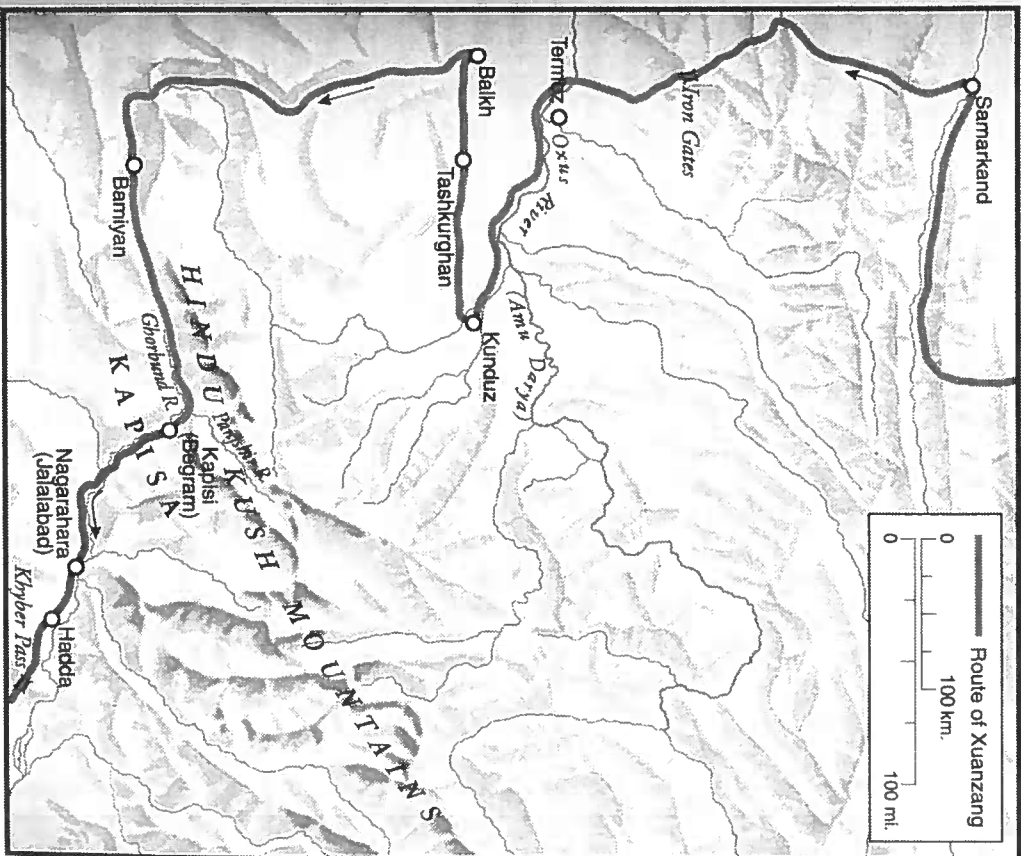


THREE

THE CROSSROADS OF ASIA



MAP 3.1
Itinerary of Xuanzang in Afghanistan (from Samarkand to Jalalabad).

The streets of Samarkand.¹ A medley of sounds—trotting horses, camel bells, and wagons creaking along the muddy roads. Smells of incense, cloves, cinnamon, curry spices in round sacks, urine, boiled lamb simmering in huge vats, and always jostling crowds of people. To Xuanzang, who was used to men with small noses, beardless faces, and almond-shaped black eyes, the men filling the roads and the bazaar were clearly foreign traders.² In Chang'an and along the oases of the Silk Route, he had already seen some men with hawk noses whose beards swallowed their faces and whose eyes looked like blue, green, or grey glass.

Now he would go beyond merely foreign faces to discover the characteristic forms of Buddhist culture in the lands south of the Oxus River (Amu Darya), which nowadays divides Tajikistan and Afghanistan. He would learn more about Buddhism's chief form of architecture, the stupa, and about the great Buddhist kings Asoka and Kanishka; he would come to know some of the well-known images of the Buddha, such as the giant Buddha at Bamian or the Dipankara Buddha, called the twenty-fourth predecessor of the Historical Buddha.

In the trading city of Samarkand, where "the merchandise of many countries was found and the craftsmanship of artisans appeared superior to that of other countries," Xuanzang observed caravans with gems, spices, and cotton coming north from India converging with caravans bearing silks and ironware from China on their way west to Persia and beyond to Rome. Bearded nomads from the steppes farther north brought their fur, cattle, and hides to trade in this important entrepôt of the Silk Route.

