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The Indus Valley civilization and early Tibet

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Introduction

The basic idea of this article came to me while reading some recent works on the Indus Valley or Harappan civilization (Kenoyer 1995, 1998; Shaffer 1992; Schaffer and Lichtenstein 1995; Possehl 1998). I was struck by some similarities between the Indus Valley civilization, as currently understood, and Tibetan society, and I wondered whether these might point to significant historical linkages between these societies.

In fact, Shaffer, Kenoyer and others now tend not to speak of the Indus Valley or Harappan “civilization,” preferring a different term, the “Indus Valley cultural tradition”. This goes along with a new emphasis on cultural continuity within the region. Kenoyer urges that rather than seeing the Indus Valley Civilization as “an enigmatic urban culture that sprang up and then disappeared, eventually to be followed by an alien and unrelated urban culture during the Early Historic period” (Kenoyer 1995: 212), we should view it as part of an ongoing “cultural tradition,” with continuities to both what preceded it and what followed. Shaffer divides this Indus Valley cultural tradition into three major periods, of which the Indus Valley civilization as generally known, the urban culture of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa and similar cities, is the second (Shaffer 1992):

- (1) *The Early Food-Producing and Regionalization Eras*, lasting from 6500 BCE, when settled agriculture emerged in the region, until around 2600 BCE. The Early Food-Producing Era is at this stage represented by only one site, Mehrgarh, but in the succeeding Regionalization Era there is evidence for the growth of a variety of relatively small-scale cultures, many of them exhibiting features continued during the succeeding phase.
- (2) *The Integration Era* (or Harappan Phase), from around 2600 to 1900 BCE, the period of the major archaeological remains from the cities at Mohenjo-Daro, Harappa and elsewhere. This period is marked by a relative similarity of cultural traits throughout a very large region including much of present-day Pakistan and extending well into North-West India. Trade networks developed over long distances: Kenoyer has traced and mapped networks associated with the trading of marine shells, carnelian and lapis lazuli, steatite, tin, copper and gold, extending from

the Gulf of Oman in the West to the Amu Darya in the north and the Deccan Plateau of India in the south-east (Kenoyer 1995).

- (3) *The Localization Era*, from around 1900 to 1500 BCE, perhaps somewhat later, in which a number of local, culturally-distinct variants of the Indus Valley cultural tradition develop: those usually distinguished are the Punjab Phase, Jhukar Phase and Rangpur Phase.

Kenoyer describes the Integration Era as “the earliest state level socio-political organization in South Asia” (1995: 212). His wording here is careful and deliberate: “state level,” not “state”. It has been argued persuasively by Jim Shaffer and others that while we may have “state-level organization” in the Indus Valley cultures during the Integration Era, we do not find many of the features we would normally associate with a centralized state (Possehl 1998). I shall return to this question later. For the Localization Era, according to Kenoyer, the archaeological record suggests “the rise of regional polities that were no longer integrated by a single ideological and economic system” (1995: 224). The most likely cause is “the overextension of socio-economic and ritual networks and the fatal disruption of the agricultural base” (1995: 224). There was “a decline in urbanism and in the control of long distance trade” (1995: 225).

For a Tibetanist, there are two striking features about these descriptions. The first is to do with agricultural technology. These societies, in their mature forms, operated with a mixture of agriculture and pastoralism. The agriculture was largely based on barley, supplemented by millets and wheats, while the pastoralism was based on sheep, goats, cattle and water-buffalo. As has been noted in the Mesopotamian context (Zeder, cited in Shaffer and Lichtenstein 1995: 144) there are inherent contradictions between large-scale agriculture and pastoralism, and it seems that this was resolved, at least in the final or Localization Era, in part by the development of separate pastoralist settlements, where the herds were kept either full-time or seasonally (Shaffer and Lichtenstein 1995: 144-5).

The second feature I have mentioned already: the lack of a centralized state. While the Indus Valley Civilization at its height had a considerable degree of coherence and unity at the cultural level, with numerous cultural features, including a common system of writing, being found over a very wide area, there is little evidence of political centralization. Kenoyer writes:

Based on the current state of research I feel that the Indus state was composed of several competing classes of elites who maintained different levels of control over the vast regions of the Indus and Ghaggar-Hakra Valley. Instead of one social group with absolute control, the rulers or dominant members in the various cities would have included merchants, ritual specialists and individuals who controlled resources such as land,

livestock and raw materials. These groups may have had different means of control, but they shared a common ideology and economic system as represented by seals, ornaments, ceramics and other artefacts . . . The largest cities may have been relatively independent, possibly even small city states, with direct political control only over local settlements and land . . . (Kenoyer 1995: 213-4).

