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## 3 The Work

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**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.<sup>1</sup>

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'<sup>2</sup> 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

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**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.<sup>3</sup>

### 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.<sup>4</sup> 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)<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> "[L]a più gran vergogna della patria nostra": so Maurizio Taddei (2002, 271) put it, and so I concur.

<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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 Faccenna<sup>8</sup> and in the writings of Maurizio Taddei, beginning with two articles published in the early

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

<sup>7</sup> 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).

<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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).<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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,<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup>

### 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),<sup>14</sup> and short panels without semi-columns (which we conjecture on the evidence of the previous elements).<sup>15</sup> 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

<sup>12</sup> 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).

<sup>13</sup> 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.

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

<sup>15</sup> 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 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.

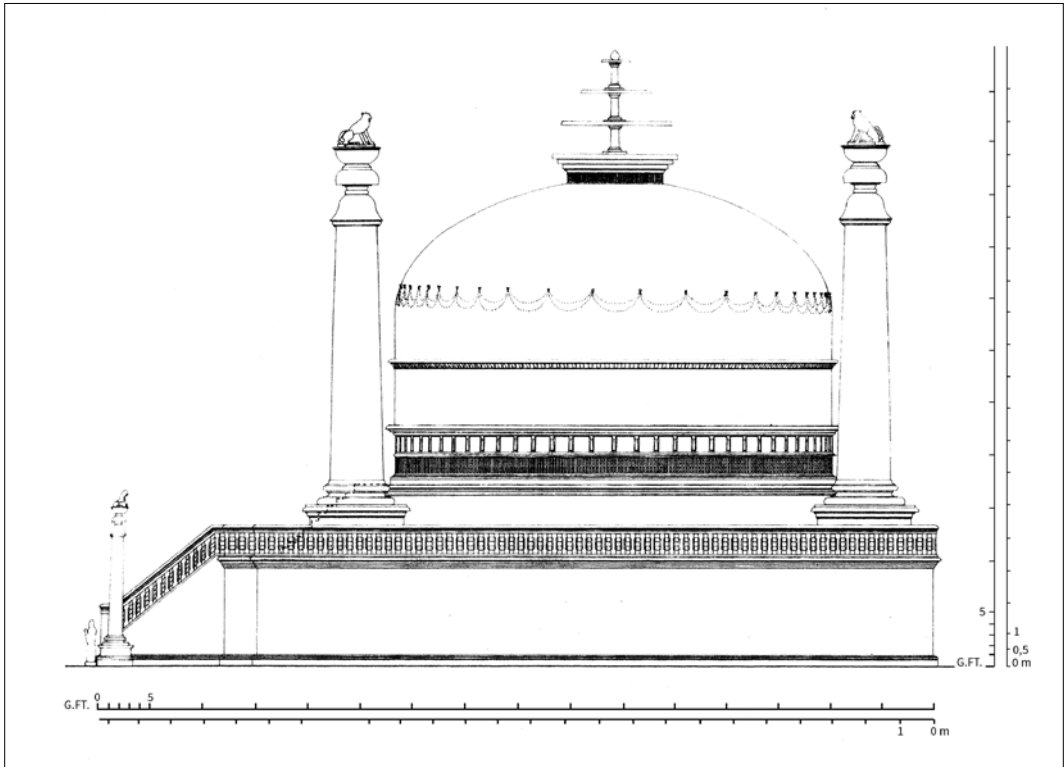
I would like conclude with two further considerations. The first is that the use of mason marks or location marks is not popular in India. The second is that while Kharoshti, a North-West script, is used in India to mark structural components, Brahmi, which is much more widespread in India is hardly 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)<sup>16</sup> 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).<sup>17</sup> 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-

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

<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> 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 et al. 2015, 42).<sup>19</sup>

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

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

<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup>

### 3.4 The Master

To what extent was the Master involved in the Buddhist community that consecrated and managed the monument?<sup>21</sup> 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, *iṣṭakākāra* 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).<sup>22</sup>

**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.<sup>23</sup>

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-

<sup>23</sup> 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).<sup>24</sup>

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 Śri Śātakarṇi.<sup>25</sup> 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 viḥāra (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

<sup>24</sup> 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).

<sup>25</sup> Possibly a synonym of *śilpiśālā* (Scherrer-Schaub 2016, fn. 8 with refs; see also Milligan 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)<sup>26</sup>

### 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.

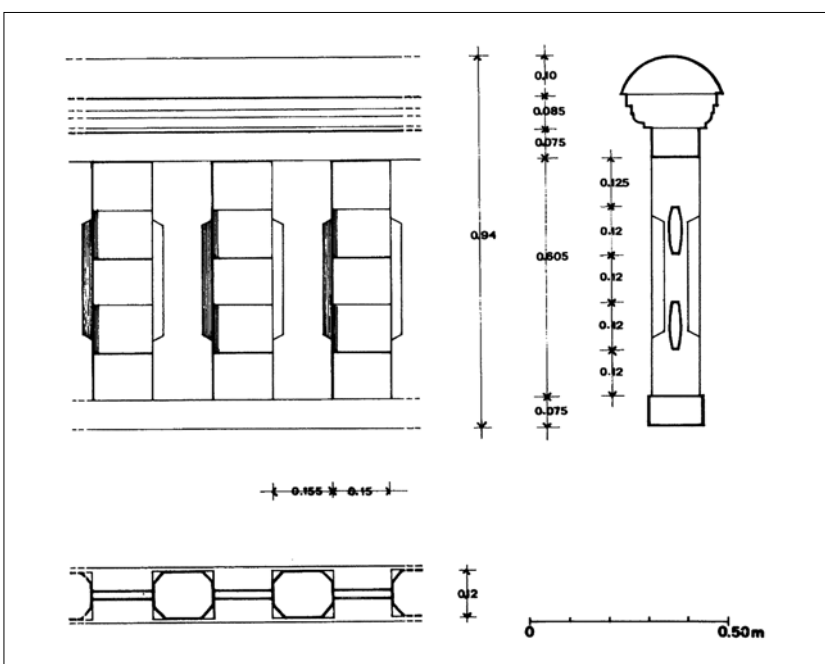
We may assume that his workers were local. We know that workmen and craftsmen of the North West, or at any rate of Gandhara, already enjoyed a good reputation: it can be inferred from the fact that sculptors and workmen from these regions worked at Bharhut, which was built several decades before that 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 nails<sup>27</sup> 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

<sup>26</sup> 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.

<sup>27</sup> *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.<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> 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).

<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup>

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 Seṇavarma, also new restoration works.<sup>31</sup> 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.