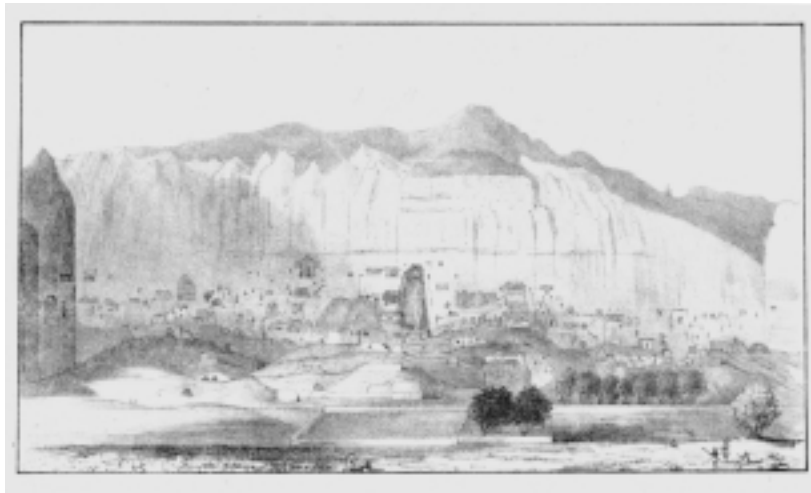


seven volumes of his manuscripts and two large bundles of his uncatalogued papers in the India Office Collections of the British Library. These records, together with his excavated finds, drawings, and maps, provide a unique record of many key sites in Afghanistan which have since been lost. One of his most important contributions was that he was the first to realise that the names and titles in Greek on the coins were repeated in Kharoshthi, thus leading to the decipherment of this previously unknown local script. In a period when numismatic interest in these regions concentrated on gold and silver coins, he recognized that the copper coinage was much more important for purposes of historical research. His detailed approach - largely unappreciated by his contemporaries - was far ahead of his time.

The Masson Project evolved in 1993 from the realization that his comprehensive archive could be used to identify and document the finds from his collection now in the British Museum's Department of Oriental Antiquities and Department of Coins and Medals. It has been generously funded since its inception by the Kreitman Foundation and, since 1998, by the Townley Group of British Museum Friends. The Project is attempting to redress the oversight of the last c. 160 years by studying Masson's manuscript records in the British Library in conjunction with his rich collection of Buddhist relic deposits, coins, rings, seals, and other small objects now in the British Museum. Work initially concentrated on producing a typed and illustrated record of all the surviving documentation. This has been of great use in helping to identify and catalogue the Masson material in the Department of Oriental Antiquities, particularly in reconstituting many of the finds from specific stupa relic deposits. With the help of Professor S. Kuwayama, the archive is now supplemented by copies of photographs from a 1960s survey of the sites, generously donated by Kyoto University, Japan, while copies of all Masson's original drawings are in the process of being obtained from the British Library. The archival record has further helped to identify many of Masson's coins in the Museum collection and has also given a site provenance to the other small finds.

Research has established that about 3,700 coins from Masson's collection were sold at auction in 1887 (some of these have subsequently also entered the British Museum collection), while in 1912 a further c. 600 were presented to the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. In 1995, with the help of Neil Kreitman and Graham Shaw, about 10,000 coins, including the residue of Masson's vast collection, were discovered in storage at the former India Office Library and were transferred to the British Museum on permanent loan from the British Library. The majority of these coins are from specific excavated Buddhist stupa deposits or from Begram (the site correctly identified by Masson as the ancient city of Alexandria of the Caucasus, founded by Alexander the Great). These two groups of provenanced coins thus provide, on the one hand, unique evidence for the spread of Buddhism into these regions and, on the other, the means for reconstructing the general history of the region, as reflected by a single important city site.

Research this past year has revealed



that Masson could only have collected c. 47,000 coins, and not the c. 80,000, as he calculated. Of these, only c. 12,400 can be accounted for, but this total includes some 7,000 coins now in the British Museum. Work on conserving and recording the British Library India Loan Collection is ongoing: 6126 coins in this collection have now been identified as probable Masson coins, and most have been cleaned, conserved, and sorted. The next step is to produce a database of all the material. An exhibition *Discovering Ancient Afghanistan: The Masson Collection*, displaying all these finds, is scheduled to

open in Gallery 69a of the Museum on 11 September 2002: coincidentally, a date that is now the anniversary of events not yet dreamed of when it was chosen in early 2001. <

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Drawing by Charles Masson of the cave monasteries and smaller (38 m) Buddha of Bamiyan.