These two features, an economy based on a combination of agriculture with barley as a major crop, and pastoralism using sheep, goats and cattle, along with an apparently highly decentralized political system held together by trade and sharing a common ideology and culture over a very large area, are both central features of the Tibetan cultural adaptation as it existed until the Chinese takeover in modern times. The Tibetan economy was, and to a large extent still is, based on a combination of agriculture, pastoralism and trade. As in the Indus Valley, barley is the main crop and sheep, goat and cattle the main herd animals, with the yak as a high-altitude substitute for other less altitude-tolerant bovines. And, as readers of *Civilized Shamans* will know, I have argued at length that Tibetan societies were highly decentralized (Samuel 1993a, see also Samuel 1982). There was no standing army for most of Tibetan history. Villages and local regions largely managed their own affairs, and even where one finds governmental structures over larger regions, such as that of the Dalai Lama's government at Lhasa, their authority derived from ideological and religious factors rather than direct political control, and their ability to control events at the local level outside the immediate vicinity of the capital city was very limited.

I argued these points at considerable length in *Civilized Shamans* and I shall not deal with them in any detail here. It is worth mentioning, however, that I suggested in *Civilized Shamans* that if Western writers thought of pre-modern Tibet as a centralized state this was in part because of their excessive reliance on data which derived from the 1920s and 1930s, when the Lhasa administration was relatively strong, and which also derived from Lhasa itself and other regions close by, where the power and influence of the Lhasa regime was greatest. I also argued that Western biases towards seeing the centralized hierarchical polity as the only form of large-scale political organization played a part in the development of a false picture of the Tibetan polity.

So far we have two intriguing similarities, one ecological and one political: but is there more to it than this? The Tibetan plateau is, of course, easily accessible from the Indus Valley. The Indus itself rises in Western Tibet, and the population along its upper reaches today is Tibetan. However, the Integration and Localization Eras of the Indus Valley cultural tradition are dated at around 2600 to 1500 BCE. If there was a significant influence from the Indus Valley cultural tradition, it would have been on the populations living on the Himalayan plateau

before 1500 BCE. Tibetan historical records do not take us reliably back before 600 CE, so we would need to suppose cultural continuity on the plateau throughout a gap of at least twenty-one centuries. What do we know of the populations on the Himalayan plateau during this period? Here, obviously, we are looking not just at the antecedents of the central Tibetan state at Yar-lung and later at Lhasa, but also those of Zhang-zhung and other groups which eventually became incorporated into the wider Tibetan cultural complex. More specifically, since the focus of this symposium is on Bon, can we suppose that any such relationship might have a bearing on early religious forms on the Tibetan plateau?

In the remainder of the chapter I shall attempt to answer these questions, and to evaluate whether the hypothesis of a relationship with the Indus Valley civilization is of any use in understanding the evolution of the Bon religion and of Tibetan society and culture more generally.

1. Chronological and Linguistic issues

Despite occasional suggestions of a genetic relationship with Indo-European languages (Beckwith 1987: 3-5, nn.2-3; Walter and Beckwith 1997), the scholarly consensus regards Tibetan as part of a larger Tibeto-Burman or Sino-Tibetan language family. George van Driem notes that while “[i]n terms of its number of speakers, the Tibeto-Burman language family is the largest in the world after Indo-European . . . by comparison little is known of its past” (van Driem 1998: 67). Van Driem suggests that the Bodic grouping (including Tibetan) and the Sinitic (including Chinese) form a sub-grouping within the wider Tibeto-Burman family and that they separated from each other at a relatively late stage (van Driem 1998: 67-8). On the basis of admittedly tentative parallels with the archaeological record, he identifies this separation with the development of the so-called Majiyao Neolithic cultural complex (dated 3900-1700 BCE), which he identifies as “proto-Bodic,” in eastern Gansu and adjacent parts of Qinghai and Ningxia (76-77).

Following Parpola (1994: 142), he suggests that this proto-Bodic cultural complex may also underly the “Northern Neolithic” or “Kashmir Neolithic,” an archaeologically-distinct cultural complex located in the Kashmir and Swat (dated 2500-1700 BCE), as well as the neolithic cultures of Sikkim and Chab-mdo. In other words, Parpola and van Driem assume that peoples speaking Bodic languages may have migrated into the plateau area and beyond to the Kashmir Valley and some sub-Himalayan regions before 2500 BCE.

Van Driem envisages two directions of migration from the Gansu-Qinghai-Ningxia area. One would have taken place westward, across the Karakorum into Swat and Kashmir, with a subsequent movement eastward along the south side of the Himalayas, leading to the Himalayan sub-group of Bodic languages (Manchad,

Bunan, Rangkas, Kanauri, Newar etc). The other would have been southwest into present-day northern Sichuan and eastern Tibet and on into Bhutan, Sikkim and southeastern Tibet, and would be the origin of the Bodish subgroup (including Tibetan proper, and various Bhutanese languages; van Driem 1998: 76-84). The Zhang-zhung language has generally been placed in the Himalayan sub-group, as in van Driem's contribution to the present symposium, where he suggests that it would have arrived by the first of these routes, probably by the middle of the third millennium BCE (van Driem 1999).

If this is a reasonable model, then we can assume a continuity of Tibetan occupation on the Himalayan plateau and neighbouring areas from around 2500 BCE onwards. There is, however, a catch to this model from the point of view of tracing Indus Valley connections¹). As van Driem has pointed out, while the Northern or Kashmir Neolithic is contemporaneous with the Indus Valley Integration Era, it is quite distinct from it, and technologically much less advanced. The Indus Valley cities had copper and bronze, while the Neolithic lasted in the Kashmir region, according to Ramachandra, until at least the second half of the 8th century BCE, with continuing use of bone and stone tools. Only a couple of copper items have been found in the upper levels of the late phase (Ramachandra 1990: 51-52).

