

## 8 The Stupa. The Execution

---

**Summary** 8.1 The Preparatory Drawings. 8. 2 – The Sculptors, the Assistants, the Tools. – 8.3 The Eyes. – 8.4 The False Railing and the Trompe-l’œil. – 8.5 Models. – 8.6 Scenes. – 8.7 The Fortune, the Copies. Swat, Miran.

Coming, now, to the details of the upper part of the drum, we must also take a closer look at the work of the stonecutters, in the meantime underway under the guidance of the Master, who has sketched out the design of the panels and dividing elements. The style shown by the school of sculpture is the same as that of the earlier sculptures of Butkara I and was aptly and concisely defined by Domenico Faccenna as “drawing style” (*stile disegnavivo*) (Faccenna in Faccenna, Callieri, Filigenzi 2003, 287-306). Here we are already in an advanced, mature phase of this style, and certainly one of the finest examples of it.

### 8.1 The Preparatory Drawings

References to the preparatory sculpture techniques are to be found in various contributions: Faccenna 1997; Faccenna, Taddei 1997; Olivieri 2018. In the first of these studies, Faccenna, not only offers an excellent summary of the process for the execution of the Frieze (Faccenna 1997, 68-9), but also introduces some pieces with traces of the preparation performed by the stonecutter. The second of these studies describes the fine qualities of some of these preparatory designs thus:

The drawing was rapidly done with quick continuous and broken lines, with repetitions and simplifications; although clumsy, the work nonetheless displays a certain dexterity – as in the turn of the shoulders, the legs, the pectoral muscles, the right forearm, and in the body’s balance



Figure 50 Hadda CC 71, ph. 458 (courtesy Pierre Cambon, Musée Guimet, Paris)

and proportions - that denotes a not altogether unpractised hand, accustomed to depicting figures. (Faccenna, Taddei 1997, 511)

From this we can see that the first stage of work on the slab already prepared with sockets and dividing elements (semi-columns) entails the use of rulers, set of squares and pairs of compasses; in the course of this stage, freehand drawing also began. This is a very important point since it brings us back to the debated question as to whether there was a school of drawing and painting in ancient Gandhara, a subject recently dealt with by Anna Filigenzi (2006a; 2006b) and Monika Zin (2013).

We have a few traces of figurative painting in Gandhara, some close to the period that saw the Master of Saidu at work: the paintings at Butkara I on GSt 3 (festoon: lemniscate), and the coeval paintings of the 'Doric frieze' of stupa 14 (garlands, and lotus flower rosettes) (we are at the beginning



Figure 51 S 1026 (after Faccenna 2001, tav. 32b)

of the first century CE, or a little earlier). From a later phase of Butkara I (GSt 4) comes a splendid portrait of a male donor (B 4335). To these are to be added some other paintings, recently discovered, in a rather more cursive style, almost sketched, showing a strong predilection for drawing: small metopes painted with tempera in a shrine at Abbasahab-china in Swat (2021; certainly third century CE). The quality of these latter, almost miniaturist paintings is particularly fine. The painter first produced a sketch in a linear style with a great deal of detail, but fresh. He then went on to fill out the forms with much diluted paint to add chromatic vividness to the underlying lines, which remain visible. The third stage sees addition of less diluted paint to create a volumetric chiaroscuro (the rotundities of the faces). The result, enhanced by the small dimensions, is indeed striking.

Further traces of sketched paintings have been found in Gandhara on funerary jars (the specimens in the British Library; Allchin 1999; second-third

century CE). On the evidence of a vessel and fragments of figurative paintings in the British Library, we may conjecture that in Gandhara there was a school of painting specialised in depicting images of the deceased monks of a certain status for funerary festivals (to be deposited in the minor stupas; Allchin 1999, 246).<sup>1</sup>

These artists, like the artists of Abbasaheb-china, might have been monks themselves or lay members of the community, who had developed their skill with ink cursive style – as Pia Brancaccio has suggested to me – in the context of the Buddhist *scriptoria*. There, as from the beginning of the common era, Kharoshthi script began to be written in cursive style with ink on parchment or, more often, rolls of birch bark (Salomon 1999).

