger expedition there has been misunderstood. Its work has been incorrectly viewed in line with the Ancient Monuments Preservation (Amendment) Act, 1932. The amended Act laid out a pragmatic programme for archaeological research in view of the economic situation between the two world wars. One of its most significant features was to open the field of research to both foreign and Indian institutions other than the ASI. Such projects were to be duly licensed and would be bound to comply with other rules such as the proper disposal of artefacts. A well-known foreign team which quickly capitalized on the situation was the School of Indic and Iranian Studies, United States, led by E. Mackay. Another project, unsuccessfully undertaken by Simone Corbiau in 1938, may also be added to this list.<sup>84</sup> The suggestion that the Barger expedition was of a similar nature seems to have been influenced by Mackay's case. This general speculation, however, does not stand up to our new archival evidence. Dilip Chakrabarti is apparently the first to have floated this opinion. 'The only reason,' he writes, 'this expedition undertaken in 1938 to Swat and the Oxus valley in Afghanistan deserves a specific mention is that this was the second and last archaeological group to take advantage of the amendment in the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act in 1932–33, the first being that of Mackay at Chanhudaro.'<sup>85</sup> Others

<sup>79</sup>See E. Leake, *The defiant border: The Afghan-Pakistan borderlands in the era of decolonization* (New Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2017 [2018]).

<sup>80</sup>Crombie to Barger, 27 May 1938; Barger to Cobb, 1 June 1938.

<sup>81</sup>Cobb writes to Barger, 'I am glad to inform you that the North-West Frontier Government and the Wali of Swat have agreed to your being permitted to camp in the vicinity of Barikot and to your conducting excavations on the Buddhist site of Kanjar Kote, which you have already inspected, with the Wali of Swat's assistance.' (Cobb to Barger, 13 July 1938.) As discussed above, permission for the most prized site of Amluk was elicited in the course of ongoing work.

<sup>82</sup>Telegram from Malakand to NORWEF, Nathiagali, 2 July 1938.

<sup>83</sup>Cumming (ed.), *Revealing India's past*, pp. 253–324.

<sup>84</sup>I. Shaheen and R. Khan, 'In pursuit of pre-/protohistory: Simone Corbiau's unsuccessful archaeological expedition to the North-West Frontier Province of British India', *South Asian Studies*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2020, pp. 166–176.

<sup>85</sup>D. K. Chakrabarti, *A history of Indian archaeology: From the beginning to 1947* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1988 [2001]), p. 168.

have also conceded to this reading.<sup>86</sup> Luca M. Olivieri, though very right in anticipating the future discovery of official records about the Barger expedition,<sup>87</sup> makes even a stronger statement, based on the available evidence, by saying that the party ‘carried out the first official excavations in Swat’ and ‘worked under licence from the Archaeological Survey and in the Memoirs of the latter, according to the terms of the licence, published the results of their work.’<sup>88</sup>

All these propositions are not supported by the archival material. The truth of the matter is that the party was denied permission by the Indian government to work anywhere in the Frontier and the adjacent areas. Thus, any contact and coordination with the ASI regarding the Swat campaign would have been a miscalculation. A government department could hardly overlook the categorical official denial. The central government and the ASI were consigned to *exclusion* or they themselves assumed a benign silence; that is, the whole situation was purposely left to go unnoticed by all. It became a local matter, beyond the British administrative sphere. It was Barger’s resolve and, no doubt, his manoeuvrings that made the Swat expedition possible.<sup>89</sup> But it appears that the excavators, and the Frontier officials, were haunted by a feeling that the work needed a broader institutional legitimation. It is in this context that the Peshawar Museum was dragged into the situation, a point we shall return to soon.

We have already presented the conditions under which Barger had been granted permission to excavate in Swat. That is, *inter alia*, that the state and the provincial government had the prerogative to keep, if they so desired, any finds free of cost. All this was obviously consistent with the archaeological laws of British India. Still, from the beginning, Cobb was of the view that since Swat was outside of British India, ‘there will be no question of obtaining a regular licence from the Indian Archaeological Department.’ He also sought Dundas’s opinion on the matter, which was perhaps not forthcoming.<sup>90</sup> On another occasion, the PA told him that ‘Barger has for his own reasons refrained from any communication with the Archaeological Department of the Government of India.’<sup>91</sup> This reveals the non-involvement of the ASI, in any capacity, in the Barger expedition. But also it raises another vexed question: how were Barger and Wright able to get their final report published, as referred to by both Chakrabarti and Olivieri,<sup>92</sup> in the *Memoirs* of the ASI? We have an answer to this based on slight empirical and circumstantial evidence. The benign silence of the central government and the ASI makes it untenable to say that the report appeared in the *Memoirs* pursuant to some legal and institutional terms. Here again it seems Barger’s personal ingenuity prevailed. Throughout their nearly three-month-long stay in India, the party’s indifference towards the ASI is understandable. But why did K. N. Dikshit,

<sup>86</sup>Olivieri, ‘Early archaeology in a “native state”’, p. 233; Khan, ‘Beginning of archaeology in Malakand-Swat (1926–1956)’, pp. 135–136.

<sup>87</sup>Olivieri, *Sir Aurel Stein and the ‘Lords of the Marches’*, p. 28, fn. 17.

<sup>88</sup>Olivieri, ‘Early archaeology in a “native state”’, p. 233.

<sup>89</sup>See K. Mason et al., ‘Explorations of ancient sites in northern Afghanistan: discussion’, *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 39, no. 5, 1939, pp. 392–398 [p. 392].

