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## 6 The Stupa on Podium

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**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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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 podium<sup>3</sup> – 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.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> Monument 14 in Butkara is undoubtedly a stupa, although the eccentric (and offset) position of the small relic chamber remains to be explained.<sup>6</sup> 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. h.: 0.22 m).

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

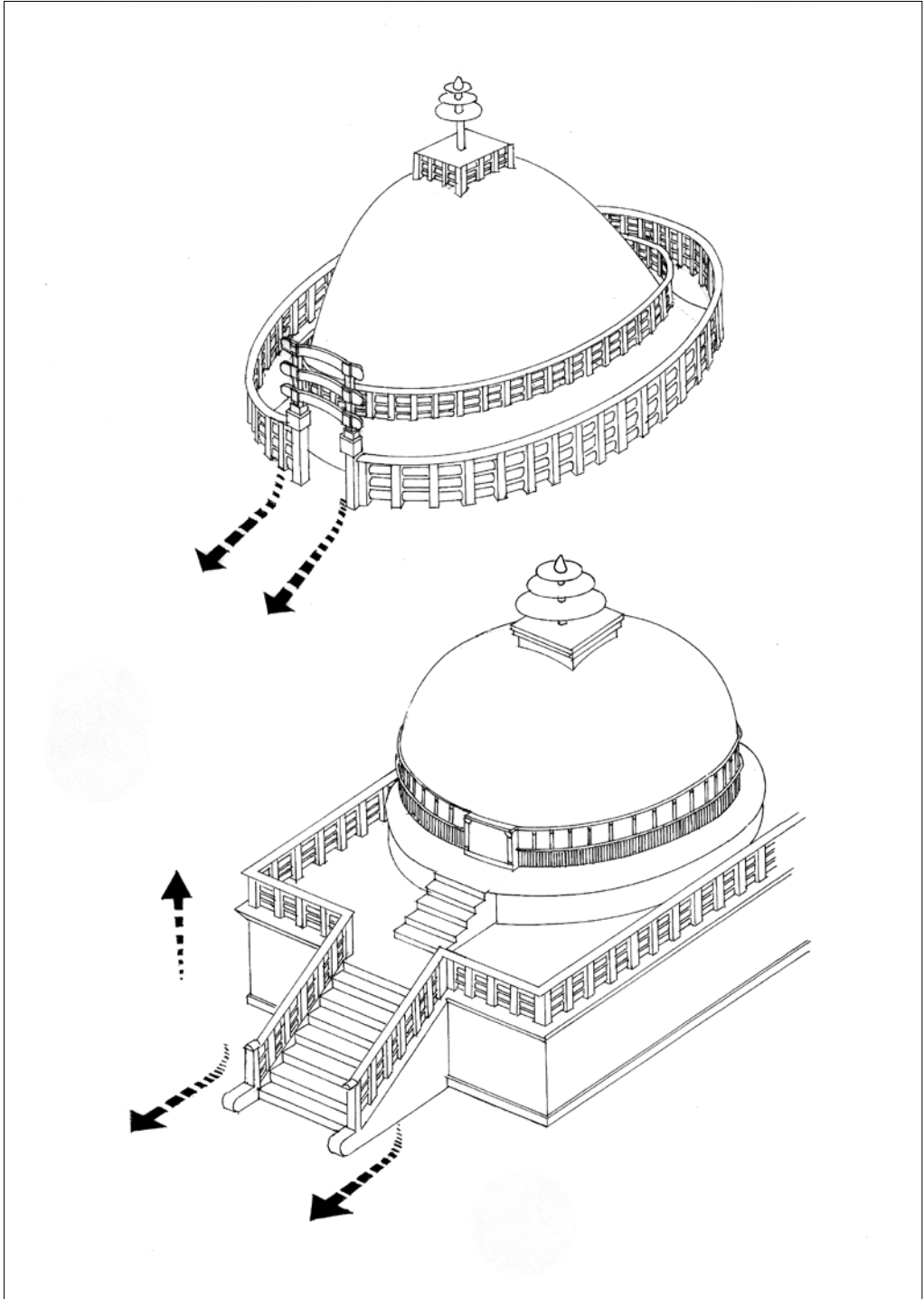


Figure 29 'Indian' stupa and 'Gandharan' stupa: a scheme (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)