Winning Over the King of Samarkand

Although the king was a vassal of the Great Khan of the Western Turks, the culture was that of Sassanian (22–637 C.E.) Persia. The language of Samarkand, Sogdian, was related to Persian; the religion of the king and the people was akin to Zoroastrianism, the national religion of Sassanid Persia. Two Buddhist monasteries existed, but they had long stood empty until the arrival of Xuanzang and his caravan. Huili reported that when two of his young disciples went there to

worship, they were pursued by the fire-worshipping Zoroastrians with firebrands. When the king heard of the incident, he ordered that the offending hands of his subjects be cut off. Xuanzang could not bear to see them mutilated and interceded on their behalf so that their sentence was reduced to flogging and expulsion from Samarkand.

Xuanzang described the king of Samarkand as courageous, a man who had a strong army and who was obeyed by the neighboring states. His relations with Xuanzang seemed to change during the visit. At first the king was pointedly unfriendly, but after hearing the monk preach on the second day, he was so impressed that he allowed the pilgrim to convene an assembly where Xuanzang ordained a number of monks. This may be an exaggerated account of Xuanzang's influence, or it may show a desire on the king's part to impress the pilgrim so that he himself might turn his kingdom toward China and break away from the Turkish protectorate. Indeed in 631, the king sent an embassy to China asking to be received as a vassal state. Taizong declined to accede to this request, and instead the two countries established diplomatic and commercial relations.

The pilgrim's face turned south now. He passed through Shahrisabz (Kesh), where one day Tamerlane would build a great palace. Then once more he entered the mountains, this time a spur of the Pamir massif. After two or three days going through very rugged terrain, bearing always toward the southwest, he entered the famous pass called the Iron Gates. Located eight miles west of modern Derbent, it marked the boundary of the empire of the Western Turks. This well-known defile was shut in on both sides by high vertical rock walls. "The road is narrow, which adds to the difficulty and danger. On both sides there is a rocky wall of an iron color. Here there are set up double wooden doors, strengthened with iron and furnished with many bells," Xuanzang tells us.³

He then traveled due south again to the historic Oxus River, now called the Amu Darya, which rises in the Pamirs and, after traversing more than 1,400 miles, ends in the Aral Sea. Staying on the northern side of the river, he stopped at Termez. Here he found Buddhism flourishing once again. He notes that there were more than 1,000 brethren.⁴

Xuanzang's observations are of special interest in view of the abundance of Buddhist monuments found by Soviet archaeologists in the

vicinity of Termez, such as this stone portrayal of a seated Buddha and his disciples (Fig. 3.1), which was discovered during an excavation of a temple located on the banks of the Oxus near Staryi Termez.

Further east on one of the tributaries of the Oxus in Tajikistan is Adzhina-tepe, the most important Buddhist monastery so far discovered in Central Asia. Along with its very large collection of Buddhist relics is a Buddha lying in the final pose of parinirvana. Adzhina-tepe marks the farthest point reached by Buddhism from India toward the west.⁵

Poisoning at Kunduz

During his long journey Xuanzang was able to take advantage of the many kinship ties of the khans and kings along the Silk Road. So it was that he made a special detour after crossing the Oxus to stop at Kunduz in present-day Afghanistan. He carried a letter to the reigning Prince Tardu in Kunduz from his first patron, the king of Turfan. It must have been a warm letter, for the Turfan king was writing to his brother-in-law, Prince Tardu was also the eldest son of



FIGURE 3.1
Limestone relief depicting Buddha seated beneath the Bo tree flanked by two monks. 1st to 2nd century C.E. From Fayez Tepe, southern Uzbekistan. Museum of the People of Uzbekistan, Tashkent.

the Great Khan of the Western Turks, whom the prince had just been visiting at his hunting quarters near Tokmak.

But Xuanzang came at an unfortunate time. The wife of Prince Tardu had died and the king was in mourning. Something like a Greek tragedy was to follow. Suddenly Prince Tardu married the younger daughter of the king of Turfan. This dastardly new queen started an intrigue with a royal prince, son of the first marriage. While Xuanzang was still their guest, she poisoned Prince Tardu and made her new lover the ruler of Kunduz. Seemingly undismayed by this murder, Xuanzang stayed on for the protracted funeral and marriage ceremonies.