<sup>90</sup>Cobb to Dundas, 5 July 1938. Does it indicate the serious nature of the issue about which the chief secretary would have liked to observe silence or avoid putting it on record?

<sup>91</sup>Cobb to Dundas, 6 August 1938.

<sup>92</sup>Chakrabarti, *A history of Indian archaeology*, pp. 168–169; Olivieri, ‘Early archaeology in a “native state”’, p. 233.

who would otherwise have been in contact of some sort with the political administration at Malakand, prefer to be silent? Before answering this, what happened at Delhi, when the party was there on their way back, should be outlined.

From Delhi Barger wrote to Cobb, in a letter dated 6 October 1938, that he was going to have a meeting with Dikshit that afternoon.<sup>93</sup> After this there was no contact between the two for four-and-a-half months when Barger sent another letter. Besides other things, it was revealed to Cobb that the ‘detailed report will appear in the “Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India” as a separate volume.’<sup>94</sup> The letter does not give further details in this regard. Although providing scant evidence, this still warrants firm conclusions. There have been reasons to believe that the meeting between Dikshit and Barger was not only fruitful but meaningful in many ways. The idea of publishing the results of the expedition for the first time would have been discussed. But more than this, at the meeting any misunderstandings and grievances between them would also have been dispelled.<sup>95</sup> Reconciliation and flexibility were mutually beneficial: the ASI, perhaps, could not afford to alienate foreign archaeological missions in the prevailing financial circumstances, while Barger would have been mindful about the prospects for future work.

A circumstantial view will lead us to suggest that the offer to publish the report in the *Memoirs* would have come from Dikshit. This is confirmed by two different, but interrelated, instances. In 1938, the ASI permitted Simone Corbiau, an archaeologist from Belgium, to carry out archaeological research in the NWFP and Malakand Agency. According to the terms of the licence, she was bound to submit all the artefacts, aside from a small representative collection for herself. Moreover, she was also required to edit the next number of the *Memoirs* in which she would present the results of her new work.<sup>96</sup> Both these offers may be contextualized against the overall circumstances of the 1930s in which the benefits to the Survey of such engagements were prudently assessed. It must be pointed out that the understanding with Corbiau was legal and legitimate,<sup>97</sup> and that the same cannot be said of the offer to Barger, nor about the subsequent publication of the report.

It seems that Dikshit purposely neglected the developments that were going on in Swat. The ASI was beset by various problems at the time and there was a general feeling that between John Marshall’s retirement and Mortimer Wheeler’s arrival nothing valuable had been achieved. This view has lately received a critical reappraisal. Dilip Chakrabarti argues that it is ‘totally incorrect to view the thirties and the years after that till the coming of Wheeler as the period of doom in the history of Indian archaeology.’ According to him, sufficient achievements were made not only in field archaeology but also with respect to publication—notably reports by

<sup>93</sup>Barger, Delhi, to Cobb, 6 October 1938.

<sup>94</sup>Barger, Bristol, to Cobb, 21 February 1939.

<sup>95</sup>Dikshit’s foreword to the report (pp. i–ii), also makes clear his high opinion of the expedition and prospects for future works.

<sup>96</sup>Shaheen and Khan, ‘In pursuit of pre-/protohistory’.

<sup>97</sup>Two points should be explained about Corbiau. She had also worked at Sar Dherai, Charsada, in 1936 and the data were published the next year. In 1938, she made an abortive attempt to work in the NWFP and Swat. Second, the understanding reached between the ASI and Corbiau about editing the *Memoirs* did not come to fruition. Corbiau’s work in 1938 failed as it did not reach its successful conclusion, unlike her success in 1936 (*ibid.*).

Marshall and Mackay about Mohenjodaro and Chanhudaro, respectively, among many others. Chakrabarti also points out the gradual improvement of the economy by 1937.<sup>98</sup> However, we can find a middle ground by stating that it is not totally untrue that during the period archaeology was experiencing some shortcomings. And the situation was being prudently dealt with by the Department. Dikshit's willingness to compromise regarding the Barger expedition, from the beginning until the publication of its report in 1941, is evidence of this, despite the fact that not a single aspect of the entire enterprise fulfilled the legal requirements.

### *The museum factor*

From the mid-nineteenth century, European museums became obsessed by Gandharan antiquities. Artefacts obtained through antiquarian and archaeological explorations and excavations during the late nineteenth century made their way to both Indian and European museums.<sup>99</sup> The vague nature of this practice was anathema to some and they consistently castigated the collection of unprovenanced and contextless objects. However, all this changed at the turn of the century with the revamping of the ASI and promulgation of archaeological laws. These developments, especially the prohibition of antiquities trafficking, perturbed many museum officials in Europe. Sir Hercules Read (1857–1929), a distinguished British archaeologist and curator who served in both the Victoria and Albert and the British museums, criticized these measures. In a presidential address, dated 28 April 1921, he termed the measures blocking ‘the flow of treasures into our great museums’ as ‘myopic parochial laws’ and ‘childish parochialism’. He justified his views by referring to the negative impacts these measures had on knowledge creation and research.<sup>100</sup> Barger would not have been unaware of these Eurocentric views. Read had already prophetically said: ‘The laws will be evaded, smuggling will increase, the morals of the merchants will be correspondingly lowered, and “prohibition” in works of art will be a mark for the scoffer, as it is now in other directions.’<sup>101</sup>

Why did Barger evade the ASI and the related formalities that any genuine scientific mission should have met? As referred to by Cobb (see above), there were certain reasons for this. The party was strongly focused on acquiring Gandharan objects, especially, for the Victoria and Albert Museum. And when Cobb specified in the permission letter that the Swat state and local government would have a prior right to any find, it perturbed Barger. He desperately presented his case to Dundas and argued for a generous treatment towards the expedition in matters of the disposal of finds, comprising sculptures, relief fragments, Buddha's and Bodhisattvas' heads, terracotta and iron objects, pottery, and so on. One of the grounds on which he was to ask for such a favour was the overstated scientific nature of his work, an impetus for much-needed

<sup>98</sup>Chakrabarti, *A history of Indian archaeology*, p. 173.