The Buddhist *scriptoria* could have constituted the environment in which skill in ink drawing was developed, and could then have been transferred to the ateliers of specialised potters. In fact, besides this evidence we should also consider an important class of painted ceramics of the Kushan-Sasanian period (third-fourth century CE), called Fashion Ware (Olivieri, Brancaccio forthcoming). In fact, the dynamic cursive brushstrokes characterising this style of painting together with the evidence of graphic conventions suggests that it derived from a school of drawing already advanced, to the extent that it went beyond the limits of schematic naturalism in the direction of sketching and caricature. The collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which, as I corrected the drafts of this study, I am studying with Pia Brancaccio, contains at least three dozen fragments attributable to individual artists, recognisable by the details, often the outlines (the painter of the oblique eyes, the painter of the foreshortened eyes, etc.).

Apart from these examples, all the other paintings are of a later date: the paintings of GSt 4, also figurative (we are in the fifth century CE), those of Jinnawali-dheri<sup>2</sup> (Taxila), the Buddhist rock paintings of the Ambela pass at Tangu (of the fifth-sixth century CE),<sup>3</sup> and the rock paintings at Buner (Hayat Khan 2020).

The reason for this digression on sketching lies in the fact that at Saidu and in the Buddhist art of Gandhara the actual sculptures (here I am referring to the low reliefs, which predominate in the production) were preceded by preparatory sketches on which the stonecutter then worked to fashion the forms. These sketches, when we find traces of them, to some extent show all the basic elements of the formal pattern: relations, proportions, perspective and composition.<sup>4</sup>

A Gandharan relief in schist from Hadda (Afghanistan), of which a photo has been preserved [fig. 50], reveals exceptional evidence in a sort of overview of all the stages in the work: drawing, cutting, sketching and filling out of the volumes. This piece is also of extraordinary importance since it shows us that the sculptor's work proceeded from right to left, precisely as

**1** At the time, evidently, the rule “not to make drawings or paintings of forms of living beings” (Schopen 2006, 239) was no longer binding (remember, however, that the rule only applied to monks making such drawings, not to drawings themselves; personal communication by Gregory Schopen).

**2** At the Taxila Museum.

**3** Which I have documented, and which will soon be dealt with by *Ciro Lo Muzio*.

**4** Important the example from Nagarjunakonda, site 3 (in Scherrer-Schaub 2016, fig. 1).

we imagine it to have been performed at Saidu, too.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, the narrative language in Gandhara often runs from right to left: this we can also see at Saidu, where the images often proceed from the right to the images awaiting them on the left. Let us take a key example from Shahr-i Bahlol, with Mara's attack on the Buddha: the assaulting armies are to the left of the Buddha (to the right for the observer), while to his right we see the defeated, showing the typical convention of the companion supporting a wounded man from behind (known as the 'Philoctetes' convention, which we will be discussing later on).<sup>6</sup>

## 8.2 The Sculptors, the Assistants, the Tools

The Master has sketched out the figures on the panels, which are then rough-hewn by the younger artists. The Master himself will take care of all the faces – certainly those in the foreground – as well as the details of the drapes and armour, and the horses (reminiscent of Phidias: here, too, there must have been a western model: S 621 \*32b-c) [fig. 51].<sup>7</sup> The finishing touches were left to others, who at times went beyond the strictly necessary. Take the case of what is probably the last panel of the Frieze, S 241 with Utaraseṇa (\*20-21) [pl. IV]: here, whoever had the task of marking the thick skin of the elephant with the small double circles characterising the typically wrinkly pores (or papillae) took in, with an excess of naturalism and zeal, even the hidden parts of the body visible only by detaching the panel and, holding it at eye level, viewing it sideways. Evidently, the sculptor lost sight of what had been perfectly clear in the Master's design, namely the general sense of perspective – what would be visible, and what would remain hidden. But beware: although the invisible detail of the papillae would be superfluous, the deep, almost 'openwork' carving is not, and is found here as elsewhere, as we saw in the chapter on light, to reinforce the chiaroscuro of the Frieze. As for the perspective plane and the point of observation, we should take into account what a revealing relief, SS I 3, that of the schoolmaster (scene of Siddhārtha's youth) [pl. XIX], tells us. Here the Master took no trouble to finish off the stylus of the seated individual intent on writing, well aware that this detail, seen at eye level and, with the play of the curve, only in profile, would in fact appear as a stylus. Seen from the wrong perspective, the stylus would have looked like a rectangular chunk [fig. 52]. The same thing occurs at Butkara in the lunette of central niche B 2816: the kneeling female figure has her hands touching the ground stubbed out because that part of the relief would not have been visible from the observer's point of view [fig. 53].<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The photo of the piece (no. CC71) was kindly provided by Pierre Cambon and the Musée Guimet in Paris, to which my thanks are due. See also Olivieri 2019c; see also the unfinished piece from Butkara III (BK III 1985-1-195) in Gul Rahim 2015, fig. 178.