These delays gave him a chance to come to know a monk named Dharmasimha who had already been to India. Xuanzang's biographer related that his hero tried to find out about the number of scriptures and treatises Dharmasimha knew. "I can explain any of them you like," the monk at Kunduz is supposed to have said. Xuanzang confined himself to asking about the treatises he thought the monk would know and found that he couldn't explain them easily. Dharmasimha's disciples were filled with dismay, but to his credit, he "ceased not to praise the Master, acknowledging that he was by no means his equal."

Visiting Stupas in Balkh

Before he was murdered, Prince Tardu, who was a pious man, had recommended that Xuanzang should make a detour to visit Balkh, because of its many religious monuments. Accompanied by some monks who had come from Balkh to participate in the funeral services of the king of Kunduz as well as the investiture of the new rulers, they went 100 miles through Tashkurgan to the west. They saw how spacious this well-fortified city of Balkh was—20 li in circuit.⁶

Xuanzang noticed the apparently barren character of the city and its neighborhood, yet he says, "in truth it was a most excellent land." The plains and valleys were extremely fertile. There were one hundred monasteries and three thousand monks who were Hinayanana Buddhists. Above all, the country was rich in relics in spite of a series of foreign invasions.

Balkh was already a city of prodigious antiquity when Alexander the Great chose it as his base from 329 to 327 B.C.E. In the early centuries of the common era, Buddhism flourished around Termez and in what is now Afghanistan, especially during the Kushan empire, from the first to the third centuries.⁷ After that empire's fall, there were a number of petty kingdoms, and the kings in times of prosperity embellished their capitals with temples, monasteries, and stupas. Both the cave monasteries at Bamyan and the thousands of stupas at Hadda were built during this period, from the third to the fifth centuries. Then came the invasion of the White Huns (455–470?), who conquered Gandhara (eastern Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan) on their way to India. This area had succumbed not only to the Huns' destructiveness but also to floods and a decline in economic prosperity. In addition, in the seventh century when Xuanzang passed through, Buddhism's dominance was giving way to a general revival of Hinduism.⁸

Two rich merchants, Tapusa and Bhalika, had brought Buddhism to Balkh, according to Xuanzang. Northwest of the city were two Buddhist shrines, or stupas, associated with those nomad traders. "At this time two householders meeting [the Buddha] in his majestic glory gave him of their travelling provisions parched grain and honey. Bhagavat [the Buddha] expounded to them what brings happiness to men and devas [gods], and these two householders were the first to hear the Five Commandments and Ten Virtues. When they had received the religious teaching they requested something to worship."⁹ The Buddha gave them his hair and nail parings. The two men, being about to return to their native country, begged to have a rule and pattern for their worship services. Thereupon the Buddha took his three garments, folded them into four, piled them on the ground, beginning with the largest and ending with the smallest. Next he took his begging bowl and inverted it on his garments. Finally he put his beggar's staff on top and said, "This is how to make a stupa."

This legend carries an important message about the early days of Buddhism and the special grace accorded to merchants. Caravanners were an important means of spreading the new faith; the two traders in the legend had traveled well over 1,000 miles from Balkh to India's holy land. The truth of this story is borne out in history, for both Kushan traders and Sogdian caravans from Bukhara and Samarkand were emissaries for the message of Buddhism to the desert oases and

to China. The Sogdian language became the lingua franca of the eastern end of the Silk Route, and both Sogdians and Parthians from Central Asia were among the earliest translators of Buddhist texts into Chinese.¹⁰

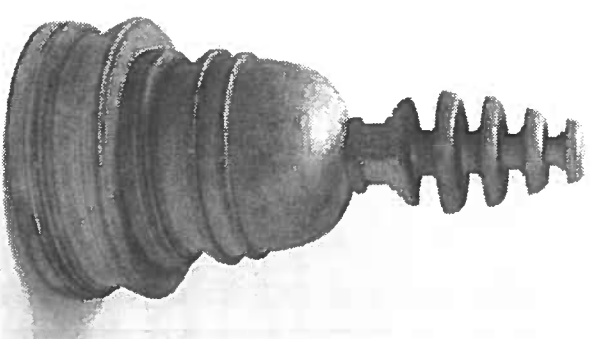
This new religion was also not identified with the highest caste or Brahmins, as Hinduism was; it was open to all. The merchants who went back to Balkh and built a stupa also set an example of turning their material wealth into Buddhist works of art. Finally, the story gives a convenient way to represent how a stupa looks with its square bottom, round dome, and tall mast (Fig. 3.2).

