

Marco Polo
Studies in Global Europe-Asia Connections 1

Stoneyards and Artists in Gandhara

The Buddhist Stupa of Saidu Sharif I

Luca M. Olivieri



Edizioni
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Stoneyards and Artists in Gandhara

Marco Polo

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Series edited by
Sabrina Rastelli

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of Saidu Sharif I, Swat (c. 50 CE)

Luca M. Olivieri

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Abstract

The work presented here advances a hypothetical reconstruction of the planning and programming of the building site, the executive process, the construction and decoration, and ultimately the deconsecration and abandonment of an ancient Buddhist stupa. The chronological context is that of the mid-first to the early fourth century CE. The geographical context is the fertile and rich Swat valley, at the foot of the Karakoram-Hindukush, to the north of the ancient region of Gandhara (today in Pakistan). The study is based on archaeological excavation data conducted over several seasons, including the most recent seasons from 2011 to 2014. During the latter excavations, conducted by the Author, new data that allowed additions to be made to Domenico Faccenna's previous studies were brought to light. Among these new insights, there are some of great importance that indicate the existence of a large central niche at the top of the stupa's upper staircase, the key to the stupa's figurative frieze. This frieze, which represents one of the highest moments of Gandharan Buddhist art, still imitated centuries later by celebrated artists in inner Asia (at Miran), is the product of a sculptural school guided with a sure hand by an anonymous Master, to whom the responsibility for the entire project should be attributed, architect, master builder and workshop master all in one. The existence of this so-called 'Master of Saidu', admirably intuited and elaborated by Faccenna, finds in this volume, if possible, further support, demonstrating the capacity of the archaeological school inaugurated by Faccenna himself to answer with ongoing excavation data the many questions that the enigma of Gandhara art still poses to scholars all over the world.

Keywords Gandharan art and archaeology. Buddhism. Stupa. Gandhara. Swat. Oḍḍiyāna. Oḍiraja. Seṇavarma. Saidu Sharif. Domenico Faccenna.

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Stoneyards and Artists in Gandhara

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Luca M. Olivieri

Editors' Foreword

Sabrina Rastelli

Chief Editor

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The Department of Asian and North African Studies (DSAAM) at Ca' Foscari University of Venice is one of the "Departments of Excellence", a financial plan launched by the Ministry of Education to fund the top State University departments that stand out for the quality of their research, didactics and development project. As a "Department of Excellence", DSAAM aims to intensify its research interests on the transcultural dimension of historical, religious, philosophical, literary and artistic processes between Asia, the Arab world and Europe. To this end, the DSAAM has established the Marco Polo International Research Centre (MaP) for Global Europe-Asia Connections, whose primary mission is the understanding of the dynamics underlying the cultural, political and economic interactions and connections between and within Asia, Europe and the Arab-Islamic world. To foster international scientific cooperation and the dissemination of up-to-date research results on topics that are supported by the Centre, the latter has conceived a new publication called *Marco Polo. Studies in Global Europe-Asia Connections*.

In dialogue with the intellectual tradition of the Centre, our research interests are vast, spanning manifold spaces (from Japan to the Mediterranean Sea), times (from Neolithic times to today, and possibly the future), and themes (from modern geopolitics to religious identities to climate change to archaeological sites), with particular attention to trans-Eurasian interactions. This emphasis on intercultural contact and exchange, especially at the crossroads of the ostensible European-Asian divide, is evoked through the title of the series: indeed, Marco Polo travelled all the way from Venice to Beijing at the end of the 13th century, engaging with many different political contexts, nations, and civilisations along the land and sea routes later jointly known as the 'Silk Road' (or, better, Silk Roads). This concept, with its underlying reference to the exchange of things and ideas across socie-

ties, is a historical phenomenon of great significance associated with a distant past; however, the vital energy of the Silk Road(s) has never dwindled. The People's Republic of China announced the "Silk Road Economic Belt" (now known as the "Belt and Road Initiative") in 2013. In other words, the distant historical traditions of the Silk Road(s) continue to penetrate discursive reality in our own day and age. Globalisation - with its various and contradictory connotations - is an overarching motif that links the Silk Roads of the past and the present.

Inspired by the famous Venetian merchant, our book series prioritises studies that are inquisitive, bold, and dynamic, with a preference for transcultural and interdisciplinary studies. We welcome manuscripts that are grounded in rigorous scholarship and speak to international academic conversations within and across diverse disciplines, including history, international relations, economics, environmental studies, literature, languages, archaeology, art history, philosophy, religion, anthropology, geography, music, performing arts, social sciences, and the digital humanities. The books in this series will focus on specific research topics but will range from single-authored monographs to edited volumes with multiple authors, each contributing a chapter to an organically conceived whole.

Stoneyards and Artists in Gandhara

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Luca M. Olivieri

Preface

Roderick Whitfield

SOAS, University of London, UK

The *Marco Polo. Studies in Global Europe-Asia Connections*, under the auspices of Ca' Foscari University of Venice, is intended to provide a means of publishing scholarly research related in one way or another to the Silk Road. It is a forum open to all, but it seems particularly important that the first contribution should be the fruit of decades of work in Pakistan by Italian archaeologists from ISMEO, and that it should concern a once monumental Buddhist stupa decorated with narrative and iconic reliefs carved in stone, including a seated figure that, although fragmentary, now proves to be one of the earliest images of the Buddha in human form. The image was to spread along the Silk Road right across Asia to reach China, Korea and eventually Japan, and to leave innumerable traces of this transmission in the form of scriptures written in many languages, cave temples richly decorated with narrative and iconic images, sculptures in diverse materials, and archaeological monuments, including both monastic buildings for the *sangha* and buildings for ceremonial purposes.

Among the latter, the most ancient form is that of the Indian stupa, a hemispherical structure of cosmic significance, which was adopted by Buddhism as the repository of relics of the Buddha. The investigation of such a stupa is the object of Luca M. Olivieri's study presented here. Surrounded by many smaller stupas, the great stupa at Saidu Sharif has been excavated over many years by numerous Italian archaeologists, whose work is acknowledged throughout the study. Olivieri's accomplishment is to have brought all their materials together so as to reconstruct the original form of the stupa and the placement of the reliefs that ornamented the drum at the second level, where they would have been seen by those performing *pradakshina*, the ritual circumambulation in a clockwise direction, from the stairway on the north side of the stupa. Although only a small number of fragmentary reliefs survive, they are clearly of high quality, and Olivieri argues that they show the planning of a master architect who supervised

every aspect of the construction, including the sourcing of materials as well as the layout of the iconographical programme. By relating the site to other well-known monuments, this study should be of signal interest to scholars in many fields, a work proper to inaugurate *Marco Polo. Studies in Global Europe-Asia Connections*.

Roderick Whitfield
(member of the Advisory Board)

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“errata corrige
l’archeologia iconografica degli archeologi
è tutta inevitabilmente di seconda mano:
è costruita sulle immagini terminali
di una serie rovesciata verso il passato”.
(Franco Guerzoni)

To Domenico Faccenna and Akhtar Manir

Introduction

Summary *Fabrica gandharica*. – The Formation of this Work.

Fabrica gandharica

A clarification before we begin: this work should have been titled *Fabrica gandharica*. So it is still recalled by many of the colleagues who have read it *in fieri*. Most liked that title, while some were disturbed by it, as if the use of Latin implicitly accentuated the idea that Gandhara art depended on classical art. That title was finally put aside when, in agreement with Edizioni Ca' Foscari, we decided to publish this small book in English and realised how little *Fabrica gandharica* could say to an audience of non-specialists.

“All new is well-forgotten old”, the saying goes. In this case, if any credit is due, I do not wish to take it for myself: the entire study set out in the following pages is owed to the work and the documentation assembled by Domenico Faccenna on the Saidu Sharif I excavation in the Swat Valley. The documentation was published by Faccenna himself together with various authors including the architects Giovanni Ioppolo and Piero Spagnesi; of the petrographers mention can be made of Eleonora Zanettin Lorenzoni and Sergio Lorenzoni, of the archaeologists Pierfancesco Callieri, Giuseppe De Marco and Francesco Noci, and of the draughtsmen Vincenzo Caroli and Francesco Martore.¹

1 A complete list of those who collaborated with Domenico Faccenna on the Saidu Sharif I excavation is provided in Faccenna 1995, 26. It is also worth recalling the contribution, for the epigraphic part, by Gérard Fussman and Riccardo Garbini; and for the graphic part of the report on the excavation of the Monastery of Saidu, Domenico D'Alterio and Antonello Stella. The fieldwork

Added to the data collected by Faccenna (1963-82) are the new data deriving from the excavations and final restoration works on the site (2011-14). All this work, both old and new, was carried out in the context of the programmes of the Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan, founded in Swat in 1955 by Giuseppe Tucci as the first archaeological mission of what once was the ISMEO. Today the Mission is part of the International Association for Studies on the Mediterranean and the East (Associazione Internazionale di Studi sul Mediterraneo e l'Oriente - ISMEO), perpetuating the scientific heritage of the former Institutes ISMEO (1933-96) and ISIAO (1996-2011). As from 2013 the new ISMEO has incorporated the Mission as a research unit with the support of contributions by the University and Research Ministry and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. Since 2020-21 the Mission has been jointly run by ISMEO together with the Ca' Foscari University of Venice.²

I owe thanks to this university and to the Department of Asian and North African Studies (DSAAM, Dipartimento di Studi sull'Asia e l'Africa Mediterranea) for the final stage of this work with the research project I supervised on *Hellenism and India. Stone and Construction Site Technologies in Gandhara: Saidu Sharif I* (Ellenismo e India. Tecnologie della pietra e dei cantieri nel Gandhara: Saidu Sharif I) carried out between September 2020 and December 2021. My thanks are due to the Centre of Excellence Marco Polo Centre, MaP (DSAAM) for considering this study as the first volume in the *Marco Polo. Studies in Global Europe-Asia Connections* series edited by Sabrina Rastelli and Elisabetta Ragagnin.

Finally, readers may wonder how much of the contents of the following pages is fact and how much interpretation. For the data and much of the interpretation I have referred to the publications of my predecessors, departing from them only when I believed that new data acquired in the meantime have made it necessary to do so. By the above-mentioned 'data' I mean all the material deriving from excavations and their documentation, most of which are published and verifiable. The hypotheses I advance here are, then, those that strike me as most logical amongst the various conceivable conjectures.

The reader will find a somewhat heterogeneous series of citations/quotations from ancient sources, which I believe may usefully complete the ex-

of 2011-14 saw the active participation of Sangeen Khan, Misbah-ullah and Aatif Iqbal, with the logistic and moral support of Usman Ollasyar, president of the Suvastu Art and Culture Association, and of Shafiq Ahmad, the field officer of the Italian Archaeological Mission. The excavations of 2011-14 were carried out in the context of the project *Archaeology - Community - Tourism (ACT) Field School* in the bilateral programme *Pakistan-Italian Debt Swap Agreement* (PIDSA). Of great importance were the exhaustive discussions in Swat and elsewhere, involving: Antonio Amato, Claudia Antonetti, Stefan Baums, Pia Brancaccio, Pierfrancesco Callieri, Omar Coloru, Matteo De Chiara, Moizza Elahi, Anna Filigenzi, Marco Galli, Ian Haynes, Elisa Iori, Lorenzo Lazzarini, Ciro Lo Muzio, Vito Messina, Michele Minardi, Sara Mondini, Llewelyn Morgan, Cristiano Moscatelli, Antonello Palumbo, Anna Provenzali, Nicolas Revire, Abdul Samad, Gregory Schopen, Amelia C. Sparavigna, Federico Squarcini, Massimo Vidale, Giuseppe Vignato, Roderick Withfield, and Zarawar Khan. My thanks go to all of them.

2 I trust this work may prove useful for students following the Master's Degree course in "Archaeology and Cultures of Gandhara and the Silk Roads", and the Bachelor's Degree course "History and Material Culture of Buddhism", which has started at the Ca' Foscari University of Venice in 2019 and 2020, ideally complementing the excellent recently published handbooks on the art and archaeology of Central Asia (Lo Muzio 2017) and the art of India (Pieruccini 2020).

position. The epigraphic sources from Swat and the neighbouring regions, especially when coeval with the object of this study, were of course indispensable. For sources on the construction procedures and ritual I have tried to confine attention to those attributable to the North-West of ancient India, which I was acquainted with in translation. In other cases, above all for the mediaeval Indian sources, the choice has not been made with strict scientific criteria. In these cases, considering also the chronological distance - which the reader should take into account - I have chosen passages I was familiar with which could, I believe, enliven the context of traditions and rules with which the Gandharan artists had to contend with, and on which they largely relied.

Thus I can only repeat the standard affirmation that all errors, omissions or imprecisions in the text are to be imputed solely to my responsibility.³

The Formation of this Work

Before entering into the subject matter itself, I would like to outline the distant origins of this study. In 2006 a miscellaneous collection was published to celebrate Domenico Faccenna's eightieth birthday (1926-2008). This important volume, edited by Pierfrancesco Callieri for the Serie Orientale Roma (SOR, C = Callieri 2006), bore the significant title *Architetti, capomastri, artigiani. L'organizzazione dei cantieri e della produzione artistica nell'Asia ellenistica (Architects, Foremen, Craftsmen. Organisation of the Stoneyards and Artistic Production in Hellenistic Asia)*. The title was chosen to honour a precise, innovative direction in studies taken by the great Italian archaeologist. However, the contributions on this specific subject proved to be in the minority in the volume,⁴ which shows how truly innovative the direction was. At the time - apart from the studies by Peter Rockwell prompted by Faccenna himself (Rockwell 2006) - no thorough study had been made on stonework techniques in the area of Gandhara. After the work of Alfred Foucher (1905-51, 80-98), followed by M. Bénisti (1960; 1963) and A. Barreau (1962), we had no studies comparable to those by Ann Britt Tilia (and Giuseppe Tilia) (1968; 1973; 1978), Carl Nylander (1970; 2006), Malcom A.R. Colledge (1979), and Michael Roaf (1983) for Iran, or the studies by Peter Rockwell for peninsular India (2016).⁵ If work is now continuing to fill in that lacuna (see Vidale al. 2015), we still owe it to the stimulus and legacy of Do-

3 For the terminology used in this work I take reference from Faccenna, Filigenzi 2007, and in part Hinüber 2016. Diacritical signs are used only in the Indian terms given in italics, and for the most common proper nouns (Kaniška, Aśoka, etc.). Words that have entered into common use such as Kushana (*Kuṣāna*), stupa (*stūpa*), *chatravali* (*chattrāvali*) and so forth are spelt without diacritical signs (see also Griffiths 1981). Quotations are with the diacritical signs used in the original. The cardinal points have lowercase initials (except for the North-West of the Indian Subcontinent) and are not abbreviated, except when used to indicate an astronomic direction (N), an excavation sector (NW) or when given between brackets (N-S). Measurements are almost always in cm, with a few exceptions. By Saidu is meant the site of Saidu Sharif I (abbreviation: S, SS I), by Monastery is meant that of Saidu. With Stupa, Columns, Frieze and Master reference is to the main stupa of Saidu, its columns, and frieze and master. The great stupa of Butkara is abbreviated as GSt. In the captions the Italian Archaeological Mission is abbreviated as MAIP.

4 Namely the articles by Filigenzi, Nylander, Olivieri, Rockwell, Salomon and Schopen, all in Callieri 2006.

5 For Bactria, in part, also Francfort 2013 (and 2020).



Figure 1 Restoration in progress at Saidu Sharif I. 2012 (ACT; photo by Fabio Colombo)

menico Faccenna. Domenico would have expected as much of us or our foreign colleagues.⁶ He left a wealth of published data waiting only to be organised. For Gandharan art's exegesis and study, in its manifold appearances, including the transmission of models, his expectations were fulfilled – for example, with the two masterly works by Anna Filigenzi of 2006, “From Mind to Eye” (2006a, in Callieri 2006) and “From Saidu Sharif to Miran” (2006b), followed by further contributions which, alas, appeared too late for Domenico to read, up to the very recent “A Space of Mobility” (2020).⁷

In the meantime, little if anything at all had been written about the organisation of the stoneyards and the techniques of artistic production in Gandharan architecture. I hope that, for all its inevitable limitations, this study may serve as a test step towards filling this lacuna.

As for the approach characterising this study, readers should bear in mind that it is an essentially archaeological contribution, which places it in line with my previous works and, at the same time, with what is known as the “archaeology of religion” (Raja, Rüpke 2015). Of particular importance

6 Recently foreign specialists and colleagues have been showing a renewed interest in the site of Saidu Sharif I. See, for example, Haynes, Peverett, Rienjang 2020. On Domenico Faccenna's contribution to the study of Buddhist architecture, see his fundamental volume on *Buddhist Architecture in the Swat Valley* (Faccenna, Spagnesi 2014).

7 On the transmission of models (i.e. *tradens*, *traditum*, and *recipients*) see also the homonymous work by Federico Squarcini (2008).



Figures 2-3
Restoration in progress at Saidu Sharif I. 2012
(ACT; photo by Fabio Colombo)



Figure 4 Restoration completed at Saidu Fharif I. 2014 (ACT; photo by Fazal Khaliq)

in this respect are the theoretical principles formulated for a positive definition of this field of studies, also with regard to the literature of religions. At present the prevalent positions are:

Addressing material culture, archaeology is not seen as getting to the heart of such religions, but rather as an expression of already-existing and well-defined ideologies. Archaeology is often reduced to and taken for face value. [...]

It is above all the local, situational, and individual dimension of religion which has been neglected [...]. The primacy given to the systematic and the dogmatic is a normative decision. It is a decision to describe religion, as it should be rather than as it is. (Raja, Rüpke 2015, 2-3)

The present study might, perhaps, be able to add a positive element to this debate.⁸ As for the background to this study, in my early years of activity and on-the-job training with the Mission in Swat, I dedicated my attention to areas I found naturally congenial, in part due to my previous experience,

⁸ Gregory Schopen's work has been a great help and inspiration to me. Here I suggest reading the incipit of the chapter "Burial 'ad sanctos'" in Schopen 1997, 114. For an excellent example of the interpretation of archaeological data for the reconstruction of rituals, see Vignato 2016-17.

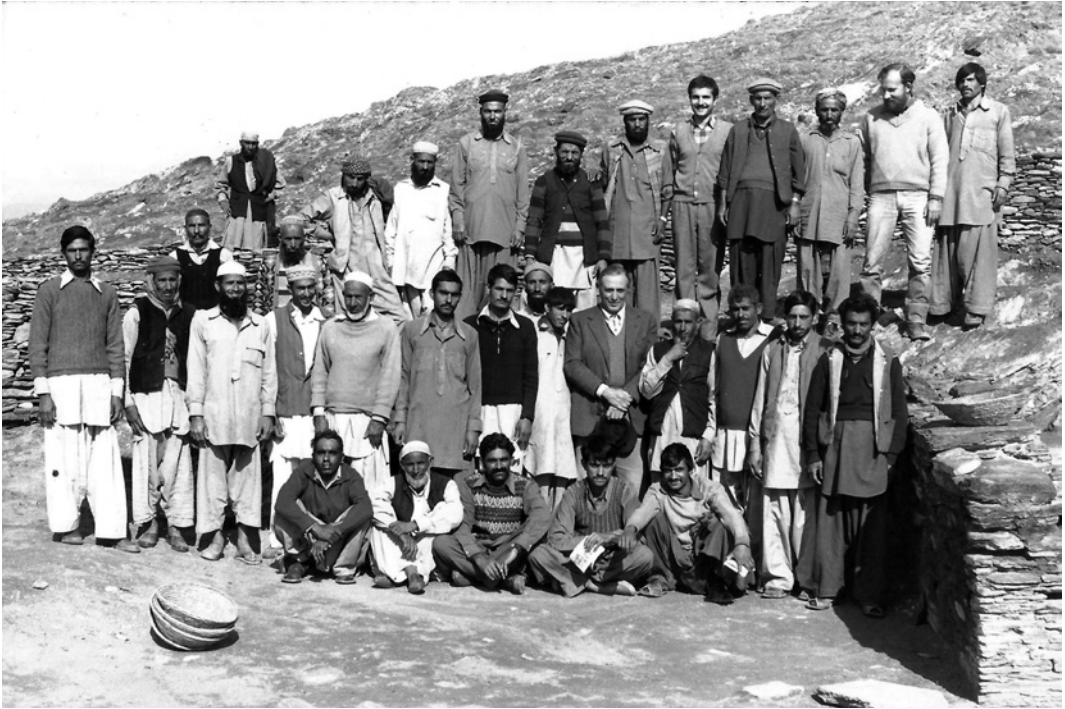


Figure 5 The excavation team at Saidu Sharif I (first row standing: at the centre is Domenico Faccenna, to the far right, Akhtar Manir; second row: at the centre, Pierfrancesco Callieri, second from right, Francesco Martore. 1982 (ISMEO; author unknown)

such as survey and excavation of urban contexts and settlements, focusing on various issues involving stratigraphy, phases of abandonment and negative interfaces. In these activities I received the sure and steady guidance of the then director of the Mission, Domenico Faccenna, whom I have every good reason to acknowledge as my most direct master (which, of course, does not make me a direct pupil).

I took over as director of the Mission from Pierfrancesco Callieri in 2013.⁹ These new responsibilities have with time led me to address the issue of the dynamics in the interpretation of excavation and survey data. So it was that I began – albeit belatedly – to delve into the work of Maurizio Taddei (1936-2000), who had generously accepted to take over from Domenico in guidance of the Mission in 1996, until his premature death.

In those years we also began to apply the experience and methods of urban excavation (developed in the excavation of Barikot) to the Buddhist sanctuaries, with three pilot excavations at Gumbat (2011), Amluk-dara (2012-14) and Saidu Sharif I (2011-14). There I had the opportunity to analyse both the phases of abandonment and the early phases of removal and

⁹ Pierfrancesco Callieri, my supervisor in the excavation of Barikot, can be considered the most direct pupil of Faccenna. With him, from 2011 to 2013, I had the honour of codirecting the Mission.

'cut' of preceding stratigraphies, defined in stratigraphic archaeology as 'negative interfaces'.¹⁰ These issues, together with various other related questions, were summed up in a short excavation handbook written for Pakistani (2014; 2017a)¹¹ and Afghan students (2021a),¹² to be followed by two more technical articles (2018b; 2021b).

When I took the initiative of setting about conservative restoration of the site of Saidu Sharif I (Saidu) in 2011, I found myself faced with the task of completing the excavation of the few parts left by Domenico Faccenna, with a view to future investigations [figs 1-4]. Particularly relevant to my subject matter in these pages is the excavation of the NE sector, zone B, to the left of the stairway of the main stupa (i.e. excavation of the remains of Column C), see below [pt. VII]. Study of the stratigraphic evidence revealed by this work at Saidu Sharif I entailed re-examination of the initial phases in the construction of the sanctuary (Olivieri 2016).

The find of new sculpture fragments in 2011-14 prompted me to contribute studying the artistic production of the site, and in particular the Stupa Frieze, on which practically everything had already been written in the major work by Domenico Faccenna on the 'Master' of the Saidu Frieze published in 2001. The problem I raised and will illustrate here, attempting to solve it, concerns in part the conception of the Frieze, but above all the commissioning, execution and installation of it, and thus the questions arising over the position of the Frieze, its observation point, and, finally, the construction of the architectural structure housing it. Here I will not dwell on exegetical and interpretative study of Gandharan art, of which the Saidu Frieze is by far and away the finest example. Study in this area is being carried out by researchers better qualified than myself, Anna Filigenzi and various others, with whom I shared data and ideas as the work progressed.

This re-examination, which I can hardly describe as completed, contributed to the idea of the present study. In this work I have not been alone; others have been dealing with the art-historical and religious aspects of the site in greater detail and with specific competencies, and will continue to do so. In the field and in preparation of this study I was assisted (very often reversing roles) by Francesco Martore, the draughtsman in charge of the graphic work for Domenico Faccenna's excavation workshop, and the late Akhtar Manir, restorer and moral caretaker of the Saidu site in the most difficult times in recent history. Both represented the memory, which proved fundamental for the continuity of the work [fig. 5].

10 There is a major contribution on the subject of abandonment and reuse of Buddhist architectural structures, and in particular stupas, in a fundamental article by Denis Byrne (1995). See also Davis 1977 and the more recent Fogelin, Schiffer 2015.

11 The second edition (as an e-book) came out for the same series and publisher in 2017.

12 Of this little book, the last to be published by the Afghan Institute of Archaeology before 15 August 2021, only drafts survive, as all print and digital copies were left in the Institute's warehouses, which are inaccessible at the time this work is printed.

1 The Site

Summary 1.1 The Location and the Toponym. – 1.2 The Importance of the Site. – 1.3 The Site and the City.

1.1 The Location and the Toponym

The site of Saidu Shafif I lies in the Swat Valley, in the north of Pakistan, and more precisely in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province (previously known as the North-West Frontier Province, NWFP), at the foot of the Hindukush [pl. I]. Saidu Sharif I, henceforth abbreviated as ‘Saidu’, is a Buddhist sanctuary situated at the bottom of a steep valley which bifurcates before the homonymous river, not far from its point of confluence with the Swat River (see Faccenna 1995a, fig. 2) [figs 6-8]. The area lies to the south-east of an ancient built-up area, the great capital, whose remains extend under the urban fabric of the modern town of Mingora (see Iori, Olivieri 2016), known in the early Chinese sources as Mengjieli [pls II-III]. In the neighbourhood of Mengjieli stands the great sanctuary known to both Chinese and Tibetan pilgrims, which according to Giuseppe Tucci (1958) is Butkara I.¹

1 Known as Tuoluo in Song Yun. Xuanzang records that it stood to the north of the city, while evidently it stands to the east. Actually, to the north of Mengjieli (Mingora) flows the river Swat. Xuanzang’s error may be due to the fact that if an observer was approaching the city (from downstream, i.e. from the south-west), he would have the (correct) impression that the site of Butkara I lay beyond the city, and thus, imagining the direction of the river Swat, to the north. Actually, in the stretch at Mingora the river describes a loop to flow south-west, and no longer southwards. And indeed, as I have noted on various occasions, above all in my early years of survey, this sharp change in the direction of the river, if not borne in mind, can lead to an erroneous representation of topographic relations in the memory of directions. In any case, in various contexts the Chinese pilgrim appears to be mistaken or to have inexact information. More important is the information Xuanzang gives on the distance of the sanctuary from the city of Mengjieli, which corresponds to the distance between it and Butkara I.



Figure 6 Aerial view of the inhabited area of Saidu Sharif (from S-SW). 14 April 1930 (Miangul Archive)

The sanctuary of Saidu (1,000 m a.s.l.) was built on two artificial terraces with a 3-metre difference in level. The Monastery - square with a central courtyard - was built on the upper terrace, while the lower terrace shows the sacred area with the central Stupa, standing on a high podium with four columns at the corners, and the minor monuments (stupas, chapels, columns). The installations at the two levels are coeval.

A brief description of the site was provided in 1926 by M. Aurel Stein, recording the place name Kanchai-kandao (Stein 1930, 43), doubtless coined from the bifurcated morphology of the place (Pashto: *kanchi* 'scissors') at the foot of the Shararai mountains (1,400 m a.s.l.).²

Begun by Domenico Faccenna in 1963 and carried on with brief interruptions until 1982, the excavation was published in four volumes (Callieri 1989; Faccenna 1995; Noci, Macchiarelli, Faccenna 1997; Faccenna 2001). On the evidence of the excavation, it was possible to date the foundation of the sanctuary around the mid-first century CE and determine that it remained active until at least the fourth century, when it was abandoned.

² As occasionally happens in sites showing ruins, here the Pashto place name is associated with derogatory terms (vice, villainy; for example, Shararai: wickedness, vice, mischief, depravity, villainy) (De Chiara 2020).



Figure 7 Aerial view of Mingora and surroundings (from SW), 3 May 1926 (Miangul Archive)

The final excavation of the site, carried out intermittently between 2011 and 2014, yielded evidence to define some minor but important points, including the stratigraphic relationship between the sanctuary and the underlying burial necropolis dated to the early fourth century BCE, but also the original area covered by the stupa terrace (Olivieri 2016; Filigenzi, Olivieri 2017). Other important data came with the find of new sculptural fragments from the Stupa Frieze, together with data on one of the columns belonging to the Stupa.

Before entering *in medias res* let me briefly consider the fact that the site cannot be identified with any of the sanctuaries so far known to us from the ancient sources, including the local epigraphic sources of the first century (Baums 2019).

The sanctuary of Saidu might, however, have had an exceptional importance in ancient times, and this might have been acknowledged among the contemporaries. Saidu was a great sanctuary – possibly a royal or princely foundation – equal, as we will see, if not superior in importance to the nearby sanctuary of Butkara I, traditionally attributed to the Maurya king, Aśoka.³

³ The stupas known as *dharmarājikā* are attributed to Aśoka. Butkara I has yielded two inscriptions which mention this term (Baums forthcoming). The first, painted on the outer part



Figure 8 A view of the Saidu River and Saidu Sharif fort (demolished; now Swat Serena Hotel) (from W-NW). 14 April 1930 (Miangul Archive)

Suffice it to leaf through the pages of Xuanzang’s travel journal about his visit to Swat in the seventh century to have an embarrassment of choices, so many were the famous sacred places, largely in ruins, that he visited. Unfortunately, the geographical information provided by the Chinese pilgrim is as detailed as it is at times contradictory, to the extent that for many areas he seems to be giving second-hand accounts. The sanctuary of Saidu may well have been among those he visited although when Xuanzang was there it had – as we will see – already been abandoned and deconsecrated.

In the past (Tucci 1940, 43 fn. 2) identification of the site had been proposed as the sanctuary known as Rehobhyara in the account by O rgyan pa, a Tibetan pilgrim of the thirteenth century. A re-examination of the traveller’s itinerary (Olivieri 2017) leads me to place it in the area of Manglawar, still in Swat but about 20 km to the north of Saidu.⁴

of a large bowl (B 8000), is from room V associated with the “Great Building” (GB) (phase 4 of the Great Stupa or GSt 4) (part of this inscription was published in Petech 1966). The second is incised on a reused slab on the east side of the stupa 133 podium (phase 3 of the Great Stupa or GSt 3) (Faccenna 1980-81, 287). The GSt 3 phase corresponds to the Saka-Parthian phase of the sanctuary. For an bibliographic updating on Butkara I, see the topographic Catalogue in Filigenzi 2015.

⁴ To this is to be added the fact that in the thirteenth century nothing of the Saidu sanctuary can have any longer been visible. I wonder if the place name given in the Tibetan text may not be interpretable as *rāhoviḥāra*: a ‘camouflaged’, ‘covered’, ‘concealed’, ‘rendered invisible

To our present knowledge, then, the ancient name of the sanctuary remains sunk into oblivion.

As for the modern name, the earliest mention of Saidu Sharif, would be C.-A. Court's (1840), who, however, gets the location wrong, placing it on the right instead of the left bank of the Swat. Court (or rather his informants) reports the toponym 'sedougan', which became 'saydúgán' with Raverty (1862; De Chiara 2020, 197).⁵ By hypothesis, we could reconstruct an older Dardic toponym 'sādhugām' (Torwali *gām* = *grām*: 'village'; De Chiara 2020, 35).⁶ The place probably held an ancient and vague tradition of sanctity, to which the Mianguls may have wanted to connect using the role the location played for their dynasty. There is the mausoleum of their ancestor *sayyid* and founder of the dynasty, popular under the name of Saidu Baba. This was the famous Akhūnd Abdul Ghaffūr (1793-1878), 'the Akhund of Swat' (the famous Edward Lear's 'Akond of Swat'). The toponym would then have been 'normalised' on the basis of the Arabic 'sayyid' (Saydugan), adopting and transforming an existing tradition, during the nineteenth century when the term entered the toponymy of Swat (De Chiara 2020, 197). From a semantic point of view, the change from 'sādhū' to 'sayyid' poses no problems, and is part of the 'Islamization' of some Swat toponyms that took place at the beginning of the twentieth century. This process includes the addition of the second Arabic term, 'sherif' (noble), which is already found in a Persian *Jangnāma* of 1863 about British expeditions in Buner and surrounding areas (Zarawar Khan, Numani 2021).⁷ The manuscript, of which the Mission obtained a photographic copy (see Olivieri 2015, 25 fn. 5), reflects the religious and political propaganda of Sayyad Ahmad Barelvi's followers among the Pashtun Khans of Swat, Buner and Dir. The text suggests that the term 'sherif' was added when the Akhūnd chose Saidu as his residence, i.e. as early as 1849. As we have seen, the new name was not fully integrated in the toponymy, and the village continued to be called Sedou/Saydu[gan] by most. The toponym Saidu Sharif, was only made official in the twentieth century, when the locality became the capital of the state of the Mianguls.⁸

The first direct account of the site and monuments, as mentioned above, is to be found in the notes made by Stein on his visit in 1926:

[Butkara] shows everywhere the effects of quarrying operations continued down to quite recent times. Such were actually still in progress at the Stūpa of Kānchai-kanda situated above a small gully which descends from the spur to the east, about halfway between Saidu and the mouth of the Janbil [*sic*] valley. Here, too, all the facing masonry had been removed, but the dome portion was still recognizable with a diameter of some 36 feet and a height of over 30 feet. (Stein 1930, 43)

to the eye', monastery (*vihāra*) (following *rāhu*, the head of the demon that covers the splendour of *candra*) (personal communication with F. Squarcini).

5 We cannot consider Baligram as the ancient name of Saidu (De Chiara 2020, 197) as that is still the name of a separate village.

6 In the Dardic (and Kafir) languages 'sādhū' is attested. For example in the Ashkun language, with the original meaning of 'pious man', 'saint' (personal communication with M. De Chiara).

7 The manuscript bears a dedication by the author, Mirza Abdul Haq, among others to the Akhund of Swat called "Sahib Saidu Sharif" (Zarawar Khan, Numani 2021).

8 For much of the twentieth century, Swat was a semiautonomous state (the Yusufzai State of Swat) ruled as from 1917 by the Miangul dynasty. In 1969 the State was absorbed by Pakistan.

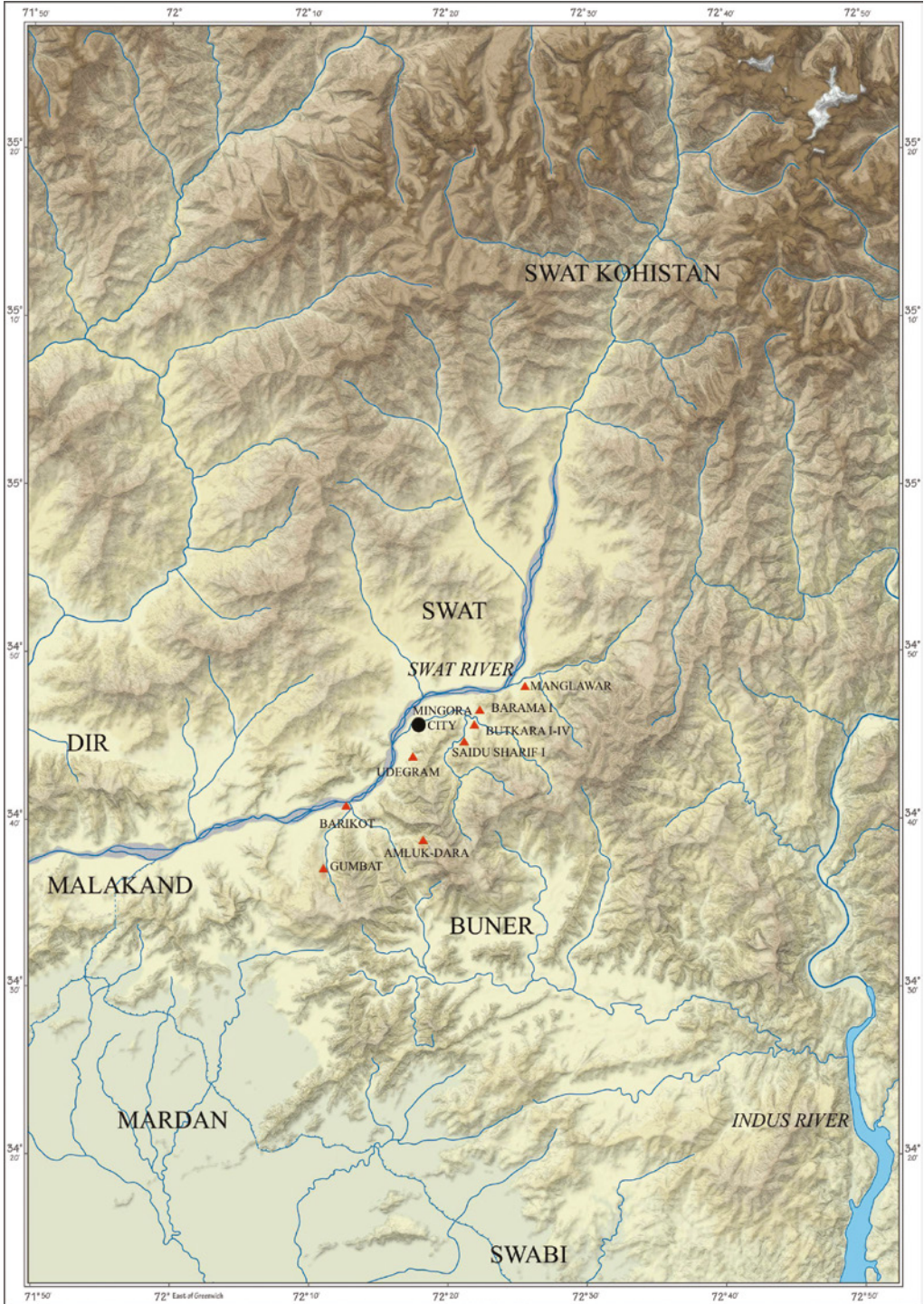


Plate I Map of Swat with sites mentioned in the text (ISMEO/University of Vienna, Department of Geography and Regional Research; by Karel Kriz, Daniel Nell; elaborated by Luca M. Olivieri)

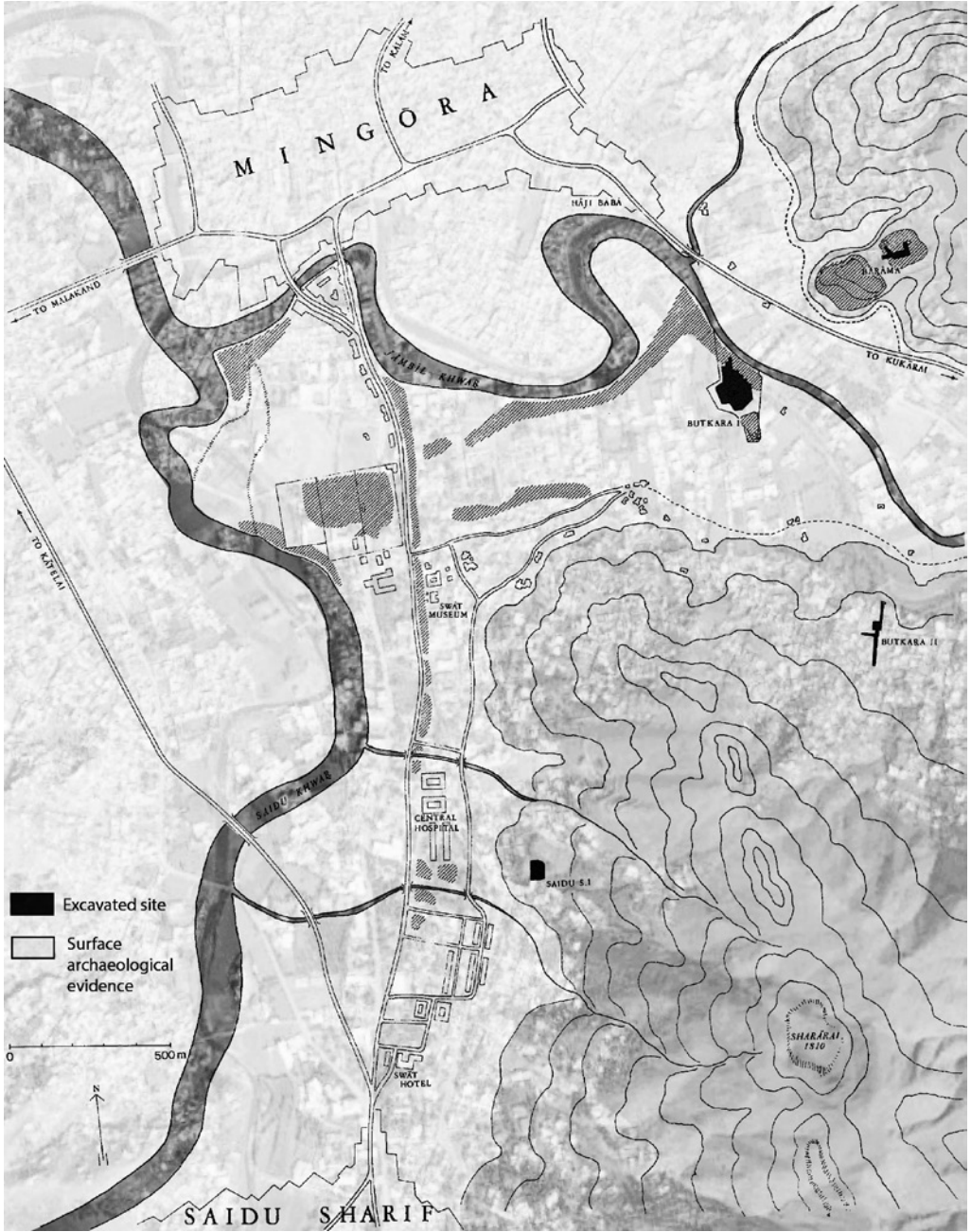


Plate II Map of Mingora and Saidu Sharif area (elaborated by Elisa Iori after Faccenna 1980-81)

According to the evidence offered by Atallah Khan, at the time Secretary of the Yusufzai State of Swat, the progressive ruination of the site was caused by the plundering of stone for building purposes (Faccenna 1995, 20-1 fn. 4). However, I do not think it is possible for the ruins to have been preserved for over 9 m in height in 1926; taking into account the burial of the podium, such a height would have accounted for nearly three quarters of the monument. Analysing an aerial photo taken in 1930 [fig. 6],⁹ we can distinctly make out the spreading bulk of the Stupa, in height measuring little more than the difference between the stupa terrace and the upper terrace. The maximum height that can be reconstructed on the basis of this photograph is no more than 3 m. Of course we know that in 1930 the Saidu Hospital was under construction a few hundred metres downstream from the site, where part of the material might have been reused, but the possibility remains that Stein overestimated the height or there was some confusion (10 feet rather than 30?), or, more probably, Stein offered an estimate reconstructing the dome on the basis of the visible diameter. When Domenico Faccenna arrived at the site and began work – thirty-five years later – the bulk was much lower and had been largely pillaged.

1.2 The Importance of the Site

Let us return to the monument and its importance in ancient times. In the scenes of the life of the Buddha in the art of Gandhara¹⁰ there are certain recurrent motifs, but in the artwork of the Saidu Frieze there are scenes which we find for the first time at Saidu (the wrestling competition), while others actually appear only at Saidu. These include, besides the scene of the cutting of Siddhārtha's hair (extremely rare),¹¹ the scene of the return of the legendary King of Swat Uтарысеṇа (Uttarasena) bringing the relics to Oḍḍiyāna (or Uḍḍiyāna) i.e. Swat. This panel (S 241), following the biographical narrative order, was probably the last in the Frieze [pl. IV].

With one possible exception, the scene is not to be found elsewhere.¹² The relief recalls an earlier one from the *vedikā* of Bharhut.¹³ I believe that Faccenna

⁹ Taken on 14 April 1930, exactly four years after Stein's visit to the site. The photo was kindly provided by the Miangul Family (Miangul Archives).

¹⁰ Note that here the term 'art of Gandhara' also includes the Buddhist art of Swat, although from the geographical point of view Swat (or Uḍḍiyāna, Oḍḍiyāna) is not part of Gandhara (the distinction was clear to the Chinese pilgrims mentioned in this study). Elsewhere for Swat I have used the term "outer Gandhara" (Olivieri 2019b).

¹¹ See the very important article by Antonio Amato (2019) on fragment SS I 66.

¹² In Swat we have a scene of return with the relics that is almost 'Christmassy', with a king, as if one of the Magi, returning as king of the north or west on a Bactrian camel (Victoria and Albert Museum, London, IM 85.1939; Ackermann 1975, 89, pl. XXVib). It could well be Uтарысеṇа. Alternatively, these scenes might be considered as depicting a procession, as in the comparable Indian depictions, although the latter emphasise the royal presence. The inscription dated around the beginning of the era of Imḍravarma (Baums 2012, no. 8; CKI 242) seems almost to be telling us that the sovereigns of Avaca took the relics from a stupa of the Maurya period, of uncertain location, and carried it in procession to find a new home in their territories.

¹³ The scene of the return with the relics (not the war for the relics, on which see the south portal of the great Sanchi stupa 1) is not rare, but nor is it very common. From India I recall observing a relief from the impost of the east entrance from Bharhut (from the *vedikā*, now in the National Museum, New Delhi; Cunningham 1879, pl. XII) with the sovereign on the back of an elephant. The fine reliefs with elephants from Kanaganahalli (see photo no. 37.38 by Christian Luczanits on <http://www.luczanits.net>) evidently depict scenes of a procession and display of the relics (see Skilling 2018, figs 1-3, 5-6). On Bharhut see Hawkes 2008; 2009.

na's identification of the scene as the return of Utaraseṇa with the relics may be taken as certain. It is, of course, a conjecture, but based on a few objective elements that make it not only appealing but convincing. Among these elements there is the fact that there is clearly a king, seated with crossed legs (the royal posture or *sattvāsana*) on a large throne with a broad back on tapered feet, set as a palanquin on a large elephant. Significant, too, is the way the hands are held; on the left hand rests a reliquary, tall, a cylindrical pyx, while the right hand is held in front to protect it.¹⁴ The elephant advances imper- turbably led by its *mahout*, the image enriched by caparisons and harnesses.

Utaraseṇa – as we learn from a dedicatory inscription, the Senavarma inscription (Baums 2012; 2018) – is considered the progenitor of the Oḍi family reigning in Swat. Oḍi is of course the name of the region of Swat (also known as Oḍḍiyāna or Uḍḍiyāna).¹⁵ According to Xuanzang, Utaraseṇa was a contemporary of the Buddha and a descendant of the Śākya, with whom he shared the solar genealogy of Indra which dated back to the mythical ancestor Ikṣvāku, in Prakrit Iṣmahō (Salomon, Baums 2007).¹⁶ Utaraseṇa, albeit being the last, obtained a proportion of the relics as preannounced by the Buddha himself before the *parinirvāṇa*. Xuanzang recounts that Utaraseṇa came to Kushinagara for the distribution of the relics, arriving from Swat, where he was born. The Oḍi family thus appears to have reigned from an unspecified time in the mid-first millennium BCE to the second half of the first century CE, when the name disappears from the epigraphic evidence.¹⁷

14 The position of the king sitting on the throne recalls here very closely the magnificent relief with the scene of worship of the sovereign from Chirg-patai in Dir (Swat), today in the Peshawar University Museum (Srinivasan 2021, fig. 1). Alongside this interpretation (the return of Utaraseṇa), however, the relatively mundane hypothesis that the scene depicts a generic scene of transport of relics should also be considered. This is usually a scene depicting several kings and always on horseback (as e.g. in the small relief from the British Museum, London, BM 1888.0901.4). Here the presence of the elephant, both compositionally and spatially, suggests that only one king is represented in the panel. As for the hypothesis that the entire story of the sovereign was reconstructed by Xuanzang on later sources, Antonello Palumbo has written to me: “In a study on the tradition recorded by Xuanzang, Sadakata Akira 定方 晟 (1987) argued that the legend related by Xuanzang was of a late date, possibly arising from a paronomastic association between Śākya (the clan of the Buddha) and Śaka (the line of Uttarasena) [on this see Witzel 1997, 313]. Note, moreover, that there are other, similar stories in which Uttarasena has no place: in two Chinese versions of the *Mahāvibhāṣa* (including one translated by Xuanzang himself and an earlier version, of the fifth century), for example, we find the legend of a female elephant that carried the relics of the Buddha as far as the North-West of India, only to collapse in total exhaustion, and be rewarded with rebirth in the body of a man, becoming an *arhat*”. See also Hinüber 2003.

15 See the place name Udegram (Uḍigrām o Oḍigrām) (De Chiara 2020, 229-30). On the subject, see Callieri 2004.

16 For example, in the Senavarma inscription on gold leaf, see lines 3c and 9a: “[von] der Iṣmahō Königsfamilie” (Hinüber 2003, 21, 31; see also Salomon, Baums 2007). The solar genealogy is one of the two (the other is lunar) which the post-Vedic warrior dynasties of India claim for themselves. It is claimed not only by the Śākya (see e.g. Aśvaghōṣa, *Saundarānanda*), but of course by others: the Ikṣvāku dynasty of Andhra Pradesh (third-fourth century), the Chola, etc. As for Xuanzang, for now I refer to S. Beal's edition (1906), knowing full well that a new edition by Max Deeg is forthcoming.

17 No one has yet addressed this issue. The general impression is that with the seizure of control over the resources of Swat under the Kushana the balance of power changed radically. It will continue in this direction until the point that in the third century CE land and economic power was firmly in the hands of the monasteries, as is also reflected in the cities (Iori, Olivieri 2020). What then happened to the Oḍi? Swat and the western Darel and Tangir valleys (located between that and the Upper Indus) share the mutual role of being a place of refuge for exiled rulers from both sides. Interesting then are the Daradarayas, i.e. the kings of the Daradas, Dards, attested in inscriptions in the Chilas area: their heraldic animal was according to Harald Hauptmann (forthcoming) the lion with raised right paw (Jettmar 1988, fig. 7), the same animal



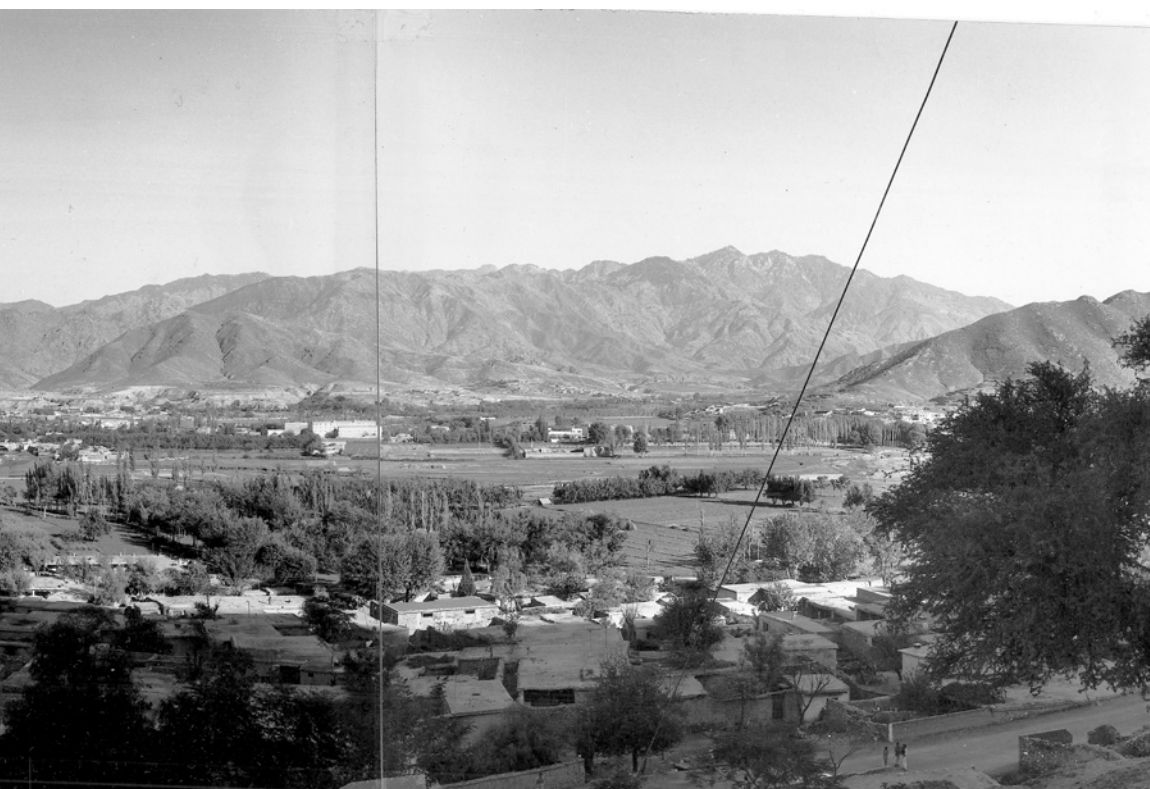


Plate III Late 1950s. A view of Mingora and Saidu Sharif from W (Amankot or Katelai)
(MAIP; photos by Francesca Bonardi)



Plate IV Saidu Sharif I, Frieze, panel S241 (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri)

Utaraseṇa, forefather of the Oḍi lineage, was the son of a Śākya prince who had fled from Kapilavastu at the time of the uprisings that led to the invasion of the Kosalas. So it was that Utaraseṇa together with his family took refuge in Oḍḍiyāna¹⁸ during the early years of the Buddha's preaching.¹⁹ In his wanderings towards the new homeland, guided by a wild goose, the Śākya prince married the daughter of a *nāga*, and acquired from the latter - in accordance with the most classical of Scythian opolatries - a sword that emerged from the depths of a lake. With this sword he then went to Oḍḍiyāna, where he killed the king and took over the kingdom. At this point in the story another *nāga*, Apalāla, enters the scene. The latter dominated the flow of the river Swat and made the lives of the valley-dwellers miserable, bringing about frequent floods and sudden droughts. In an episode in his life, the Buddha - accompanied by the prince of the *nāga* Vajrapani - visited Oḍḍiyāna in spirit to convert Apalāla with the power of the *vājra* (diamond-mace). Before returning in spirit to Kushinagara, where he was to perform the *parinirvāṇa*, the Buddha met Utaraseṇa's mother, a blind widow. He told her to send her son Utaraseṇa, whom the Buddha recognised as a member of his own lineage, to the distribution of the relics which, he foretold, was soon to take place. The same source makes mention of the stupa built on the place where the elephant of Utaraseṇa, who was returning with the relics, met its death.²⁰ This stupa was identified by Aurel Stein as the Shingardar stupa (Stein 1930, 31-2) on the basis of the distances and spatial relations between the various sites recorded by Xuanzang, who located it to the south-west of Mengjieli. There is no proof that Shingardar (a stupa of relatively late construction - late first-early second century) had any connection with Utaraseṇa: the nearby rock allegedly in the shape of an elephant (Stein 1930, 32, fig. 24), although it is not, is no proof, nor is the relief in the nearby cave of Hindu-ghar, which does not depict Utaraseṇa (33) but Surya, as brilliantly demonstrated by Anna Filigenzi (2015, 221-3). Thus Utaraseṇa's stupa has yet to be identified.

The panel fragment with Utaraseṇa shows that the sanctuary of Saidu, founded in a period subsequent to those events, is to be associated with the lineage of that king. Thus, it can be associated with one of the stupas founded by direct or indirect descendants of Utaraseṇa, such as a prince or an important minister, and by their families in the mid-first century CE.

that we find in an unfinished relief, or evidence of workmanship from Butkara I (Faccenna 1997). The heraldic symbol has a clear reference to both Buddhism and the Saka tradition (see the obverse of the tetradrachms of Azes and the gold token of Tillya Tepe). The later Daradarayas had names like Vaiśravaṇasena, and among one of their centres of power the toponym of Oḍi in the Kaghan Valley between the Indus and Kashmir is mentioned (Hauptmann forthcoming).

18 The term certainly has to do with the Oḍiraja, possibly as "way of the Oḍi". Only subsequently, through pareymology and correspondence with the agricultural wealth of Swat, was the place name Oḍḍiyāna attributed with the meaning of "garden".

19 According to Xuanzang in the same circumstances other Śākya families sought refuge in the mountainous lands of the far west - Śāmbhī (Chitral? Wakhan?), Himatāla (Paropāmisō, Hindukush?) and Bamiyan; at the other end of ancient India, the early Tagaung dynasties also claimed to be of Śākya descent.

20 The best synopsis of the legend of Utaraseṇa was written by Martha Carter in a study on what the author aptly called a "Scythian Royal Legend" (Carter 1992). On the entire topic and its historical implications, see Deeg 2011, 194-7 and Albery 2020. On the various hypothesis on the whereabouts of the Utaraseṇa stupa, see Salomon 1980, 289-90.

1.3 The Site and the City

Mengjieli thus corresponds to the modern pronunciation of the transcription of the name of the ancient capital as recorded by Xuanzang. We do not know the original name, but it must have been very close to the modern one, Mingora (*Mingawəra*), which has origins prior to the arrival of Pashto spoken by the Yusufzai in Swat as from the sixteenth century (De Chiara 2020).²¹ The earliest known form of the place name is 'Minkrawara' (found in Court 1840, map).

Xuanzang, who does not seem to be exaggerating the distances here, records that at a few *li* (miles) from Mengjieli, "the royal town of Oḍḍiyāna", there was a famous sanctuary which stood on the place where the Buddha lived in one of his previous lives as the patient Kṣānti-rṣi.²² On the basis of topographic reconstruction we can state here that this was the sanctuary of Butkara I.²³ Butkara I, as we learn from the excavations, was still a more or less active cult centre in the seventh century, albeit in decline – its ruins were still visible to the eyes of the Tibetan pilgrims in the thirteenth century (Tucci 1940). As for its position, without returning to the question of the cardinal direction considered above, we still have to consider the fact that the sanctuary appears located outside the city while, as we shall see, other data locate it within the urban fabric. We must take into account the fact that at the time of Xuanzang's visit, in the seventh century, the city had shrunk considerably, and it is certain that Butkara I, once situated within the city, then lay at a distance from it. In fact, the excavations demonstrate that both the inhabited areas in the plain and the fortress of Barama on the heights, guard, had by then been abandoned for centuries (Faccenna 1964-65; Iori,

21 For a list of the place names ascertained in the epigraphic documents, see Baums 2019.

22 According to the inscription on gold leaf of Seṇavarma (CKI 249; Baums 2012, no. 24), the stupa called Ekakūṭa stupa ("Ekaūḍa": "with a recess", "with a peak"?), perhaps a wooden chapel with a stupa inside the cell, or a stupa with a wooden pinnacle-*chattravali*, containing relics of the Buddha and built by Vasuseṇa, son of Utaraseṇa, had been damaged by a thunderbolt. During the reconstruction works decreed by Seṇavarma, which radically changed the dimensions and form of the stupa, a dedicatory inscription was found referring to Vasuseṇa. If the latter is the son of the same Utaraseṇa who lived at the time of Buddha, the foundation of the Ekakūṭa stupa should be dated back to around the early third century BCE. If the entire account set out in the long inscription of Seṇavarma is true, and if Utaraseṇa lived at the time of the Buddha, it would mean that there had been a stupa prior to the times of Aśoka (a stupa of Mauryan times is mentioned in the inscription of Iṃdravarma of the dynasty of the Avaca, CKI 242, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). As for the stupa called "Ekaūḍa", it could not have been the Stupa of Saidu since we know that at that time the area subsequently occupied by the sanctuary was occupied by a burial necropolis. On the whereabouts of the Ekakūṭa stupa (located in Swat) see Salomon 1986, 289-90. There is a very interesting hypothesis by Henry Albery: "Thus, for architectural, chronological and epigraphic reasons, the location of Vasuseṇa and Seṇavarma's Ekaūḍa could well be Butkara I, near the Oḍḍirāja capital, Mingora. One may expect that this site, representing the fulcrum of the region and the likely capital of Oḍḍiyāna, would be a good candidate for the location of these rulers' stupa establishments" (2020, 249). We must, however, point out that if we place the inscription of Seṇavarma around 60~70 CE, the event described cannot refer to the great stupa of Butkara I (GST) either, for its stratigraphic data tell us that the reconstruction closest in time (the phase labelled GST 3) had already been accomplished at least half a century before. No evidence of a destructive event such as the one caused by the thunderbolt, nor of the subsequent excavation and restoration work as reported in the inscription, was therefore found (assuming archaeology could record it). The inscription was first presented by H. Bailey in 1980, then studied by G. Fussman in 1982, R. Salomon in 1986, and by O. von Hinüber in 2003 (see references in Baums 2012).

23 At the time of Xuanzang a *li* corresponded to just over 300 m. In the account by Song Yun, Butkara I was evidently mentioned as Tolo, and as Dhumat 'ala in the Tibetan accounts (Olivieri 2017 with preceding bibliography, in particular Tucci 1958).

Olivieri 2016).²⁴ At that time the cities of the region, as we can infer from Xuanzang, were mostly castles. The ancient Bazira and Ora (Barikot and Udegram), as the excavations show, remained alive only on the high ground, while the built-up areas in the plains had for centuries been abandoned. Xuanzang visited a region showing every sign of decline – monasteries abandoned and in ruins, the flourishing agriculture wilting away, as again confirmed by the archaeological data (Olivieri forthcoming).

A century before, when Song Yun was writing, evidently the city was smaller than it had been five centuries before, but it still had a life of its own and contained the court of the local king,²⁵ who received the pilgrim and his fellow traveller Huisheng with the protocol reserved for ambassadors (of the dynasty of the Northern Wei: the court provided a local interpreter who spoke Chinese). The sanctuary (of Butkara I), Song Yun tells us, was the royal sanctuary where the king held an assembly in the presence of the Buddhist clergy every year.

Returning now, however, to the golden age of urbanisation in Gandhara and Swat, in the first-second century, the dimensions of the city and the spatial relations between the city and the sanctuaries must have been very different and better defined. Both Saidu Sharif I and Butkara I were sanctuaries belonging to the city, the former in the periphery but dominating the city, while the latter was integrated into the ancient urban fabric. Moreover, the former had a monastery [pt. V] while the latter was surrounded by residential structures from which it was separated by perimeter walls with openings for access. Butkara I was situated in the heart of a closely developed urban fabric of dwellings, both small and large, while Saidu dominated the built-up area, being separated from it. Its community dwelt in a monastery, perhaps one of the first and certainly the earliest of those we know of. Around it there are no dwellings apart from the three small cells for solitary meditation identified above the monastery terrace in Area D (Callieri 1989, 47), nor are there other sanctuaries but only infrastructures to channel the water of the streams in the Kanchai Valley (47). Other structures must have been located below, in the area now between the Saidu Hospital and the Swat Museum.²⁶

Thanks to the aerial photography carried out at Mingora for the Archaeological Mission [pt. VI],²⁷ we know that the city centre lay close to the confluence of the rivers Jambil (flowing from the east) and Saidu (flowing from the south). The two rivers then flowed in a north-west direction, and thence into the river Swat. The fact that the isthmus of land between the two rivers lay by the city centre is confirmed by ample archaeological evidence. Here we will focus only on the evidence coeval with the phase of construction of the sanctuary of Saidu.²⁸

24 The latest period of Barama I corresponds to period 4/5-6 of Butkara I (= Sacred Precinct), but above all to the final phase of the built-up area around the sanctuary (= Inhabitated Area, period 5) (Iori, Olivieri 2016, tab. 1).

25 Apparently not a descendant of the Odi family, whose memories have been lost since the end of the first century.

26 The site known as Saidu Sharif II (Faccenna 1995, 21 fn. 1, fig. 3).

27 On 26 May 1959.

28 Thus I do not take into account the earliest Butkara II necropolis (1200-800 BCE), nor the Buddhist sacred area of Butkara III, which was built towards the end of the first century (see Olivieri 2019b, 232).

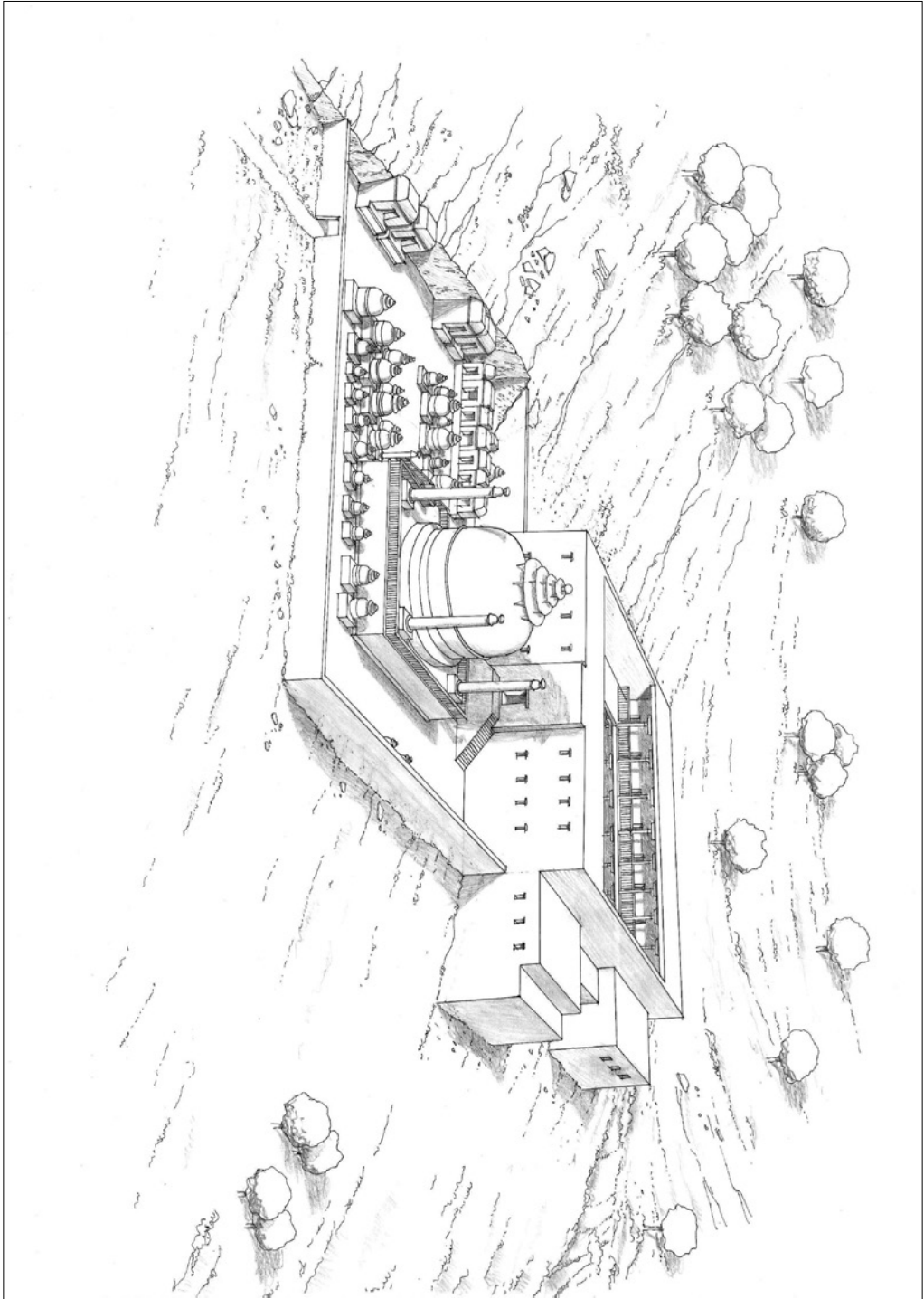


Plate V Saidu Sharifi, stupa terrace and monastery, ideal reconstruction (from SW) (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)



Plate VI 1959. Mingora urban area, aerial view (N to the left) (MAIP)

We will start from the outskirts. Saidu clearly lay beyond the southern limits of the city, while Butkara was still within the urban fabric. In the neighbourhood of this site, a little to the north, there is an area of burials, the one best known to us being known as Butkara IV, a tripartite family mausoleum covered by a mound, excavated in 1963 by Maurizio Taddei (Olivieri 2019b). Around it there are other tombs and cenotaphs, documented in part. On the other side of the river Jambil, directly facing Butkara I, a defensive fortress, Barama I (Faccenna 1964-65), was brought to light, doubtless guarding the eastern entrance to the city.