<sup>6</sup> Peshawar Museum, PM-2667 (former PM 128).

<sup>7</sup> As well as for the cornices: for example the piece SS I 231 was certainly carved by a very skilled hand [fig. 85]. Note the presence of similar cornices at Butkara III (from BK III 1985-1-94 to BK III 1985-1-97; Gul Rahim 2015, figs 189-91).

<sup>8</sup> I refer to its original position. In the present location (Swat Museum, Gallery 6) and in the position where it was found (filler leaning against the podium of monument 70) these 'aporias' are clearly visible (Faccenna 1980-81, pl. 227). The lunette B 2816 must have been located about one and a ½ m above the ground as the upper part of a large false niche (see also Faccenna 1985).



Figure 52 SS I 3, detail (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri)

While in the case of the relief B 2816 the doubt remains that the sculptor's work was not finished, such doubt does not exist for the scene SS I 3.

This detail, moreover, offers further proof that the panels were sculpted to be seen only at the level of the observer. As we will see, further proof comes from study of the perspective applied in the design of the panels. Of the possible comparisons, we may take the case of the 60 panels in fine white limestone, from the drum of the Stupa of Kanaganahalli, in Karnataka (photos nos 36.23, 37.06 by Christian Luczanits on <http://www.luczanits.net>; Zin 2011; 2018b) [figs 54-55]. The panels are divided in three registers: the lower one is a false *vedikā* of the classical Indian type, while above there are two registers separated by a freeze with flights of wild geese turning left in the direction of the *pradakṣiṇā*. The scenes are divided by pillars with zoomorphic capitals, shafts picked out by three lotus flower discs like



Figure 53 B 2816, detail (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri)

false *stāmbha*. Of the inscriptions on the Stupa, four can be dated to the first century and most of the panels are probably datable to the first century BCE-first century CE (Hinüber, Nakanishi 2014), to the Sātavahāna period, also on the evidence of archaic decorative elements like the zoomorphic capitals and the flights of wild geese. In any case, assembly of the stupa with the panels should not have been earlier than the end of the first century BCE. At Kanaganahalli, then, (as also in the case of the great stupa of Amaravati) the figured frieze came to be placed above the false *vedikā*. This is the most logical model also for the Frieze of the Saidu Stupa.

In the Frieze, the hands of the person are always imprecise, especially when opened, while the feet are carefully depicted. Lips not tight, but always closed. The details of the turbans/caps are in keeping (Faccenna 1999-2000), as are the details of the drapes, which often see the application of various



**Figure 54**  
Kanaganahalli, photo CL00 36.23  
(courtesy/photo by Christian  
Luczanits)



**Figure 55**  
Kanaganahalli, photo CL00 37.06  
(courtesy/photo by Christian  
Luczanits)





**Figure 56** Scheme S 1112 over SS I 3  
(elaborated by Antonio Amato after Spagnesi 2001)



**Figure 57** S 709 (after Faccenna 2001, tab. 37)

conventions whether the figures are standing or seated: concentric wavy lines between the legs, crenulate vertical fringes (another sign of the Master or his school, also to be seen at Butkara I in panels B 3673 and B2816). The crenulate fringes (S 1112 \*47) are a technique that was not always correctly interpreted by the Master or his helpers. They should indicate the straight drop of the garments, but in some cases we find them oddly represented in unnaturally oblique fringes, even for figures in the foreground (S 676 \*35a, S 1102 \*46b). The mass of foliage of the trees, always the same or at any rate similar, was reproduced from a cartoon. Details of the leaves were subsequently added to the general design and also helped for identification of the scenes since specific episodes in the life of the Buddha were associated with certain trees, and not others (*pīpal*, *śāla*, *jambu*: Faccenna, Filigenzi 2007, pl. 159).<sup>9</sup> Comparing the foliage to the left (S 1277 \*59a, S 1112 \*47, S 1128\*50, and SS I 3) with the foliage to the right (S 1443 \*62 and S 1162 \*55b-c), we see that two distinct models were used for the trees to the left and the trees to the right with a little variation in the form of the leaves. Evidently cartoons were used to transfer the images [fig. 56]. The finishing touches appear to have been applied by one and the same hand, not necessarily that of the Master.