Over the centuries the stupa form became more complex; more platforms supported the dome, the dome changed, the square railings at its top were enlarged and elaborated, the mast grew taller, and the symbolic umbrellas on it increased in number.

The Indian ruler King Asoka (c. 273–237 B.C.E.), third emperor of the Mauryan dynasty, is said to have initiated the stupa cult. Like the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine six hundred years later, Asoka's conversion to Buddhism was of great historic importance. According to legend, eight stupas had been used

FIGURE 3.2

A small reliquary, dated first century C.E., in the shape of a stupa, the principal form of Buddhist architecture. The British Museum.



to enshrine the last possessions and remains of the Buddha, whence Asoka further divided the relics and erected 84,000 stupas throughout the major cities of his realm. He believed the bones of the human body consist of 84,000 atoms, and he desired to build 84,000 stupas, one over each atom of the Buddha's skeleton.¹¹ There is evidence that a major redistribution of relics did take place under Asoka's direction. Ever since then "a monument of this type has been an indispensable element of every monastery or temple in Asia, either in the ancient form of an Indian stupa or its variants, or in the eastern Asian form of a pagoda."¹²

Buried inside these stupas, which Xuanzang would encounter everywhere on his journey, were the relics of the Buddha. The Chinese pilgrims noted that the most valuable ones were usually kept in small receptacles made of crystal or gold; these in turn were enclosed in stone boxes or earthenware containers, which were of decreasing value.

Sometimes a relic was broadly interpreted to include a sacred text or a small statue representing the Buddha. Stupas were also built in praise of disciples or revered holy men, or to commemorate important events in the Buddha's life or his previous lives. Part of stupa worship was an ancient Indian rite in which the pilgrim circumambulated around the stupa following the path of the sun.

Originally stupas were burial mounds or sepulchers. Their form and meanings kept evolving. The symbolism is varied, but it has come to be thought of as a cosmic diagram in which the dome represents heaven sheltering the interior as a world mound. The tall mast symbolizes the World Axis. The stupa also stands for nirvana, the ultimate goal and highest consummation for all Buddhists.

The New Monastery where Xuanzang stayed for a month had been one of the most splendid monasteries of the Buddhist world. "This was the only Buddhist establishment north of the Hindu Kush in which there was a constant succession of Masters who were commentators on the canon. The image of the Buddha in this monastery . . . was studded with noted precious substances, and its halls were adorned with costly rarities, hence it was plundered for gain by the chiefs of the various states. In the monastery was an image of Vaisravana deva which had bona fide miracles and in mysterious ways protected the establishment."¹³

There he found Prajnakara, a genial and learned man, with whom he was able to converse profitably and read certain Hinayana texts that interested him. For the first time since he had left China, Xuanzang found a Buddhist teacher whom he respected, even though he was a follower of Hinayana Buddhism. They enjoyed one another so much that when it came time to leave, Prajnakara accompanied him south through the Hindu Kush Mountains to Bamian.

Like the soldiers of Alexander the Great, they had a very difficult time of it. The snowdrifts were twenty to thirty feet high, the worst Xuanzang had encountered. Although he didn't lose as many men and animals as he had crossing the Tian Shan Mountains, he seems to have been in the midst of a perpetual blizzard. But let Xuanzang tell it himself: "These mountains are lofty and their defiles deep, with peaks and precipices fraught with peril. Wind and snow alternate incessantly and at midsummer it is still cold. Piled up snow fills the valleys and the mountain tracks are hard to follow. There are gods of the mountains and impish sprites which in their anger send forth monstrous apparitions, and the mountains are infested by troops of robbers who make murder their occupation."¹⁴

Seeing the Famous Buddhas at Bamian

Xuanzang's caravan prevailed against the blizzards, mountain gods, and robbers and finally approached Bamian, an oasis town in the center of a long valley separating the chain of the Hindu Kush from that of the Koh-i-baba range. Xuanzang noted that the country produced spring wheat and had flowers and fruit. It was suitable for cattle and afforded good pasture for sheep and horses. He commented that the people of Bamian wore fur garments and coarse wool to protect themselves from the cold. Although their "manners were hard and uncultivated," he admired "their simple, sincere religious faith."

The first sight of the valley of the Great Buddha must have made the weary travelers gasp—immense cliffs of a soft pastel color and behind them indigo peaks dusted with snow, rising to a height of 20,000 feet. They saw the reddish cliffs in the cold, clear air; as they came closer, they could make out two gigantic statues of the Buddha standing in niches carved in the mountains (Fig. 3-3).