Ramachandra notes in relation to the Northern Neolithic that

[t]he Neolithic culture of the [north-west Indian] region is distinct and stands aloof from that of the rest of India . . . This culture appears to be an isolated development, particularly when we observe that the contemporary well-developed urban Harappa culture . . . in the immediate neighbourhood has had little impact on this culture although doubtful but incipient infiltration of this urban culture has been observed in the Neolithic ceramics in the form of a couple of pot forms. (Ramachandra 1990: 51).

Parpola similarly observes that "contacts between the Northern Neolithic and the Harappans were very limited" (Parpola 1994: 142).

On the Tibetan plateau itself, bronze artefacts again do not appear in the archaeological record until well into the first millennium BCE. A bronze mirror with an iron handle, in a grave site in the Lhasa region carbon-dated between 758 and 401 BCE, is currently the "both the earliest bronze and the earliest iron artifact found in Tibet" (Tang and Hare 1998). This mirror is probably an imported item, and the indigenous adoption of bronze technology by Central Tibetan agriculturalist populations may not have occurred until as late as the 7th to 9th centuries CE. Tang and Hare emphasize the relative lateness of technological developments on the Tibetan plateau, and hypothesize that "the region's special geographic conditions retarded cultural diffusion" (Tang and Hare 1998).

Thus it seems, whether we follow Parpola and van Driem in identifying the Northern Neolithic with an immigrant Bodic-speaking population or not, that both the Northern Neolithic in Kashmir and Swat and the adjoining plateau populations remained technologically well behind the Indus Valley cultural tradition, and that there is very limited direct evidence of technological borrowing by either region from the Indus Valley culture of the Integration or Localization Eras.

It is, of course, common for technologically less complex societies to be in contact with more complex societies over long periods, to trade with them and to borrow from them while preserving their own cultural distinctiveness. Such situations are particularly likely to persist where, as here, the neighbouring peoples are associated with very different physical environments and ecological adaptations. The “tribal” populations of modern India, whatever their origins, have been in this situation for many centuries, and so have many other peoples around the world. The urban Indus Valley cultural tradition during the Integration Era appears to have been in contact with many such groups. Shaffer and Lichtenstein stress the wider “cultural mosaic” of which the Harappans (i.e. the urban populations during the “Integration Era”) formed part:

Although “mature” Harappans were the Greater Indus Valley’s dominant social group, they were not omnipotent and interacted to varying degrees with culturally similar, as well as different, social groups . . . Their cartographic isolation by scholars, . . . completely fails to depict the full, dynamic, social and geographic system of which they were but one part. (Shaffer and Lichtenstein 1995: 137)

We should, I think, avoid being caught in an artificial choice between the two extremes of total openness to Indus Valley influences and of complete closure. That contact existed between plateau cultures and the Indus Valley can scarcely be doubted. Civilization on the Tibetan plateau, at least in recent centuries, has only been viable as a combination of agriculture, pastoralism and trade (Samuel 1993a: 42-3, 145-6). While it is likely on both archaeological and historical grounds that what we now know as Western Tibet, the former Zhang-zhung, was a less arid, more productive and more populous region in earlier times, it is hard to imagine the plateau ever supporting a substantial population purely on its own resources. In other words, the people living on the Tibetan plateau have always been involved in long-distance trade, both to obtain specific goods and resources not available locally, but also because these communities would simply not have been viable at more than the barest subsistence level without the profits derived from long-distance trade.

Giorgio Stacul, discussing Northern Neolithic material from Swat, notes that the kinds of economic exploitation which probably characterized these mountain

regions, where the “principal resources consisted of not only grazing and a small amount of agriculture, but also very probably the exploitation of the rich forests,” would have promoted “vertical communications and cultural interaction” (Stacul 1992: 119-120). Many of the commodities which were passed along the Himalayan trade routes in modern times, such as salt, butter, tea and wheat, would leave little or no trace in the archaeological record.

In other words, it seems likely that despite the cultural distinctiveness of the neighbouring populations, there was plenty of contact between them. The peoples who occupy these regions into modern times have maintained a considerable level of cultural distinctiveness as one moves upwards from the lower Indus or the Gangetic plain through the Himalayan foothills and onto the Tibetan plateau, despite the extensive and ancient trading networks.

In such situations of culture contact, one would expect members of the less technologically advanced society to accept and adopt those features that make sense within their own cultural context and ecological adaptation, often transforming them in the process, while rejecting those that do not fit, much as the Tibetans at a later period were to select and transform elements from the Tantric Buddhism of India to develop their own unique form of Buddhism (Samuel 1993a). We should thus expect to find selective transfers of cultural features from the lowland cultures to the highland populations, which might or might not leave significant traces in the archaeological record.