Clear evidence of a built-up area was observed in the vicinity of the confluence of the Jambil and Saidu. Detailed evidence emerged far more clearly in one of the aerial photos in a sector of the modern built-up area called the 'grassy ground', now occupied by the football pitch and cricket field of Mingora and Saidu Sharif. Today political meetings and assemblies are held here, while at the time of the Yusufzai State of Swat it was the 'Champ de Mars' of the capital of the state (Saidu Sharif). Obviously, we cannot tell whether the structures were all coeval with the phase we are concerned with here. Although Faccenna conjectured three superimposed phases of construction (Faccenna 1980-81, 4: pl. XXVIII),²⁹ on the evidence of the urban excavations carried out in Swat, like Barikot and Udegram, where the urban fabric for centuries covered the same area (in particular between the second century BCE and the third century CE), we can be quite sure that the structures which can be made out in the aerial photograph, if not coeval, certainly reflect the area occupied by buildings in the mid-first century. Even more telling in the photo is what is missing. I believe that with this photo we have had the luck to capture the south-west limit of the ancient city.

The aerial photo shows a very regular road system and built-up area. The axis of the main north-south road, which is about 6 m wide, lies along the east side of the urban fabric. Opening on it are long rectangular buildings with very elaborate internal layouts, separated by narrow lanes. The back end of these buildings is lined by a service road only roughly aligned in a north-south direction, measuring about 2 m in width. The main axis seems to be delimited by a structure of just under 6 m in width, which runs along the entire length of the road. It may be the west sector of the city wall or defensive rampart. Beyond lies an empty space stretching as far as the 'grassy ground'.

The intermediate axial east-west road is narrower (about 4 m), while the southern one - apparently the main one visible - is 6 m in width. Facing it is a building of large proportions, behind which runs a lane parallel to the intermediate axis with a series of rooms of decidedly small proportions opening on it. The large building is made up of a number of rooms marked by central pillars and open courtyards, without any apparent order. On the other side of the road runs the structure of about 6 m in width and as long as the blocks built within. Beyond, again, there is an empty stretch running as far as the 'grassy ground'. This structure, too, may have to do with the city wall or defensive rampart on the south side (there appears to be a postern slightly out of axis but at the level of the north-south service road). What the aerial photo shows should, therefore, be the south-west corner of the ancient capital. The visible surface appears to cover just over a hectare.

29 My approach leads me to exclude certain evidence like modern structures.

If we take Butkara I as possible opposite end of the city, the long side of the city should have measured about 1 km.

On this side of the city, an evident limit in the first century was represented by the funerary area of Butkara IV, which must have been situated outside the city limits. The subsequent Buddhist sanctuary of Butkara III also stood *extra muros*.

Running to the east and south, the two valleys of the Jambil and Saidu represented the city's agricultural area, as well attested since the proto-historical period with the farming villages of Loebanr III and Kalako-dhe-*rai*.³⁰ Along these two valleys also lay the routes for access to the southern plains, and to the Indus. In particular, the Saidu valley afforded one of the two major routes for mount Ilam, the Aornos of the early writers on Alexander's feats, and on to the Indus plain (Coloru, Olivieri 2020).³¹ From the second century on, both the Saidu and Jambil valleys were colonised by a great many Buddhist monasteries and sanctuaries, many of which were still functioning around the seventh-eighth century, and most certainly were at the time of Xuanzang's visit.

As for the other direction in which the city extended, towards the north, we must take into account the river Jambil flowing at the centre. If this is the case, in the other direction the city could have extended for over 1 km before running onto the spur of the Mingora hills.

In conclusion, in area the city may well have covered over 100-120 hectares, which would have made it a city as large as Puṣkalāvati (including Bala Hisar) and Sirkap/Taxila (including the Mahal high ground).³²

30 For a bibliography on these sites, see Olivieri 2011a.

31 The other route runs from Barikot (Bazira) to reach Amluk-dara or the Karakar pass (Coloru, Olivieri 2019). A side note: the earliest mention of Barikot is found in Court 1840, "Berikoot" (307), "Berikout" (map).

32 According to my calculations (based on Schlingloff 2013), a town of 15 hectares like Barikot could have had about 5,000 inhabitants. Ancient Swat must not have had more than 300,000 inhabitants (Olivieri forthcoming). Mengjieli could have had 50,000 inhabitants, almost a sixth of the entire population of Swat.

2 The Stupa

Summary 2.1 The Stupa and Its Times. – 2.2 Indirect Epigraphical Data. – 2.3 Synchronisms Between Taxila (Dharmarajika), Butkara I and Saidu. – 2.4 The Stupa and Its Decoration.

In the following pages we will be considering solely the first phase in the life of the site of Saidu (Period I, phase a), and in particular of the Stupa, as well as some of the associated monuments, with particular focus on (column) bases 75 and 69, base 80, and the bases of columns 24 and 29 (see Faccenna 1995a, fig. 32).¹ These are monuments related to the symmetrical plan for the very first Stupa, to which stupas 21, 31, 32 as well, possibly, as 57 [pls VII-VIII] were added immediately after to the design of the facade. Finally, we will give some consideration to the phases of abandonment and deconsecration of the site and the Stupa.

2.1 The Stupa and Its Times

At this point we need to define the period under consideration, before going into further detail. The chronology of Saidu is defined by a series of factors, numismatic and otherwise, concerning the late phase of the ‘Saka’ or ‘Saka-Parthian’ period. This is a particularly important historical phase, characterised by great activity and looming large in the archaeological stratigraphy, with religious foundations, extension of the fortification walls (as at Barikot) and cities, as at Sirkap (Taxila). This phase is marked by use of the Azes Era in inscriptions and the copper alloy coins of the Saka and Parthian sovereigns. Absolute radiocarbon dating of the stratigraphies in association with both these coins and the typical material culture at Barikot (‘Saka-Parthian’ phases) bring us to a period between the mid-first century BCE and the second half of the first century CE (Olivieri et al. 2019, tab. 1).

1 See my note 18 in Haynes, Peverett, Rienjang 2020, 257.

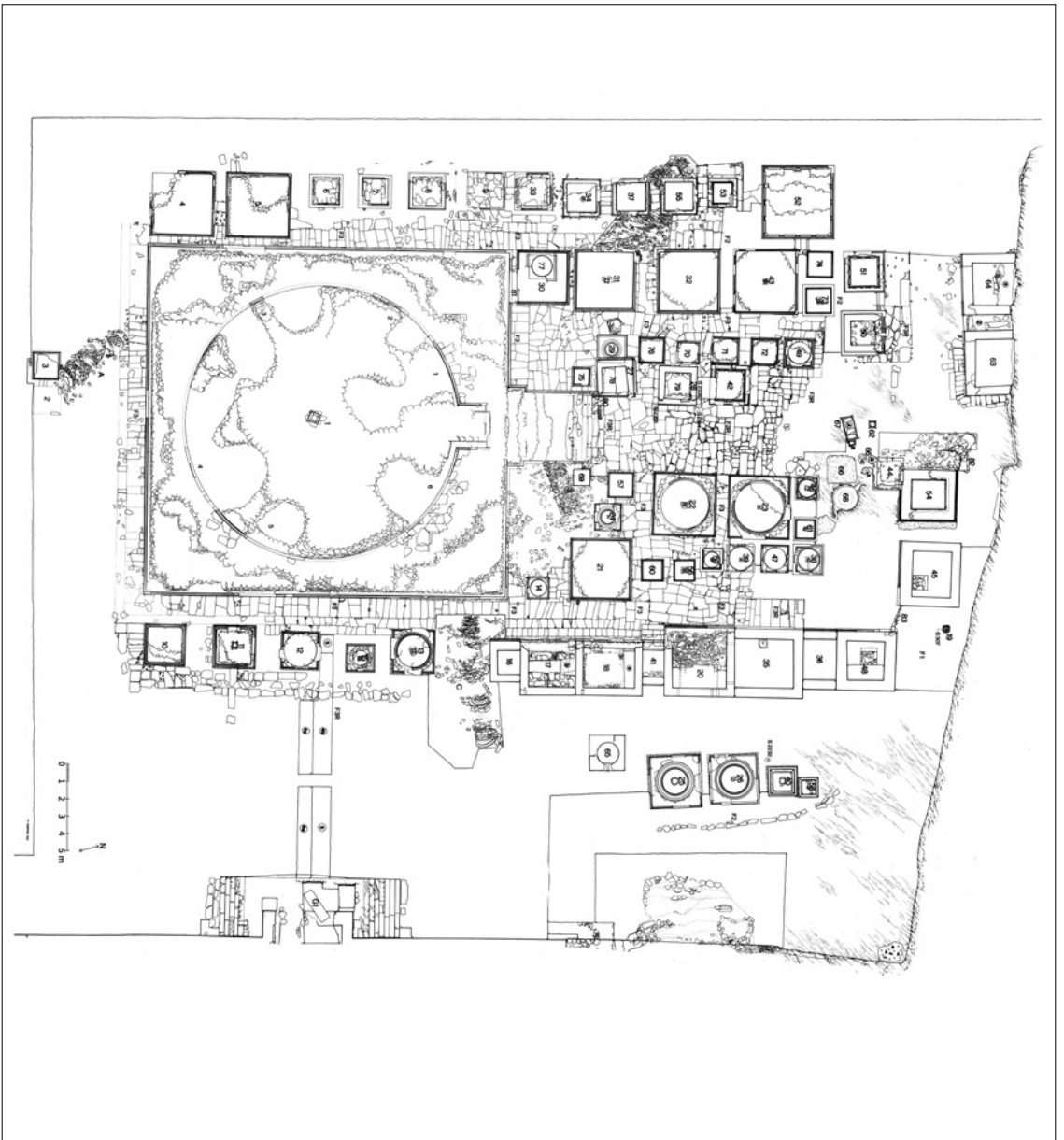


Plate VII Saidu Sharif I, general map (after Faccenna 1995; drawings by Francesco Martore)



Plate VIII Saidu Sharif, general map with structural periods (after Faccenna 1995a, fig. 32; drawings by Francesco Martore)

With regard to the Azes Era, this study tends to follow the dating to 47/46 BCE proposed by Falk and Bennet (2009), also given the concordance with the Kharoshthi inscriptions (CKI) adopted here as *editio princeps* (Baums, Glass 2000-). If, on the other hand, we were to take the Azes Era to coincide with the Vikrama Era, as was the unanimous practice up to 2009 (for example: Salomon 1982),² we would have to shift back by ten years, to 58/57 BCE.

The question is still debatable. The 47/46 BCE dating is a reconstruction, while the previous dating (58/57 BCE) associates the Azes Era with a historically attested era. As far as the present study is concerned, the issue – which I consider crucial also for Saidu – concerns the dating of the Senavarma inscription (Salomon 1986): this would be around 70 in the first case and 60 CE in the second, thus placing the beginning of this sovereign's reign at 56 or 46 CE. As for the general chronology, a dating ten years earlier (the one based on the Vikrama Era, i.e. 58/57 BCE) would, archaeologically speaking, be more convincing for the entire sequence of events considered here. Henceforth, for the sake of completeness, the interval between these two dates will in all cases be indicated with the approximately equals sign (also known as double tilde), e.g. 28/27≈18/17 BCE or 59/60≈69/70 CE (simplified this way: 27≈17 BCE or 60≈70 CE).

The material culture of this 'Saka-Parthian' phase³ shows a certain westernisation of customs, doubtless influenced by the fact that before arriving in Gandhara these peoples had spent some time in areas that were already showing a certain response to Hellenistic culture, such as Sistan (Sakastan).⁴ Not far from there, in Kandahar, in Arachosia, Greek had been spoken since the time of Aśoka.

It is true that the use of Greek, attested in Swat in the Indo-Greek age in onomastic graffiti on vessels, disappeared (with the exception of some coin inscriptions) in the Saka phases, and was replaced in graffiti on pottery by Gandhari Prakrit (*gandhārī*) written with Kharoshthi (*kharoṣṭhī*). It is, however, also true that many new western elements found their way into the material culture of these phases. We may take, for example, the introduction of terracotta figurines known as 'Hellenistic Ladies', the decidedly Hellenising painted or moulded decorations, and the use of particular products from the Greek world like the pyramidal loom weights and tripods or *lāsana* for cooking (see Coloru et al. 2022).

This was the background to the art-historical episode that led to the apogee of the Frieze of Saidu. The development of the Gandharan sculpture school, which can be followed with a certain continuity better in Swat than elsewhere, eventually showed an abrupt advance that is worth looking into.

An important point that needs making is that we find no evidence of a sculptural tradition or art (neither local nor imported) in Swat and Gandhara before the development of Gandharan Buddhist art. Apart from the two

² "Therefore the long standing problem of the origin of the Vikrama era can now be considered solved: *Azes I was the founder of the Vikrama era*" (Salomon 1986, 68; italics in the original text).

³ Archaeology has not yet been able to distinguish a 'Saka' from a 'Parthian' phase in Swat in the material evidence. The two major changes in material culture, and in pottery, occur at Barikot first in a phase in which Saka coins are dominant and Indo-Greek coins disappear (in absolute chronology ca. 50 BCE = beginning Macrophase 3b), and then in the first period associated with Kushan coins (in relative chronology ca. 80-90 CE = Macrophase 4a) (see Olivieri et. al. 2019).

⁴ On this Saka phase in Sistan the study by Paolo Daffinà (1967) has yet to be bettered. Of the recent contributions, Gazerani 2015 on the Saka and the epic cycle of Sistan is worth adding.

enigmatic prehistoric pillar heads studied by Massimo Vidale,⁵ the great necropolises of the late Bronze Age and early Iron Age (1200-800 BCE) and associated settlements – from which we have many terracotta figurines, both human (female) and animal – have yielded no artistic objects in stone. I exclude from the list the rough manufacture of farming implements: mortars, pestles, scale weights and sharpeners (Stacul 1987; Vidale, Micheli, Olivieri 2016). And yet a certain technique must surely have evolved in the quarry activities. Apart from agricultural tools, stone was widely used for building – for foundations and part of the superstructures – and tomb roofing.⁶

In the phases of what is known as the ‘second urbanisation’ of India in the North-West, in the mid-first millennium BCE, at Barikot, where we find notable evidence of transfer of ceramic models from the Ganges plain and Iran, indicative of craft specialisation (copper, iron, glass), we have no stone products apart from farming and domestic tools. We have to wait for the Indo-Greek phase to see the beginnings of a local production of small vessels and dishes in chlorite schist and steatite, which found increasingly widespread circulation (also as reliquary caskets for the stupas) precisely during the Saka or Saka-Parthian phases. From the very outset the production was highly refined, showing use of the lathe as well as fine abrasives and skilful use of the burin. It is perfectly evident that in this phase technical and pyrotechnical skills relating to chlorite stones in general must have found their way to Swat, for the same period saw a growing practice of firing vessels with talc-based slip to obtain a lasting and visibly striking effect of golden lustre (called Golden Slip Ware).⁷ As for the production of stone vessels, sub-spherical forms occur most frequently, in some cases internally compartmented, and on a smaller scale cylindrical pyx forms, lamps and, finally, small decorated and figured plates, in some cases also compartmented (called ‘toilet trays’).⁸ The first evidence we have of sculpture as such associated with this phase is to be seen in a metope fragment in green chlorite schist depicting an eight petals lotus flower (BKG 2726). This was found on the surface of a layer of waste material dating to the Saka-Parthian period, part of an extra-urban dump on the slope of the defensive rampart outside the walls of Barikot [figs 9-10].

Quite clearly, from the rigid forms with flattened frontal perspective of the early sculptural endeavours found at both Taxila⁹ and Butkara I¹⁰ to the subsequent production attested in both sites the advance in terms of formal elements is as distinct as it is abrupt. As we have seen, the period in question showed a proliferation of technical innovations and possibly also of

5 Inventory nos. V 504 and V 503 (Swat Museum): Vidale 2006.

6 We observe the first and only fully developed form of stonework in a mysterious creation found at Barikot *in situ* in strata dating to around 1100 BCE. It is a large disc of unknown function, 1 m in diameter, skilfully chiselled and smoothed on both sides (BKG 3289, Swat Museum).

7 See Maritan et al. 2018 and the contribution by Maritan in Callieri, Olivieri 2020. The art of work in steatite and firing of it was widespread in India in the Bronze Age at Harappa and Mohenjo-dharo, but it came from the south-west regions of Iran.

8 On which, see the study by Lo Muzio 2018 with preceding bibliography.

9 Marshall 1951, 699-703, pls 212-13. See Marshall 1960a, §§ 3-4.

10 Here I am referring to B 6841 (which belongs to the series of lion protome cornices of monument 14 of Butkara I; Faccenna in Faccenna, Callieri, Filigenzi 2003, fig. 6), the series of pseudo-capitals B 197, B 286, B 3396, etc. (Faccenna, Taddei 1962-64, pls DLVI-DLVIII), and series of reliefs with the Buddha (B 2147, B 6461, etc.) (Faccenna in Faccenna, Callieri, Filigenzi 2003, figs 16-17).



Figure 9 BKG 2726 (ACT; photo by Aurangzeib Khan)

transfer of expert craftsmen (indicative, here, are the loom weights).¹¹ The sudden burgeoning of artistic productions already showing maturity and yet apparently unrelated to the earlier traditions may have had to do with immigration of artists and craftsmen to a certain region.¹²

As we know, in the ancient and premodern world, artists and technicians in general (including in the military sphere) moved between culturally distant areas, bringing to some the technical and symbolic capital of others; suffice it to recall the Comacine masters, the Abruzzese Romanesque stonemasons, etc.¹³ For our story we recall the cases of the artists (a painter, an ivory carver) who moved from India to the lands of the West (the Yavana country) (Scherrer-Schaub 2009, 32 fn. 18). For our particular case, the most, albeit later, striking example is Tita, the artist from Miran who

11 As pointed out to me by Chiara Spinazzi Lucchesi, looms and weavers move together, the artisans with their instruments (including the specialist tools used by sculptors such as the drill), and never the contrary.

12 My colleague Sara Mondini rightly reminds me of the work of Alka Patel and Elizabeth Lambourn on the movement of works and workers from Gujarat. The reader will be able to find there the most appropriate bibliographical references.

13 And the visit by Giovanni Bellini to Istanbul: exemplary is the case of the portrait of Mehmed II, a reproduction of which adds a touch of solemnity to the entrance to Ca' Cappello, in the premises of our university department in Venice. As for examples, these are innumerable: they range from Indian craftsmen in Ghaznavid and Ghuride Afghanistan (Flood 2009a, 157) to European experts at the court of Persia and the Sikhs (e.g. see Lafont 1992; Galletti 2008). Regarding the first example, Flood explicitly speaks of “masons and mobility” with reference to symbolic and visual capital: “These juxtapositions of similar subjects executed in different idioms offer, I suggest, an example of what Terry Allen calls ‘style as consumer choice’. Allen suggests that imported forms, decorative idioms or techniques (in Allen’s case those found in some twelfth-century Syrian monuments) may sometimes have been chosen for their ‘exotic’ qualities, ‘a fashion statement in the advertising language of today’s mass market’ (Allen 1988, 108). The question of the market is relevant, for the twelfth century sees the rise of the famous urban ‘bourgeoisie’ in the eastern Islamic world, with a palpable impact on the production and consumption of ceramics, metalwork and manuscript painting” (Flood 2009a, 149-50).



Figure 10 A view of the Barikot (Bazira): SW quarters of the city; Mt. Ilam in the background (ACT; photo by Luca M. Olivieri)

demonstrated, with his signature in Kharoshthi, that he was originally from Gandhara, although we do not know how long he and his family resided in the area of Tarim.¹⁴ We shall be returning to Tita later on. Then we have the ‘Indianising’ art and associated techniques in Southeast Asia. We might take the simple and exemplary case of an important ceramics class in the Gandharan area known as ‘Fashion Ware’. This ceramics class, with its rich figurative repertoire, suddenly appeared in its already mature form in Swat and the surrounding regions in the mid-third century CE. Its appearance there can only be due to artists and master craftsmen coming from other regions.¹⁵

2.2 Indirect Epigraphical Data

The dating of the Seṇavarma inscription is also highly relevant to the chronology of Saidu. The simultaneous mention of a son – a young adult, we imagine – of the Kushan king Kujula Kadphises is decisive. Kujula’s occupation of Gandhara can be placed later than 45≈55 CE and was certainly consolidated by 65≈75 CE (again with respect to the two possible dates of the beginning of the Azes era). The first dating is derived from the later inscriptions mentioning Parthian sovereigns: that of the reliquary of Ariasrava (40≈50 CE) and that of Takht-i Bahi (or, better, Sahr-i Bahlol) (45≈55 CE).¹⁶ The second dating is derived from the rock inscription of Panjitar (Mount Mahaban, Eastern Gandhara) which, mentioning the year 122 of the Azes era, can be put to 65≈75 CE.¹⁷

14 As for the name Tita little can be said: the hypothesis that it is coined on the Roman name ‘Titus’ is in principle not entirely impossible, however it would be the only established case as opposed to the ‘Greek’ names of Gandhara (see Baums 2018). Echoes of the name Caesar, e.g. in the Ara inscription of the Kushana king Kanishka III (kaisara) (ca. 268 CE) and in the name of the Turki king Sāhi Fromo Kesar (eighth century) do not stand out.

15 On this topic a specific study is to be published (by the present Author). As for the mobility of specialised artists, another quote from Flood (2009a, 150): “Precedents exist for such migrations: for example, in the *Rājatarāṅgini*, the twelfth-century Kashmiri royal chronicle, we read of a craftsman from the land of the Turks (*Turuṣkadeśa*) who was employed to gild a parasol (*chattra*) on a Shiva temple built by King Kalasha, the Hindu ruler of the Kashmir Valley between 1063 and 1089 (transl. Stein 1900, 7: 528-31). Gilding was rarely used on Kashmiri metalwork, and the context in which this commission occurs suggests that itinerant artisans were particularly valued for their possession of specific skills that were not common to the artistic production of both regions, despite their proximity” (see § “Markets, Mobility and International Hybridity” in Flood 2009b, 189-226).

16 Respectively CKI 53 and CKI 358. For the later chronology, see Falk 2015, no. 060. The association of the inscription with its stupa-shaped reliquary would have been important to the chronology of the former (as already argued in Fussman 2003, 518) if only this association were certain. Indeed, since the discovery of these objects and their actual location are shrouded in mystery, no one can prove that the two objects are connected.

17 With the proviso that the inscription does not mention the name of the sovereign, but “the Kushan”, a typical formula of the inscriptions of Kujula Kadphises. However, mention of the year should eliminate any doubt (Falk 2015, § 065). There should always be a counter-hypothesis, and for this (among others) readers and myself are indebted to Antonello Palumbo, who wrote to me: “We should not overlook the Panjitar inscription (CKI 59): it mentions a *maha-ṛaya[sa] Guṣaṇa[sa] rāja* which Salomon and Falk among others identify as Kujula, and a year, 122, attributed to the Azes era, although it is not mentioned. In an old article (1914, 372) J.F. Fleet observed that the form *Guṣaṇa*, with the initial G, is late: it is effectively to be found in two other inscriptions, that of Manikiala (discussed in Fleet 1913, 105), which apparently mentions someone claiming to be a distant descendant of Kanishka, and that of Kamra, on which see G. Fussman, “Documents épigraphiques kouchans” (1980, 45-58), which dates back to the time of Vasiṣka. I expect that palaeographic considerations suggest for Panjitar a date in the first rather than the third

Thus around 70 (or 60) CE, in the fourteenth year of the reign of *Seṇavarma*, the latter had explicitly acknowledged the political role of the Kushans,¹⁸ who had yet to take possession of Swat but ruled over the cities of the plains which depended largely on the double harvest of Swat for their supply of foodstuffs (Spengler et al. 2020; Olivieri forthcoming). Hence the great importance and wealth of the local princes. But the *Seṇavarma* inscription has more to tell us, casting light on the personality of this unique figure in the ancient history of the valley.

Four highly significant details can be picked out amongst the many others in the *Seṇavarma* inscription. Although he was not the first of his lineage to abandon the calculation of time according to the Azes era, which continued elsewhere until it gave way to the Kanishka era, the inscription calculates the date as year 14 of the *Seṇavarma*'s reign. The inscription mentions the *saṃgha* three times,¹⁹ whose settlements *Seṇavarma* was evidently favouring. *Seṇavarma* also stated that he wanted his lineage to outlive his enemies “for a thousand years’, in an expression that has puzzled more than one scholar” (Palumbo 2011, 10).²⁰ Finally, *Seṇavarma* dwelt on the royal genealogy and the metaphysical aspect of the lineage which, as we have seen, was the same as that of the Buddha.²¹ It is evident that – at least until he had no choice but to accept the supremacy of Kujula – *Seṇavarma* had ‘big ideas’. But even with regard to Kujula, with his recollections of the latter’s son, he wished to show to posterity his familiar relations with the

century CE; interestingly enough, on Gandhari.org [= Baums, Glass 2000-], Baums puts a question mark after ‘year 122 of Azes’, and suggests no other dating”.

18 As for the fourteenth year, see the curious antecedent of Ashoka who enlarged a stupa in the same year of the reign: “King Piyadassi, dear to the gods, in the fourteenth year of his reign doubled the size of the *stūpa*” (English translation of Pugliese Carratelli 2003, XXIX).

19 In the epigraphic repertory of the early first century CE, I could find no mention of monasteries, with the possible exception of the “Monastery of Rama” in inscription CKI 455 dated to the turn of the Christian era (on the issue of its authenticity, see Fussman 2015, 160-1). CKI 455 also refers to a “confraternity”, *sahayara*, the term we also find in three inscriptions dated to the first half of the first century CE (CKI 45, CKI 51, CKI 47). The term may be alternative to or developed from *saṃgha* (?). For an image of the *Seṇavarma*'s inscription, see Baums 2012, fig. 6.9.

20 Palumbo points out the anumerical value of the term “thousand years” as sufficing to define an impressive length of time, certainly used in the Iranian world (Panaino 2018), then in the Roman world and finally in the Buddhist world (Nattier 1991, 42-8; Salomon 2018, 52). We may recall here Philip the Arab, who celebrated the millennium of the foundation of Rome. Jan Nattier writes: “In the early years of the Buddhist community the figure of five hundred years given for the duration of the Dharma in a number of scriptural sources must have seemed reasonably generous. Around the first century CE, however – that is, around five hundred years after the death of the Buddha – we begin to find a new version of the prophecy of decline. In certain Sarvāstivāda and Mahāyāna texts the life span of the Dharma is now given not as a mere five hundred years, but rather one thousand, a total sometimes treated as consisting of two ‘sub-periods’ of five hundred years each” (1991, 42).

21 Again, Palumbo wrote to me: “The *Seṇavarma* inscription makes no reference to the kinship between the Oḍi kings and the Buddha. Now, if there is any text where such descentance should be mentioned and extolled, it is precisely that long inscription. But there is no mention, and this silence should be accounted for. The other point is that the document attesting the *Iṣmaho* = *Ikṣvāku* equivalence is about a century after the time of *Seṇavarma*. In a century many things can happen. Perhaps assimilation between the two names, which might originally have been unrelated, occurred in that period; or perhaps, if on the other hand the identity existed from the outset, it is possible that attribution of the Buddha to the lineage of *Ikṣvāku* came about later. In any case, I feel it needs to be explained why *Seṇavarma* did not state that his was the lineage of the Buddha, if this was the current opinion in his times” (personal communication).

great king.²² If we conventionally accept 60≈70 CE as year 14 of the reign (depending on when the Azes era began), Seṅavarma must have ascended to the throne around 56 CE (with the Azes era at 47/46 BCE) or 46 CE (with the other option). It is, broadly speaking, in this period that the building of Saidu is to be placed, in the light of which we might not unreasonably imagine that Seṅavarma himself was the interlocutor of the artists who worked at Saidu.

We might therefore imagine the Saidu Stupa as the 'Palatine Chapel' of the court of the Oḍi, if not of the sovereign himself, built in the brief period of Seṅavarma's political independence.²³

2.3 Synchronisms Between Taxila (Dharmarajika), Butkara I and Saidu

Before returning to the Saidu Stupa, let me make a brief digression on some cornices from the sanctuary of Dharmarajika at Taxila, and their relevance to the chronology of the Great Stupa (phase 3) (GSt 3)s of Butkara I. Faccenna's approach, based on the chronological succession between the new formal language of the phases associated with GSt 3 and the mature development we find at Saidu, sounds very convincing to me.²⁴

The chronology of Saidu is defined on the basis of a few elements: the epigraphs on the somewhat archaic ceramic sherds (Callieri 1989) and an (imitation) coin of Azes II associated with a pavement of the Monastery of Saidu corresponding to the final phase of the first period of the Stupa.

The chronology of GSt 3 of Butkara I is clearly attributed on numismatic evidence to the Saka phase in the light of the key find of Azes II tetradrachms deliberately placed, also under the pavement of a later phase of GSt 3 (Faccenna in Faccenna, Callieri, Filigenzi 2003, 283-6; Faccenna 2001, 141). The chronology of these coins is fixed to after the second half of the first century BCE.

Helping to make the context a little more certain are the data we can glean from two cornices of shrine L of Dharmarajika, dealt with by Domenico Faccenna (2005). Both Faccenna and Chantal Fabrègues (1987) underlined how close these pieces are to the cornices of monuments 14 and 17 as well as various others from Butkara I (GSt 3 phase), see below [pl. xviii]. The two fragments from Dharmarajika (Taxila Museum, inv. no. 8509 and 8510 = cornices A and B in Faccenna 2005) both show a dedicatory inscription

22 The situation reminds me - almost to the letter - of the relationship between the *bādshāh* Miangul of Swat and the British authorities of Peshawar, all between his descendant and successor, the *wali* of Swat, and the president of Pakistan in the 1950s and 1960s. The friendship and family ties between the two guaranteed the autonomy of Swat from Pakistan until 1969.

23 The affiliation to the Kushans is announced in the Seṅavarma inscription: "Sadaṣkaṇa, son of the great king, chief king of kings Kujula Kadphises, son of the gods, [...] is honored" (CKI 249; Baums 2012, 231-2). For the chronology, see Falk 2015, 93-4. The *editio princeps* of the inscription can be found in Hinüber 2003.

24 With a *caveat*: Faccenna writes that "[a]nche se abbiamo acquisito questi importanti elementi temporali, essi non possono risolversi in una equivalenza di principio e di fine di questa produzione. Certamente il fregio di Saidu Sharif I non costituisce il termine di essa, così come non possiamo ritenere che nn. 14, 17 e 135 di Butkara I ne segnino l'inizio" (These important temporal elements cannot be considered automatically as the beginning and the end of this production. Certainly the frieze of Saidu Sharif I does not constitute the end of it, just as we cannot assume that nos. 14, 17 and 135 of Butkara I mark the beginning) (Faccenna 2001, 145).

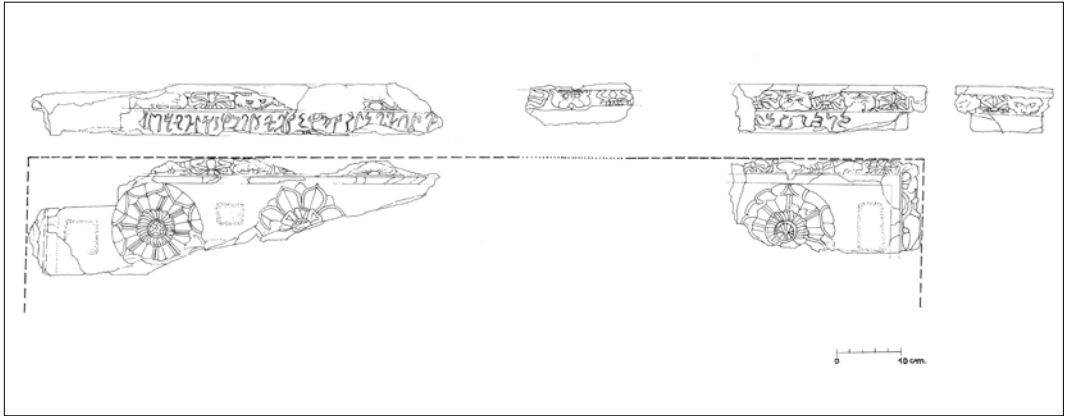


Figure 11 Three cornices from Dharmarajika (Taxila) (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)

[fig. 11]. Actually, the two fragments belong to a single cornice, cornice A representing the left corner and cornice B (Fabrègues 1987, fig. 4) the right. It is a projecting cornice with leonine protomes alternating with palmettes on the (cyma reversa) outer face, while on the lower, flat one are preserved open lotus flowers of different forms. The projection of the cornice was supported by brackets, as evidenced by the shallow recesses to be seen on the lower face of both fragments. The inscriptions run along the lower fillet of the cornice, thus being very much in sight. There is also a third fragment without inscription (inv. no. 467 = Marshall 1951, 710, no. 80, pl. 217; Fabrègues 1987, fig. 3; Faccenna 2007a, figs 15-16), again from the same context; in terms of material, style and decoration it is close if not identical to the previous fragments, and indeed would appear to be part of the same cornice (but not certainly, for it shows somewhat inferior crafting). The fragment was reused in another monument, as evidenced by the cut on the lower part and the addition on the upper face of a rebate and socket for a metal cramp, which – as we know – was not utilised at the time when the piece was sculpted. As for the material, it is worth noting that Faccenna, with his thorough knowledge of the stone materials of Gandhara, observed that the chlorite schist of the cornices of Dharmarajika could have been from Swat, and is very similar to that of the cornices of Butkara I (Faccenna 2005, 92).

In the inscription on cornice A,²⁵ Stefan Baums reads: “(1) In honor of..., (2) for the gift of good health of his own relatives, friends and kinsmen, (3)... of (?) the Hoḍrea”. The latter term may be associated with the Oḍi, or princes of Swat (Baums 2019, 168 fn. 5).²⁶

²⁵ Inscription CKI 69: (1) ... e puyae, (2) at[va]nasa ñatimitrasalohidaṇa arogadaḁṣiṇae, (3) Hoḍreaṇa.o... (Baums, Glass 2000-, <https://gandhari.org/catalog?itemID=43>).

²⁶ I owe thanks to Stefan Baums for the reading of the inscriptions and Antonello Palumbo for this hypothesis. The latter wrote to me “As for the matter of Hoḍrea, that it may be a variant of the name better attested as Oḍi is implicitly recognised by Baums himself in his article on the toponyms in the inscriptions, seeing that he cites the phrase with Hoḍrea together with two other ‘somewhat obscure expressions’ (which include, respectively, the forms [u] ḍi and oḍrea) to qualify the observation that the name in question ‘is consistently spelled Oḍi’ [Baums 2019, 168 and fn. 5]”.

On the fragment of cornice B,²⁷ where I believe the inscription CKI 185 begins (Kharoshthi is read from right to left), the inscription is translated by Baums as “in the ninety-third year”. Thus, with reference to the era of Azes, we are in either 46/47 or 35/36 CE. The central part of the inscription (i.e. of the cornice) is missing. This would be where the third fragment (a reused piece) would be placed, were it not for its poor execution.

Partial confirmation of this chronology is offered by two other fragmentary inscriptions (CKI 70-71), one being a poorly preserved cornice, both from shrine L. Both are close to the preceding inscriptions – from which we have a probable dating – in terms of material and style – and both refer to the wife of a personage we find in contemporaneous contexts a little closer to us. The donor of both, whose incomplete name (...*mitra*) recurs twice, is the wife of a certain Indraseṇa. The name Indraseṇa, although not exclusive to this period or indeed to this region, also appears in one of the most important donor inscriptions of the Avaca (CKI 257) as son of a high-ranking Śātruleka official who donated relics in 30/31 CE or 40/41 CE (again, on the basis of the era of Azes). This may be the same person, as might be proved by the dating of the cornices, which can be placed fifteen years later, when this Indraseṇa was married and his wife made personal donations.²⁸

So where does this digression take us? If the Dharmarajika inscriptions considered here were contemporaneous with or even a little later than the pieces, they would date back to the first half of the first century. Having ascertained that the two Dharmarajika cornices are coeval given their stylistic affinities with the cornices of monuments 14 and 17 at Butkara I, the dating of the inscriptions could also apply to the Butkara I cornices. Production of these materials should any case be placed within the first half of the first century. Saidu came shortly after, just enough time (one generation later, as Faccenna says, perhaps less) for both the artists and indeed the clients to become familiar with a totally innovative language.

If we were to conjecture an absolute chronology, the Saidu Stupa could date to around the period of the intervention supported by Seṇavarma on the Ekaūḍa stupa (in 60≈70 CE).²⁹ Thus, I believe, the Saidu could be dated slightly later than hitherto supposed: it should in fact have been built shortly after 50 CE (if we accept the equivalence between the eras of Azes and Vikrama = 58/57 BCE), or in the following decade (if we take the era of Azes as 47/46 BCE). I incline towards the former hypothesis. In any case, we are in the golden age of Seṇavarma, when the Oḍi had yet to yield power over Swat to the Kushans.

²⁷ Inscription CKI 185: *sambatsa[ra]ye treṇa///(*vadimaye...)* (Baums, Glass 2000-, <https://gandhari.org/catalog?itemID=159>).

²⁸ The fact that an inscription of members of the Avaca family cites the Oḍi is hardly surprising: in the first century it was not infrequent, to the extent that it is believed that there may have been matrimonial alliances between the two families (Salomon 1999, 153 fn. 27; Callieri 2004).

²⁹ Which makes it all the more likely that it is not that of Butkara I, given that the major restorations of phase GST 3 had been carried out there previously.

2.4 The Stupa and Its Decoration

The sculpture materials and the visible parts of the Stupa are in two types of schist, respectively serpentinite (green chlorite schist) and whitish talc schist. For definition of the materials I take reference from the specialist contributions appearing in the excavation reports (bibliography in Giuliano 2015, 25 fn. 8).

The Stupa rests on a square podium measuring about 20 m per side,³⁰ standing at a height of 3.32 m, with a stairway giving access on the north side. The facing of the masonry, subsequently plastered, was in small *opus isodomum* talc schist blocks. The stairway leads to the paved upper level of the podium, each corner of which is marked by a tall column in talc schist surmounted by a seated lion facing towards the centre of the Stupa. The stairway and podium show a stone railing made up of posts and cross-bars in talc schist. The Stupa is built on the podium and has a circular plan, consisting of three cylindrical bodies (drums)³¹ and a solid dome (*aṇḍa*) surmounted by a series of umbrellas or *chattras*. The total height is estimated at 14 m. The first storey of the Stupa (15.87 m in diameter) is broader than the others (13.48 m in diameter); at 2.2 m above the level of the podium there is a path for ritual circumambulation or *pradakṣiṇāpatha*; 2.30 m in width, reached by a second stairway aligned with the principal one.

Around the second drum next to the *pradakṣiṇāpatha* was the Frieze and the accessory register decorated with a false railing (or false-*vedikā*) both in green chloritoschist [pls VIII-XI, fig. 82].

The Frieze is made up of a series of figurative scenes separated by semi-columns of the Gandharan-Corinthian order. It runs along the drum of the second storey of the Stupa with scenes arranged in a narrative sequence running clockwise. The sequence recounts the episodes in the life of Prince Siddhārtha, from conception to awakening as Buddha, and then on to the preaching, his *parinirvāṇa*, the distribution of relics and the return of Utaresaṇa to Swat. The Frieze was accompanied by an accessory register of the same height depicting a false railing. In the reconstruction proposed in this study the Frieze was set above the railing (I will explain why later on).

The Frieze was interrupted by a large central panel framed by two Gandharan-Corinthian pilasters of about 1 m in height (Faccenna 1995a, 542-3, fig. 263). These two pilasters and the two pillars with square registers constitute further evidence of a probable break in the registers of the second storey of the Stupa which, in the light of the new material, we conjecture as having been a large central figured false niche with three antas: a central panel and two side panels.

Both Frieze and false railing were topped by cornices of rows of acanthus leaves, the latter showing slight differences which we will return to later on. Above the decorated cornice of the Frieze ran a projecting cornice in plastered masonry created with same technique as the cornice of the podium: a framework of small projecting and recessed slabs coated with slaked lime and modelled with a template to create the moulding. The latter was reconstructed by Faccenna (2001, fig. 4) as consisting of fillet, cavetto, ovolo, straight reverse ovolo with dripstone and covering slab.

³⁰ The lengths of the four sides range from 20.84 to 19.92 m. See Faccenna 1995a, 433.

³¹ Faccenna uses the term third body (storey) or second circular body (storey) (2001, 19).

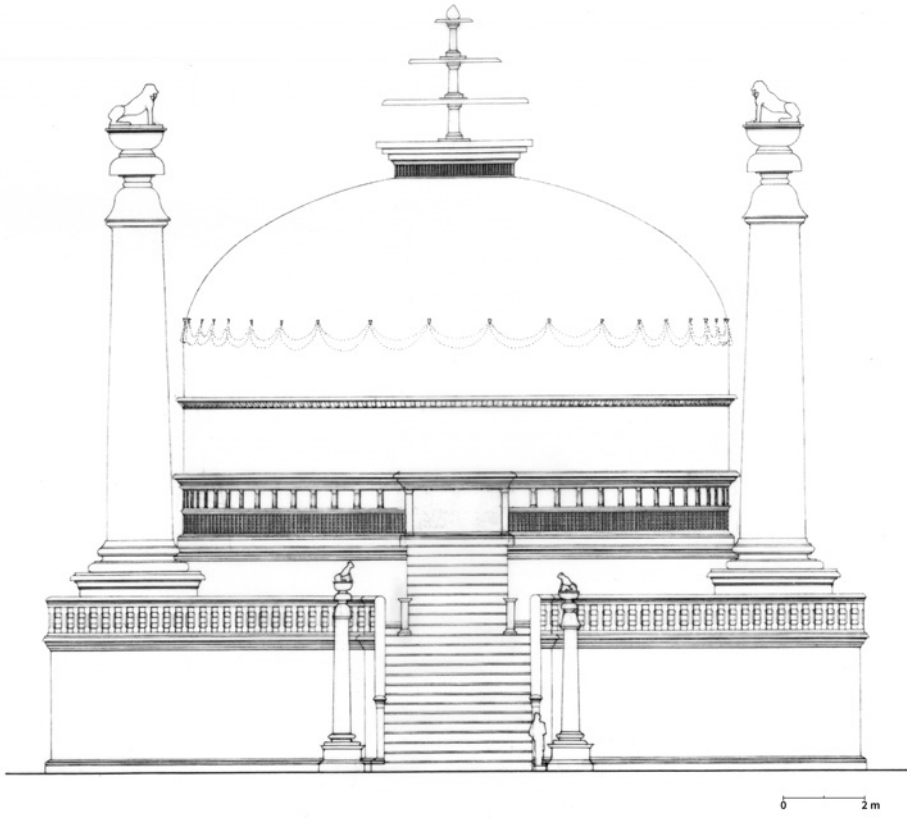


Plate IX Saidu Sharif I, main stupa, front view (N) restitution (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)

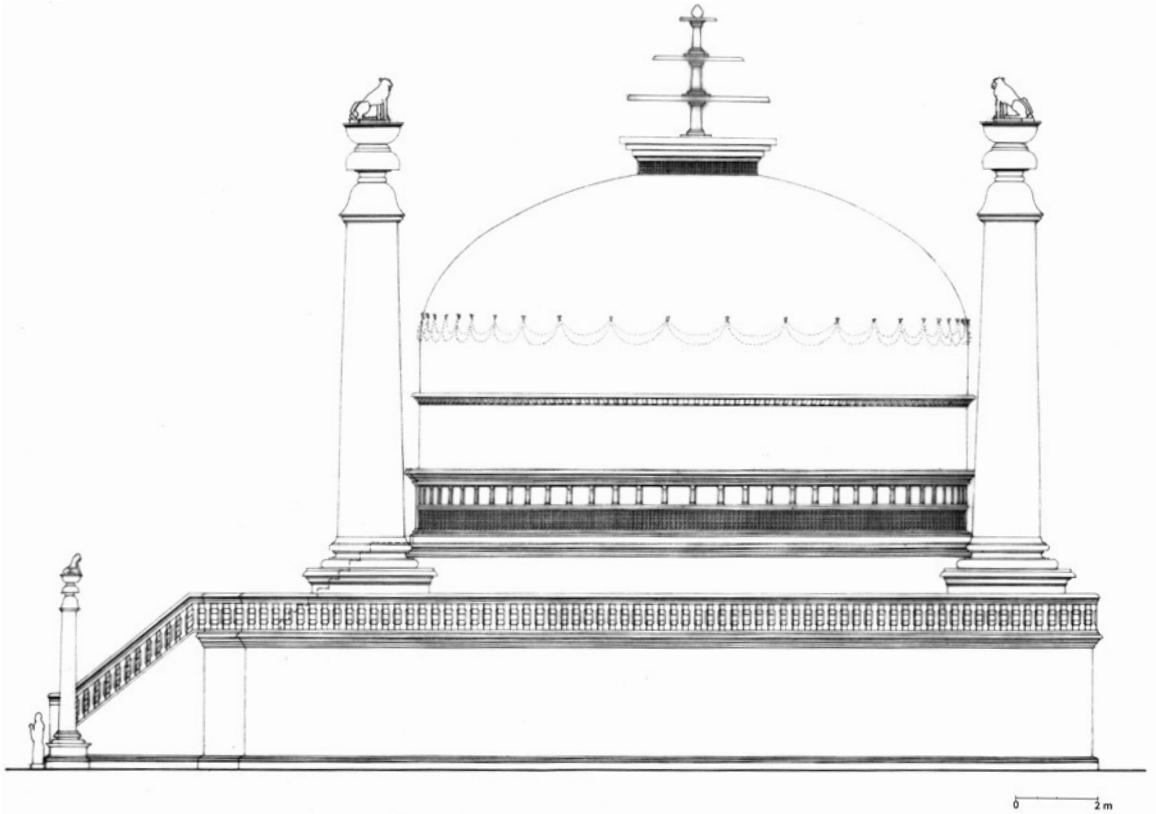


Plate X Saidu Sharif I, main stupa, side view (W) restitution (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)

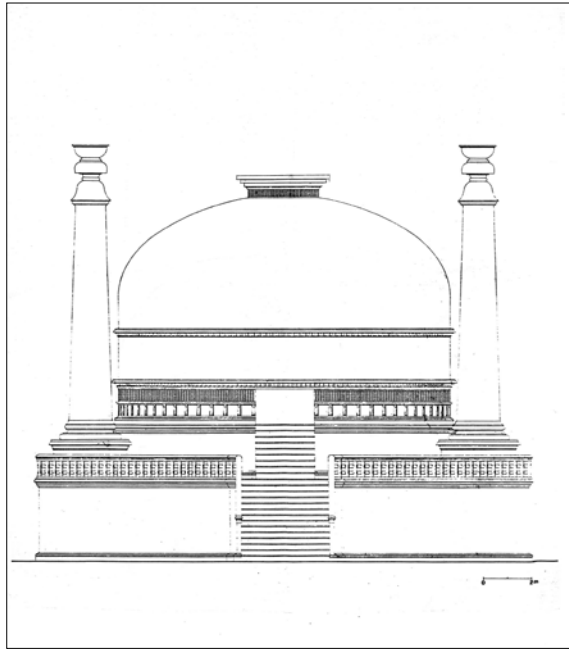


Figure 12
 A sketch of the front view of Saidu Sharif. 1992 (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)

Here we conjecture that the Frieze and the false railing were interrupted at the front, where the stairway was situated, by a large composite central panel or a false niche. It must be said that the term is purely conventional and refers to an architectural element typical in Gandharan stupas on a podium with a central staircase (Faccenna, Filigenzi 2007, pl. 20; Kuwayama 2019). The term ‘niche’ (or ‘false niche’) suggests the idea of an albeit minimal recess, while at Saidu at least (but also at Amluk-dara) the ‘niche’ is projecting from the frieze line.³² So in Saidu by ‘false niche’ we mean a ‘major central panel’. The reader should bear this clarification in mind. The existence of a central false niche was not ruled out by Faccenna (1995a, 543; 2001, 46, fn. 11) and today, in the light of the new fragments yielded by the excavation, it has practically become a certainty.

That Faccenna seriously considered the matter, far more than was left in writing, is demonstrated by a drawing, reproduced here, dating from the early 1990s, in which the hypothesis, as an empty space, was made clear in a reconstructive sketch [fig. 12].³³ As the reader will see, the general dimensions of the central empty panel are the same as in our reconstruction, which is now based on the discovery of new sculptural fragments too large to fit into the Frieze. Today we are therefore in a position to fill that empty space.

The false railing was a continuous openwork decoration made up of small pillars and cross-bars, again in chlorite schist, set against the wall of the Stupa to represent a railing like the real one (*vedikā*) shown on the podium

32 A real niche in recess is found in Tokar-dara (see Faccenna, Spagnesi 2014).

33 The drawing had already been published without comment as fig. 41 in Callieri, Filigenzi 2002.



Figure 13 SS1 182 (MAIP; photo by Antonio Amato)

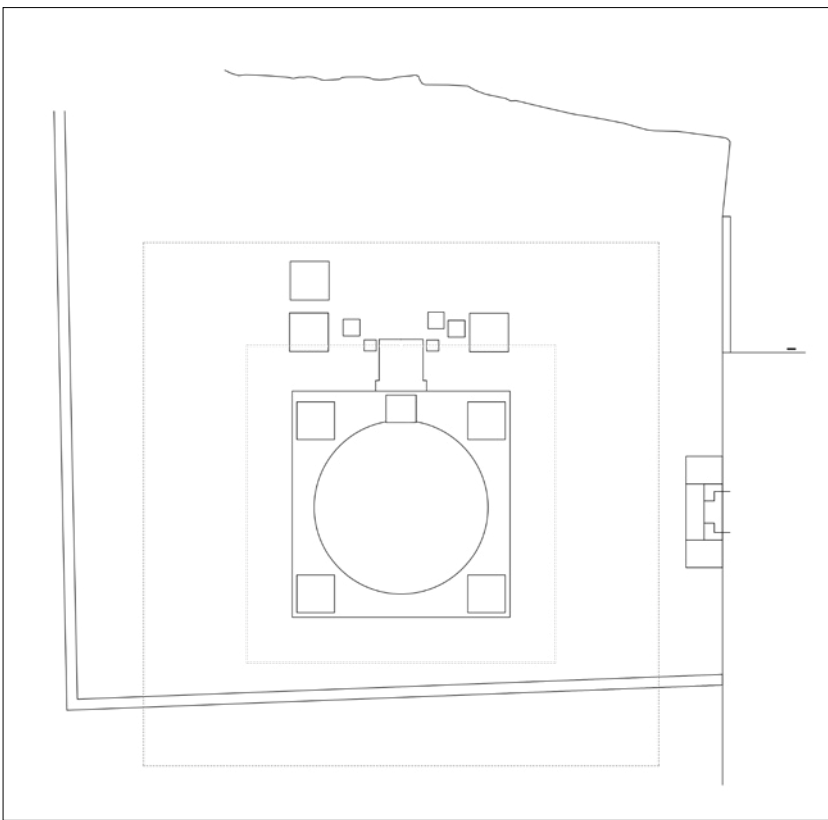


Figure 14 Saidu Sharifi, sight lines (plan) (drawings by Ian Haynes and Iwan Peverett)

and on the first stairway. The false railing consists of plain small pillars, 45 cm high, and (four) cross-bars, and may well have had at the beginning and end two posts (decorated with open lotus) set against the sides of the central false niche. With the central false niche, the pillars (about 6 per panel) would not be 396 (Faccenna 2001, 296) but 369, thus excluding the two lotus flower posts. The two pillars represent important evidence to justify the existence of a central false niche. These are in green chlorite schist and decorated with square registers of eight-petalled lotus flowers, with saw-teeth-decorated vertical fillet, 46 cm high S 1092 and SS I 182 (previously A 41; Faccenna 1995a, 545, figs 265-6) [fig. 13]. Note that, having sockets on one side only, these posts must have stood at the beginning and end of a sequence of parts: considering the dimensions, almost certainly belonging to the false railing.

Above the false railing ran the Frieze (which includes the acanthus leaf cornice) topped by the closing moulding of the second circular storey, described above.

Excluding the false niche, the Frieze appears to be made up - as I calculate - of about 60 (65 according to Faccenna but including the space of the false niche) panels in chlorite schist, reconstructed as being about 45 cm in height (excluding bases and cornices) and about 65 cm in length, including the Gandharan-Corinthian semi-columns.

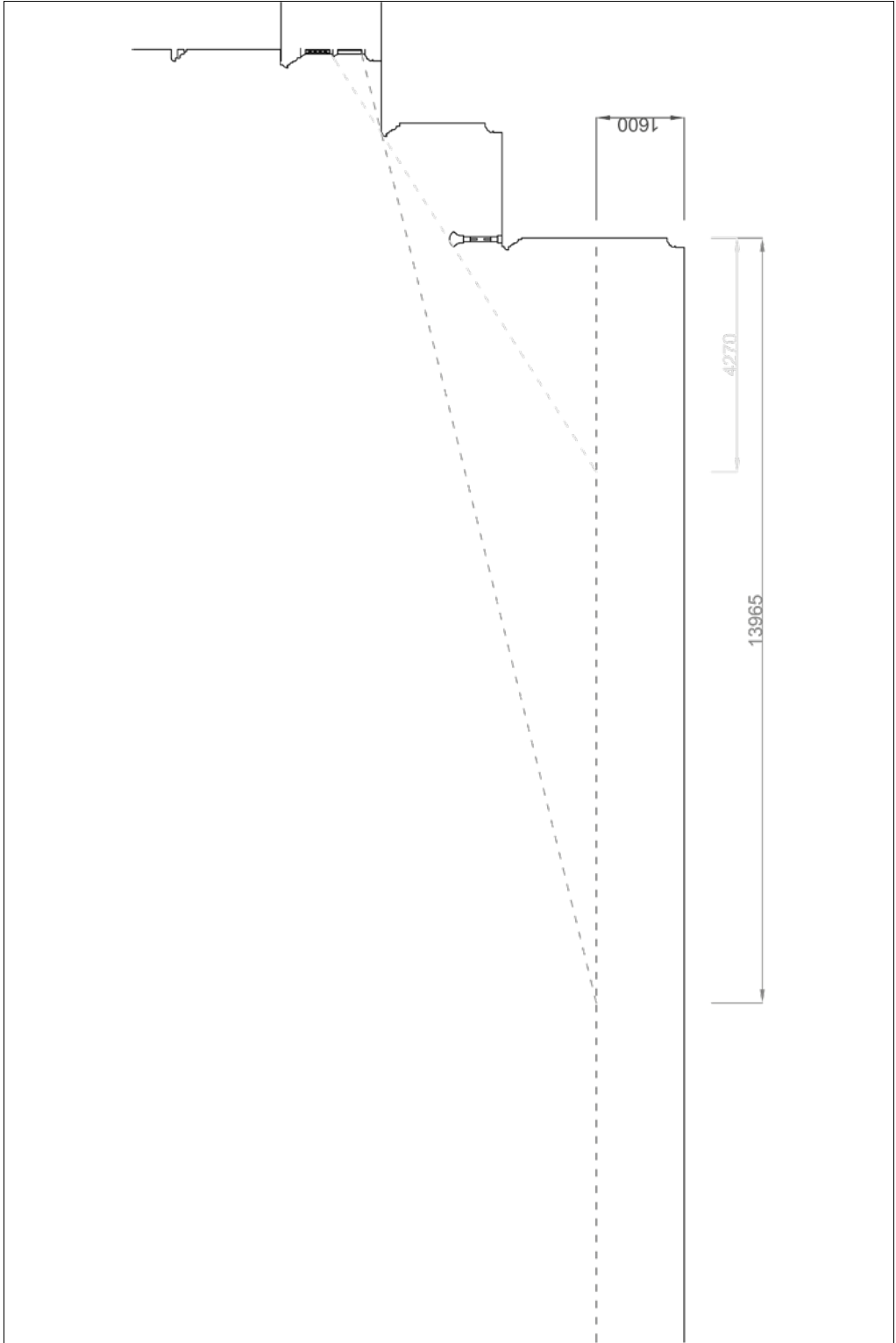


Figure 15 Saidu Sharif I, sight lines (side) (drawings by Ian Haynes and Iwan Peverett)

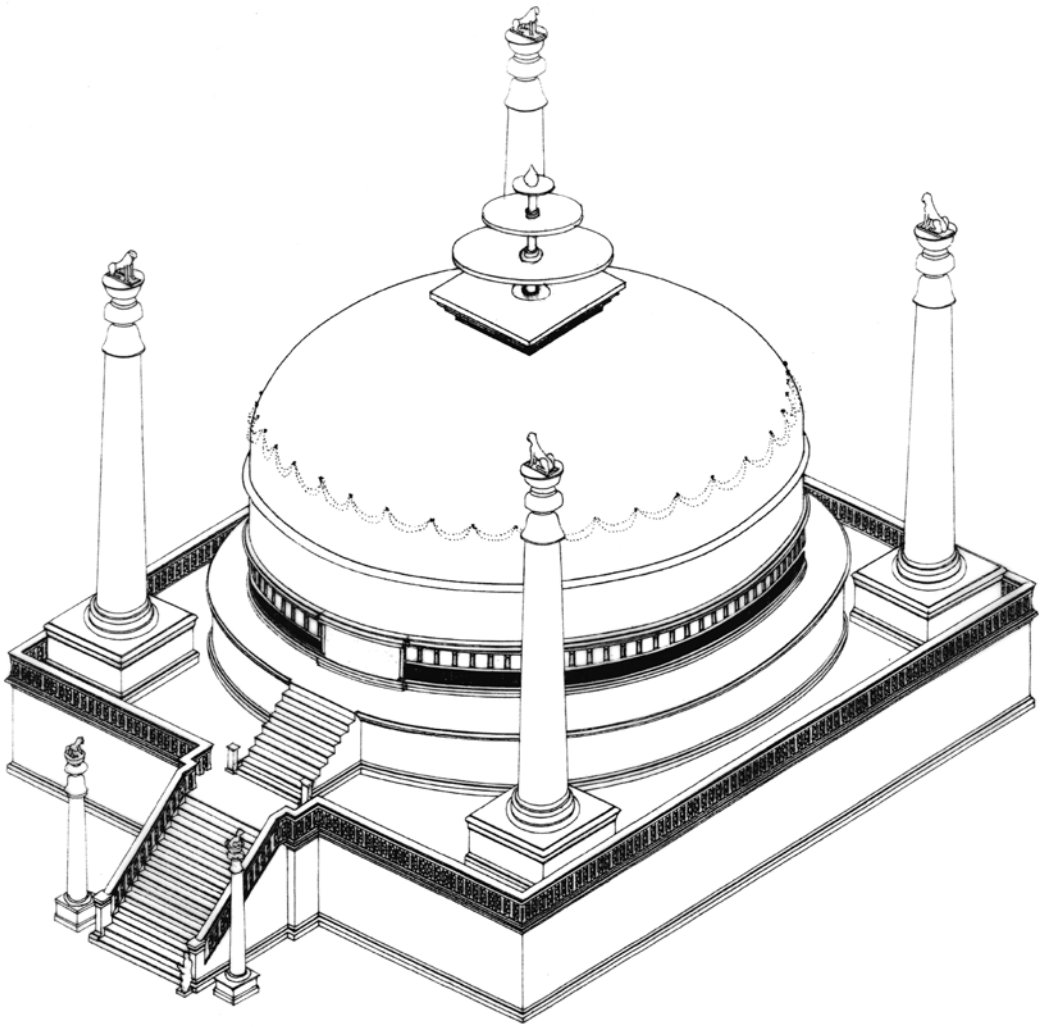


Plate XI Saidu Sharif I, main stupa, isometric view (NW) (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)

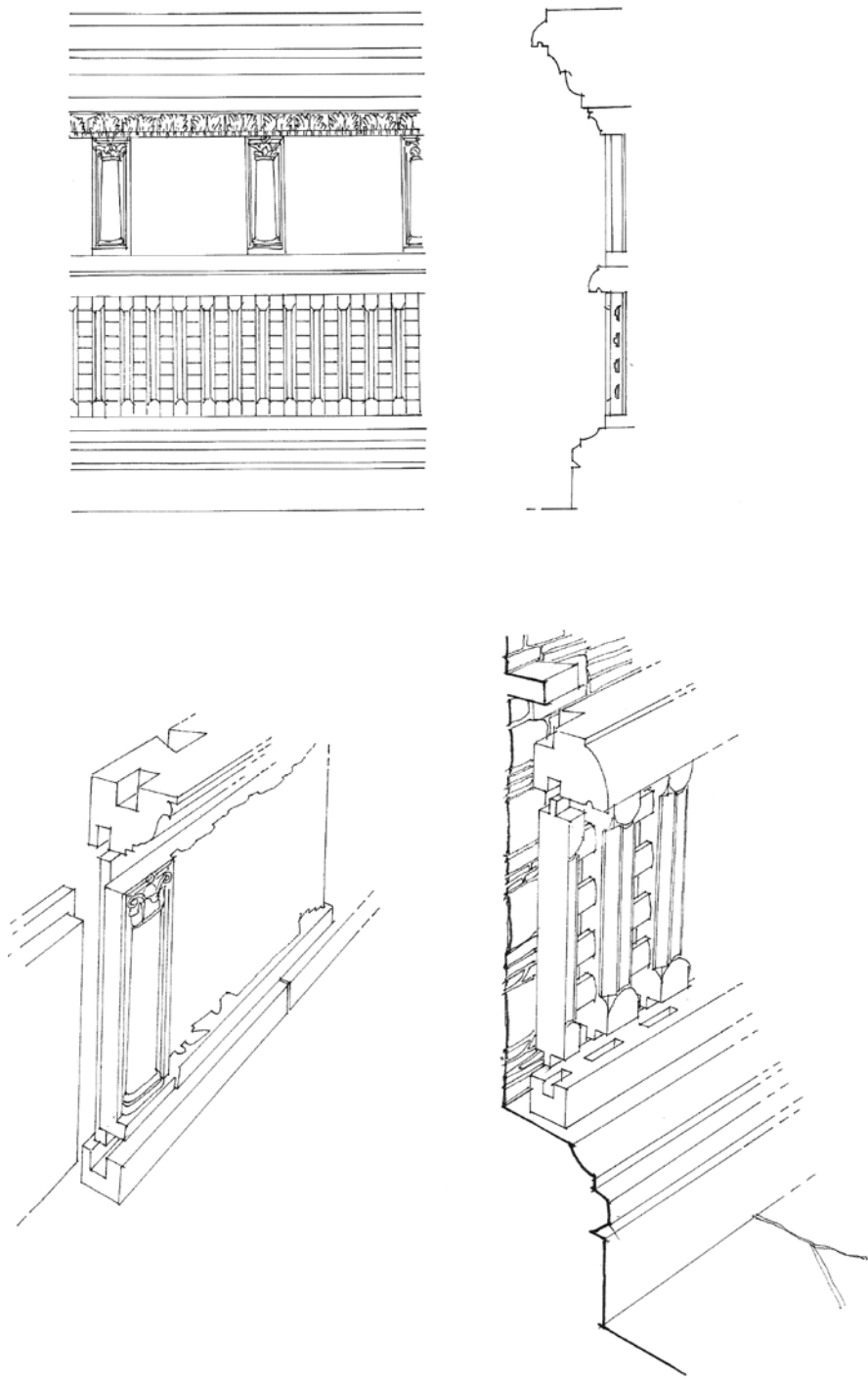


Plate XII Saidu Sharif I, Frieze and false railing, assemblage of registers (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)

As we have seen, the Frieze was most probably on the second storey, and thus visible from the level of the ambulatory path (*pradakṣiṇāpatha*). In the reconstruction proposed by Faccenna based on comparison with miniature stupas and minor stupa friezes with double register (Faccenna 2001, plate 152), the Frieze was positioned below, at the level of the legs of the worshipper, while the register with the false railing ran above. In our reconstruction here, however, the Frieze was situated above, at eye level, while the false railing came below [pt. XII].

If the Frieze were situated in the lower part of the second storey, it would have been visible from outside the Stupa, as far as 10 m away, from which point onwards the Frieze would have disappeared behind the railing situated on the podium, to then gradually reappear on ascending the stairway. Only the panel situated at the centre of the opening of the two stairways would have remained visible from below the Stupa.

In the second reconstruction, which I propose here, the Frieze situated on the upper part of the second storey must certainly have remained perfectly visible from the terrace pavement level up to a distance of 4 m from the podium. This is the natural distance of approach created by the projection of the stairway. Thus, in this second reconstruction the Frieze could not only be seen by the worshipper on the ambulatory passageway but was also visible at all times from the pavement terrace of the sacred area. And indeed, in this reconstruction, therefore, the Frieze was not only closely bound up with the life of the monument but also had a public function [figs 14-15].³⁴

³⁴ An interesting comparison can be found at Kanganahalli, where the lower panels of the stupa's drum present a false railing, while the narrative panels are at a height closer to the eyes of the worshipper. This is - as we shall see - the most precise comparison with my reconstruction, which sees the Frieze placed above the false railing.

3 The Work

Summary 3.1 Art as Technique. – 3.2 Technique as Art. – 3.3 Mason Marks and Metrology. – 3.4 The Master. – 3.5 Sockets, Tenons, Cramps.

At this point in our study, I do not intend to enter into discussion of the complex art-historical aspects of the Frieze, a masterwork of the Buddhist art of Gandhara. For now I wish to draw attention to two anomalies of Gandharan art, the second produced by the first: one of content, the other of definition.¹

I will begin with the latter. There are arts, artistic creations and schools defined with a double name: Graeco-Hellenistic, Graeco-Roman, and so forth. These definitions are always somewhat vague – after all, does the hyphen combine or separate them? The former seems to delimit their chronology ('Greek art of the Hellenistic period'), while the latter could combine them ('the art of both the Greeks and the Romans'). If these common and generally accepted definitions fall short in precision, what are we to make of 'Graeco-Buddhist'² often attributed to the art of Gandhara? It neither delimits them ('the Greek art of the Buddhists' or 'the Buddhist art of the Greeks'), nor combines them, since the Greeks were not Buddhists with the possible exception of the famous Indo-Greek kings Menander or Demetrius (see Coloru forthcoming), and even they may not have been. Again, 'Indo-Greek' is not very meaningful, but at least in this case we have a series of dynasties with Greek names, writing in Greek and reigning in India, but we have no real knowledge of the religion they professed, independently of the political support given to one or the other. So what are we to make of

1 From this point on, I will often refer to G. Didi-Huberman's work, in particular *La ressemblance par contact* of 2008, which I read in the Italian version (2009). I would like to draw the reader's attention to the final chapter of this work, an involuntary echo of which can be found in Franco Guerzoni's quotation in the epigraph to this volume.