FIGURE 3.3
The valley of Bamiyan, set between the peaks of the Hindu Kush and the Koh-i-baba ranges. One of the two colossal Buddhas described by Xuanzang is visible in this long-distance view.

Closer still, they saw that the two colossal figures were colored and glistening with ornaments; the smaller wore blue, the larger one red, and their faces and hands were gilded.

When Xuanzang's caravan first arrived in Bamiyan, the king met the pilgrim and escorted him to his palace. Later Xuanzang's fellow monks took him on a tour of their valley. Xuanzang reports that there were some tens of Buddhist monasteries and several thousand monks who were adherents of a rare Hinayana school, whose chief tenet was that the Buddhas are above earthly laws, an idea that is perhaps an approach to the conception of the transcendent Buddha of the Mahayana pantheon.¹⁵

Together they visited the chief monastery at Bamiyan with its world-famous Buddhas. Long before Bamiyan was known to the whole world, modern art historians quoted Xuanzang's eyewitness account:

On the declivity of a hill to the north-east of the capital was a standing image of Buddha made of stone, 140 or 150 feet high, of

a brilliant golden color and resplendent with ornamentation of precious substances. To the east of it was a Buddhist monastery built by a former king of the country. East of this was a standing image of Sakyamuni Buddha above 100 feet high, made of *t'u-shih* (bronze), the pieces of which had been cast separately and then welded together into one figure.¹⁶

These two Buddhas, which faced south, an orientation ensuring the full benefit of the sun's warmth, were actually 175 feet and 125 feet, respectively. In between these two statues, the monks' cells and hundreds of chapels for private and communal worship (Fig. 3.4) were covered with paintings.

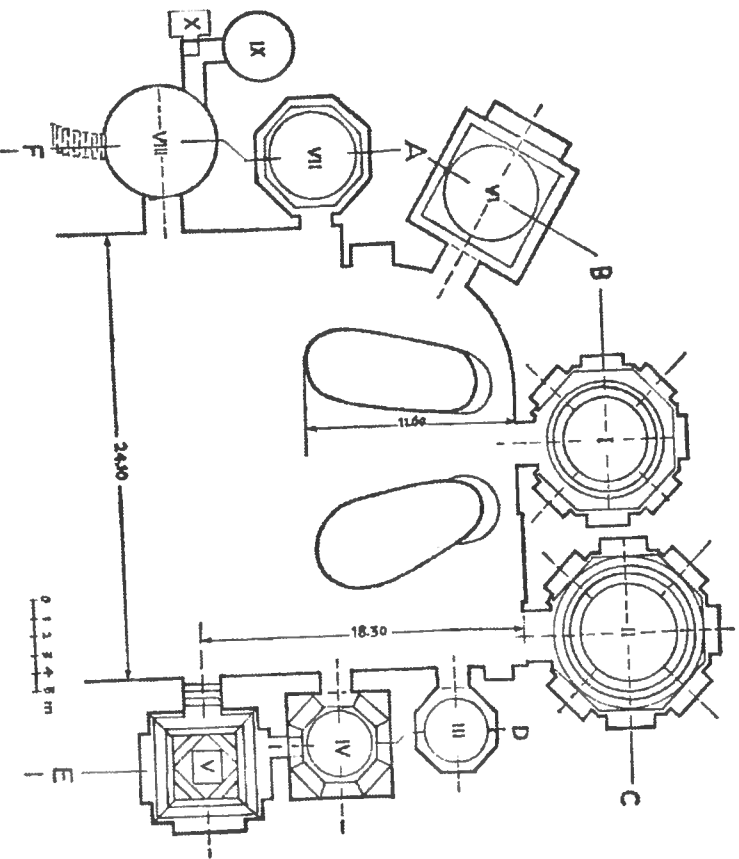


FIGURE 3.4
Ground plan of rock-hewn chapels at Bamiyan, Afghanistan, which form a semicircle around the 175-foot-high figure of the Buddha, which was destroyed by the Taliban in 2001.