Again, the scene with a seated figure at Saidu is repeated twice with some variants (S 246, \*22, S 1246, \*58c-d): clearly, the same pattern is being followed, and here, too, we recognise use of the cartoon. The faces of aristocrats with their headdress (types 1-4 of Faccenna 1999-2000) [fig. 57], some

<sup>9</sup> *Ficus religiosa*, *Shorea robusta*, *Syzygium cumini* (or jambolan).



Figure 58 S 622, detail (after Faccenna 2001, tab. 33a)



Figure 59 S 623, detail (after Faccenna 2001, tab. 34c)

truly serial,<sup>10</sup> may be further evidence of the use of cartoons. We will be looking into the cartoon technique, possibly with pouncing, used at Saidu for design and transfer of scenes, later on.

The assistants worked on many of the marginal details: saddles, jewels, furnishings, architectural elements and birds. The faces of the riders and men in arms, like the young wrestlers, show uniform, almost undifferentiated treatment: here the Master must have guided the work of his assistants. In some cases, however, we detect elements of portraiture, at times generic (the ages of the women in S 622: young in \*28, old in \*33) [fig. 58],<sup>11</sup> at times specific, as in the case of the evident portrait of a minor personage of the court (\*34a) [fig. 59].<sup>12</sup> Of the possible portraits by the Master (whether coded or physiognomic), there are two that can be considered true masterpieces-

<sup>10</sup> Compare, for example, the three faces in three-quarter view in the middle row of S 246, \*22 with the similar faces of S 1112, \*47.

<sup>11</sup> In this relief, behind the old woman (facing left and depicted with foreshortening) we glimpse an actual portrait, almost sketched, of an (old?) woman in profile (\*34b). Interesting, too, is the figure of a small girl (S 420 \*28): in comparison with the standard figures in the Frieze, on the evidence of the proportions this cannot be interpreted as a figure appearing smaller because not in the foreground. Note the characteristic hairstyle of the noblewomen of Saidu: hair pulled back into a ponytail at the top or to the side ('Sunga' fashion, one might say), which, held in place by a thick fabric crown like a laureate festoon, leaves the hair short but voluminous on the ears, almost garçon-style, with double fringes, the upper one open to let the lower one show. For laureate crowns see also the Saka-Parthian period female terracotta figurines from Swat (pending the publication of the study of those from Barikot, see Callieri, Filigenzi 2002, 145).

<sup>12</sup> Whose frowning features recall those of a military chief possibly of Central Asian origin. Particularly curious is the family look shared with the portrait of a Kidarite (?) lord in the tempera wall painting in GST 4 at Butkara I (B 4335; c. fifth century) (Faccenna 1980-81, pl. I).



Figure 60 SS1 29, detail (ACT; photo by Edoardo Loliva)



Figure 61

SS I 170 (ACT; photo by Antonio Amato)

es: the more graphic portrait of a princess in the central false niche (SS I 2) [pl. xvi] and the delicate moulding of the face of a young man S 1443 (\*62).

Wrestlers, but also the young Siddhārtha, with their curly hair consistently evidence use of the drill [fig. 60]. It is hardly surprising that the drill was in use at Saidu after 50 CE, for it had found widespread use in the art of Pergamon a century before, but also in India, although here it was used employing a highly advanced technique for drilling of hard stones: with an emery tip (corresponding to the mineral corundum) or diamond (which has been attested in India since at least the third century BCE).

Yet the deep drill marks on the curls, which to Saidu already seem to be a citation or a mannered work, are in fact not, since we know that the use and fashion was imposed later in the West. Although the drill, as a tool applied to sculpture, is certainly imported, its sign cannot therefore already be the sign of an ‘aesthetic capital’ or formal capital to be flaunted. On the contrary, it is the sign of the prevalence of the tool over the hand, of the tool as innovation. The fact that the instrument in Rome was used very sparingly by ‘school’ artists, and that it spread first in the workshops of the so-called ‘plebeian art’ (of Bianchi Bandinelli), and only later in official art, is very significant.<sup>13</sup>

The stoneworker’s toolkit also included the lathe, as evidenced at both Butkara I (Rockweel 2006, 169-72) and Saidu (miniature column SS I 170) [fig. 61], having already found widespread use in the production of quality pottery in chlorite schist (Vidale et al. 2015).