2 Maybe starting with Gottlieb Wilhelm Leitner (1894). The binome 'Romano-Buddhist' is less used nowadays (see Falser 2015, 39).

the term ‘Graeco-Buddhist’? Nothing remotely precise, in reality, and the term ought to be abandoned as misleading. So much had already been made clear by Maurizio Taddei (1993) and Anna Filigenzi (2012), but the label remains stubbornly stuck on the bottle (see also Mitter 1992; Abe 1995). The label resulted from the need to make a ‘manifesto’ of a certain phenomenon which may actually have arisen from a practice.³

3.1 Art as Technique

The archaeological school of Italian classicists, which was after all the context in which both Faccenna and Taddei had studied, had already grasped this practice *in nuce* well before Daniel Schlumberger theorised the developments of Greek art to the east of the Mediterranean as far as Gandhara (Schlumberger 1960). Here I wish to recall Alessandro Della Seta, the unforgotten director of the Italian Archaeological School at Athens until the racial laws, “the greatest shame of our country” were promulgated in 1938.⁴ When Taddei presented his brilliant solution to the apparent semantic anomaly of the art of Gandhara, which I will return to later on, he recalled Della Seta, and in particular his early work *Dello scorcio nell’arte greca* (Della Seta 1906-7). Della Seta wrote:

Non adunque l’opera di artisti isolati, di ‘Graeculi’ vaganti per il mondo antico, può essere l’arte del Gandhâra: essa è l’ultima propaggine di quella scuola greco-orientale che aveva già introdotto i suoi mezzi rappresentativi nella Persia, e che avendo dovuto già forse, nell’allontanarsi dal puro centro classico, fare il primo tirocinio per l’applicazione della sua forma a nuovi contenuti, onde appagare i gusti e le esigenze di nuovi popoli, doveva sentirsi sufficientemente capace, passando in paese buddistico, di dar vita all’iconografia di una nuova religione. (Della Seta 1906-07, 133; cited in Taddei 2002, 270)⁵

3 Among the many things that have been said is the use of Western forms in Gandharan art as instruments of political propaganda at the Gandharan frontier and internal social pacification during the Kushana period (Aldrovandi, Hirata 2004). In my opinion, this work is based on a weak statistical methodology and a partially erroneous chronology.

4 “[L]a più gran vergogna della patria nostra”: so Maurizio Taddei (2002, 271) put it, and so I concur.

5 En. transl.: “Thus the art of Gandhâra cannot be the work of isolated artists, of ‘Graeculi’ wandering over the ancient world; it is the last offshoot of the Graeco-Oriental school that had already introduced its means of representation in Persia, and perhaps in distancing itself from the pure classical centre, had already had begun a new apprenticeship, to apply its form to new contents in order to satisfy the tastes and requirements of new populations, evidently feeling sufficiently capable, on entering Buddhist territory, to create the iconography of a new religion” (if not otherwise stated, all translations are by Graham Sells). On Della Seta a fine article has recently appeared by Marco Galli (2018). Galli underlined another important passage from Della Seta 1906-7: “Ed io ritengo che molte delle caratteristiche dell’arte buddistica [...] si spiegheranno solo allorquando si sarà considerata l’arte buddistica non come un prodotto spontaneo della religione ma come il risultato di una cristallizzazione iconografica a cui la religione stata costretta dal contatto col popolo greco” (Della Seta 1906-07, 136; Galli 2018, 227). Here the term ‘popolo greco’ should be replaced by the term ‘scuola greco-orientale’ (En. transl.: “I believe that many of the characteristics of Buddhist art [...] will only be explained when Buddhist art is considered not as a spontaneous product of religion but as the result of an iconographic crystallisation forced by contact with the Greek people”).

Alessandro Della Seta's work did not escape the attention of Alfred Foucher – the first to theorise Graeco-Buddhist art – for the latter cited it approvingly in various contexts (Foucher 1905-51, 750, 778). Apart from Foucher and Taddei, however, hardly anyone found a place for Della Seta in the history of the debate on precisely what is or is not the art of Gandhara.⁶ However, the point I wish to stress here is that Della Seta, with his “begun a new apprenticeship, to apply its form to new contents” brings into the matter two fundamental elements that are often forgotten, namely ‘technique’ and ‘school’. In sculpture, a ‘technical art’ *par excellence*, ‘art’ and ‘technique’, like ‘technique’ and ‘school’ cannot be separated, as both the great theoreticians like Rudolf Wittkower and the writings of great masters, most recently Arturo Martini remind us.⁷ Of course, ‘technique’ and ‘school’ are closely bound up with the human component, for there is no transmission over distance in the artistic tradition. Everything is mediated by the human component, from master to pupil, and from pupil to pupil over time and space. When the distance from the origin of the movement is truly great, what makes the ‘school’ lasting is the ‘technical’ component, which is a matter of technical manipulation made possible by particular tools and models that are handed down. This, I believe, is the background that gave rise to the sudden artistic revolution from which what is known as the art of Gandhara sprang in the period of the allied principalities of the Saka in the first half of the first century CE.

3.2 Technique as Art

In this respect, it would be hard to find anything better than the Saidu Frieze to study the art that evolved so suddenly and reached maturity so rapidly, at least to judge by the swift transition from the first forms to those of the mature ‘drawing’ style represented in the masterpiece that the Frieze surely is. Such rapid maturing cannot be conceived of without the contribution of profoundly Hellenised regional ‘schools’ acquainted with the use of techniques – geometrical perspective, in the first place, with its conventions and formal illusions –, have repertoires of models available, and have no problems in handling the new tools of the trade, beginning with the drill. The schools soon took root in Gandhara, evidently benefiting from the contribution of the Indian tradition both in sculpture (from Mathura above all) and in construction. The sculptural tradition that developed among the carpenters and the ivory carvers (we find epigraphic evidence at Sanchi 1) gave sculptural space a role it had not previously had at this level. The building tradition, again with its origins in carpentry, gave rise to the art of mortise and tenon, dispensing with metal joints which would find little or no use in the earliest forms of Gandharan art.

The Frieze, then, is also ideally open to study in order to solve the apparent semiotic anomaly of the art of Gandhara. On this particular point, we can find help both in the school of Domenico Faccenna⁸ and in the writings of Maurizio Taddei, beginning with two articles published in the early

⁶ On Della Seta a fine article has recently appeared by Marco Galli (2018).

⁷ Reference here is very broadly to Wittkower 1985 (Italian edition) and specifically the writings added to the posthumous edition of *Scultura lingua morta e altri scritti* (Martini 1983).

⁸ Here in the broad sense as school of excavation, documentation and study.

1960s (1963; 1964-65) to arrive at the Rome lecture (1993) and the Kansas City lecture, published posthumously (2006).

In his masterly work on the figured Frieze of Saidu (2001), Domenico Faccenna recognised behind all the fragments from Saidu attributable in terms of style, dimensions and material to the Frieze of the Stupa, the hand of one master, a foreman or head of an atelier, called the 'Master of Saidu'. He is recognised as an artisan/sculptor, master of a major atelier at work around the middle of the first century CE. The circular part of the Stupa where the Frieze was most probably situated (the second circular storey) has a diameter of 13.48 m. Thus the Frieze (including a possible central panel) followed a line of about 42.44 m for nearly 1 m in height (including accessory register of the false railing). It is, then, a frieze of considerable length, equal to a fifth of the entire length of the frieze circling the Trajan's column, or in comparison with the Pergamon altar a third of the length of the principal frieze (120 m) and half that of the Telephus frieze (79 m). In terms of height, the panels of the Frieze are half the height of the lower panels of the Trajan Column.⁹ Thus, it is clearly one of the greatest friezes of antiquity. Also of striking proportions was the Stupa of Saidu: 20 m wide at the base and over 17 m in height, it was at the time the largest stupa of all in Swat, slightly larger than GST 3 at Butkara I. Moreover, the Stupa was unique in its kind, being – on the evidence of the available archaeological data – the first Buddhist stupa set on a square podium, marking a veritable revolution in architecture. We will discuss this later on. The dimensions, importance and novel aspects entail further implications. The sculptural work, clearly supervised by a single Master, nevertheless takes its place in the context of highly organised building projects on an ambitious scale: in other words, in an activity that only a major stoneyard or enterprise (or company) could have carried out (see Scherrer-Schaub 2009, 30). So much is to be seen, for example, in the consistency and uniformity in the treatment of the non-figurative parts of decoration, but also in the intermediate phases of the -figurative parts. The system of design, preparation, working and treatment of the surfaces is constantly repeated. It is, in fact, clear that the individual parts had been prepared in terms of dimensions, including thickness, before being sculpted, as evidenced by two elements. The first concerns the total thickness of the panels, which never exceeds 6 cm, i.e. the thickness of the back slabs of the panels is indeed minimal in relation to the protection of the figures (on average 1.5 cm, in one case 0.6 cm).¹⁰ Moreover, the treatment of the back of the panels is characterised by regular chiselling with a flat-headed tool, always 2 cm wide, and finishing with a 1 cm chisel.¹¹ In general in the later Gandharan reliefs of Swat, the rough-hewing was (also due to the smaller dimensions) carried out with chisels ranging from a maximum width of 1 cm, but above all – and this is the point – the direction of the chiselling does not follow any particular scheme; it is very dense and less orderly, also because, tending not to produce thin slabs, the craftsman made do with relatively rough treatment of the back parts. Thus the treatment we find at Saidu is characteristic of the school of the Master, and even lends support to the hypothesis of panels of green schist from other sites produced by the same atelier.

9 And almost a third of its upper panels.

10 Panel S 1128 (Faccenna 2001, 37, fig. 72).

11 On measurements in relation to the Gandharan foot (Gft) see below § 3.3.

The second point concerns the sequence of long sockets, (as long or as high as panel slabs), horizontal and vertical, well explained by Faccenna (2001, 36-8), and the sequence of short rectangular sockets (mortises) and tenons. In the Frieze these parts never stand out or recede from the decoration of the figured surface. Naturally, we find corrections and adjustments, but never changes in conception. The connections between panels, and between the panels and the bases and cornices are achieved with vertical and horizontal, upper and lower mortises and tenons. These are always carved out of or formed from the back half of the thickness, starting from the middle, marked by incised lines to show the exact positions in which they were required.

There were no iron cramps. The dovetail mortises observed mostly in the cornices show that wooden (or stone) cramps were used. The - rare - occurrence of square holes drilled at the centre of the sides of panels or on the semi-columns indicates the occasional use of wrought iron nails,¹² serving to secure where necessary the vertical position of panels otherwise connected together with a system of domino-type slotting in. The system was not completely stable, although for each panel there were three base elements and three cornice elements projecting to right and left to connect with the adjacent panels. There was also another case that rendered the use of nails here and there indispensable, with panels not directly set against the wall face but slightly detached (by about 1.2 cm) due to the back projection of the horizontal cramps, but also to the impossibility of fitting rectangular panels to the curve of the drum.¹³

3.3 Mason Marks and Metrology

The Frieze system is based on a succession of fixed modules, namely long panels with dividing semi-columns (which have survived), isolated semi-columns (some of which have survived),¹⁴ and short panels without semi-columns (which we conjecture on the evidence of the previous elements).¹⁵ It is therefore possible that the stoneworkers began by carving the semi-columns (in this case different hands have been identified; Faccenna 2001, 131) so as to create the framing for the craftsman who would be working on the figurative elements. Once designed or prepared, the panels were given numbers, marked on the lower part of the front with Kharoshthi letters (*akṣara*). In the case of double marking, it has been noted that the central one indicates the position of the panel while the one to the left indicates the next: on the evidence of the examples of double marking we have been able to infer that

12 Notes that the sculptors at Saidu had the use of two types of drill, hand drill and bench drill (Brancaccio, Olivieri 2019, 139 fn. 19).

13 The idea of empty spaces between the panels and the masonry is not, however, very convincing. There is the possibility that the bases were inserted into the masonry so as to make the panels adhere as closely as possible to the back of the Stupa. Some of the panels show thick patches of lime on the back, which could be better explained if the panel was in tangential contact with the masonry. This would imply that installation was performed as the superstructure rose, which is the thesis I put forward in this volume.

14 See fragments SS I 26, SS I 127, SS I 171 (= A344 and SS I 229 [fig. 87]).

15 Actually, there is a potential panel without semi-columns. Panel S 592 (maximum width 46 cm), representing "The Meeting with the Sick Man", was studied by A. Santoro (2008, fig. 9). Antonio Amato is studying the possible congruence of the panel in the Frieze.

the internal sequence reflects the Kharoshthi alphabet, called *arapacana* from the first five letters (Salomon 2006, 199). A different, expanded system (with vowel-consonant combination) was adopted to number the 369 posts of the false railing (207). The marking system has at least three significant implications. The first concerns the need for communication amongst various work groups in different parts. If the marks had been applied on finishing off the pieces, the instruction would have had to do with the workshop and stoneyard. If the pieces were marked before, the sculptors must have had cartoons on which the scenes were drawn with corresponding marks. The second point is that the marks, *akṣara* with phonetic or numerical value, implied exchange of information at a distance between individuals with a fair degree of literacy. Thirdly, in the sequence of operations the person planning the scenes had also planned their installation. In other words, the master of the sculpture atelier was also the architect, and the two groups of craftsmen who had to interpret the marks were both under his supervision.

I would like conclude with two further considerations. The first is that the use of mason marks or location marks is not popular in India. The second is that while Kharoshti, a North-West script, is used in India to mark structural components, Brahmi, which is much more widespread in India is hardly ever used. These two aspects would suggest that the marking technique was mainly used by the North-Western craftsmen. The opinion of Richard Salomon on that is particularly relevant. Apart from a few Brahmi evidence (Bharhut and Bodhgaya)¹⁶ he is “not aware of any other instance of letters in Brāhmi or Brāhmi-derived scripts being used as location markers on ancient monuments [in South Asia]” (Salomon 2006, 217; see also Salomon 2011).

Perhaps therefore the extensive use of mason marks at Saidu should be placed among the earliest evidence of this system of communication between craftsmen, if not the first large-scale evidence that has come down to us from ancient India. Salomon himself, who certainly has the widest possible knowledge of Indian epigraphic data, has to compare the systems used in Gandhara (e.g. at Panr I in Swat) with the systems used in the Hellenistic world, particularly in Asia Minor. Salomon himself (Salomon 2006, *passim*) finds himself compelled to find exemplary comparisons for what seems more “a local variation of a common Hellenistic technique” than a simple “independent development”, in the monuments of Aphrodisias (frieze in honour of C. Julius Zoilos, first century BCE), Pergamon (Ionic temple: second century BCE), Miletus (*Rundmonument* of Eumenes II, second century BCE). This is an aspect that deserves – following Salomon’s suggestion – to be further explored.

Another important point, which evidences how the sequence of operations for the Frieze fitted in with the broader sequence of construction of the Stupa, lies in the consistency of the measurements, which are multiples or sub-multiples of a constant value calculated as 32.4 cm, which has been given the name of ‘Gandharan foot’ (Ioppolo 1995).¹⁷ This differs from the Attic foot observed in the measurements of the fortifications of the Indo-Greek age (thus two centuries earlier) at Barikot (Antonetti 2020 with earlier ref-

¹⁶ Kharoshthi marks were used on the east gate of the railing of the great stupa at Bharhut (Cunningham 1879, 8, pl. VIII).

¹⁷ The hypothesised Gandharan foot, first proposed by Giovanni Ioppolo in Faccenna 1995a, has not found much consensus. It is hard to see why, for the hypothesis is logical, well-grounded and, at least at Saidu, well-attested.

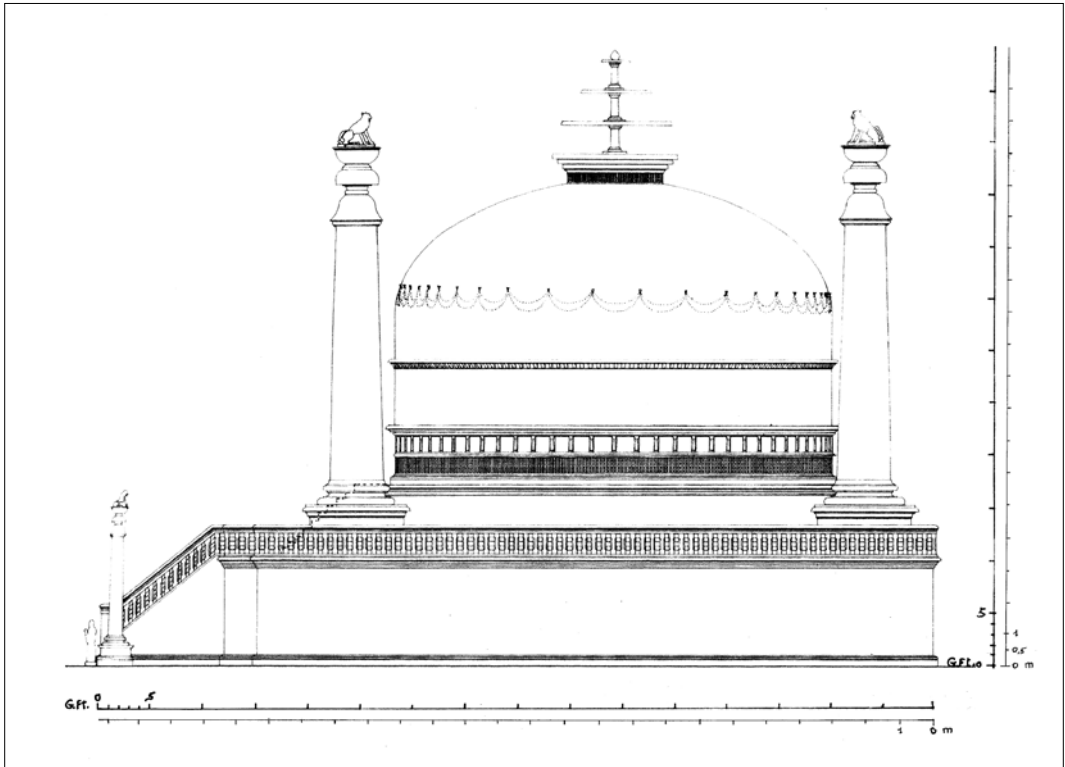


Figure 16 Saidu Sharif I, conversion scheme metres/Gft (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)

erences), and from every other measurement known to us in ancient India. It was therefore (pending demonstration) a unit of measurement that belonged to the technical heritage of the architect and designer of Saidu, who I believe to have been also the principal artist of the complex [fig. 16].

Approaching measurement of the Frieze in these terms (considering only the measurements known to us), we find that the complete panel (with sockets) comes to 1.5 Gandharan feet [45 cm] in height, without sockets 1.3 Gandharan feet, and might have reached two Gandharan feet [65 cm] in length.¹⁸ The capital of the semi-column (measuring just under 0.5 Gandharan feet [14 cm]) represents the minimum unit of measurement applied. Finally, although we are still in the early stages of our study, submultiples of the Gandharan foot (hereafter abbreviated as Gft) also appear to be used in the graduation of measures (or incremental scales) of the stoneworker's toolkit at Saidu (Vidale al. 2015, 42).¹⁹

Our reconstruction of the sequence may not be perfectly exact, but the archaeological evidence shows unequivocally that the sculpted parts were

¹⁸ The measurements in cm given here are approximate. For the measurements of the panels with semi-columns, see Faccenna 2001, 35-6.

¹⁹ The sculptors' work entailed the use of chisels with 1 cm flat heads to prepare the blocks or slabs, chisels with flat and round heads (from 0.4 to 0.24 cm) for the finer work, pointed chisels, bench and bow drills and mechanical or powder abrasives.

designed to be assembled together, and on the monument. This confirms the detailed analysis by Piero Spagnesi (“Notazioni architettoniche”; Spagnesi 2001) which opened the way for corroborated reconstruction of the sculptor’s design models and the compositional patterns.

The final implication of that analysis is that the Master of the Frieze was probably also the architect who designed the Stupa. On the evidence of data subsequently collected, it has been possible to detect close collaboration on the part of the commissioners (laymen and/or monks) in the design stage with the architects, of the architects with the sculptors and quarrymen (for the choice of materials), foremen (executive stage) and workers, all under the supervision of a single person who must have had a clear picture of the plan. Connection between the various stages of the Saidu Stupa is so close – the various parts measured on the monument – that we must perforce recognise the entire monument as the work of one and the same enterprise whose principal artist, possibly even the head, is to be seen precisely in the Master of Saidu identified by Domenico Faccenna.²⁰

3.4 The Master

To what extent was the Master involved in the Buddhist community that consecrated and managed the monument?²¹ We must keep in mind that the community of Saidu Monastery may have been one of the first in Swat, to live in such a structured monastery. The Master had a long professional career behind him, as we would put it today, and all the evidence suggests that Saidu was his major enterprise, if not his masterwork. It seems less probable that the Master already belonged to that or some other emerging monastic community. Needless to say, he may have become a Buddhist...

The Buddhist monastic texts (in particular the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*) mention figures like superintendents, architects and masons but, apart from the figure of the superintendent, the impression is that they tended to be extraneous to the monastic community (Schopen 2006). As for the terminology, in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* we find *navakarmika* for the superintendent, *sahāyaka* for the assistant, *sthapati* for the foreman, or possibly for the architect, *takṣaka* for the carpenter, *saṃlipta* for the plasterer, *citrakāra* for the painter, *iṣṭakakāra* for the brick maker, and *bhṛtaka* for the manual labourer (Schopen 2014). However, we find no specific terms for the sculptor and the stonemason. Reference to art is generally to pictorial art, although it may at times be to sculpted images (Schopen 1997, 232, 239).²²

20 “Ma una storia edilizia più precisa del fregio avrebbe bisogno di altri dati. Con i resti a disposizione tutto porta a credere a una lavorazione complessa e a più mani; e la figurazione unitaria, anche se variata, dell’insieme spinge a ipotizzare una mente unica di progettista” (En. transl.: “However, for a more precise history of the construction of the Frieze we would need further data. With the remains we have, all the evidence suggests a complex system of work involving a number of workers, while the consistency of the figured content of the whole, albeit varied, suggests a single figure behind the design”) (Spagnesi 2001, 65).

21 Archaeological data would suggest that the phenomenon of Buddhist monasticism, as we represent it in its ideal completeness, did not yet exist in mid-first century Swat, and perhaps – with those idealised characteristics – not even later.

22 Many of these are to be found in the mediaeval *Śilpaśāstra*. According to a possible reading of the donative inscription CKI 359, Aśoraḥṣida was a *masenavakammike*, or “intendant de mesure” (see on that Baums 2012, 218 fn. 40).

There is, however, a tradition of sculptor-monks: Xuanzang, and before him Faxian, reports the case of the miraculous gigantic sculpture of Maitreya in wood from Darel, which is actually attributed to Ānanda's disciple Madhyāntika, who is said to have brought Buddhism to Kashmir (see Willemen 2013). Otherwise, however, the information we have from Sanchi, Mathura, Kanaganahalli and Miran, would seem to refer more to autonomous professional figures. Let us also take a look at the content of a donative inscription of the Avaca dynasty (Apraca) dated 22≈32 CE (from Bajaur? CKI 359):

The superintendent of stūpa construction (*thuvanavakammike*) is called Śirila. (It) is his *samadravana* [alternative reading of *samadravana*: His (disciple) was in turn (*vana* = Sanskrit *punar*) Samadra]. His pupil is called Aśoraḥṣida. He is a superintendent of construction (*navakammike*). (Baums 2012, 218-19)

Here there is no mention of the community (which we find mentioned only in the later inscriptions), as if the figures mentioned were autonomous professionals.²³

While we are only able to guess what the relations were between sculptors and architects and the Buddhist community, the iconographic and textual sources of Indian mediaeval temple architecture are extremely precise and have been thoroughly studied. Here I will cite a case that might be particularly relevant to this study. An important essay by Kumud Kanitkar (2010) on the Saiva temple of Ambarnath in Maharashtra (1035-1060 CE) offers us some potentially useful details. Over and above the ritual elements associated with design and work, both inscriptions and the figurative visual elements clearly delineate three components and their caste: political (the King, funding and supporting the project: *kṣatriya*), the technical component (the architect and his team including the sculptors, responsible for execution: *vaiśya*), and the religious component (responsible for the pre- and post-execution rituals: *brāhmaṇa*). The figures of the architects (*sūtradhāra*) mentioned in the inscriptions are represented on the figurative friezes with the tools of their trade: the handbook of building rules and the measuring rod. Obviously, the example cited here cannot directly apply to the Buddhist world, where theoretically (but not necessarily in practice) it was in contraposition to the concept of the *varṇa*. What interests us in particular is that the professional role of the architect as a lay figure had its place in the Indian world. Of course, there was nothing to stop an architect from being a member of the community, above all when we consider the considerable competence arrived at by the Buddhist *saṃgha* in a wide range of fields: medicine, agronomy, hydraulics, engineering, administration, mathematics, astronomy, finance, and so forth. It would be fruitless to seek further information from a site geographically and chronologically closer to Saidu, from the Kushan dynastic sanctuary of Surkh Kotal in southern Bactria (first half of the second century CE). The name Palamède left at the bottom of the epigraph SK 2 might have been that of the archi-

²³ Pia Brancaccio reminded, though, me the case of the *navakarmika-bhāṇaka* of Bharhut, who was at the same time the construction superintendent (*navakarmika*) and the reciter/preacher (*bhāṇaka*) (Schopen 1997, 190).

tect of the sanctuary (as argued in Bernard 2001) or of the actual author of the epigraph (as argued in Sims-Williams 2012).²⁴

Apart from a few exceptions, our sculptors and craftsmen very rarely left their signatures. In India we find evidence of signatures a little later. I can recall four cases in particular. The closest evidence in spatial terms is from the great stupa of Zar-dheri (Zar Dheri) in the Mansehra region, where the name Hariśava, identified as possibly that of the sculptor, is mentioned on two panels of the great false niche A (Salomon 2011, 384, 391). From Sanchi 1 comes a famous inscription (no. 384; early first century CE?) mentioning Ānanda, “foreman of the artists” or the *aveśāna* of the Sāthavāhana king Śrī Śātakarṇi.²⁵ From Mathura we have two onomastic inscriptions interpreted hypothetically as signatures of sculptors (Lüders 1961, §§ 77, 132, 145-9), and at Kanaganahalli we find mention of names and genealogy (Hinüber, Nakanishi 2014, 75 ff.) of some – evidently celebrated – sculptors (*panatuna*, *panatukena*) in inscriptions on the bases of statues of the Buddha (post-second century CE).

Also important is the testimony left by Aśvaghōṣa in one of his works where he speaks of the Charsadda-Puṣkalāvātī artist Karna, who went to Taxila to decorate a vihāra (Scherrer-Schaub 2009, 30). At the other chronological and geographical end, the case of Tita at Miran is also important. The famous signature of Tita at Miran V is accompanied by an indication of the fee (3000 *bhammaka*), as he himself records in the inscription inscribed in Kharoshthi between the paintings. This is particularly important information since it tells us both that Tita was a professional painter, and that he might have come from Gandhara, and spoke a language, Gandhari, which the monks at Miran certainly had knowledge of, as in the monasteries of Tarim monks were engaged in translating Buddhist manuscripts from India. The case of Tita is also exemplary because, as a thorough professional, he had at hand among the tools of the trade the cartoons with the scenes (derived from the Frieze of Saidu), as we shall see later on.

We do not know how clear-cut the distinction between the two categories (laymen and monks) was at those times in Swat, and the question may not have been all that important. Be that as it may, if we want to understand whether the Master of Saidu was a lay figure (Buddhist or otherwise) or a monk (local or foreigner), we should consider other evidence, which we will be looking into in the following pages, beginning with the fact that monasticism began to be spoken of in Swat only as from the times of Saidu.

I would like to conclude my discourse with a quote by way of paraphrase concerning another unknown great master of the past, from the Albani Psalter (England, twelfth century):

As often with really original creations – creations that are a new beginning – the genesis of the art of the master to whom we owe the two great

²⁴ For the Achaemenid period and the Ionian artists and technicians, and for the Greek signature of Pytharchos found on the blocks of the Persepolis quarry, see Nylander 2006 (133-4, fig. 11). In this respect, this passage from F.B. Flood is important: “When it came to artistic patronage, cultural, ethnic, and religious boundaries were evidently permeable and porous; neither religion nor ethnicity was an impediment to the employ of a skilled artist on a royal project, even a religious monument” (Flood 2009b, 189).

²⁵ Possibly a synonym of *śilpiśālā* (Scherrer-Schaub 2016, fn. 8 with references; see also Miligan 2016, 177 ff.).

narrative cycles is obscure. Where exactly he received his artistic training it is difficult to say, for when we first meet him, his style is already fully formed, so that whatever he may have assimilated appears blended into one inseparable homogeneous whole. Iconographic and stylistic analysis tells us that he drew on the pre-Conquest English and even more on various continental pictorial traditions, especially on Ottonian and Italo-Byzantine art, and because of this heavy debt to foreign styles he has even been suspected of having been a foreigner, an immigrant himself; a view for which I see no real evidence. But that he had first-hand knowledge of the continental achievements and particularly also of continental forms of monumental art, can hardly be denied and the simplest explanation for it would probably be that he had gone through a period of apprenticeship abroad. There his eyes must have been opened to the art of pictorial storytelling as it was then practised in various parts of the Continent and he must have been initiated even into the latest trends in Byzantine narrative. On returning home his foreign experiences enabled him to rediscover a stock of narrative imagery which England had harboured for centuries. (Pächt 1962, 22-3)²⁶

3.5 Sockets, Tenons, Cramps

Now, granting that the Master was the master of the sculptors, the architect of the Stupa and associated monument, and in charge of the enterprise, we have a truly versatile figure who had at hand the models of the distant West, which he bore in mind for a totally original and new building, whose structural roots, however, were basically Indian.

We may assume that his workers were local. We know that workmen and craftsmen of the North West, or at any rate of Gandhara, already enjoyed a good reputation: it can be inferred from the fact that sculptors and workmen from these regions worked at Bharhut, which was built several decades before that of Saidu. However, some essential aspects of the working system in use at Saidu were thoroughly Indian.

We see it in the particular attention towards continuous sockets and the play of tenons and mortises, which – apart from the very occasional use of metal – harks back to a building tradition that has its origins in Indian carpentry. As for the metal cramps and nails, let us take a look at the prescriptions in a text of monastic rules associated with the North-West of ancient India, the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*:

When making offerings (to the stūpa), the monks wanted to hang flower garlands on the stūpa. They, thereupon, climbed up and drove nails²⁷ into the stūpa and hung the flower garlands. Then, brahmins and householders all said as follows: “Your master has extracted the nails and thorns (of suffering) forever. How (dare the monks), now, drive nails into (the stūpa of

²⁶ With this long quotation I do not wish to imply that the Master of Saidu necessarily travelled, although this cannot be ruled out. The reader should take this passage with due caution. Having said that, in my opinion the quotation presents a surprising combination of similarities and overlaps with our Master and the cultural temperament in which the Saidu Stupa was created.

²⁷ *Nāgadanta?* Contra G. Schopen (personal communication) pointed out to me that the Tibetan translation of this text mentions *phur bu* (*kīla*, *kīlaka*), which most probably refers to wooden pegs.

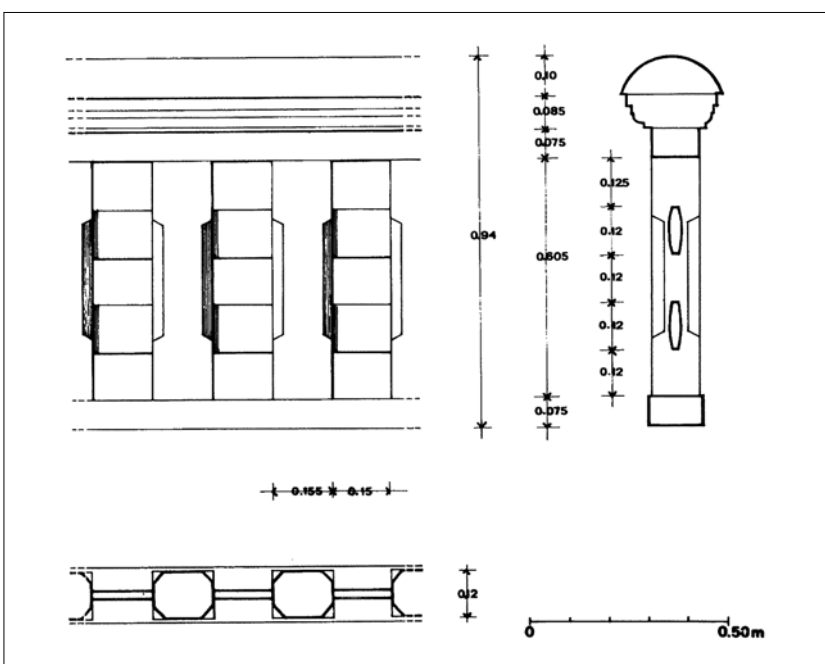


Figure 17 Saidu Sharif I, the railing (after Faccenna 1995a, fig. 202; drawings by Francesco Martore)

the Buddha)?". The monks, then, told this to the Buddha. The Buddha said: "One should not drive sharp nails into the stūpa. If somebody transgresses, he will be guilty of wrongdoing (*duṣ-kr̥ta*)". (Karashima 2018, 464)

Thus, apart from the metal cramps, the system of assembly of the *vedikā* of Saidu [fig. 17] differs in no way from that of Bharhut, while we could have found the same system for assembly of the Frieze in the stupas of Andhra Pradesh. The extraordinary command of techniques (petrography, engineering, statics, design, geometry and carpentry) and expressive means could have been the heritage of an exceptional individual, perhaps (but not necessarily) Buddhist.²⁸ Indeed, I should think it took a certain detachment to achieve these formal and architectural revolutions that led to the Stupa of Saidu, and to the biographical representation of the episodes, as well as the decisive presence of the lay world, of the donors, clearly perceptible in the entire Gandharan production at Butkara I and Saidu. Although, we must add, at that point in history admitting the donors within the narrative came quite naturally. It had already happened in the Indian world, where the presence of the donors constitutes the major source of vitality in the reliefs, both at Sanchi and at Bharhut.²⁹

²⁸ One of the *avadāna* studied by Ulrich Pagel (2007) illustrates "an episode where a non-believing minister [...] is appointed overseer of works [...] for a stūpa construction and later attends the festival even though he does not appear to care much for the monument" (Pagel 2007, 386).

²⁹ Norm is a problematic term (norm-rule/exception), as are original and copy: although I am aware of this, I use both here in the current way.

All that we have so far described does not correspond to the ‘norm’ in Gandharan art. True, the surviving attestations of pieces cohering to form decorative or figured units (mostly friezes) are few, and no example of the great narrative friezes of Gandhara survived the havoc wrought by time and excavations, except for the Frieze of Saidu and elements from Butkara I. What have survived, however, belong mostly to monuments of certainly later date – even though not much later – than the Stupa of Saidu.³⁰

The vast majority of the material that has come down to us from other sites, with the exception of the step-risers (see the recent Olivieri, Iori 2021) and doorjambs and architraves, show evidence suggesting pieces completed before installation (in some cases produced in series), regardless of the final destination which they were subsequently to be adapted to. This is to be seen above all in the series of sockets which often spread out on the figured or decorated part, but also and above all in the lavish use of iron cramps. Totally absent from Saidu, iron cramps – as we have seen – serve to anchor the pieces to the masonry, but they would be perfectly superfluous in pieces of small and medium dimensions. With their small sockets, cramps served to attach to the monument parts produced subsequent to the architectural plan of the monument itself. In this respect many – if not the majority of – monuments were to be finished over time, and visitors to the Buddhist sacred areas must have had the impression of something unfinished (which is reflected in the sources, as we will see). Returning to these minor productions, we now know that there were ateliers that specialised in specific scenes and specific elements (such as friezes), with production in series following more or less standardised dimensions, found to be practically identical in different sanctuaries even at a considerable distance from one another (Brancaccio, Olivieri 2019).

In the Buddhist world, the building of a stupa – single or collective, completed as one operation or continued over time, whether large or small, in moulded clay or masonry – is in any case a meritorious action. Donating an element is equivalent to donating the entirety since the value lies in the action. At the highest level there is royal donation, represented for this period by the stupas of Aśoka (called *dharmarājikā*), and then aristocratic or princely donation, well represented in Prakrit at the turn of the Christian era in the many inscriptions of the dynasties of the Oḍi and their more powerful neighbours, the Avaca, etc. These inscriptions contained mention of new foundations, new structures (stupas, columns) in existing sanctuaries (even dating back to the Mauryan period) and, as we saw in the case of Seṅavarma, also new restoration works.³¹ As not all belonged to the landed

30 With the exception of the earlier material of Butkara I and of Dharmarājika which has come under close study (Faccenna 2005), this largely concerns large stupas like those of Amluk-dara (Olivieri 2018), Gumbat (Olivieri et al. 2014), Butkara III, Nimogram, Marjanai, and outside Swat, of Loriyan-tangai, Sikri, Thareli, Zar-dheri, etc. In many of these cases thorough re-examination of the excavation data will be necessary (where they exist, as at Zar-dheri or Nimogram; see Pons 2019; Raducha 2012).

31 In the case of new foundations reference is to founding a stupa “in a previously unestablished place” (e.g. CKI 255; Baums 2012, 209). The formula came under study in Salomon, Schopen 1984. The practice does not always involve the foundation of stupas or major structures. Antonello Palumbo pointed out to me that in no fewer than five inscriptions in our region there is no explicit mention of architectural structures: CKI 242, CKI 251, CKI 257, CKI 266, CKI 402). Historical memory of early foundations and their restoration records: “these relics, from a Maurya period stūpa, on which a miracle has been performed, are established in a secure (?), safe, central (?) establishment” (CKI 242; Baums 2012, 208).

aristocracy or the merchant classes, who could afford buildings *ex novo* or major donations, in regions like Gandhara, where Buddhism had become a very widespread cult, the most common form of donation was with joint contributions, as if taking part in a *tabula gratulatoria*. The ordinary worshipper, having acquired or ordered the pieces, could ask the superintendent of the shrine - just as a cemetery custodian might be asked to take care of minor works - for the pieces to be assembled (or added in the case of multiple donations) on the desired stupa (usually a minor one). This phase could see cramp holes or sockets made on the spot. In a way, the iron cramp, which does not belong to the Indian tradition, represented in the art of Gandhara what the standard screw has represented in the modern world - the possibility for many to 'have' their small stupa decorated in a process of emulation that progressively led to an increasingly serial and repetitive art.

4 The Frieze. The Material

Summary 4.1 The Stone. – 4.2 The Working Plan and the Quarries. – 4.3 The Enterprise.

4.1 The Stone

One point we had yet to make is that the art of the Saidu Frieze is recognisable at a glance. Later on we will look into the distinctive formal characteristics. Should the formal element not help us recognise the hand of the Master of Saidu, the choice of material certainly would. The entire Frieze is sculpted in very soft, lightly talcose, but compact chlorite schist with a characteristic dark sage green. This stone is quarried from emerald outcroppings not far from Saidu, like the outcropping on the other side of the river, in a place known as Katelai (today Amankot) (Olivieri 2006, 139-40; Di Florio et al. 1993) and in the ophiolitic hills of Mingora. The whitish talc schist with ankerite inclusions used for the facing of the podium, the railing and the columns, might have come from Katelai or again the ophiolite quarries of Mingora: “[T]he chlorite-schists are in all cases strictly associated with soapstone and probably derive from the same areas” (Di Florio et al. 1995, 623). One well-studied quarry that yielded both varieties of stone was at Swegalai, at about 15 km away, on the right bank of the river Swat (Olivieri 2006, 140-1). The chlorite-schists of Saidu belongs to a class of stones generically called ‘serpentinite’ that has an extraordinary geological history. A history that explains its rarity and intrinsic preciousness. It is the abyssal basalt from the seabed of the ancient Tethys Ocean, which, approximately 50 MM years ago, rose thousand of metres during the collision between Eurasia and Ancient India plates when the Himalaya-Karakoram ranges were formed. These areas of intersection are called ‘Main Mantle Thrusts’ by geologists. The Swat valley is one of such zones. The metamorphosed basalts acquire various degree of softness, while their minerals, as they oxidise, produce marvellous gradations of colour from whitish green to sage green, from dark blue to purple.



Figure 18 Panel, fragment (from Ackermann 1975, pl. VIIIb; VAM IM 85.1939)

The choice of stone, which helps us to recognise small and shapeless fragments as parts of the Frieze, has a direct effect on the sculptor's technique, and the choice was clearly made with care for a purpose. The technical aspects (chiselling, incision of details, the possibility of perspective and the rendering of surfaces, always stopping short of complete smoothing) find a perfect match in the material chosen; indeed, the incomparable style of the Master of the Frieze, matching technique with material, owes as much to the technique as to the material. Thus the first evidence of artistic mastery at Saidu lies precisely in the choice of stone. The response of the hand to the material is always sure: the stone is reliable, never unpredictable, responding with constancy, but also the hand is trained as if it had always been acquainted with that stone. We do not know whether the Master of Saidu ever worked on other supports or other stones, but we do know that his work did not begin at Saidu, nor did it stop there. The work of the Master of Saidu would appear to find an echo, not so much in the details as in the composition, in certain pieces from Butkara I belonging to what is known as the first sculptural group (the 'drawing style'), the earliest.¹ For example, a lithotype very sim-

¹ Certainly belonging to the school of Saidu is relief B 1353 (Faccenna 2001, pl. 71a) and B 3673 (pl. 74), on the evidence of the treatment of eyes and hands (see Faccenna 2001, § 2.7). Among the other pieces, I consider to be of the hand of the Master or his school - on the basis of the stone (green schist), the treatment of eyes and rendering of volumes - the following piec-



Figure 19 Panel, fragment (from Ackermann 1975, pl. XXXIIb; VAM IS 129.1961)

ilar if not identical to the chlorite schist of Saidu was also used at Butkara I for the sculptures attributable to the phase of GST 3 (prior to and partially coeval with the first phase of Saidu). I would not rule out the possibility that the Master of Saidu may have developed his mastery in the stoneyard of Butkara I, where a number of ateliers were in any case at work. His presence or that of his school is also evidenced in other sites such as Parrai, in the Swat Valley, at about 30 km downstream from Saidu, where we find undoubted evidence of both the hand and the stone of the school of the Master of Saidu in a relief [fig. 18].² Consider also the great relief in green schist from the same area (Nawagai) [fig. 19]: here the details have been lost but the decidedly thin slab and the composition on two registers of the donors are strongly reminiscent of the style of the Master.³ In all these cases the hand of the school of Saidu is to be observed not only in certain details (the turbans, the rendering of iris and pupil) but also in the characteristic treatment of the rear surfaces with deft strokes of flat chisels, as well as the thin proportions of the slabs.

es: B 2606 (Faccenna, Taddei 1962, pl. XCVIIa), B 1703 (pl. CLXXXVIIa), B 195 (pl. CLXXXVI-II), B 3440 (pl. CCLVIIIb). In particular here see the treatment of the women's faces, very close to S 622 (Faccenna 2001, pl. 33).

² Victoria and Albert Museum (VAM), London, IM 85.1939 (Ackermann 1975, 59-60, pl. VIIb) (h. 24 cm).

³ VAM, IS 129.1961 (Ackermann 1975, 97-8, pl. XXXIIb) (h. 45 cm).

In the pieces from these sites in lower Swat, however, his hand – granted that it is indeed his – does not appear to have achieved the same mastery and maturity that shine through the great project of the Frieze of Saidu.

4.2 The Working Plan and the Quarries

Returning, now, to the material, in the organisation of the Saidu stoneyard we can observe a precise intention in the selection of materials. Both types of stone chosen are far from common: the green chlorite schist with the right compactness (also called sepeintinite) is rare, while good quality white talc schist (compact, not greatly metamorphosed) is hard to come by. Considering that these two materials must have been fundamental and impossible to substitute from the very outset, the enterprise must have made an appreciable economic outlay to secure an exclusive supply of high-quality material from the quarries without the risk of running out of it.

Let us try to imagine the work of the quarrymen on the ophiolitic hills of Katelai and Mingora. They have practically become inaccessible under the modern built-up area. Only the part removed by deep excavation of the emerald mine, on the north side of the hills, is open to view but surrounded by barbed wire and, again, practically inaccessible. The hill of Katelai still preserves, half-buried under a modern malodorous refuse dump that only hens seem to appreciate, a marvellous ancient cut of green schist. All around are large outcroppings of talc schist with ankerite, also buried under effluents and refuse. Upstream from here evidence of the extraction of semicircular or semi-spherical blocks of chlorite schist has also been found. Such evidence is recurrent: it was found by Giuseppe Tucci at Bologram, and later found at Katelai and also at Swegalai, another area of ophiolites and emeralds on the right bank of the Swat at 15 km downstream from Saidu (Olivieri 2006, 140-1). This lithotype (green and grey chlorite schist) was the most used for vessels, pyxes, to fashion reliquaries for the stupas, and for the toilet-trays – the small, decorated compartmented dishes typical of the production of the Saka-Parthian period in Swat. This type of quarrying was carried out on small fronts (the lithotype with the right compactness and grain is hard to find), and – judging from the working traces – from the bottom upwards (Olivieri 2006, 144). The importance of Swat for the quarrying of this valued lithotype is worth stressing: in the past I had even suggested the idea of a veritable ‘soapstone road’ towards the other great centres of production of the art of Gandhara (Olivieri 2006, 144). It is in fact worth recalling that Swat also lies at the heart of the quarrying of schist suitable for sculpture; the few quarries further south are of inferior quality. It may well be significant that the first examples of Gandharan art were documented in Swat, where the origins of this artistic phenomenon are probably to be sought. The point is this: the art of Gandhara could have had its earliest origins in Swat.⁴

For the extraction of *chattrāvalī* umbrellas phyllite and granite were favoured, according to the sites. We have many examples of extraction of umbrellas at Barikot, Gogdara and Amluk-dara. The process was always the

⁴ The study published by Faccenna, Callieri and Filigenzi (2003) is significantly entitled “At the Origin of Gandhāran Art”.

same: isolation of the block by digging an extraction channel all around, as deep as was necessary to arrive at a sub-horizontal lithoclase level from which the umbrella could be levered up by means of wedges (Olivieri 2006, fig. 1; Rockwell 2006, fig. 4).

At Swegalai we were able to document an entire ancient talc schist quarry front with terrace cultivation for the extraction of large blocks. The same system may be applied at Katelai or the Mingora hills, whence the Saidu green schist certainly came.

The quarrying activities always begin with identification of surface veins in the neighbourhood of the major stoneyards, where the material probably arrived semifinished. The Swegalai quarry (site A) is cultivated stepwise from the top down with fronts measuring about 2 m in height and 3-4 m in width, now largely covered with ploughland. The first stage of the work involved isolation of the block in the wall by digging an extraction channel with 2 cm-wide chisels to expose the lithoclase, and picks (of the type found at Taxila and Udegram) and wedges for the detachment.⁵ Once extracted, the block was hewn at the foot of the quarry front, and then slid on ramps (in Italian: *lizze*) positioned at the centre and sides of the terraced base: here was located the quarrymen's village with their silos for water, the rough-hewing grounds and storage. Many of these details have been documented at Swegalai (Olivieri 2006, 142).

We may imagine the same process on the hills of Katelai. Here the Master must have made his way to ascertain the right vein, follow the quarrying work and probably leave an assistant to ensure the quality of the stone. Once extracted, the blocks had to be slid down earth ramps to the river; otherwise, a sort of base stoneyard had to be organised to cut the blocks down to size to carry them down, held in the arms. In wintertime today the Saidu can easily be waded across, the water coming up to thigh level, a little upstream from Katelai and Saidu; in the spring it is deeper but without strong current, the bed being broad here. Transport must have been arranged with rafts. In any case, transport of the material was not nearly so demanding as actually finding it and, having found it, making sure there was enough to finish the project.

4.3 The Enterprise

The entire process so far described can only be seen as the product of complex collective activity, coordinated by a single specialist, artist and technician, the Master of Saidu, who was responsible for the whole process: from the design to the choice of materials and the final execution of both the construction and the sculptural components.

As we know, in Gandhara and surrounding regions, part of the religious building activities were works in progress, to be returned to at intervals. The sources refer to the results as "half-finished monasteries" (Salomon 2006, 240-2). Building of the Saidu Stupa clearly did not follow this pattern - it was to be completed, and probably had a principal source of funding through a high-ranking group or individual, possibly a king. As we will see later on, the Buddhist sources themselves lend support to the stress

⁵ Marshall 1951, 555, pl. 167, nos. 141-2; UD 144: Udegram Bazaar.

we place on the dominant role of the lay community and the sovereigns in the building of the great stupas.

As for the funding, although we know that in India work was mostly undertaken by collective enterprises (Deheja 1992),⁶ I believe that at Saidu it was in the hands of an individual or a single group belonging to the élite: the Saidu project was very well defined, planning the contemporaneous and *ex novo* construction of at least a great stupa (the largest so far built in Swat) and a monastery.

By the way, to our present knowledge, the Monastery of Saidu (Callieri 1989) is the oldest of those so far excavated by archaeologists. Construction was clearly contemporaneous with that of the Stupa, and thus in the mid-first century CE. Moreover, before the phase corresponding to the foundation of this Monastery, we find no mention of monastic communities in the Oḍi and Avaca inscriptions; the first repeated mention of the *saṅgha* occurs only in the Seṇavarma inscription (Baums 2012, 227-33), the presumed dating of which we have already discussed.⁷ At that time economic power was firmly in the hands of the aristocracy, still the only landowners, who were the owners and managers of the huge agricultural production, the main source of wealth in Swat, especially wheat and barley in summer and rice in autumn. The real power of the Buddhist monasteries and the trading activities favoured by the development of the cities were yet to come. In fact, it would take about eighty years, the beginning of the central period of Kushan rule. In the second century CE, along with the disappearance of the name of the Oḍi from the epigraphic record, and the rise of the Kushan financial control, we observe the progressive expansion of monastic property in the rich countryside. The growing number of monasteries took on the role of resource controllers, eroding the power of the landed nobility, until they also controlled important urban properties around the third century CE (Iori, Olivieri 2020). The crisis of the cities – as we see in Barikot (Bazi-

6 As Taddei points out, Deheja is not referring to Gandhara (Taddei 1993, 30 fn. 24).

7 With the exception of CKI 403, see below ch. 11. Antonello Palumbo wrote to me: “Passing reference to monastic figures of governments is to be seen in the inscriptions of Utara with Indravarma (Baums 2012, no. 9, CKI 265, < 15 CE?), who mentions ‘the monk Dhramasena, superintendent of construction’ (*dhrama[s]eno śamano ṇaveamio*)” in relation to the erection of a stone column (*śīlastambho*) for a relic depository, and Śatruleka (Baums 2012, no. 17, CKI 257, 19/20 CE), who mentions another relic depository ‘in the village Aṭhaya, in the possession of the Kāśyapiya venerables’. Moreover, the inscription of Loṇa (Baums 2012, no. 5, CKI 247) refers to the disciples of the Buddha in general (*bhaga[va]to śavaka*). The important points to note are: 1) in none of the other inscriptions of the kings of Avaca, amounting to fifteen excluding seals and coins, is there any reference to monks; 2) nor in these three are there any references to monasteries or other infrastructures of sedentary and organised monastic communities: what is significant is mention of a village (*grāma*) in relation to the Kāśyapiya masters. We should not assume that where there are ‘monks’ there are also monasteries. In a later period (third-fourth century CE) the documents in Gāndhāri from Niya in Taklamakan effectively reveal a community of ‘śramaṇa’, which is neither completely monastic nor secular: its members wear the monastic robe and assemble in a monastery on certain occasions but otherwise live with their families. However, let us not forget the Patika inscription, year 78 of Maues (Baums 2012, no. 12, CKI 46), which mentions the construction of a monastery (*saṅgharama*) at Takṣaśīlā, and also the name of the supervisor of the works (*navakarmika*), a certain Rohiṇimitra, who does not seem to have been a monk; according to Baums the inscription should date to the first 2 decades A.D.”. On Bharhut, see Hawkes 2008, 3.

The first mention of a member of the Buddhist community in Swat associated with a certain stratigraphy is to be found in a Kharoshthi inscription traced on a (ceramic) bowl from Barikot dated to the same period as the Stupa and Monastery of Saidu: /// [sa]śamaṇeras[a] /// (“of the novice”, BKG 4024, B5; Baums in Callieri, Olivieri 2020, 280).

ra) - that followed the end of Kushan power did not involve the great monasteries.⁸ In the third-fourth century CE the Buddhist monasteries of Swat advance from being administrators to landowners, and from recipients of donations to granters of political power.

8 On the death of Kaniška, in the early years of Huviška (c. 155-58 CE), problems began for the Kushan powers, as shown by the converging evidence of inscriptions from the two ends of the Empire: Gangetic India and Bactria (Falk 2015). On the evidence of the political crisis of the third century in Swat see Iori, Olivieri 2020 with refs.

5 The Frieze. The Form

Summary 5.1 The Narrative Images. – 5.2 The Great Central Panel (or False Niche). – 5.3 The Scene.

5.1 The Narrative Images

We have yet to go into the sculptural and iconographical aspects of the Frieze. Let us now address these thorny questions.

At the planning stage, the life of the Buddha must have been the theme proposed for the frieze on the monument. This is not to be seen as an obvious choice, considering the nature of the monument. With the choice of the theme itself, we are already looking towards a series of innovations that characterise both the monument and its artistic content.

Important as the theme of biographical narration is, debate on it has, oddly enough, been rather less than one might have expected (certainly less than many minor issues now receiving great attention). This is probably due to the fact that the only complete biographical friezes that have come down to us are those of Loriyan-tangai and Sikri, both on small if not actually miniature stupas. Moreover, on the Loriyan-tangai stupa (Swat-Malakand), the frieze goes only from the Birth to the Renunciation (and is positioned on the podium), while the Sikri frieze (Mardan), which is on the drum, is also devoted to the previous lives of the Buddha; moreover, the panels might have been reassembled in the wrong order (Taddei 1993, 32 fn. 26; see Faccenna 2001, § 3.4). In both cases, however, we are at the end of the first if not well into the second century CE. In both, rather than displaying dynamic movement the narration develops through juxtaposition of scenes with a frontal Buddha, somewhat like the stations of a *via crucis*. Apart from these examples, all the rest, representing the overwhelming majority of the art – among the largest in terms of quantitative production – is accounted for by loose pieces of reliefs mostly of the late-first/second century, detached from the monuments, or portions of figured friezes set on semi-columns or half-pilas-

ters from small stupas, naturally showing only a selection of biographical scenes. In these fragments, moreover, the linear narrative we would expect to find is often lacking, the static approach noted at Sikri predominating, while lively dynamism only appears in the genre scenes (actors, musicians, dancers, women at a balcony, etc.). I would in fact say that while this novelty is to be seen in Gandhara, and first appeared at Saidu, it is seldom used later, and certainly not with the completeness and magnificence attested at Saidu. Here I am not referring to the sculpturesque production, in stucco of the fourth-fifth century, when replication of the multiple Buddhas predominated, also with doctrinal motivation, nor am I referring to the small and large steles in schist of the third-fourth century, conveying a sense of the Mahayana devotion of bodhisattvas and paradises, which appears to reflect the age of Gandharan art coming towards an end. Rather, I am referring to the production in schist achieved when the diffusion of this art had reached its culmination, beginning to turn into a genre itself. We have no other evidence of great friezes or biographical narratives. This is one of the major elements of Saidu. To our present knowledge, there is no complete biographical figured frieze of the life of the Buddha in Gandhara. But, again, the 'system' is replicated in part, in parts, but never in its entirety.

Saidu artistic production is thus to be placed at an exceptional, fortunate time in relations between art and clients, associated with the apogee of the Oḍiraja, who may perhaps represent themselves in the Frieze. As far as we know, such conditions were never to be repeated on such a scale. After Saidu, the Buddhist monasteries organised themselves in such a way as to acquire an importance independent of the secular powers, to the extent of centralising management of agricultural production and even gaining power as landowners in the cities, where they bought properties, as we have already seen.¹

From the point of view of secular power, administration of the territory under the Kushans, and also the fact that the latter had chosen as allies 'on the field' the monasteries, with their manifold competences in agronomy, administration, etc., must have left less scope to the local nobles, the landowning powers, who must have seen their power eroded through the progressive transfer of production and properties. In fact, from the beginning of the second century we see an inexorable decline in the number of secular dedicatory inscriptions, with corresponding increase in the inscriptions of subjects affiliated to the Kushans (Baums 2018, 66, tab. 1). Effectively, the Oḍiraja disappears from the historical picture of Swat after Senavarma.

This is also a time (second-third century CE), well documented by urban excavations, that saw an important phase, that archaeologists have defined of 'Indianisation' of the material culture in ceramic forms and techniques, ornaments, etc. (Olivieri, Vidale et al. 2006; Callieri, Olivieri 2020). By contrast, the golden age – in terms of creativity and development – of Buddhist art in Gandhara came when the consolidation of a local culture was at its height, open to the world but with a character of its own (first century BCE–first century CE).

Coming back to the matter of biographical narrative linearity, the scholars who have looked into it have begun with the earliest material of Swat, for it was undoubtedly here that the pattern formed. One of them was Maurizio Taddei, who dedicated two major works to the topic (1993; 1999); I rec-

¹ For an overview of these topics, see Olivieri, Vidale et al. 2006; Olivieri 2012; Filigenzi, Olivieri 2018; Olivieri, Iori 2019; Olivieri 2020. Particularly important is Shaw 2017.

commend them to the reader. Here I will quote him only briefly as a warning against the risk of temptations:

If, however, this form of narrative has no true match in India, it would be futile to seek the model in the Roman-Hellenistic world. It was there, in Gandhāra, the choice was made to entrust the religious message through the dimension of human life. (Taddei 1993, 38)²

5.2 The Great Central Panel (or False Niche)

At Saidu the biographical narrative is developed through sixty panels, supposing that, as suggested above, there was a central panel or false niche. The 2011 excavation revealed two or possibly three large fragments, which might be surviving parts (with others overlooked in the past) of a large central panel, beginning and end, standing as a caesura in time and the focal centre of the Frieze [pt. XIII].³

The presence of a central panel at the top of a stairway, or at any rate at an entrance, represents a further connection with the early Indian tradition,⁴ which saw the stupa with its four entrances ideally marked out by four *mahācaitya* – more or less false niches as seen later in representations of Amaravati, each standing for a symbol associated with the Four Miracles (Birth, Enlightenment, Preaching, Death or Extinction) (Bénisti 1960, 78). As Saidu introduced the novelty of a single entrance, determining to which cycle the central figure belonged would be very useful for our purposes. Thanks to the find of fragment SS I 22, we know that this must have depicted a large Buddha seated on a throne with standing figures on either side. Part of this Buddha, (his left knee), the throne and, to the right (for the observer), evidence of a draped figure, are preserved in a large panel fragment. The fragment is 14 cm thick and showed on the lower side at least two parallel tenons (one preserved), and the centre mark, indicated by the guideline corresponding to the centre of the drapery covering the throne. This centre sign is very important since – in the language of the marks used at Saidu – it constitutes clear evidence that it was a panel to be placed at the centre of a symmetrical composition and was made up of a number of elements, since a single slab of those proportions was probably not available. Note the partial conservation of a figure with drapery with crenellated fringe to the left of the seated Buddha. The edge shows a smooth vertical face that was to be set against a side panel. In terms of dimensions, there is only one panel that could be placed beside this fragment (to the right). This is a damaged relief (S 305), which would go well beside the central group with respect to dimensions and figures represented (note the drapery with

² “Buddhism was certainly not the only religion that Hellenism had dealings with, and we should perhaps ask ourselves whether it is only a matter of Hellenistic lexicon adapted to Buddhist thought or whether we should speak of a narrative structure that was created by Buddhism in the Northwest regions, which Hellenism, after providing for it the most suitable formal repertory, was able to master and later reflect upon other, more western religious experiences. And this is perhaps the really great innovation brought about by the Buddhist art of Gandhāra” (Taddei 1999, 83).

³ Apart from the two dozen fragments that may have belonged to the Frieze. These and others will be dealt with by Anna Filigenzi and Antonio Amato.

⁴ The term ‘early Indian tradition’ is used to refer to the Indian architectural tradition prior to or coeval with Saidu (c. 250 BCE–50 CE).



Figure 20
SS I 117 (MAIP; photo by Antonio Amato)

crenellated fringe in both).⁵ The violent chiselling indicates that in the phases of abandonment (about fourth century CE) it was deliberately damaged. We will be returning to this point when we come to the demolition phases which, we may add here, occurred not only rather early, but almost immediately after the abandonment of the monument.

The outer cornice of the group could have been formed by two Gandharan-Corinthian pilasters (not semi-columns) larger than those of the Frieze (between 80 and 100 cm in height as compared with the roughly 40 cm of the semi-columns; 20 cm in width), with central flutes and Corinthian capitals with central leaf. It was the find of these two pilasters [fig. 20]⁶ that suggested to Domenico Faccenna, without any other evidence at the time, the existence of a central group or figured false niche.⁷ The maximum preserved width of the fragment with the Buddha enthroned is 62.20 cm, and we can therefore infer that the total width must have been at least 85 cm. The preserved height is 40.30 cm, and proportionally the entire piece must have been 1 m high. The face of the Buddha must have been about 26 cm in height. The faces of the figures gathered to the left and right, which may have belonged to the central group – we have some evidence – do not exceed 13 cm, with the exception of one reaching 17 cm.

⁵ The piece was interpreted as the presentation of Yaśodhara to Siddhārta (Faccenna 2001, 138).

⁶ Faccenna 1995, 542-3, fig. 263. One of the two pilasters (A 86) was recently inventoried (SS I 117) [fig. 20].

⁷ The second stairway that leads to the top of the podium at the top of the first circular storey (not preserved at Saidu), has always implied in all the cases observed the presence of figured work at the centre or a false niche. See the examples in the stupas of Amluk-dara, Tokar-dara (a column stupa) etc., analysed by Elisa Iori (2018).

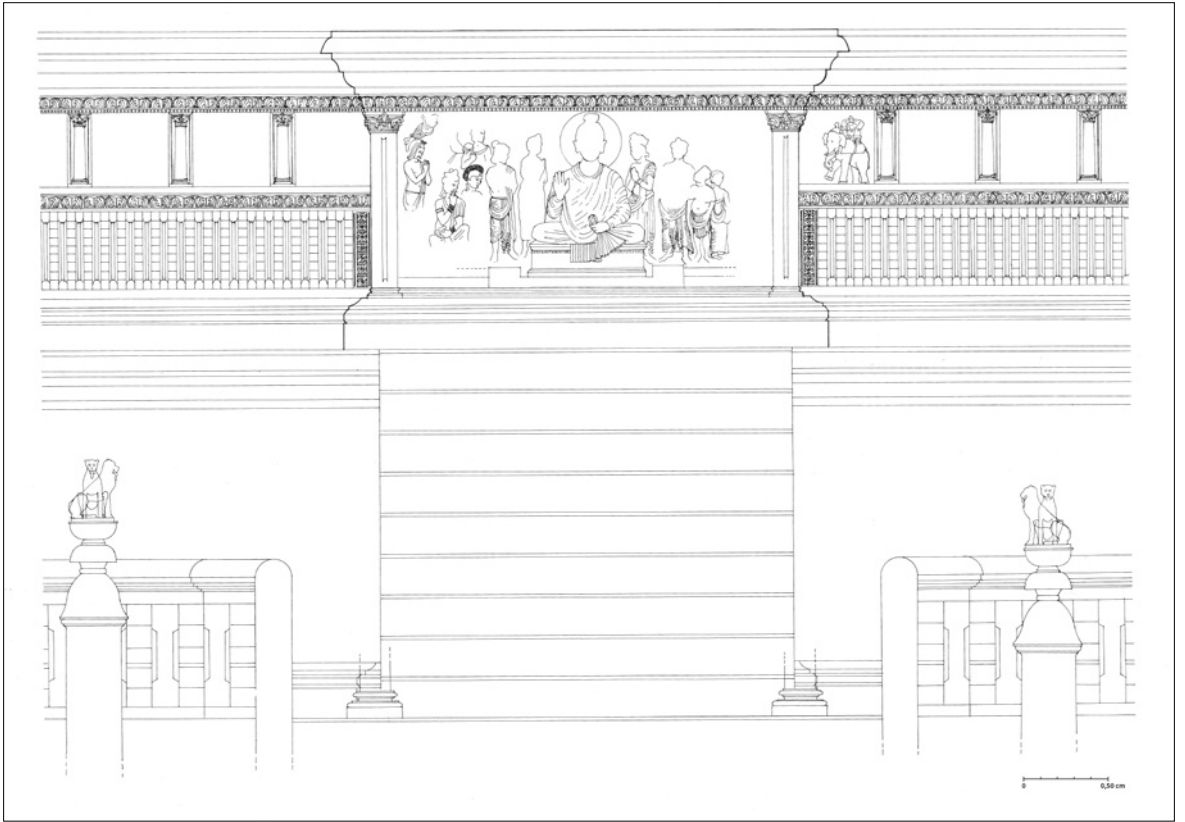


Plate XIII Saidu Sharifi, front view (N) (detail) (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)



Figure 21 SSI 15 (ACT; photo by Edoardo Loliva)

The same excavation sectors that yielded the new fragments of the Frieze [fig. 21]⁸ and the large fragment of the seated Buddha also yielded various fragments of heads of men – young and smooth-skinned, old and bearded – and women. Given the sizes of the heads, these fragments cannot have belonged to the panels of the Frieze, nor indeed to any of the monuments at Saidu, but may have belonged to this central panel.⁹ Outstanding amongst these figures is an extraordinary female figure with princely robes (SS I 2) and a face rendered so carefully that one cannot help thinking it must have been an actual portrait.

Let us take a look at the fragments we consider here. I will begin by listing those documented from my 2011-14 excavation.

1 Buddha seated on a throne in the form of the podium with smooth plinth and torus base, smooth body, cornice with fillet, cyma reversa, recessed triple fillet, dentils and bars showing lesser height and width;¹⁰ Buddha wearing a cloak (*samghāṭī*) and thus with both shoulders covered. The folds of the outer garment are gathered together in the lap, stretching to the knees on either side, and falling fanwise in the centre, while the inner garment hangs in eleven close-set vertical folds, hanging over the plinth but under the fan-shaped folds. If Buddha is holding the garment with the left hand the right hand was possibly in the teaching gesture (later known as *abhayamudrā*). On the right behind the Buddha is a standing figure with *paridhāna* with crenellated hems (fragment SS I 22) [pl. XIV].

2 A panel with at least three figures facing to the right: at the centre, the right profile of the face of a young woman with short hair over her cheeks, crown-garland with elongated laurel leaves, earrings hanging low; behind, at a lower level we can make out a slightly smaller male figure with turban (type 1 or 2 of Faccenna 1999-2000);¹¹ above, a figure possibly with a

8 Of these SS I 15 is one of the few (along with S 360? [Faccenna 2001, 235-6]) in which the image of Siddhartha has been preserved (?). In 2001 Faccenna wrote: “Nel fregio di Saidu Sharif I, tra i frammenti rimasti, non ci è conservata la sua immagine” (En. transl.: “In the frieze of Saidu Sharif I, among the remaining fragments, there is no image of him”) (Faccenna 2001, 145) [fig. 21].

9 Faccenna 1995, 543. In any case, the entire reconstruction of the central group is a task assigned to a work group led by Anna Filigenzi with the collaboration of Antonio Amato.