The pilgrim does not mention these famous frescoes, which are thought to date from the sixth or seventh centuries, while the Buddhas themselves may have been built as early as the third century or as late as the seventh.¹⁷

Xuanzang called the larger figure a Buddha image and the smaller one a “Sakyamuni” or Historical Buddha. As a Master of the Law, as he was often called, Xuanzang would have been particular about such differences in theory, even though he was inclined in practice to keep his intellectual sophistication in one place and his devotion and commitment in another. The size of the Buddha may have served as a model later on for other gigantic statues of a divinized Buddha in China and Japan.¹⁸

Xuanzang was the first to describe these famous Buddhas. They have since become known all over the world and continue to be the subject of major news stories, editorials, and magazine articles. International attention came first of all when the Taliban armies threatened their destruction; then they shocked the entire world in March of 2001 when they bombed these ancient Bamiyan statues out of existence, leaving empty gaping holes. Such wanton destruction obliterated not only the patrimony of the people of Afghanistan but monuments of international renown that are thought to have been the largest Buddha statues in the world.¹⁹

A present-day Afghan scholar, Dr. Zemulia Tarzi, is searching for a third Buddha described by Xuanzang. It is a huge image of the Parinirvana Buddha supposed to be twelve or thirteen *li*—four or five miles—east of the cliff.²⁰

Xuanzang describes a curious custom that he would encounter again with the great King Harsha in India. The king used to summon an assembly every five years at which he gave away all his possessions to the people, and afterwards his officials redeemed his possessions.

From Bamiyan, Xuanzang and his caravan went east, climbing the pass of Shibar, which, at an elevation of 9,000 feet, gives access to the upper valley of the Ghorband River. He was overtaken by a snowstorm in the Black Mountains (the modern-day Paghman Mountains) and lost his way. Happily some hunters helped him to follow the winding valley of the Ghorband as far as the meeting of that river with the Panjshir River. At this point the mountains opened up, and the beautiful plain of Kapisa revealed itself.

Finding Hidden Treasures in Kapisa

With its magnificent frame of mountains on three sides, Kapisa lies in one of the most scenic and historic valleys in all of what is now Afghanistan. Its capital, Kapisi, is an ancient city located on the archaeological site of the village of Begram. Although it is forty miles north of Kabul, the elevation of the plane is somewhat lower. Today, wheat, maize, and sesame fields flourish in this rich alluvial region, along with walnut and mulberry trees.²¹ In Xuanzang's time it yielded “cereals of all sorts and every kind of fruit tree, timber and saffron.” What a remarkable continuity after so many centuries!

As befitting this important political, commercial, and artistic center, there were one hundred monasteries with more than six thousand monks, chiefly Mahayanist, around Kapisa. “Their stupas and sangharamas [monasteries] are of an imposing height, and are built on high level spots, from which they can be seen on every side, shining in their grandeur.”²² There were also ten Hindu temples in his kingdom.²³

The Chinese pilgrim describes the people as being of a rude and violent disposition, a little like the inhabitants of Bamiyan. The king, who also went out to meet the pilgrim, was of the merchant class. Xuanzang noted that he was an intelligent, courageous man, a benevolent ruler, whose power extended over ten of the neighboring lands.

Alexander the Great crossed the Kapisa plain in the spring of 329 B.C.E. At Kapisi, the political capital and commercial center of the Kushan empire, French archaeological missions led by Joseph Hackin discovered the magnificent Begram treasure in 1939. The far-flung nature of Kushan trade with the outside world is revealed in the exquisitely carved ivories from India, fine Chinese lacquerware from the Han dynasty, an infinite variety of Roman bronzes, and most astonishing of all, a glass vase (Fig. 3.5) representing one of the seven wonders of the world—the famous lighthouse at Alexandria. All were once in the Kabul Museum until it was destroyed by bombings over a period of time during the civil war from 1991 to 1995. Some of its treasures may have been saved, for along with the destruction, there appears to have been extensive looting.²⁴

This treasure points to Afghanistan as the true crossroads of the Silk Road, for the area stands halfway between Rome on the one

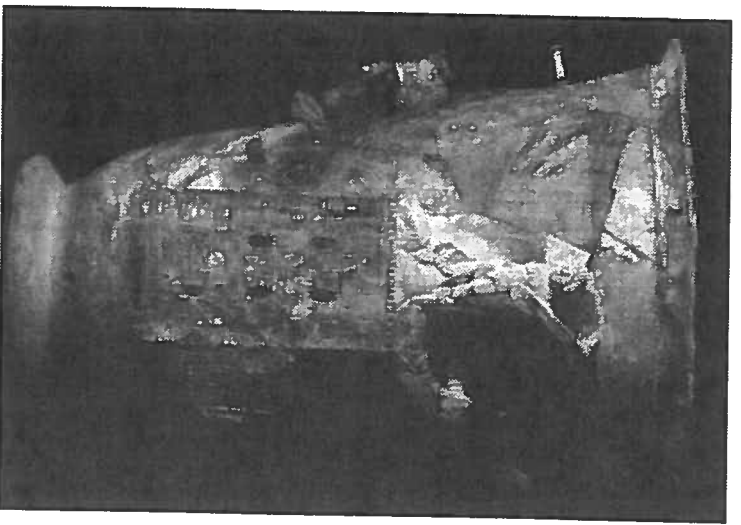


FIGURE 3.5
Carved glass vase from
Begram, Afghanistan,
showing the Lighthouse of
Alexandria, one of
the seven wonders of the
ancient world.