Thanks to the work carried out under the supervision of Massimo Vidale, albeit on a limited sample of pieces, it has now been recognised that the toolkit

<sup>13</sup> As an intellectual quotation, the imitation of the drilling of curls can be found even in late twentieth century sculpture: think of Giorgio De Chirico’s *Mysterious Baths* of 1973.

used at Saidu was more complete than previously supposed.<sup>14</sup> Some tools we have already mentioned: a series of chisels with 100 mm for the preparation of blocks or slabs, chisels with flat and round heads from 4 to 24 mm for the final work, pointed chisels, some very small (for the finishing touches on pupils), bench and bow drills, lathes and mechanical or powder (sands) abrasives.

On the basis of the 2015 study, it was possible to advance the hypothesis that “the tools belonged to a series organised in scales with set increases in dimensions”, possibly relating to the Gft (Vidale et al. 2015, 42). In this connection it is worth recalling the two sizes preferred by the Master and his school for the treatment of the backs of slabs and rough hewing, namely the chisels with flat heads of 2 and 1 cm wide. The measure is precise: although the mathematical proof may not be very solid, both the measures appear to be sub-multiples of the Gft on a 32.4 base.<sup>15</sup> Apart from some rare examples, from Barikot and Udegram (yet to be studied), and the plates of instruments from Taxila (Marshall 1951, pls 166-7), we have no other data (see Olivieri 2006, 142).

As already mentioned, excavations in Saidu have uncovered interesting additions to the metal instrumentarium used by sculptors and their helpers: a series of mostly rectangular portable whetstones (sharpeners) made of hard and soapy-grained talc schist [fig. 81].<sup>16</sup>

### 8.3 The Eyes

Returning to the panels of the Frieze and the characteristics of their execution, in terms of form a constant element is to be seen in the treatment of the eyes, elongated, the iris deeply incised with a small circle and the pupil indicated with an almost triangular sign. The incisively executed eyelids are almond-shaped while the eyes show a characteristic inclination, rising outwards from the bridge of the nose. The upper eyelid covers about a quarter of the iris, giving the gaze – above all of the principal personages – a very pronounced ‘inner’ look of absence and presence at the same time, perfectly in line with the episode narrated. In formal terms, the impression is of almost ‘feline’ eyes, also due to a certain extremely curious (unintended) effect suggesting light-coloured, almost green eyes.<sup>17</sup> All the eyes – the most expressive elements in the Frieze – were executed by the same hand, that of the Master, who put his skill and technical command into them. Mastery is to be seen in the phases of large dimensions (e.g. the young woman in the large central panel, SS I 2), as in the multiplication of small spaces, all the same (S 246, \*22). Eyes had a particular role in the sculptural technique of the Master.

We observe thorough command of the general perspective of the overall design. Indeed, the entire design along the colonnade supported by col-

<sup>14</sup> Preliminary listing of the toolkit used for the Frieze appeared in Rockwell 2006; Vidale et al. 2015; Brancaccio, Olivieri 2019.

<sup>15</sup> The first is 1/32.4 of the Gft; the second 1/16.2 of the Gft.

<sup>16</sup> 14 tools: inv. nos. SS I 232-244, 254.

<sup>17</sup> They are reminiscent of the ‘feline’ eyes of Gentile da Fabriano, whose treatment, especially in fresco painting, comes very close to the effect given by the Master of Saidu. The effect is pretty well visible in a piece from Butkara III representing a mustached Buddha (BK III 1982-1-193; see Gul Rahim 2015; Rhi 1994, fig. 6).

umns between and in front of which the personages stand or move as if in a proscenium is skilfully planned. The static elements, both architectural structures and trees, serving practically as wings to the scene, are mostly frontal. The city gates are in perspective (S 709, \*37), which helps project the Frieze towards the internal vanishing point, while the faces are often foreshortened with variable perspective, falling into line only from a single viewpoint. This can be appreciated above all in the case of substantial projection of volumes. Here I will consider only the faces in the main rows, disregarding the faces in the upper rows (i.e. the back rows) and the lower ones (when kneeling). The faces of the principal figures are to be observed only from one viewpoint: frontal, to the right. The sculptor must have stood in front of the panel at face level (which must have been at eye level), facing it slightly from the right (i.e. in the position of someone approaching the panel from the right during the *pradakṣiṇā*). From this point the sculptor fashioned the pupil, as can be observed in the double stroke of the chisel indicating the pupil with impressive mastery. As every good cartoonist knows, a slender notch breaking into the round shape of the iris, suggesting reflected light, gives the eye a spherical appearance, bringing life to a gaze that would otherwise be dull. It may seem an odd comparison, but here the Master of Saidu uses a similar trick, two strokes of a pointed chisel from outside inwards, creating a triangle with base towards the inner corner of the eye. If it were possible to reproduce the ideal plan for chisel-work on the eyes for every fragment, both the work plan and the position of the panels could be reconstructed fairly accurately. I believe that this stage was attended to as work proceeded, with the panels already mounted.