10 On the dentils and bars see below § 9.1.

11 These two types of ‘turbans’, typical of the most influential members of the court, look more like floppy headdresses, held in place by knotted embroidered bands on the forehead, rather than turbans. The difference between the two types depends on the length and elaboration of the upper part. A comparison can be made with the decorated band around the high headdress of the second figure of the prince on the large panel in the Museum of Oriental Art, Turin (IAp/179). Alternatively, one can consider the band as a raised flap. See the example from the inscribed silver pyxis from the time of Vasudeva (third century) (Falk, Sims-Williams 2017). One of the figures, referred to in the inscription as Rām the *hōstīg* (a title of unknown meaning), wears a short, long-sleeved tunic with a girdle and breeches, carries perhaps a thin torc, and carries a long sword with a flat circular pommel. He wears a cap with side flaps folded upwards, which is very similar to the ‘turbans’ of type 1 and 2. The upper part of the chin-bands of soldiers and knights (types 3 and 4 of Faccenna 1999-2000), would also appear to be wrapped around similar headdresses. The chin-bands serve to protect the mouth from dust, e.g. when riding. These headdresses (types 1-4) should be studied with renewed attention. It is not by chance that Faccenna had devoted a short work to them (Faccenna 1999-2000). As for the value of these headdresses in the cultural context of the time and place of the frieze, Faccenna writes: “The use of pre-existing models cannot be ruled out. Yet we have reasons to believe, given the homogeneity of the complex, that if any such use took place, it was confined to the period in which the frieze was executed” (Faccenna 1999-2000, 48 fn. 3). It can be concluded that, just as the armour is the



Figure 22 SSI 155 (MAIP; photo by Antonio Amato)

fly-whisk or whip (a groom?) (fragment SS I 2). The completion of the male figure with turban and the woman is to be found in S 1286 [pls XV-XVII].

The following are pieces excavated in the past but inventoried subsequently, in 2019.

same as the parts of armour from the first century revealed by the excavations (Olivieri 2011b), the headdresses (with torque and swords, etc.) were probably those in use by the nobles and knights of the Odi, later repeated in the Gandharan production dependent on the Frieze, and almost in fashion in the later production also in Swat itself. It should be noted that the tall conical headdresses, absent from the Frieze, are present only in the art of the Kushan period (see for this type of headdress Olivieri, Sinisi 2021; MAO, IAp/179; see later the reliefs of stupa 38 of Saidu that I call the 'Cycle of the Months').



Figure 23 SS I 203 (MAIP; photo by Antonio Amato)

3 Face of a young man, right profile, smooth-skinned (fragment SS I 203) (this could be the face of the young man with the horse) [fig. 22].

4 Elderly male face in profile on the left, bearded (fragment SS I 203) (belongs to the right-hand side of the false niche) [fig. 23].¹² To these pieces are added others documented and inventoried in the past.

5 Face of a woman, almost frontal, turned slightly to the left, with features similar to SS I 2 (fragment S 11; Faccenna, Taddei 1962, pl. CLXXXVIIb).

¹² It will be useful for the reader to compare the Master's art with that of a later production from another great stupa in Swat that is less than half a century later. Compare the 'young' and 'old' of Saidu with the 'young' and 'old' of Amluk-dara, where the verism of the Master's portraits stiffens into the cliché of the ages of the ascetics (we are about 110-120 CE) [figs 24a-b].



Plate XIV Saidu Sharif I, SS I 22, Buddha, central figure of the false niche (ACT; photo by Edoardo Loliva)



Plate XV Saidu Sharif I, SS12, false niche, left side figures (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri)



Plate XVI Saidu Sharif I, SS12, false niche, detail of SS12 (MAIP; photo by Shafiq Ahmad)



0 10 cm

Plate XVII Saidu Sharif I, S 305, false niche, right side figures (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)



Figures 24a AKD 43 (ACT; photos by Edoardo Loliva)

This face is the same size as the other three described above (max. 13 cm) and could belong to one of the lost figures on the left side of the false niche. **6** Brāhma, praying, in profile, with *uttariya* on the left shoulder, *gāndharva* flying above (fragment S 629). The position of the *gāndharva* suggests that it was under the left kalathos of the capital of the left pillar; one can assume that this figure was mirrored by Indra on the opposite side.

7 Male torso of prince with armilla in decorated bands, short necklace (*torc*) and bracelets with triple or quadruple decorated band, *uttariya*, hand held on an object (the hilt of a sword)¹³ (S 1286 *76b) [fig. 25].¹⁴ One can see a bent right arm with an armilla with a decorated band, the hand perhaps open as a sign of adoration; the left arm bent towards the waist with triple or quadruple band decorated bracelets, in the act of holding the hilt of a sword with a flat circular pommel, which looks very much like the handle of the *akinakes* of the Saka. The man wears a short necklace (*torc*), another Saka element, while the dress is Indian, the *uttariya*, worn with elegance.¹⁵

13 On the seat and the position of the arms see S 1246 *58c-d, and S 1125 *64a.

14 I remind the reader that the asterisk * refers to the corresponding table in Faccenna 2001.

15 For a complete discussion of *torcs* (including the gold ceremonial girdle of Pattan) and short swords with pommel hilt of Saka milieu, as well as their iconography in the petroglyphs of the



Figures 24b AKD 75 (ACT; photos by Edoardo Loliva)

To the right of the man just behind remains a portion of a female bust with a long necklace; the male figure could be seated as on the example of the large panel B 2816 (Faccenna, Taddei 1962-64, pl. CLXII); the fragment is part of the left panel and could be integrated into SS I 2.

8 Panel (*77c) with three standing figures (Callieri, Filigenzi 2002, nos. 144, 142). The figure to the left with *saṃghāṭī* with crenellated folds, roughly chiselled, is taller than the other two. He has the same dimensions and clothing as the standing figure on the right of SSI 1 (Faccenna 2001, 138). This panel is part of the right side (for the viewer) of the false niche [fig. 26]. The two figures to the right represent a man with *paridhāna* and *uttariya*, torso bare, and a woman with a long tunic. Both faces are chiselled: the man, with brahmin's hairstyle, looks up towards the Buddha (face in profile to the upper left), the woman, who from the crown appears to be a noblewoman, seems to be looking down, in slight foreshortening.¹⁶ S 305 has a vertical recess on the right (for the viewer), which implies the pres-

Upper Indus, see the posthumous work of Harald Hauptmann (forthcoming).

¹⁶ This is why the piece was interpreted as the presentation of Yaśodhara to Siddhārta (Faccenna 2001, 138). If the piece is to be placed - as I believe - in the central niche, the subject must be different.



Figure 25 S 1286 (after Callieri, Filigenzi 2002, nos 142, 198)

ence of a lateral vertical dowel (projection), tangential to the right pillar, which completed the scene.

9 Possibly to be added is fragment S 1178: a three-quarter preserved right leg (h. 10 cm) of a male figure with part of a dhoti (*57c).

10 Finally, I would like to add a fragment with a standing figure with *paridhāna* and *uttariya* S1026 (*76c), preserved for 33 cm, from the left foot to the waist, which for material and style belongs to the school of the Master (Faccenna 2001, 137), and for size is associated with the smaller figures of panel S 305. If S 1026 was part of the false niche, it should be located to the left of the Buddha together with pieces S 1286, SS I 2, SS I 155 [fig. 27].

We are fairly certain that all these pieces were part of the central false niche. They are all clearly the work of the Master and, in terms of dimensions, none could have belonged to the Frieze, nor indeed to any other dec-



Figure 26 S 305 (after Callieri, Filigenzi 2002, nos 144, 199)



Figure 27 S 1026 (after Faccenna 2001, tab. 76c)

orative group of the other early stupas, which are of considerably smaller dimensions than those of the central Stupa.

In general, the faces in the Frieze panels do not exceed 6.5 cm. The proportional ratio between the dimensions of the faces is clear: Buddha (central false niche: max. 26 cm) - large figures (central false niche: max. 17 cm) - middle size figures (central false niche: max. 13 cm) - figures (Frieze: max. 6.5 cm).

So the whole work of the false niche was composed of several parts. If on the left we have only fragments, on the right we have sufficient information. The central panel SS I 22 was monolithic; at the bottom it was held together with S 305 by a smooth dowel to complete the plinth base under the throne. S 305 in turn was completed on the right by a vertical dowel.

On the evidence of comparison and of the fragmentary remains it is quite possible that the subject of the false niche was a generic scene of adoration of the Buddha. Next to the Buddha we find two pairs of figures: more than bodhisattvas or *lokapāla*, perhaps influential members of the Saidu religious community. At their sides are figures of the royal family, which may be actual portraits (see Lefèvre 2011). Scenes of this type can bring together, alongside gods, lay worshippers and others making offerings. It is not excluded, indeed it is likely, that members of the royal family (who knows,

perhaps Senavarma himself) are represented here among the laity.¹⁷ Judging by the compositional richness of the perspective planes that we imagine from the surviving parts, by the composition by size, which decreases symmetrically from the centre towards the sides, by the projecting architectural framework, by the composition of the slabs to form the unity of the false niche, it is clear that we are faced with what was, and can only be imagined, the masterpiece, the most ambitious work of the Master of Saidu.

As far as the architecture of the false niche is concerned, a case in point is from Butkara I (B 3732; Faccenna, Taddei 1962-64, pl. CLXXXVIIb), where we find a generic scene of the Buddha preaching, with two lay figures at his sides. The scene is included in a central panel, at the sides of which are sequences of narrative scenes interrupted by Gandharan-Corinthian semi-columns. This piece, set within a narrative frieze with Gandharan-Corinthian partitions, may have been taken as the model, possibly for the scene itself, but not for the form of the central panel which, here, given the pilasters, we should visualise as rectangular. Adoration scenes are ideal for representing a generous donation by a great aristocratic family.¹⁸

Thanks to the new findings we can take a central false niche to be certain (see Faccenna, Callieri 2002, fig. 41) with a conjectured width including the cornice of about 3 m, a little more than the width of the second stairway (9 Gft).¹⁹ This measurement could correspond to five panels calculated at about 1.56 Gft [50.8 cm] without the dividing element (0.5 Gft [14 cm]) [conjectured total length 2 Gft = 64.8 cm]. The hypothetically reconstructed height of the false niche is not greater than that of the Frieze including the accessory register of the pseudo *vedikā* but excluding the upper cornice of the Frieze (thus > 123 cm). If this were the case, the false niche would have come within the top cornice of the Frieze, which, due to the greater thickness components of the false niche (c. 20 cm), was certainly projecting here. The whole of the central false niche therefore projected at least 10 cm over the profile of the frieze.²⁰

Returning to the length of the false niche, subtracting this measurement from the circumference of the second storey, (131 Gft [42.44 m]), the area occupied by the Frieze would have been about 121.7 Gft (39.44 m) and the Frieze itself would have consisted of 60 panels.²¹

17 See the proportions between the various figures in the adoration scene B 7362 (Callieri, Filigenzi 2002, 174 fn. 84).

18 A fine, later example among the many depicting the aristocratic donors of Swat beside the enthroned Buddha is preserved in the Museo delle Civiltà in Rome (Bussagli 1984, 192). See also, B 3014 (Faccenna, Taddei 1962-64, pl. CCXXIII).

19 If we add to the 84 cm of the original width of the central panel SS I 22, 65 cm per side (calculated on the original width of panel S 305) 20 cm of the lateral dowels, and 22 cm of the maximum width of the two large lateral pilasters (measurement taken at the capital), the total width of the false niche group falls perfectly within the presumed maximum limit of 3 m overall, calculated on the width of the stairway. The width of the frontal false niche of the column stupa of Tokar-dara (l. podium c. 21 m) measures 3.8 m; that of Amluk-dara (l. podium c. 34 m) measures 3.65 m.

20 Often the top cornice of the central false niches was decorated with rows of acanthus leaves (see also B 1768; Faccenna, Taddei 1962-64, pl. CDVII).

21 A possibility that had already been considered (Faccenna 2002, 128).

5.1 The Scene

According to Faccenna's interpretation, based also on the areas where the surviving parts were found, the Frieze should begin from the left of the central group following through five biographical cycles defined according to the canonical series of the 'Birth Cycle' 'Palace Life', the 'Way towards Enlightenment', 'Propagation of the Law', 'Death Cycle'.

With regard to the canonical tradition incorporated in the early Buddhist architecture of India, there are the four 'miracles' (Birth or *jāti*, Enlightenment or *abhisambodhi*, Preaching or *dharmacakrapravartana*, Death or *parinirvāṇa*) with the addition of 'Palace Life', which represents a further novelty amongst the innovations at Saidu.²² On the basis of our calculations, 12 panels should have belonged to each of the five cycles, each with its semi-column set to the left of the figured panel, for a maximum length within of 65 cm or 2 Gft. The resulting total covers the entire circumference of the second circular storey of the Stupa.

For this biographical cycle, we have no evidence of this particular sequence (we are not concerned with single episodes here) before Saidu. Even in its most evident narrative forms, the Buddhist art of northern and central India confined itself to the choice of episodes in the life of Siddhārtha, and their paratactic – and in any case atemporal – arrangement. As Anna Filigenzi succinctly put it, "the event [in the Buddha's biography] is not viewed in its [...] unfolding, but in its being" (Filigenzi 2002, 96). The art of the Saidu Frieze moves on from this tradition, presenting something never attempted before by the artists of the Subcontinent, namely organising the episodes in a temporal, biographical sequence. Maurizio Taddei pointed out that this innovation had no precedents in India "and perhaps not even in the classical world" (Taddei 1993, 25). Nor indeed, as far as we know, even in Gandhara, before Saidu.

And even the Gandharan-Corinthian partition with semi-columns, which was to become so common in Gandhara as to be taken for granted, was without precedents.²³ Faccenna (2003, 347) does not exclude that the partition may be a "transference" of the railing motif (*vedikā*). With reference to Saidu, however, I would not agree, also because an enclosure (the false railing) is actually present in the other register of the Frieze. At Saidu the partition serves the same function as natural division with trees or framing of the scenes (Filigenzi 2004, 105). When it first appeared in the Saidu Frieze, we may reasonably imagine it having an extraordinary visual impact. The partition serves both as a technical device and to cope with the aspect of time as *continuum* to be translated into spatial terms, as well as the spatial *vacuum* resulting from gaps in time. The caesuras in the two registers of space and time need to be accounted for when the artist addresses the problem of the synoptic representation of events in sequence. In short,

²² The 'Great Departure' in the early Indian stupa is often used as first scene in the sequence.

²³ The mind turns to the reliquary of Bimaran dating roughly to the period of Saidu (Cribb 2018; Errington 2018): I have no certainty, but my impression is that it must be later. Here, I am not referring to the iconography of the Buddha, nor of the associated personages, but to the typical form of partitions with short fluted pillars, Tuscan type capital and carinated arch. Short fluted pillars are typical of the later production in schist and the first production in stucco. Note, however, that the figure of the Buddha on a decorated doorjamb from Butkara I dating to the late first or early second century CE is very similar to that of the Bimaran reliquary (B 3215; Faccenna, Taddei 1962-64, pl. CCLXXXIX). We will return to this later on.

the partition allows for the dissolve between one episode and the next, distinguishing them but at the same time projecting them in their continuity. Here I would like to air a suggestion by my colleague Antonio Amato. He has pointed out to me the way the figures in the background of the Frieze seem to appear *from behind* the semi-columns, as if the artist had conceived of the partition as standing in the foreground, while behind, as in a continuous strip, the figures effectively moved from one panel to another. This narrative device has a distinctly evident dramatic effect (in the sense of theatre, representation).²⁴ And yet the Master's study of the perspective pattern led to a further development. Actually, the entire Frieze is conceived of as a single scene unfolding behind and in front of a peristyle, within a portico punctuated by columns [fig. 28]. The diagram presented here shows that the horizon line passes at the height of the capitals' *kalathos*. On the other hand, the line from the observer's point of view is at the height of the second third of the panel starting from the bottom, i.e. at about 1.6 m from the ground level at the top of the first cylindrical body, i.e. at the eye level of the moving (walking) spectator. The perspective development shows the path of the scenes from panel to panel under a portico. The theme of the false arcade is so widespread that it hardly merits discussion: here it reminds me, for example, of the Hellenistic-Alexandrian motif of the Palace of Columns at Ptolemais in Cyrenaica (Pesce 1950; Gullini 1964, fig. 263).²⁵ There, behind the upper real columned portico (Corinthian order), south side, internal front, we find in the background, set back and raised, a pseudo wall portico on a smaller scale (about 1/3).

We will return to the subject of the portico when we address the question of the perspective of the work and the view of the Frieze, and thus its positioning.²⁶

But it is worth mentioning the relationship between the portico and the *peripatos*, between the portico and the *pradakṣiṇā* or ritual circumambulation. The Stupa, though static, is built to be perceived through movement: this is an important fact in design because the architect already knows how the construction will be perceived, knows its paths and – here is the point – the obligatory points of view/observation.²⁷ The architect knows that there will

²⁴ On the possible role of drama and theatre in the genesis of the Buddha biographical cycle in Gandhara, see Brancaccio, Liu 2012 and Brancaccio forthcoming.

²⁵ In general the false-portico or pseudo-portico motif (*logeion* in the theatre) found success in the Alexandrine world (Bonacasa 2009).

²⁶ On this point see the reference by Faccenna (2001, 182). The origin of this motif might be sought in the Parthian world that goes from Seleucia on the Tigris to Margiana (Old Nisa) and beyond. It is always worth rereading that brief masterpiece by Antonio Invernizzi († 2021), the "Réflexions sur les rencontres interculturelles dans l'orient hellénisé" (published in 2014). There is also a return from Gandhara back to the west: consider the contribution of the sculptors of the Gandharan school to Surkh Kotal (Olivieri, Sinisi 2021, fn. 6), but above all the limestone sculpture of Termez and Airtam of the Kushan period. In general the question as to where the sensibility was formed that we find fully fledged in the first art and architecture of Butkara I and Saidu remains unanswered. Michele Minardi, for his part, has presented interesting material from Chorasmia with a convincing discussion on Battria (Minardi 2019). Faccenna looked to Sistan (Faccenna 1981). As for the 'Parthian' component in Gandharan art, one is always pleased to reread not only Fabrègues 1987, Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1949 but also Rowland 1956; Marshall 1960a (§ 3) and Goldman 1978.

²⁷ The fact that for stupas we know the simple rules of *pradakṣiṇā* is an exception to the information we have for path rituals associated with other monuments with visual programmes, for example the Apadana in Persepolis.

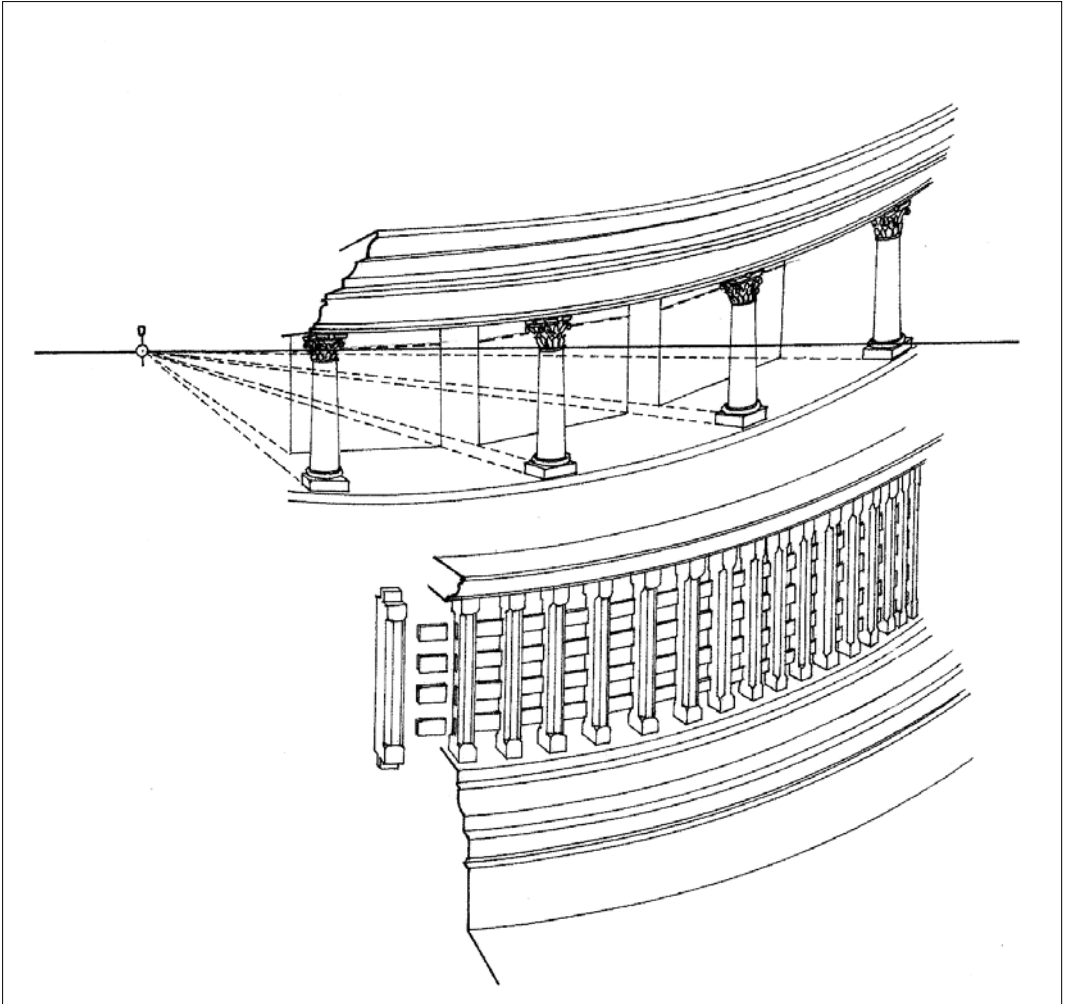


Figure 28 The false portico and the false railing; the dotted line indicates the sculptor's point of view (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)

be no different ways, no alternative points, to 'experience' that construction. Like a phonograph record that only gives sound if it is turned, and in one direction only, so here the Stupa is only experienced in movement, in a specific direction. This has a very important association with the fact that when we walk around the Stupa, in the shadow of an ideal portico, and always and only in one direction, mind you, we 'read' a story, a narration, unfolding before our eyes. How much does this 'obligation' imposed on the architect help the sculptor (who in Saidu is certainly one and the same person)?

Knowing that a frieze will necessarily be seen in motion helps the composition and its design. This is because of the simple logic that shows that in order to insert 'time' where there is no time (the static sculptural panel), all that is needed is for the viewer to move:

How is a picture or relief whose elements are essentially immobile, and whose world is basically stilled and silent, graphically to convey, and not vaguely to hint at, a story that unfolds in time? A story encompasses a sequence of events, but is more than their mere succession. It is the change and the transition from one episode to the next, in short the passing of time, which we must be made to feel if the story is to become alive in our mind.

[...] Since pictorial form cannot move, ingenious devices have been developed for enlisting the onlooker's help in supplying motion or movement, particularly in cyclical representations. To follow the Panathenaic procession we have bodily to move along the Parthenon frieze turning the four corners of the temple. (Pächt 1962, 1-2)²⁸

There is yet another aspect to consider (not so much as a hypothesis, but rather as an aesthetic suggestion). The repetitive, the rhythmic association of the semi-columns with the panels suggests a further association of the protagonist of the sequence (Siddhārtha/Buddha) with the semi-columns themselves, as if they were repeated symbolisations of him: the repetition annuls the multiplicity, making of the many semi-columns one single but repeated semi-column. In the early Indian environment, this shift in level would not be hard to conceive of, the column (the semi-column being its two-dimensional simulacrum) itself being a symbol of royalty and, making the natural distinction, of the Buddha as universal sovereign, *cakravartin*. Indeed, in the case of our Saidu Stupa, the monument is marked at the four corners by four gigantic leonine columns, while the two minor columns, also leonine, stand at the sides of the stairway, and two taller ones stand a little further out, asymmetrical and more external to the stairway.

Thus the space-time caesura was at the same time a symbol and possibly even a ritual, rhythmic support for mnemonic repetition of the story of Siddhartha/Buddha which, at the time of the Saidu Frieze, had yet to be transcribed.²⁹ Perhaps study of the texts and rituals could reveal to someone better grounded in these aspects than myself whether the pause suggested by the architectural caesura on the visual path of the *pradakṣiṇā* served some further function.

In metrical terms, the Frieze is a sequence of short and long elements, and the architectural caesura - figuratively speaking - is like the clash of a cymbal marking the end of one scene and the beginning of the next. We can imagine the path followed by the worshipper as a prayer in movement, syncopated circumambulation performed with few steps and slight, imper-

²⁸ At this point Otto Pächt adds references that I quote here for the reader's benefit: C.H. Kraeling et al., *Narration in Ancient Art, a Symposium* (57th General Meeting, Chicago, December 29, 1955); H.A. Groenewegen-Frankfort, *Arrest and Movement* (Chicago, 1951). I thank Doris M. Srinivasan for pointing out the interest of the Austrian scholar's work for Gandharan narrative (Srinivasan 2016).

²⁹ The term *verbomoteur* coined by Marcel Jousse comes to mind (see Ong 2002, 21). On the transcription of the oral tradition, see Richard Salomon (2018, 52), where he explains the absolute need of the Buddhist world, felt particularly around the turn of the Christian era, to oppose the prophecy holding that the teaching would be lost around five hundred or a thousand years after the *parinirvāṇa*. Transcribing, copying and depositing innumerable texts of the scriptures became "a sort of insurance policy or back-up system". The first transcriptions of the Buddha's biography date to the subsequent period: it seems to me that the earliest is the *Buddhacarita* of Aśvaghōṣa, generally dated to the early/mid-second century CE

ceptible pause. Obviously, the start and finish of this ritual path would ideally be in front of the central image (the false niche).

Text and image as a double competence in the narrative art, one discursive the other visual, are never disjointed. In fact, as already mentioned, in one of the inscriptions of the west portal (corner pillar) of Bharhut (see also Ray 1994-95), the donor, who was a *navakarmika*, is also called *bhāṇaka*, that is both building superintendent and performer in charge of reciting, preserving (and creating?) texts.³⁰ Taddei (in this following A.K. Coomaraswamy) uses the significant term of “picture showmen” for monks or lay members who had the task of illustrating narrative reliefs to the worshipper (Taddei 1999, 82). Note that Taddei does not use the equivalent ancient Indian term, because we do not know it, and because Taddei and others, including V. Deheja (1990) imagined the existence of these figures from the existence of the narrative reliefs, and from ‘labels’ placed as captions under the Bharhut images. These ‘labels’ disappear in Sanchi, they are not present in Gandhara, and this according to Taddei was due in the first case to the progressive familiarity of the worshipper with the legendary corpus on the life of Buddha, which was gradually structured, and in the second case also to the fact that “the life of Buddha was arranged in a more or less stable, meaningful succession of significant episodes” (82). The problem in this Buddhist art of Gandhara, and in particular for these first accomplished expressions of it, such as the art of Saidu, is precisely that of the relationship between text and image. Which comes first? There is no clear answer to this question. It is perhaps necessary to try to disengage from the iconological tradition of Christianity and then the Renaissance, where the image often follows the written text. An admirable example of *sganciamento* (detachment, uncoupling) is, after all, the Ara Pacis and, above all, the Trajan Column (Settis et al. 1988), which – unless proven otherwise – does not originate from a formalised text, but primarily from the memory of action.³¹ These conclusions, in contexts that are not so distant after all, are reached by Otto Pächt (1962), who, with reference to the contribution of art to the creation of the religious and dramatic text in the Anglo-Saxon Middle Ages, speaks in dignified terms of “stagecraft”.³²

Returning to the relationship between artists and monks, we have no evidence that these roles coincide, even though they both share a common conceptual context. If this were still largely oral at the time, the question would remain difficult to resolve: visual expression leaves taphonomic traces, oral expression does not. One could try to intercept this phenomenon outside of Buddhism in rock art, for example that of cultures marginalised by Buddhism in the Gandhara (Olivieri 2015b).

In India, during the several centuries around the Christian era, such possibilities existed. Inscriptional evidence indicates that there was little or no barrier between a person’s involvement in Vedic rituals and devotional cult practices requiring icons; potential patrons and artisans

30 Let us translate it as *rhapsōidos*, in the literal sense of *rhapsōidein*, i.e. ‘stitcher of songs’ (see the already cited Ong 2002, 23). In 1929 A.K. Coomaraswamy coined the term “picture showmen” (1929).

31 This is more important than the Telephos frieze, for which we have a collation of stories (cf. Milman Parry’s insight into the verb *rhapsōidein* as ‘to stitch together a song’, see above).

32 See the chapter on Milman Parry in Ong 2002 (It. ed. 2014).

could experience both. In this accommodating atmosphere, ritual forms charged with symbolic meaning congenial to the new context could be transmitted with ease. Comparable historical situations, in other areas of world art, exist to support this thesis. For example, quite analogous is the role of the ritual as the starting point for iconographic innovations in twelfth-century English narrative painting. In the early twelfth century, full-fledged picture cycles suddenly make an appearance for which no prior textual or pictorial models exist. Tracing the source of a particular cycle, the St. Albans Psalter, Pächt [Pächt 1962] is able to show that the spoken words of the liturgical drama helped the twelfth-century artist cope with the problem of finding pictorial expressions for subjects never treated before. (Srinivasan 2016, 49)

The problem would seem to be no longer whether twelfth-century iconography was inspired to some of its innovations by the liturgical drama, but whether the style of pictorial narrative as such had been influenced by the new venture of presenting the Bible story as staged drama, in a basically theatrical form. (Pächt 1962, 32)³³

Finally, as far as the visual design is concerned, I even believe that at least in Saidu, the Master, who was certainly a professional, retained a great deal of independence. Not only that: if one relies on the absence of a sculptural tradition in Swat and Gandhara before that of Butkara I, and then of the Frieze, one would have to conclude the artist had probably trained elsewhere (all the more so since one hears the technical and instrumental appeal of the Hellenistic tradition).

33 As mentioned, Pia Brancaccio was the first to deal with this issue and is still dealing with it, with truly new perspectives: “This is not to say that Gandharan reliefs represent actual Buddhist plays performed by local actors. What we are trying to argue is that there is a profound dramatic perception behind the creation of Gandharan narrative” (Brancaccio, Liu 2012, 179; see also Brancaccio forthcoming).

6 The Stupa on Podium

Summary 6.1 The Podium. – 6.2 Antecedents at Butkara I. – 6.3 Stairways, Partitions, Railings. – 6.4 Columns.

At Saidu the Stupa is built upon a raised square podium. The stupa on podium pattern, with a central stairway and thus a frontal approach, is directly connected to the narrative pattern of the figured frieze. This way, a harmony is created between the two, the stupa with frontal stairway offering ideal architectural framing for the – biographical – narrative progression shown by the frieze. The narrative needs a starting point, which is possible only with a single entrance. The fact that there is only one entrance is accounted for by the elevation of the podium, while in the case of a traditional stupa it would appear decidedly odd if not indeed bizarre to have only one entrance.

6.1 The Podium

If we compare GST 3 at Butkara I with the Saidu Stupa, it will be seen that in the same time frame, i.e. the early first century, in the space of a few km, two different approaches to space in the architecture of the stupa were possible. Domenico Faccenna made a particular point – with good reason, as we will see – in placing GST 3 at Butkara I about a generation before Saidu. The characteristics of phase 3 of the Butkara I monument, which we can place in this precise chronology, can be also observed in the (possibly) coeval phase corresponding to the final structural arrangement of Dharmarajika Taxila, which belongs to the same ‘Indian’ typology. Essentially, this consists in the raised level (*medhi*), the internal and external *vedikhā* and

the four stairways arranged in a cross pattern.¹ Further works were to follow, but without affecting these elements, which can still be discerned today. We find the same elements in GSt 3, which is dated to about 20 BC. In GSt 3 at Butkara I (and in the other two examples), accesses are horizontal and quadruple; a short stairway leads to the ritual pathway, anchored in space in all the directions, symbolised by four entrances oriented with sunrise.² In the Saidu Stupa of Sharif I, by contrast, access is vertical as the stupa stands on a high podium [fig. 29]. This novelty was also introduced at Sirkap (Taxila) and at Butkara I, in monuments built in the phase of GSt 3. Reference here is to monuments 14, 17 and 27, which are of great importance also for an understanding of the dynamic that would lead to the Saidu Stupa [figs 30-31, pl. XVIII]. The other, earlier monuments are pillar 135 (Facenna 1984), and the votive columns, already attested by GSt 2 at Butkara I, datable to the mid-second century BCE.

At Saidu approaching the stupa was not so much a matter of coming progressively closer as, rather, being faced with an abrupt ascent. Construction of the stupa on a drum (the first storey of the stupa) set on a podium accessible from one side only marked a break with the Indian tradition and an experiment never before attempted on such a scale. In the first place, the stupa rises before the visitor presenting a frontal approach. The implications of these two simple facts are highly significant. The monument not only takes on a new aspect, which had never been seen before, but also opens the way to future developments to which mediaeval temple architecture and the monumental shrine would be indebted. The precedents for the podium³ – as we have seen – are the monuments on enclosed square podium (F and G) and stupa (A) at Sirkap, as well as monuments 14 and 17 at Butkara I. The frontal stairway monuments of Sirkap (Block F and G) and podium 17 of Butkara I are not necessarily stupas [fig. 31]. At Sirkap the proportion between the width of the podium and the first circular body proves it.⁴ In the case of monument 17, this would be proved by the proportion between the width of the podium and the width of the square upper body.⁵ Monument 14 in Butkara is undoubtedly a stupa, although the eccentric (and offset) position of the small relic chamber remains to be explained.⁶ Also at Butkara, monument 27 is also a stupa, whose columned podium is very similar to the

1 Not at Manikyala, the other large 'Indian' stupa of outer Gandhara (near to present-day Rawalpindi): here we find the four stairways placed at the cardinal axes, but not the *vedikā*, which, according to C. Luczanits was deliberately omitted and imitated in the half-pilaster partitions set along the *medhi* and the first body of the stupa (Luczanits 2014, 245). If, however, the visible phase of the monument with these half-pilasters dated to the third century CE, Luczanits' hypothesis could not stand: compare the capitals with vegetal motifs of these half pilasters with those of stupa 61 at Amluk-dara (third century CE; see Olivieri 2018).

2 At both Butkara I and Dharmarajika, and at Manikyala, the orientation of the entrances is slightly misaligned. In these sites the northern entrance is shifted by a few degrees towards the east.

3 The existence of antecedents in the Indian area, in particular at Lumbini in Nepalese Terai, cannot be confirmed. I do not consider here the stupas of the Dharmarajika of Taxila as they are of uncertain chronology in my opinion (contra Kuwayama 2019, 111).

4 The G podium is 3.87 m wide and 1.32 m high: the F podium is 5.90 m wide and 1.67 m high. See attached drawings.

5 A kind of double podium is certainly unusual for such an archaic stupa. The double podium occurs in a much later period, and on a very different scale. Here the podium is 2.67 m wide and 0.98 m high; the later body is 1.41 m wide (max. height: 0.22 m).

6 The podium is 2.59 m wide and 1.10 m high.

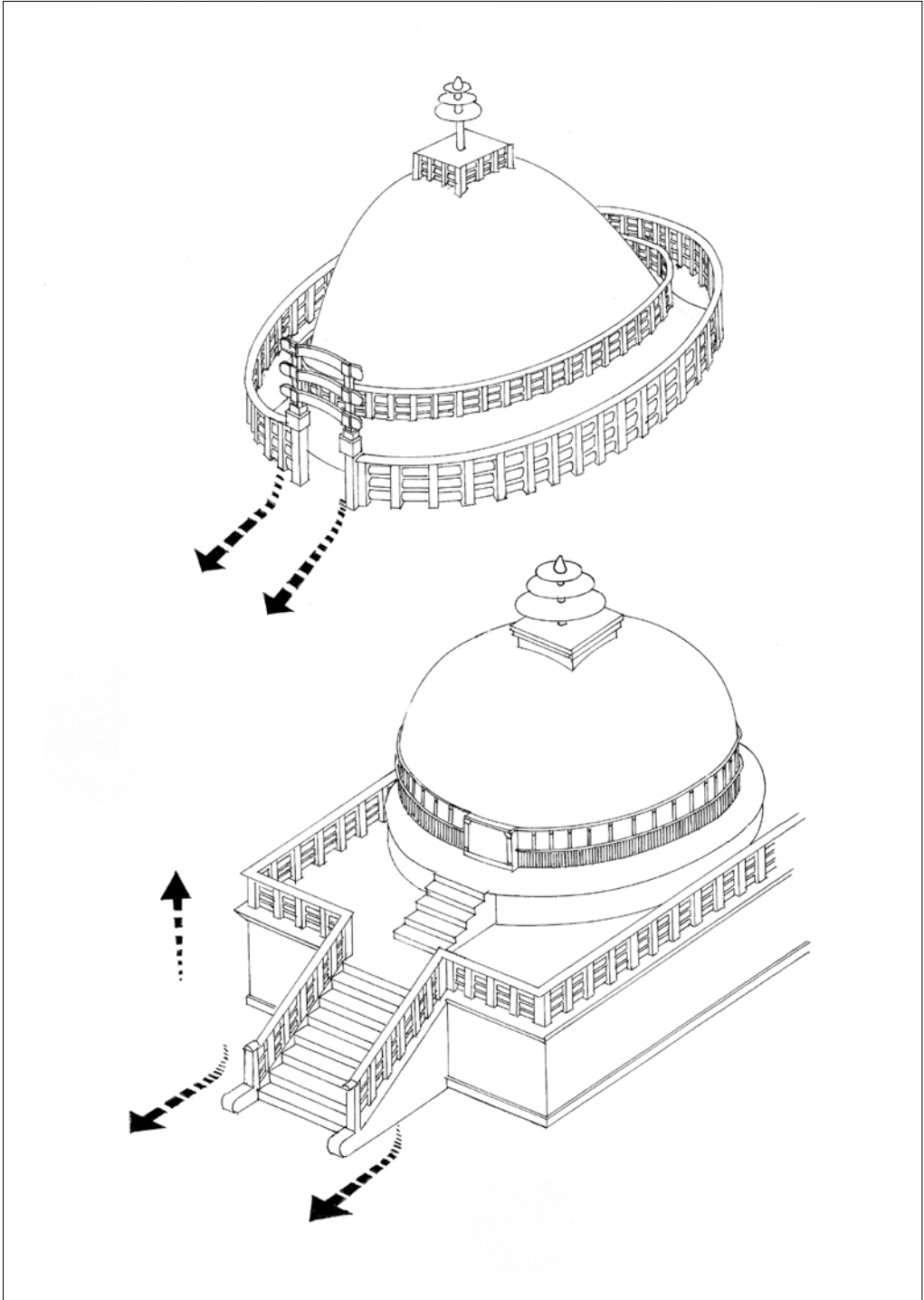


Figure 29 'Indian' stupa and 'Gandharan' stupa: a scheme (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)

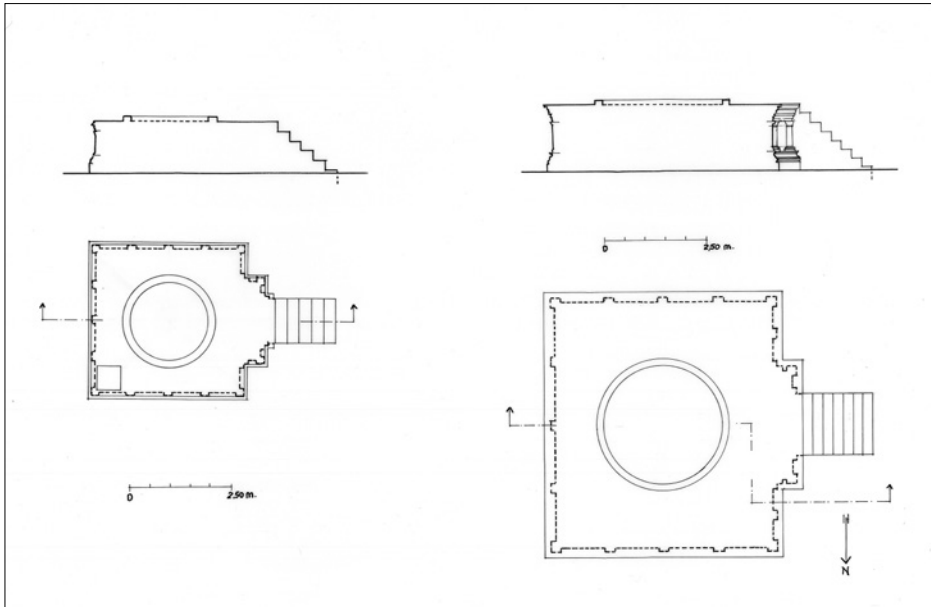


Figure 30 Sirkap, Blocks F and G (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)

contemporary monument 17, but with the addition of a bracketed cornice, of which - with Saidu - it is one of the earliest examples.⁷

Here, too, as subsequently with the podium, we would have a case of potential contamination. If the column had already been part of the Buddhist tradition before Aśoka, who raised so many columns himself, we have some difficulty with the square podium, which however recalls the throne (Brancaccio 2019). The podium with freestanding column, particularly with funerary significance, found its way throughout the Mediterranean area, with the (square in plan) pedestals of the *epitymbia*.⁸

Kuwayama in his recent work addresses the problem of the podium and the central stairway (themes dear to him) as a function of a “change of stūpa rituals” (Brancaccio 2019, 112), i.e. the abandonment of the ritual of *pradakṣiṇā* or circumambulation, in favour of *darśana* or (frontal) vision, of the central niche (125). I agree with Kuwayama (and with Brancaccio, who partly follows his reasoning) for stupas on niche podium and double central staircase after the first century, such as Amluk-dara, Tokar-dara, Ab-basaheb-china.⁹ In some of these - I agree with Kuwayama - the space of the *pradakṣiṇāpatha* is meagre even, if not absent. I disagree for the older evidence, or at least for Saidu, where the *pradakṣiṇā* is functional to the

⁷ On this monument see Faccenna, Salomon 2007; on the bracketed frame, 115 fn. 2.

⁸ We find illustration of the *epitymbia* both in archaeology (e.g. the necropolis of Abakainon in Sicily) and in ceramics (e.g. in the Apulian amphoras) (Sofia 2020). As for the podiums or pedestals of the columns of Aśoka, I know of only one at Delhi, built for resetting of the column NDL 164 in the fourteenth century.

⁹ I am mentioning here just those I know from having worked on them; for a catalogue of monuments with these characteristics see Faccenna, Spagnesi 2014.

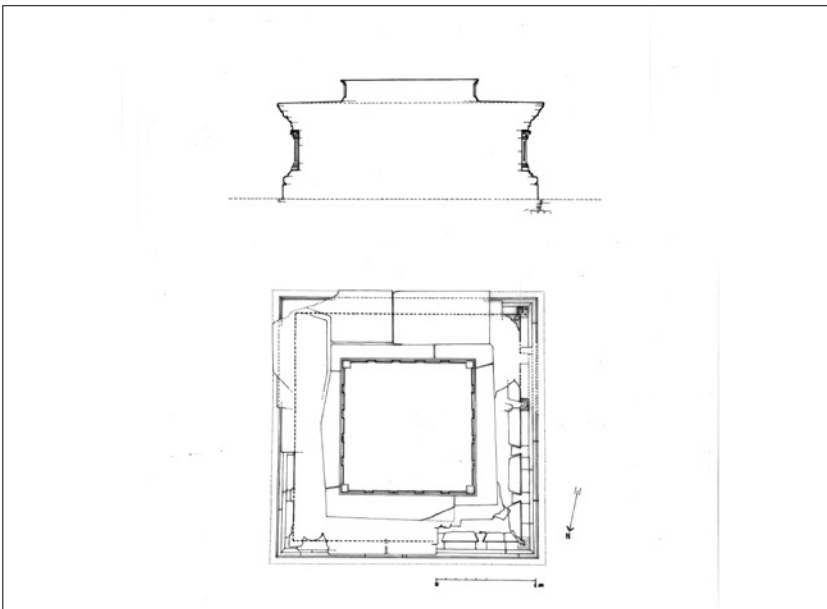


Figure 31 Butkara I, Monument 17 (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)

Frieze and vice versa, and there is a functional plane specifically designed for circumambulation. In this sense, the Saidu Stupa is truly the key to the passage, the only one that has come down to us, not only between the traditional stupa and the Gandharan one, but perhaps between one ritual and another, a key in turn also to doctrinal changes that still elude us but that perhaps can be guessed at.¹⁰

Be that as it may, once the new path had been opened up and the model of stupa on podium created, the Saidu model was to be replicated – first of all at Saidu itself, as construction of the Stupa advanced – with the pairs of stupas 31 and 21 and, subsequently, 57 and 32. And, with the construction of the Stupa, columns 75 and 69, on square podiums set either side of the stairway were replicated a little later by the two columns on podiums of stupas 29 and 24.

The model with podium then came to be applied at Panr I (stupa with columns here), Gumbatuna (column stupa), which are practically coeval, and then repeated *ad libitum* for three centuries in Gandhara, to become the outstanding architectural signature of the art of this province (for Swat, see Faccenna, Spagnesi 2014). Take, for example, the case of Ranigat, in Buner, where an Indian-type stupa was embedded in a square podium in a later phase.

We will see how this model was reflected in a Jain environment, at Mathura. And indeed, we know that relations between Swat (and Gandhara) and

¹⁰ In the Mahayanic direction? This transformation can be seen in the urban Buddhist temples of Barikot from the third century, where the stupa is absent and worship is based on stone steles (Moscatelli forthcoming).

Mathura were very close, at least during the period when both regions belonged to the metropolitan territories of the Kushan system (see Fussman 1994a). At Mathura we find pieces reminiscent of Gandhara, if not actually Gandharan,¹¹ just as in Gandhara and Swat we find Mathuran pieces (at Kafir-kot, for example, but also in the urban excavation of Barikot, see Taddei 2004), or at any rate showing the influence of Mathura.¹²

We can also extend our view to the monuments of Gangetic India, such as the ancient podium of stupa A at Kushinagara, the place that saw the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*, but also one of the minor stupas, stupa 14, where the partitions with columns showing bell-like capitals and pseudo-brackets are strongly reminiscent of the Gandharan counterparts (Vogel 1908, pl. XIII 5). No examples of stupas on podium can be traced before the Gandharan examples. The stupa of Piprhawa in Nepalese Terai, dated to the last centuries before the Common Era, certainly had a low podium in the phases associated with the subsequent reworking.¹³

We must, however, bear in mind that the podium – as can well be appreciated at Saidu – is primarily a projection of the ground. In fact, at Saidu the relic chamber was dug out from the top of the podium, as if it were ground level (in combination or alternatively, the podium can also be considered as a seat/throne: relics are also placed on the seat/throne).¹⁴ In this case, too, as indeed others showing formal contaminations of figurative language, everything taken over from cultural contexts extraneous to the Indian world was adopted insofar as it was already significant or indicative to the eyes of the Indians who would be using the final model. In this respect, once again, while the high podium may recall Hellenistic mausoleum models seen in western Asia, the latter were chosen to meet a formal requirement already existing and consolidated, albeit with new, bolder and architecturally innovative means.

Once the Gandharan model of the stupa on podium became established as the one model for hundreds of monuments over the next three centuries, it also set the standard in the coastal regions in the third and subsequent centuries. At Devnimori, in inner Gujarat, the *mahāstūpa* was built in the early third century on a double podium showing a sequence of elaborate partitions (Ishikawa 2020). The double podium model also came to typify the brick stupa architecture later on in Sindh. Later elaborations of the double podi-

11 Apart from the celebrated Buddha of Anyor, dated to year 51 (of the Kaniska era [178 CE]) (Government Museum, Mathura, no. A65), see – in the same museum – the pilaster capital in schist (no. A34-2537).

12 From Amluk (VAM, IM 69.1939) and Gumbat (Swat Museum, GBK 1).

13 Some stupas were built on square bases even after the first century CE at Nagarjunakonda (Sarkar, Misra 2006, 41; Kottkamp 1992, Abb. 53-4). In one of his many thought-provoking studies Michael Witzel refers to the relationship between the square plan and circular plan in the funerary monuments of ancient India, the former reflecting orthopractice in the post-Vedic context while the latter does not: “According to ŚB [*Satapatha Brāhmaṇa*] 12.8.1.5 the ‘easterners and others (!)’ are reported to have round ‘demonic’ graves” (Witzel 1997, 312). I pass the information on for the benefit of those more expert than myself.

14 We will deal with it in the next pages: the most eloquent image is the Gandharan frieze with the empty throne surmounted by a canopy on which is the reliquary: an admirable graphic synthesis of the stupa (see the example of the frieze now in the Lahore Museum [Acc. no. G-381] published in Brancaccio 2019, fig. 7.13) [NB it is very interesting that the schist reliquary that allegedly housed the Seṇavarma inscription reproduced an ‘Indian’-type stupa and not a Gandharan stupa on a podium (Salomon 1980, 262), such as, e.g., the bronze reliquary from Jaulian (Taxila) now in the British Museum (BM 1887.0717.23; see Fussman 1994b, fig. 10)].

um in the Gandharan area, including the crosswise stairways to be found at Bhamala (Taxila), Shah-ji-ki Dheri (Peshawar) and Zar Dheri (Manshera), would have important implications for the successive Buddhist architecture in both Eastern India and Southeast Asia. However, let us not digress further but return to the novelty of the podium. Kuwayama (1978; 2002) holds that the model is undoubtedly to be found in the Roman funerary mausoleum of the Augustan age.¹⁵ It is a thought-provoking hypothesis, for the Roman model might serve to explain why the Gandharan stupa was from this period associated with festoons, in some cases held by putti. These are images typical of the Hellenistic, and above all Roman funerary architecture, but at the same time they were already being used in the stupas. A great, continuous rectilinear festoon decorated GST 3 at Butkara I, while plant festoons hanging from the *nāgadanta* projecting from the *aṇḍa* adorned the ancient stupas of Gandhara.¹⁶ Actually, Kuwayama's hypothesis on the direct origin of the podium from the Roman world is not convincing; to fit it somewhat approximately with the evidence we might imagine that the model was adopted in Rome and at Gandhara independently, possibly with reference to the Hellenistic *naiskos*, where we find both the frontality and the verticality. Whatever the origin of the podium, it is in any case a matter of contamination, doubtless to be sought in those artistic provinces which, having acquired familiarity with the Hellenistic repertoire, could have been the source of the formal and iconographic contaminations manifested – perhaps most strikingly among all the examples – in the art of Saidu.

6.2 Antecedents at Butkara I

According to Faccenna, the art of Saidu emerged at the end of a process of familiarisation with certain formal novelties that had begun at Butkara I (Faccenna in Faccenna, Callieri, Filigenzi 2003, 297-8; Faccenna 2007a).¹⁷ So let us take a step back, and take another look at Butkara I, in the period of GST 3, where we find *in nuce* the elements which subsequently – a generation later, as Faccenna insightfully had it – would burst into blossom at Saidu. One important point concerns the pillar partition, which was already to be found in GST 3. Apart from this we have the podiums, still fairly low, of monuments 14, 17 (and 27), and above all we find the partitions with semi-pillars displaying Corinthian capitals, the Attic cornices with leonine protomes and the Doric frieze.¹⁸

The small monument 14 of Butkara I is perhaps the most important monument of the whole early Gandharan period, fundamental for the evolution

¹⁵ The thesis has been taken up anew in recent studies (Turco 2015, 34-5), with some particularly striking examples like the mausoleums of Pozzuoli [figs 48-49], and in particular the Mausoleo del Ciaurro. To the visitor's eye, the most 'Buddhist' monument in Rome is the secluded Augustan-era mausoleum of Lucilius Peto at the corner of Via Salaria and Via Po, with its monumental frontal inscription surmounted by a Lesbian *kymation* cornice.

¹⁶ As at Saidu. A wavy festoon would decorate the subsequent expansion of the Stupa at Butkara I (GST 4, c. fourth-fifth century).

¹⁷ With the aforementioned *caveat* about the non-"equivalence of principle [Butkara I] and end [Frieze] of this production" expressed in Faccenna 2001, 145.

¹⁸ In particular in the quadriglyph pattern probably derived from the *vedikā*. For the description of the three monuments see Faccenna 1980-81, 241-60.

of the podium with semi-column (or semi-pillar) partitions, but also for the Attic cornice (with lion protomes). For this reason, the reproduction of the north front, west side is presented in this volume (the north-west corner is the one where the Attic cornice is preserved) [pls XVIII-XIX]. Monument 14 displays a podium cornice with Lesbian *kymation*, projecting fillet with dentils and bars on a band showing various figures alternating with leonine protomes.¹⁹ The figures on the cornice are the stylised lily (or palmette), the *garuḍa* and the eagle on a lotus flower (on which, see Provenzali 2005). The cornice rests on small semi-columns (semi-pillars at the corners), surmounted by almost pure Corinthian capitals. The monument has come down to us much altered and cut by the construction of the later stupa 15. The small, delicate columns of monuments 14 and 17 display fluting that looks excessively broad, thus giving the whole structure an unbalanced appearance, showing uncertainty in the formal aspects, as if it needed more time to become familiar with these formal novelties. For the cornice with leonine protomes the most immediate comparisons are to be made with two cornices in grey schist from Dharmarajika (attributed to stupa D3 and chapel L) (Fabrègues 1987; Faccenna 2005).²⁰ The choice certain themes, such as the birds on the cornice of 14, recalls, on the one hand, the podium of Block F at Sirkap, while the choice of birds recalls the small ritual podium of the Maurya period known as the 'Diamond Throne' (*vajrāsana*) from Bodhgaya, but in general the entire coeval decorative tradition exemplified in the column capitals of Aśoka, where the stylised palmette, lily and flights of birds are well attested.²¹

Monument 17 at Butkara is decorated with Lesbian *kymation* and projecting fillet with dentils and bars on a band showing lemniscate decoration alternating with small pillars and leonine protomes [fig. 31].²² The cornice rests on small columns and pillars (here, too, real columns and pillars set into the masonry),²³ surmounted by almost pure Corinthian capitals. Over the podium, recessed by a good 60 cm,²⁴ is the base decorated with Doric-like elements [fig. 32], not triglyphs but quadriglyphs created with elements closely

19 The motif is also to be seen in three fragments of the same cornice, from Butkara I: B 6841, B2587, B2792 (Faccenna in Faccenna, Callieri, Filigenzi 2003, 287). These cornices seem to be the work of the same hand (288). The decoration pattern with dentils-and-bars pattern is an important element, see below § 9.1. The Lesbian *kymation* is found also in a fragment of cornice from a smaller stupa at Saidu (SS I 230), and at Butkara III (BK III 1985-1-43; Gul Rahim 2015, fig. 133). Dentils are an important element in the decoration of the gilded schist stupa-shaped reliquary, in which the Seṅavarma inscription is said to have been found (Salomon 1980, 262).

20 See § 2.3.

21 The presence of bird motifs in the earliest reliefs of Gandhara may reflect antecedents like the throne of Bodhgaya. It was certainly a recurrent element at the beginning of the Common Era, as evidenced by the accepted datings of the monuments of Sirkap and Butkara I, but also of the Bimaran reliquary which, although considered ancient, in my opinion should be attributed to the second century. The goose to be seen amongst the birds in the reliquary of Kaniška from Shah-ji-ki Dheri (but also in an eighth century frieze from Tapa Sardar) is also a symbol of Utarasena (NB the frieze from Tapa Sardar, Ghazni, chapel 17, is illustrated in Taddei, Verdari 1978, figs 28, 134).

22 Lemniscate almost open, S-shaped, placed horizontally. This sign must have had important meanings, and not be a simple graphic filler. It is widespread in rock art of the animalistic Scythian style in the Karakoram and Himalayas (for Ladakh see Vernier 2016, 80, 90).

23 Identical forms and proportions of the small semi-columns of monument 17 are also to be seen in an example of Dharmarajika at Taxila (Marshall 1951, 704, pl. 214, no. 25).

24 Podium: 2.67 m (h. 0.98); base: 1.41 (h. max.: 0.22 m).

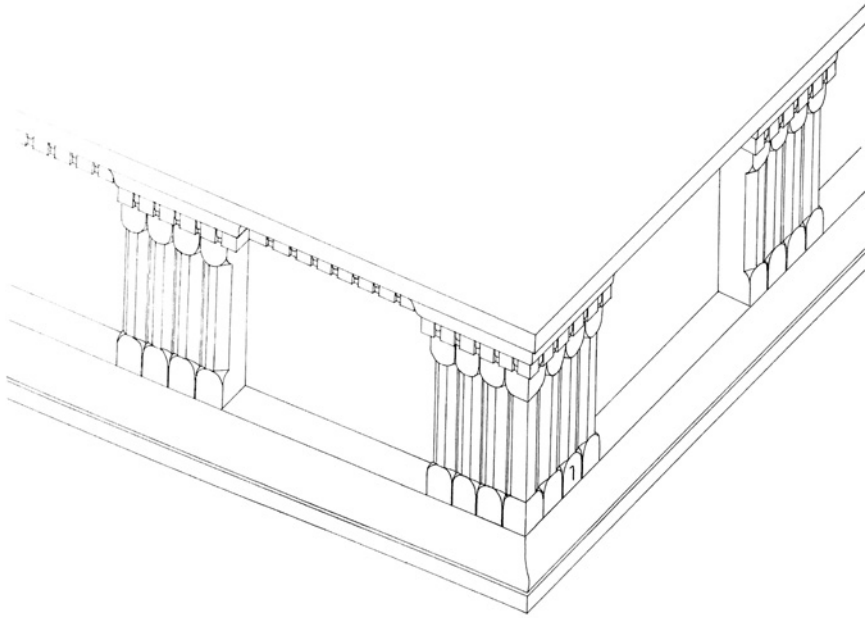


Figure 32 Butkara I, Monument 17, detail (after Faccenna 2001, fig. 52a; drawings by Francesco Martore)

resembling the pillars of the false railing were then to be seen at Saidu (Faccenna 2001, 174). It is a “processo di mistione”, not “una cattiva interpretazione”, nor a “influenza passiva”, but a “elaborazione voluta, originale [dei triglifi] con l’inserimento di altri [motivi] di tradizione locale, religiosa” (174).²⁵

Between these dividing elements the spaces were decorated with open flowers painted in tempera. The lemniscate of the cornice is a rare decorative element in Gandhara, but we find it in this phase at Butkara I itself, both in monument 17 and in the tempera decoration of the preserved upper storey of GST 3 (Faccenna 1980-81, pl. 60).

As we have seen, the top edge of the podium at Saidu was marked by a railing in white talc schist, which runs on as railing of the access stairway, ending against two low pillars. In this respect the podium, although raised, and indeed considerably higher than the Indian *medhi*, unlike the latter does not represent the ground area. The *medhi* serves as the first storey of the stupa, and not the podium. The podium represents the ground area, that part of ground which is consecrated and raised above the natural condition. The function of the podium in the Buddhist understanding can be associated with the podium of Bodhgaya, and more specifically its throne symbolism. The reliquary is placed on the empty seat or throne (as some Gandharan reliefs show), just as the reliquary chamber is placed on the po-

²⁵ En. transl.: “a contamination process” not a “bad copy/interpretation”, nor “a passive influence”, but a “deliberate, original elaboration [of the triglyphs] with the insertion of other [motifs] of local, religious tradition”. Faccenna’s indication of an indirect comparison with the crowning of a funerary slab from Alexandria in the second century BCE is very interesting (Faccenna 2001, 174 fn. 74).

dium; Pia Brancaccio (2019) has written convincing pages on this. While the throne could be empty but signify the Buddha, the podium-throne of the columns of Sirkap and Butkara I found precisely in the columns the most eloquent symbol to indicate the Buddha. This may be the right direction to be looking in to understand the way the podium (maybe of the western mausoleums) was chosen as a symbolic device to emphasise the aniconic value of the stupa as symbol of the Buddha himself.

6.3 Stairways, Partitions, Railings

In the earliest Gandharan and architectural structures before Swat, or in other words the earliest monuments of Butkara I (phase of GSt 3), the pattern with pillars or semi-columns had not yet been used for sculptural panels, while it had already been used in the architectural pattern. Beside it was favoured in particular the Ionic frieze and quadriglyph motifs (Fabrègues 1987; Faccenna 2002b). Isolated columns, on a base whether square (torus base) or circular (scotia base), were already established elements. The first evidence of the pillar pattern was to be found at Taxila in the bases of stupas and monuments at Sirkap (period II), and in particular Block F (pillars and simplified Corinthian semi-columns) and Block G (Tuscan type pillars) in the urban site of Sirkap. It is just possible that these bases (like monument 17 at Butkara I) may, rather, be columns on square podiums. Again at Sirkap we also have the courtyard of Block A with the central stupa and minor (column) bases with smooth pillars, possibly Tuscan type. We can therefore with good reason advance the hypothesis that the semi-column partition motif in a narrative frieze was first used in the Frieze of the Saidu Stupa. It is a device that was then to become canonical, and so popular as to become serial and manneristic in the later Gandharan architecture.

Contrary to the examples of Butkara I, at Saidu the Corinthian order rises from the podium, which is plain here, without partitions, to the Frieze, and is thus in a sense ennobled. At Saidu the Corinthian capital is transformed: the proportions change, it is simplified and amplified to become, to all intents and purposes, emblematic of the new architectural order which had every right to be called 'Corinthian-Gandharan'. The Corinthian-Gandharan order owes its success not so much to the experiments with the early podiums of Butkara I as to the fact that it was chosen as dividing element in the finest of visual expressions of Buddhism in the North-West of ancient India - the biographical frieze.

Here we must take a step back, and return from the Frieze to the pavement level of the stupa terrace, at the centre of which rises the podium of the Saidu Stupa. As we have seen, the Stupa stands on a square podium, 3.20 m in height with a base of about 20 m, a stairway giving access on the north side. Thus, to enter the stupa itself the visitor has to ascend the 15 steps of the first stairway, reach the top of the podium railed in by the *vedikā*, and then climb the (probably) nine steps of the second stairway, following in axis from the first (for a total of 24 steps). Here we arrive at the top of the base drum of the stupa (or *medhi*) on top of which is the flat surface on which the worshipper can perform the *pradakṣiṇā*. On the side of the base drum are two registers with the false railing (false-*vedikā*) below and the Frieze above, just as we find (according to my hypothesis) in the great stupa of Kanganahalli.

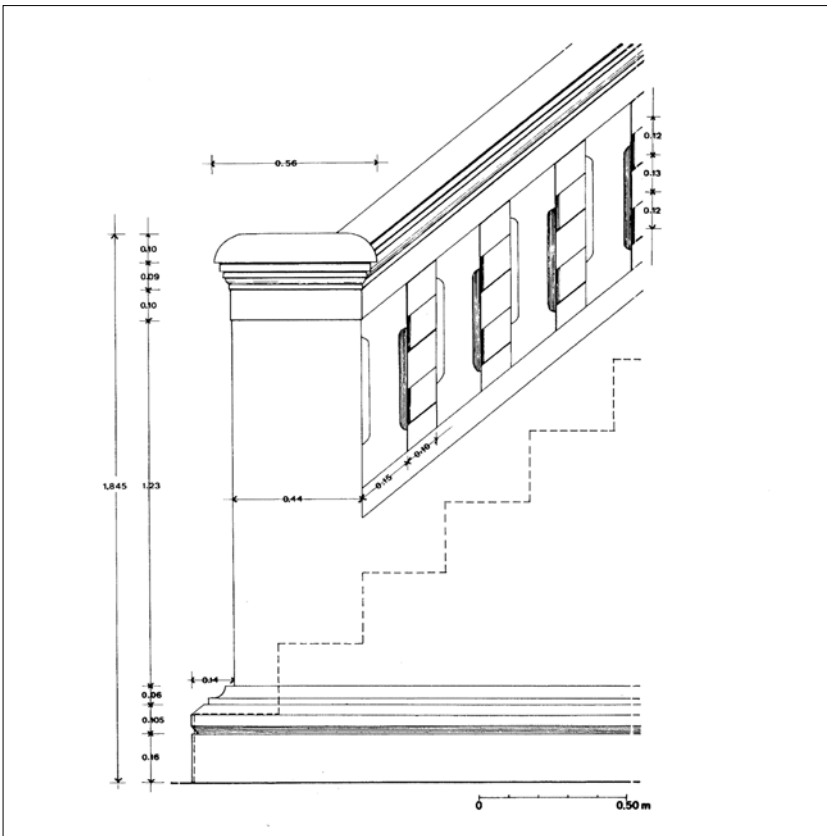


Figure 33 Saidu Sharif I, the first stairway (after Faccenna 1995a, fig. 209; drawings by Francesco Martore)

The lower stairway – as in the Indian stupa stairways (*sopāna*) – had a railing with a heavy talc schist banister. This ended, or rather continued, with the enclosure (railing) (*vedikā*) of the podium, in this respect perfectly identical with the enclosures of the great Indian stupas [fig. 33]. These railings were classically made up by uprights (*vedikā-sthāmba*) and cross-bars (*sūcī*), with covering (*uṣṇīṣa*), evidently imitating wooden architecture. So far, then, Saidu shows nothing new with respect to the Indian stupa (including GSt 2), apart from the fact that the stairways of the Indian stupas (including GSt 2) are short and elongated, while the Saidu staircase is long and slopes at 45°.

Thus the novelty is not formal but technical. The presence of a railing of that weight on a square plan and, moreover, on such a long and sloping stairway is certainly a technical gamble, never before attempted on such a scale to my knowledge.²⁶ In general, the heavy railings of the Indian stupas have broader and more massive *vedikā-sthāmba*, firmly fixed in the floor and, thanks to the circular plan, structurally solid. The same railing, but on

²⁶ Another ‘technical gamble’ was the design of the false railing mounted in openwork, i.e. detached from the wall of the stupa, and moreover placed under the frieze. On the ornamental *vedikā* see Bénisti 1963.

stone bases resting on or anchored to the top level of the podium, is certainly less stable. And contributing to making the situation even more unstable is the fact that the *uṣṇīṣa* of the railing is made up of two parts and has a volume twice that of the base. This meant a relatively high centre of gravity although – following the Indian tradition – the base (*ālabhana*) was probably set into the floor. Moreover, besides having weak points at the corners, the railing does not end up – as in the Indian stupas – against the reassuring monumental gates (*torāṇa*), but against the low top pillars of the stairway railing. From this point the railing becomes a banister (with a heavy *uṣṇīṣa*), running down the sides of the stairway which shows a slope of 45°. The bases of the railing must have been assembled to form an inclined plane at the sides of the steps – ending with the two entrance pillars, against which the entire weight of the structure comes to bear. Compared with the short and less sloping stairways of GSt 3 at Butkara I, where we find two solid entrance pillars, at Saidu the initial pillars are of the same width as the *stāmbha* of the railing. Thus it was an intrinsically weak structure. Clearly, the weakness of the structure must have been a cause of considerable concern for those responsible for the maintenance of the sanctuary and Stupa. As far as I can recall, there exists only one type of monument with fairly certain chronological placing in which this gamble was taken before Saidu (square railing connected to the railing of a stairway at 45°), but on a very different scale. My reference here is to the type to be seen at Sirkap, Blocks F and G (Faccenna 1995a, pl. 272).²⁷ Recent re-examination of the data preserved by Domenico Faccenna in the archives of the Italian Archaeological Mission bears out the possibility that these two Sirkap examples were columns or pillars (Faccenna 2001, 168 fn. 63; 2007b; see also Kuwayama 1978 and above [fig. 30]). Further confirmation could be seen in the find of two fragments of statues of a seated lion (placed on the top of columns) from both Block G and F (Marshall 1951, pls. 27d, 34c).²⁸ The Block A stupa, again at Sirkap, would be another candidate; the chronology is not entirely clear, and moreover here the railing is not made up of assembled parts but of open-work slabs.²⁹ What is in any case clear is that the podium model was first established at Taxila and Swat; we have no clear chronologies for the other

27 Also at Butkara I we find columns on podiums as early as the second extension of the Stupa (GSt 2; second half of second century BCE), but here we have plinths rather than monumental podiums.