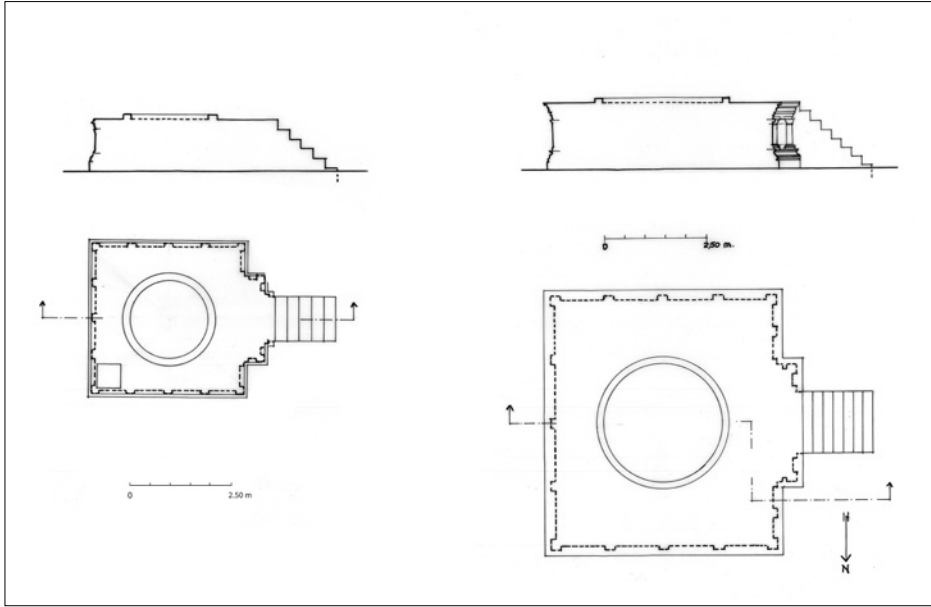


Figure 30 Sirkap, Blocks F and G (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)

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

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*.<sup>8</sup>

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.<sup>9</sup> 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

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

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> 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.

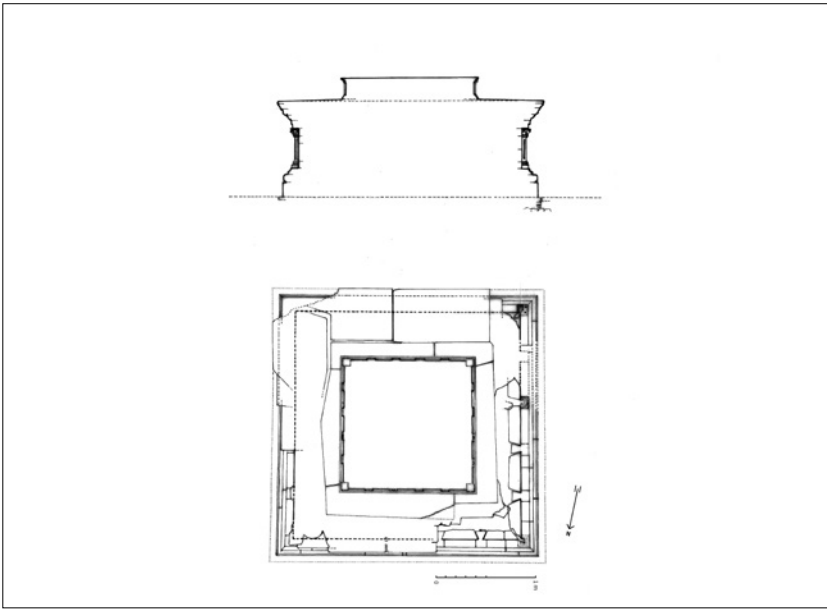


Figure 31 Butkara I, Monument 17 (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)

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.<sup>10</sup>

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

<sup>10</sup> 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,<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup>

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.<sup>13</sup>

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).<sup>14</sup> 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) [N.B.: 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.<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> 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).<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup>

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

<sup>15</sup> 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.