The importance of barrel-shaped carnelian beads, the famous *gzi* beads, in Tibet points to at least one likely borrowing along these trade routes. These beads are still traded throughout Tibet, where they are highly valued and regarded as protective talismans (Ebbinghouse and Winsten 1988; see also Tucci 1980: 245). Similar beads were produced by the Indus Valley craftsmen, who worked extensively with this material (Kenoyer 1995: 218). While Kenoyer’s map of the Indus Valley trading network in carnelian (Kenoyer 1995: 247, Figure 5) does not mark a trade route along the upper Indus into Tibet, carnelian barrel beads occur in Northern Neolithic contexts in Kashmir (Ramachandra 1990: 50, 51), and were presumably traded onwards into Tibet through this region. Turquoise and coral, also of ritual or magical significance in modern Tibet, might likewise have been traded up onto the plateau via the Indus Valley.

The importance of such trade items should not be underestimated. The two areas which I pointed to at the start of this chapter, however, the mixed agricultural-pastoralist economy and the political structure of Tibetan societies, are more central and pervasive cultural features, and one might suppose that the degree of cultural difference between the upland and lowland societies might be a barrier to such substantial borrowings. In the next section, I examine these in more detail.

2. Agriculture

Despite their reliance on Neolithic technology, the Northern Neolithic cultures were quite sophisticated farmers. Stacul notes that in lower Swat there is “conclusive proof for early, well-developed double cropping . . . and for a well-balanced farm breeding system . . . which dates from the beginning of the second millennium BC” while large stone-walled settlements in the upper Swat valley, associated with grazing, some agriculture, and probably also forest exploitation, also go back to at least the second millennium BCE (1992: 119-20). The Majiyao Neolithic was apparently a millet-cultivating agricultural society (van Driem 1998: 79-80), so that the Tibetan shift to the more altitude-resistant barley may well have been learned from populations adjacent to the barley-growing Indus Valley people.

The combination of agriculture and high-altitude grazing mentioned by Stacul is a characteristic Central Tibetan mixture in more recent times. Often, this takes place within a single household or village community (the so-called *sa ma 'brog* pattern, e.g. Samuel 1993: 41). Whether this combination was part of the technological inventory brought by the hypothetical proto-Bodic population when it first arrived on the plateau is unclear. The Majiyao culture seems to have been purely agricultural:

In China, all Neolithic remains belong to agricultural peoples. The exceptions are the microlithic and shell-mound sites where hunting and fishing economies predominated. Agriculturists were also spread over the fringe region of the Plateau and the northern steppes of China during the Neolithic. In essence, there were no nomadic cultures operating in China during the Neolithic (Hare 1998).

Hare's contrast here, however, is between “agricultural” and “nomadic”: I am not clear whether the evidence from the Majiyao culture is compatible with the *sa ma 'brog* pattern, in which agricultural communities also pasture animals at higher altitudes. If evidence for such an adaptation is lacking from Majiyao, the *sa ma 'brog* pattern could have been adopted, like the use of barley, from the Northern Neolithic populations adjacent to the Indus Valley civilization.

The conspicuous division of Tibetan society as a whole into agricultural and pastoralist (*'brog pa*) populations probably did not come from either Majiyao or the Indus, however. Hare suggests that the nomadic pastoralist component of Tibetan culture originated through the displacement of agriculturalists in the middle and east part of the Qinghai-Tibetan plateau by nomadic herders from Bronze Age steppe cultures. He dates this process from the beginning of the first millennium BCE (Hare 1998). If this is so, then it was the beginning of a long-term

process of incorporation and Tibetanization of non-Bodic pastoralists which has continued in the region until quite recent times.

At any rate, the degree of cultural similarity in modern times between Tibetan *'brog pa* culture and the Mongolian, Turkic and other steppe populations to the north-west, north and north-east suggests that they provided a major contribution to the overall Tibetan cultural adaptation. Many important cultural features of the Tibetan population clearly do *not* come from the Indus Valley civilization or from the Majiyao culture. One of the most obvious of these is the horse, and the associated tradition of fighting from horseback. It is unclear how far back the use of the horse goes in the history of settlement on the Tibetan plateau. Men on horseback are depicted in rock paintings at lCe-do in the Byang-thang, but there seems little indication of when these paintings might date from, beyond the assumption that they are pre-Buddhist (Bellezza 1997: 244). John Bellezza divides these paintings into phases before and after the domestication of the horse, but since the main criterion for inclusion in one phase or the other is whether horses are present in the paintings, it might be unwise to build too much on the distinction (1997: 240). A painting without horses may, after all, simply mean that the painter had no particular reason to include any.

If Hare is right in suggesting that immigration of (presumably horse-riding) steppe cultures onto the plateau dates back to the early 1st millennium BCE, then the spread of the horse and of horse-based fighting techniques may have been a major component behind the subsequent history of the plateau. Christopher Beckwith has argued that developments in the technique of fighting on horseback were responsible for the expansion of the Yar-lung state in the 7th century CE, and by this time the horse had clearly been thoroughly "Tibetanized" (Beckwith 1977, 1987). The later Bonpo tradition regards the land of sTag-gzig (see below) as a source of horses, as does the epic of Gling Ge-sar, but both of these date in their present form from a period where the horse has long been an established part of Tibetan society. Certainly, there seems no reason to assume that the horse was borrowed from the Indus Valley cultures, where the evidence for its existence is both very limited and heavily contested (see e.g. Parpola 1994: 155-9), and there are no traces at all of horse-based militarism (see below)².