hand and Chang'an on the other on the east/west roads. On the north/south axis, caravans from Samarkand (from which Xuanzang had come himself so recently) and India jostled each other in this famous area.

Although Kanishka was a tolerant promoter of religion, he is also known as one of the great supporters of Buddhist art from the first to the third centuries C.E. Like the Tuoba Wei in China, who built the large Buddhist caves at Yungang and Longmen, the Kushans had originally been a nomad people from the north who had no artistic traditions of their own. They imported precious objects such as the Begram treasures, and they borrowed the arts of the contemporary Roman empire, which came to them over the trade routes, not from Rome itself but from the eastern outposts of the empire. The union of this Western art with Eastern religion is one of the foundations of Gandharan art and the source of its unique form. Xuanzang had seen an example of this union at

Bamiyan, where the drapery of the huge Buddha was modeled after the Roman toga, and the Buddha head was adapted from a classical prototype such as the Apollo Belvedere.²⁵

On a ridge rising to the east of the mound where the Begram treasure was found is the Koh-i-Pahlawan, or Hill of Heroes, a Buddhist religious center that flourished from about the third century C.E. onwards. The Shotorak Monastery there had been built centuries before to house a Chinese prince taken hostage by King Kanishka.²⁶ Xuanzang was their first visitor from China.

Xuanzang could see for himself on the walls paintings of the Chinese prince. After the hostage returned home, he sent religious offerings back to what came to be called the Monastery of Hostages. Out of gratitude, the monks held religious services in his honor at the beginning and end of each Rain Retreat season. This had been done for generations. The Chinese hostage was so generous and wealthy that he also left behind a buried treasure that was to be dug up when the monastery fell into disrepair.

The rainy season in the spring of 630 C.E. Who should dig up the treasure? Why, Xuanzang of course. The outer walls of the stupa collapse. The Chinese monk arrives at a crucial moment, a clear sign that it is a propitious time to exhume this treasure. The monks tell him the following story: "An evil king who is covetous and cruel intends to seize the treasure. He orders his men to dig under the feet of the deity (Vaisravana), but the earth quakes and the figure of a parrot on top of the deity flaps its wings and screams in alarm when it sees the men digging. The king and his soldiers fall down unconscious and finally they go away in fear." Xuanzang prays to the guardian deity of the monastery for his blessing. Xuanzang supervises the work crew. The monks dig down seven or eight feet. To their great delight, they find a large copper vessel containing lustrous pearls and "several hundred pounds of gold."²⁷

While he was at the Monastery of Hostages surely he stopped to look at one of the several carvings of the Dipankara Buddha (Fig. 3.6). Maybe he learned the story as he gazed at the Buddha carved in grey schist, with its moving portrayal of religious devotion.



FIGURE 3.6
A fragment of the
Dipankara Buddha,
called the twenty-fourth
predecessor of the His-
torical Buddha, Sakya-
muni, from Shotorak
Monastery near Kapisa,
Afghanistan, where
Xuanzang stayed in 630
C.E. This was the
Monastery of Hostages,
built for a Chinese
hostage taken by King
Kanishka.

It was said that a young man went out to meet Dipankara, the last of the Buddhas of the Past, and that the youth threw toward him five lotus flowers, which stayed miraculously suspended in the air. He then prostrated himself, put down a deer skin, and offered his long hair as a carpet for the Dipankara Buddha's feet. When he beheld the majesty of this Buddha, he knew that he wanted to seek supreme knowledge of the truth. Dipankara, recognizing the intensity of the young man's desire, which we can feel even in this sculptural fragment, prophesied that in a future incarnation the youth would become the Historical Buddha, Sakyamuni.

Not long after the treasure diggings, the king of Kapisa, who was also a Mahayana Buddhist, asked Xuanzang to take part in a five-day religious assembly. This was a kind of debate similar to the

scholaric tournaments held in Europe in the Middle Ages. Xuanzang presided and, according to his biographer, demonstrated that he had mastered all the doctrines of the different schools while his opponents understood only their own.