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

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

<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> 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).<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup>

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].<sup>22</sup> The cornice rests on small columns and pillars (here, too, real columns and pillars set into the masonry),<sup>23</sup> surmounted by almost pure Corinthian capitals. Over the podium, recessed by a good 60 cm,<sup>24</sup> 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 Seṅvarma 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 Utaraseṅa (N.B.: 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 (max. h.: 0.22 m).



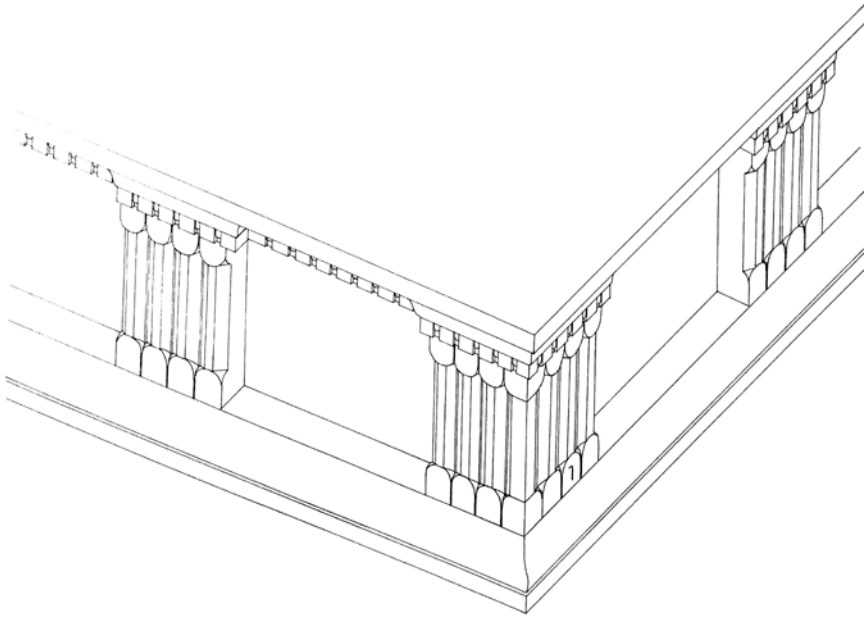


Figure 32 Butkara I, Monument 17, detail (after Faccenna 2001, fig. 52a; drawings by Francesco Martore)

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).<sup>25</sup>

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-

<sup>25</sup> 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.

