

## 7 Building the Stupa

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### 7.1 The Choice of the Area

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

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

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

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

The ancient cutting operations on the slope of Saidu brought to light the graves of an ancient necropolis abandoned at least three centuries before, and possibly no longer visible in the year 50 or so [figs 38-39]. As pointed out above, the practice of burial in the earth is not to be seen as objectionable; indeed, bones were placed with care and reverence in the foundation ditches of some of the monastery walls (Olivieri 2016). The deliberate juxtaposition of ancient necropolises and Buddhist stupas is generally recognised, and Gregory Schopen has dealt with it in particular (2004). The special interest of the Saidu Sharif I necropolis lies in the fact that it does not belong to the typology, nor indeed to the chronological phase of the Iron Age necropolises of Swat or the Swat Protohistoric Graves (SPG),<sup>1</sup> but to an already historical phase (c. 400-200 BCE), in which, for example, the city of Bazira (today Barikot) had already been founded, occupied and re-fortified by the Macedonians, and so forth (see the absolute chronology in Olivieri et al. 2019) and the Butkara I stupa might well have already been founded, too. On the basis of the available radiocarbon data<sup>2</sup> shortly after the necropolis of Saidu came the mausoleum of Butkara IV (c. 200 BC-100 CE), with three chambers conserving the remains of twenty individuals, members of the same family. An archaeological and genetic study of this funerary monument has recently been published (Olivieri 2019b).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

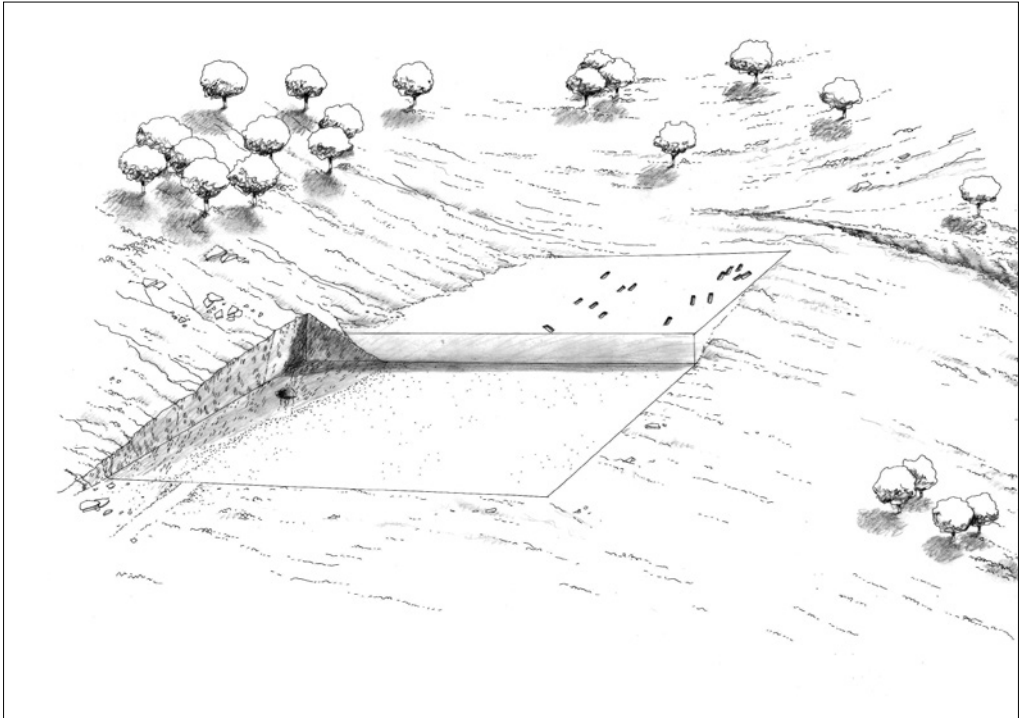
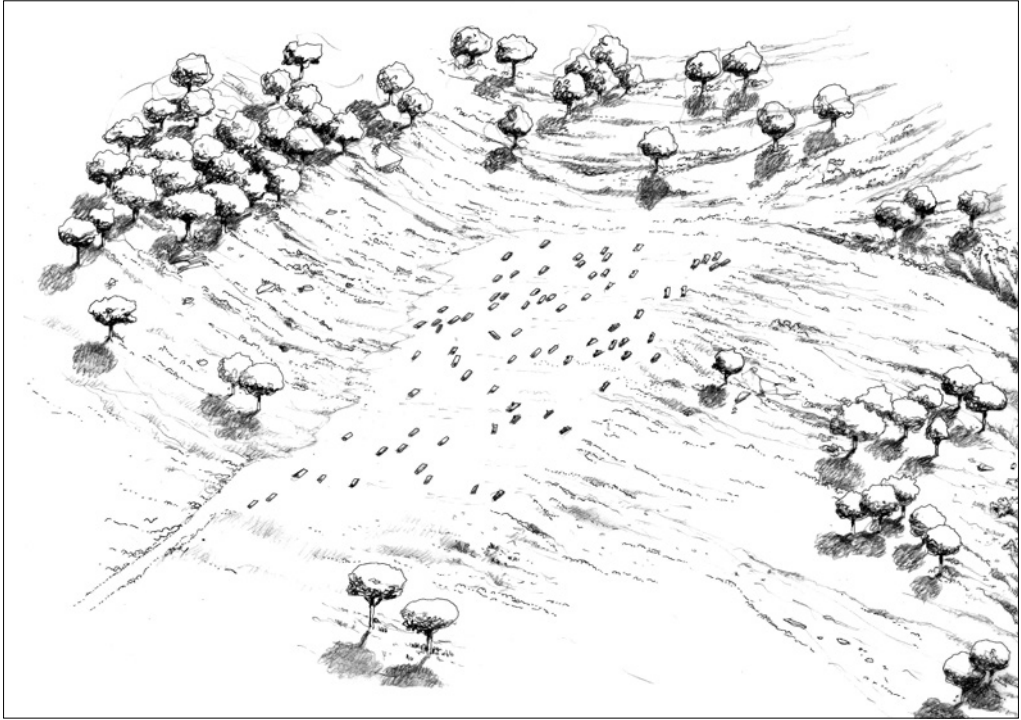