On his journey, Xuanzang met the first Jains and Hindu ascetics—including a Saivite who covered his body with ashes and wore a chaplet of skulls on his head. This was a foretaste of what he would meet in the powerful Indian continent to the south, where Hinduism had grown for four thousand years. This religion had no single founder but was composed of innumerable sects. The Hindus were united by the acceptance of caste and devotion to the ancient religious texts known as the Vedas.²⁸

Xuanzang described the Hindu people as “given to music. Naturally they are untrustworthy and thievish; their disposition is exacting one over the other, and they never give another the preference over themselves. . . . They are little, but they are active and impetuous. Their garments are made of white linen for the most part and what they wear is well appointed.”²⁹

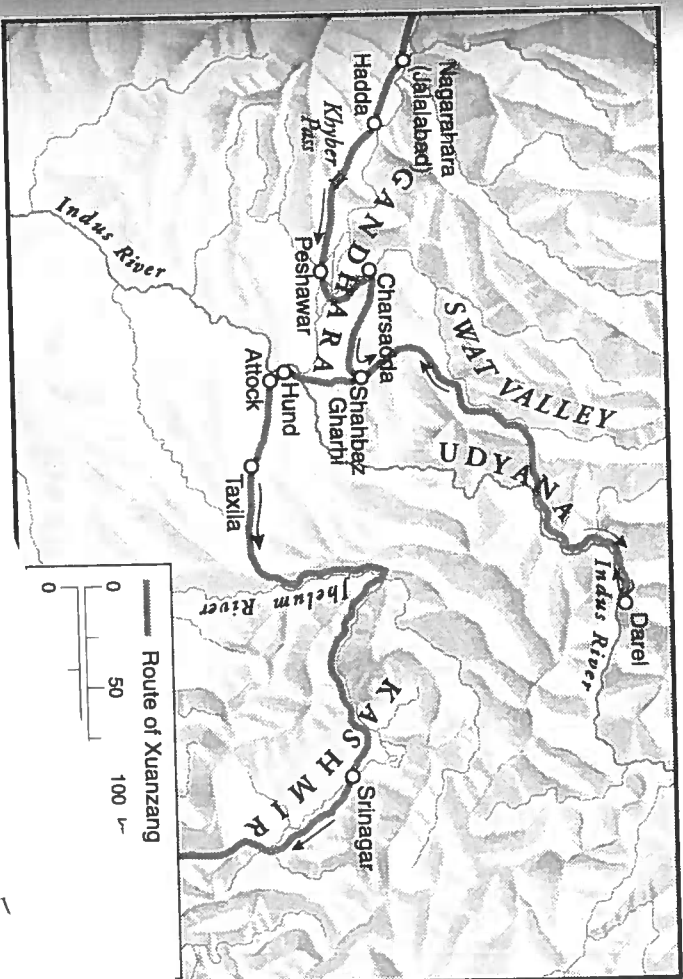
We can see here the difference between these “restless Hindus” and the mountain-dwelling Afghans of the Hindu Kush, with their harsh, uncultivated ways, wearing fur garments, and course wool. A modern view marks British India as beginning on the eastern side of the Khyber Pass, but Xuanzang considered that he had entered India when he came to Jalalabad, his next important stop.



Xuanzang had now been traveling for the better part of a year, from September 629 to the early fall of 630. By almost any criterion, it had been an extraordinary year. His physical vigor and toughness had been tested by extremes of temperature, sheer distances covered, and variety of terrain. He had crossed both the Taklamakan Desert and the Desert of Red Sands, and traversed both the Tian Shan Mountains and the Hindu Kush range. For a man only twenty-seven years old, the variety of his experiences, his personal and organizing skills were astonishing. He had conversed with kings from cultures very different from his own; he had dealt with caravan and pack men of varying nationalities provided by each king; he had coped

with robbers; and he had related to and preached to monks and royal alike. The spiritual challenges were no less demanding: He prayed for guidance before he departed, he prayed in the desert, and he fasted for his beliefs. And now, now, he was approaching the land of many and profound religions—India.

FOUR THE LAND OF INDIA



MAP 4.1
Itinerary of
Xuanzang from
Kashmir to Kas.

But have high hopes of the strange colf he had met. "The inward tall to mark loving," he said, "nambulating this

THE LAND of Kashmir
at Jalalabad