

Stoneyards and Artists in Gandhara

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

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Preface

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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*.