<sup>99</sup>D. Michon, *Archaeology and religion in early Northwest India: History, theory, practice* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 35–43; Himanshu Prabha Ray (ed.), *Buddhism and Gandhara: Archaeology of museum collections* (London: Routledge, 2019).

<sup>100</sup>Hercules Read, ‘Museums in the present and future’, *The Antiquaries Journal*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1921, pp. 167–182 [pp. 178–182].

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 180.

Indian historical studies in England. The Victoria and Albert Museum and the Indian Research Committee, in sponsoring the party, primarily intended to spur 'the promotion of Indian studies and of a wider interest in Indian Art and Indian History in England. This can only be done if the greater part of the finds, and especially the more important ones, are available for exhibition in London.'<sup>102</sup> In line with the established notion of Europe's centrality in academic pursuits, a further value was attached to the argument. The division of the materials set for different destinations—Barger, probably, had in mind the Peshawar Museum and the Wali's durbar—was viewed as harmful to 'the student of material which may be especially valuable to him, if, as so rarely happens, it is coherently presented as a collection coming from one site.'<sup>103</sup> Barger went so far as to envisage the future of British scholars in the field of Indian archaeology as dependent on either the success or failure of his own mission. 'It would further be discouraging to future British archaeological enterprise in India at a time when, owing to the number of foreign scientific expeditions of various kinds that have been working in India, British expeditions would be particularly welcomed.'<sup>104</sup> A polite request, therefore, was made to Dundas:

I am sure that some such considerations as these will be present in your mind when the question of the disposal of the finds arises, and I hope that you will not feel that in mentioning them now I am committing an act of ingratitude towards the [NWFP] Government whose support has made our work here possible. I mention them because I am anxious, as I am sure everyone else concerned will be, that this Expedition should make the best possible contribution to the promotion of Indian studies and of future expeditions to India.<sup>105</sup>

A copy of the letter was also received by Cobb, who just reiterated that 'the conditions imposed are the minimum that could be expected.'<sup>106</sup> However, this position was soon altered. The open hand given to Swat and the local government, that is, to retain 'any find' they deemed desirable, was replaced by a closed offer to each to select 'one or two' pieces.<sup>107</sup> Dundas was sympathetic to the party.<sup>108</sup> Dilawar Khan, curator of the Peshawar Museum, was contacted to come to Swat for the division of finds.<sup>109</sup> The Swat

<sup>102</sup>Barger to Dundas, 16 July 1938. Such exhibitions were later conducted and lectures given on various occasions by Barger and Wright.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid. Cf. R. Khan, 'In the shadows of swords: The antecedents of the archaeological research in Malakand-Swat, 1895–1899', *Annali, Sezione Orientale*, vol. 80, 2020, pp. 136–159.

<sup>104</sup>Barger to Dundas, 16 July 1938.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

<sup>106</sup>Cobb to Dundas, 21 July 1938. Why Cobb was so stern is clear from one of his early letters to Dundas. 'I hear from Colonel Collingridge that Barger has made several statements expressing disapprobation of the G/I [Government of India?]; expressing his opinion that all finds are his for the keeping; Colonel Collingridge advised that he should be carefully watched, as he considers him to be a "sharp customer"! For these reasons I am taking the above undertaking from him regarding excavations etc.' (Cobb to Dundas, 11 July 1938).

<sup>107</sup>Cobb to Dundas, 6 August 1938.

<sup>108</sup>Dundas to Cobb, 10/11 August 1938.

<sup>109</sup>Cobb to Dilawar Khan, 21 August 1938. Barger and Wright are wrong in saying that Dilawar Khan was sent by the Indian government (Barger and Wright, *Excavations in Swat*, p. 13).

state was also asked to let the PA know if they wanted 'to keep one or two remains' and to inform him that Dilawar Khan could help them in their selection.<sup>110</sup> Since the expedition was to leave Swat at the end of September, the curator was first asked to arrive on 23 or 24 September, but later a telegram informed him of a slightly revised schedule; he was to be at Malakand on 25 September and at Saidu (Barikot?) the following day.<sup>111</sup> Dilawar Khan was permitted to travel by the secretary to the Frontier Government, Development Departments.<sup>112</sup> In this way, the sensitive issue of the disposal of the discoveries, of primary interest to the Victoria and Albert Museum, was successfully dealt with as Barger wished, and conceded to by the Frontier and Malakand authorities.

A related issue which calls for our attention is the question of the capacity in which the Peshawar Museum and its curator were engaged in the complex matter of deciding the fate of the materials. As a provincial museum, it was not an integral part of the ASI. The involvement of the Peshawar Museum and Dilawar Khan in the Barger enterprise is not, thus, totally beyond understanding. It may be taken as an imperial attempt to provide legitimation to the work. Anyway, this overt complicity, it appears, had another long-term dimension as well—illicit trade in antiquities.