28 Maximum height as reconstructed c. 70 cm, with the Block F lion as part of the railing (?). There are no further data. The two lion fragments were not included in the list of sculptures in Marshall 1951. A reliquary in schist came from column G (Marshall 1951, pl. 35g). Faccenna's hypothesis was taken up in the reconstruction of Sirkap by Daniel Michon (Michon, *El An-tably* 2013, fn. 3).

29 This is one of the elements that incline me to attribute stupa A at Sirkap to a later date. On the numismatic evidence, Faccenna concluded that stupa A and monuments in Block F and G were in any case of a later date than the Block E stupa; here, again, I raise a question as to whether it is, rather, a column, as Faccenna argues, here with greater conviction (1995, 168 fn. 63). In this connection there could well be a different interpretation of the solid semi-dome with stucco reverse acanthus leaves, not as dome of stupa E, but as bell (bell-like element?) (with reverse leaves) or bowl (with outright leaves) of the Gandharan-Persepolitan capital of a large ancient column. Marshall places the monument earlier than the Saka-Parthian phase of the city. Let us recall that votive columns had been present at Butkara I starting from the second reconstruction of the great stupa (GSt 2; second half of second century BCE). Given the difficulties of chronological placing (intending to consider only monuments earlier than 50 CE), I will not extend examination to the stupas on podium in the various sanctuaries of the Taxila valley. Cf. Kuwayama 1978.

sites. We know that the lords of Swat, rich and powerful thanks to the plentiful crops of their region, frequented Taxila, the metropolis on the other side of the Indus, the city *par excellence*, if we exclude Puṣkalāvati, which was linked to Swat by direct economic exchanges, in particular of food supplies. At Taxila we find votive material possibly donated by aristocrats from Swat (Provenzali forthcoming), recognised by the style, but also by the material – schist – not to be found in the region of Taxila.

Coming back to the railing, it was certainly a major undertaking to import the traditional railing on square podium with central stairway. From the point of view of design, this sort of contamination between tradition and innovation created a great novelty in terms of visual impact, but technically it was a gamble. It is worth noting that while the stupa on podium continued to enjoy success, to the extent that after Saidu there is hardly any Gandharan stupa that is not on a podium, the railing as architectural element virtually disappears. It is not to be found in the later large stupas of Swat, excellently documented as they are. We have found no evidence of it in the excavations at Gumbat, nor at Amluk-dara.³⁰ We must bear in mind that *vedikā* remains are always fairly large and of little interest to plunderers. On the basis of my experience, then, I would say that, quite simply, there were not any. The reason must lie in the fact that experience must have been shown – possibly in the case of Saidu itself – that podium and *vedikā* put together amount to a technical gamble.

We find evidence of this gamble in the first restorations of the Saidu Stupa, on the east side, in the plinth, in the reused and reworked parts of the balustrade (railing), which had obviously collapsed (Faccenna 1995a, 444, pl. 23). We have already ascertained that, if the Frieze was above the false railing of the drum (or second storey), then the *vedikā* of the podium did not serve as visual filter. In this respect, the *vedikā* – which, let us recall, is the heritage of the Indian stupa – lost significance once the stupa was separated from the external area by virtue of being raised on a podium, which creates the ‘space’ of the stupa. As such it could be omitted, and it is indeed no longer to be found in the subsequent stages.

6.4 Columns

Speaking of technical gambles, what are we to make of the columns of the Saidu Stupa? Nearly 13.75 m tall, lion included (c. 12 m, without the lion), with an average upper diameter of 1.3 m and an average lower diameter of 1.8 m, the four columns (*sthāmba*) at the corners of the Stupa were made up of a series of courses of small schist bricks with an average height of 10 cm enclosing a core of masonry in small stones laid in horizontal layers, mixed with crushed stones, phyllite flakes and chips, and clay. These small bricks show a characteristic cavetto on the inside base, evidencing the laying system. In practice, the cavity along the entire length of the perimeter forms a sort of shallow cup into which the filling is pressed with the rubble system and bound securely by the clay. In practice, each course forms a structure, solid but more elastic and lighter than a course in solid stone.

³⁰ On Gumbat and Amluk-dara, see the final excavation reports in Olivieri et al. 2014, and Olivieri 2018.

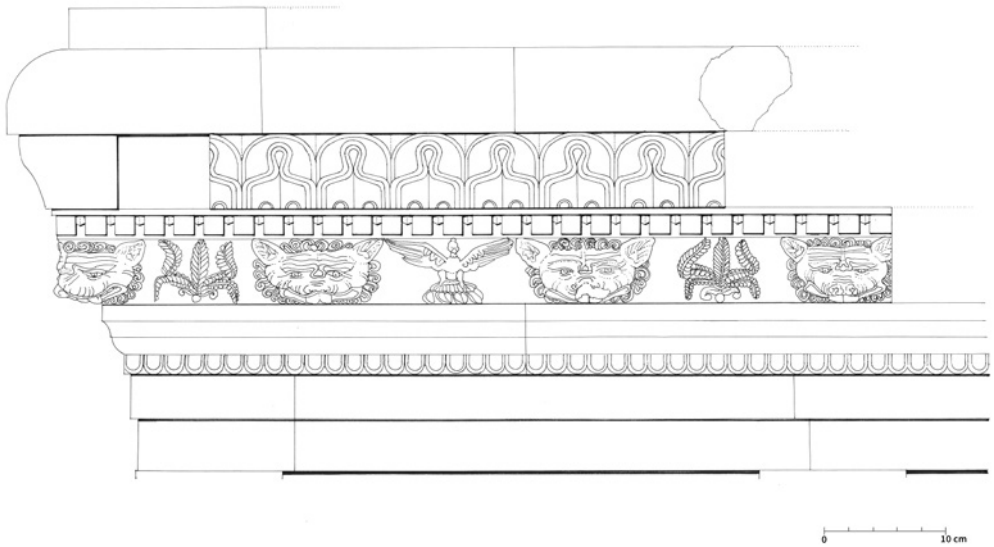
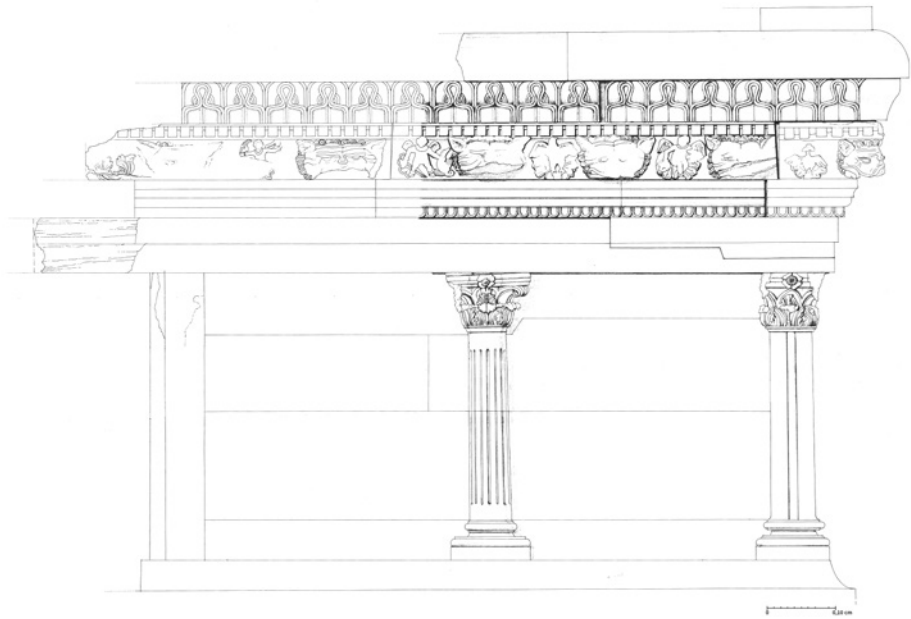


Plate XVIIIa-b Butkara I, stupa 14, sides N (detail) and W (detail of the cornice) (MAIP; drawing by Francesco Martore)



Plate XIX Saidu Sharif I, Frieze, panel SS13 (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri)

The Attic (scotia) base of the columns rests on a cube of roughly 2.9 m per side (through comparison within the site we conjecture a torus base), while the top culminates in a capital surmounted by a seated lion [fig. 34].

On the evidence of comparison with the architecture represented in the finds, the capital of these columns is of the triple bell type – a type known as ‘Gandharan-Persepolitan’.³¹ The evidence from the 2011 excavation bears out this reconstruction: the documented parts show that the top cup-like element had a lowered echinus on a fairly high collar. The platform above the abacus projected out far more than the abacus itself. On the platform is seated a talc schist lion rising on its front legs, breast in full evidence, jaws open with the tongue hanging out. The columns are plastered and painted red (Faccenna 1995a, 492).

All the pieces are solid and there are no traces of through holes for pins.³² The parts were juxtaposed by gravity and cemented with mixed clay [fig. 35]. The choice of material is deliberate, as indeed is the choice of technique, for which we find no comparisons in this period. Considering the absence of an internal axis (such as a cedar trunk *deodar*, for example) we can only wonder how these structures stood up to the test of time. The most evident example in this respect is to be seen in the later Chakr-e Minar (or Minar-e Chakari) at Kabul, the last of two votive columns left standing until 1998 (Fussman, Murad, Ollivier 2008, 300; Dorn'eich 2009). The column on square podium with Gandharan-Persepolitan capital stands altogether 27 m high (the shaft is 12 m high) and has a diameter at the base of 5.76 m. Effectively, it is twice the size of the columns of Saidu. The column – as verified when it was reduced to a pile of rubble – was entirely made of masonry, unlike the Saidu columns.³³

As Chris Dorn'eich wrote:

The structural system of the columns was simple. The accumulating gravity loads were brought vertically – i.e., within the solid column shaft and in the most direct way – down to the bedrock, the best of all possible foundations. As freestanding columns, the Minars did not have to carry any dead loads. They can be considered as vertical compression members and first of all had to resist possibly dangerous buckling forces. Here, too, the obvious – not very elegant – sturdiness of the column proportions was on the safe side. The ratio of total height to smallest shaft diameter was 27 m. ÷ 4.5 m. = 6 for the Minar-i Chakari. [...] Resistance against wind forces, particularly important in the case of the elevated, exposed

31 Or, better, with three elements: (beginning from the bottom) dome, bell-like element, bowl. The upper bowl was in green schist decorated with acanthus leaves, on rows of dentils and bars of varying height and width. A fragment was found from Column A (Faccenna 1995a, pl. 45b).

32 Peter Rockwell (2016, 236-7) conjectured that the top bell-like elements were held together with a pin. Effectively, the find in 2011 of an intermediate element (to be inventoried) attributable to the capital of coeval column 75 or 69 (one of the two small columns at the sides of the stairway) shows a hole which may have been made for a pin. This way the cohesion of the parts of the capital would have created a centre of gravity at the centre and stabilised the column. However, the excavated parts of Column C – the column on the north-east side – show no traces of holes. In Column A (Faccenna 1995a, fig. 216), the only element with a hole is an intermediate element between the second (bell-like element) and third (bowl) parts.

33 Fussman, Murad, Ollivier (2008, 300) write “without clay”; Dorn'eich (2009, 71), reporting data from fieldwork in 1999, writes with regard to both columns: “Instead, their interiors were solidly filled up with well-cemented rubble masonry”. The cup-like upper element of the Minar was reinforced by an “armature de bois” (Fussman, Murad, Ollivier 2008, 220-1).

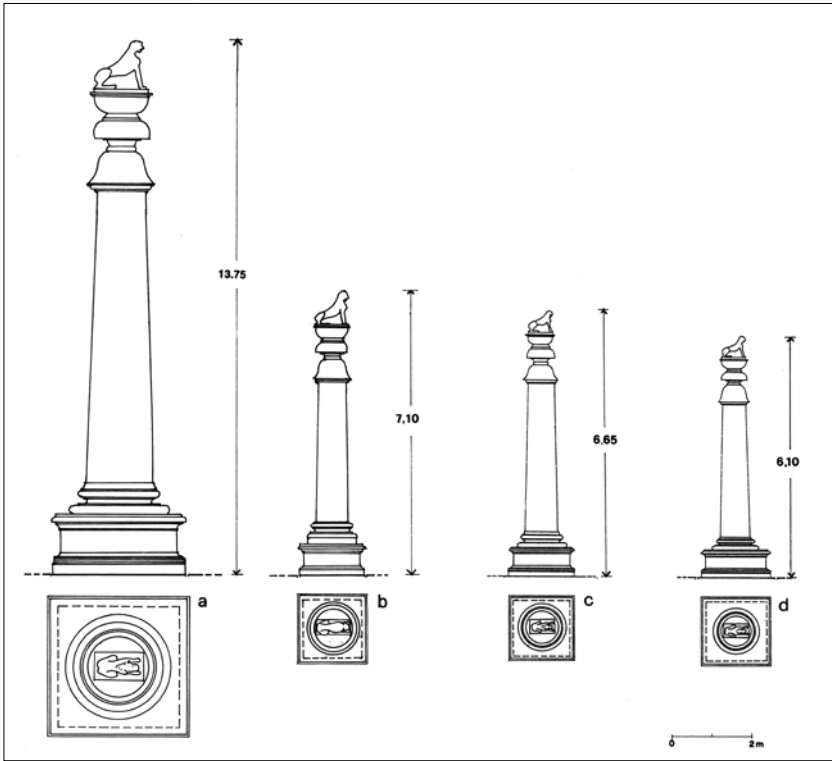


Figure 34 Columns: (from left) Saidu Sharif I, column C; no. 24; no. 29; Panr I no. 8 (after Faccenna 1995a, fig. 229; drawings by Francesco Martore)

Figure 35 Column C, the core (ACT; photo by Francesco Martore)

location of the Minar-i Chakari, was greatly enhanced by the cylindrical shapes of column shaft and capital. (2009, 73-4)

Thus the building technique of the Saidu columns with its ashlar creating cup-like forms with centre gravity differs from that of the later columns of Kabul. In any case, as we have seen, the structure shows sufficient resistance but poses difficulties for maintenance. The static and maintenance problems must have lain behind the relative rarity of column stupas in real architectural structures. The freestanding column enjoyed a certain success (although it became less common in the Kushan phases), in part because the height was not conditioned, as in the case of the large stupas, by the fact that it had to reach at least the height of the *harmikā* or top umbrella railing (*chattravali*).

Actually, we know of few column stupas in real architecture (Faccenna 1986). Here the same observation made for the *vedikā* applies: apart from Saidu, in Swat it is only at Tokar-dara and Gumbatuna that we find main stupas showing four columns on the podium.³⁴ The majority of stupas at Swat do not have columns, nor do those of Buner, Mardan, the Peshawar plain, Taxila - in short, the entire area of Gandhara.³⁵ In any case, as a sacred monument the column, like the freestanding pillar, is significant, both at Swat and at Taxila (at Sirkap and Dharmarajika), above all in the Gandharan architecture of the first century BCE and the following century.³⁶

In the first-third century CE, aside from the stupa on podium, the preferred monument was the *vihāra* or shrine (often on a podium) and subsequently the pseudo-*vihāras* or shrines on a square plan with truncated conical roof. The latter were to be seen at Saidu in the late phases, and also in the very late phases of Amluk-dara and Nawagai.³⁷ The column stupa that seems have disappeared by the end of the first century CE persisted as a model in sculptural representations and became canonical, as if taking on the status of quintessential stupa model. Faccenna (1995a) dedicated no fewer than fifteen plates to illustrating this subject, ranging from sculptural panels and models in stone and metal to petroglyphs (see also Faccenna 1986). Particularly important among these is a panel from Butkara III (Faccenna 1986, pl. 278b), which would appear to show exactly the Stupa of Saidu, to which is to be added another recently found in our excavations at Barikot [fig. 36].³⁸

We may reasonably conjecture that stupas like the Saidu Stupa came to be seen as exemplary, visited, admired, described and possibly even replicated in their essential parts, as was the case with great monuments in the Hellenistic world, which were portrayed on coins and in ideal landscapes and bas reliefs. From Mathura, from a sanctuary at Kankali Tila, in the north

34 The Panr I stupa cannot so much be considered a 'column stupa' in every respect as, rather, a 'stupa with columns'.

35 Again, reference here is strictly to 'column stupas' alone.

36 The first-century BCE inscriptions of the Apraca and Oḍi dynasties contain two references to the donation of freestanding columns. This accords with the archaeological evidence from Butkara I, where freestanding columns were already being built as early as the second century BCE.

37 Shrine 17 at Amluk-dara is dated to well into the fifth century CE (period V). For Amluk-dara and comparisons, including Nawagai, see Olivieri 2018.

38 See also Faccenna 1995b. On the panel from Butkara III (BK III 1985-1-183) see Gul Rahim 2015, fig. 26.



Figure 36 BKG 2269 (ACT; photo by Aurangzeib Khan)

of India, we have a Jain votive tablet (*āyāgapaṭa*) in red sandstone displaying an image of a stupa clearly on a square podium, which would seem to be looking back to a well-established architectural tradition [fig. 37] (see also Faccenna 1995a, 571, pls 248a-b). And yet I do not believe that it can be an antecedent; we lack the necessary architectural evidence. If there were any, perhaps we would have to seek it in the Jain archaeological evidence, which is very scarce, possibly because it was never sought with the attention dedicated to Buddhist art and architecture. The tablet in question (Smith 1901, pl. CIII; Vogel 1930; Benisti 1960, pl. XIII), which should date to the later first century (Smith 1901, 61), is clearly an idealised version of a Jain stupa-monument on podium, the latter displaying a series of niches with statues or bas reliefs, with a central stairway ending in a *toraṇa* erected on the podium, at the centre of the railing. At the (four?) sides of the stupa above the podium we find columns surmounted by *cakra* (Faccenna 1995, 571). It is indeed surprising to find a possible connection between the Buddhist art of Saidu and the Jain art of Konkali, and yet a *vedikā-stāmbha* at Kankali Tila shows striking similarities in treatment to analogous pieces from the Saidu Stupa itself (cf. Benisti 1960, pl. LIX and Faccenna 1995a, fig. 267).

In conclusion, the Saidu Stupa was taken as a model as from the second half of the first century in all its components except for the technically weaker parts - the *vedikā* and the columns.

Excavating the Stupa of Amluk-dara (early second century) we gradually became aware of a great many novelties introduced in this colossal monu-



Figure 37 A Jain monument (plaque from Mathura)
(after Benisti 1960, pl. XIII)

ment, possibly the second largest in the whole of Swat. The podium is 4.7 m high and 36.4 m (thus about 100 Gft), while the stupa superstructure rises to a height of over 30 m (here, too, possibly 100 Gft). The access stairway is very broad (3.15 m) and has preserved no evidence of a parapet, although it had a low entranceway formed by two pillars with Gandharan-Corinthian capitals standing at the sides of the first step set on two oblong bases whose short, front side was rounded, like the outer extremities of the architraves of the Indian *torāṇa*. While the latter were often decorated with protecting spirits (*yakṣa*), here we have Heracles (below, left) and Aphrodite (below, right).

We have no evidence of what might have rested on the entrance pillars. If we were to base our conjectures on the example of the coeval pillars built in front of the Saidu Stupa, there might have been some *cakra*, the wheels of *dharma* (Faccenna 1984). This type of monumental stairway, characterised by the rounded bases (or side-elements) began to gain ground after Saidu (Brancaccio 2018), and was characterised by two particular elements: the figured step-risers, and the lateral triangular elements (strings) within the stairway showing fantastic figurations or animals (see Iori, Olivieri 2021).³⁹

³⁹ In the following pages reference for the plates of the Frieze panels will be to Faccenna 2001. To avoid tedious repetitions, references to a plate in that text will be indicated with *n. The material yielded by the excavation at Saidu up to 1982 has been entirely inventoried with progressive numbering preceded by the sign S (Saidu), while material from excavations subsequent to 2011 is inventoried with a numerical series preceded by the sign SS II (Saidu Sharif I). Some of the SS I panels mentioned in the text are reproduced in this volume.

7 Building the Stupa

Summary 7.1 The Choice of the Area. – 7.2 Orientation and Light. – 7.3 The Festivity. – 7.4 The Stoneyard. – 7.5 The Raising of the Podium. – 7.6 The Atelier *in situ*. – 7.7 The Lateral Monuments and Stairways. The Façade.

7.1 The Choice of the Area

There was no antecedente for the stupa discovered by archaeologists at Saidu, which was founded, as the formularies of the Oḍi and Avaca would have it, in a “previously unestablished place”.

To summarise the points made so far, we may reasonably suppose that the project for the Stupa, planned in advance, began at a propitious time in an unspecified year that could probably be placed shortly after the year 50. We know that the Stupa and its Frieze were part of one and the same project under the supervision of an architect and sculptor, called by Domenico Faccenna the Master of Saidu. The work may have been commissioned by the highest local authorities – quite possibly the royal house of the Oḍi – and lavishly funded, seeing that the enterprise (or company) was able to secure the supplies in advance. There can be no doubt that the choice of materials was made by the Master himself. His enterprise must have been important, already enjoying success, and must have worked on various other orders, possibly before, possibly after Saidu (we have evidence of the same hand and other monuments in Swat, at Parrai and at Butkara I). The prestige of his clients, the availability of resources placed at his disposal and the good reputation of the enterprise were sufficient to ensure the necessary supply of high-quality material chosen for the project. The green chlorite schist (serpentinite) for the registers of the second storey (Frieze and false railing) and the white talc schist (podium facing, etc., columns, balusters) are two varieties of stone available in Swat, but somewhat rare.

So let us return to Saidu. The first question to address was the choice of the site. Choice fell on this sloping ground beside which runs a watercourse, flow-

ing down the western Shararai mountains, within sight of the river Saidu and the river Swat. Upstream there flows a small watercourse which periodically cuts across the mountain slope, although today it is no longer noticeable. The slope was levelled out into two terraces, quadrangular in plan, on the upper one of which the Monastery was to be built, while the lower one was for the stupa terrace. The second terrace lies at about 3 m below the upper one. We do not know whether there were already strict rules at the time of construction, like those later contained in the *Mahāsāṃghika-vinaya* (22, 1425; Karashima 2018), which has come down to us in the Chinese translation by Faxian (416-18 CE), who prescribed that the monastery should stand to the east of the stupa. This prescription would be in accordance with the situation at Saidu and Amluk-dara, but in contrast to the arrangement at Tokar-dara, Abbasahab-china and Gumbat, just to take some examples in first-second-century Swat. That the original text dates back at least to the second century is attested where, dealing with the stupa, reference is made to the square podium, which had evidently come into practice by then. Somewhat more interesting, in the same text, is the question as to how the *aṇḍa* should be erected. The idea was that it should be structured in two parts, first the inner part, then the facing. Reference here seems to be to building rules which, I assume, have to do with the statics of the monument. It would be worth looking into this further to be able to tell whether in some cases archaeologists may have mistaken this procedure for an enlargement of the stupa.

The ancient cutting operations on the slope of Saidu brought to light the graves of an ancient necropolis abandoned at least three centuries before, and possibly no longer visible in the year 50 or so [figs 38-39]. As pointed out above, the practice of burial in the earth is not to be seen as objectionable; indeed, bones were placed with care and reverence in the foundation ditches of some of the monastery walls (Olivieri 2016). The deliberate juxtaposition of ancient necropolises and Buddhist stupas is generally recognised, and Gregory Schopen has dealt with it in particular (2004). The special interest of the Saidu Sharif I necropolis lies in the fact that it does not belong to the typology, nor indeed to the chronological phase of the Iron Age necropolises of Swat or the Swat Protohistoric Graves (SPG),¹ but to an already historical phase (c. 400-200 BCE), in which, for example, the city of Bazira (today Barikot) had already been founded, occupied and re-fortified by the Macedonians, and so forth (see the absolute chronology in Olivieri et al. 2019) and the Butkara I stupa might well have already been founded, too. On the basis of the available radiocarbon data² shortly after the necropolis of Saidu came the mausoleum of Butkara IV (c. 200 BC-100 CE), with three chambers conserving the remains of twenty individuals, members of the same family. An archaeological and genetic study of this funerary monument has recently been published (Olivieri 2019b).

The graves of Saidu and the nearby mausoleum of Butkara IV are characterised by the absence of grave goods (present in abundance in the earlier graves). Moreover, the dead here show a common genetic heritage, shared also with the populations that lived in Swat at least as from 1200 BCE to the

1 On which much has been done, with new data, in the last few years (Narasimhan et al. 2019 with refs).

2 Three individuals from Butkara IV (Olivieri in Narasimhan et al. 2019, 168-9), and five from Saidu (165-8) (Noci, Macchiarelli, Faccenna 1997; Olivieri 2016, 572).

mediaeval period.³ We may therefore hypothesise a common funerary culture. The difference between the two sites lies in the monumentality and the treatment of the mortal remains: simple graves in the earth marked by a small mound and a *séma* (a stone driven into it) at Saidu [fig. 40], a common mound with underground ossuaries and three chambers at Butkara IV [fig. 41]. The graveyard of Saidu had already been abandoned in the third-second century BCE, while the mausoleum of Butkara IV continued to function until sometime after 50 CE (Olivieri 2019b). Thus it was still functioning when Butkara I saw major works on the restructuring of GST 2 and, above all, GST 3, which holds great importance for study of the sanctuary of Saidu. One possible reason for the choice of the site on the slopes of the Shararai mountains is that it was known to have once included a graveyard, still remembered. It is possible that the necropolis, albeit poorer than the mausoleum of Butkara IV, shared with it a funerary tradition maintained amongst the higher-ranking families, the local élites. I have already advanced the hypothesis that Butkara IV may have to do with the role and position of the Oḍirāja. The inscriptions of both these and the Avaca often reveal the importance attributed to the family and to the treatment of their dead: see, for example, donee inscription CKI 176, dated to the dawn of the Common Era: “Nobody provides the funerary ritual nor food and water to the ancestors” (Baums 2012, 202).

Let us return to the preliminary operations. In cutting into the hillside, the dig was carried out on the rock walls of the north side for the twofold purpose of making room and accumulating building stone. The work on the north wall was also extended to the horizontal planes of bedrock, which were dug stepwise to recover as much material as possible. Subsequently, the empty spaces left were filled with flakes, scraps of stone and then gravel, and finally a filling of grit used to support the original pavement level in rammed earth (Olivieri 2016).

The work on the north wall was carried out with picks, then evened out with broad blades fitted with handles, and finished off with flat-headed chisels of a breadth of up to 1 cm, which left a series of parallel diagonal marks (see Faccenna 1995a, 61-4, pls 15-19). Excavation of the horizontal surfaces was not finished off since they would subsequently be covered with the pavement layers.

As I have already had occasion to remark (Olivieri 2016, 576), also this part of the work, i.e. excavation of the rock wall, was not only planned for the outset but was actually finished by the stoneworkers under the direct supervision of the Master. So much is attested by the breadth of the chisel marks, the precise lines they followed and the finished effect of the bare rock – smooth, level and neat. In no other documented case of excavation for extension of a stupa terrace (I am thinking of Amluk-dara), nor quarrying (Olivieri 2006) is such careful, well-finished work to be seen.

3 “According to the genetic analyses the individuals buried at Butkara IV were not much different from the SPG people. The two clusters shared the same genetic ancestry, with the only difference of a c. 10% increase of [Ancient Ancestral South Indians]-related ancestry at Butkara IV and in the other early-historic burial features. In other words, the individuals of Butkara IV, as well as the other coeval individuals (from Aligrama B and Saidu Sharif I), were largely derived from the same ancestral gene pool of the SPG individuals, albeit with a modest amount of additional admixture from populations from parts of South Asia with higher AASI ancestry that accumulated over time. This increase (possibly via the maternal side?) is possibly part of a gradual and slow process of ‘Indianization’ that proceeded side by side with the diffusion of Buddhism” (Olivieri 2019b, 252).

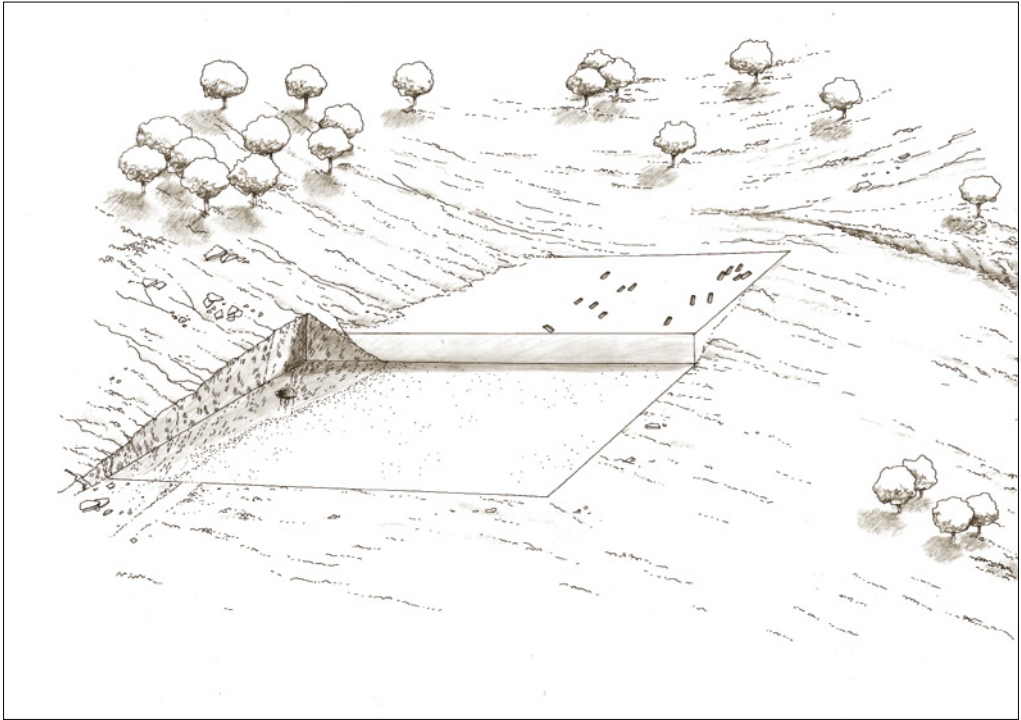
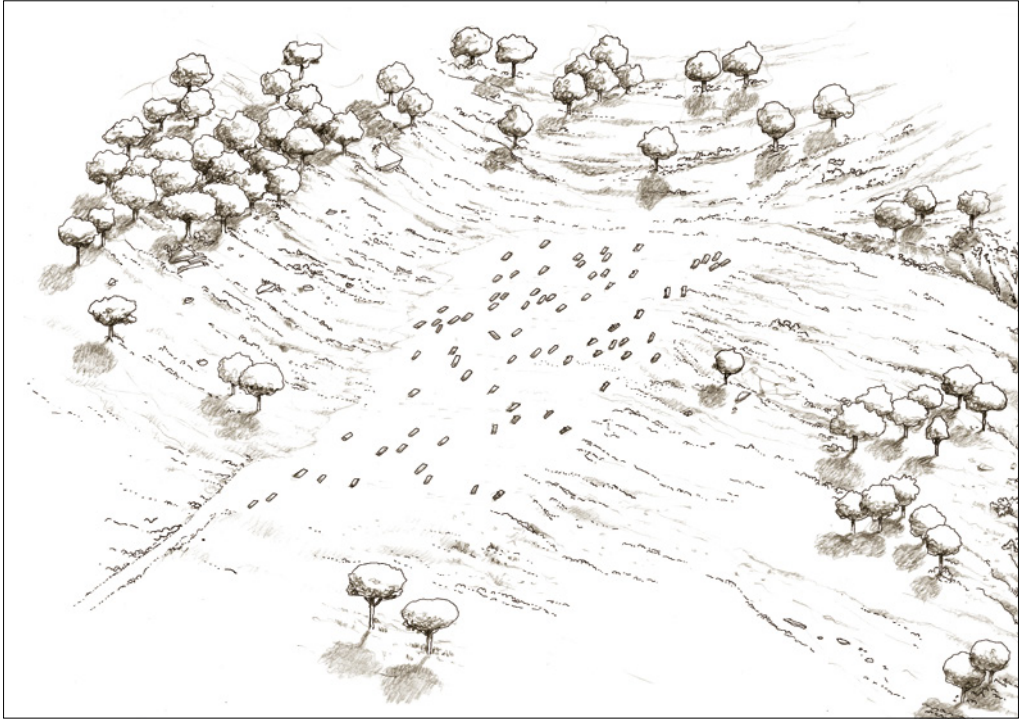


Figure 38 Saidu Sharif I, the graveyard (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)

Figure 39 Saidu Sharif I, the terraces for the construction of the sanctuary (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)

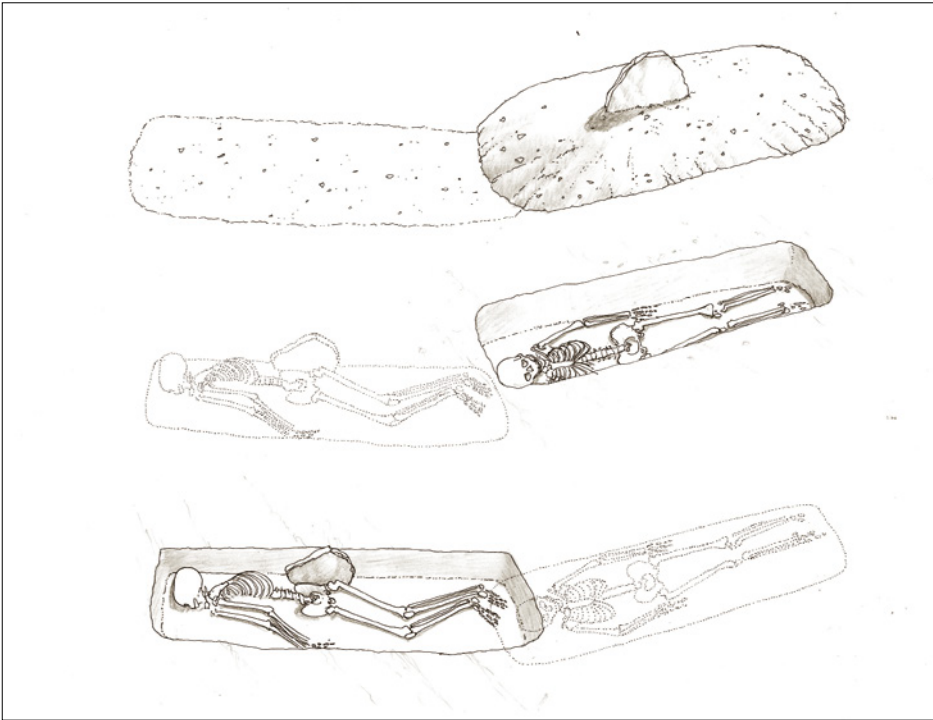


Figure 40 Saidu Sharif I, the graves (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)

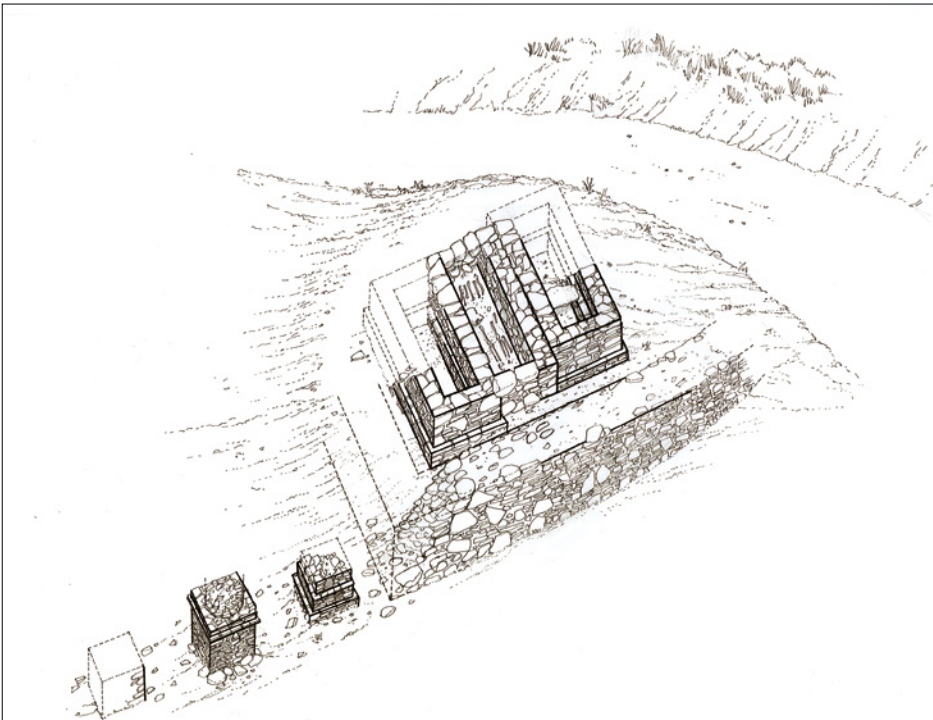


Figure 41 Butkara IV, the funerary structure (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)

The pelitic schist of the rock walls was subsequently utilised as filling for the solid body of the Stupa and the superstructures of the Monastery. In the lower terrace over 1000 m³ of stone were quarried, which was sufficient to fill the stupa superstructure. In the course of cutting into the hill side to create the two terraces, the workers found some graves. In some cases the workers created secondary burials for the bones exposed. The care taken by the workers (and supervisors) probably derived from the local funerary tradition that they shared rather than a sign of *pietas* by the presence of members of the religious community overseeing the work (Faccenna in Noci, Macchiarelli, Faccenna 1997, 107-8).

Having cleared the terrace space (probably by the beginning of the summer) material was brought in from the quarries, which could have been progressively opened up in the outlying areas of the stoneyard. As we have seen, for the chlorite schist the quarry was situated at Amankot/Katelai, while for the talc schist it was most probably at Mingora or Swegalai, on the opposite side of the river Swat at a distance of about 15 km. The pelitic schist used for the foundations, filling and, subsequently, for the *chattravali* umbrellas and the capitals of the columns, as well as the monastery, was of local provenance, from the rocks limiting the north side of the terrace and the quarry area documented upstream from the Monastery (Di Florio et al. 1995, 622, figs 306-7).

7.2 Orientation and Light

The orientation of the Saidu Stupa is towards N-NE, a courageous choice, considering that this is the most awkward side, facing a scarp that had already been excavated in part to obtain building material and make room for the stupa terrace (Olivieri 2016, 574-7). Any other orientation would have had a happier outcome: looking eastward towards Shararai mountains behind which the sun rises – and as Aśvaghōṣa wrote in his *Buddhacarita* “Ed egli [Siddhārtha] come il sole nascente sulla montagna orientale [...] crebbe rettamente col passare del tempo” (II, 20; transl. by Passi 1979).⁴

Looking southwards, the view is of Mount Ilam, which is both the Aornos of the historians of Alexander, sacred to the ancient gods (probably Indra, Heracles in the Greek reading),⁵ and the sacred mountain of Swat: here the Buddha dwelt in a previous life, in the days when “by listening to half a *Gāthā* of the law [he] was content to kill himself” (Xuanzang, III; transl. by Beal 1906, 123).

Or, again, looking westwards the landscape is dominated by the vast opening of the confluence of the river Swat with the river of the Saidu valley, prompting profound meditation: “Come la barca trasporta l’uomo [...], così coscienza e corpo sono in dipendenza causale reciproca” (*Buddhacarita* XIV 75; transl. by Passi 1979).⁶

As we will see, moreover, a scene with a boat is depicted in the Saidu Frieze (S 20; Callieri, Filigenzi 2002, 181, fn. 102), which might represent

⁴ “Then like the young sun on the eastern mountain [...] the prince gradually grew in all due perfection” (transl. Cowell 1894).

⁵ See Tucci 1977; Olivieri 1996, and the more recent Coloru, Olivieri 2020.

⁶ “Just as a man is borne by a boat [...], so consciousness and name-and-form are causes of each other” (transl. Cowell 1894).

the river trip on which Siddhārtha had the revelation of the nothingness of pleasures (*Mahāvastu* I 183; transl. by Jones 1949-56).

The one evocative aspect that might have prompted the builders to orient the Stupa to the north would have been the desire to place it in axis with the sanctuary of Butkara I, although Butkara I is actually hidden behind the northern slopes of the Shararai mountains. The alignment with Mount Falak-sar in upper Swat is precise but to be ruled out since the peak can only just be glimpsed, only much further north along the valley, but neither from Saidu nor from Butkara I. Ruling out these possibilities, I am convinced that the decision to orient the entrance to the Stupa to the north responds to a precise astronomic choice regardless of the immediate surroundings. This is not the first case: Amluk-dara and three other important stupas in Swat are oriented to the north. Some other stupas in Swat, such as Garasa, Tokar-dara and Abbasaheb-china A look to the west, others, like Shingard-ar and Gumbatuna, look to the east, while Loebanr, Arabkhan-china II and Top-dara look to the south-east. These variations might be seen as suggesting interpretation of these orientations in terms of the time of year when the stupas were founded.

At the same time, however, I believe that the decision to orient the front of the monument the North reflected a choice that took into account not only the monument but, in this case, in particular the Frieze. The Saidu Stupa is, like every stupa, a container of relics. In addition – and this is a novelty that to our present knowledge appeared first at Saidu – it is also the frame of the Frieze. The Frieze dominates every choice, every choice being accessory and functional to the artistic consecration of the Frieze. The Frieze in turn is dominated by the great false niche, the centre and focus of the entire work. The point I am making here is that the position of the Frieze and its false niche, – a great work of open-air sculpture that must have shown a play of light and shade in the course of a day and through the seasons – may well have been established in advance and determined the orientation of the Stupa, and thus the date of foundation and of the beginning of the works, in which case the entire process would have been planned well in advance.

To return to the examples cited above, of the large stupas at Swat, besides Amluk-dara also Abbasaheb-china B and Shnaisha are oriented to the north, but not exactly. In my previous study (Olivieri 2019a, 6-8), I pointed out that the slight misalignment with the astronomical north they have to do with the orientation of sunrise observed at a particular time of the year along the solar analemma.⁷ My first calculations on the orientation of Amluk-dara to the north-northwest led me to estimate the foundation date at the time of the year subsequent to the autumnal equinox (see also Snodgrass 1991, 15). The podium of the Saidu Stupa shows a N-NE orientation with an azimuth of 108°. Taking sunrise as reference, in the analemma conventionally calculated at 50 CE⁸ this orientation would correspond to the first half of October or very early March, immediately after or before the two equinoxes.⁹

7 The analemma defines the elliptical movement of the sun between the solstices when sunrise approaches the astronomical east, and the equinoxes when it occurs with a declination of a few degrees towards the north or south.

8 The variations are imperceptible: a few degrees every two centuries.

9 On the orientation of the Saidu stupa, I consulted Carolina Sparavigna (Turin Polytechnic), who had written some important observations on certain Buddhist stupas and monuments, and

Even more interesting is the fact that the cist (or relic chamber) where the reliquary of the stupa was placed, created within the podium of the stupa, shows a different orientation, yet more towards the north-east with an azimuth of 126° (see above **pl. VII**). This was, of course, noted by Domenico Faccenna (1995a, 442). In comparison with the analemma conventionally calculated at 50 CE, in this case we would be some time after mid-November or in late January-early February. Creation of the podium and of the chamber was achieved successively. The orientation of the stupa podium corresponds to the time when the design of the stupa was implemented on the ground, i.e. when the monument was founded. Orientation of the chamber was accomplished when the podium was already close to completion and attention was moving on to the design of the stupa drum, for all intents and purposes the stupa itself. In this phase, from this height, the corners of the podium were clearly visible, at a convenient level to use as reference for the alignments. The different alignment shown by the chamber was intentional, as Giovanni Ioppolo had ingeniously concluded in his study on Saidu included in the 1995 excavation report (Ioppolo 1995, 170). The idea is that this alignment, too, was, like the former, established on the basis of astronomical alignments, sunrise being one of the possibilities, and indeed the most immediate and readily verifiable. On the basis of this hypothesis, if the podium was traced out on the ground shortly after or before one of the equinoxes, the chamber was obviously designed and created a few months later. Following this logic, we could put the creation of the podium to October and of the relic chamber to February, or alternatively March for the podium and November for the chamber. The archaeological data on dates of reliquary deposits in Gandhara offer some clues. Thanks to the valuable study by Stefan Baums we can say that, of the months of the year (whether indicated with the Macedonian or Indian names), almost all were used for sacred deposits in the period at the turn of the Common Era (Baums 2018, 67), but most often - with six cases each - in the Indian months of *Āṣāḍha* (June-July), *Śrāvana* (July-August: e.g. the Seṇavarma's deposit) and *Kārttika* (October-November). This offers further statistical evidence in favour of foundation in March and deposit of the relics in November. In fact, creation of the relic chamber, deposit of the relics and closure - and thus consecration - were completed in rapid succession.

Building had to get underway, and from then on would be carried out over the stupa chamber, which would become inaccessible, reopening of it implying demolition of the stupa. Reopenings are not uncommon, but often associated either with natural destructive events (like the episode recounted in the Seṇavarma inscription) or with enlargement of the stupa, the latter being a ritual activity often benefiting from royal donations, ample evidence of which we have from Sarnath to Butkara I, in India and Southeast Asia. The Maurya Emperor Aśoka referred to stupa enlargements in one of those edicts on columns, at Niglīvā: "Il re Piyadassi, caro agli dei, nel decimoquarto anno del suo regno, ha raddoppiato l'ampiezza dello *stūpa*" (XXIX; transl. by Pugliese Carratelli 2003).¹⁰

in particular on the stupas of Sanchi (Sparavigna 2015). I am indebted to her for the preliminary points.

10 En. transl.: "King Piyadassi, dear to the gods, in the fourteenth year of his reign doubled the size of the *stūpa*".

Thus, at a purely hypothetical level, we could choose one of the two pairs of dates – March and November – as the most probable, which would imply that construction of the chamber was accomplished about nine months after the foundation. March is to be favoured over the alternative also in consideration of the season: obviously, it is preferable to begin works when the warmer months are about to arrive.¹¹ In a chronological and geographical context not far from the object of our interest here, it is worth recalling the dialogue from the *Acta Thomae* which took place in a city of India's Northwest (Sirkap?)¹² between the Parthian king Gondophares and the apostle Thomas, sent there by Jesus Christ as a carpenter and architect: "Ogni edificio si comincia d'estate e tu proprio d'inverno sei capace di portare a termine un palazzo?" (II 18, 40; transl. by Erbetta 1966).¹³

Before concluding this part let me briefly cite the conclusions arrived at by Amelia Carolina Sparavigna on the orientation of three large and well-known Buddhist monuments belonging to three different periods and three different geographical areas of the Buddhist oecumene: Sanchi (Northern India, second century BCE-first century CE; Sparavigna 2015), Sigirya (Sri Lanka, fifth century CE; Sparavigna 2013) and Schwedagon (Myanmar, twelfth century?; Sparavigna 2018). At Sanchi, which lies on the Tropic of Cancer, both Sanchi I and Sanchi II and III, as well as the monastery 51, the orientation chosen was as observed at sunset on the day of the summer solstice.¹⁴ This is also to be seen at Sigirya in the case of both the 'Lion Rock' complex and the 'Water Gardens'. In the third case, the complex appears to be oriented in accordance with the direction of sunrise observed at the beginning of the hot season, in April-May, at a time that could well coincide with the period that sees celebration of the feast of Vesak (*Vaisākha*), i.e. the birth of the historical Buddha (the date of which varies, depending on the full moon). Also worthy of mention here is a major study by Michael Willis on Udayagiri, a site not far from Sanchi ("the sunrise mountain", final phase: fourth century CE). The watercourse scoring the rock on which open the sanctuary-caves dedicated to Viśnu is oriented in the direction of sunrise on the day of the summer solstice (Willis 2009).¹⁵

Let us return to Saidu. I have already mentioned the many aspects that suggest exceptional organisational abilities behind the enterprise with which the Master of Saidu collaborated, or himself supervised. These also include the choice of orientation and season. The North – the least favourable side of the site, looking towards the crag rising at about 20 m from the stairway giving access to the podium – may indeed have been chosen to orient the Stupa, but bearing in mind the position of the Frieze.

As reconstructed by Faccenna, also and above all if we admit the hypothesis – now borne out by the finds of fragments – of the large central panel,

11 Let us remember, however, that tracing out the design on the ground did not mean immediately starting work. At Amluk-dara, for example, following the same line of reasoning, design of the stupa would have been accomplished in the autumn.

12 Cross-referencing the data of the coeval journey by Apollonius of Tyana as narrated by Philostratus.

13 "Every building is builded in summer, and canst thou in this very winter build and make ready a palace?" (transl. Bonnet 1889-1903).

14 At a different conclusion ("oriented towards the moonrise and sunset on the day of the Buddha purnima" [early May]) arrived Rao 1992.

15 Other important studies on the matter are Spink 1985 and McKim Malville 2015.

the north is the only option if the aim was to orient the birth of Siddhārtha cycle towards the east, bringing the growth of the young bodhisattva, if not his birth, to be met by the early morning sunshine (Filigenzi 2002, 101).¹⁶

The association of birth and youth with the east is wonderfully evoked by Āsvaghoṣa in his *Buddhacarita*, so tellingly indeed that the text seems – I cannot help thinking – to have been written by one who had seen the Frieze of Saidu.¹⁷ Let us return to Āsvaghoṣa's text: "Ed egli come il sole nascente sulla montagna orientale [...] crebbe rettamente col passare del tempo" (II, 20; transl. by Passi 1979).¹⁸ This passage turns the mind to the mountains of Shaharai that loom over Saidu from the east, lit up by the sun rising behind them, and the first sunbeams shining on the events as Siddhārtha grew to maturity depicted on the eastern panels of the Frieze.

The scene of the Enlightenment must have come at the beginning of the second quarter of the *pradakṣiṇāpatha*: "[a]nd he sat with his face turned to the East" (after Coomaraswamy 1916).

We cannot tell whether the vision evoked here is a figment of the imagination or a real possibility, but it is certain that the atelier of the Master of Saidu must have taken the factor of light into account in his work. The parts of the Frieze along the various segments of the Stupa drum received different qualities of light at different times of the day (and of the year), and must have shone out in turn according to the time and their position. Each of these moments must have had a particularly appropriate light.

Let us take the example of a great rupestral sculpture in Swat, the colossal relief of the sitting Buddha at Jahanabad, recently restored by the Italian Mission. The gigantic face (1.60 m high) was sculpted with impeccable anamorphosis, proving perfectly harmonious in all its parts to the observer on the ground, 10 m below. It is in such low relief that the volumes take on solidity only when viewed in the afternoon light. Here we are in the seventh or eighth century, and thus distant in time from Saidu. These techniques were, however, already being applied at Saidu, as in every site displaying open-air sculpture, whether on rock or on monuments. The sun guides the hand of the expert and observant sculptor.

The awareness of light is expressed in many revealing details. In fact, while the modelling is always plastic in the Frieze, almost as if to impose itself on the light, to emerge from it, to create its shadow, in the panels we always find sculpted elements that are almost in 'openwork': these are details, minor elements, which seem to have served to exploit – I would say almost passively – the light, so as to create a strong change in chiaroscuro at the appropriate times of day, with changes of direction that would modify the background according to the time of day. The play of light was accentuated by the changing shadows through the latticework of the false railing, which we

16 As reconstructed by Faccenna, from north to east we have the birth cycle, from east towards the south, life in the palace, from south to west the Enlightenment and Preaching, and from west to north the Death cycle.

17 Taddei wrote: "I would then suggest that [the Gandharan] arrangement of the scenes in a chronological succession of meaningful episodes of the Buddha's life has its precise parallel in the narration offered by Āsvaghoṣa in his *Buddhacarita*" (Taddei 1999, 81). See also Scherre-Schaub 2016, 30 ff.

18 "Then like the young sun on the eastern mountain [...] the prince gradually grew in all due perfection" (transl. Cowell 1894).

know was mounted so as to be slightly detached from the wall of the stupa.¹⁹

We are hoping that the work of my colleagues in the Mission will soon result in a three-dimensional reconstruction of the Frieze on which sunlight can be shone, taking the cue from a museographic experiment brilliantly carried out in a superb display of the Altar of Telephos in the Pergamonmuseum in Berlin (2018).

In conclusion of this chapter and introducing the next, it is, I believe, worth taking a look at some observations (Mankad 1950, xxi) regarding a mediaeval Indian text, the *Aparājitaprcchā*:

Indian architects availed themselves of the co-operation of the priestly class wherever necessary and for this purpose they had requisitioned the aid of ritualism. At every distinctive stage of a structure where the possibility of deviation from the fixed plan was foreseen, there were enjoined ritualistic ceremonials in order that they may serve as checks to the work of construction. The ceremonials were performed in the proximity of and sometimes even in the constructed portion itself. The priests would start these rites with '*prācisādhanā*' i.e. they would independently fix the cardinal directions and set up the *yajña vedi*. Thus they would detect any errors made by the architects and protect the structure from flaws. (cit. in Kanitkar 2010, 80)

7.3 The Festivity

In India the consecration of a 'religious' monument is a complex operation that can be planned even decades before.²⁰ It follows a sequence of stages: choice of the site, organisation of it, measurement and consecration of the ground plan, consecration deposit and, finally, installation of the ritual pinnacle. A clear and detailed description is offered by the *Śilpa Prakāśa*, a manuscript associated with the Sun Temple (thirteenth century) of Konārka in Orissa (Boner, Śarmā 2005). The manuscript (considering its distance in time and space from Saidu) describes the stages, the roles of the individuals involved, and how much they were given for their ritual contribution.

Once the site was chosen and the terraces levelled out, the first operation must have been to trace out the pattern of the stupa on the ground. The occasion must have been celebrated with solemn rites in the presence of the religious and secular authorities. We do not have a lot of data on the procedure for the foundation of a stupa in early Buddhism. For reference, we turn again to the new study by Anna Ślāczka (2007) of the late (and non-Buddhist) text, the *Kāśyapaśilpa*. Here the three stages of consecration of a sa-

¹⁹ This technique reaches excellent heights in what could be described as the lamellar *staccato* of certain sculptors of the Lombard and Veneto schools of the fifteenth century. It probably originated in the art of wood carving, and was formed by the superimposition of different layers carved in *staccato* (corresponding to different planes of representation in the horizontal perspective), an art in which the Tuscans and Donatello excelled. The device was certainly developed thanks to a virtuoso possession of instruments, including the drill.

²⁰ The adjective would be superfluous. The term 'consecration' actually means the activation. In this sense, the term 'monument' could be replaced by the term 'object'. The reader will find some interesting considerations in Elizabeth Cecil's work *Mapping the Pāśupata Landscape* (Cecil 2020). Another important volume on these topics is *Consecration Rituals in South Asia* (Keul 2017).

cred monument are defined: the first stone foundation, deposit of the relics, and then positioning of the topmost pinnacle.

In the *Karmaśataka*, a collection of *avadāna*, consisting of edifying (Buddhist) stories, we find a series of further highly significant pieces of information. One concerns the raising of the central staff, *yaṣṭyāropaṇa* ('raising the staff'), which is considered one of the final operations (Pagel 2007). In many stupas, even late, this must have been the case: Foucher (1905-51, 84-98) mentions this at several points. In other circumstances, as at Saidu – if this operation meant also the raising of the *yūpa* or central axis of the stupa – it must have corresponded to the first action subsequent to tracing out the pattern on the ground. Otherwise, it is hard to see the need to make use of these celebrations – organised by the secular component – to collect, in what seems to have been a competition between the king, the merchants and outstanding figures in the community, sums ("sixty million pieces of gold") (Pagel 2007, 382-3), that can be better accounted for as an advance necessary for the construction work, rather than as for the collection of precious gifts to be placed on top of the stupa (Foucher 1905-51, 92).²¹ But this is just a speculation.

According to the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, the *yaṣṭyāropaṇa* ceremony saw the presence of monks (Schopen 2004, 21). The ceremonies are described as being particularly lively, with sounds and songs and performance of plays (the lives of saints and of the Buddha; see Pagel 2007, 373): to attract the multitudes the king abolished the taxes for those who turned up, and "had gongs (*gaṇḍi*) struck, drums beaten and conch shells blown" (384). There are also certain other ceremonies for the erection of structures, even if only temporary. Again, the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya* describes the raising of a banner, a flag and a *chattra* (383).

Back to the Stupa construction site: as we will see later on, for a stupa like that of Saidu, founded on a podium, the foundation ceremony must have corresponded to the creation of the relic chamber. In any case, tracing out the pattern of the stupa on the ground with the orientation of both the Stupa and the Monastery must have been the first ritual action performed on the site. This should probably have been preceded by geomantic survey of the area, serving as a basis to define the spaces. The levelling of the terraces would then follow with a view to the date of the foundation of the stupa, which had been calculated well in advance.

As for the solemn presence of the Buddhist community, we should bear in mind that the Stupa was being built for a monastery that did not yet exist and was being built at the same time. The site, the preparation, and the building of both the Stupa and the Monastery were all part of a royal (?) donation to the community of monks. The task of tracing out the pattern must have been entrusted to a specialised monk or an important religious figure (Schopen 2014, 263). Once the orientation had been chosen, the *yaṣṭi* staff raised to mark the centre of the monument and the first stone laid, the – most probably secular – enterprise chosen by the clients took charge

²¹ In fact the text concluded thus: "Since I am not worthy of the revenue (that I received from the king), I shall offer all the things [...], including the 60 million gold coins, that I intended for the stūpa, to (his) stūpa" (Pagel 2007, 383). Further details on this ceremony come from the *avadāna* anthology from Merv (Karashima, Vorobyova-Desiatovskaya 2015). Foucher's source, Tao Yo, describes the giant stupa in Peshawar (Shah-ji-ki-dheri); on Tao Yo as the primary source of other accounts see Daffinà 1963 (especially 256-9).

of the project, while the works were closely followed by members of the religious community.

In ancient Buddhism the celebrations associated with the various stages of the work, like the annual festivities generally celebrated at the end of the summer, saw the presence of Buddhists and Brahmins, laymen and merchants, ordinary people and nobles. The monks received their parts in offerings of food and clothing, and waited for the dust raised by the festivity to settle before taking over control of the sacred area once again (also literally see Pagel 2007, 390). It seems practically as if once the role of the king had been established (or re-established) through the celebration, the stupa came - or returned - under the control of the monastic community. We also have a direct account of such celebrations: in the sixth century, Song Yun - as we have seen - recorded an annual festivity organised by the king of Swat, held in the presence of all the clergy in the sanctuary of Butkara I every year.

We mentioned the dust: at times it was more than metaphorical, as for example it was raised by gymnastic competitions and games - events between the sacred and the profane, organised by the sovereign with great ostentation to collect funds for the stupa (for both construction and maintenance). We can picture the scene: two teams running after one another (like something between Florentine *calcio* (football) and 'capture the flag'), competing for a banner to blaring music. The following text, from the *Avadānaśataka* (I 387.7-12), records a celebration at a stupa that had already been established:

Then, one day, King Bandhumat held (*kārita*) a festival at the stūpa. While the stūpa festival took place (*vartamāne*) a banner (*patākā*) was raised in the midst of (a group of) wrestlers (for which they had to fight). In the end, one of the king's wrestlers defeated another wrestler, appropriated the banner and carried it off, accompanied by a retinue of several hundred thousand people and to the tunes of various musical instruments to the spot where the Vipāśyin stūpa stood. When he reached that stūpa, (the wrestler) recalled the good qualities of the Blessed One, fixed the banner to the staff on top of the stūpa and took the following vow: "May I obtain such good qualities, delight such teacher and not alienate him". (Pagel 2007, 388)

By association, this takes us back to the scenes of the wrestlers, and the frequent if not common occurrence of wrestling scenes in the art of Gandhara, beginning with the Stupa of Saidu and the scenes appearing in the cycle of Siddhārtha's youth. Besides being one of the activities for young nobles to show themselves worthy in their fathers' palaces, waiting to take their fathers' place, wrestling was also an unintentional form of dramatic art, miming conflict that always saw the best side winning (the king's team in the passage quoted above), but it was also one of the forms of celebration of the stupa. Thus the fight of the young Siddhartha in the Gandharan reliefs also reflects the real life of young nobleman, as it had been lived by the donors of the stupa, now at the centre of power and seeing themselves and their world reflected anew.

The wrestling scenes - an excellent subject to convey the harmony of body and mind and the growth of the future Buddha - also convey a moral message in which the winner (Siddhārtha) is also the best of the contenders.

Il Bodhisatta si dimostrò superiore a tutti, primo nelle scienze della letteratura e dei numeri, poi nella lotta e nel tiro all'arco, e in ognuna delle sessantaquattro arti e scienze. (Coomaraswamy 2020, 25; transl. by Sassi)²²

Finally, since wrestling was one of the ways followed by laypeople to celebrate the stupa, the wrestling scenes on the Frieze are a celebration of the stupa itself, but also of the Buddha, who is the recondite and manifest symbol of the stupa. In circumstances of the sort we can imagine also the participation of the musicians and dancers (including the “Persian snappers”) that we often find depicted, from the earliest phases of the art of Gandhara including, for example, the phases associated with GST 3 at Butkara I.²³

Let me make a digression here. In the preceding pages I have mentioned - mainly on the basis of Pia Brancaccio - the potential role of theatre and religious drama in the formation of the new narrative language (Brancaccio, Liu 2012; Brancaccio forthcoming). The role of theatre is explicitly intuited in the series of friezes known as ‘actors’ friezes’, which are recurrent in Swat production from the second century onwards, and which seem to be a typical production of some specific workshops especially in the Barikot area (Brancaccio, Olivieri 2019). One of the characteristics of these friezes is that the representation of the figures conversing in pairs with a lively gesture, suggesting dialogues expressed in a clear voice. In the Frieze, on the other hand, all the figures are distinguished by their composed position in space, which is manifested in the position of the hands and arms almost always close to the body. There are exceptions, of course: for example, SS I 1212, which depicts a character bringing his hands to his head, as if in a gesture of despair, perhaps pertinent to a scene from the ‘Death Cycle’ (*parinirvāṇa*). In this case, the ‘dislocated’ position of the arms is explained by the need to express, through a cliché, the narration of the event. In the rest of the Frieze, the characters are silent, with their lips not tightened, but always closed: they do not speak, they are more spectators than actors. The only case in which we can clearly recognise scenes in which the vitality of the body is expressed are the fight scenes and the scenes with musicians, men (S 1137) (*53a-b) and women (S 1152) (*553c-4a-c) (Faccenna 2002, tab. XI). In both cases, the movement of the arms, the puffed out cheeks blowing on the instruments, the heads turned upwards, sometimes to the right and sometimes to the left, the arms raised in the accompaniment of the sound with the rhythm of the body, all tend to break the balance that is dominant elsewhere. One might think, therefore, that the musical procession of the stupa festival might be at the origin of this important break in the solemnity of the Frieze as a whole.²⁴

With regard to festivals, seasonal cycles and the Buddhist calendar, I would like to conclude this chapter with a reference to an important work by Anna Filigenzi (2019), concerning the sanctuary of Saidu. Minor stupa 38,

²² En. transl.: “The *Bodhisatta* proved himself superior to all, first in the sciences of letters and numbers, then in wrestling and archery, and in each of the sixty-four arts and sciences”.

²³ See the Chinese version of the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*: musicians, dancers and actors among others were present at the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha (Bongard-Levin 1981, 14). I remind the reader here of the brilliant article on the “Persian snappers” by Ciro Lo Muzio (2019).

²⁴ The dimension of ‘leisure’ associated with the sacred spaces of Buddhism is still very evident today, even in unexpected ways. Justin T. McDaniel has dedicated a recent study to this theme with the significant title: *Architects of Buddhist Leisure* (McDaniel 2017).

built in period I, phase c of the sanctuary (late first century CE; Faccenna 1995a, 280-2) presents a frieze with a double figured register separated by a continuous rectilinear festoon. At the bottom are selected scenes from the life of the Buddha separated by Gandharan-Corinthian semi-columns, at the top is a continuous frieze with festive and courtly scenes interrupted by vines.²⁵ The scenes in the upper register clearly have an agricultural and courtly character, as in a 'Cycle of the Months' of a medieval church: the general theme is that of offerings made to a character wearing a conical headdress seated in a European manner on a folding throne (a sort of curule saddle), a sovereign, by those making the offering also represented wearing conical headdresses; some of the scenes are repeated. We recognise scenes associated with the seasons: spring (S 704 and S 418: the offering of the lamb to the ruler?), summer (S 418: the offering of fruits), autumn (S 735: the offering of wine). The overlap between the biographical scenes of the Buddha and the 'Cycle of Months' almost suggests the idea of a perpetual calendar, which allows the episodes of the Buddha's life to be placed throughout the year.²⁶

7.4 The Stoneyard

That all the building work was carried out by a single concern (sculptors, architects, workmen) can be inferred from two leading pieces of evidence: one has to do with the fact that expert stoneworkers took part in the enlargement of the terrace, while the other lies in the choice of the material to be sculpted, which is also in part used in the construction itself.

Having procured the material, the stoneworkers prepared the parts, each group working on different parts. One group worked on the talc schist: one team prepared the pseudo-isodomic chlorite schist blocks of the podium facing, while a second team worked on the parts of the balustrade. It is evident that two teams were at work in the stoneyard organised on both terraces. The most expert stoneworkers under the guidance of the Master would have already started work on the green schist. Quite possibly the first stage of the work was carried out directly in the quarry areas, which we know to have been relatively nearby; here, the quarrying operations would have been supervised in order to have entire parts big enough for the decorative scheme.

Then there was the group of workmen. One team on the upper terrace worked on the superstructure of the Monastery, raised on shallow foundation pits, while another set about creating the core of the Stupa starting from a heap (which is the literal meaning of *stūpa*) of pebbles brought from the nearby river.²⁷

²⁵ Similar are a series of two-registered friezes called 'actors' (Brancaccio, Olivieri 2019), attested at Gumbat, Abbasaheb-china, Kanjar-kote and generally in the shrines of the valleys south of Barikot: there the upper register presents theatrical scenes, the lower one, scenes from the life of the Buddha. The relationship between the two registers is not clear. The most eloquent of these friezes is the one from Peshawar (VAM, IM 215.1921) (Ackermann 1975, 71-2, pl. XVa).

²⁶ Anna Filigenzi and Cristiano Moscatelli will work on this together with Laura Giuliano (Museum of Civilisations, Rome). In a future project, stupa 38 will be completely reconstructed by combining the materials stored in the Museum of Civilisations in Rome and those of the Swat Museum in Saidu Sharif. Observations of a similar approach can be found in Albery's work on Siddhartha's 'astrobiography' (Albery 2017, especially 356-9).

²⁷ For an image of a pre-modern building site, see e.g. Piero di Cosimo's painting *Costruzione di un edificio* (c. 1490).