Charles Masson's sketch of his excavated finds from the relic deposits of the Buddhist stupas Kotpur 2, Bimaran 2, Gudara, Deh Rahman 1 ("Tope Abbee") and Passani tumulus 2 in the Darunta district, east of Jalalabad.

Charles Masson's sketch of the Buddhist stupa no. 2 at Bimaran, in the Darunta district, west of Jalalabad, Afghanistan.



After H. H. Wilson, *Ariana Antiqua*, London 1841, Topes pl. III.

Travelogue of an Ethnomusicologist: Living Musical Traditions of the Ismailis in Afghan Badakhshan

My research concentrates on the music and poetry of the Ismailis in Badakhshan, which resulted in research trips in 1992 and 1993 in Tajik Badakhshan,¹ in 1996 in Afghanistan, again in 1998 in Tajik Badakhshan, and in 2001 in Afghan Badakhshan.² Due to the harsh geographical and complicated political circumstances, Badakhshan has, until now, been an isolated area. What follows is a travelogue of my last trip to Afghan Badakhshan in August 2001.

Research >
Afghanistan

By Jan van Belle

Preparing a trip to Afghan Badakhshan is a complicated affair requiring a lot of time, stamina, and especially patience. First, a Tajikistan visa from the Russian Embassy in London was needed, followed by another four weeks of waiting for the Tajikistan Foreign Ministry to authorize it. Once this visa was cleared, I was able to book my flight from Munich to Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, where I had to wait yet another ten days to obtain my Tajik visa extension to Tajik Badakhshan (GBO), and to apply for an Afghan visa with the Afghan Embassy. On top of this, that flights between Dushanbe and Khorog, the capital of Tajik Badakhshan, only run in clear weather resulted in another two days of waiting. On arrival in Khorog, I was lucky enough to get help from FOCUS, the Aga Khan humanitarian organization that arranges food supplies to the Afghan side. They provided me with helpful information and transportation to Tajik Eshkashim, a town in the South of Badakhshan, which, at that time, was the only place to cross the border. It is still con-

Typical folk music ensemble



trolled by the KGB, so I also needed a special permit from them; it makes one suspect that the authorities are doing their very best to discourage visits to this part of the world. Once in Afghan Badakhshan, I could sleep in the FOCUS guesthouses in Afghan Eshkashim and in Baharak, where I was able to arrange an old Russian jeep, drivers, and a guide/translator for my trip. The FOCUS sticker on the jeep partly helped prevent constant harassment at the frequent checkpoints - or by prowling warlords in their Toyota jeeps - requiring additional travel documents issued by district governors or commanders.

Concepts of time, life and death

Travelling in Badakhshan is something to be endured. I would say that we owed our survival to the incredible skills of the driver, who steered the jeep, with its bald tires, with unfaltering good temper - and with total abandon - along narrow mountain roads and deep gorges. The roads are an unsurfaced carpet of bumps, full of pot-holes, stones, and relics from the civil war. At times, they were flooded with sand entering our lungs and covering our bodies and luggage with a thick layer of dust, not to mention penetrating seemingly every chink and cranny in the old jeep. Drivers in Afghanistan are invariably also trained mechanics with large supplies of spare parts and tools. Our old jeep, in fact, broke down several times, which required frequent repairs attended to with skill and improvisation from the driver and his helper. Indeed, they spent nearly as much time under the jeep as behind the steering wheel.

It was evident that, in this part of the world, the concepts of time, and of life and death, completely differ from our own, and a researcher must learn to adapt. All in all, I spent roughly 80 per cent of my time either waiting or on the road, and could only commit 20 per cent to effective research and recording.

Worse than I had imagined

The purpose of my research was to compare Ismaili music in Afghanistan with the performance practice of Ismaili music in Tajik Badakhshan, where we had already complet-

Osmund Boppearatchi, 1999.