One suspects that, sometime after Barger's departure for Afghanistan, a covert understanding between Wright, as representative of the Victoria and Albert Museum, Major Cobb, and Dilawar Khan had been reached. The Museum, it appears, wanted to procure Gandharan objects via such a network. The exclusion of the ASI from the entire process clearly indicates manipulations aimed at safely transferring all the artefacts to England. However, some specific clues also add to the picture. Wright wrote to Cobb from his camp at Charbagh that Codrington was pleased by the gift sent by the PA and that '[h]e would also much appreciate it if you feel inclined to repeat your offer to send him a Gandharan figure, should you come across one. The Museum is particularly weak in pieces of some size.'<sup>113</sup> Cobb replied that he had no such pieces but would, however, remember the request.<sup>114</sup> This offer came more openly from Barger:

I should be most grateful if you would let me know of any interesting finds that may from time to time come your way. I hope that Wright made it clear that the India Museum would gladly pay the freight or other charges on any really good pieces of sculpture or other objects that turned up if you could send Codrington photographs of them.<sup>115</sup>

The situation of the Victoria and Albert Museum had now been clearly explained both by Wright and Barger. Cobb sent some artefacts to Wright, when the latter was still in Peshawar on his return journey, for the Indian Museum. 'The Buddha is quite a nice one,' says Wright, 'and we shall be glad to have the other things too.'<sup>116</sup> The picture

<sup>110</sup>Cobb to the Secretary to the Wali of Swat, 21 August 1938.

<sup>111</sup>Cobb to Dilawar Khan, 28 August 1938; Telegram from Malakand to Dilawar Khan, Peshawar Museum, 20 September 1938.

<sup>112</sup>Secretary to Government, NWFP, Development Departments, to The Curator, Peshawar Museum, 6 September 1938.

<sup>113</sup>Wright to Cobb, 1 September 1938. Cf. Khan, 'In the shadows of swords'.

<sup>114</sup>Cobb to Wright, 10 September 1938.

<sup>115</sup>Barger, Delhi, to Cobb, 6 October 1938.

<sup>116</sup>Wright, Delhi, to Cobb, 4 October 1938.

becomes clearer from the next line of the letter: 'I shall tell Codrington what you say about a large figure, and I am pretty certain he will be ready to offer £10 or £15 if Dilawar Khan can set agents to work.'<sup>117</sup> There can no longer be any doubt about the smuggling of Gandharan antiquities. Colonial officials such as Cobb and archaeological workers such as Dilawar Khan seem to have been part of the network which Barger and Wright were able to establish.

### The princely attitude

Not a single comprehensive and comparative study dealing with princely responses to archaeological issues has been undertaken. One point, however, has consistently been made: that princes were not necessarily driven by vindictive passions with respect to the archaeology and monuments of other communities. Princely involvement was, in fact, so complex that a single explanation and interpretation can hardly be convincing. Each state might tell a different story. In this context, no less important in the Barger mission is the figure of Abdul Wadud. He was much appreciated for his positive and supportive behaviour both by his contemporaries, such as Stein, Barger, and Wright, and also by later scholars. The state's role in the introduction and promotion of modern education in the area has led to its rulers being lauded.<sup>118</sup> But so far nothing has been said about their sense of and interest in history. A number of studies have recently appeared about the princely states of India showing their varying levels of interest, or the lack thereof, in archaeological matters. Some important states were actively involved in archaeological activities. Like variations in their size, economy, and political importance, the states' approaches towards archaeology were also different. The Swat state was not particularly interested in its archaeology, beyond the immediate benefits it had to power relations.

The reasons for Abdul Wadud's disinterest can be explained by numerous factors. His religious orientation may have been one. He belonged to a saintly family surrounded by a societal environment that, while not necessarily harbouring a conscious contempt for images and idols, was, at the least, indifferent towards them. Some of his acts demonstrate puritanical propensities. He is said to have had dismantled the shades at Jugiano Sar, Ilam, and visitation to the site, especially by Hindus, was discouraged.<sup>119</sup> Additional evidence of his attitude comes from Cobb's correspondence.

When the PA made a closed offer to select one or two pieces from the Barger party's discoveries, the Wali's response was indifferent. The reply was that they 'would be only too pleased to keep two specimens of the recoveries' and that the curator 'when coming up to select for the Peshawar Museum may also select for us.'<sup>120</sup> Cobb seems to have already been well aware of this lack of interest. In his letter to Dilawar Khan regarding the disposal of the artefacts, the PA added that the 'Swat State [may] also *perhaps* keep

<sup>117</sup>Ibid.

<sup>118</sup>See, on education in the Swat state, B. Khan, 'Growth of modern education in Swat state', MEd thesis, University of the Punjab, 1963; Sultan-i-Rome, 'Education in the state of Swat', *Hamdard Islamicus*, vol. XXXI, no. 2, 2008, pp. 71–84.

<sup>119</sup>Personal communication with Sultan-i-Rome, Hazara (Swat), 14 December 2019.