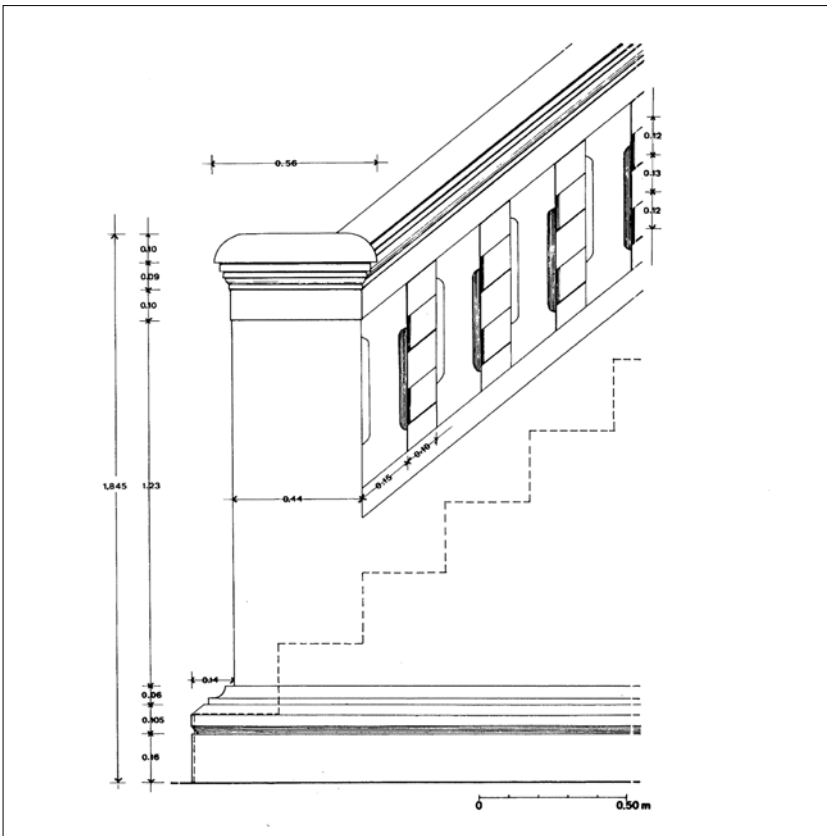


Figure 33 Saidu Sharif I, the first stairway (after Faccenna 1995a, fig. 209; drawings by Francesco Martore)

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.<sup>26</sup> 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

<sup>26</sup> 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).<sup>27</sup> 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).<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup> 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.

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

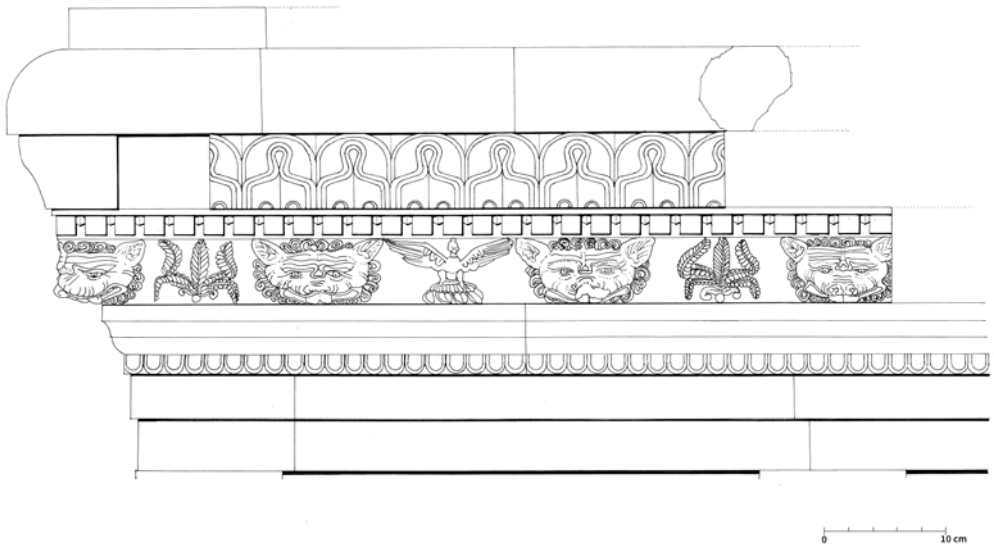
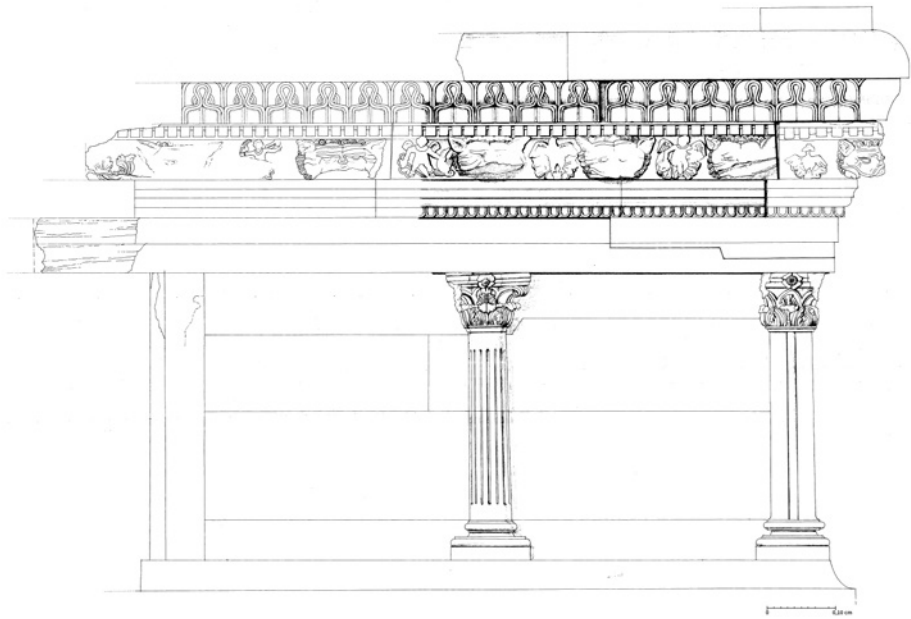