Figure 38 Saidu Sharif I, the graveyard (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)

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

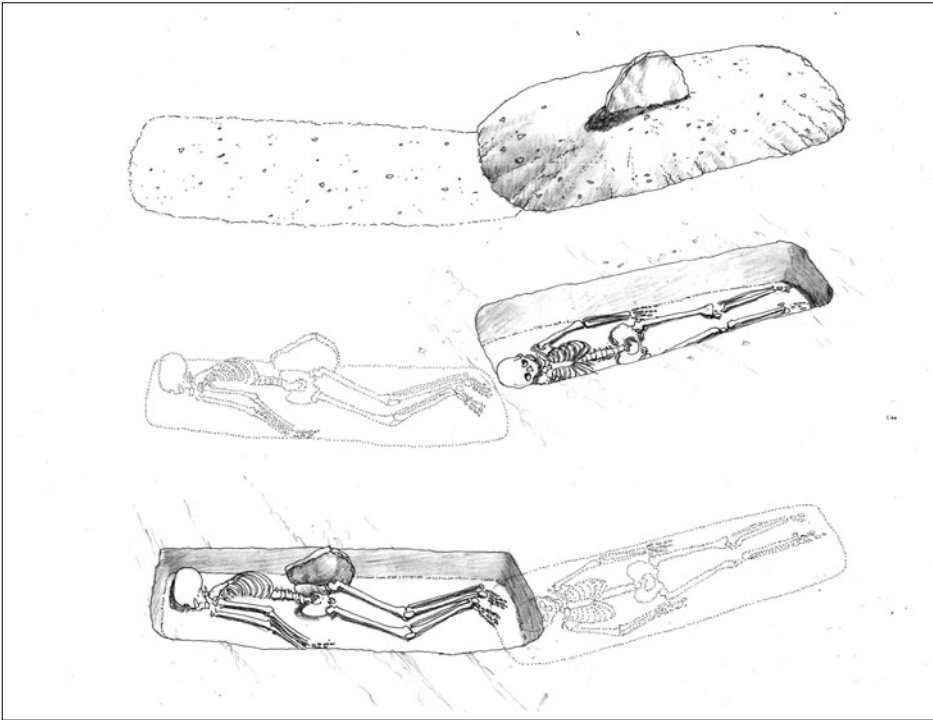


Figure 40 Saidu Sharif I, the graves (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)