<sup>120</sup>Secretary to the Ruler of Swat to the Political Agent, 22 August 1938.

a few of them' (my emphasis).<sup>121</sup> On an earlier occasion, while updating Dundas of the developments, Cobb said that the party had 'collected a number of antiquities with which they seem to be well satisfied. It is unlikely that the Swat authorities will want to keep any of the things found.'<sup>122</sup> All this aside, there was some hope that 'the State will acquire a keener interest in the archaeological wealth of the State.'<sup>123</sup> Thus we can assert that Abdul Wadud lacked any interest in archaeology, unlike his educated son and heir-apparent, who was somewhat interested. Both, however, envisaged having 'a small Museum for their finds some day.'<sup>124</sup> Moreover, when the edited volume *Revealing India's Past*, as mentioned above, was published in 1939, the PA circulated its contents among the rulers of Dir, Swat, and Chitral in order to find out if they would want to purchase a copy. Only the Mehtar of Chitral ordered one and the other two declined the opportunity.<sup>125</sup> This is in contrast to the interest of many other states in knowledge and research. Many such instances are cited in the works of Nayanjot Lahiri mentioned in this article. However, it is worth pointing out here that when James Fergusson's book, *Tree and Serpent Worship* (1868), appeared, Shahjahan Begum of Bhopal expressed her interest in it and received a copy from the viceroy.<sup>126</sup>

A question arises as to why Miangul Abdul Wadud was not really interested in archaeology. While we can hardly offer any specific answer to this, there is circumstantial evidence to examine. Throughout the Miangul had been passive and unassertive in matters related to archaeology. Whenever he was asked to give permission to any research/antiquarian team, he readily granted it. Whether it was the disposal of Barger's material, dividing up the camp for Amluk, or refusing Wright permission for the proposed week-long excursion to Buner, he simply complied. First, perhaps he had an inherent disdain (?) towards *the history and heritage of a religious other*. Secondly, it may be argued that such an approach to archaeology best suited his political designs. Not only did it appease the paramount power, but individuals, organizations, and institutions from abroad were also persuaded of the so-called enlightened and progressive spirit of the state. We know of various examples of such gifts to different people. And as the youngest on the map of princely India, and beset by many internal and external threats, the Miangul could hardly act like other princes, such as rulers of Bhopal and Kashmir.

### Some other historical corrections

Finally, some other published statements by Barger and Wright may also be revisited to add to the overall reappraisal of the expedition. In an interview in Delhi with a representative of the *Statesman* on 4 October 1938, Barger stated that various Buddhist

<sup>121</sup>Cobb to Dilawar Khan, 21 August 1938. The PA also expressed to Barger: 'The Local Government suggest that Swat State should be asked if they wish to select a few specimens of the antiquities collected by you at Barikot' (Cobb to Barger, 21 August 1938).

<sup>122</sup>Cobb to Dundas, 6 August 1938.

<sup>123</sup>Cobb to Codrington, 1 October 1938.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid.

<sup>125</sup>The Political Agent to the Chief Secretary to Government, North-West Frontier Province, Peshawar, 14 December 1939.

<sup>126</sup>Singh, *The discovery of ancient India*, p. 299.

sites had been excavated in Swat for the first time. No work of this nature had previously been allowed.<sup>127</sup> However, we now know that a different situation existed in the area during the early 1930s. Between 1928 and 1933 Stein and various political agents had discussed the possibilities of excavations in Swat. They were primarily concerned with legal matters, as the applicability of archaeological laws in the area was mired in obscurity. Notwithstanding this, Stein was able to enter into Swat late in April 1933, with the clear aim of digging at Barikot and Amluk Dara. But on account of a fall from his horse, causing severe fractures, he went back to Kashmir and the proposed work was discontinued.<sup>128</sup> On the other hand, the excavations of the Barger expedition were totally without any legal considerations. The work was a sort of clandestine activity made possible by a tripartite understanding between Dundas, Cobb, and Barger. At the same time, it explains the Wali's culpability.

Barger also distorted the facts to the *Statesman* by saying that in 1926 Aurel Stein had 'made a rapid survey of some of its [Swat] chief sites.' This is a sheer misstatement, no doubt with a tinge of intentionality, about Stein's seminal work. In fact, he had carried out a comprehensive reconnaissance across nearly the entire state for more than two months (between March and May). A great number of both central and peripheral sites were properly and accurately measured and documented.<sup>129</sup> In sharp contrast, the Barger team was not qualified for archaeological excavations. It is not only obvious from the report published in the *Memoirs*<sup>130</sup> and from the whole corpus of archival material related to their fieldwork, but also from Cobb's remarks. 'They have no experience in excavating and are unlikely to find much, as Stein with his deep knowledge has carried out a very thorough survey of all the sites.'<sup>131</sup> If we compare Barger's works dealing with Central Asian geography with his (co-authored) excavation report on Swat, it becomes obvious that he was well versed in geography rather than in excavating. The depth of his geographical understanding is quite simply marvellous.

In the *Statesman* another half-truth, or even untruth, was shared about the disposal of the discoveries in Swat: 'A representative selection of the finds of the Expedition remains in the possession of the Ruler of Swat, and others have been lodged in the Peshawar Museum.'<sup>132</sup> As thoroughly discussed above, just four trivial pieces went to them. Cobb triumphantly wrote to Codrington: 'The Local Government insisted on Mr. Dilawar Khan ... selecting some pieces for Swat State and for the Peshawar Museum; he has left the best pieces to Wright.'<sup>133</sup> This successfully addresses scholars' concern and curiosity about '[t]he final destination of the items [which] is not completely clear...' It is no more 'certainly the wali's collection (now in the Swat Museum). ...'<sup>134</sup> The collection, certainly, largely made its way to the Victoria and

<sup>127</sup>*Statesman*, 5 October 1938.

<sup>128</sup>Olivieri, *Sir Aurel Stein and the 'Lords of the Marches'*, pp. 144–170. It may, however, be noted that future research could potentially change this picture.

