Recent discoveries of rock-carvings and rock- artefacts from Swat valley (Pakistan)
Luca Maria Olivieri: IsIAO, Rome

During the 2004 spring campaign, new protohistoric carvings and rock-artefacts have been found in Swat. The findings are mainly from Kandak Valley, not far from the Barikot village (Laurenza & Vidale in SAA 2001). Four classes of findings will be presented: cup-mark boulders, rock-carvings, rock-paintings and tanks. We present and discuss some new cup-mark sites, among which is Lekha-gata.. Further examples of bi-triangular style, together with a carving representing a chariot, were observed in another shelter. A revision of the work previously done in the shelters of Sargah-sar and Dwolasmame-patai (Olivieri in SAA 2003) allowed us to complete the documentation with new important details. One of the most interesting findings is the s.c. ‘wine-presses’: large rectangular tanks excavated in the solid rock whose features fit very well both with some ethnographic data and with other examples from Hunza. The new findings will be compared with the previous data, in order to provide sounder interpretations and establish a more detailed cultural sequence.

Petrographic study of pre-Buddhist religion: Bonpos of the Western Himalaya
Prof. Laxman S. Thakur (Department of History, Himachal Pradesh University, Simla)

The main focus of present study is to understand the cultural evolution of western-Himalayan tribal society prior to the spread of Buddhism in the area. Extensive archaeological fieldwork carried out by the present researcher in the border districts of Lahaul-Spiti and Kinnaur has revealed a large number of petroglyphs. Some of the carvings accomplished on these rocks are comparable with the symbols and devices used by the Bonpo community that has once exercised very dominating role in the ancient kingdom of Zhang Zhung. This paper has used for the first time archaeological evidence explored in situ to unearth the ceremonial organisation, rituals, and belief system of western-Himalayan people living in most inhospitable and arid landscape of the Himalaya. The archaeological data have been compared with the people living in the area of the study, and the migrant Bonpo community from Tibet, now settled at Dolanji near Solan, Himachal Pradesh. The information gathered from the present Bonpo community has been used in interpreting and explaining several symbols engraved on the petroglyphs. The paper has used ethnographic information for interpreting archaeological data, and archaeological evidence for explaining the socio-cultural pattern of pre-Buddhist nomadic and semi-agricultural communities once inhabiting the ancient kingdom of Zhang Zhung. Zhang Zhung remained the centre of Bonpo faith until the seventh century when it was gradually absorbed by the expanding empire of central Tibet. The archaeological data earlier collected by J. V. Bellezza (1997-2000) and Suolang Wangdui (1994) from Byang Thang (Northern Plains of Tibet); A. H. Francke (1902-3, 1905-7) and H. P. Francfort, et al. (1992) from Ladakh are compared with those explored from Lahaul-Spiti in Himachal Pradesh. The data collected from a few sites have been interpreted for wider generalisation and understanding of Himalayan pre-Buddhist socio-cultural patterns existing in the area prior to the seventh century AD.
The Tibetan Empire in the Karakoram and Western Himalayas, and its contribution to Buddhist art.

Philip Denwood: SOAS, London

A number of rock reliefs, typically depicting bodhisattvas or buddhas, some accompanied by inscriptions, are known from the districts of Gilgit and Baltistan (Pakistan), Ladakh and Spiti (India), and Purang (Tibet). Their study has been held back because many of them have been poorly recorded or not published, because they have not been considered as a group, and because of many uncertainties in the history of the areas.

Although the full evidence cannot be given in this paper, I believe the chronology of the westward advance of the Tibetan empire into these regions (7th-9th centuries AD), with the subsequent ethnic Tibetanisation of parts of them, can now be outlined with a much higher degree of confidence. Against this background the paper will consider the range, iconography, stylistics and epigraphy of these rock reliefs using published and unpublished material. It will also briefly review the sculptural and other art of the Patola Shahi dynasty of Gilgit in relation to historical developments.

The paper will conclude that while the new Tibetan rulers brought the art of the Patola Shahis to an end, they encouraged and sponsored the production of most or all of the rock carvings under consideration.

New evidence on the "Renovation Inscription" at Tabo Monastery

Kurt Tropper

The so-called "renovation inscription" at Tabo monastery (Spiti, Himachal Pradesh) ranks among the most well-known epigraphic documents in the Western Himalayas. It has been edited and translated three times, namely by Tucci (1935), Steinkellner/Luczanits (1999) and Thakur (2001). While the latter two publications are primarily based on in situ transcriptions of the authors themselves, Tucci had to rely on a copy that was prepared for him in 1933 by a local assistant. As has been pointed out already by Steinkellner/Luczanits and Thakur, the edition of Tucci features a number of misreadings and gaps, but it has text in some places where the inscription was not legible any more when the transcriptions for the two recent editions were prepared. Thus Tucci’s study is of ambivalent value, but it is based on what had to be considered the earliest documentation of the inscription available so far.