3. Political Organization

I turn now to the second issue mentioned at the start of this chapter, that of the decentralized nature of Indus Valley societies.

The idea of a complex and large scale society without what we would typically regard as state organization - centralized control, a bureaucracy of some kind, hierarchical structure encompassing the whole territory, some form of police

or military organization to enforce obedience - arose in modern times from British social anthropology. At least, it was my own background in British social anthropology, with heavy exposure as a student to the literature on stateless societies such as those of sub-Saharan Africa, that led me to explore models of Tibetan society in which state elements were limited or absent (Samuel 1982, 1993a).

Archaeologists in recent years have been increasingly interested in models derived from social and cultural anthropology, and Possehl's 1998 article, 'Sociocultural Complexity Without the State,' which argues, in the context of a volume on *Archaic States*, for a non-state model of the Indus Valley civilization, also goes back to the anthropological literature, here more American than British but with similar orientation.

It is perhaps worth pointing out to those unacquainted with this literature that there is an extensive body of anthropological research demonstrating the existence of effective modes of large-scale organization and co-ordination in the absence of state structures. These structures may be based on clan and lineage structures, with patterns of segmentary opposition, feuding, etc., as found among the pastoral populations of Northern and Eastern Tibet in modern times, but we also find, for example through parts of West Africa, a combination of sedentary populations with mostly small-scale authority structures linked together through collective agreements to protect trade and markets into large-scale trading networks (Mair 1962; Nadel 1942).

Possehl suggests that the state is "a highly successful form of sociocultural organization . . . Peoples organized as states are often able to expand through conquest; this political form can be seen as aggressive, even predatory" and explains that the prevalence of states in the ethnographic record may result from "other forms of sociocultural complexity simply fall[ing] prey to state forms of organization or their own internal failings in organization" (Possehl 1998: 267-8). Some non-state societies appear to have effectively resisted being absorbed by the state (Clastres 1977), but in general large-scale stateless forms of organization, "sociocultural complexity without the state," seems to have survived only in areas where specific geographical or ecological factors have inhibited the growth of state mechanisms in pre-modern times. Thus Islamic societies in North Africa and elsewhere (Samuel 1982), and Tibetan societies (Samuel 1982, 1993a), remained stateless for long periods because the physical obstacles facing those who might wish to impose state organization on them were such that until the mid-20th century such control could never be maintained (or was simply not worth maintaining) for more than short periods of time. This underlies, for example, the partial and intermittent Chinese attempts to exert sovereignty over the Tibetan region during the 17th to 19th centuries.

Shaffer and others place some emphasis on the absence of evidence of militarism in the Indus Valley cultural tradition. To quote Possehl,

There is no direct evidence for warfare during the Mature Harappan. There are no murals picturing warriors, prisoners, or battle; no settlements can be shown to have been attacked, with defenders who died on the spot, their bones scarred by blows, or arrow-points sticking in the fire-blackened walls of destroyed buildings. (Possehl 1998: 269)

As I have already noted, Tibetan civilization has had a military aspect, most conspicuously during the expansionist era of the Yar-lung state, leading to the early Tibetan empire of the 7th to 9th centuries CE. Within the picture of Tibetan societies sketched in *Civilized Shamans*, such militaristic and centralising episodes were the exception rather than the rule, and never succeeded in establishing long-lasting state structures. Earlier societies on the plateau, such as Zhang-zhung, would not necessarily have been as militaristic as the Yar-lung state, which indeed rapidly overcame and absorbed them during its expansionist phase. On Hare's model, the growth of militarism within Tibet, such as it was, would presumably be associated with the progressive influence and assimilation of steppe cultures. Even today, the image of the horseback warrior is strongly associated with the nomadic-pastoralist (*'brog pa*) populations of the east and north-east.

At the same time, if Possehl is correct that the existence of sociocultural complexity without a state is, as it were, the natural condition of things except where (as usually) it falls prey to the aggressive expansion of the state model, then we hardly need the Indus Valley to provide a model for the development of such a political form on the Tibetan plateau. We might simply regard this as the normal state of affairs where large-scale cooperation develops in the absence of expansionist military states. Are there other, more specific, features of Tibetan political forms that might point to an Indus influence?

One feature which might be considered here is that of dual-organization structures in Tibetan societies. The prevalence of such structures in societies on the Tibetan plateau, including Zhang-zhung, is very marked. I discussed this theme briefly in *Civilized Shamans* (1993a: 152-3), considering there a number of examples:

1. the presence of two *sde pa* (heads of state) in some east Tibetan states, such as 'Ba and Li-thang;
2. the relationship between the Dalai and Panchen Lamas, the two heads of the 'Bri-gung-pa order (Che-tshang and Chung-tshang), or the two heads of the Karma-pa order until the late C18 (Zhwa-dmar-pa and Zhwa-nag-pa);

3. the appointment of two persons, usually, though not always, a lay person and a monk, to *rdzong dpon* positions under the Lhasa administrations;
4. the two capitals of ancient Zhang-zhung.