7.5 The Raising of the Podium

The Stupa had no real foundations as such, being broad enough to constitute a statically firm structure. We may, however, use the word foundation for an area excavated in which horizontal slabs were laid to create a base for construction, as has been documented only along the perimeter of the podium and the projecting body of the stairway. Having laid the first courses, arranging the pebbles horizontally, possibly positioned to radiate from the centre to ensure lines of internal resistance, work then proceeded with the facing of the podium. On the ground, so to define the circumference, was placed the torus and cavetto type base made of blocks of calcareous schist with an average height of 32.5 cm (i.e. c. 1 Gft), fastened with plaster of slaked lime and clay to the filling immediately within. Here the difficult part of the work was arranging the core in such a way as to balance the thrusts and prevent the risk of there being only an outward thrust, which would eventually set the podium bulging out. To this end, following the techniques observed in local modern stoneyards where dry stone predominates, we may imagine that the facing was first raised and the filling was then carefully loaded in, bringing the pressure of the load towards the centre, on which the innermost filling would then be loaded with a gradient sloping down to the outside to counteract the thrust.²⁸ Thus opposite thrusts would have been generated keeping the static load of the podium downwards and not outwards. In general in stupas of the 'Indian' type (in which the stupa starts from the ground or the *medhi*), built in brick or stone, there must not infrequently have been an internal structure, in some cases concentric and radial (as at Sanghol), in others only radial walls (as at Dharmarajika in Taxila). These certainly had a diagrammatic value (we can imagine the pattern on the ground), but also and above all a functional value, allowing for division of the loads and lightening of the structure (Kuwayama 1997).

At Saidu the outer part of the podium core consisted of layers of about 30 cm in height of large pebbles alternating with layers of slabs of pelitic schist of about 10 cm in height, projecting slightly outwards (Faccenna 1995a, pls 20-5). In resulting gaps, the rear faces of the facing blocks were mortared. The pseudo-isodomic blocks in calcareous schist of the facing (the largest being c. 75 × 18 cm) were fitted with the help of mortar made up of one part lime and more purified clay, with the addition of inert organic material including straw. The size of the blocks changed moving upwards (the largest lower down), while remaining the same horizontally along the same course (see Foucher 1905-51, 88).

As work proceeded, paving in large slabs (pavement F3) was laid around the podium. At some points the slabs touch on the base, at others the slab end slots into it, evidencing the fact that the paving was laid after building the first courses of the podium. Some spaces were left in the paving. To begin with, before the first step, to the right (west) of it, a jar (S 2257) was sunk with the mouth left projecting at the pavement level. The jar possibly relates to base 80 possibly for sacred image. To the north of the Stupa, in line with the stairway, four tanks were created, two deep and circular for water, dug into the rock bed, and two square with schist lining for the plas-

²⁸ There is not much on the technical aspects of stupa construction. See Peiris, Jayawardana, Wijesinghe 2010.

ter mixture, which was made on a horizontal surface documented in the excavation (De Marco in Faccenna 1995a, 293-6).²⁹ There was no problem about the water supply, available at the site in ample quantity.

7.6 The Atelier *in situ*

Once the material had been selected, the team of stoneworkers must have moved on to the stoneyard. The plain to the south of Stupa would have been a good place to work, or otherwise the plain to the west, both clear of any structures and close to the river. Considering that, as we will see, the procedure in the work entailed continual verification of the measurements, piece by piece, the workshop is not likely to have been far from the stoneyard.³⁰

In this way, as we have seen, the stonecutters could concentrate their work on a great many pieces of stone. Preliminary hewing of the slabs of chlorite schist was carried out at the nearby Amankot/Katelai quarry lying 3 km west of the stoneyard, on the other side of the river Saidu. There they were cut down to size for use in the stoneyard. If the Gft unit of measure was widely used in all the stages of construction of the monument, we may imagine that it was also used to set the maximum measurements of the slabs. These appear to have been cut in accordance with the size of the base, thus: (a) long slab, base measuring about 2 Gft; (b) short slab, base measuring about 1.5 Gft; (c) smaller elements, base measurement of about 0.5 Gft. Thanks to this tripart structure, confirmed by the finds, it was possible to assemble the parts with great flexibility and, where necessary, adapt the rectilinear segments (elements) to the curvilinear profile of the monument. Once the slabs had been cut, they were roughhewn on the back down to the maximum thickness, and then smoothed on the front and sides. This way the slabs took on rough preliminary shape as the future panels. The continuous vertical and horizontal sockets were cut into the sides. The minor blocks were used to prepare the panel bases and frames, and the small blocks in the debris were used for the pillars of the false railing, other pieces for its cross-bars. As we have seen, the Frieze system is based on a succession of a series of elements (see a-c above), i.e. fixed modules consisting of a majority of: (a) long panels with dividing semi-columns; (b) and short panels without semi-columns; (c) a small number of single semi-columns [fig. 42]. The inclusion of some single semi-columns and slabs was dictated by the need to be able to adapt the assembly appropriately, avoiding surprises but also enabling connection of the left side of the final panel to the central false niche.

The type (a) slab was divided into spaces for the panel (figured ground and its frame) and space for the dividing element (pillar with capital and its fillet frame). The same procedure was followed for slabs (b) and (c). At this point the slabs must have been ready, not finished but complete as construction parts with the assembly slots, together with the dividing elements.

²⁹ I see the tanks as clearly belonging to the initial phase of the works.

³⁰ Alternatively, the workshop may have been set up on the upper terrace, where a set of 14 sharpeners or whetstones was found (SS I 232-245) [fig. 81]. Theoretically, the Monastery may have been built before the Stupa was completed. The earliest coin found, intentionally deposited under the restored first pavement of the Monastery, is a posthumous Azes II issue datable to the second half of the first century (I owe thanks to Joe Cribb for the news). However, I believe that the building of the Monastery and the Stupa proceeded side by side.

In the meantime building work continued on the podium, and after about eight-ten months it must have arrived close to the top. When the workmen had reached about 1 Gft from what was to be the top of the podium (maximum height: 10 Gft), the rite of tracing out the relic chamber was performed. The fact that the relic chamber was sunk into the podium shows that the latter was conceived of as a projection of the ground. In a stupa without podium, in the early Indian tradition, the relic chamber, like the chamber of a sepulchre (from which the stupa originated), would have been buried in the ground and covered by the mound of the *aṅḍa*.

As we have seen, the relic chamber differs in orientation from the podium, more towards NE with an azimuth of 126°. Considering that the creation of the chamber was carried out at the time when the podium could serve very well as reference for symmetrical alignment, the alignment adopted must have been, like that of the podium before, in a direction corresponding to sunrise, and on the evidence of our calculations the time of year was November. Creation of the relic chamber was immediately followed by deposit and closure, with consecration.

The relic chamber is on a square plan and consists of two superimposed compartments [figs 43-44]. The lower, narrower one is cubicle, measuring nearly 1 Gft (32.45 cm) in height and breadth. Once lined with vertical slabs (sides) and horizontal slabs (base) assembled in the manner of a cist (with edges not contiguous) it was reduced to less than 1 Gft. The lower compartment containing the reliquary was closed with a standard thick square slab. The upper component, just under 2 Gft in width, and about 26 cm deep was lined with facing of carefully arranged small slabs. The religious community must have played a part in carrying out the relic chamber project – indeed, this must have represented the most solemn moment for it, the actual laying of the first stone. The structure of the chamber, whose large dimensions are in proportion to the monument, is very regular, created in accordance with the best practice. The chamber was found empty except for a tiny gold box, doubtless a reconsecration deposit made when the reliquary was removed. We will return to the subject at the end of this study.

Having created the relic chamber, deposited the reliquary and closed the chamber, work would then turn to completing the podium on which the stupa was to be erected. The upper cornice of the podium has not survived but, assuming formal symmetry with the base, most likely it showed ovolo and cavetto moulding with projecting straight ovolo covering and further slab covering set back from the edge of the podium. This was created with a framework of small projecting and recessed slabs coated with slaked lime and modelled with a template. The paving slabs of the podium were laid in correspondence with the slabs of the covering. At this point, we come to two major parts of the process: tracing out the perimeter of the drum with the projection of the second stairway aligned with that of the podium, and tracing out on the ground the bases of the four columns equidistant from the base of the drum.



Figure 42 SSI 26 (ACT; photo by Edoardo Loliva)

7.7 The Lateral Monuments and Stairways. The Façade

Construction of the Saidu Stupa appears to have left nothing to chance. It has, for example, been ascertained that all the measurements so far taken on the monument amount to multiples or submultiples of the Gandharan foot (Gft), implying that there was an architectural design.

Of course, there are various imprecisions and approximations, in some cases deliberate, the most striking to be seen in the Frieze itself, the panels of which show measurements consistently less than multiples of the Gft. If we take as an example the lower relic chamber, it was designed and fashioned on the basis of the Gft, but with the subsequent facing of upright slabs the measures obviously proved a little less. The same procedure may have been chosen for the Frieze, all the measurements of which are a little less than multiples of the Gft to be sure that they would fit within a scheme which was, however, measured on the basis of the Gft. Thus, while based on precise instructions all the building work proceeded on empirical bases, adjusted according to the specific cases, evidencing the craftsmanship of the workmen and foremen rather than evoking a Gandharan Vitruvius translated into stone.

Bearing these aspects in mind, turning our attention now to the general plan (see the modules by G. Ioppolo in Faccenna 1995a, figs 25-26), we see that the podium of the Stupa is 10 Gft in height while its sides measure 65 Gft (N-S) and 63 Gft (E-O). The distance between the west end of the terrace and the podium, and between the podium and the east end, i.e. the front wall of the Monastery, is in both cases equal to the surface of the podium. The diameter of the drum at the level of the second storey measures 49 Gft.

The width of the second stairway (and probably of the large front panel) comes to c. 9 Gft. We observe that in general the height of the steps of the Gandharan stairway is slightly more than the ideal architectural height of

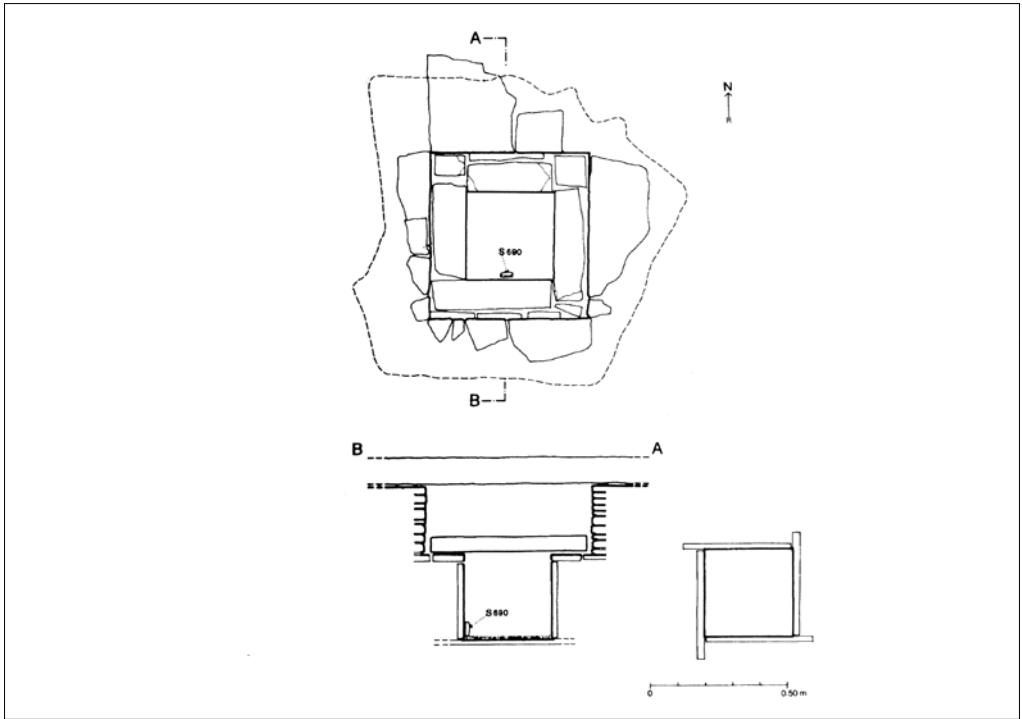


Figure 43 Saidu Sharif I, the reliquary recess (after Faccenna 1995a, fig. 188; drawings by Francesco Martore)

Figure 44 Saidu Sharif I, the reliquary recess (after Faccenna 1995a, pl. 44)

about 17 cm, with a of 17/29 riser/tread ratio (in cm). In Gandhara the riser/tread ratio invariably comes somewhere between 20/30 (Gumbat), 24/28 (Amluk-dara) and 25/30 (Saidu Sharif I) (c. $\frac{3}{4}$ /1 Gft) (data from Olivieri et al. 2014).³¹

As a consequence of the ratio preferred, the bodies of the stairways in Gandhara are shorter, the steps fewer in number and the slope steeper.

In Gandharan architecture the stairways invariably rise at an angle of 45° (see Faccenna, Spagnesi 2014), while the ideal angle in architecture is less than 37°. The higher risers (i.e. the steeper slopes) offer more visual space for the decoration applied to the step-risers. This visual space can be appreciated in its entirety, in perspective from a lower level and, indeed, also in ascent.³²

Relatively little remains of the monumental stairway of Saidu apart from the balustrade and part of the first steps of the first flight of steps leading to the podium (cfr. Faccenna 2001). However, we do have one piece in green chlorite schist that may have belonged to a step-riser of the second stairway, which leads to the *pradakṣiṇāpatha*. This piece (SS I 21) shows a fine ivy volute twisting to the left with spiralling shoots. The tenon is on the lower side as evidenced by the Kharoshthi mark *ga* incised on the bottom edge [fig. 45].³³ There is also a pair of (very accentuated) scotia corner bases in green schist. They are 33 cm long and wide, 15 cm high and project 20 cm. They have two large L-shaped recesses on the upper face [fig. 46]. The two bases (SS I 225 and SS I 226), found re-used in the Monastery, can be placed at the beginning of the second stairway. From the shape of the recesses I imagine that the two bases supported two low pillars, perhaps surmounted by *cakra*, as in the classical case of Butkara I (Faccenna 1995a).

Returning to the base of the first stairway, we find just before the first step to the east and west, respectively, two square bases, 69 and 75. In the ideal reconstruction offered by Faccenna (1995a, 565, fig. 283), on the evidence of his masterly reconstruction of a pillar with *cakra* from Butkara I (Faccenna 1984) these are interpreted as bearing pillars surmounted by *cakra*. The two bases are coeval with the Stupa, enhancing the monumental stairway and possibly even serving as monumental entrance. However, we must bear in mind that nothing survives of a connecting element for pillars, nor have any *cakra* fragments been found. On the other hand, excava-

31 I have already ruled out the possibility that the second stairway had a railing (banister). However, it should be noted that during a recent recognition of the materials in the storerooms of the MAIP, I found two inclined cross-bars in talc schist smaller than those belonging to the first stairway (SS I 251 and SS I 252).

32 It is worth noting that in the site of Amluk-dara the slope and length of the lower flight of stairs were modified in a phase subsequent to the third century CE. The Stupa had two stairways, the lower, larger one of which, decorated with step-risers in schist (Olivieri, Iori 2021), led to a level projecting from the podium. From here, a second, smaller flight rose to an upper level, facing a frontal false niche, of which only the projection of the lower base has survived. After another event that wreaked destruction, probably one of the earthquakes that hit the nearby ancient city of Barikot and certainly also Saidu, all the decorative material was created *ex novo* with imported calcareous stone heavily coated with lime plaster (see Olivieri, Filigenzi 2018). It was in this phase of the monument that the lower stairway saw large-scale remodelling, and the entire body of the stairway was lengthened. The lower flight originally had 21 steps (riser/tread ratio 24/28), was 6 m in length and had a slope of about 45°. The new flight was longer (about 11 m) with our lesser slope (about 38°). Its 32 steps with a riser/tread ratio of 17/28 bring it closer to the architectural ideal. However, the new staircase was simple, without step-risers, which would in any case have been negligible with this new slope.

33 Personal communication by Stefan Baums.



Figure 45 SS I 217 (ACT; photo by Antonio Amato)

Figure 46 SS I 225-226 (MAIP; photo by Elisa Iori)

tion yielded two leonine statues in talc schist (seated lions) of smaller proportions than those of the podium columns (150 cm in height).

Leonine columns 75 and 69 and the base 80 are quite clearly associated with the symmetrical design of the very earliest Stupa (Saidu), to which were added immediately after – albeit interrupting the symmetry of the façade – leonine columns 24 and 29, with the addition in a slightly later phase, I believe, of stupas 21, 31, 32 and possibly 57.³⁴

As has long been recognised (Faccenna 1984), the pillar is regularly associated with the *cakra*, the column with the lion. These further fragments of leonine statues attest mainly to two sizes: statues of > 100 cm and > 0.75 cm in height.³⁵ The latter size may be associated with columns (including podium) of just over 5 m in height, and thus bases of a width of about 1 m.³⁶ The intermediate size is associated with columns (including the podium but always excluding the lion) rising to a height of about 6/6.5 m, which is the height of columns 24 and 29 (Faccenna 1995a, 501, fig. 229). It follows that the statues of 1 m in height probably topped bases 57 and 69, which are in fact column bases.

As can be seen in the attached table, the lion SS I 29 [figs 47-48] (with fragments SS I 30-31, 58 and perhaps S 1758), found on top of the collapse of the upper part of Column C, corresponds to the lion at the top of that column (the mounted parts form a statue ca. 150 cm high). The fragment SS I 227 possibly belongs to the lion of column A. The fragment SS 32 (with SS I 36 and 37) belongs to the lion of column 24 or 29 (the assembled parts form a statue c. 100 high).

Table 1 Column lions. List of fragments

1	SSI 340	SIAS 54 (b) 27 Inside 54	Main Stupa. Column or central niche element (?).	Fragment; body missing. Back side missing. Chipped on the proper left side. Tongue painted in red.	h. 27 w. max. 18 l. max. 19 Tenon (on the lower side): 5x3x2	Limestone
2	SSI 29	Column C	Column lion (Main Stupa)	Fragment, back and front legs missing.	h. 72.0 max. w. 35.0	Limestone
3	SSI 30	Column C	Column lion (Main Stupa): leg	Fragment, only right leg and part of the base is preserved	h. 40.5 max. w. 17.5 max	Limestone
4	SSI 31	Column C	Column lion (Main Stupa): back	Fragment, only half of the back (right) is preserved	h. 40.0 max. w. 31.0 max	Limestone

³⁴ See my note 18 in Haynes et al. 2020, 257.

³⁵ See Faccenna 1995a, 497 fn. 1. F. On the 16 surviving fragments of lions see [tab. 1]. See Faccenna 1995a, pl. 256. For a complete study of the lion fragments with dimensions and provenances, we will have to wait for publication of the work by Antonio Amato, now underway. In 2021, during the final survey of Saidu materials stored at the Mission House (in Saidu Sharif), a bigger lion head was documented. It was part of a seated lion statue whose total height was greater than the others documented at Saidu (> 150 cm) (Faccenna 1995a, pl. 187e). It was found reused in the foundation of shrine 54. It may have been part of a column associated with the façade design of the central false niche [figs 86a-b]. For SS I 227, documented in 2021, see [fig. 86a-b] (Faccenna 1995a, pl. 256e).

³⁶ In the case of column 8 in the nearby Buddhist site of Panr I, a height of about 5.5 m is associated with a die base of 1.5 m (Faccenna 1995a, 501, fig. 229).



Figures 47-48 SS I 29 (ACT; photo by Edoardo Loliva)

Figure 49 (left) SS I 32 (ACT; photo by Edoardo Loliva)

5	SS I 227	Column Inside 54	Column lion (Main Stupa)	Only the left half of the lion's snout is preserved.	h. 23.0 max. w. 21.0 max. t. 10.0 max.	Limestone
6	SSI 58	Column	Column lion (Main Stupa)	Only left frontal pawn is preserved. Chipped.	h. max. 25.5 w. max. 18 t. max. 16.6	Limestone
7	S 1758	Inside 55	Column lion (Main Stupa)	Fragment. Paw.	h. max. 37,2	Limestone
8	SSI 32	SIAS 63 (d)	Column lion	Fragment, back and front legs missing; traces of plaster (+SSI 36 and SSI 37).	h. 29.4 max. w. 16.5	Limestone
9	SSI 36	SIAS 63 (d)	Column lion: base	Only part of the base. Fragment of SSI 32 (SSI 37)	h. 10.4 max. l. 7.0 max w. 7.5 max.	Limestone
10	SSI 37	SIAS 63 (d)	Column lion: leg	Only part of the right leg and base. Traces of plaster. Fragment of SSI 32 (SSI 36)	h. 9.4 max. l. 8.9 max. w. 7.6 max	Limestone
11	SSI 33	SIS 25	Column lion	Fragment, only left leg and part of the base preserved.	h. 15.3 max. w. 16.0 max	Limestone
12	SSI 34	SI H 10	Column lion	Fragment, back and front legs missing.	h. 55.0 max. w. 27.5	Limestone
13	SSI 35	SIG 14	Column lion	Fragment, head, back and front legs missing.	h. 35.0 max. w. 5.0	Limestone
14	S 842	SIAS (26b) between 23 and 39	Column lion	Fragment, back, head and legs missing.	h. max 24	Limestone
15	S 1759	Inside 55	Column lion	Fragment. Head missing.	h. max. 64	Limestone

The small base in talc schist 80, with broad square socket, set at the right corner of the stairway, by the jar sunk into the earth, could not have supported a short pillar for a basin, as might have been expected, since its diameter would have interfered with the first upright of the balustrade. Thus the socket may well have been for the base of the statue, possibly of the principal donor, as if he were a *yakṣa* or *lokapāla*.³⁷ Significantly, the stairway of the Stupa would have been to the right of the personage (see Faccenna 1995a, 198). Thus the entrance to the Stupa was marked by two leonine columns at the sides of the stairway, and immediately after by two similar

37 Note that in Faccenna's reconstruction (Faccenna 1995a, 565, fig. 283), base 80 is proposed as the base of a statue. The base was later obliterated by the construction of stupa 27 which was built in period I, phase b (end-first century-beginning second century CE). Base 80 was certainly used as the base of a statue: one might imagine there the portrait of a donor: e.g. the male donor from Panr I (P 630; Luczanits, Jansen 2008, 206, Kat.Nr. 123; see also Tucci 2019, fig. 300), the female donor B 6000 from the 'Great Building' (GB) of Butkara I (phase GSt 3) (Faccenna, Taddei 1962-64, pls CLIV-CLVII; Faccenna 2006, 19), the statue in the round B 3019 (Faccenna, Taddei 1962-64, pl. CXLIV). The statues in question often bear an attribute or a gift (B 6000 also shows the right palm as a sign of royalty, as in the statues of Hatra [I owe this suggestion to Moizzia Elahi]). These statues, and especially those with a reliquary in their hands are to be understood, like some images from figured panels, as actual portraits/representations of the donors of the individual monuments (thus in the Frieze and its central false niche).

but larger columns in the space lying before the beginning of the stairway.³⁸ In this phase, while entering into the design of the façade the two columns stand out from it, creating a slight break in the symmetry.

The design of the façade with the columns, and with the large central false niche representing the central focus of the architectural design, quite certainly belong to the original plan of the Stupa. All the rest was added subsequently. As for the false niche, for now let me simply recall the basic details: rectangular in form, about 3 m wide including the side pilasters (just over the width of the second stairway), we can imagine it coming to a height of over twice that of the panels of the Frieze (> 123 cm plus the upper cornice, etc.).

If these dimensions were confirmed, we would have a large rectangular panel, longer than it was wide, marked at the sides by two Gandharan-Corinthian pilasters and surmounted by a cornice of rows of acanthus leaves, possibly the same that continued above the Frieze. Of course, various other forms and endings are possible – for example, an upper register topping with a carinate arch – but as yet we have insufficient evidence even to hypothesise them.³⁹

38 Column 24 has a slightly smaller base (1.61 m as opposed to the, 1.7 m of the other) and had a small cist for consecration deposit, missing from the other.

39 Consider, for example, a curious element, a winged putto with reliquary, possibly associated with a semi-arch volute, S 429. We have several bigger elements which may be related to the framework of the central false niche: three large brackets with double volute and central groove (SS I 247-9: average h. 10.5 cm, 1.35 cm. projecting part 15 cm), and one single double-socketed upright of false railing (SS I 250: h. 39 [excluding the tenon; reconstructed h. > 80 cm]), with its base (SS I 253).

8 The Stupa. The Execution

Summary 8.1 The Preparatory Drawings. 8. 2 – The Sculptors, the Assistants, the Tools. – 8.3 The Eyes. – 8.4 The False Railing and the Trompe-l’œil. – 8.5 Models. – 8.6 Scenes. – 8.7 The Fortune, the Copies. Swat, Miran.

Coming, now, to the details of the upper part of the drum, we must also take a closer look at the work of the stonecutters, in the meantime underway under the guidance of the Master, who has sketched out the design of the panels and dividing elements. The style shown by the school of sculpture is the same as that of the earlier sculptures of Butkara I and was aptly and concisely defined by Domenico Faccenna as “drawing style” (*stile disegnavivo*) (Faccenna in Faccenna, Callieri, Filigenzi 2003, 287-306). Here we are already in an advanced, mature phase of this style, and certainly one of the finest examples of it.

8.1 The Preparatory Drawings

References to the preparatory sculpture techniques are to be found in various contributions: Faccenna 1997; Faccenna, Taddei 1997; Olivieri 2018. In the first of these studies, Faccenna, not only offers an excellent summary of the process for the execution of the Frieze (Faccenna 1997, 68-9), but also introduces some pieces with traces of the preparation performed by the stonecutter. The second of these studies describes the fine qualities of some of these preparatory designs thus:

The drawing was rapidly done with quick continuous and broken lines, with repetitions and simplifications; although clumsy, the work nonetheless displays a certain dexterity – as in the turn of the shoulders, the legs, the pectoral muscles, the right forearm, and in the body’s balance



Figure 50 Hadda CC 71, ph. 458 (courtesy Pierre Cambon, Musée Guimet, Paris)

and proportions - that denotes a not altogether unpractised hand, accustomed to depicting figures. (Faccenna, Taddei 1997, 511)

From this we can see that the first stage of work on the slab already prepared with sockets and dividing elements (semi-columns) entails the use of rulers, set of squares and pairs of compasses; in the course of this stage, freehand drawing also began. This is a very important point since it brings us back to the debated question as to whether there was a school of drawing and painting in ancient Gandhara, a subject recently dealt with by Anna Filigenzi (2006a, 2006b) and Monika Zin (2013).

We have a few traces of figurative painting in Gandhara, some close to the period that saw the Master of Saidu at work: the paintings at Butkara I on GSt 3 (festoon: lemniscate), and the coeval paintings of the 'Doric frieze' of stupa 14 (garlands, and lotus flower rosettes) (we are at the beginning



Figure 51 S 1026 (after Faccenna 2001, tav. 32b)

of the first century CE, or a little earlier). From a later phase of Butkara I (GSt 4) comes a splendid portrait of a male donor (B 4335). To these are to be added some other paintings, recently discovered, in a rather more cursive style, almost sketched, showing a strong predilection for drawing: small metopes painted with tempera in a shrine at Abbasahab-china in Swat (2021; certainly third century CE). The quality of these latter, almost miniaturist paintings is particularly fine. The painter first produced a sketch in a linear style with a great deal of detail, but fresh. He then went on to fill out the forms with much diluted paint to add chromatic vividness to the underlying lines, which remain visible. The third stage sees addition of less diluted paint to create a volumetric chiaroscuro (the rotundities of the faces). The result, enhanced by the small dimensions, is indeed striking.

Further traces of sketched paintings have been found in Gandhara on funerary jars (the specimens in the British Library; Allchin 1999; second-third

century CE). On the evidence of a vessel and fragments of figurative paintings in the British Library, we may conjecture that in Gandhara there was a school of painting specialised in depicting images of the deceased monks of a certain status for funerary festivals (to be deposited in the minor stupas; Allchin 1999, 246).¹

These artists, like the artists of Abbasaheb-china, might have been monks themselves or lay members of the community, who had developed their skill with ink cursive style – as Pia Brancaccio has suggested to me – in the context of the Buddhist *scriptoria*. There, as from the beginning of the common era, Kharoshthi script began to be written in cursive style with ink on parchment or, more often, rolls of birch bark (Salomon 1999).

The Buddhist *scriptoria* could have constituted the environment in which skill in ink drawing was developed, and could then have been transferred to the ateliers of specialised potters. In fact, besides this evidence we should also consider an important class of painted ceramics of the Kushan-Sasanian period (third-fourth century CE), called Fashion Ware (Olivieri, Brancaccio forthcoming). In fact, the dynamic cursive brushstrokes characterising this style of painting together with the evidence of graphic conventions suggests that it derived from a school of drawing already advanced, to the extent that it went beyond the limits of schematic naturalism in the direction of sketching and caricature. The collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which, as I corrected the drafts of this study, I am studying with Pia Brancaccio, contains at least three dozen fragments attributable to individual artists, recognisable by the details, often the outlines (the painter of the oblique eyes, the painter of the foreshortened eyes, etc.).

Apart from these examples, all the other paintings are of a later date: the paintings of GSt 4, also figurative (we are in the fifth century CE), those of Jinnawali-dheri² (Taxila), the Buddhist rock paintings of the Ambela pass at Tangu (of the fifth-sixth century CE),³ and the rock paintings at Buner (Hayat Khan 2020).

The reason for this digression on sketching lies in the fact that at Saidu and in the Buddhist art of Gandhara the actual sculptures (here I am referring to the low reliefs, which predominate in the production) were preceded by preparatory sketches on which the stonecutter then worked to fashion the forms. These sketches, when we find traces of them, to some extent show all the basic elements of the formal pattern: relations, proportions, perspective and composition.⁴

A Gandharan relief in schist from Hadda (Afghanistan), of which a photo has been preserved [fig. 50], reveals exceptional evidence in a sort of overview of all the stages in the work: drawing, cutting, sketching and filling out of the volumes. This piece is also of extraordinary importance since it shows us that the sculptor's work proceeded from right to left, precisely as

¹ At the time, evidently, the rule “not to make drawings or paintings of forms of living beings” (Schopen 2006, 239) was no longer binding (remember, however, that the rule only applied to monks making such drawings, not to drawings themselves; personal communication by Gregory Schopen).

² At the Taxila Museum.

³ Which I have documented, and which will soon be dealt with by Ciro Lo Muzio.

⁴ Important the example from Nagarjunakonda, site 3 (in Scherrer-Schaub 2016, fig. 1).

we imagine it to have been performed at Saidu, too.⁵ On the other hand, the narrative language in Gandhara often runs from right to left: this we can also see at Saidu, where the images often proceed from the right to the images awaiting them on the left. Let us take a key example from Shahr-i Bahlol, with Mara's attack on the Buddha: the assaulting armies are to the left of the Buddha (to the right for the observer), while to his right we see the defeated, showing the typical convention of the companion supporting a wounded man from behind (known as the 'Philoctetes' convention, which we will be discussing later on).⁶

8.2 The Sculptors, the Assistants, the Tools

The Master has sketched out the figures on the panels, which are then rough-hewn by the younger artists. The Master himself will take care of all the faces – certainly those in the foreground – as well as the details of the drapes and armour, and the horses (reminiscent of Phidias: here, too, there must have been a western model: S 621 *32b-c) [fig. 51].⁷ The finishing touches were left to others, who at times went beyond the strictly necessary. Take the case of what is probably the last panel of the Frieze, S 241 with Utaraseṇa (*20-21) [pl. IV]: here, whoever had the task of marking the thick skin of the elephant with the small double circles characterising the typically wrinkly pores (or papillae) took in, with an excess of naturalism and zeal, even the hidden parts of the body visible only by detaching the panel and, holding it at eye level, viewing it sideways. Evidently, the sculptor lost sight of what had been perfectly clear in the Master's design, namely the general sense of perspective – what would be visible, and what would remain hidden. But beware: although the invisible detail of the papillae would be superfluous, the deep, almost 'openwork' carving is not, and is found here as elsewhere, as we saw in the chapter on light, to reinforce the chiaroscuro of the Frieze. As for the perspective plane and the point of observation, we should take into account what a revealing relief, SS I 3, that of the schoolmaster (scene of Siddhārtha's youth) [pl. XIX], tells us. Here the Master took no trouble to finish off the stylus of the seated individual intent on writing, well aware that this detail, seen at eye level and, with the play of the curve, only in profile, would in fact appear as a stylus. Seen from the wrong perspective, the stylus would have looked like a rectangular chunk [fig. 52]. The same thing occurs at Butkara in the lunette of central niche B 2816: the kneeling female figure has her hands touching the ground stubbed out because that part of the relief would not have been visible from the observer's point of view [fig. 53].⁸

⁵ The photo of the piece (no. CC71) was kindly provided by Pierre Cambon and the Musée Guimet in Paris, to which my thanks are due. See also Olivieri 2019c; see also the unfinished piece from Butkara III (BK III 1985-1-195) in Gul Rahim 2015, fig. 178.

⁶ Peshawar Museum, PM-2667 (former PM 128).

⁷ As well as for the cornices: for example the piece SS I 231 was certainly carved by a very skilled hand [fig. 85]. Note the presence of similar cornices at Butkara III (from BK III 1985-1-94 to BK III 1985-1-97; Gul Rahim 2015, figs 189-91).

⁸ I refer to its original position. In the present location (Swat Museum, Gallery 6) and in the position where it was found (filler leaning against the podium of monument 70) these 'aporias' are clearly visible (Faccenna 1980-81, pl. 227). The lunette B 2816 must have been located about one and a ½ m above the ground as the upper part of a large false niche (see also Faccenna 1985).



Figure 52 SS I 3, detail (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri)

While in the case of the relief B 2816 the doubt remains that the sculptor's work was not finished, such doubt does not exist for the scene SS I 3.

This detail, moreover, offers further proof that the panels were sculpted to be seen only at the level of the observer. As we will see, further proof comes from study of the perspective applied in the design of the panels. Of the possible comparisons, we may take the case of the 60 panels in fine white limestone, from the drum of the Stupa of Kanaganahalli, in Karnataka (photos nos 36.23, 37.06 by Christian Luczanits on <http://www.luczanits.net>; Zin 2011; 2018b) [figs 54-55]. The panels are divided in three registers: the lower one is a false *vedikā* of the classical Indian type, while above there are two registers separated by a freeze with flights of wild geese turning left in the direction of the *pradakṣiṇā*. The scenes are divided by pillars with zoomorphic capitals, shafts picked out by three lotus flower discs like



Figure 53 B 2816, detail (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri)

false *stāmbha*. Of the inscriptions on the Stupa, four can be dated to the first century and most of the panels are probably datable to the first century BCE-first century CE (Hinüber, Nakanishi 2014), to the Sātavahāna period, also on the evidence of archaic decorative elements like the zoomorphic capitals and the flights of wild geese. In any case, assembly of the stupa with the panels should not have been earlier than the end of the first century BCE. At Kanaganahalli, then, (as also in the case of the great stupa of Amaravati) the figured frieze came to be placed above the false *vedikā*. This is the most logical model also for the Frieze of the Saidu Stupa.

In the Frieze, the hands of the person are always imprecise, especially when opened, while the feet are carefully depicted. Lips not tight, but always closed. The details of the turbans/caps are in keeping (Faccenna 1999-2000), as are the details of the drapes, which often see the application of various



Figure 54
Kanaganahalli, photo CL00 36.23
(courtesy/photo by Christian
Luczanits)



Figure 55
Kanaganahalli, photo CL00 37.06
(courtesy/photo by Christian
Luczanits)



Figure 56 Scheme S 1112 over SS I 3
(elaborated by Antonio Amato after Spagnesi 2001)



Figure 57 S 709 (after Faccenna 2001, tab. 37)

conventions whether the figures are standing or seated: concentric wavy lines between the legs, crenulate vertical fringes (another sign of the Master or his school, also to be seen at Butkara I in panels B 3673 and B2816). The crenulate fringes (S 1112 *47) are a technique that was not always correctly interpreted by the Master or his helpers. They should indicate the straight drop of the garments, but in some cases we find them oddly represented in unnaturally oblique fringes, even for figures in the foreground (S 676 *35a, S 1102 *46b). The mass of foliage of the trees, always the same or at any rate similar, was reproduced from a cartoon. Details of the leaves were subsequently added to the general design and also helped for identification of the scenes since specific episodes in the life of the Buddha were associated with certain trees, and not others (*pīpal*, *śāla*, *jambu*: Faccenna, Filigenzi 2007, pl. 159).⁹ Comparing the foliage to the left (S 1277 *59a, S 1112 *47, S 1128*50, and SS I 3) with the foliage to the right (S 1443 *62 and S 1162 *55b-c), we see that two distinct models were used for the trees to the left and the trees to the right with a little variation in the form of the leaves. Evidently cartoons were used to transfer the images [fig. 56]. The finishing touches appear to have been applied by one and the same hand, not necessarily that of the Master.

Again, the scene with a seated figure at Saidu is repeated twice with some variants (S 246, *22, S 1246, *58c-d): clearly, the same pattern is being followed, and here, too, we recognise use of the cartoon. The faces of aristocrats with their headdress (types 1-4 of Faccenna 1999-2000) [fig. 57], some

⁹ *Ficus religiosa*, *Shorea robusta*, *Syzygium cumini* (or jambolan).



Figure 58 S 622, detail (after Faccenna 2001, tab. 33a)



Figure 59 S 623, detail (after Faccenna 2001, tab. 34c)

truly serial,¹⁰ may be further evidence of the use of cartoons. We will be looking into the cartoon technique, possibly with pouncing, used at Saidu for design and transfer of scenes, later on.

The assistants worked on many of the marginal details: saddles, jewels, furnishings, architectural elements and birds. The faces of the riders and men in arms, like the young wrestlers, show uniform, almost undifferentiated treatment: here the Master must have guided the work of his assistants. In some cases, however, we detect elements of portraiture, at times generic (the ages of the women in S 622: young in *28, old in *33) [fig. 58],¹¹ at times specific, as in the case of the evident portrait of a minor personage of the court (*34a) [fig. 59].¹² Of the possible portraits by the Master (whether coded or physiognomic), there are two that can be considered true masterpieces-

¹⁰ Compare, for example, the three faces in three-quarter view in the middle row of S 246, *22 with the similar faces of S 1112, *47.

¹¹ In this relief, behind the old woman (facing left and depicted with foreshortening) we glimpse an actual portrait, almost sketched, of an (old?) woman in profile (*34b). Interesting, too, is the figure of a small girl (S 420 *28): in comparison with the standard figures in the Frieze, on the evidence of the proportions this cannot be interpreted as a figure appearing smaller because not in the foreground. Note the characteristic hairstyle of the noblewomen of Saidu: hair pulled back into a ponytail at the top or to the side ('Sunga' fashion, one might say), which, held in place by a thick fabric crown like a laureate festoon, leaves the hair short but voluminous on the ears, almost garçon-style, with double fringes, the upper one open to let the lower one show. For laureate crowns see also the Saka-Parthian period female terracotta figurines from Swat (pending the publication of the study of those from Barikot, see Callieri, Filigenzi 2002, 145).

¹² Whose frowning features recall those of a military chief possibly of Central Asian origin. Particularly curious is the family look shared with the portrait of a Kidarite (?) lord in the tempera wall painting in GST 4 at Butkara I (B 4335; c. fifth century) (Faccenna 1980-81, pl. I).



Figure 60 SS1 29, detail (ACT; photo by Edoardo Loliva)



Figure 61

SS I 170 (ACT; photo by Antonio Amato)

es: the more graphic portrait of a princess in the central false niche (SS I 2) [pl. xvi] and the delicate moulding of the face of a young man S 1443 (*62).

Wrestlers, but also the young Siddhārtha, with their curly hair consistently evidence use of the drill [fig. 60]. It is hardly surprising that the drill was in use at Saidu after 50 CE, for it had found widespread use in the art of Pergamon a century before, but also in India, although here it was used employing a highly advanced technique for drilling of hard stones: with an emery tip (corresponding to the mineral corundum) or diamond (which has been attested in India since at least the third century BCE).

Yet the deep drill marks on the curls, which to Saidu already seem to be a citation or a mannered work, are in fact not, since we know that the use and fashion was imposed later in the West. Although the drill, as a tool applied to sculpture, is certainly imported, its sign cannot therefore already be the sign of an ‘aesthetic capital’ or formal capital to be flaunted. On the contrary, it is the sign of the prevalence of the tool over the hand, of the tool as innovation. The fact that the instrument in Rome was used very sparingly by ‘school’ artists, and that it spread first in the workshops of the so-called ‘plebeian art’ (of Bianchi Bandinelli), and only later in official art, is very significant.¹³

The stoneworker’s toolkit also included the lathe, as evidenced at both Butkara I (Rockweel 2006, 169-72) and Saidu (miniature column SS I 170) [fig. 61], having already found widespread use in the production of quality pottery in chlorite schist (Vidale et al. 2015).

Thanks to the work carried out under the supervision of Massimo Vidale, albeit on a limited sample of pieces, it has now been recognised that the toolkit

¹³ As an intellectual quotation, the imitation of the drilling of curls can be found even in late twentieth century sculpture: think of Giorgio De Chirico’s *Mysterious Baths* of 1973.

used at Saidu was more complete than previously supposed.¹⁴ Some tools we have already mentioned: a series of chisels with 100 mm for the preparation of blocks or slabs, chisels with flat and round heads from 4 to 24 mm for the final work, pointed chisels, some very small (for the finishing touches on pupils), bench and bow drills, lathes and mechanical or powder (sands) abrasives.

On the basis of the 2015 study, it was possible to advance the hypothesis that “the tools belonged to a series organised in scales with set increases in dimensions”, possibly relating to the Gft (Vidale et al. 2015, 42). In this connection it is worth recalling the two sizes preferred by the Master and his school for the treatment of the backs of slabs and rough hewing, namely the chisels with flat heads of 2 and 1 cm wide. The measure is precise: although the mathematical proof may not be very solid, both the measures appear to be sub-multiples of the Gft on a 32.4 base.¹⁵ Apart from some rare examples, from Barikot and Udegram (yet to be studied), and the plates of instruments from Taxila (Marshall 1951, pls 166-7), we have no other data (see Olivieri 2006, 142).

As already mentioned, excavations in Saidu have uncovered interesting additions to the metal instrumentarium used by sculptors and their helpers: a series of mostly rectangular portable whetstones (sharpeners) made of hard and soapy-grained talc schist [fig. 81].¹⁶

8.3 The Eyes

Returning to the panels of the Frieze and the characteristics of their execution, in terms of form a constant element is to be seen in the treatment of the eyes, elongated, the iris deeply incised with a small circle and the pupil indicated with an almost triangular sign. The incisively executed eyelids are almond-shaped while the eyes show a characteristic inclination, rising outwards from the bridge of the nose. The upper eyelid covers about a quarter of the iris, giving the gaze – above all of the principal personages – a very pronounced ‘inner’ look of absence and presence at the same time, perfectly in line with the episode narrated. In formal terms, the impression is of almost ‘feline’ eyes, also due to a certain extremely curious (unintended) effect suggesting light-coloured, almost green eyes.¹⁷ All the eyes – the most expressive elements in the Frieze – were executed by the same hand, that of the Master, who put his skill and technical command into them. Mastery is to be seen in the phases of large dimensions (e.g. the young woman in the large central panel, SS I 2), as in the multiplication of small spaces, all the same (S 246, *22). Eyes had a particular role in the sculptural technique of the Master.

We observe thorough command of the general perspective of the overall design. Indeed, the entire design along the colonnade supported by col-

¹⁴ Preliminary listing of the toolkit used for the Frieze appeared in Rockwell 2006; Vidale et al. 2015; Brancaccio, Olivieri 2019.

¹⁵ The first is 1/32.4 of the Gft; the second 1/16.2 of the Gft.

¹⁶ 14 tools: inv. nos. SS I 232-244, 254.

¹⁷ They are reminiscent of the ‘feline’ eyes of Gentile da Fabriano, whose treatment, especially in fresco painting, comes very close to the effect given by the Master of Saidu. The effect is pretty well visible in a piece from Butkara III representing a mustached Buddha (BK III 1982-1-193; see Gul Rahim 2015; see Rhi 1994, fig. 6).

umns between and in front of which the personages stand or move as if in a proscenium is skilfully planned. The static elements, both architectural structures and trees, serving practically as wings to the scene, are mostly frontal. The city gates are in perspective (S 709, *37), which helps project the Frieze towards the internal vanishing point, while the faces are often foreshortened with variable perspective, falling into line only from a single viewpoint. This can be appreciated above all in the case of substantial projection of volumes. Here I will consider only the faces in the main rows, disregarding the faces in the upper rows (i.e. the back rows) and the lower ones (when kneeling). The faces of the principal figures are to be observed only from one viewpoint: frontal, to the right. The sculptor must have stood in front of the panel at face level (which must have been at eye level), facing it slightly from the right (i.e. in the position of someone approaching the panel from the right during the *pradakṣiṇā*). From this point the sculptor fashioned the pupil, as can be observed in the double stroke of the chisel indicating the pupil with impressive mastery. As every good cartoonist knows, a slender notch breaking into the round shape of the iris, suggesting reflected light, gives the eye a spherical appearance, bringing life to a gaze that would otherwise be dull. It may seem an odd comparison, but here the Master of Saidu uses a similar trick, two strokes of a pointed chisel from outside inwards, creating a triangle with base towards the inner corner of the eye. If it were possible to reproduce the ideal plan for chisel-work on the eyes for every fragment, both the work plan and the position of the panels could be reconstructed fairly accurately. I believe that this stage was attended to as work proceeded, with the panels already mounted.

In 2006, referring to the dating of the earliest sculpture of Butkara I and Saidu, defined as the “drawing style” by Domenico Faccenna (2003), Maurizio Taddei wrote:

I only wish to point out that, were it not for the stratigraphic data and the evidence of re-worked pieces, I should have been rather inclined to date the drawing group no earlier than the middle of the second century CE, because the figures in its reliefs are characterized by the carving of the irises and pupils in their eyes, the use of which is not widespread in Hellenistic/Roman marble statuary before the time of Hadrian. (Taddei 2006, 43)¹⁸

This is a fundamental point, not so much with regard to chronology, with which I do not agree, as for the matter of the carving of iris and pupil, which may actually be seen as one of the technical innovations that the ‘drawing style’ entailed, and which the Master brought to new heights of expression. As for the chronology, showing the iris and pupil is not necessarily proof of a later chronology. It would be if we were to view the art of Saidu in terms of the art of the Roman portrait. As for the Hellenistic world, representation of iris and pupil, albeit minimal, is to be seen, for example, in the portrait of a young man from Pergamon,¹⁹ and in the portrait said to be of Dio-

¹⁸ Taddei’s point was made cautiously, applying – as he himself said – only if taking into consideration the excavation data. Nevertheless, Taddei’s point has been extrapolated in support of the late chronology for the ‘drawing style’ (Zin 2018a, 104).

¹⁹ Pergamonmuseum, P 375.

doros Paspáros from Pergamon;²⁰ while their chronology does indeed follow the end of the Attalids, it nevertheless remains within the first century BCE (see Blume-Jung 2018, figs 1, 7, 153). In these two cases, the preparation certainly served to give the paint a sculptural, three-dimensional quality.

In the Indian tradition of ivory carving, iris and pupil had been details depicted also in examples prior to the dating of the Frieze. For stone I recall rare medallions of the Bharhut *vedikā*, and the *yakṣa* of Sanchi; for ivory the celebrated statuette of Lakṣmī of Pompeii and the ivories of Begram. Given its great intrinsic value, ivory does not lend itself to painting, unlike marble and stone both in India and in the west; thus if it was not painted the eye had to be incised – not a matter of style, but of technical necessity. This may also have been the case at Saidu and Butkara I with the emerald-green schist.

Here we come to a point that we had yet to touch on. There is no evidence of paint, nor indeed of gilding, attributable to the initial phase of the Frieze.²¹ The stone was possibly chosen and treated both for the emerald chromatic effect that it would give to the natural tone of the sculpture, and for the chromatic impact in contrast with the warm shell hue of the general volume of the Stupa, and with the red of the columns.²²

As for the emerald and its colour:

Une émeraude ayant la couleur du perroquet, des feuilles de bambou, [...] est extrêmement bienfaisante aux hommes qui la portent dans les cérémonies en l'honneur des Dieux ou des Mânes. (*Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, LXXXIII; transl. by Finot 1896)

The work on the eyes with the detail of the pupil is, however, one of the characteristic signs of the Master. To round off the sculptural work and ritually give life to the images this was the procedure in Gandhara for images of Siddhārtha (before the Enlightenment) and of the Buddha, as well as the other major figures. Juhung Rhi has produced fairly convincing evidence in support of the hypothesis that the ‘ceremony of the eyes’ was regularly performed in Gandhara (Rhi 2005). Moreover, the sculptures he cites as evidence – of unknown provenance – have already been recognised as being by the same hand (Marshall 1960a, 62). It is an interesting point which – together with our insights regarding Saidu – could suggest that this ceremony was associated with the production of the major ateliers. With regard to the ‘eye painting’ ceremony, it is worth reading what Richard Gombrich has to say [fig. 62].²³

20 Bergama Museum, no. 3455.

21 Faccenna refers to “probable gilding” of the Frieze (Faccenna 2002, 123), although there are no traces of it.

22 A suggestion: the chlorite schist of the Frieze came from the same areas that were quarried for emeralds (Pashto: *zamrud*), and given the general chromatic impact it is as if each of these panels, by virtue of the rarity of its material and sacred nature of the episode depicted, became as it were a multiplication of *tabulae smaragdinae*.

23 See also Rhi 2005, 172 fn. 16. For the mirror ceremony and the use of mirrors in re-consecration (or statue restoration) ceremonies in Buddhism from Tibet to Southeast Asia, see the fine study by Nicolas Revire (2015, in particular page 187). Evocative, in this connection, is the image reproduced here of some Buddhist steles from with eyes that seem to emerge from the darkness of the material (from Dorjay 2010, fig. 14) [fig. 62]. This image also helps us to understand that the eye ceremony was repeated on various occasions in the life of the sacred image.



Figure 62 Buddhist stelae, Ladakh (after Dorjay 2010, fig. 14; courtesy by Phuntsog Dorjay)

The ceremony is regarded by its performers as very dangerous and is surrounded with tabus. It is performed by the craftsman who made the statue, after several hours of ceremonies to ensure that no evil will come to him. This evil, which is the object of all Sinhalese healing rituals, is imprecisely conceptualized, but results from making mistakes in ritual, violating tabus, or otherwise arousing the malevolent attention of a supernatural being, who usually conveys the evil by a gaze (*bällma*). The craftsman paints in the eyes at an auspicious moment and is left alone in the closed temple with only his colleagues, while everyone else stands clear even of the outer door. Moreover, the craftsman does not dare to look the statue in the face, but keeps his back to it and paints sideways or over his shoulder while looking into a mirror, which catches the gaze of the image he is bringing to life. As soon as the painting is done the craftsman himself has a dangerous gaze. He is led out blind-folded and the covering is only removed from his eyes when they will first fall upon something which he then symbolically destroys with a sword stroke. The spirit of this ceremony cannot be reconciled with Buddhist doctrine, so no one tries to do so. Monks say that really the whole thing is nonsense, but a picturesque tradition worth preserving. Many laymen hold the same view, and though they obey orders to keep clear, they do so with some indifference. Only the craftsman, on whom the evil influence may fall,

The newly painted eyes stand out on steles blackened by the oxidation of numerous layers of melted butter poured over them for hundreds of years. Particularly significant are the subsequent studies by Donald K. Swearer on the image consecration rituals in Thai Buddhism, first mentioned in a number of stimulating articles (like Swearer 1995) and subsequently developed in an important monographic study with the significant title *Becoming the Buddha* (2004).

seems really frightened, and insists on the importance of every detail of the ceremony. (Gombrich 1966, 24-5)

Further information on the practice during the days of weekly observance at Rājagṛha in Bihar is offered in the account by Yijing, another famous pilgrim slightly later than Xuanzang:

Next, one of the priests, on being requested, kneels down before the image, and recites hymns in praise of the Buddha's virtues. After this two other priests, being requested, sitting near the image, read a short Sutra of a page or a leaf. On such an occasion, they sometimes consecrate idols (lit. bless idols), and mark the eyeballs of them, in order to obtain the best reward of happiness. Now the priests withdraw at pleasure to one side of the room; and, folding up their Kashayas (i.e. yellow robes), and binding their two corners at the breasts, they wash their hands: then they sit down to eat. (IX, 46; transl. by Takakusu 1896)

On the other hand, let us take a look at an account of the 'awakening' of the statues immediately after being sculpted at Konārka in the thirteenth century.

The first opening of the eyes was performed without *mantras* by the craftsman [*śilpīns*]. It consists in drawing or sculpting the eyes. This is immediately followed by a ceremony of purification of the image from the touch of the craftsman. The second opening of the eyes is performed with *mantras* by the priest [*ācārya*] who mimes the work of the craftsman. And purifies the image from the touch of the craftsman, removes the image from the human realm and introduces it into the process of ritual divinization. (Ślaczka 2006, 187)

8.4 The False Railing and the Trompe-l'œil

Before going on with the construction, we must stop a moment to consider the composition of the Frieze and the subjects in it. As we have seen, the Frieze introduces an account of the heroic life of the historical Buddha, which unfolds in space and time. It includes scenes which would become common in the subsequent art of Gandhara, but are rare in the tradition preserved in the texts and vice versa, such as the wrestling scenes, the journey by boat (S 20; *12b), and the arrival of the relics brought by Utarasena [pt. IV]. Others are completely new and show original compositions (again in the wrestling scenes, among others).²⁴ Thus it seems to me that while following the wishes of the community and clients, the Master played an active

²⁴ At this stage we do not know whether we are witnessing a multimedia animation of the (oral?) texts and then the transfer of these into the plastic scenes, or vice versa, the animated creation of the texts (in Italian *in-segnati*, 'taught, explicated', from *insegnare*, 'to teach', which contains the term *signum*, 'sign, de-sign'). See in Squarcini 2008 the "ciclo della *imitatio*". It is also important to note again that in Bharhut the *navakarmika* is also a *bhāṇaka*, i.e. both responsible for the site and in charge of reciting/transcribing texts. See also the reflections of Cristina Scherrer-Schaub (2016, 12 ff.).

role in designing the scenes, planning the scenario and choosing the most appropriate scenes, partly on the basis of his own preferences and skills. The design of the Frieze must have been set out on the panels already prepared (with sockets and dividing elements), setting the panels around a circumference to take in an overall view of the whole. In this stage, the lay clients, the principal donors and the beneficiaries of the monastery under construction must have discussed these scenes, walking around them. I can imagine the Master taking a stand in favour of the scenes he was particularly keen on keeping, and quite possibly admitting others that he would have preferred not to include in the negotiations. The Master I visualise is an artist already aware of his own genius (in the etymological sense), and in this respect modern, a name - in short - enjoying sufficient reputation to have his own way.

There is a point to consider. On the evidence presented so far it is clear that the relationship of the Frieze to the Stupa is not exactly as a work to its cornice but more precisely as a fresco to its room. The relationship is one of reciprocal need: the fresco, or relief, arriving when the space has already been defined. The exceptional nature of the Saidu Frieze is the same as can be seen on a considerably larger scale in the great celebratory of monuments of antiquity, and lies in the fact that the building and Frieze were born together, the building as narrative, a motionless sign endowed with dynamic movement. Indeed, the narrative takes over its space to the extent, even, of conveying the illusion of being space itself (the illusion of the Frieze as continuous porch [*portico*] helps in this respect), annihilating or reducing the volumetric weight of the edifice behind the Frieze. On the other hand, the narrative needs the building just as the hands of a clock need the dial. The stupa sets the pace of observation, as the observers advance along the space around the monument.

The stupa is a non-edifice, unless we focus on that invisible hollow space, the pineal gland of the whole - namely, the relic chamber. Architecturally the stupa, being solid, lends itself to few variations, and in fact to see some change, as would be the case in the architecture of Dvaravati, Burma and Bengal in late antiquity, it had to lose its solid nature or, better, ease it into the interior, hiding it almost, denying it, to create galleries and empty spaces projected inwards by the centrifugal multiplicity of the *maṇḍala*-planimetries. It was to be a long, slow process, but here, quite abruptly, the stupa surges upwards, the experiment having possibly been first attempted at Butkara I with monument 14 (and 17?). As we have seen, the creation of this model entails the process of projection in perspective: the outer elements shift upwards in a radial direction (the stupa is the centre). The buttresses, monumental entrances and portals become - literally - stairways. Ascending the stairs, we enter the space of the stupa, the top of the stairway being analogous with the inner entrance to the Indian stupa: here upper corresponds to inner. Once we have approached the stupa, before climbing the second stairway (which leads onto the *medhi* facing the false niche with the Buddha) we find ourselves in front of another railing surmounted by lively scenes threading through a colonnade that seems limitless, and that seems almost to begin and end from behind a large false niche which is effectively a doorway, as aptly described by Elisa Iori (2018). We have already seen that there were no reasons, neither technical nor logical, apart perhaps from simple caution, to maintain that the Frieze was situated below the false railing. Placed in a low position, the Frieze would have revealed all its inconsistencies and hidden

its beauty. Faccenna's caution has to do with the stupa models in which the false railing is situated on the upper part of the drum, never below. Actually, these models represent the false railing as a sort of stupa template, never showing a figured frieze, so we cannot deduce from them a relationship between the parts (see Faccenna 1995a, pls 265-85). The example of the great stupa of Amaravati has much more to tell us, and even more that of Kanaganahalli: these we have already discussed. Now, let us take it that the false railing did in fact occupy a low position. Returning to the viewpoint in space described above, in which the horizontal became vertical, looking ahead at the top of the first stairway we see a railing, behind which can be seen in continuous colonnade set against a circular building – the stupa. The Stupa and Frieze thus appear behind the false railing.²⁵ This play of perspective had for some time been exploited in Indian Buddhist architecture: take the case, for example, of the stupa depictions on the west pillar of the north portal of Sanchi I. Here, full use is made of the scheme of placing below what is meant to be in front and above what is behind. In the design by the Master of Saidu, the horizontality of the ground is raised, but from there the vertical perspective projects a space that again appears horizontal, and concentric: internal railing, colonnade, stupa. Thus the false niche actually represents a false door before the access to the interior space which, in reality, the worshipper can only imagine. The door is open, but teaming with personages, with the Buddha in meditation at the centre: there can be no passing through, no entering the *sancta sanctorum*. Here is the stupa in its very essence, the Buddha, inaccessible, just as the relic chamber is inaccessible, imagined at the point where the axes cross behind the false niche. The architecture suggests a process of imagination so complex and at the same time evident that I can find no plain words to express it. In the meantime, all around are cast the huge shadows of the leonine columns, a symbol of the Buddha, of the kings and of the Buddha-king, whose genealogy goes back to Ikṣvāku, ancestor both of the Buddha and of the Oḍi family.

This architectural design produced such an impressive and awe-inspiring effect that the Stupa of Saidu was reproduced in models and low reliefs; we may mention those from Butkara III, Malakand, Butkara I (see Faccenna 1995a, pls 274-8) and Barikot (BKG 2269) [fig. 36].

The stupa creates the time for observation, through the observer's step through the space around the monument. The space of the monument (its form in space) is marked by time (the narration) which again recalls the space, this time the geographical space of the places of events. Here one is

25 Indirect evidence for the function of the railing as a spatial caesura comes from Zar-dheri, from the sculptural group of false niche B (Peshawar Museum, fragment S91). Here a series of characters are depicted standing behind a railing as if the scene were taking place 'behind' the fence. In a different context, that of the external body of the Augustan Ara Pacis, the concept of the fence 'behind' which the scene takes place is rendered by the lower (floral) register, 'above and behind', which the figurative scene unfolds. Inside, the lower register corresponds to a false railing/fence. R. Bianchi Bandinelli writes "E che cosa rappresenta la decorazione floreale che sta sotto ai fregi figurati? Essa, che è forse l'elemento artisticamente più vivo di tutto il monumento, non sta in nessun rapporto funzionale coi fregi figurati" (Bianchi Bandinelli 1981, 190) (En. transl.: "And what does the floral decoration below the figured friezes represent? This decoration, which is perhaps the most artistically lively element of the entire monument, has no functional relationship with the figured friezes"). Apart from the comparisons with the Pergamene landscape, the comparison with the two-register painted frieze of the 'Tomba dei Tori' in Tarquinia (sixth century BCE) offers perhaps the most convincing answer to the sense of the floral register as a railing/enclosure, almost a hedge, 'behind-above' which the scene unfolds (191).

in Lumbini and Kapilavastu; then one moves to Bodhgaya, then to Varanasi, then to Kushinagara. The worshipper is transported not only back in time, but along the time of the narrative, but also and above all in the space of the mental pilgrimage. In one of the first texts of the Pali Canon to be formalised (according to Hinüber 2009), the *Mahāparinibbānasutta*, the Buddha announces that those four places of his biography, a biography that is about to be fulfilled but is not yet completed – so it is a prophecy and for this reason even more important – will be the destinations of the pilgrimage. Taddei, quoting É. Lamotte, reminds us that the biographies of the Buddha may have originated from pilgrimage guides or *māhātmyas* (such ancient ones have not come down to us, but we know the tradition and the later ones) (Taddei 1999, 75). According to Taddei (1999), the pilgrimage that retraces the biographical events is part of the formative process that leads to the biography of the Buddha, and therefore to the narrative art, of which the Frieze is one of the first attested examples. Thanks to its frieze, the Saidu Stupa preserves and represents the historical space of the Buddha: to walk around its perimeter is at the same time to travel through space, pilgrimaging from centre to centre. It should be remembered that the spread of Buddhism in Gandhara brings with it this problem of displacement or multiplication or reproduction of sacred geography.²⁶ Not being able to be part of the Buddha's biographical geography Gandhara and Swat enter into the geography of previous lives, into the *jātakas*: in these they become part of anachronisms that explain according to an inverse sense of time (which only the succession of lives can conceive), for example, the meaning of the future Kanishka in the Buddha's life (see Kuwayama 2019, 109-11). If Swat and Gandhara are the scene of antecedent episodes or journeys in spirit, such as that for Apalāla's conversion, a stupa like Saidu's thanks to its narrative frieze can thus bring the whole geography of the Buddha to a place, for the benefit of those who live there. This is a conceptually ambitious operation, and this is also why I believe that, if Saidu was one of the first places – if not indeed the first – where this took place, then behind this logical leap there must be the will of a sovereign, who to a certain extent replicates a process initiated by the multiplication/expansion of the sacred geography of Buddhism started by the sovereign-*dharmarāja* par excellence, Aśoka. There was a great tradition and memory of Aśoka and the Maurya in Swat and the surrounding valleys, as evidenced by the epigraphs of aristocratic donations.²⁷ This is also why I believe that the Saidu stupa is the 'Palatine Chapel' of the Oḍi lords.

26 The theme is very important and concerns the creation and recreation of the sacred topography of Buddhism both in Gandhara (Fussman 1994a; Neelis 2019) and, for example, in the Chinese world where the shift of the geographical 'centre' that intervenes with Buddhism has important cultural implications (see Forte 1985). Note that some territories of ancient Burma and Yunnan (Dali) were renamed 'Gandhara' in late antiquity (see Yian 2010). Furthermore, the theme of the reproduction of reality as the creation of an equally valid reality is important in the Buddhism of our regions. For example, M.A. Stein assumed that stupa graffiti on boulders at some fording points on the Indus River near Chilas were substitutes for the construction of real stupas, which it was in fact impossible, due to frequent flooding (Stein 1944, 22-3).

27 "[T]hese relics, from a Maurya period stūpa, on which a miracle has been performed, are established in a secure (?), safe, central (?) establishment" (CKI 242; Baums 2012, 208). See also Baums forthcoming.

8.5 Models

This chapter brings us to the heart of the matter represented by the Stupa and its Frieze. As we have seen, the fact that the Frieze contains a biographical narrative has no precedents in India. We are sometime after 50 CE, and to find antecedent models we must look to the Hellenistic precedents, which must have enjoyed widespread success in the Seleucid East and, from there, in the Iranian world, at least as examples. We must bear in mind, among other things, that the cultural climate in which this process developed was that of the Saka and Parthian sovereigns, the Odiraja being their vassals. In the material culture of the built-up areas of Swat in the phases associated with this period in history, we find the most evident ‘western’ evidence, both in the ceramic decoration (whether painted or stamped) and terracotta figurines (the so-called ‘Hellenistic ladies’), as well as the use of western technologies like the cooking *lāsana*, pyramidal loom weights, etc. (Coloru et al. 2022).²⁸ This process was underway while the forms of ‘pure’ Hellenism of Bactrian and Indo-Greek, particularly ceramic forms, the use of Attic metrology (Antonetti 2020) and the use of Greek in inscriptions (Tribulato, Olivieri 2017) disappeared definitively. At the same time, in the sculptural production of this period (and the “toilet trays”) we find ample evidence of an ‘Iranian’ if not actually Parthian taste in clothing and practices, like the figures of dancers called ‘Persian snappers’ discussed in an excellent article by Ciro Lo Muzio (2019). The most significant evidence of this form of dance includes sculptural fragments from the phases associated with the GST 3 of Butkara I: the large dancer B I 5938 and the *nāgadanta* B I 116 (Lo Muzio 2019, figs 4.3-4.4).

The Buddhist perception of the Saka phase was ambivalent, and this took on great significance both in the not always easy relations between élites and the various communities, and in the political value of the donations and their diplomatic importance:

The generous patronage of Buddhist institutions by Sakas and other outsiders is abundantly attested in contemporary inscriptions [...] so it is not surprising that the Sakas in the Gandhāran *avadānas* are presented in a favorable light. What is surprising, however, is that in other Buddhist traditions, the Sakas are also associated with the disappearance of the Dharma, but in a decidedly negative way. (Salomon 2018, 254)

With great insight, Faccenna views the sculptural aspect of this phase in the development of the art of Gandhara, i.e. the ‘drawing style’, in the context of the more variegated eastern Graeco-Iranian background. Here lay, precisely in the homeland of the Saka and Parthian sovereigns – the profoundly Hellenised eastern Sistan – the intermediate origin of a new language between West and East. The language was no longer Hellenistic, but already localised and transformed into a mature sensibility which may well have already found expression in the pictorial complex of the Kuh-e K̅v̅āja

²⁸ I refer the reader to the tripartition *imitatio, actuatio, replicatio* in *Time and Narrative* by P. Ricoeur (1990).

(Faccenna 1981, 94-5).²⁹ However, I agree with Michele Minardi (personal communication) that the raw material of this art (i.e. the stone) remains important here: we should therefore look towards places where ateliers of stone sculptors were active, thus perhaps mainly in Bactria, as we have already mentioned. In future it may be well to look further in this direction to grasp the origins of the 'western' form of the early art of Gandhara. Once again, however, we should look to the transmission of techniques (sculptural, ceramics, textile) to identify the means of this translation. These means include new tools and models to copy - thus veritable 'material agencies', already acquired, but there was also an innovative idea to be seen in the biographical dimension of the narration. This, too, is a model, or rather a macro-model, for it does not suggest a taste for individual details of treatment, but rather for plotting the general plan of a cycle, which was to transform the very history of Buddhism from within. For this reason, too, I believe, the Master of Saidu is to be considered the general designer of the work, from the architecture and frieze to the formal details. And another reason why, I believe, the Master is not to be sought necessarily among the members of the monastic community, but among the lay figures responding at the same time to the language of form in the local culture and the contents of the system of faith and thought. From then on, it would become increasingly predominant as a unifying and totalising language of faith and power for three or four centuries.