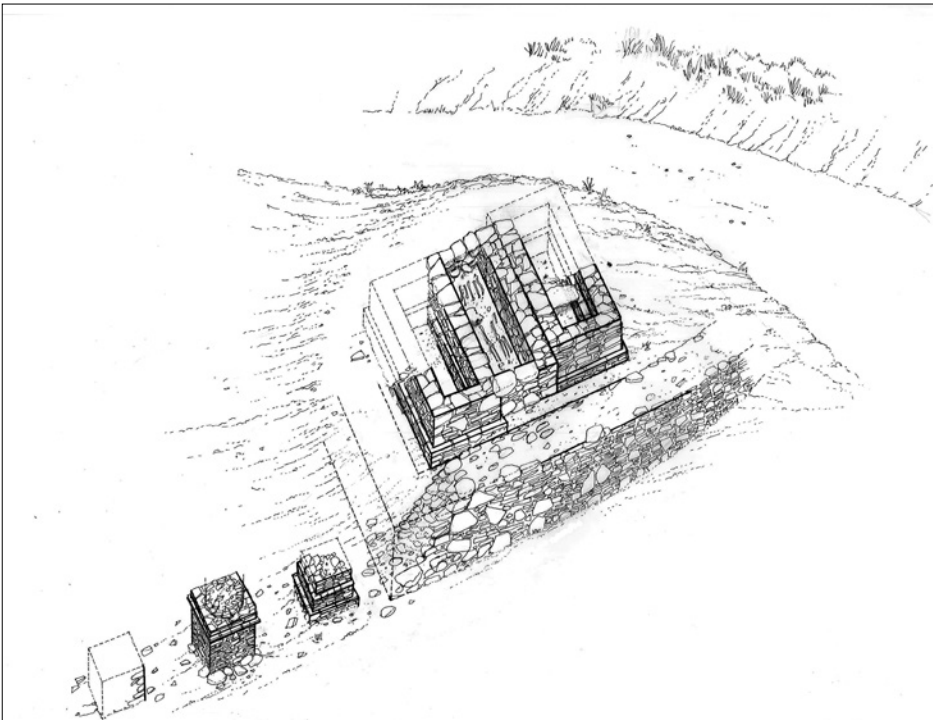


Figure 41 Butkara IV, the funerary structure (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore)

The pelitic schist of the rock walls was subsequently utilised as filling for the solid body of the Stupa and the superstructures of the Monastery. In the lower terrace over 1000 m<sup>3</sup> of stone were quarried, which was sufficient to fill the stupa superstructure. In the course of cutting into the hill side to create the two terraces, the workers found some graves. In some cases the workers created secondary burials for the bones exposed. The care taken by the workers (and supervisors) probably derived from the local funerary tradition that they shared rather than a sign of *pietas* by the presence of members of the religious community overseeing the work (Faccenna in Noci, Macchiarelli, Faccenna 1997, 107-8).

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

## 7.2 Orientation and Light

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>5</sup> See Tucci 1977; Olivieri 1996, and the more recent Coloru, Olivieri 2020.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 7.3 The Festivity

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### 7.4 The Stoneyard

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 7.5 The Raising of the Podium

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

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

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

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



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

## 7.6 The Atelier *in situ*

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

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

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

<sup>29</sup> I see the tanks as clearly belonging to the initial phase of the works.