<sup>129</sup>Stein, *An archaeological tour in upper Swat and adjacent hill tracts*.

<sup>130</sup>Barger and Wright, *Excavations in Swat*.

<sup>131</sup>Cobb to Dundas, 5 July 1938.

<sup>132</sup>See also Barger and Wright, *Excavations in Swat*, p. 13.

<sup>133</sup>Cobb to Codrington, 1 October 1938.

<sup>134</sup>Olivieri, 'Early archaeology in a "native state"', p. 233.

Albert Museum.<sup>135</sup> It could be fruitful to undertake future searches for some objects in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford and others, perhaps, in Bristol University. In the former, only one figure is known to certainly have come from Barger and Wright. It is the Bodhisattva Maitreya, in very good condition, contained in Barger and Wright's 1941 report (pl. V.4, no. 138).<sup>136</sup> The identification of two pieces each in the Peshawar and Swat museums is still pending. A circumstantial reading of the overall colonial milieu prompts us to see the importation of the collection as an arbitrary imperial act unsupported by any laws. And, yes, we cannot rule out the possibility of further manipulations between Barger and the ASI officials when the party was back at Delhi.

### Discussion and conclusions

The Barger expedition illustrates the unique trajectory of archaeology in the Malakand Political Agency, situated in the Indian north-western frontier zone. The party was not originally intended for Swat or Gandharan art and archaeology. It ended up as such on account of a lack of prospects for fieldwork initially in Chinese Turkestan and Afghanistan and then in the NWFP and Chitral. Like the unsettled background of the project, its operations were also not informed by any genuine scholarly concerns. Throughout, the sole obsession was to yield the largest possible collection of Gandharan objects for the sponsoring institutions. And it is in this context that the sidelining of the ASI in the entire enterprise can be understood. In this way the wholesale transfer of the discoveries (except the four pieces which future research may bring to light in the Peshawar and Swat museums) out of India could be ensured. The expedition succeeded in its purpose, owing to colonial favours and princely expediences and interests, at the cost of losing any legitimation forever. It would be fruitful to put the matter in a broader perspective.

Did the Barger mission really transgress the archaeological laws? This question requires situating princely states in relation to the purview of British Indian legal and institutional dispensations. The concept of sovereign pluralism, incorporating political orders of various degrees, is vital to our discussion.<sup>137</sup> British paramouncy

<sup>135</sup>Barger and Wright, *Excavations in Swat*, p. iii. See, just for example, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O454824/sculptural-hand/>, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O454824/sculptural-hand/?carousel-image=2017JU2327>, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O98385/relief-unknown/>, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O98385/relief-unknown/?carousel-image=2017JU2234>, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O93301/birth-of-buddha-sculptural-fragment-unknown/>, [all accessed 5 January 2023]. For a later study of many of the reliefs in the Victoria and Albert Museum, see H. C. Ackermann, *Narrative stone reliefs from Gandhara in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London: catalogue and attempt at a stylistic history*, Reports and Memoirs, vol. XVIII (Rome: IsMEO, 1975).

<sup>136</sup>D. Jongeward, *Buddhist art of Gandhara in the Ashmolean Museum* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2018), cat. 77, pp. 110–111. Barger and Wright, *Excavations in Swat*, p. iii, state that some 'objects have been acquired by the Indian Institute at Oxford. ...' Since the fate of the Indian Institute throughout remained unsettled and its museum collection and library were dis- or relocated repeatedly, there is always the possibility of finding Gandharan material from the Barger expedition in the Ashmolean and Pitt Rivers museums in Oxford.

<sup>137</sup>Hopkins, *Ruling the savage periphery*.

embodied 'alternative legalities of Princely States'. According to Beverley, 'contradictions posed by the Princely States and other sovereign polities, or anomalous zones, reveal a contingent trajectory in which flexible and multifarious legal arrangements were incorporated into high-colonial political geography.'<sup>138</sup> In this situation, the ASI's priorities and responses were indeterminate. Sometimes it tried to assert itself in peripheries, and at other times it behaved in the opposite way. Its activities in the princely sphere were actually circumscribed. Seen from John Marshall's perspective, the princely states could not be outside of the ASI's realm. 'By an order of the Government of India in the Foreign Department, dated the 4th June, 1901, this serious omission was at last remedied. Kashmir, Rajputana, and the Punjab States as well as Dir, Swat and Chitral, were added to the charge of the Surveyor of the Punjab-Baluchistan-Ajmer Circle. ...'<sup>139</sup> The situation on the ground was ultimately not so smooth. Dilip Chakrabarti comments on this arrangement as follows: 'no direct order could be given by the Surveyors to the Native States; everything had to be routed through the medium of the political authorities.'<sup>140</sup> Similarly, Mridu Rai maintains that '[i]n principle ... the colonial state could only "invite" the cooperation of the native states in their archaeological enterprise.'<sup>141</sup> The situation on the ground, therefore, was rather complex. Marshall's intrusion into the Bhopal state in order to effect an alternative arrangement for the caretaking of the Sanchi monuments, in collaboration with the Maha Bodhi Society, was sternly resisted by Nawab Sultan Jahan Begum.<sup>142</sup> Similarly, the Kashmir durbar was doing archaeology in its own particular way. In a run-in with the ASI, the question that arose was: who reserved the right to conduct archaeological activities? The durbar not only privileged its own officers but also declared, as a result of its conflict with Marshall concerning artefacts from a 'British-sponsored' work in Ladakh in 1910, its sole right to its antiquities. The crisis intensified and 'within a decade, a notification of the Kashmir government proclaimed unequivocally its primary title to objects of archaeological, historical and literary interest in its territories.'<sup>143</sup> All this, along with communal matters, made archaeology an object of political concern and official interest. There was so much vigilance in the state's guardianship of its antiquities that when, in 1934, Helmet de Terra approached the Kashmir authorities for permission for his famous Yale-Cambridge expedition (1935) to conduct its geological and prehistoric research, it was denied him. The reason for the denial was some misunderstanding about the return of an object de Terra had removed during his work in the area in 1932. The new permission was granted only after the old issue was settled.<sup>144</sup> The Kashmir example illustrates 'sovereign pluralism' with reference to archaeology. But what about Swat?