To return to the question of the model in terms of the idea, let us, as Maurizio Taddei suggested, turn to the most celebrated of narrative friezes, that of the deified hero of the Attalids, the Telephos cycle on the altar of Pergamon (about 160 BCE):³⁰

a significant precedent can be recognized in such Hellenistic narratives as the story of Telephos in the Pergamon Altar (presumably 165-156). But one should remember that the Telephos frieze is continuous in its composition not divided into neatly individualized scenes. (Taddei 2006, 46)

In the preceding pages we have illustrated the role played by the dividing elements, which had already made a showing at Butkara I; here they serve both for the visual programme (scenes divided into narrative units), and for the ritual component (each panel represents a mnemonic key), as well as the kinematic effect (action-pause-action) developing around the Frieze. Although thus divided, as we have seen, the Frieze was conceived and designed as a continuum of images unwinding behind a long colonnade which begins and ends with a door (the central false niche). The figures in the

²⁹ On chronological issues developed on the basis of recent radiometric dates, and in general on the context of the first phase of this site, see Callieri 2021. On Sakastan (Sistan), Daffinà 1967 remains fundamental. On the artistic component see also Filigenzi 2006a, 29-35. On Elymais and the role of the local elites, see the fine work of archaeological analysis of the sacred open space of Hung-e Azhdar in Khuzestan (Messina 2015). As for the cultural temperament of Iran at the turn of our era, see the pages of Arnaldo Momigliano on "Iranians and Greeks" (Momigliano 1975), and in general most of the contributions published in Pierre Leriche's work on the "orient hellénisé" (Leriche 2014).

³⁰ The first reference to comparison with the Telephos frieze finally appeared in Faccenna 2001 (182-3), and was subsequently played down in Faccenna 2002 (139) in favour of the Via Portuense tomb in Rome. Among the technical components shared with the Hellenistic world of Asia Minor is the language of markings discussed above.

middle ground and background – figures that move behind the dividing elements (the columns of the colonnade, but also the architectural structures and the trees) – suggest a before and after along the sequence. The scene of exit from the city gate (S 709, *37) [fig. 57] and the panel with the wrestlers S 1128 (*50) offer two clear examples of this. In both cases, now from the right, now from the left, there are figures that come from behind (corresponding to before or after according to whether they come from the right or from the left). In the first panel the rider who comes from behind practically conveys the impression that we need only wait a second to see him move on and another arrive from behind, following him. In the second case, the same convention (half the face visible) – we expect to see him coming towards the observer, in the meantime moving in his direction. More examples are to be seen in panels S 1112, S 1412 (*47, *61b) and SS I 3.³¹

If, then, this is the conception of the Frieze, how does it compare with the Telephos frieze? To what extent can the latter be considered a ‘continuous frieze’ compared with the former?

Actually, the Telephos frieze, too, consists of a series of exemplary scenes in a biographical cycle divided by conventional architectural and landscape elements. Take, for example, panel 3 (following the new 1995 numbering, Pergamonmuseum) where the two figures (Neaira and Heracles) are back to back, but separated by an architectural element and an overhanging plant element. The scenes involving the former and the latter are separated in time. Elsewhere the dividing elements take the form of columns (*trennende Säule*), as in the case of panel 44-45 with the scene of two seated men facing one another on two rocks (let us keep this scene in mind), and so forth. In other panels the architectural elements are enhanced with the presence of birds (panel 49), as are the trees in the Saidu Frieze (S 1128, *51d). Thus, while the Saidu Frieze shows evident, regular division, the Telephos frieze hides the division, but cannot be considered a continuous frieze – a term that could be applied only to Trajan’s Column and the Column of Antoninus, if even to them. The concept behind the great friezes is the same – a heroic narrative that begins with the oneiric artefacts and concludes with the heroic death on the *kline* amidst the mourning of those left behind.

The Pergamon altar had just been built when at Barikot-Bazira and Charsadda-Puṣkalāvati the Greek king Menander or one of his successors set to work on that great plan of organisation of the Indo-Greek territories that came to be under way subsequent to the victory over Eucratides, after 150 BCE. Speaking of conceptual contaminations, let us take a look at Plutarch’s account of Menander at a distance of a century and a half; actually, his life story mirrors that of the Buddha (moderation in life, death and contention over the relics, division of the relics and creation of commemorative mausoleums):

a un certo Menandro, invece, che aveva ben regnato sulla Battriana ed era morto nel corso di una spedizione militare, le città resero in comune i rituali onori funebri, ma poi se ne contesero i resti e a fatica pervennero a un accordo, stabilendo di ritirarsi dopo aver equamente suddiviso le

31 Here one could even imagine the possibility of multimedia fruition of these otherwise mute artefacts, which, like the exposed edicts of Aśoka, could be the ‘seat’ (or the ‘set’) of an animation of the scene, with bards, musicians, readers and bystanders, scopic supports capable of scenic evocation, a true place of *kinēma gráphein* (I thank here F. Squarcini).

ceneri, e di erigere ciascuna un monumento in suo onore. (Plutarch, *Moralia* 821d-e; transl. by G. Pisani, in Lelli, Pisani 2017)³²

If Menander undergoes through this shift into the intellectual world of Plutarch, we might reasonably imagine that echoes of the heroic cycles, men of moderation, offspring of the gods and founders of dynasties (Aeneas, Telephos) could make themselves felt – through tales of the deeds of other heroes who traversed Asia recounted by storytellers – also in the Buddhist environment of the Iranizing populations of Gandhara. This is one possibility. The other lies in the echo of the wonder of the monument itself. It may, indeed, be the Pergamon altar that was anathematised as the “throne of Satan” in the *Apocalypse* of John (2, 113).³³ After all, do we not find echoes of the art of Pergamon still resonating in the small ateliers working for the shrines of Panr I, Gumbatand Abbasaheb-china in Swat? Let me recommend the study published by Pia Brancaccio with a contribution by myself (Brancaccio, Olivieri 2019). In Rome, the art of Pergamon, and precisely the art of the altar of Telephos, was to inspire the Late Republican celebratory of monuments in which Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli insightfully detected the principle of what is called *arte plebea*. Significantly, this tradition had its beginnings after 191-190 BCE, after the war against Antioch III and the conquest of Asia Minor. Sixty years later the Attalid kingdom of Pergamon, with its newly built Altar, came under Roman administration (133 BCE).

Non ci sorprenderà il fatto che da questo clima del tutto particolare non sia sorta, ancora nel I secolo a.C., una visione artistica nuova, una espressione originale e che domini invece un singolare eclettismo che porta ad accostare, in una stessa opera, parti eseguite secondo tradizioni artistiche del tutto diverse tra loro. Questa dell’eclettismo è la prima caratteristica che distingue l’arte romana da quella medio-italica che aveva sopperito fino ad allora alle necessità artistiche di Roma. Potremmo aggiungere, anche, che essa distingue l’arte romana da ogni altra cultura artistica, perché di solito l’eclettismo sta alla fine di una civiltà, è un fenomeno di esaurimento e di intellettualismo. Qui, invece, lo troviamo all’inizio. (Bianchi Bandinelli 1981, 51-6)³⁴

This eclecticism “was prompted by the craze [of the new élites] to take material possession [...] of the heritage of classical and Hellenistic Greece”

32 En. transl.: “To a certain Menander, however, who had ruled well over Bactria and had died in the course of a military expedition, the cities jointly dedicated the ritual funerary honours, but then fell into contention over the remains and with difficulty arrived at an agreement, determining to depart after having made fair division of his ashes, and each to raise a monument in his honour”.

33 See the study by Kristen Seaman on the ‘fortune’ of Pergamon (Seaman 2016).

34 En. transl.: “It is hardly surprising that no new, original artistic vision had yet emerged in the first century BCE in this very particular climate where a singular form of eclecticism predominated, leading to the juxtaposition in a single work of parts executed in accordance with highly diverse artistic traditions. This eclecticism is in fact the first characteristic that distinguished Roman art from the Middle Italic art that had so far served for the artistic needs of Rome. Indeed, we might add that it distinguished Roman art from every other artistic culture, since eclecticism usually marks the end of civilisation, resulting from exhaustion and intellection. Here, however, we find it at the beginning”.

(51).³⁵ It is in the origins of this eclecticism, as also of its secondary technical and formal manifestations, that, as I see it, lie the reasons that – paraphrasing – “distinguish the art of Gandhara from every other artistic culture”. I would add to the observations of the great Italian archaeologist that, in reality, the “plebeian” art of Rome and the art of Gandhara were, behind the ruffled surface of formal eclecticism, the new form of art that had yet to come into its own but was moving in that direction.³⁶

In Rome – Bianchi Bandinelli notes – this ‘eclecticism’ found its first openings in funerary – i.e. ‘plebeian’ – art, as for example in the Lusius Storax monuments (Chieti), with its (strikingly ‘modern’) group scene showing an assembly of magistrates. The first public monument that comes close to the style of Pergamon is the so-called ‘altar’ of Domitius Ahenobarbus, where we find the same formal dichotomy observed in the Altar of Pergamon between the Gigantomachy of the principal frieze (= procession of Poseidon and Amphitrite in the ‘altar’) of a mature and major master, and the more restrained story of Telephos (= civil ceremonials seen in the ‘altar’) attributed to a young master. The dating of the Altar, “the earliest of the public monuments adorned with sculptures which we have for Roman art” (Bianchi Bandinelli 1981, 56) is attributed to the very last years of the second century BCE.

As for the eclectic evocations of the scenes used to convey the visual message, suffice it to take the fine and telling example chosen by Tonio Hölscher, the Aeneas relief (one of the heroes represented with ‘biographical’ narration) on the Ara Pacis (Hölscher 1993, 61; 2004, 82).³⁷ Each of the parts forming the relief in question harks back to different traditions, each chosen on the basis of the most suitable model to convey the intended message. The idyllic landscape, distant and serene, is represented with a Hellenistic approach (as also to be seen in the Telephos frieze), Aeneas is represented as an austere, classical figure, best suited to conveying the sense of *auctoritas* which the Augustan adoptive genealogy is meant to evoke, while the more vibrant, frowning non-classical attendant recalls the figures we find

35 The Italian original reads: “nasce dallo smanioso desiderio [da parte delle nuove élites] di appropriarsi materialmente [...] l’eredità della Grecia classica e ellenistica” (51).

36 Both arts seem almost to be “precursors of the late antique”. On the incipient phases of the formation of an artistic phenomenon, I find enlightening what Mario Sironi wrote in *I maestri antichi* (1936, in Sironi 2000): “Erratissimo il giudizio sull’arcaismo, cioè di risorgenza dal nulla. Si rifletta che cinque secoli di arte bizantina precedettero queste opere [...]. Queste sculture del lombardo Antellami [sic], il meraviglioso, il perfettissimo maestro che inizia quasi la serie gloriosa delle grandi figure italiane, dopo Roma, i bizantini e i primi gotici, hanno respiro altissimo e delicatissima bellezza” (Sironi 2000, 98) (En. transl.: “The judgement on archaism, that is of resurgence from nothing, is very wrong. Consider that five centuries of Byzantine art preceded these works [...]. These sculptures by the Lombard Antelami, the marvellous, the most perfect master who almost began the glorious series of great Italian figures, after Rome, the Byzantines and the early Gothic, have the highest breath and most delicate beauty”). On this and the criticism of the *ex novo* birth of artistic phenomena, the Renaissance for example, see Didi-Huberman 2009, 90-1: behind it there is no ‘miracle’ as Vasari writes, but imitation through reproduction, formal study, casts, transmission of images, the ‘techniques of the imprint’, which will be briefly discussed in the following pages.

37 On the contribution by Hölscher, see the study by Martina Stoye (2020), whose conclusions were anticipated by Maurizio Taddei (1963a; 1963b; 1964-65). Both Tonio Hölscher and Maurizio Taddei worked on the lines of Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli. Domenico Faccenna, taking a different angle, started from the approach of the same school, which looks back directly to Alessandro Della Seta. As far as I know, it was Marco Galli who first in Italy pointed out the importance of Hölscher for studies on Gandhara. The first German edition of Hölscher’s *Römische Bildsprache als semantisches System* was published in 1987.



Figure 63
Émblema, plaster, Termez
(after Leriche 2015, fig. 24)

in the Hellenistic scenes of sacrifice: “at every stage, the entire repertoire of the Greek art was available for use, to be applied in accordance with the intended message of the subject” (Hölscher 2004, 82).³⁸

That this phenomenon of formal citation, as described by Hölscher, i.e. the phenomenon of eclecticism mentioned by Bianchi Bandinelli, was a new (and technically innovative) phenomenon in Rome is confirmed by the way it was received by Pliny, who criticised the inauthenticity of the portraits of the newly rich superimposed on copies of Greek athletes, heroes and gods, illegitimate images according to him, which he contrasted with the severe portraits of ancestors from the good old days, painted or made in wax (*Naturalis Historia* XXXV, 4).³⁹

In non-Greek (or no longer Greek) Asia, the lure of citation - which is at one with the process of social emulation, hence with elites and urban centres - would seem less visible than in Rome. This is not the case, and its history can be read through the transmission of models by means of casts, copies and cartoons. Let us take the Pergamene reference: the fact that it was present is proven by the discovery in northern Bactria at Termez (Uzbekistan) of a plaster cast or model depicting a scene from Gigantomachy. [fig. 63]. Although it was duly published (Leriche 2015), it seems to have attracted scant attention. Termez was a capital city located along the course of the Amu Darya (Oxus); the cast was found in Chingiz-tepe and is comparable for material, and possibly also function, with the plaster casts or medallions from the urban site of Begram II (another large capital in the

³⁸ In the Italian edition we read: “[P]er ogni livello [fase] era a disposizione tutto il repertorio dell’arte greca, applicabile a seconda del contenuto del messaggio da trasmettere” (Hölscher 1993, 62). See Pappalardo, Messina 2019.

³⁹ *Expressi cera vultus and imagines pictas* (*Naturalis Historia* XXXV, 6). See Didi-Huberman 2009, 57-65. See also Settis, Anguissola, Gasparotto 2015.

south of the Hindukush, in Kapisa, not far from Kabul).⁴⁰ In both cases the finds are attributable to the 'Kushan' phase of the two cities, between the second and third century. These medallions, like the medallions of Alexandria, Baia and Sabratha, are associated with a production of models that remained in use from the Hellenistic period onwards, and indeed for a long time. These two-dimensional and three-dimensional plaster models were used by sculptors together with the cartoons and toolkits. They served to create both counter-casts for modelling and the bases for embossing in goldsmithing (see, e.g., Baratte, Falk 2001; Lone, Khan 2019). In a recent article Anna Filigenzi, presenting sculptural models and casts as vectors for the transmission of scenes and iconographic models, took the case of a cast of a decorative mask with Okeanos, showing a Hellenistic approach, which is found to have been applied in exactly the same way in the same period of Late Antiquity at Mes Aynak and Tapa Sardar (two sites in eastern Afghanistan), again in a Buddhist environment.

The Termez model must have been the result of a progressive copying process, but its origin is certainly to be sought in the principal frieze of the altar of Pergamon, perhaps precisely in one of the missing panels (as seen on the north side of the great frieze would be a likely hypothesis). Again, in connection with the Pergamene themes, see, for example, a figure of Rhea-Cybele (south side of the great frieze), which we find echoed on a small Gandharan dish in schist no later than the mid-first century CE, now in Rome (MNAOR 14849; Lo Muzio 2002, pl. XIII.B). Minor Pergamene themes, like those of the painter Sosus, or the sea *thiasoi*, proliferated in the Gandharan art of Swat in the second century (see, e.g., Brancaccio, Olivieri 2019; Olivieri, Iori 2021). On this the exegetes of Gandharan classicism offer ample material, and I hardly need go further here.

8.6 Scenes

There are four points that I will try to summarise having got so far. The first is that the art of Gandharan did not owe its artistic maturity to a passive formal contamination. The second point is that a positive contamination was already under way in Gandhara before the Kushan period. Thirdly, as has already been demonstrated by Anna Filigenzi, what we have here is not so much classicization of Gandhara as the birth of a new art in India, to which the creation of a mobile geography of pilgrimage spaces also contributes (narrative friezes allow for a pilgrimage in time and space made at

⁴⁰ Begram II is a phase of Begram, the most important one in terms of findings and data, dating between the end of the Saka-Parthian period (i.e. Begram I) and the Kushan-Sasanian period (c. 300 CE). On the chronology of Begram III (post fourth-fifth CE) there is still no unanimous consensus. As for the Begram II medallions, I will recall the study by Alessandro Adriani published in *Archeologia Classica* in 1955, which first presented this material to Italian scholars. Among the materials of Middle Asian import or Hellenistic-Roman influence, I would not want to forget the bronze handles from Charsadda (Coarelli 1966) "that were greeted by scholars with surprising coolness" (Taddei 1990, 355). On Begram see (for the time being) Morris 2021. A digression: on Hellenistic survivals in Inner Asia one should quote Salviati 2021 (361, pl. 5.1) and the tomb of General Huo Qubing (140-117 BCE) and the comparison with the Amazon and Barbarian from Anzio (copy from a Greek original of the second century BCE, Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo, Rome) (Salviati 2021, pl. 5.2): "Granite sculptures such as these [...] have no precedent in Chinese stone art [where] there are no examples of statuary in the round and of large dimensions" (see Nickel 2020, 114). The translation from the original Italian is mine.

a single site). The fourth point, which links up with the first, is that the art of the Frieze already shows artistic maturity and mastery. The local context that saw its development was characterised by the presence of élites responsive to Graeco-Iranian taste that had already been formed.

As we have seen, this new artistic creation already revealed an eclectic side in which, rather than the effects of a process of 'acculturation', we find the results of a contamination not passively experienced but sought after. This development appears to have come about in the ateliers thanks to artists able to interpret the sensibilities of court élites. Particularly relevant here are Bianchi Bandinelli's observations on the 'plebeian' art of Rome and, above all, Maurizio Taddei's insights in two masterly articles (Taddei 1963a, 1964-65).

The technical process applied in the art of Gandhara is, therefore, the same which we find utilised in Rome, developed through abstraction of the forms (from the original context), to be standardised in use. Let us briefly return to Hölscher: in what appears to the art historian to be a theoretical process, he clearly identifies an essentially practical approach deriving from the combination of client and atelier:

Roman sculptors were certainly as a rule not theoreticians, but manual workers, who did not think about aesthetic value-systems; the same was true of the general public. But what the writers on art had formulated in theory could have, indeed must have, resulted in unpremeditated, spontaneous practice. The commissioning of a statue, it goes without saying, affected the subject in the first instance. The sculptors, seeking a suitable model for it, could doubtless perceive by pure intuition which models from Greek art were, according to the popular ways of thinking in his time, the most appropriate ones. (Hölscher 2004, 98-9)⁴¹

A similar cultural process has been recognised in the Arsacid world of Western Iran:

Arsacid artisans were able to select those subjects, spread in Hellenistic Mediterranean, useful to the communication needs of the new ruling class. A precise form of resilience occurred in second / first century Central Asia, whose result was the birth of a totally new, independent form of art. (Pappalardo, Messina 2019, 78)

As for the clients, what sort of awareness might we attribute to them – how might they have contributed to the choice of subjects adopted by the sculptors of Gandhara, and in particular here in the Frieze? Many of these artists, and certainly the Master himself, were professionals who had their portfolios of cartoons and models, their leather cases with their chisels, their toolboxes with their drills and bags with mallets. Thus it seems to me that

⁴¹ In the Italian edition we read: "Di solito, però, gli scultori romani non erano dei teorizzatori, bensì artigiani che non stavano a meditare su sistemi di valori estetici; e lo stesso vale per gran parte del pubblico. Quanto era stato formulato in via teorica dagli scrittori d'arte, può e deve essere avvenuto in materia del tutto irriflessa e spontanea nella pratica. La commissione di un'opera d'arte ovviamente concerneva innanzitutto il tema. Lo scultore che poi cercava per esso un prototipo adeguato poteva senz'altro riconoscere intuitivamente quali modelli dell'arte greca fossero i più adatti secondo le idee correnti del tempo [...] In maniera analogamente irriflessa doveva procedere la comprensione dell'osservatore" (Hölscher 1993, 81).



Figures 64a-b Panel (Victoria and Albert Museum, online collection [V&A Owned Content [V&A Owned Content, © Victoria and Albert Museum, London]], VAM IM 93.1939 = Ackermann 1975, pl. XXV1b) – Saka coin (Azes) (BM online collection, BM IOC.197; reproduced with the courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

they played an active role in proposing the models they knew to suit best to this or that scene. Of course, the clients must also have played their part, while the artist had the task of understanding and directing their taste. We might take, for example the case of the statues of Kushan officials and sovereigns from Mathura, Peshawar and Surkh Kotal (Olivieri, Sinisi 2021). Both at Mathura and at Peshawar, where major schools of sculpture were well established, but also at Surkh Kotal, where both Gandharan and Bactrian sculptors were at work, it seems evident that the artists did not seem very happy about the precise formal and iconographic indications of their clients, formalised rigidly, it seems to me, individual communication deliberately conveyed through the coin models. There is, in fact, a flourishing literature on the issue of relations between sculpture and iconographic coin models, for example in the images of the Kushan kings,⁴² or the Buddha images on Kushan coins (Tanabe 1974 et al.). Above all in the Kushan environment, which was in practice a great ‘common market’ from Bactria to the Ganges plain and, through intermediaries, to the Indian Ocean, coins were the physical connectors and ideal vectors of the ‘models’ throughout the networks in physical space.

Coins, as a possible iconographic source having widespread circulation may well have also had a major role in the dynamic economy of the Saka-Parthian period. This was a time when the market first appeared to be soundly based on regular issues in copper alloy, and so on a fiduciary type of economy that might be described as ‘proto-financial’.⁴³

⁴² See the observations by Fabrizio Sinisi, in particular in Olivieri, Sinisi 2021.

⁴³ See the reappraisal of the issue of the ‘Great Debasement’ concerning Saka period copper alloy issues in the contribution by Omar Coloru in Coloru et al. 2022.



Figures 65a-b Bimaran casket, detail (BM OA 1900.2-9; GNU Free Documentation License; reproduced with the courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum).
Butkara I, B 3215 (after Faccenna 1962-64, pl. CCLXXXIX); details

Here is an example from this period, namely the panel we have already seen showing the scene of the sovereign returning with the relics, or a procession with relics, on the back of a Bactrian camel (VAM, IM 85.1939, Ackermann 1975, 89, pl. XXXIb). The sovereign may in fact possibly be a king of the North or West, like our *Utarasena*. The image, which appears to evidence the work of the school of the Master, clearly owes much to the rare iconography of an *esachalch* (1.9 gr.) of *Azes* (Saka sovereign) (type Senior 81.10).⁴⁴ The two images are shown above [figs 64a-b].

While on the subject of ‘symbolic capital’ we have a major contribution by Marco Galli who first used it for the art of Gandhara and the cultural climate of the *Qdiraja*.⁴⁵

The process of affirmation and consolidation of the new form of power also came about through a calculated use of images. Certain themes were selected from the traditional mythological and religious patrimony and transformed into an effective expression of the new ideology of the Hellenistic kings. For this reason the creation of a new visual language occurred in a climate of fierce rivalry and great experimentation.

What dynamics and what connections between social context and intellectual activity can be identified within the Gandharan milieu? Schol-

⁴⁴ British Museum, IOC.197. The obverse bears the legend “*ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ / ΑΖΟΥ*” ([coin] of the Great King of Kings *Azes*); on the reverse the same appears in *Kharoshthi*. See Kadgaonkar 1996-97.

⁴⁵ Then followed by Elisa Iori (see Olivieri, Iori 2021). The concept was first formulated by Pierre Bordieu in 1979 (see Bordieu 2013).

ars will have to concentrate their future studies on this question in order to identify the connection between forms and artistic production on one hand, function and artistic perception on the other. (Galli 2011, 282, 286-7)

Thus, to paraphrase Bianchi Bandinelli, the artistic phenomenon of Gandhara as we see it manifested at Butkara I and Saidu arose from the “*smanioso desiderio*” (‘eager desire’ or ‘craze’) of the local élites to appropriate and represent themselves materially through the forms of the “symbolic capital” of Hellenistic Greece and Hellenised Iran, to which ritual innovations (the creation of mobile geographies of pilgrimage) undoubtedly contributed. We must bear in mind that the concept of ‘symbolic capital’ as a combination of material and intangible resources is associated with the concept of ‘exclusiveness’. By this we mean the capacity of the élites to take over the vectors – above all the human vectors, the artists – able to express this capital of images and forms through their artistic production, having in their possession the techniques and basic models.⁴⁶

While on the subject of the circulation and use of models within the Gandharan artistic tradition, I might cite the example of the Bimaran reliquary. Here I am referring to both the architectural framing with the carinated arch and the iconography of the Buddha, both appearing in comparable form on a decorated doorjamb from a Butkara I (B 3215; Faccenna 1962-64, pl. CCLXXXIX) belonging to the latest phases of the first century or, probably, the second century. Note that in this case the figure of the Buddha is very close to that of the Bimaran reliquary except for the position of the right hand and feet, as well as the presence/absence of the moustache (an important detail present only in the reliquary). As for the feet (in both cases showing a *lento pede* movement) it feels like a mirror image: at Bimaran the left foot is shown sideways, the right standing, while at Butkara I it is the opposite. Note that the hand gesture at Butkara I is backwards: it shows the back instead of the palm. These small but revealing differences might constitute evidence that both images derived from the same model. Again, these two images are reproduced above [figs 65a-b].⁴⁷

In this first century CE in the Saka-Parthian territories, work in the atelier may have proceeded as a sort of universal practice that had taken on a particular form in Gandhara. It would be reductive to sum this up as a process of so-called ‘influences’ and formal acculturation between the two ends of southern Eurasia. If we could see how the Buddhist art of Swat arrived at the Frieze, we might also appreciate the sense of the conceptual revolution which, importing celebrated models and adopting them with authoritative flair (as authors), also imported the sequence, arriving at a new synthesis in which the events in the life of Siddhārtha, as in the case of Telephos, take the form of a heroic tale, an exemplary biography, becoming the *acta* of the Buddha. The *acta* represent the transmission of the story (oral/visual)

⁴⁶ For this region and for some of the major monuments it is quite possible that there was the sort of ‘competition’ among clients to secure the services of the best and perhaps most renowned of the artists. A similar competition, but without rivals, could have taken place, for example, at Surkh Kotal (see Olivieri, Sinisi 2021, fn. 6).

⁴⁷ Of the fragments from the Butkara I, I recall one (B 4324) that is particularly close (Faccenna, Taddei 1962-64, pl. CCV). We shall be returning to it with A. Filigenzi in a future study. About the position of the right hands of the two Buddhas: the position showing the palm is what was later codified as *abhayamudrā*, while the one showing the back can be identified as *namaskāramudrā* (personal communication by Ciro Lo Muzio).

in a new phase of 'reproduction': not only beyond time (through narration) but also beyond space (with the multiplication of the sacred topography).⁴⁸

We are in a phase that can be defined, as a cultural context, as 'Saka', a term that defines Scythian populations, who may have been present in these regions as early as the end of the second millennium.⁴⁹ In their wanderings, these peoples have widely shared a *koiné* of images and models, the origins of which are rooted in the visual communicative language of southern and inner Eurasia and which was formed throughout the first millennium BC. Alongside the almost paroxysmal taste for decoration, which seems to be an end in itself but derives from their textile, felt and toreutic art, we find in their language - which brings together the best of sedentary peoples - models of near-eastern, Achaemenian, classical and Hellenistic visual communication. The classical and Hellenistic baggage, which is at the origin of the formal choice of Frieze art, was therefore not necessarily a reflection of a cultural dependence on the Hellenistic world, as we have been accustomed to think, but - perhaps more simply - a part of that wider symbolic capital that could be used for the self-representation of the elites. In that historical moment, the Swat elites found in that classical and Hellenistic baggage the most expressive language to render what they perceived as their special religious identity - Buddhism - and their political role, which they felt increased by it (the Senavarma inscription proves it). Moreover, behind them in Gandhara and Swat there was no definite artistic tradition to refer to. Indeed, we have no evidence of any pictorial art or modelling prior to these phases, if we exclude terracotta figurines and rock shelter art - both effective to the eye but crude -, the geometric decoration of necropolis vessels and the earliest Bronze Age vase painting. This should be remembered: Buddhist art from Gandhara and Swat are the earliest forms of elaborate art that have come down to us (excluding any art on perishable media that has now disappeared). Remaining with stone sculpture, which is not perishable, the phylogeny of Buddhist art is not at all clear; we do not recognise the pre-formative phases, except for those of the movement that has already begun. In architecture, monumental constructions, stupas and city walls had already been built by the third and second centuries BCE. As far as sculpture is concerned, however, nothing: here we do not have the geometric kouroi of the protohistory of Pheidias modelling.

In this context, it must be admitted quite simply on one hand that if the artists, the artisans, were local, their Maestro must have been trained elsewhere, and that - on the other hand - the elites chose to involve workers accustomed to working with a baggage of exotic models, in this case the classical and Hellenistic one, with its instruments and forms. With these premises, a complex, contaminated and new form of art cannot but be born.

We will approach the subject of contamination starting from the iconographic material in the Telephos frieze as mentioned above - the two men sitting on the rock almost mirroring each other. This recalls the widespread model of a man seated on a rock, weary, one leg stretched forward, foot resting easily on the heel, the other bent somewhat back, instep bent, toes set firmly on the ground. At Pergamon, too, this scene echoes earlier scenes. My

⁴⁸ Obviously here I am quoting Walter Benjamin.

⁴⁹ As studies of the ancient genome of ancient Swat inhumates tell us (Narasimhan et al. 2019). With reference to the so-called toilet trays, read the final considerations in Lo Muzio 2002.

knowledge of classical and Hellenistic art may be somewhat rusty, but my thoughts turn, for example, to the example of the two Pelasgians on panel B of the Ionic Temple of Ilisos in Athens (Beschi 2002, fig. 6; D'Agostino 2017). The two Pelasgians, rather like the two men on Pergamon panels 44-46, are of different ages, one young, one old, the latter looking ahead, the other seemingly turning his head. In the Telephos cycle the Pelasgians are not present, so the young master who sculpted the frieze used here an earlier formal model, taken as genre (youth and age),⁵⁰ outside the narrative context referred to. Quite possibly at Ilisos earlier models were echoed, subsequently formalised in the wounded Philoctetes model, familiar as from the Homeric epic and Attic vase painting onward, and eventually reechoed in the numerous many seated heroes of ancient visual narrative, all seated in the same way, be they Greek, Roman, Scythian.⁵¹ This scene of Philoctetes prompted a major study by Taddei published – significantly – in 1963 in *Dialoghi di Archeologia*, the journal edited by Bianchi Bandinelli (Taddei 1963a).⁵²

Taddei's study starts from a silver *skyphos* found at Hoby in Denmark (Kopenhagen Nationalmuseet). This precious artefact of the Julio-Claudian period shows two episodes in the mythical life of filler detectors Philoctetes: still young, suffering from a snakebite, a companion holding him from behind, and in his old age seated on a rock, leaning on a stick, facing a companion who is also seated on a boulder. The second scene is reminiscent of the highly successful iconographic model we have already met, while the first harks back to another successful model which reappears in the scenes known as the *Helfergruppe*. Both scenes, as Taddei observes, show contaminations insofar as neither is a replica or copy of another, but both emerge from the coexistence of various scenes that had already become canonical, combined to create a new scene representing a narrative context different to that of the precursors. The process seems to be complicated, intellectual, almost, and would indeed be so as seen from an iconological point of view. But if, like Taddei, we conclude that it was all the result of what we might call a 'universal practice', which boils down to the atelier routine, we can appreciate how naturally it came about. The ateliers of the artists and stonecutters had various models at their disposal, some three-dimensional of important or well-known works, which were used to put together scenes as if they were (in fact they were) repertoires. Thus we see in the Hoby *skyphos* a scene harking back to Phidias (the young man supported by his companion) added without responding to any specific narrative need, nor adding a new episode to the story, but simply being congenial and fitting in with the narration: "[l]'inserzione di questa figura è del tutto superflua ed ha la sua giustificazione soltanto come puro elemento di gusto compositivo" (Taddei 1963a, 202).⁵³

50 See the images reproduced here of the two small metopes from Amluk-dara representing these genres: the old man and the young man, the young Brahman and the aged ascetic.

51 See the famous vase from the Scythian necropolis of Kül Oba near Kerch in the Crimea (Rostovzeff 1922, pl. XXII).

52 Particularly useful is the first footnote where Taddei's thanks go to Faccenna but also to "il Prof. R. Bianchi Bandinelli che cortesemente ha voluto leggere il dattiloscritto di questo articolo e mi è stato generoso di utili consigli" (Prof. R. Bianchi Bandinelli who kindly read the typescript of this article and give me a great deal of useful advice).

53 En. transl.: "The inclusion of this figure is perfectly superfluous and finds justification only as a simple element of compositional taste".



Figure 66 S 800 (after Faccenna 2001, tab. 120a)

There is in fact a connection between this and the artistic production of Butkara I coeval with the Frieze. The four reliefs considered by Taddei show wrestling scenes, competitions associated with the cycle of the youth of Siddhārtha. In particular, we will dwell on the last three, the first being of minor and possibly later production, while the others clearly belong to the phase in which the 'drawing style' reached maturity, and which can be placed close to the period of execution of the Saidu Frieze, possibly shortly after.⁵⁴

Su ognuno di essi è rappresentata una scena che, per quanto mi risulta, non è nota da altri rilievi del Gandhāra. Un giovane, vestito col solo *paridhāna*, si abbandona a terra privo di sensi mentre un compagno, alle sue spalle, lo sostiene afferrandolo sotto le braccia. (Taddei 1963a, 198)⁵⁵

⁵⁴ B 3982, B 4100, B 5896, B 7743: respectively figs 1-4 in Taddei 1963a.

⁵⁵ En. transl.: "On each of these is depicted a scene which, as far as I know, does not appear in the reliefs in Gandhāra. A young man, wearing only a *paridhāna*, falls fainting to the ground while a companion behind him supports him, holding him under the arms".



Figure 67 S 1124 (after Faccenna 2001, tab. 49)

Here, too, let me repeat, paraphrasing the above observations, the scene was added without responding to any specific narrative (we do not find it in the Buddhist texts). However, here it adds to the story a new episode which would in fact be repeated, to become canonical in Gandharan art.⁵⁶

To the four reliefs presented by Taddei we may add some others from Saidu which also led to another model. The relief from a minor stupa at Saidu (S 800; *120) [fig. 66], discussed in a second study (Taddei 1964-65), is of exceptional importance: two groups of wrestlers as seen from behind. The first, following the small frieze from the left, shows a triumphant wrestler lifting his opponent up by the belt; the second shows a wrestler who has passed out, bent head supported (from the left) by the shoulders of a companion, while the third, in front of him, revives (from the right), pouring water onto his back from a vessel which he holds raised over his enfeebled companion. The frieze combines the *Helfergruppe* model with that of the *famulus* pouring water over his older companion, and the model scene of Hercules holding Antaeus up by the belt. Interestingly enough, the role of Hercules is played by Siddhartha, recognisable even from behind by his powerful shoulders, voluminous curls (two of the *lakṣana*, or signs of the Buddha) and the nimbus around his head, while his defeated opponent's face is attributed with the same wild features as Antaeus - a triangular face with chin pointing upwards in the effort to escape from his opponent's hold. The relief is clearly subsequent to the Frieze, but it must have found inspiration in it, divided as it appears between two Gandharan-Corinthian semi-columns (one lost). The scene of Hercules and Antaeus also recurs in one of the reliefs at Butkara (B 7743): it appears to be the same scene, observed from behind at Saidu, in front at Butkara I. It also seems to be by the same hand, as if they were artists specialised in certain scenes, as appears to be confirmed for the minor scenes looking back to classical models, studied with Pia Brancaccio, in pieces from Panr I, Gumbat and Abba-saheb-china (Brancaccio, Olivieri 2019). The conclusion Taddei comes to is as simple as it is striking: this scene, depicted from the two sides, can be accounted for with the use of a three-dimensional model (Taddei 1964-65, 177). Thus these contaminations come from the ateliers. As for the chronology, it is worth noting that this iconography of Hercules and Antaeus, familiar as from the Hellenistic age, only found real circulation in the Roman world as from the first century BC, continuing to occupy a place in West-

56 Quotation as creation, copying as art, can be found in Homeric and oral poetry in general according to Milman Parry (*rhapsōidein* means 'to sew together a song'). Homeric poetry was the result of formulaic thinking, the stitching together of 'prefabricated parts', pre-existing images. I have already partly quoted the following passage, which I quote here in full: "The oral poet had an abundant repertoire of epithets diversified enough to provide an epithet for any metrical exigency that might arise as he stitched his story together - differently at each telling, for, as will be seen, oral poets do not normally work from verbatim memorization of their verse". "In any case, in the Iliad and the Odyssey Homer was normally taken to be fully accomplished, consummately skilled. Yet it now began to appear that he had had some kind of phrase book in his head. Careful study of the sort Milman Parry was doing showed that he repeated formula after formula. The meaning of the Greek term 'rhapsodize', *rhapsōidein*, 'to stitch song together' (*rhaptein*, to stitch; *ide*, song), became ominous: *Homer stitched together prefabricated parts. Instead of a creator, you had an assembly-line worker*" (Ong 2002, 22-3; italics added). I would like to mention at this point the relationship between technical action, visual creation, memorisation and the creation of 'songs': Minardi (2020, 18), points us to Tuck's (2006) work on textile art and the creation of the ancient epos ("Singing the Rug"), which went unnoticed by many colleagues despite the fact that it also speaks of India. Cf. *sūtra* (**syū-*, *suēre*) = to sew. Finally, once again we refer the reader to Cristina Scherrer-Schaub's (2016, 26 ff.) reflections on this topic.

ern art up to the Renaissance and beyond. With interesting synchrony, this model then arrived in Gandhara, turning up in many scenes, not necessarily concerning competitions.⁵⁷

In the Saidu Frieze, too, we find traces of similar compositional patterns, with scenes harking back to models like those we have already seen, but also to others yet to be clarified with precision. Of the former, I will mention three parts of the Frieze in which these models are hard to make out in the fragmentary material but seem to show through: S 727 (*40a), S 792 (*40c-d), and above all the superb relief S 1124 (*49) [fig. 67]. Here we find both the exhausted companion and the scene of the pouring of water, in a scene showing exceptional sculptural qualities, particularly powerful in the *disiecta membra* emphasised by the fragmentary state of the panel, but elegant in the sinewy musculature. Everything that needs be said about this piece is to be found in Faccenna's study (2001, 265).

Of the other scenes, our attention is drawn to the scene with a boat (S 20, *12b), for which one is tempted to seek easy comparisons in the West, above all in mosaics and megalographic wall paintings on Nilotic subjects.⁵⁸ But we need not necessarily look so far. Faccenna finds the most significant of the comparisons in India (Faccenna 2001, 216-17). The eastern portal of stupa 1 at Sanchi (a little earlier than the Frieze) portrays a boat with the same system of planking held together by plates and three frontal figures, strongly reminiscent of the frontal figures in the scene at Saidu.

8.7 The Fortune, the Copies. Swat, Miran

Discussing what I have defined as 'universal practice', we have already considered the question of the transfer into the Frieze of repetitive elements such as trees, for example, and indeed semi-columns and capitals. Undoubtedly a system of cartoons (patterns) was used, using very fine parchment or birch bark. The design could come out in positive as many times as required: it sufficed to apply a little wax and then press over with a stylus, possibly of lead. This way the image was transferred onto the slab. There can be no doubt that the scenes best preserved, like those of the trees on the right, were designed only once and then replicated. Superimposing the images of various different panels, the trees match perfectly [fig. 56]. The process was also applied in the reverse. Anna Filigenzi has ascertained without a shadow of doubt that the paintings in monastery V at Miran, signed by the painter Tita, derived in part from the Saidu Frieze (Filigenzi 2006a). Here the same process took place by virtue of which certain Hellenistic stereotypes – the seated Philoctetes, Heracles lifting Antaeus – found their way to Saidu, and not only Saidu, and were used for scenes which have nothing to do with the personages portrayed. This is a case of contamination of subject matter, as Alessandro Della Seta thought, conveyed at the technical level rather than by content, for we find models circulating from one atelier to another. In

⁵⁷ I am thinking of a step-riser with exergue showing a scene of snakelike Tritons fighting (Christies, New York, Asia Week 2020, fn. 2007, NYR 01953_0204). The model found many applications; see the embossed production certainly from Gandhara in Baratte, Falk 2001, figs 2 ("Le groupe du centaure âgé") and 3 ("Le groupe du jeune centaure").

⁵⁸ But not only; I am in fact also thinking of the scenes with Ulysses and the Sirens on the urns from Volterra.

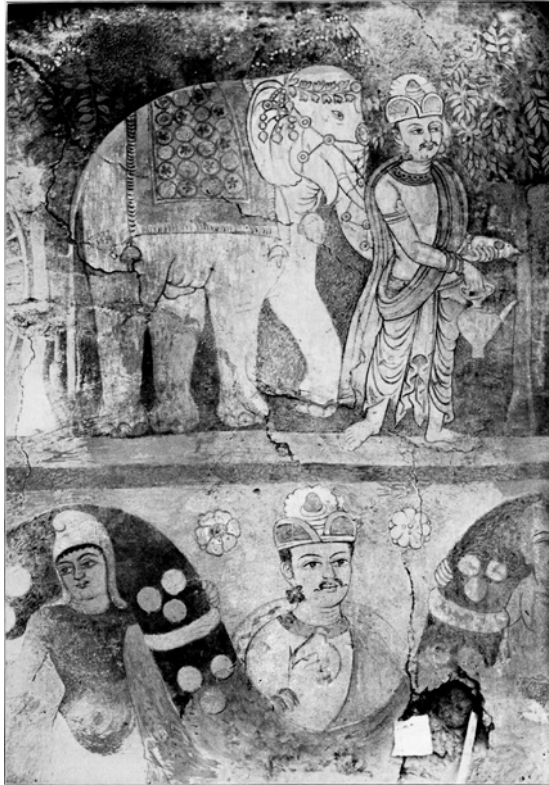


Figure 68

Miran V (after Stein 1912, pl. 136)

the course of time, with the series of transfers, the actual contents may be lost or forgotten, but it does not matter: the model will in any case be transformed and of the various models preference will go to those that have something to say to the new user (*in primis* the artist, and then the client). Thus, as I see it, the selection process takes place in the ateliers, and from there, with an understanding of how the clients will feel about them, the models will be proposed and worked on. Behind the success of the Corinthian capital may well lie the vases of flowers set on columns (*urnagatha*), behind the flying Erotes obviously the *gandharva*, and behind the Gandharan atlas figures the squatting *yakṣa*. Moreover, the Atlas and telamon figures in Western art are never squatting, but always standing: thus the squatting Atlas is the product of a contamination not only completed, but completed in Gandhara, on a subject that was and remains Indian.

Just as scenes reinterpreted from Western models turned up at Saidu and Butkara I, in the temples of Miran, in the fourth-fifth century, when the Saidu Stupa had already been deconsecrated, they found their way to the hands of the painter Tita. He was a professional painter, handsomely paid for his work as he himself pointed out in his inscription painted in Kharoshthi, the established script of Gandhara, between the paintings. Tita's scenes were reinterpretations of models in the Frieze, which the painter kept in the form of cartoons, as revealingly described by Anna Filigenzi (2006a). There can be no doubt about the fact that they were models, for the originals are preserved at Saidu. Panel S 1112 with the gift of the elephant



Plate XX Saidu Sharif I, Frieze, panel S 1112 (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri)

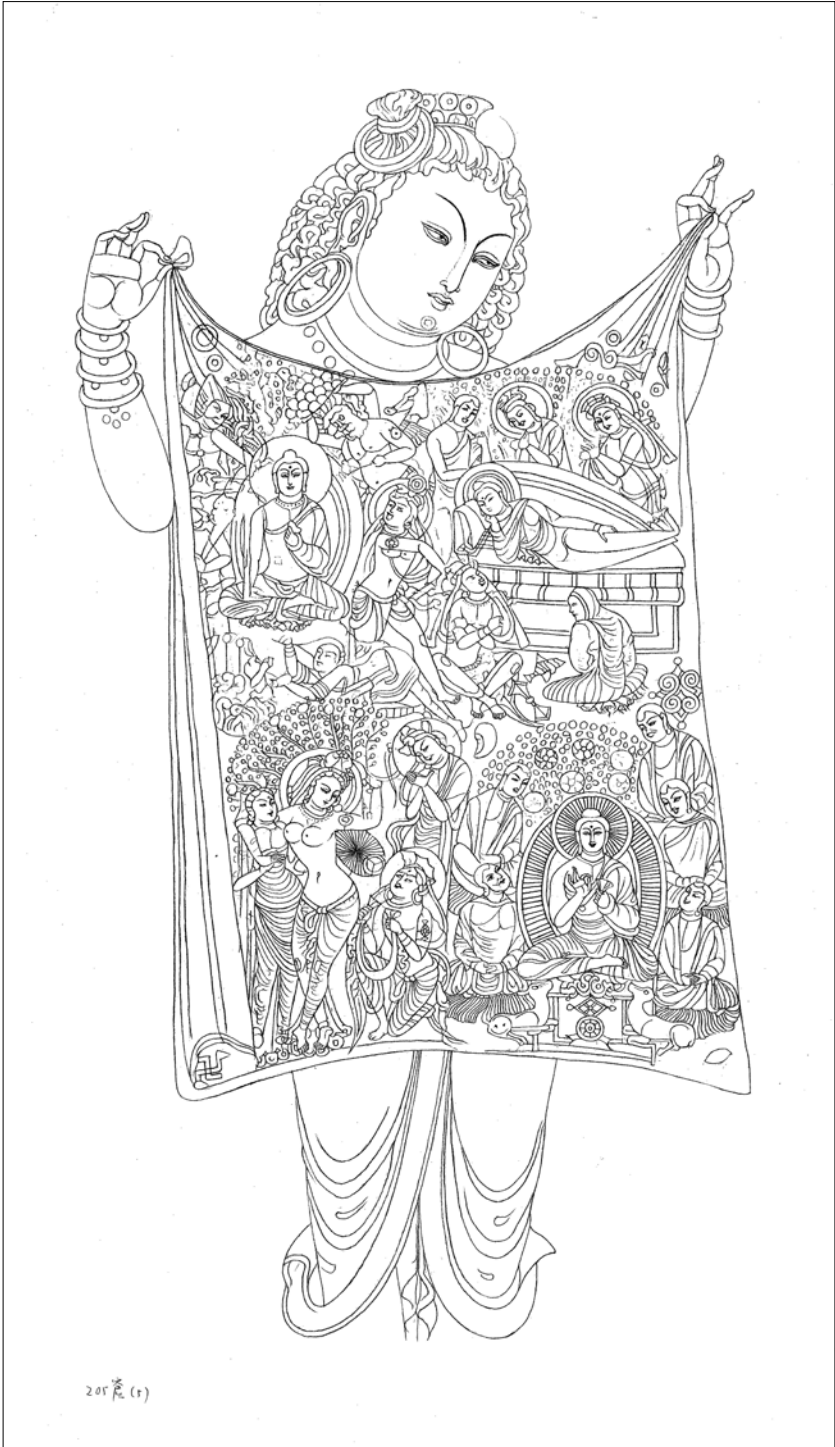


Figure 69 Kizil Cave 205 (drawings by Guo Feng - 微信图片)

to Siddhārtha (*47) was transformed at Miran V into a scene of the gift of the elephant by Viśvantara, the generous prince and previous incarnation of Siddhārtha [pl. XX, fig. 68]. Other scenes from the Frieze were transformed and used on a number of occasions. Exit from the city gate (S 709, *37) reappeared at Miran V. The scene of the figure seated with left hand resting on thigh was repeated twice at Saidu with variants (S 246, *22, S 1246, *58c-d), offering further evidence of the use of cartoons at both Miran V and Miran III (Stein 1921, fig. 143). At the same time, as noted by Arcangelo Santoro (2006), in the case of Miran we find marked anachronisms, the scenes reproduced have no sequential narrative relationship with the story of Viśvantara, nor – Filigenzi adds – with those of the models. I find both observations entirely cogent.

Another form of contact between Swat and Miran (and Khotan) must have been made through portable models, on parchment or as actual scale models; such is the case of the unmistakable example pointed out by Anna Filigenzi of the Buddha with whiskers and tall *uṣṇīṣa* bound by a lace with a square knot, an original model of which may be seen, for example, in the face from Butkara I ‘drawing style’ (B 2540), and which we again find centuries later in Central Asia in a bronze from Kothan and, indeed, in a painting at Miran III (in the order in Filigenzi 2020, figs 1-3).⁵⁹

If not through cartoons, at least we have irrefutable evidence of the use of textiles for the reproduction of paintings thanks to the findings in the corridor of the K-complex in Gaochang (Qocho) in the Turfan basin.⁶⁰ Of these forms of transmission of models, we may have an echo from that famous painting from Kizil, the great site of monasteries and rupestrial cells on the northern banks of the Tarim.⁶¹ In Cave 205, in the first half of the seventh century, a fabric with four scenes of the life of the Buddha painted with Indian overtones is displayed by a female figure holding it at the top, almost as if it were an Eastern Veronica (Bussagli 1954, fig. 37) [fig. 69].⁶²

Copy of the Saidu Frieze must have already been underway in an early period, as early as the second century, in the area of Barikot. See, for example, the fine relief with hunters from the area around Barikot (on the left bank of the river Swat facing Parrai), already discussed by Faccenna (2001, 220).⁶³ That this relief is later we can tell by many aspects, and in particular by the convention of the irises (projecting, globular) which is typical of Butka-

⁵⁹ See the various examples presented in Faccenna 2001 (pls 102-10) of both the ‘Mathura’ type Buddha with right shoulder bare and the Gandharan type (see also the hypotheses offered in Rhi 1994). More examples are to be found in Srinvasan 2006, figs 11.3, 11.7. On Miran it is also worth noting the study by H.-P. Francfort (2014).

⁶⁰ See Ruin K: Le Coq 1913, 8, pl. 45e (ca. eighth-ninth century CE).

⁶¹ For Gandharan ‘contaminations’ in the paintings of Kizil, see Santoro 2001 (with refs) and, for minor wooden production, Bhattacharya 1977. As for the ‘classical’ themes for seventh-eighth century Sogdiana, the considerations in Compareti 2012 are interesting.

⁶² On the Difference in style between the Kizil painter and that of the scenes reproduced on material, Mario Bussagli observed: “The artist thus succeeded in combining different lines while imitating the style that he was well acquainted with, and which he must have felt to be very different from the forms he himself was creating” (Bussagli 1954, 122).

⁶³ VAM, IS.143.1961 (Ackermann 1975, 96-7) (h. 22 cm). Faccenna presents further examples of similar but not identical compositions (2001, 220). Here I would also add a relief reflecting a somewhat Gandharan style recently found at Semthan (Kashmir): it represents to huntsmen on elephant-back. Here, too, the debt to formal characteristics typical of Saidu seems to be evident in certain details: the turbans with chin-straps, the cassock of the torso, the tunic under the sewn tassels (the fragment is at present preserved in the Shri Partap Singh Museum at Srinagar).

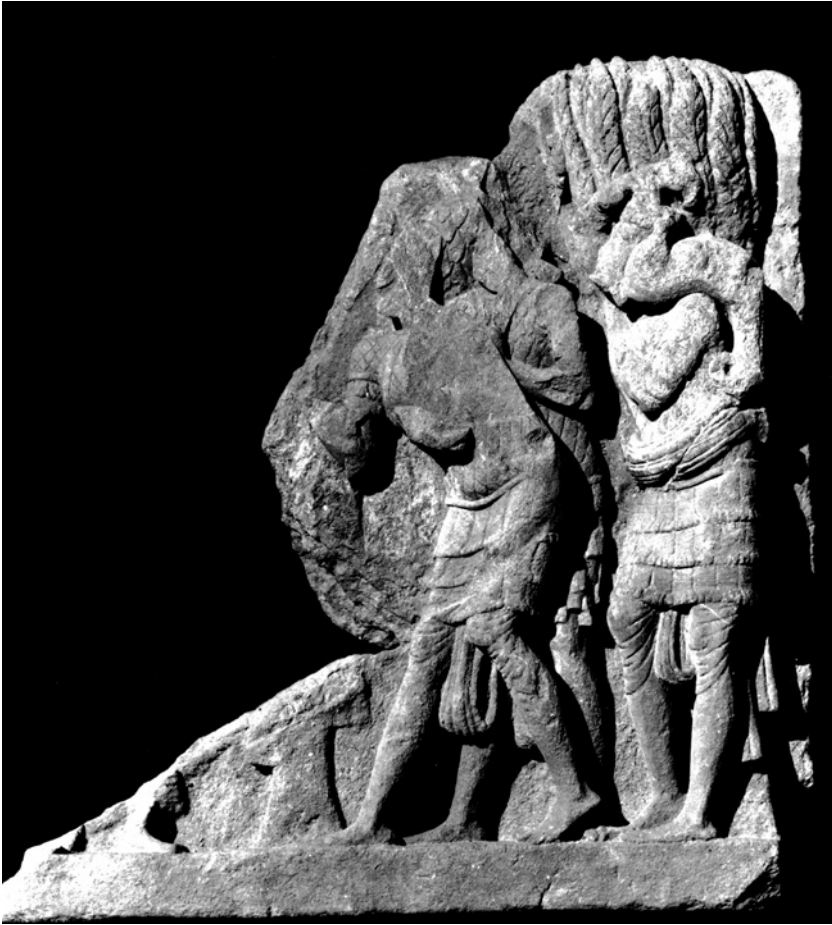


Figure 70a S 48 (after Faccenna 2001, tab. 13)



Figure 70b Panel IS.143.1961 (Victoria and Albert Museum, online collection [V&A Owned Content, © Victoria and Albert Museum, London])

Figure 70c Miran V (Stein 1912, pl. 141)

ra production, and of that of the stupas in the valleys of Barikot in the second century (Brancaccio, Olivieri 2019). Apart from this, in terms of general composition and details it is clearly a copy of the Saidu Frieze. Compare this relief with both panel S 1162 (with two soldiers, *55b-c) and, above all, panel S 48, which illustrates the episode of Siddhārtha's meeting with three huntsmen (*13-14) [figs 70a-b].

In the Barikot relief and in S 48 the three huntsmen turn to the left, the first with his face raised (see also S 1162). At Saidu we have two trees: one in the middle ground between the two figures at the sides on the left, and one to the right, like the wings of a theatre. At Barikot the relief shows a tree between the two lateral figures on the left. It looks practically as if the relief from the Barikot area replicates a portion of S 48, the part with the two figures further to the left, behind which we see the second tree. The second figure from the right at Saidu bears also a bow on his shoulders, while in the Barikot relief the corresponding figure bears a bow of the composite type. The outmost figure to the left at Barikot may be offering garments to Siddhārtha with arms slightly bent forward, exactly like the corresponding figure at Saidu, although there the arms are badly damaged. Thus we can complete the Saidu panel on the evidence of the later copy of it at Barikot. In both pieces huntsmen wear armour with overlapping scales depicted with lozenges.⁶⁴ The armour only covers the bust and is worn over a tunic consisting of fringed leather tassels sewn together, emerging on the arms like short sleeves with a band, and like a short skirt protecting the waist. Finally, the turbans with chin-band (type 3 of Faccenna 1999-2000) are the same as used at Saidu in general, and possibly also in S 48 (although it is damaged). Both have certain details missing. Missing at Barikot is the rolled *uttariya* at the waist and the *dhoti* emerging under the tunic. Missing in S 48 is the detail of the armour with pectoral disc, although it is present in other panels at Saidu (S 1112 *47-48a).

Apart from the armour, which is of the anatomical type, all these details of the huntsmen's clothing reappear in the clothing of the huntsmen on the north wall of Miran V. Moreover, one of the soldier-huntsmen (Stein 1912, fig. 141) is carrying on his back what looks like a prey [fig. 70c]. The story of Viśvantara takes place entirely against a forest background – note the young man clinging onto a deer – like the story of Siddhārtha at Saidu, where representation of the forest is characterised by the cliché of the trees. Thus, in this case we seem to have two copies of the same panel, S 48, one in stone from second-century Swat, and a painted from fourth-century Miran.

Below, reproductions are provided of both S 48 and the Barikot relief, as well as the painting on the north wall of Miran V.

Let us now go on to the technique used for the copies, some evidence of which can be deduced in the light of the relations of symmetry (direct or reverse) and the proportional relations between copy and original.

In the case of the double gift of the elephant [pl. XX and fig. 68], between Saidu and Miran, it is worth noting a very interesting aspect: the figures are perfect mirror images. At Saidu, an individual to the left (face turned, almost in profile) holding a ewer in his left hand with the spout towards the

⁶⁴ Armour with overlapping scales is well represented at Saidu (S 708, *36; S 1164, *55d) and finds an interesting parallel in the flakes of armour already present in Macrophase 3b (Saka-Parthian) from the Barikot excavation (Olivieri 2011b).

right; elephant on the right, advancing towards the left. At Miran, an individual towards the right (face semi-frontal) holding a ewer in his right hand, spout towards the left; elephant on the right advancing towards the left. We have the same scene with some variants but as mirror images. At Miran the scene is about three times larger (3:1), calculating on the evidence of the scale given in the lower right-hand corner of one photograph by M. Aurel Stein (1912, fig. 147), and of the ratios that can be deduced here and there in the text. Curiously, the Miran paintings have been lost, while their older models survived at Saidu.

In the case of the Barikot copy, we have a relief that is exactly half as high as the Saidu relief (1:2), and we can therefore deduce the use of a pantograph or, more likely, division into squares reproduced in a pattern on very fine parchment, which could be used, for example, for transfer onto the plastered walls of Miran with the technique of pouncing. Moreover, the choice to reproduce some models in mirror image must have to do with the fact that at Miran V the scenes are painted on the walls of the cell that contains the stupa, and not on the stupa itself and so the worshipper would have found them to their left when performing circumambulation (Santoro 2006, 32 fn. 7). Thus these images are not to be considered as a guide for the *pradakṣiṇā* (being situated to the left), and in fact are not in narrative order (32 fn. 7). However, since they are to be viewed from left to right, the artist appropriately created mirror images of the original models.

9 Raising the Stupa

Summary 9.1 Assemblage of the Frieze. – 9.2 Upper Drum and Dome. – 9.3 The umbrellas and the *machinae*. – 9.4 Colour and Gilding.

9.1 Assemblage of the Frieze

Once completed, the panel was mounted on the runners. Evidently, assembly proceeded in the direction of the Frieze, i.e. from right to left.

First the false railing is mounted, then the panels. See adjacent drawing. The assembly of the false railing involves a base and an upper frame with recesses. Once the base is in place and embedded in the wall, the masons climb up with the masonry to the right height where the frame is then embedded. The work is very delicate, but it is facilitated by the presence of the central false niche and the larger starting pillar (the one on the left). The pillar is mounted in the base, then the four cross-bars are inserted, then the next pillar, and so on [figs 71, 72a-b]. The pillars are detached from the stupa wall by a hair's breadth, which makes the process extremely delicate. Imagine, then, the continuous play of light and shadow produced by the false railing. Once a certain number of pillars had been assembled, the upper frame was carefully lowered, making sure that the pillars were vertical enough to fit easily into the upper recesses. At this point, the rear part of the frames, fitted with dovetail brackets, was walled in [figs 73a-c]. Nevertheless, the creation of the false railing with these characteristics is another of the numerous 'technical gamble' experimented with the Master at Saidu. Had the false niche not been present, the undertaking would have been desperate. A good static hold of the entire register was in fact guaranteed by the walled bases and cornices, by the high number and frequency of the small pillars (369), one every 5.5 cm, but above all by the fact that the lap started and ended against the solid structure of the central false niche. The

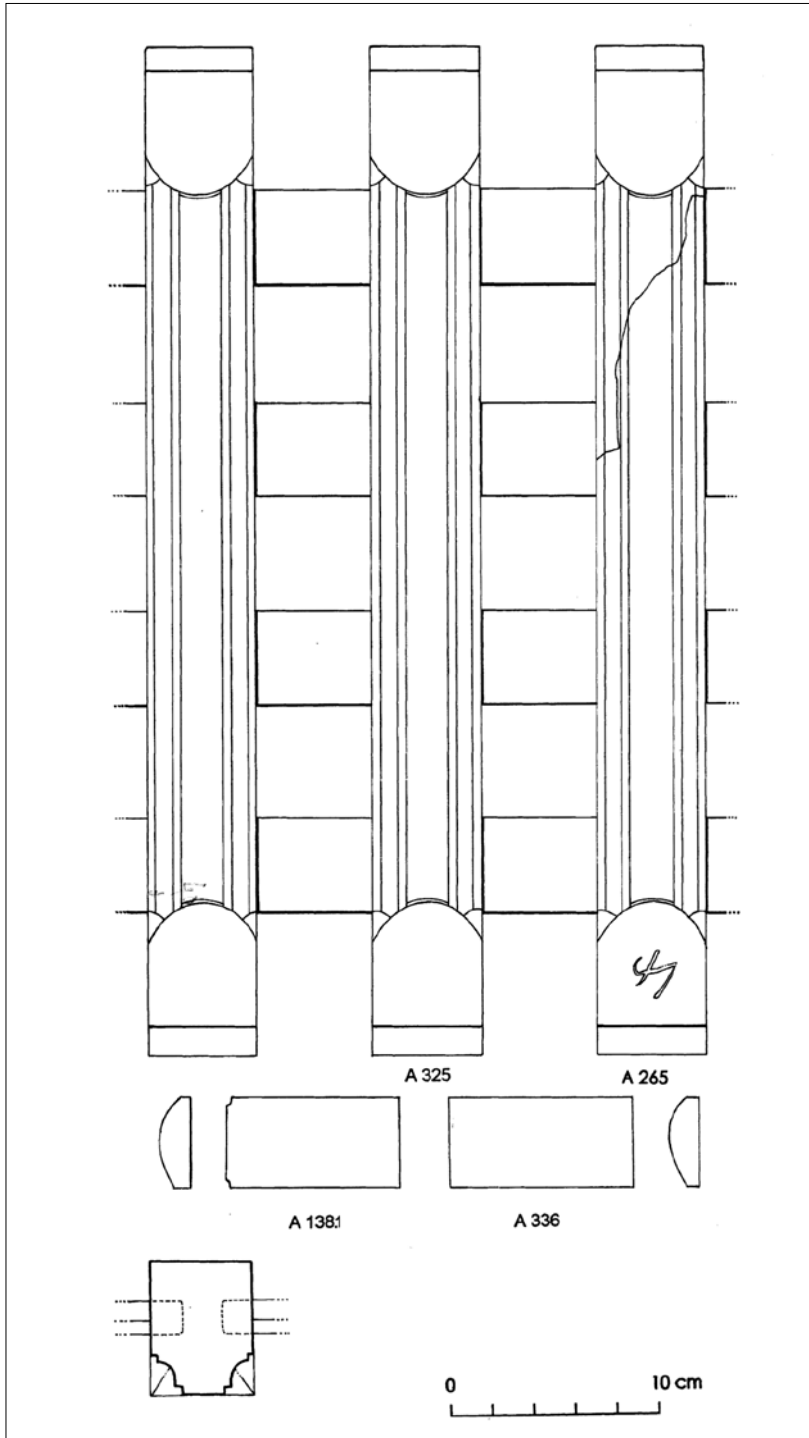


Figure 71 The false railing, assemblage system (after Faccenna 1995a, fig. 79; drawings by Francesco Martore)



Figure 72a-b
SS I reg. 59
(ACT; photo by Edoardo Loliva)

structure, even if it does not appear to be solid, had to be extremely resistant and ready to support, like a pile-dwelling, the positioning of the Frieze.

Once the lower register was completed, the procedure continued with the panels (second register), which also started and ended on the outer pilasters of the central false niche. The panels were then completed with cornices. I will return to this description after lingering over an important detail.

Even if the two registers are reversed, as proposed here (with the Frieze above the false railing), Faccenna's reconstruction envisages that the false-recinto was inserted by means of short recesses in a lower frame with an inverted groove decorated with a row of singing leaves on a fillet decorated with dentils and bars, while the upper part (the Frieze) was inserted in the guides of the upper frame, again with an inverted groove decorated with a row of singing leaves on a plain strip. In the graphic reconstruction presented in this volume, I propose a different solution, however idealised, of the two frames.

As has just been said, the frames are similar, their difference being in the lower fillet and the recesses. The cornice segments attributed to the register of the false railing present a fillet with dentils and bars and are recognisable by the recesses for the upper tenons of the pilasters. The frame segments attributed to the Frieze, with the smooth fillet, have continuous recesses for the upper face of the panels. Faccenna's documentation is very

clear and there would be no doubt. Yet there is a good number (I mean of the total number of segments recovered)¹ of reworked segments, i.e. segments of the false railing register reused for the Frieze. In the reconstructive drawings that accompany this study, I have chosen to go – so to speak – against the evidence and ideally attribute the frames with dentils and bars (dentils-and-bars) to the Frieze [pl. XIII]. This is not only for aesthetic reasons. There are a number of clues, which point me in this direction. For example, consider the three cases in which the designer of the Frieze modifies the frames (with dentils and bars) in which the recesses for the pilasters of the false railing were reshaped as a continuous recess for the panels. Apart from these three cases, only two other frame segments with dentils and bars with recesses for the pilasters survive. This is therefore one of the rare cases of technical aporia found at Saidu. In my opinion, four hypotheses arise. The first, which I feel able to discuss, for the reasons I will discuss in a moment, is the one already proposed by Faccenna. The second (a corollary of the first) sees in the remodelling of the frames a phase of restoration that follows the collapse of the false railing (Faccenna 2001, 69). The third is that there was a rethink in the construction phase, that is, that the project of the cornices changed during the course of construction and that it was decided to move the cornices with dentils and bars on the Frieze, but that this project was not completed. The fourth, as an extreme consequence of the previous one (and which I do not support), is that the false railing did not have an acanthus leaf frame and that this, not completed in all its parts, was only for the Frieze. In theory, in fact, the false railing should not have had an acanthus leaf frame (with or without a plain fillet). The false railing (false-*vedikā*) actually represents an enclosure that should be surmounted by a simple roof, as was actually visible on the Stupa itself around the podium and the main staircase. The problem here is that no elements of an ideal simple, rounded projecting roof (*uṣṇīṣa*) have been found to replace the cornice.²

Returning to the fillet with dentils and bars, by a logic of aesthetic priority (more complex vs. less complex), that should be more important than the smooth fillet, and therefore attributed to the Frieze instead of the false railing. In my opinion, the Master was late in realising this problem, but he could not have failed to notice it. Therefore, in the drawings, I have chosen to follow an idealised rather than a real reconstruction of this important detail.

The question of the fillet with dentils and bars is actually very important, because it is a 'revealing detail', already a distinctive element in Butkara I in monuments 17 and 14.