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

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

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

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

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



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

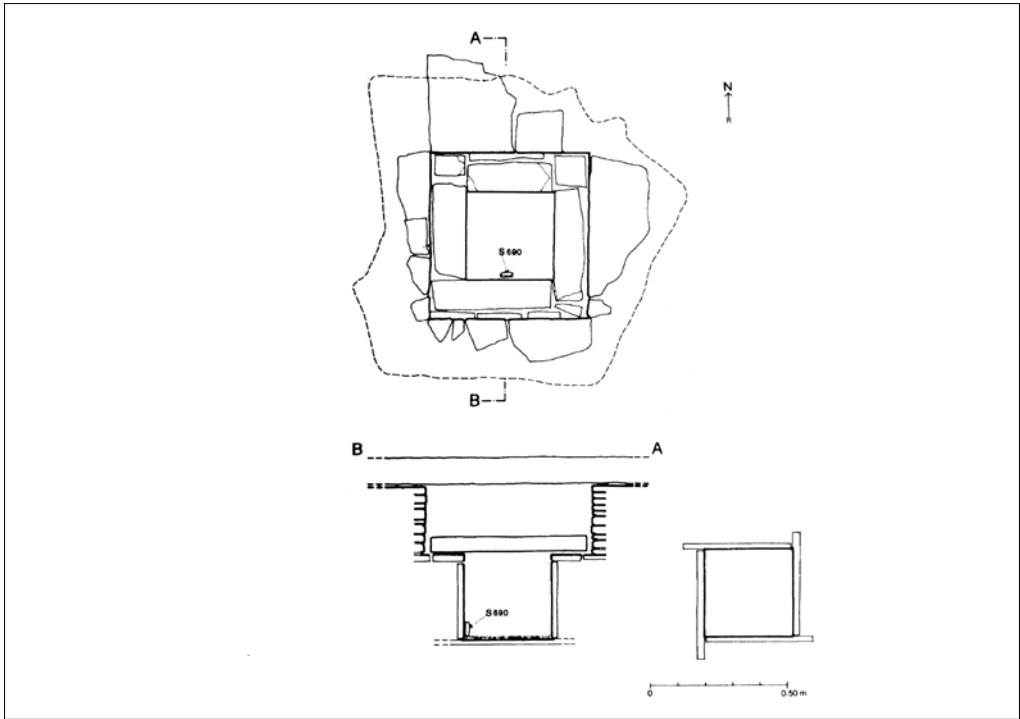
### 7.7 The Lateral Monuments and Stairways. The Façade

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

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

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

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



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

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

about 17 cm, with a of 17/29 riser/tread ratio (in cm). In Gandhara the riser/tread ratio invariably comes somewhere between 20/30 (Gumbat), 24/28 (Amluk-dara) and 25/30 (Saidu Sharif I) (c. ¾/1 Gft) (data from Olivieri et al. 2014).<sup>31</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

**33** Personal communication by Stefan Baums.



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

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

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

Leonine columns 75 and 69 and the base 80 are quite clearly associated with the symmetrical design of the very earliest Stupa (Saidu), to which were added immediately after – albeit interrupting the symmetry of the façade – leonine columns 24 and 29, with the addition in a slightly later phase, I believe, of stupas 21, 31, 32 and possibly 57.<sup>34</sup>

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

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

**Table 1** Column lions. List of fragments

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

<sup>34</sup> See my note 18 in Haynes et al. 2020, 257.

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

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



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

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



5	SS I 227	Column Inside 54	Column lion (Main Stupa)	Only the left half of the lion's snout is preserved.	max. h. 23.0 max. w. 21.0 max. t. 10.0	Limestone
6	SSI 58	Column	Column lion (Main Stupa)	Only left frontal pawn is preserved. Chipped.	max. h. 25.5 max. w. 18 max. t. 16.6	Limestone
7	S 1758	Inside 55	Column lion (Main Stupa)	Fragment. Paw.	max. h. 37.2	Limestone
8	SSI 32	SIAS 63 (d)	Column lion	Fragment, back and front legs missing; traces of plaster (+SSI 36 and SSI 37).	max h. 29.4. w. 16.5	Limestone
9	SSI 36	SIAS 63 (d)	Column lion: base	Only part of the base. Fragment of SSI 32 (SSI 37).	max. h. 10.4 max. l. 7.0 max. w. 7.5	Limestone
10	SSI 37	SIAS 63 (d)	Column lion: leg	Only part of the right leg and base. Traces of plaster. Fragment of SSI 32 (SSI 36).	max. h. 9.4 max. l. 8.9 max. w. 7.6	Limestone
11	SSI 33	SI S 25	Column lion	Fragment, only left leg and part of the base preserved.	max. h. 15.3 max. w. 16.0	Limestone
12	SSI 34	SI H 10	Column lion	Fragment, back and front legs missing.	max. h. 55.0 w. 27.5	Limestone
13	SSI 35	SI G 14	Column lion	Fragment, head, back and front legs missing.	max. h. 35.0 w. 5.0	Limestone
14	S 842	SIAS (26b) between 23 and 39	Column lion	Fragment, back, head and legs missing.	max. h. 24	Limestone
15	S 1759	Inside 55	Column lion	Fragment. Head missing.	max. h. 64	Limestone

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

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

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

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

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

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

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