Unlike the moiety systems found in many small-scale preliterate societies, such as those of Aboriginal Australia, these relationships are not primarily relationships of *opposition*, although this may enter into the situation in particular cases. More typically they may be seen as relationships of *functional equivalence*, in which one partner is recognized as senior, and the other takes over in his absence or at his death, or of *partial functional specialization*, in which one represents a more secular and the other a more sacred or spiritual orientation. I suggested in *Civilized Shamans* that a parallel might be drawn with the Tibetan practice of polyandry, in which two or more brothers marry a wife in common and act as joint husbands, with the eldest recognized as having primacy. In such families, one brother may become a monk, but return to take over the household and act as husband to the joint wife should the other brothers predecease him.

It should be noted that this dual organization is distinct from the pattern recently identified by John Bellezza for ancient Tibetan civilizations, and referred to by him in terms of “Divine Dyads”. Bellezza’s dyads each consist of a mountain and lake, associated with a god and goddess respectively, and there is no sense that one partner might replace or substitute for the other. It may be significant, though, that the Bonpo in modern times have a set of three holy mountains (rTa-rgo, Gangs Ti-se and rKong-po Bon-ri). The relationship between these mountains might bear comparison with those I am discussing here (Bellezza 1997: 293, Cech 1987).

The Indus Valley civilization during the Integration (or “mature” Harappan) Era was initially often described as having had two capitals, Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, of approximately equal importance, and it has also been suggested that Mohenjo-Daro served primarily as a ceremonial centre. The parallels with Tibetan dual organization seem tempting. However, it now seems, with the identification of a third major, as yet unexcavated, urban centre at Ganweriwala, that the dual-capital model of the Indus Valley was an oversimplification. Shaffer and Lichtenstein note that

[t]he three largest “mature” Harappan urban centers, Moenjo-daro, Harappa and Ganweriwala have comparable sizes, configurations and associated objects, and are approximately equidistant from each other... none emerges as *the capital* settlement of an ancient state. (Shaffer and Lichtenstein 1995: 135).

This need not invalidate the comparison with dualism on the Tibetan plateau, since I have suggested that the essence of the Tibetan pattern is less dualism than multiplicity and equivalence, but it perhaps makes it less striking.

A second feature may be considered here. Indus Valley urban centres generally have raised platforms, which have been associated with ceremonial purposes, although no definitive evidence of cult activities has been identified. Can we compare these to the tendency for settlements on the Tibetan plateau to be associated with raised structures with administrative or ritual purposes? Here I am thinking both of the *rdzong* or castle, as at Lhasa, Leh or rGyal-rtse, but also of the *dgon pa* or monastic settlement, which is frequently in Tibetan communities a separate enclosure some way above the main settlement. The Tibetan structures are more substantial, and differently placed, to the Indus Valley structures, but there may be something in the parallels between the two situations.

All in all, it seems that the situation may have existed for cultural transfer between the Indus Valley and societies on the Tibetan plateau, but that the kinds of similarities we can trace at present are relatively general in nature, and do not offer any particularly conclusive argument for invoking a significant influence from this direction. In the following section I turn to the question of religion.

4. Religion

Our earliest direct evidence for Tibetan religion comes from inscriptions and historical texts referring to the mid-7th century CE onwards. As I have pointed out elsewhere, these represent the cults associated with the Yar-lung and Lhasa courts, and it is not clear what relationship they might have with the religion of the general population at that time, or with earlier religious forms on the plateau (Samuel 1993a: 436-443). I have suggested tentatively that one might hypothesize the existence of a 'shamanic'-style religion at an earlier period, in which spiritual powers (*bla/lha*) inherent in the landscape, particularly in mountains and lakes, are closely related to local social and/or kin groups (Samuel 1993a: 186-7, 436-9; see also Samuel 1985). I would be even more tentative about such a suggestion today, especially given the multiple misunderstandings that seem inevitably caused by any use of the term 'shamanic' in scholarly discourse, however carefully defined. The importance of mountain god-cults and the lake-goddess cults often associated with them has nevertheless been born out by a series of more recent ethnographic studies (Blondeau and Steinkellner 1996; Bellezza 1997; Macdonald 1997; Blondeau 1997).

