

# Introduction

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**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.<sup>1</sup>

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**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.<sup>2</sup>

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-

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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.<sup>3</sup>

### 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,<sup>4</sup> 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).<sup>5</sup> If work is now continuing to fill in that lacuna (see Vidale et al. 2015), we still owe it to the stimulus and leg-

**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)

acy of Domenico Faccenna. Domenico would have expected as much of us or our foreign colleagues.<sup>6</sup> 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).<sup>7</sup>

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

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<sup>6</sup> 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).

<sup>7</sup> 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)

the “archaeology of religion” (Raja, Rüpke 2015). Of particular importance 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.<sup>8</sup> 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

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<sup>8</sup> 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 (ISMEQ; author unknown)

to areas I found naturally congenial, in part due to my previous experience, 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.<sup>9</sup> 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 ana-

<sup>9</sup> 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.

lyse both the phases of abandonment and the early phases of removal and 'cut' of preceding stratigraphies, defined in stratigraphic archaeology as 'negative interfaces'.<sup>10</sup> These issues, together with various other related questions, were summed up in a short excavation handbook written for Pakistani (2014; 2017a)<sup>11</sup> and Afghan students (2021a),<sup>12</sup> 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].

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**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.