<sup>138</sup>Beverley, 'Frontier as resource', p. 268.

<sup>139</sup>John Marshall, 'The story of archaeological department in India', in *Revealing India's past*, (ed.) Cumming, pp. 1–33 [p. 11].

<sup>140</sup>Chakrabarti, *A history of Indian archaeology*, p. 123.

<sup>141</sup>Rai, 'To "tear the mask off the face of the past"', p. 410.

<sup>142</sup>Lahiri, 'From ruin to restoration'.

<sup>143</sup>Rai, 'To "tear the mask off the face of the past"', pp. 410–411.

<sup>144</sup>File No. 53–13 FRP, Subject: Archeological researches, by Mr. T. T. Paterson, into the North-West Frontier Province, Civil Secretariat, NWFP, Political Branch, H. de Terra to the Secretary, the Foreign and Political Department, Simla, 30 July 1935, Tribal Affairs Research Cell, Peshawar.

It has already been said that there was no such disciplinary apparatus in place for the archaeology of Swat. The Wali seems to have been resistant to unnecessary extraterritorial colonial legalities. This is evident from when Metcalfe, PA at Malakand, communicated to him Stein's observations about the threats faced by archaeological remains in the area. Stein wondered about the possibility of princely guardianship. Metcalfe, as Olivieri maintains, also envisaged that Indian archaeological laws could be broadly introduced in the state. The Wali gave rather a tepid response: 'I do cooperate with the Government, regarding the buildings and stone carvings of historical interest situate[d] within my area and will try my local [level] best for their preservation.'<sup>145</sup> It not only shows a native indifference but, at the same time, evidences colonial disinterest as well. The Wali's evasion was not consistent with the concept of paramountcy; that is, that in the case of conflict between colonial laws and interests and any other legal order, the former were to prevail. Paramountcy also accounted for 'occasional intervention in, or selective control of, a ruler's domestic affairs whenever IPS officers deemed it desirable to do so. It also meant that an Indian ruler was obligated to heed whatever "advice" the Paramount Power considered necessary to give on his domestic affairs.'<sup>146</sup> If the colonial authorities really wanted the ruler of Swat to yield to their advice in the matter of archaeological laws, things would have been different. The colonial state was deeply interested in the matter of forests, unlike archaeology. The protection and good management of forests was one of the terms of the treaty concluded between Swat and the British Indian government. Both the authorities entered into serious consultation and vibrant cooperation in technical and administrative matters regarding forests.<sup>147</sup>

This legal and jurisdictional ambiguity better explains the frontier's 'economic dependence', an element of Benjamin Hopkins' 'frontier governmentality'. This imperial economic structure in peripheral zones 'created pathways for the development of "illicit" economies, which included trade, smuggling, and the production of prohibited goods. ... Often, these illicit economies centered on commodities either banned by or highly regulated by the state, most importantly arms, as well as bodies.'<sup>148</sup> Hopkins, like Eric Beverley, considers the 'peripheralization' of 'frontiers' as spaces of opportunities for both colonizers and indigenous people of different strata.<sup>149</sup> Drawing insights from their argument, antiquarians and foreign archaeological missions may also be seen as looking for opportunities to mint money or collect antiquities for their sponsors. Scholars have long been worried by this dismal situation. Olivieri observes that the antiquity 'market was actually created precisely by the British military personnel along the frontier, by the European collectors, some of whom were also British, and by the competition among museums, also in British India.'<sup>150</sup> In 1913, Stein, as

<sup>145</sup>Olivieri, *Sir Aurel Stein and the 'Lords of the Marches'*, pp. 82–84.

<sup>146</sup>J. Onley, 'The Raj reconsidered: British India's informal empire and spheres of influence in Asia and Africa', *Asian Affairs*, vol. XL, no. 1, 2009, pp. 44–62 [p. 53].

<sup>147</sup>Sultan-i-Rome, *Land and forest governance in Swat: Transition from tribal system to state to Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2016) [especially Chapter 4].

<sup>148</sup>Hopkins, *Ruling the savage periphery*, p. 23.

<sup>149</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 31–32; Beverley, 'Frontier as resource'.