Plate XVIIIa-b Butkara I, stupa 14, sides N (detail) and W (detail of the cornice) (MAIP; drawing by Francesco Martore)



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’.<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup>

As Chris Dorn'eich wrote:

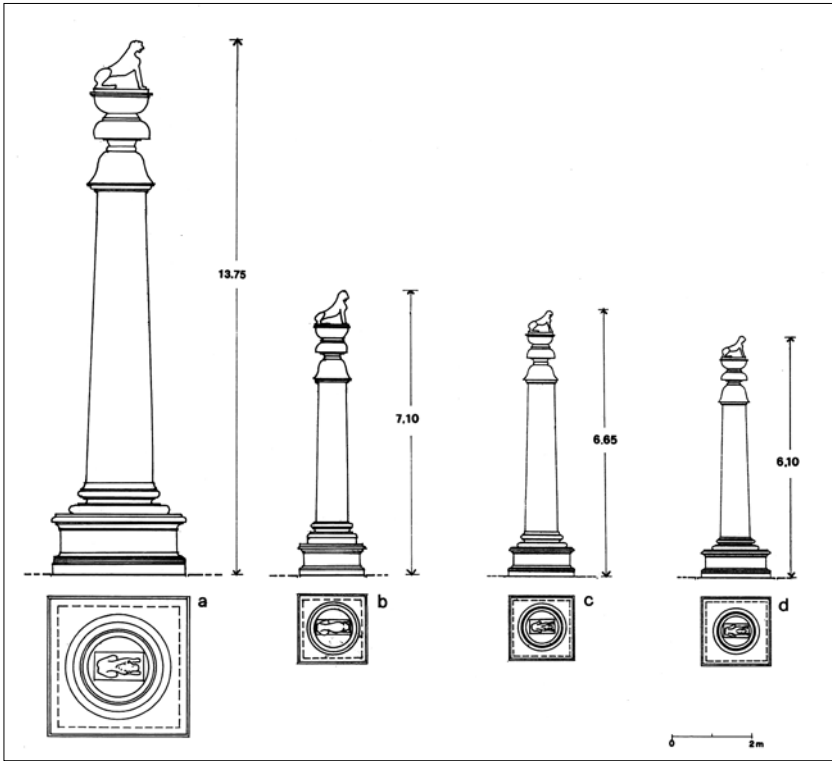
The structural system of the columns was simple. The accumulating gravity loads were brought vertically – i.e., within the solid column shaft and in the most direct way – down to the bedrock, the best of all possible foundations. As freestanding columns, the Minars did not have to carry any dead loads. 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.<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup>

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.<sup>37</sup> 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].<sup>38</sup>

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).<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> 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 I I (Saidu Sharif I). Some of the SS I panels mentioned in the text are reproduced in this volume.