Some years ago, I attempted to relate aspects of this model to Bonpo historical understandings of their own religion, in particular the three phases or periods (*rdol bon*, *'khyar bon*, *bsgyur bon*) and the distinction between the "Bon of cause" (*rgyu*

bon) and the “Bon of effect” (*'bras bu'i bon*). This latter distinction is significant in that the “Bon of cause” comprises matters such as divination, prediction, rituals to local gods and spirits, and funerary rituals, which presumably predate in some form both the court religion of the Zhang-zhung and Yar-lung courts, and the importation of Buddhist and similar material that shaped the subsequent development of Bon (cf. Samuel 1993b). We may summarise the scheme as follows (see also Karmay 1972, 1975; Tucci 1980: 224):

Phase of Bon	Chronology	Traditional description
I (<i>rdol bon</i>)	from time of sTon-pa gShen-rab to murder of legendary king Gri-gum	partial teaching of Bon by sTon-pa gShen-rab of 'Ol-mo lung-ring on his visit to Tibet; persecution of Bon by Gri-gum, prohibition of some Bon teachings and concealment of texts; loss of king's direct link to heaven at Gri-gum's death
II (<i>'khyar bon</i>)	from death of Gri-gum to time of Khri-srong lde'u-btsan (late C9); importation of “Bon of effect”	restoration of Bon by son of Gri-gum, sPu-lde Gung-rgyal; emphasis on funerary rites; ascendancy of Bon; persecution by Buddhist king Khri-srong lde'u-btsan
III (<i>bsgyur bon</i>)	C10 onwards	dominance of Buddhism; rediscovery of Bon by <i>gter ston</i> , beginning with gShen-chen Klu-dga

In this scheme, Phase I could be taken tentatively as the time of the early religion of local gods and spirits, Phase II as representing the religion of the Zhang-zhung and Yar-lung courts, while Phase III is the Bon religion as we know it today. Bonpo and Buddhist (*chos pa*) historians differ over the content of religion in these various phases, with Buddhist historians arguing that only the “Bon of cause” (divination, prediction, rituals to local gods and spirits, funerary rituals) existed in the pre-Buddhist period (Phases I and II), while Bonpos claim that the “Bon of effect” (i.e. the ascetic and Tantric material) also existed during this period (Karmay 1972: 34 and n.1). It is quite likely that, as Per Kvaerne has suggested, there may have been contact with Buddhist or Śaivite yogins during the period of the royal courts (i.e. Phase II). Any “Indus Valley” material would presumably, however, be part of Phase I, and might be associated with the figure of sTon-pa gShen-rab himself.

While I am not suggesting that the Bonpo historical material be taken at face value as a literal historical account³⁾, the above at least serves to suggest the distance between contemporary Bon and “folk religion” material and any hypothetical Indus Valley influences.

As for Indus Valley religion, this too is a highly speculative area at present. A fair amount has been written in recent years (e.g. Hopkins and Hildebeitel 1987, Parpola 1994, Jairazbhoy 1994, Atre 1998), but there is little agreement, which is perhaps hardly surprising given the ambiguity of much of the surviving evidence and the unlikelihood of any conclusive decipherment of the Indus Valley script in the foreseeable future.

I shall restrict my discussion to two features: animal deities and goddess cults. It seems very likely that the Indus Valley religion included a cult centred on sacred animals, primarily bulls but also buffalos and other animals. The bull in profile is by far the commonest single item on Indus Valley seals, though other animals also occur, and it is invariably represented along with an object of probable ritual significance in front of it, apparently a censer or offering-stand (Possehl 1996). The water buffalo also seems to have been of religious significance, with buffalo horns occurring frequently as apparent signifiers of divine status on human figures e.g. (Parpola 1994: 159, 248).

The importance of wild animals, above all of the yak and its wild counterpart, the *'brog*, but also of wild varieties of the sheep, goat and donkey, in Tibetan mountain-deity cults is well known. In modern iconography, these animals are frequently depicted as the vehicle of the deity, but the idea of the deity appearing in the form of an animal, particularly a yak (*lha'i g-yag*) is still prevalent in the Byang-thang and other *'brog pa* areas. Both gNyan-chen thang-lha, a major ancestral deity of the Central Tibetan kingdom, and rTa-rgo rin-po-che, the divine protector of the Zhang-zhung kingdom, are held to manifest in this form (Bellezza 1997: 39, 305). In addition, a divine yak (the Srid-kyi g-yag-pho dkar-po) plays an important part in at least one version of the Bon cosmogonic myth (Tucci 1980: 219-20, Bellezza 1997: 47). It seems plausible that in earlier periods the deity was thought of as having the form of the animal itself. Early Tibetan rock-paintings frequently depict such animals (e.g. drawings in Bellezza 1997), though there is no especial indication of divine status. Could we imagine a relationship here with the theriomorphic deities of the Indus Valley civilization?

As for goddess-cults, there has been considerable speculation regarding the role of goddesses in Indus Valley religion (Hopkins and Hildebeitel 1987, Jayakar 1989, Jairazbhoy 1994, Atre 1998) and we might look at possible relationships between these and early Tibetan goddess-cults. Tibetan goddesses in more recent times have been associated mostly with lakes (Bellezza 1997) and with the earth more generally. Examples include the famous *srin-mo* nailed down in the time of Srong-btsan sgam-po, and perhaps relatable to figures such as dPal-ldan lha-mo

and her Bonpo counterpart Srid-pa'i rgyal-mo (Samuel 1993a: 168, 222, Volkmann 1995). Dang-ra rgyal-mo, the goddess of the lake adjoining Mount rTarg, is a lake goddess who also is also, according to Bellezza, "the primary guardian of the fertility of the land and livestock" (1997: 334). Some apparently female figures in early rock drawings may represent goddesses (Bellezza 1997: 184, fig.6; 199, fig.13).