<sup>150</sup>Olivieri, 'Early archaeology in a "native state"', p. 226; for the museum collections, see Ray (ed.), *Buddhism and Gandhara*, especially Chapters 6, 8 and 9.

superintendent of the Archaeological Survey, Northern Circle, reprimanded those involved in illegal activities and transactions in art in the frontier area, including Swat. Olivieri comments that such diggings and antiquity hunts by third parties would also be tacitly commissioned by colonial officers. Consequently, they would purchase the material on the pretext of salvaging it. If the government would not be inclined to acquire the material, it would become the owner's property.<sup>151</sup> The Barger team greatly benefitted from the opportunities available in the 'liminal space' of Swat. The old desire of the Victoria and Albert Museum was, thus, fulfilled. In 1921 Stanley Clarke, curator of the Indian Section of the Museum, complained to Marshall about the poor collection of objects from the NWFP in their possession. He enquired if the latter 'could help them obtain a fairly representative "gallery of Indian sculpture of all periods"'.<sup>152</sup> Marshall vehemently disapproved of the request. Around two decades later, the Victoria and Albert Museum acquired a handsome collection of Gandhara sculpture which Barger justified, in line with Read's Eurocentric interpretation, with the epistemological trope of knowledge creation and the promotion of Indian studies in England.

Legal obscurity and the alarming art outflow, or its control, has something to do with the dis/interest and response of princely sovereigns. The contributions of the rulers of Bhopal and Hyderabad to the Buddhist archaeology of Sanchi and Ajanta Caves bust the colonial myth of Muslims being intrinsically devoid of interest and ability to work for the *other's* archaeological and monumental heritage. Marshall took the dilapidated landscape of Sanchi as evidence of this incapability. He, therefore, proposed Buddhist caretakers for the complex in collaboration with the Maha Bhodi Society. The Begum was prompt to reject the idea for personal and political reasons. Among other things, such an arrangement would be tantamount to impugning not only her capability and honesty but her princely sovereignty as well. This initial run-in, however, soon turned into a long-term fruitful collaboration in the field of research, conservation, and publication about Sanchi.<sup>153</sup> Similarly, the Dhar durbar's collaboration with the ASI in conserving many Muslim monuments at Mandu and elsewhere in the state contradicts the misplaced colonial view of seeing South Asian archaeology as bifurcated along religious lines.<sup>154</sup> But this is, in fact, not the whole story. Laudable in many ways, the rulers of Kashmir's sponsorship of archaeology was actually embedded in the ideological apparatus of the Dogra state. 'Indeed, the Dogras were concerned with mining in rather general ways the "older" stores of Hindu symbolism. ... Renewed princely sponsorship would therefore signal the revival of "indigenous" Hindu rule.'<sup>155</sup> Such religious partisanship, simultaneously influenced by other mundane motives, also manifested itself at the time of partition. In princely Alwar and Bharatpur, Rajasthan, the officially commissioned systematic destruction

<sup>151</sup>Olivieri, 'Early archaeology in a "native state"', pp. 226–227.

<sup>152</sup>N. Lahiri, *Finding forgotten cities: How the Indus civilization was discovered* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2005 [2017]), pp. 231–232.

<sup>153</sup>Lahiri, 'From ruin to restoration'; Singh, *The discovery of ancient India*, pp. 296–299.

<sup>154</sup>N. Lahiri, *Marshalling the past: Ancient India and its modern histories* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2012), pp. 340–350.

<sup>155</sup>Rai, 'To "tear the mask off the face of the past"', p. 412.

of mosques, tombs, and graveyards took place.<sup>156</sup> Where does Swat stand vis-à-vis this archaeological spectrum? It exemplifies what I would call an *indifference paradox*: not essentially contemptuous in character but certainly cognizant of the political utility of archaeology. The Wali did not involve himself either in sabotaging or preserving archaeological remains. The archaeology in his realm, unlike the case of Kashmir, could not be used as an ideological resource either in terms of promotion or annihilation. Its potential utility remained only in the suzerain sphere of British India. The ruling house expediently facilitated the working of colonial archaeology, as is clear from this study.

It may also be pointed out that certain issues regarding the Barger expedition still need further research. In particular, any legal, institutional, or other kind of understanding reached about the transportation of the material to England is a serious and important problem yet to be addressed.

**Acknowledgements.** I owe my gratitude to many people who facilitated this research. I would like to express my deepest thanks to Ex-Deputy Commissioner, Malakand, Iqbal Hussain and ex-Additional Deputy Commissioner, Rahmat Wazir. Deputy Commissioner, Lower Chitral, Anwar-ul-Haq also took great interest in this work and assisted me in many ways. Particular mention is made of Nurul Amin and Tahir of the Deputy Commissioner Office for their assistance during my work in the archive. All this was kindly mediated by Ihsanullah Khan, Assistant Commissioner, Naushahro Feroz, Sindh. I thank Muhammad Ilyas Khan, Provincial Management Service, Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, for his continuous support during my fieldwork. Recently, Arshad Khan, Secretary, Information Department, Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, whose contribution to the field of archaeological historiography of the area is unsurpassed, extended a generous helping hand. Haleemullah Khan also accompanied me during my fieldwork and I am grateful to him. For scholarly input, I am indebted to Himanshu P. Ray, Nayanjot Lahiri, Andrew Amstutz, and the three anonymous reviewers of MAS. Peter Stewart and Gabriel Coleman also kindly helped me in preparing the final version of the article. Peter also invited me to present an earlier version of this article at the Fourth International Workshop of Gandhara Connections, ‘The rediscovery and reception of Gandhara art’, organized by the Classical Art Research Centre, University of Oxford, 24–26 March 2021. The responsibility for any flaws and weaknesses in this article is solely mine.

**Competing interests.** None.

<sup>156</sup>Lahiri, *Marshalling the past*, pp. 142–143.

**Cite this article:** Khan, Rafiullah. 2023. ‘The grey zones of antiquarian pursuits: The 1938 Barger expedition to the princely state of Swat’. *Modern Asian Studies* 57(3), pp. 866–894. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X22000312>