Faccenna wrote:

Il piccolo, ma qualificante dettaglio delle barrette può essere di gran peso nella considerazione degli apporti, contatti e influenze con aree culturali esterne. Mentre il motivo a soli dentelli è largamente diffuso nel mondo ellenistico con profili dei dentelli diversi per larghezza e inter-

1 In all (including the segments found in the new excavations) we have two segments from the false railing register (Faccenna 2001, 310-11), 14 segments from the Frieze register, three of which originally belonged to the false railing register and were reworked. It is not excluded that, once the survey of the Mission's storerooms is completed, some small fragments not considered at the time of the excavations will be found.

2 Otherwise one would think that the two segments with the recesses for the pillars were the result of an error, which was not corrected in time.



Figures 73a-c
SS I reg. 56 (ACT; photo by Edoardo Loliva)

vallo tra essi, caratterizzanti aree differenti, la presenza delle barrette richiama l'ambiente romano nella rielaborazione che esso compie nella prima età augustea di motivi ellenistici e nella loro diffusione [...] Compare a Roma in monumenti della prima età augustea (Regia, Tempio di Saturno, Tempio di Apollo Palatino, Tempio di Apollo in Circo). (Faccenna 2001, 177 fn. 76)³

To conclude this, and in my opinion, to justify the hierarchical superiority of this decorative motif to the plain fillet, I would point out here that the podium or throne of the Buddha in the false niche or central panel of the Frieze, that is, the largest and most central of the sculptures adorning the Stupa, at the centre of the visual and architectural focus, also features a decoration of this kind, with dentils and bars. The problem of the frames therefore remains open.

Leaving aside aesthetic considerations and returning to reality, both frames have – as we have already mentioned – dovetailed recesses for (certainly wooden) cramp [fig. 73c].⁴ These wooden cramps must have project-

³ “The small, but qualifying detail of the bars can be of great importance in the consideration of contributions, contacts and influences with external cultural areas. While the denticulated motif is widely diffused in the Hellenistic world with denticulated profiles of different widths and intervals, characterising different areas, the presence of the barrettes recalls the Roman environment in the reworking of Hellenistic motifs and their diffusion in the early Augustan age [...] It appears in Rome in monuments from the early Augustan period (Regia, Temple of Saturn, Temple of Apollo Palatine, Temple of Apollo in Circus)” (English transl. by G. Sells).

⁴ We have already mentioned the cramps: we have no evidence of iron cramps for the stone in the work on the Frieze. All the cramps we have from the Monastery seem to be carpentry



Figure 74a-b SS1 27 (ACT; photo by Edoardo Loliva)

ed considerably: in this way the supporting frame below and the locking frame above would have been solidly set into the face of second storey as it was raised by the workmen. This way, the panel was set firmly against the body of the Stupa. Thus the work of the sculptors and workmen proceeded in parallel.

Adherence of the panel was ensured with smudges of lime to fill the inevitable gaps between the straight panel and curved body. Where necessary, the semi-column was fixed even more firmly with iron nails, square in section, that were driven from outside and subsequently hidden by stucco work (possibly with a mixture of lime and chlorite schist dust). The shape of the holes suggests that they were arranged before assembly, quite possibly

work, in wood. Cramps came into frequent use in Gandhara from the end of the first century. For the minor friezes and cornices (figured/decorated) they served to mount pieces which were not designed for a specific monument but produced in series, the cramps serving the function of 'universal connector'.

one every so many panels. Very rare is the use of circular holes practically hidden in the panel itself. These could have done while work was underway, only when really necessary, with the use of a hand drill for nails either square (more often) or round (more rarely) in section, used for carpentry and well documented with excavation of the Monastery of Saidu (Callieri 1987). Here, too, stucco work was applied to cover the intervention. This way the frames could have been anchored to the body under construction, setting the panels firmly against the masonry and helping to stabilise all the figurative material. Once the work was completed, the Master proceeded with chiselling of the pupils to perfect the sense of perspective.

Above the decorated cornice of the Frieze ran the final course of moulding (fillet, ovolo, cavetto, reverse ovolo, covering slab). Above, the third storey can be pictured as a free band of the same height as that of the second storey,⁵ culminating with the string course, small covering slabs supported by brackets. The presence of this projecting string course is perfectly justified if, as at Amluk-dara and Tokar-dara, we picture it protecting a painted band, possibly displaying garlands. The string course was supported by a series of brackets in green schist with double volute (with vertical central flute), separated by interconnected talc schist flat metopes (coloured?) (l. 19 cm = 0.6 Gft), many examples of which have survived, the projecting parts all measuring in a range of 12-14 cm [figs 74a-b, 83].⁶ Thus the string course slab must have projected by about 15-20 cm from the side of the monument.

9.2 Upper Drum and Dome

Shortly after the third storey, from a height corresponding to that of the third storey, begins the curvature of the *aṅḍa* which, like Faccenna, we picture in the form of a slightly depressed arch on a minimal springer. At the level where the curvature begins there may well have been (see the example of Chatpat published in Foucher 1905-51, 59, fig. 12)⁷ the *nāgadanta*, i.e. the figured brackets in green schist used as support for real garlands. This way the lower curve of the garlands would have come at about the height of the beginning of the curvature of the *aṅḍa*. The *nāgadanta* are figured brackets leaning forward at an angle of about 45° [figs 75a-b, 76a-b]. The brackets were set into the masonry by their straight horizontal shafts or rear tails. Seven preserved brackets of this type have been identified with certainty: some (?) with upper volute and projecting figure of a standing putto represented performing various actions, all offering something: a reliquary held to the chest with both hands, or two bunches of flowers, one in each hand, hands joined in the salutation, or right hand held forward with the left by

⁵ On the basis of survey on the stupas with preserved superstructure, including Amluk-dara and Abbasaheb-china (Faccenna, Spagnesi 2014).

⁶ Faccenna 1995a, 518-22, plus a series of at least a dozen from recent excavations. H. 12 cm, w. 0.6 cm, projecting part 12 cm. Note the presence of similar brackets at Butkara III (BK III 1985-1-144 and BK III 1985-1-206; Gul Rahim 2015, figs 202, 205).

⁷ As suggested to me by Anna Provenzali, who also suggested I should make comparison with the stupa-shaped reliquary in stone from Panr I (P 1132).



Figure 75a-b SS I 62 (ACT; photo by Aurangzeib Khan)

the side.⁸ They were set at regular intervals (on one of the stupas comparable to ours in size, at least every 2 m); the garland was hung behind the projecting volute, clearly visible where it fell between the brackets.

On the top of the *aṅḍa*, above the inverted pyramid of the *harmikā* and the railing of the top *vedikā*, the *chattravali* umbrellas may have numbered only three, or five, and appeared small in relation to the sweep of the dome. The surviving slab of the Saidu *harmikā* was in dark grey schist – a material more compact and resistant than the green schist. The three remaining fragments belonged to the lower slab (the smallest), decorated on the side (14 cm in height) with eight-petalled rosettes within a fillet lozenge (Facenna 1995a, 547-9). The largest fragment, which is intact (1.07 m), should correspond to the central part on which the side parts were mounted, so we can suppose an original width of about 2.5 m per side. Possibly belonging

⁸ The seven pieces are: S 87, S 363, [S 429], [S 1355], SS I 62, SS I 182, SS I 204. The two pieces here in square brackets are a little different. The others certainly belong to the same series, which belongs to the Stupa. Apart from S 429, they are all fragmentary. Based on the one intact piece, S 429, the average height of the bases would be in the region of 20-22 cm – little, if we consider the general proportions (bearing in mind the *caveat* by Anna Provenzali), sufficient if we take into consideration that the height and projection of the brackets on the string course of the third storey, which certainly belong to the Stupa, never exceed 12-14 cm. Moreover, as emerges from a study being carried out by Provenzali, the *nāgadanta* are a type of architectural elements limited to the very earliest phases of Gandharan stupa architecture. Thus, it seems to me hardly likely that the figured brackets of Saidu do not belong to the Stupa. See also Provenzali 2005.



Figure 76a-b SS I 182 (ACT; photo by Aurangzeib Khan)

to the *harmikā* is a pillar in green chlorite schist, 20 cm in height without base and topping (pillar A 45, with eight-petalled lotus flower at the ends and band decorated with astragali and beads; Faccenna 1995a, fig. 264b). Although Faccenna's idea that these could have belonged to the top railing of the *chattravali* (*harmikā*) is the only one that seems possible (p. 547), in the drawings illustrating this text, the *vedikā* has been deliberately omitted.

9.3 The umbrellas and the *machinae*

While the architect of Amluk-dara avoided some of the unsuccessful experiments of his precursor at Saidu (the railing on the top of the podium), one experiment that he did not fail to attempt – and succeeded in – was to bring to the top of the stupa at least seven umbrellas or *chattras*, the largest of which had a diameter of 8 m, for a height of the *chattravali* of about 8 m including the exceptionally large *harmikā* (over 4 m wide), a fragment of which, now lost, was noted by Stein in 1926 (Stein 1930, 19). The largest umbrella had a diameter of about 8 m, the second largest 7.2 m. The total weight of the former was over 24 t. These umbrellas were made up of 8 heavy segments bound together by cramps (and metal braces). The fourth umbrella, measuring 4 m, consists of a single piece weighing 9 t. The second to last umbrella had a diameter of 1.65 m.

The height of this structure brings the height of the stupa, measured from the ground, from the 25 m up to the bare dome to a total of nearly 33 m (about 100 Gft) (see Olivieri 2019a). The top umbrellas at Amluk-dara, supported by a forest of wooden props at the sides, came tumbling down on the left side of the stupa and on the stairway in a later phase, in the closing centuries of the first millennium CE, undoubtedly as the result of a violent earthquake. Probably this was the last stage in a process that must have seen, first, the collapse of the wooden props, then the lower umbrellas falling apart as the segments detached, and finally the *chattavali* collapsing onto itself (the top of the stupa is wide enough to cover the ruins). In a subsequent stage umbrellas slid down the side, taking with them all the brackets and projecting parts of the superstructure from the left side.

At Saidu, on the other hand, still following in the tracks of the Indian tradition, the umbrellas numbered only three (or five?) and were relatively small in comparison with the sweep of the dome.⁹ The largest umbrella yielded by excavation had a diameter of 4.8 m, thus projecting well beyond the *harmikā* (reconstructed width about 2.5 m), but only just extending beyond the first curvature of the dome. Its weight is estimated to have been 14 t.¹⁰ If the principle of harmony between the height of the columns and that of the stupa (measured from the podium) applies, given that the columns come to just over 14 m with the lions at the top and the Stupa just over 12 m including the *harmikā*, there could not have been more than three umbrellas (see Faccenna 1995a, 564-5). The second umbrella had a diameter of 3.6 m and weighed 9 t; the third, 2.6 m and 4.4 t.¹¹ The pinnacle of the *chattavali* must have come a little above the lions. To avoid an optical effect of flattening, the minimum space between the umbrellas must have been of 1 m. The ratio studied at Panr I between the width of the umbrellas and the height of the intermediate joints appears gradually to have diminished (see again Faccenna 1995a, fig. 279). If these proportions were also applied at Saidu, then the first umbrella of 4.8 m came 2 m above the *harmikā*, the other two at a lesser distance. Unless it had five umbrellas, the Stupa would thus have risen for over 16 m from the ground (50 Gft), nearly 3 m above the lions.

In any case, the system to erect the *chattavali* must have been very complicated and dangerous. At Amluk-dara the large umbrellas were divided into segments (usually eight), mounted together and set on wooden props.

9 As for the precise number of umbrellas, little is known (see Schopen 1997, 303-4; also Fussman 1994b, 28-9). Apart from established practice, we must consider the technical difficulties. In the earliest stupas, including Saidu and Butkara I, the umbrellas clearly numbered three (or five): at Butkara I, following the Indian tradition, relatively small, but larger at Saidu. We have clear evidence of seven umbrellas at Amluk-dara. We may imagine that in many cases of high *chattavali* representation is idealised. For the towering *chattavali* and multiple umbrellas, evidence of which we find in the rock incisions of the upper Indus or the bronze models of the seventh-eighth century (see Faccenna 1995a, pls 274-85), and which seem to reflect real architectural elements, we can also imagine wooden structures. The Senavarma inscription may already have referred to wooden pinnacle on the Ekaūḍa stupa, which caught fire on being struck by lightning. In the case of many later stupas, dating to the fifth-sixth century, like the stupas on an octagonal plan at Hadda, Bamiyan, Mes Aynak (for example, in complexes 045, 003, 013), one need only consider the rubble masonry technique used, with a lining of small slabs, to realise that such structures could not support superstructures in stone. On the evidence of the pinnacles found at Mes Aynak we can see that the topmost *chattavali* were also made of terracotta, as well as wood. On fires, lightning and wooden or metal pinnacles, see Foucher 1905-51, 84).

10 Fragments C 101 and C 102.

11 Respectively fragments C 95 and A 140 with C 94. If there had been room for a fourth umbrella, we would have to consider fragment C 97 (2 m in diameter and weighing 2.6 t).

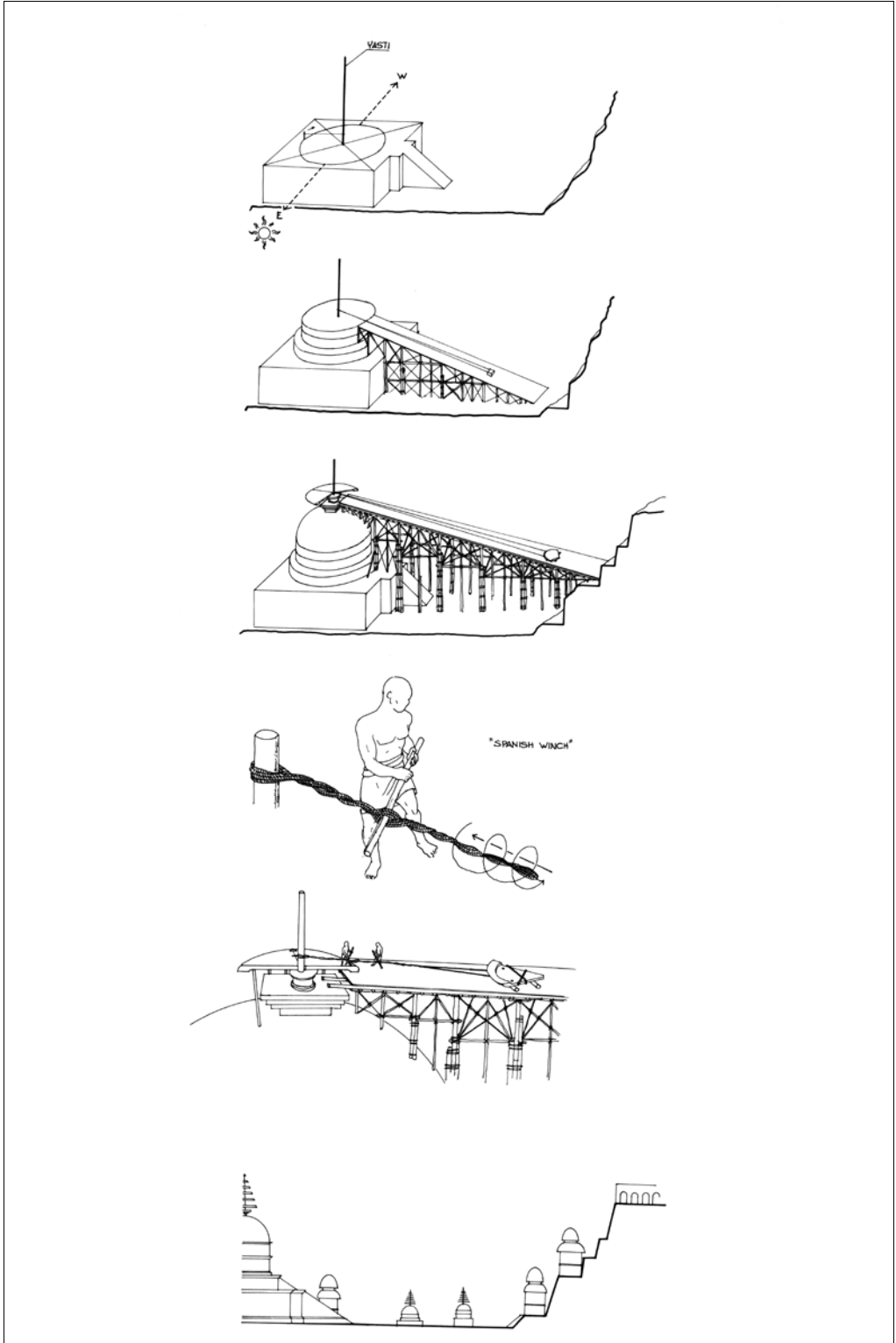


Figure 77 Building operative techniques (drawings by Francesco Martore)



Figure 78 SSI 12, minor stupa (ACT; photo by Edoardo Loliva)

The system used for the operation must have been based on the Spanish winch, making ramps of earth to shift the blocks directly from the terraces of the quarries worked stepwise in the rock slope facing the stupa. Once the work was completed, the terraces were occupied by buildings, minor stupas and other structures connected to one of the monasteries of Amluk-dara (Olivieri 2019a) [fig. 77].

A similar method may have been adopted at Saidu. Using ramps and the Spanish winch is the easiest solution to the problem of the lack of *machinae* (*yantra*) in Gandhara, and indeed in the texts when referring to the construction of stupas, but above all in sculptural depictions. Actually, there are two significant exceptions (which suggests that there may have been many more): in the *Divyāvādāna* and the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*.

In the former collection, the story of Makāndika contains reference to a mechanical master. The term recurs in the latter text, describing the attempt by Devadatta, cousin and diehard antagonist of the historical Buddha, to kill the Buddha (one of the last events before the *parinirvāṇa*), with mention of “a master of mechanics” asked by Devadatta to build a “machine operated by 500 men” to raise a huge boulder to drop on the Buddha. The picture changes in some of the scenes at Gandhara, showing the raising of a pillar instead of the boulder. These reliefs were analysed by Maurizio Taddei (1963). Undoubtedly the reason for the erection of a pillar is to be sought – as Taddei points out – both in the transmission of the type of scene well attested in Hellenistic and subsequent art, and in the experience the Gandharan sculptors had of machinery of the sort that must have been used in building, to raise votive columns. Each of these ‘exotic’ iconographic models or archetypes cited in the art of Gandhara enjoy viability always and only if they continue to have a significant role to play in the context of use, even if they have lost their original narrative meaning. We have seen this in the scenes of wrestlers, and the iconography of Hercules and Antaeus, etc. The scene of Devadatta may therefore allude to the existence of building *machinae* for which no evidence is found in the data offered by art and archaeology.

9.4 Colour and Gilding

The last operation was a matter of plastering and painting, which we have already had occasion to mention. The podium and parts in talc schist masonry (third storey) were, finally, plastered with a lime base (Faccenna 1995a, 125-9, fig. 15). This process had from the outset been deemed necessary not only for protection but also to pick out the parts of the moulding in accordance with the design. To this by no means secondary detail, Faccenna dedicated pages of fundamental importance (129-32). Plastering was carried out frequently, certainly seasonally (126).¹² At Amluk-dara, thanks to the evidence of the collagen in the plaster, we hypothesise a seasonal sequence organised thus:

[Collagen] was extracted from animal bones in late autumn (when weather is dry and cold and it is more favorable for gelatinization). In late

¹² The base or plinth of the podium shows five successive layers of plaster preserved and accurately documented (Faccenna 1995a, 435, fig. 183).

spring, after the end of the rainy season, when the weather is mild and dry, stucco was prepared. Various binders were used to make the stucco and color layers more stable and weather-resistant. The presence of egg [albumen] in the final layers of the stucco suggests the hypothesis that the stucco surface was dry and smooth when color was applied. In this condition pigments needed to be mixed with a strong binder to adhere to the substratum. (Olivieri 2019d, 127)

As for the colour, little can be added to the observations on the basis of the excavation (Faccenna 1995a, 133-4). The plaster had a warm, ivory or shell hue. If the third storey was surmounted by a string course supported by brackets, on the evidence of what remains and of the example of Am-luk-dara, it may well have been painted with garlands; we can be quite certain that the columns were red.¹³

There are no traces of gilding on the Frieze, while it is recurrent in the stupas of the subsequent periods (132 fnn. 1-2). A recent study (Zaminga et al. 2019) on the 2 fragments from a miniature stupa in schist from shrine 54 at Saidu (period III) suggests that the gilding system used might have harked back to a technique widespread in the Hellenistic world.

The Frieze sculptures, with their sage green colour, had not been conceived of as being gilded, nor indeed painted over with the typical shell-coloured lime-based whitewash widespread throughout India for the preparation of paint (Faccenna 1995a, 95) [fig. 78]. That the eyes were not painted (and if they were not, what else would be?) is evidenced by the care taken over cutting the details of the iris and pupil. Stucco work on the parts secured with nails, or to cover errors or cracks, must have been carried out with the lime-based mixture of talc schist dust, although we have no traces of it.

Our final hypothetical reconstruction of the side and front façades is summarised in the plates attached to this study.¹⁴

¹³ In addition to Faccenna 1995a, consider the three intermediate discs of the capital of column C found in 2011 with traces of red (not inventoried: preserved with register no. SS I 28, 65 and 107).

¹⁴ The reconstruction of Saidu offered by Le Huu Phuoc - with two figured registers separated by two pseudo-*vedikā* registers and a towering *chattravali* with eight umbrellas for a total height of about 24 m for the monument - although based on excavation report data is a product of the imagination (Le Huu Phuoc 2010, 175-6, fig. 6.14).

10 **Restoration Work, Deconsecration, Abandonment**

Summary 10.1 Restoration Work. – 10.2 Collapse of the Columns. – 10.3 Deconsecration. – 10.4 Abandonment.

It is not easy to determine the time, or the times, at which the [Stupa] was damaged and then restored. Nor is it possible to indicate its gradual change in appearance (possibly ending up devoid of railing, column and frieze). (Faccenna 1995a, 445)

10.1 **Restoration Work**

Faccenna discusses the restoration works on the monument at length (1995a, 443-5). There is no need to add anything further, apart from noting that for some time the restoration works on the podium followed the original use of talc schist blocks (which means that the quarries were still active), after which reused material began to be used instead, obtained from the remains of the balustrade that had in the meantime collapsed and was also in green schist. Readers can follow these works with the photographs published in the excavation report (Faccenna 1995a, pls 23, 25c).

Other material from the Stupa – pillars, cornices and bases – is scattered all over the terrace (Faccenna 2001, fig. 80), pieces from the Frieze have also been reused, and the balustrade, as we have seen, was dismantled and reused both in shrine 54 (period II) and in the podium of the Stupa itself. This proves that partial plundering had already begun when the monuments in the sacred area were still functioning, before period II, when monuments incorporating material from the Stupa were built (Faccenna 1995a, 138; 2001, 69, 299).

According to Faccenna, towards the end of period I the Frieze was certainly reworked. Both the false railing (false-*vedikā*) and the figured panels, the assembly of which, as we have seen, was almost the result of experimentation, had problems.

Towards the end of period I the Frieze was certainly readjusted. There were problems with both the false railing and the figured panels, which, as we have seen, were not sufficiently stable. Significant evidence of this is to be seen in the re-adaptation of elements of the cornice and base of the false railing, reused as cornice and base of the panels. The tenon sockets on the pillars were adjusted to fit with the panels. This is a delicate point, we have already discussed it; I add here that if the false railing had been detached because it had partly collapsed, the Frieze would also have had static problems. Obviously for Faccenna this problem does not arise because in his reconstruction the Frieze was at the bottom. Having considered that this was not probable, I also believe that at the moment the false railing collapsed, the detachment phase of the Frieze also began. This event must be later, certainly towards the end of the second century. Elements of synchronism of the two episodes can be deduced from the simultaneous reuse of elements from the Frieze and the false railing. For the former: fragments of the Frieze are in the core of the podium of shrine 63 (period II, phase a = second-third century); for the latter: a small pillar is found in the core of the podium of shrine 36 (period II, phase b = second-third century). Towards the end of period II (and in the third century) plundering had started on the podium facing in talc schist blocks, which were reused in the restoration of other monuments, creation of small new structures in the stupa terrace, and even in some parts of the Monastery.¹ Thus we may picture the scene; restoration work continued on the minor stupas around it while the great Stupa at the centre fell ever deeper into decline or, better, was gradually demolished, taken to pieces to 'feed' its architectural *minores*. The mind turns the story of the previous life of the Buddha in which, as prince Mahāsattva, he fed the tiger and its cubs with his body (there are more *jātakas* with a similar moral). Perhaps there is no better end for a stupa.

10.2 Collapse of the Columns

The columns at the front of the monument had already fallen, too: a fragment of a lion from a column (Faccenna 1995a, 137, pls 158, 161b) was reused in restoration of the podium of stupa 27.²

With period III we see occurrences that suggest destruction through natural causes, like especially earthquakes. The most dramatic feature of the architectural landscape of this period is to be seen in the collapses in the NW sector (Faccenna 1995a, pl. 10) and collapse of columns A and C on the floors in the final phase.³ Evidence of the decline of and failing interest in

¹ See the contribution of Di Florio et al. in Faccenna 1995a, in particular p. 620. Important pieces such as the bases of the second staircase SS I 225 and SS I 226 and the fragment with the haircut SS I 66 ended up at the monastery (Amato 2019).

² To judge by the dimensions, I believe that here we have one of the medium-size lions (columns 24 and 29).

³ The stratigraphic position of the collapse of Column A in sector S of the site is more difficult to place.

the site is to be seen in the ruins of the two columns, which were not removed, unlike the other two which must have collapse earlier on.

It is interesting to observe the lie of the remains of Column C, two sections of which are to be seen. The upper section fell between monuments 13 and 16, to the north-east of the Stupa. The lower section collapsed in the SW sector, zone B, to the immediate left of the stairway. This section seems to have fallen in the opposite direction to the upper one: the former points to the west, the latter to the east. On the evidence of these two sections and their position we can advance the following hypothesis. With the collapse of the upper part, the lower part was twisted round, collapsing in the opposite direction to fall just left of the stairway (see Faccenna 1995a, pls 46-9) [figs 79-80].

When Column C collapsed it was still topped by the lion, which was in fact found in three fragments during the 2011 excavation, at a distance of about 1 m from the top disk.⁴ The upper section of Column C, collapsed between minor stupas 13 and 16, actually covered a small monument that remained hidden until excavation of the column in 2011-12. The monument, of which only the base of the podium has survived, and which appears in the numbering as 100, lies a little to the east of 13 and 16. The monument was totally shattered by the collapse of the column, only the first courses of the podium remaining. It proved difficult to make out the phasing of the pavement of monument 100 when Column C collapsed since the rammed earth floor of the terrace had been disturbed by the previous excavations, frequent cleaning and exposure to the elements.⁵ In any case, the springer of 100 seems to correspond to the level of the springer of 13 and 16, and therefore to belong to the final phases of period I. The pavement phase on which Column C collapsed (covering 100) has however been identified as corresponding to F2, i.e. the period III pavement of the stupa terrace.

The collapse of the two remaining columns (C and A) was, therefore, one of the last events in the life of the site, occurring in a phase that was not followed by any attempt at restoration but, rather, progressive and final abandonment (Faccenna 1995a, 159). This seems to bear out our conjecture that the collapse was due to one of the major earthquakes occurring in the third-fourth century, hypothesised by Faccenna at Saidu, Panr I and Butkara I (158, tab. XXI).⁶ Thanks to the excavation data on Barikot and Amluk-dara, it has been possible to detect and provide absolute dating for two destructive earthquakes that followed in the space of about 30-50 years between the end of the third and the beginning of the fourth century (Olivieri 2012; 2013; 2018; Olivieri, Filigenzi 2018; Iori, Olivieri 2020).

While large-scale restoration works were undertaken subsequent to the damage caused by the two earthquakes at Butkara I, Panr I and Amluk-dara, entailing substantial modification of these monuments, Saidu was in practice abandoned to its fate.

⁴ The fragments are SS I 29, SS I 30 and SS I 31, respectively the chest with the head, the right leg and part of the back.

⁵ Moreover, the work carried out in the period 2011-14 was on a site that had been open to the public since the 1980s, to be used as a cricket pitch during the Taleban occupation of Swat between 2008 and 2009.

⁶ For further evidence of collapses resulting from earthquakes, see the NW sector (Faccenna 1995a, pl. 10).

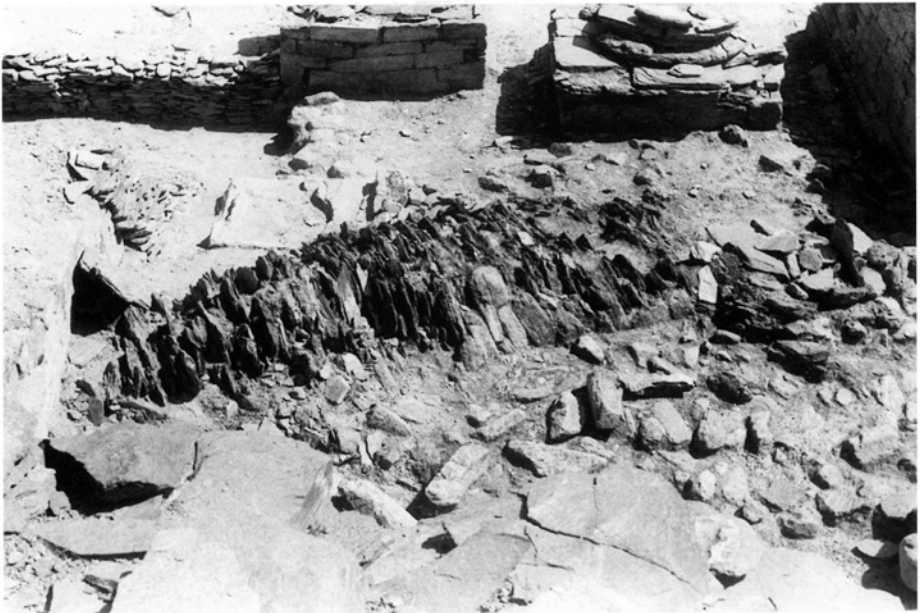


Figure 79a-b Collapse of Column C, stratigraphic evidence (= Faccenna 1995a, pl. 48)



Figure 80a-b The demolition of the Frieze, stratigraphic evidence (= Faccenna 1995a, pl. 288)

10.3 Deconsecration

This phase of abandonment saw a series of events of great importance for the life of the monument. We will describe these events by following the order of the actions that accompanied them. The actions are as follows: opening of the relic chamber, removal of the reliquary, new deposit, closure, deposit in the upper antechamber, closure, and offering of bracelets.

When it was opened, the relic chamber was in such condition as to give the archaeologists the hope of finding the original reliquary. We can imagine their disappointment: the reliquary had already been taken away leaving on the bottom of the lower chamber, on the south side, nothing more than a tiny silver tin. What might they have expected to find in a chamber of these dimensions? A large pyx certainly, like the one depicted in the scene on the Frieze with Utarasena, and certainly not the tiny box left on one side of the chamber.⁷

What is certain, therefore, is that some time in the life of the Stupa, the reliquary was removed and a new deposit made. Thus, once the chamber was opened the reliquary was taken away. The bottom of the chamber, which was covered with a thin layer of ash, was not disturbed. Within the chamber, resting on the south (back) side, was deposited a small, short cylindrical silver reliquary with a diameter of 4.35 cm (S 690), which in turn contained four objects (S 691-4): a cylindrical gold receptacle of very small dimensions, diameter 2.15 cm (containing a pearl with through hole S 695), a cylindrical bead of a necklace in quartz, 6 gold bracts in the shape of a lotus flower and a similar bract in silver. Apart from these, the following objects were found deposited: two spherical necklace beads in gold (S 1425), a third, similar one (S 1862), a fragment of gold thread (S 1863), a gold leaf (S 1426) and a silver bract in the shape of a lotus flower (S 1864).

Once the lower chamber had been closed, within the upper chamber evidence that the lower deposit suffered no further disturbance is to be seen in the following deposit objects: two identical necklace beads in gold (S 1427 and S 1868), a tiny silver bract in the shape of a lotus flower (S 1867), a pearl and a shell necklace bead (S 1866 and S 1865). With these deposits the upper chamber was ceremonially closed once again.

These findings may be a new deposition, or the remains of the original one, but they are certainly not what was left from a theft, otherwise there would be no accounting for the survival of the precious reliquary. The fact that the small silver box with its precious content remained intact and the chamber again closed appears to demonstrate that the operation was performed in a spirit of piety, doubtless to transfer the original relics to another stupa. The receptacle might have been made a gift on that occasion. Alternatively, the small box may have been in the original reliquary as an accessory deposit, from where it was removed to find new deposition *in memoriam* of the original reliquary which had been taken away.

Since then, and until the archaeologists arrived on the scene, no one had ever opened the chamber. Thus we can deduce that, although possibly already abandoned, the Stupa remained a sacred place, by virtue of its fame if

⁷ Or a reliquary-jar, like the one documented at Saidu Sharif I in the chamber (circular, however, in this case) of stupa 25, a little later than the Stupa (period Ib), containing semi-charred bones (Faccenna 1995a, 299-301).

nothing else. In fact, the operation can only have been performed at a time when the Stupa had been partly demolished, for otherwise it would have been impossible to arrive at such a depth.

As I reconstruct the episode, with the Stupa partly demolished excavation was performed from above seeking access to the chamber in order to recover the relics and deposit them elsewhere. In this phase the consecration deposit was left; it did not contain relics but might typically have belonged to that type of deposit (*garbha*) associated with consecration of buildings other than stupas. Of course, it is a very complicated issue and I have no intention of reducing it to an *aut aut*. Nevertheless, I find the distinction suggested by A. Ślācza (2007, 9) useful.⁸

The distinction is also to be observed in the monastic literary tradition of the North-West: “One, which contains *śarīras* (relics), is called a *stūpa*; one, which does not have *śarīras* in it, is called a *caitya*” (Karashima 2018, 446). A consecration deposit is made for a building while, in the case of relics, the stupa is constructed for them. The relics are worshipped (through the stupa), while the consecration deposit is worshipped only at the moment of deposition. In many examples the deposits are placed under the relic chamber, while the relics are placed within the chamber.

The fact that the reliquary found in the relic chamber contains bracts in the shape of lotus flowers, and above all the fact that it was (carefully) placed off centre, not to replace the original reliquary, strongly suggests that here we have a consecration deposit. I hope that further study will be dedicated to this evidence in the future. In any case, if the Stupa had already been partly demolished and deprived of its Frieze, as we will see later on, it would only have been right to remove the relics.⁹ The consecration deposit may have served to ritualise the removal of the reliquary and consecrate as a memorial (*caitya*) what had once been an important stupa. Archaeological documentation must contain many of these episodes. Certainly, some of the stratigraphic evidence of Butkara I can be interpreted in this light.

As far as I can remember, only one similar case comes to mind, from Sirkap, in the secondary deposition of the Block A stupa:

The stūpa in the centre had been despoiled of its relics: but the relic chamber still contained, among other objects, some broken pieces of what must once have been a singularly beautiful crystal casket, the fine workmanship of which suggests that it dates from Maurya age. From the fragments remaining it is evident that the casket, when intact, would have been too large to go inside the relic chamber; and it must be inferred, therefore, that it was enshrined there in its present broken condition. The probability is that the relics were taken from some much older monument and that, the crystal casket in which they had reposed having been broken, the fragments of it were scrupulously preserved. That contact with the relics would invest such fragments with a special sanctity. (Marshall 1960b, 80)

⁸ According to this study, the deposition of pieces of gold leaf belonging to a lotus flower was made in the context of the ritual consecration or reconsecration of a non-stupa monument. I would recommend to the reader the more accessible Skilling 2018. Fogelin and Schiffer (2015), with reference to the Indian world, use the expression “termination ritual” for these cases. For a study on relics as deposit in the Buddhist world, see the contributions in Stargardt, Willis 2018.

⁹ The Stupa may have suffered further demolition in part to have access to the relic chamber.



Figure 81 Whetstones from Saidu (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri)

Figure 82 The assemblage of the false railing (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri)



Figure 83 The assemblage of the brackets (MAIP; photo by Michele Minardi)

Figure 84 SS I 227 (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri)

Figure 85 SS I 231 (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri)

Figure 86a-b SS I 340 (MAIP; photo by Aurangzeib Khan)



Figure 87 SSI 229 (MAIP; photo by Aurangzeib Khan)

As we have seen, deposition of the consecration deposit was usually performed with a rite. Here this might be attested to by the find of fragments of twisted bracelets in blue glass over the second covering of the chamber (Faccenna 1995a, 441 fn. 1). The stratigraphic picture was tellingly traced out by Faccenna.¹⁰ Having been reopened and the new deposition made, the chamber was again closed under its lid. Some more precious objects of diminutive proportions were deposited in the upper chamber, which was closed with its square slab. The hole made for access was carefully sealed with stones, and some bracelets were deliberately broken in honour of the deed. At this point the preserved top of the Stupa rose 150 cm above the relic chamber, with neatly laid slabs of stone between the two. The bracelets were found among the stones at about 70 cm above the relic chamber. On the evidence of this connection it is clear that they were of a type of material safely datable to the late third-early fourth century, certainly not corresponding to the date of the building of the Stupa but perfectly in line with the date estimated for the abandonment of most of the monuments at Saidu.¹¹ In Buddhist ritual contexts, women's bracelets have been found intentionally broken on the benches in the courtyard of temple B at Barikot (third century), around the altar (Olivieri 2016), or, both broken and intact, inserted into the floor of the *pradakṣiṇāpatha* in the Dharmarajika stupa at Taxila (Micheli 2020; Marshall 1960b, 104). The ritual breaking of brace-

¹⁰ Despite the painstaking excavation, Faccenna wondered whether the bracelets might be modern, and thus "intruders" (1995a, 441 fn. 1). We are now certain that the bracelets are typical of the Kushan and late-Kushan phases, well attested in the urban excavations.

¹¹ Date of abandonment established by Faccenna and Callieri in the fourth-fifth century. See Olivieri, Filigenzi 2018. The chronology of the coins later associated does not go beyond the fourth century (Faccenna 1995a, 158-63).

lets is evidently associated with female rituals, possibly involving the female monastic communities and having to do with the abandonment of family life (marriage), as if entering into a state of symbolic widowhood (hence the breaking of the bracelets) and into the community of the *bhikṣuṇī*.¹² The deconsecration of the Stupa and secondary consecration of the monument as memorial, *caitya*, might (let me stress 'might') have been performed by a female community. The fact that possible evidence of female monasticism – supposing my interpretation to be right – appeared in Swat only in this late period casts revealing light on the orthodoxy (or rather on conservatism) within the communities of Gandharan Buddhism: with a few exceptions, such as Utpalavarnā, who played an essential role in the story of the Buddha (see Bopearachchi 2011), female figures are absent from the monastic life, nor in the donee inscriptions, in contrast with the practice in India, do they find any mention as far as I can remember (with the exception of CKI 226 discussed in Salomon 1995).

As we have seen, it is not very clear whether the reconsecration of the (semi-demolished) Stupa was made during or at the end of the life of the sanctuary. The former hypothesis is more probable.¹³

10.4 Abandonment

However, the Frieze had already been scattered by then. I will conclude this study with an account of what we know of the fate of the Frieze. Some of the panels collapsed and were found at the base of the podium, in particular on the east side, also under the remains of the lower section of Column C, in sector NE/B, to the left of the stairway. Most of the fragments must have been moved there, deliberately brought together, both in sector NW/A of the excavation (to the right of the Stupa stairway) and in sector NE/B (to the left of the stairway), which was excavated in 2011-12. From there the specimens by the least worthy of the sculptors following in the steps of the earlier masters were taken to patch up the masonry of the shrines and minor stupas for which no better treatment was reserved (Faccenna 1995a, pls 288-96).

Two fragments of the Frieze (one uncertain: S2341, Faccenna 1995a, 167a; S 1163, *55c)¹⁴ appear to have been reused before the final abandonment of

¹² On the female monastic communities, see the first eight chapters of Schopen 2014.

¹³ I excavated some of these phases in 2015: they are very simple structures built on the ruins of the sanctuary shrines, as is the case of the earthen stupa 80 (period III), built on the ruins of shrine 54 (Olivieri 2019a, 115-16; see Faccenna 1995a, 427). Belonging to these final phases (period IV), too, are the simple burials of jars with semi-charred bones 19 (Faccenna 1995a, pls 194c-d). In this phase many of the rooms in the sanctuary were reoccupied: see the fine example of shrine 45, where, in a phase of reuse, we find large pebbles used as grinding stones, piles of shards, bones, possibly of animals, and the remains of architectural elements (*chattrā* and spacers) (Faccenna 1995a, pl. 192a): it looks rather like the cranny of one of those hermits or *siddha* of Vajrayāna. The ruins of the monasteries and sanctuaries of Swat, with all their memories, must have been ideal places of hermitage for the *siddha* of late Buddhism: magically evocative places, *loci sacerrimi*, as subsequently recorded in the toponymy and folklore of the Pashtun. This atmosphere is effectively conjured up in the accounts of the Tibetan pilgrims in Swat (Tucci 1940).

¹⁴ S 2341 does not appear in the listing of the Frieze in Faccenna 2001, it can hardly be associated with the panels of the Frieze given its small dimensions, but it could be by the school of the Master.

the sanctuary. Fragment S 2341 was found reused within shrine 28, which belongs structurally to period Ib (but in the latest phase of the shrine), certainly corresponding to period III. Moreover, the main object of cult in the shrine in this phase is a stele with Buddha (possibly a bodhisattva, holding something in his left hand), which we know to be a production no earlier than the early third century.¹⁵ Fragment S 1163 was reused in the pavement deposit of shrine 63 (period II).

Of great importance here is the fate of the mutilated relief (S 305), which certainly belongs to the central false niche and was found on the east side of stupa 32. The large-scale, heavy-handed reworking that eliminated most of the figures on the left offers potentially highly significant information, besides telling us that the central group, once removed in the phases of restoration, was treated as material for reuse. In fact, we have to think of what lay behind the violent chiselling of the piece, which cannot be explained as technically necessary for reuse. If confirmation were to come for our conjecture that the Stupa of Saidu represented, as it were, the 'Palatine Chapel' of the aristocratic élites of Swat (the Oḍi), then we might see in this an act of *damnatio memoriae* perpetrated at a time of dramatic political upheaval. It might have been the very time that saw the collapse of the urban élites and abandonment of the urban settlements in the north of Gandhara and beyond, attested to by the archaeological excavations at Udegram, Barikot and Shaikhan-dheri (Olivieri 2021). In which case we should be dealing with a well-defined archaeological phase of this region, to be placed chronologically well before the mid-fourth century CE.

¹⁵ Stele S 2338; Faccenna 1995a, pls 167c-d. On the late Gandharan stelae see: Olivieri, Filigenzi 2018, with refs, but above all Moscatelli forthcoming.

11 Concluding Remarks

Summary 11.1 A Few Implications. – 11.2 Post-scriptum.

11.1 A Few Implications

Some of the colleagues who read this work in its various stages before its publication have repeatedly expressed the thought that somehow the work lacked a conclusion. The observation, though fair, has put me in difficulty, as if in fact, at the present stage, I am not yet able to propose a real conclusion, or rather a conclusive definition of the theme. The topic is still open, and new data and new hypotheses will change the tenor of our knowledge very soon. Perhaps as a 'conclusion' I could instead mean the sense that studies in this direction might have for a deeper (or 'different') understanding of the problem.

In this sense, a point that must be stressed, as a direct consequence of this work, is that we need well-conducted and well-documented excavations. We can no longer equate the complexity of data that result from an excavation that is well done and well published (such as Faccenna's), with non-homogeneous data from approximate excavations, from hasty surface reconnaissance, or even worse, from illegal excavations. Moreover, illegal excavations bring with them, as a side-effect, that many data comes from pieces that only a few can see in person (this is the case, for instance, of the Senavarma inscription). A subsequent corollary of the above is that we should really start to be very careful in considering materials from illegal excavations, also because - especially in this century - they are increasingly and deliberately mixed with blatantly false materials, which intoxicate and weaken the discipline and the scientific debate.

I believe it is essential to begin to put archaeological data back at the basis of our art-historical and religious-historical study of the past. Know-

ing the reality of the past is perhaps an illusion, but the more solid and reliable data we have, the more we can propose a model of reality that, even if similar to the Platonic shadow cast on the wall, comes as close as possible to the profile of the object of our study.

While another aspect that should be emphasised is that of regional differences, we should also consider the role of 'universals' especially when it comes to the processes associated to political power and to the role of the elites. Among these processes are those of emulation and race to secure the men who can best ensure the success of emulation. In this context, the role of manual labour as a connector is particularly relevant,¹ also to understand regional differences, as we have seen in Swat, and as others have pointed out, for instance, in the Arsacid world.² The art as technique, as the discipline of knowing how to do, and of doing better than others, is probably one of the most important connectors of world history in pre-modern contexts.³ *A latere*, one should also consider that technical competence has a very important place in the Buddhist vision of human society.

11.2 Post-scriptum

While I was proofreading this work, the problem of writing a concluding chapter was somewhat overcome by the preliminary results of the excavation we were conducting in the ancient city of Barikot in the Swat valley. It is indeed true what I said in the opening, that new results could change or challenge our knowledge, and that any conclusion would be premature.

At the end of October 2021, when our fieldwork on the city's acropolis was coming to an end, we explored a series of clandestine digger's trenches in the central area of the ancient city, in the land recently acquired by the provincial archaeological authorities [fig. 88]. The excavation trench was named 'BKG 16'.

Once the pits were emptied and the intact archaeological levels were reached, the excavation of BKG 16 revealed an extraordinary Buddhist monument preserved, despite the vandalism, for over 3 m in height. It is a building on an apsidal podium on which stands a cylindrical cell, opened to the West, which housed a small stupa. The monument is located inside a rectangular *temenos* (also open to the West). On the sides of the front of the monument are a minor stupa, a cell, and the podium of a monumental pillar or column. The staircase leading to the cell has been reconstructed in three phases, the most recent dating back to the second-third century CE, coeval with a series of vestibule-rooms that led to an entrance that opened onto a public courtyard overlooking an ancient road, one of the axes leading from one of the city gates to the centre of the ancient city. In fact, the discovery

1 As I write these notes, I read about an important exhibition at the Palladian Basilica in Vicenza, significantly entitled *La fabbrica del Rinascimento. Processi creativi, mercato e produzione a Vicenza* (The Factory of the Renaissance. Creative Processes, Market and Production in Vicenza). The exhibition touches on the theme of the role of symbolic capital, and therefore also on the economic value of the technical, manual component of art in the courts.

2 I refer here to Pappalardo, Messina 2019.

3 The technique of 'doing' of the ancients or their faculty of 'well-doing' (considered in its double meaning: the ethical and practical one; cf. Giambattista Vico's *facere, facilitas, facultas* in *De antiquissima Italorum sapientia*, I, VII).



Figure 88 Barikot, aerial view of the centre of the ancient city (N at the bottom) (MAIP; photo by Malak Abrar Torwali, elaborated by M. Minardi)

of this religious monument in the centre of the ancient city of Barikot, is also linked to the discovery, in the same days, of one of the gates and street axis of the ancient city. We can hypothesise, as also at Sirkap in the Taxila valley, the existence of a real temple street along the axis of the road that from the peripheral sector of the city walls went up towards the acropolis.

The oldest stairway of the monument still bore in situ half of a step-riser with a dedicatory inscription in Kharoshthi, which can be dated to the first

century CE on palaeographic grounds (BKG 7394).⁴ The other half of the step-riser was found turned upside down, reused as a floor slab in the later phase of the monument (BKG 7393). The surviving portions of the inscription tells us that the monument (?) was made by an individual, “the son of Saṃgharākṣida” in honour of “all the buddhas” and in honour of the mother and father.⁵ The evaluation of chronology is at the beginning, but it is very likely that the monument, or rather the phase of the monument referred to in the step-riser inscription, belongs to mid-first century CE, and it is coeval with the Stupa of Saidu Sharif. In addition to the coins and the stratigraphic sequence, the ceramic assemblage is also extremely clear with its Saka-Parthian forms, intense red-orange pottery, well fired, ‘clinky’, with thick and polished slips, the so-called ‘Eastern Sigillata Ware’ type (see Maritan in Callieri, Olivieri 2020). The fact that the name “Saṃgharākṣida” was that of the father of an individual who had a dedicatory inscription written in the mid-first century CE implies that the term *saṃgha* had already entered onomastics at least two generations earlier. I must therefore correct what I wrote in the first chapters of this book. The presence of structured Buddhist communities (*saṃghas*) and monasteries should predate the Monastery of Saidu, which therefore would not be the first, but only the earliest monastery that we know.

By the way, the name Saṃgharākṣida is extremely interesting, as it is mentioned as the donor of a beautiful reliquary (obviously from a private collection) whose inscription (CKI 403) mentions the year 60 of Azes (4≈14 CE) (Baums 2012).⁶

In the year 60, on the 15th [month] of Ksandikos, by Saṃgharākṣita, son of Śiraka, a relic is established in honor of all buddhas. (transl. Baums 2012, 207)

With all the due cautions, if this Saṃgharākṣida were the same individual mentioned in the Barikot step-riser, a mid-first century chronology for the BKG 16 monument reconstruction would be further confirmed.⁷

⁴ Personal communication by S. Baums.

⁵ Personal communication by S. Baums. The final reading will be done by Baums in the forthcoming excavation report.

⁶ CKI 403 shows “distinctly archaic features of both writing and language” (Salomon 2000, 57), some of which appear to be shared by the inscriptions BKG 7393-7394 (‘all buddhas’). On CKI 403 see references in Baums 2012, where the date is resolved as 2/3 CE. The onomastic suffix *-rakṣida* (‘protected by’) is extremely common (CKI 43, CKI 50 and 267, CKI 175, CKI 441 and BC 15 [Bajaur Collection], CKI 403 and CKI 359). The latter is the donative inscription of the Avaca dynasty (Apraca) dated 22≈32 CE (Baums 2012, 218-19), which mentions Aśorākṣida, the pupil of a superintendent of a *navakarmika* (see above § 3.4).

⁷ Salomon warns us against easy associations: “[t]he name of the donor of the relics, Saṃgharākṣita, is also the name of the donor in the ladle inscription (Konow 1929, 89) as well as of one of the donors in the Shāh-jī-ki Dheri inscription (Fussman 1987, 79). But given the generic character of this Buddhist name, there is no particular reason to assume that these three Saṃgharākṣitas were the same individuals. Although the donor’s father name is Śiraka, which reminds us of Śira, the (female) donor of the Taxila gold plate inscription (Konow 1929, 86), but here too the resemblance is probably only coincidental” (Salomon 2000, 57, with references). The presence of ‘archaic’ features in both CKI 403 and BKG 7393-7394 may not be just ‘coincidental’. If the two names referred to the same individual, it would be possible that the Saṃgharākṣita reliquary was illegally excavated in Barikot. By the way, I suspect that many objects that have recently emerged on the antiquities market were actually looted in Barikot, and that the name of the site was always cautiously omitted, knowing full well that the Italian Archaeological Mission had been active at the site for years. Not considering sculptures and



Figure 89a-b

BKG 7224 and BKG 7284 (MAIP; photo by Aurangzeib Khan)

Very important, again in relation to Saidu is the detail, certainly not minor, that amongst the decorative material of this phase of the monument in BKG 16, we found elements in greenish schist, very close to the materials of the Stupa of Saidu, in terms of material processing and forms: false railing pillars, cornice elements, double volute brackets; even their dimensions are not distant from those of Saidu, obviously smaller, but with similar proportions [figs 89a-b].⁸ This is another element in favour of the exemplary role that the Stupa of Saidu and its Master, with their technical and formal innovations, played in Swat.

The most interesting information comes from the most evident of the pre-Saka phases of the monument, which may date (?) to the Indo-Greek period (c. 150-50 BCE), as confirmed by coins and pottery assemblage. In this phase, there was an earlier monument, also surrounded by a rectangular *temenos*, with an apsidal plan looking like an enclosure with a stupa. On the outside of the apsidal enclosure there were, more or less in the same position of those of the following phase, an 'Indian' type stupa and two bases of pillar or column. The structural sequence is very well readable in the

coin hoards but only inscribed objects, in addition to CKI 403, see for example the stone vessel CKI 404 (Salomon 2000) which mentions a toponym, Vajrakuḍa (Vajrakūṭa), which in my opinion can be tentatively associated to Bazira/Vajra-Beira/Vaira i.e. Barikot (see Baums 2019, 169-70). The latter is mentioned as Vajrasthāna in a Śāradā inscriptions of the Shāhi times found on the acropolis of Barikot and now in the Lahore Museum (LM 119) (see the contribution of O. von Hinüber in Callieri, Olivieri 2020); in a fifteen-century Tibetan text (*deb-ther sngon-po* or *The Blue Annals*) Buddha himself gives a prophecy on king Indrabuthi, whose seat was located "In the northern quarter, in Śrī-Vajrasthāna, Oḍḍiyāna" (Roerich 1949, 361; curiously, the toponym is absent in Wylie 1957).

⁸ Very interesting is also the discovery, not far from BKG 16, of a small inhumation cemetery (BKG 17), which seems coeval to the Saka-Parthian phases and then to the burial of Butkara IV, which was discussed in the previous pages.



Figure 90 Barikot, aerial view of the trench BKG 16 (N at the bottom) (MAIP; photo by Malak Abrar Torwali, elaborated by M. Minardi)

aerial photograph reproduced here [fig. 90]. It should be noted that, during the excavations we found clear evidence that the ‘Indo-Greek’ monument was actually built upon an earlier structure. I am confident that our next excavation season (2022) will reveal more details of this earliest structural phase. For the moment I prefer to wait for the radiocarbon data, which will soon be available. What is certain, for the time being, is that here we have a sacred Buddhist monument configured as a sacred empty space, that was demolished and rebuilt around the middle of the first century CE. The earliest monument at BKG 16 was a chambered monument (or ‘womb-stupa’? Both terms seem to refer to the same feature), without an axial or central entrance, whose foundation may predate the mid-second century BCE. The monument was rebuilt around the mid-first century CE. In the reconstruction, the external apsidal form was maintained, but the inner chamber was filled with earth and layered stones. This way the former chamber was transformed into a raised apsidal podium on which a circular chamber, accessible by a central staircase, was built. In a second phase, a low bench-like structure was added around the apse of the podium. The inner chamber enclosed the upper part of a small stupa.

The monument belongs to a type that, to the best of my memory, was never been archaeologically documented before in Gandhara [pl. XXI]. It might be an example of the otherwise elusive ‘chambered’ or ‘womb’ stupa-monu-

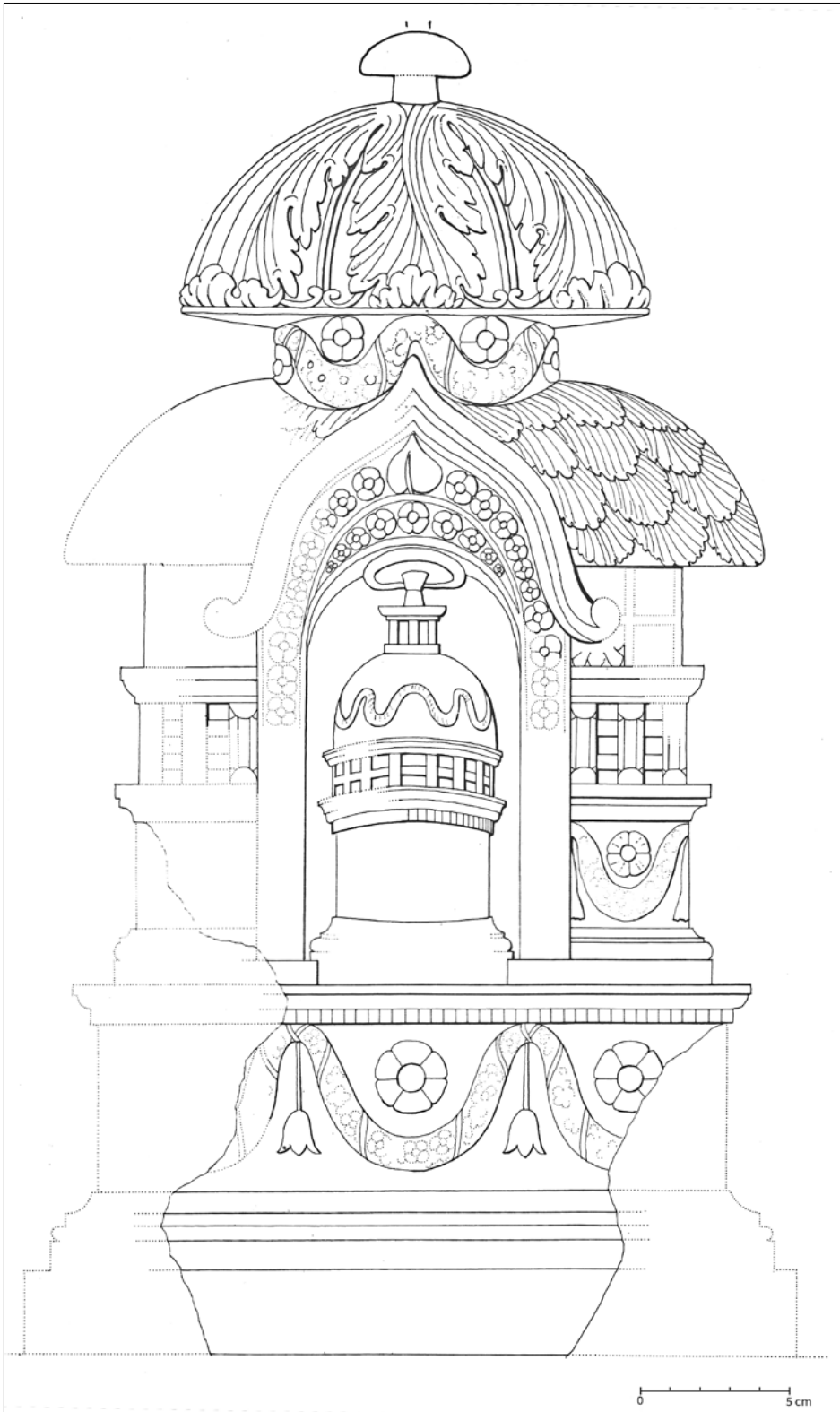


Plate XXI Butkara I, panel B 920, detail of the monument
(MAIP; drawing by Francesco Martore; reproduced in Faccenna 1995a, fig. 253)

ment, like the Ekakūṭa stupa⁹ of the Śeṅavarma inscription.¹⁰

Fussman's *traduction littérale* of the Śeṅavarma inscription reflects a situation and a structural history that somehow recall the structural history of the BKG 16 monument:

[1 a] Il salue de la tête les pieds de ceux en qui est né le chemin, de ceux qui pratiquent la pénitence, de ceux qui pratiquent la vie religieuse de continence, de la double communauté rassemblée, très chère, agréable, protectrice du *stūpa*. [1 b] Le seigneur Senavarma, roi(telet) d'Oḍi, chef suprême, fait savoir. [1 c] Le *stūpa* Eka-kuḍa que voici a été fondé par un membre de la famille royale; comme j'en suis l'héritier, je fais ce don pieux... afin de prolonger le nom de mon frère Varmasena. [1 d] Quand cet Eka-kuḍa fut fondé, alors, pour obtenir la qualité d'*Arhat*, [2 a] pour moi, pour mes père et grand-pères, il fait le *stūpa* grand, pas inaccessible (?). [2 b] Le revêtement de terre est fait par Senavarma et cet Eka-kuḍa est achevé avec une grande hauteur et circonférence ; [2 c] l'ayant correctement établi, je poursuis mes efforts. [2 d] Voici que sur l'Eka-kuḍa, il y a chute de foudre. Le *stūpa*, incendié par elle, subit des dommages. Toute la partie éboulée (fut refaite) à l'identique (?) ; fut étendue une couche à la base (?) ; fut élevé ce qui avait été jeté à bas (?). [2 e] Alors, ce qui va être établi [3 a] doit être écrit. Le fils d'Utarasena, Vasusena, de la famille Iṣmahō des roi(telets) d'Oḍi, fonde cet Eka-kuḍa. [3 b] A ce moment, dans la chambre située à la base [du *stūpa*], venant de la famille royale, il y eût des reliques corporelles du Bienheureux. (Fussman 1982, 7)

Saidu Sharif,
13 December 2021¹¹

9 On the term Ekakūṭa see Hinüber 2003; Salomon 1986; Fussman 1982; Bailey 1980. For the typology see the mid-1st century relief B 920 with its crowd of adoring aristocrats, princes and pages, ladies and knights (Faccenna 2001, pl. 80a) [pl. XXI].

10 Line 2a of the inscription associates the Ekakūṭa stupa to the term *aduvegahā*, which has been translated as “womb-stupa” (Falk 2003; Baums 2012). The latter is a possible translation based on *gahā/garbha* (womb or deposit), and not on *grha* (house, chapel) (see Salomon 1986: “single (not two) chambered”, and Hinüber 2003 “ohne Reliquienkammer”).

11 When this volume was completed, I had the opportunity to read two works that would have helped me greatly in my study. I quote them below for the sake of completeness: Walters, J.S. (1997). “Stupa, Story and Empire: Constructions of the Buddha Biography in Early Post-Aśokan India”. Schober, J. (ed.), *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 160-92; Zin, M. (2018). *The Kanaganahalli Stūpa. An Analysis of the 60 Massive Slabs Covering the Dome*. New Delhi: Aryan Books International.

Stoneyards and Artists in Gandhara

The Buddhist Stupa of Saidu Sharif I, Swat (c. 50 CE)

Luca M. Olivieri

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32 Butkara I, Monument 17, detail (after Faccenna 2001, fig. 52a; drawings by Francesco Martore)

- 33** Saidu Sharif I, the first stairway (after Faccenna 1995a, fig. 209; drawings by Francesco Martore)
- 34** Columns: (from left) Saidu Sharif I, column C; no. 24; no. 29; Panr I no. 8 (after Faccenna 1995a, fig. 229; drawings by Francesco Martore)
- 35** Column C, the core (ACT; photo by Francesco Martore)
- 36** BKG 2269 (ACT; photo by Aurangzeib Khan)
- 37** A Jain monument (plaque from Mathura) (after Benisti 1960, pl. XIII)
- 38** Saidu Sharif I, the graveyard (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)
- 39** Saidu Sharif I, the terraces for the construction of the sanctuary (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)
- 40** Saidu Sharif I, the graves (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)
- 41** Butkara IV, the funerary structure (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)
- 42** SS I 26 (ACT; photo by Edoardo Loliva)
- 43** Saidu Sharif I, the reliquary recess (after Faccenna 1995a, fig. 188; drawings by Francesco Martore)
- 44** Saidu Sharif I, the reliquary recess (after Faccenna 1995a, pl. 44)
- 45** SS I 217 (ACT; photo by Antonio Amato)
- 46** SS I 225-226 (MAIP; photo by Elisa Iori)
- 47** SS I 29 (ACT; photo by Edoardo Loliva)
- 48** SS I 29 (ACT; photo by Edoardo Loliva)
- 49** SS I 32 (ACT; photo by Edoardo Loliva)
- 50** Hadda CC 71, ph. 458 (courtesy Pierre Cambon, Musée Guimet, Paris)
- 51** S 1026 (after Faccenna 2001, tav. 32b)
- 52** SS I 3, detail (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri)
- 53** B 2816, detail (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri)
- 54** Kanaganahalli, photo CL00 36.23 (courtesy/photo by Christian Luczanits)
- 55** Kanaganahalli, photo CL00 37.06 (courtesy/photo by Christian Luczanits)
- 56** Scheme S 1112 over SS I 3 (elaborated by Antonio Amato after Spagnesi 2001)
- 57** S 709 (after Faccenna 2001, tab. 37)
- 58** S 622, detail (after Faccenna 2001, tab. 33a)
- 59** S 623, detail (after Faccenna 2001, tab. 34c)
- 60** SS I 29, detail (ACT; photo by Edoardo Loliva)
- 61** SS I 170 (ACT; photo by Antonio Amato)
- 62** Buddhist stela, Ladakh (after Dorjay 2010, fig. 14; courtesy by Phuntsog Dorjay)
- 63** Émblema, plaster, Termez (after Leriche 2015, fig. 24)
- 64a-b** Panel (Victoria and Albert Museum, online collection [V&A Owned Content, © Victoria and Albert Museum, London], VAM IM 93.1939 = Ackermann 1975, pl. XXVIb) – Saka coin (Azes) (BM online collection, BM IOC.197; reproduced with the courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)
- 65a-b** Bimaran casket, detail (BM OA 1900.2-9; GNU Free Documentation License; reproduced with the courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum).
Butkara I, B 3215 (after Faccenna 1962-64, pl. CCLXXXIX); details
- 66** S 800 (after Faccenna 2001, tab. 120a)
- 67** S 1124 (after Faccenna 2001, tab. 49)
- 68** Miran V (after Stein 1912, pl. 136)
- 69** Kizil Cave 205 (drawings by Guo Feng – 微信图片)
- 70a-c** S 48 (after Faccenna 2001, tab. 13); panel IS.143.1961 (Victoria and Albert Museum, online collection [V&A Owned Content, © Victoria and Albert Museum, London]); Miran V (Stein 1912, pl. 141)
- 71** The false railing, assemblage system (after Faccenna 1995a, fig. 79; drawings by Francesco Martore)
- 72a-b** SS I reg. 59 (ACT; photo by Edoardo Loliva)
- 73** SS I reg. 56 (ACT; photo by Edoardo Loliva)
- 74a-b** SS I 27 (ACT; photo by Edoardo Loliva)
- 75a-b** SS I 62 (ACT; photo by Aurangzeib Khan)
- 76a-b** SS I 182 (ACT; photo by Aurangzeib Khan)

- 77** Building operative techniques (drawings by Francesco Martore)
78 SSI 12, minor stupa (ACT; photo by Edoardo Loliva)
79a-b Collapse of Column C, stratigraphic evidence (= Faccenna 1995a, pl. 48)
80a-b The demolition of the Frieze, stratigraphic evidence (= Faccenna 1995a, pl. 288)
- 81** Whetstones from Saidu (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri)
82 The assemblage of the false railing (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri)
83 The assemblage of the brackets (MAIP; photo by Michele Minardi)
84 SS I 227 (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri)
85 SS I 231 (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri)
86a-b SS I 340 (MAIP; photo by Aurangzeib Khan)
87 SS I 229 (MAIP; photo by Aurangzeib Khan)
88 Barikot, aerial view of the centre of the ancient city (N at the bottom) (MAIP; photo by Malak Abrar Torwali, elaborated by M. Minardi)
89a-b BKG 7224 and BKG 7284 (MAIP; photo by Aurangzeib Khan)
90 Barikot, aerial view of the trench BKG 16 (N at the bottom) (MAIP; photo by Malak Abrar Torwali, elaborated by M. Minardi)

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The book advances a hypothetical reconstruction of the planning and programming of the building site, the executive process, the construction and decoration, and ultimately the deconsecration and abandonment of an ancient Buddhist stupa in Gandhara. The chronological context is the mid-first to the early fourth century CE. The stupa is located near the town of Saidu Sharif in the fertile and rich Swat valley, a northern region of ancient Gandhara (today in Pakistan). The study is based on archaeological excavation data conducted at the site over several seasons. The narrative frieze of the stupa of Saidu Sharif represents one of the highest moments of Gandharan Buddhist art. The frieze is the product of a sculptural school guided with a sure hand by an anonymous Master, to whom the responsibility for the entire project should be attributed – architect, master builder and workshop master all in one.

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