At this stage, though, while it seems fairly clear that there were divine female figures in the Indus Valley, it is difficult to say anything conclusive about their nature. There are indications of associations with trees and vegetation and with wild animals, in particular the tiger, as in a well-known group of seal-images, and possibly also with fertility and agricultural productivity (Jairazbhoy 1994) but none as far as I know with lakes or with the earth as such.

5. Conclusion

My intention here is modest. I am not in a position to demonstrate conclusively that there has been major influence from the Indus Valley Civilization on early societies on the Tibetan plateau. Given the limited nature of our knowledge concerning both early Tibet and many aspects of the Indus Valley Civilization, this is hardly surprising. Yet the material presented above is perhaps sufficient to suggest that the Indus Valley should be taken seriously as a possible source for early Tibetan cultures, and that its neglect in the literature so far is unjustified.

Given the long time-gap between the Indus Valley cultural tradition and the oldest Tibetan historical sources, and the absence, as far as we know, of writing on the plateau during this period, we would be unlikely to find detailed knowledge of Indus Valley societies preserved within Tibet. Yet I shall conclude with a tentative suggestion that we may find a reflection of the Indus Valley civilization in the accounts of the semi-mythical Bonpo homeland 'Ol-mo lung-ring, the place of origin of the original teacher of Bon, sTon-pa gShen-rab.

Dan Martin has dealt in some detail with the problem of 'Ol-mo lung-ring in his recent *Tibet Journal* article (Martin 1995). In later Bonpo tradition, 'Ol-mo lung-ring is often associated with or identified with sTag-gzig, which is itself usually taken by Western scholars to mean Iran. The emphasis in the earlier sources, however, is on 'Ol-mo lung-ring itself, and there is no particular reason to locate it in Iran. Martin points out that the famous map of 'Ol-mo lung-ring analysed by Kuznetsov as a map of the Persian Empire and its tributary states, including such locations as Cyprus and Jerusalem, is not really a map, and that its graphic form may be quite modern (Martin 1995: 66). Martin is, I think, entirely convincing with regard to the dubious nature of Kuznetsov's conclusions, and

certainly the geographical content of this map or diagram appears of little use to the seeker for Bonpo origins. Martin concludes that the “true” ’Ol-mo lung-ring may be permanently hidden behind the semi-mythical “Sharp Teeth” (dBal-so) Glacier.

Yet, earlier in the same article, he points out that the area suggested for ’Ol-mo lung-ring by the *Mdo ’dus* and other relatively early accounts might correspond to Baltistan, Gilgit, northern Kashmir, the northern part of present-day Pakistan (Swat, Chitral, etc.) and perhaps Badakshan “along with possibly the mountainous parts of northern Uttar Pradesh” (1995: 57). This region, Badakshan perhaps excepted, corresponds to the upper fringes of the Indus Valley Civilization, the area of interface between the Indus Valley peoples and the Tibetan plateau. Could it be that this traditional location does retain some sense of genuine connections along this interface?

We might ask too whether the actual name ’Ol-mo lung-ring has any reference to the Indus Valley. Several authors have assumed that the term Meluhha was used by the Sumerians to refer to the Indus Valley civilization, with which they traded (e.g. Parpola 1994; see also Possehl 1998: 274). Meluhha, it has been suggested, is cognate to Sanskrit *mleccha* - which means, of course, non-Aryan, outside Brahmanical civilization. If Meluhha is really equivalent to *mleccha*, it may well be the Indus Valley people’s own term for themselves, or at least one used by other populations besides the Sumerians.

Could we relate these names to ’Ol-mo lung-ring? ’Ol-mo lung-ring can be read as “The Long Valley of Olmo,” and the occurrence of ’Ol-mo gling as a variant form in relatively early contexts suggests that the ’Ol-mo component should be read on its own (Martin 1992: 49). From Meluhha to Olmo is perhaps not an impossible leap. And so I will close this chapter with the suggestion that perhaps we may still be able to glimpse beyond the Sharp Tooth Glacier and see, beneath the Long Valley of ’Ol-mo, the distant and shadowy memory of the Long Valley of the Meluhha, the Long Valley of the Indus.

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Notes

- 1) As George van Driem pointed out when the original version of this chapter was presented at the Osaka workshop in August 1999.
- 2) If Parpola and others are right in associating the Ghalegay IV culture of Swat (c.1700-1400 BCE) with an Indo-Aryan population, this would provide an early western (if post-Harappan) source for both horses and horse-based militarism (Parpola 1994: 152, 168). There is however as far as I know no evidence to suggest that Tibetan plateau populations ever employed the chariot-based fighting techniques of the Indo-Aryans, which would in any case be of limited utility on the plateau. Tibetan military technology appears to have been much more closely allied to that of steppe nomadic peoples.
- 3) Though according to Namkhai Norbu the traditional date of gShen-rab's birth can be dated on the basis of Bonpo material to 1917 BCE, which would fall right at the end of the Indus Valley Integration Era as currently dated (Namkhai Norbu 1995: 156-158).

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