In 2006, referring to the dating of the earliest sculpture of Butkara I and Saidu, defined as the “drawing style” by Domenico Faccenna (2003), Maurizio Taddei wrote:

I only wish to point out that, were it not for the stratigraphic data and the evidence of re-worked pieces, I should have been rather inclined to date the drawing group no earlier than the middle of the second century CE, because the figures in its reliefs are characterized by the carving of the irises and pupils in their eyes, the use of which is not widespread in Hellenistic/Roman marble statuary before the time of Hadrian. (Taddei 2006, 43)<sup>18</sup>

This is a fundamental point, not so much with regard to chronology, with which I do not agree, as for the matter of the carving of iris and pupil, which may actually be seen as one of the technical innovations that the ‘drawing style’ entailed, and which the Master brought to new heights of expression. As for the chronology, showing the iris and pupil is not necessarily proof of a later chronology. It would be if we were to view the art of Saidu in terms of the art of the Roman portrait. As for the Hellenistic world, representation of iris and pupil, albeit minimal, is to be seen, for example, in the portrait of a young man from Pergamon,<sup>19</sup> and in the portrait said to be of Dio-

<sup>18</sup> Taddei’s point was made cautiously, applying – as he himself said – only if taking into consideration the excavation data. Nevertheless, Taddei’s point has been extrapolated in support of the late chronology for the ‘drawing style’ (Zin 2018a, 104).

<sup>19</sup> Pergamonmuseum, P 375.

doros Paspáros from Pergamon;<sup>20</sup> while their chronology does indeed follow the end of the Attalids, it nevertheless remains within the first century BCE (see Blume-Jung 2018, figs 1, 7, 153). In these two cases, the preparation certainly served to give the paint a sculptural, three-dimensional quality.

In the Indian tradition of ivory carving, iris and pupil had been details depicted also in examples prior to the dating of the Frieze. For stone I recall rare medallions of the Bharhut *vedikā*, and the *yakṣa* of Sanchi; for ivory the celebrated statuette of Lakṣmī of Pompeii and the ivories of Begram. Given its great intrinsic value, ivory does not lend itself to painting, unlike marble and stone both in India and in the west; thus if it was not painted the eye had to be incised – not a matter of style, but of technical necessity. This may also have been the case at Saidu and Butkara I with the emerald-green schist.

Here we come to a point that we had yet to touch on. There is no evidence of paint, nor indeed of gilding, attributable to the initial phase of the Frieze.<sup>21</sup> The stone was possibly chosen and treated both for the emerald chromatic effect that it would give to the natural tone of the sculpture, and for the chromatic impact in contrast with the warm shell hue of the general volume of the Stupa, and with the red of the columns.<sup>22</sup>

As for the emerald and its colour:

Une émeraude ayant la couleur du perroquet, des feuilles de bambou, [...] est extrêmement bienfaisante aux hommes qui la portent dans les cérémonies en l'honneur des Dieux ou des Mânes. (*Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, LXXXIII; transl. by Finot 1896)

The work on the eyes with the detail of the pupil is, however, one of the characteristic signs of the Master. To round off the sculptural work and ritually give life to the images this was the procedure in Gandhara for images of Siddhārtha (before the Enlightenment) and of the Buddha, as well as the other major figures. Juhung Rhi has produced fairly convincing evidence in support of the hypothesis that the ‘ceremony of the eyes’ was regularly performed in Gandhara (Rhi 2005). Moreover, the sculptures he cites as evidence – of unknown provenance – have already been recognised as being by the same hand (Marshall 1960a, 62). It is an interesting point which – together with our insights regarding Saidu – could suggest that this ceremony was associated with the production of the major ateliers. With regard to the ‘eye painting’ ceremony, it is worth reading what Richard Gombrich has to say [fig. 62].<sup>23</sup>

**20** Bergama Museum, no. 3455.

**21** Faccenna refers to “probable gilding” of the Frieze (Faccenna 2002, 123), although there are no traces of it.

**22** A suggestion: the chlorite schist of the Frieze came from the same areas that were quarried for emeralds (Pashto: *zamrud*), and given the general chromatic impact it is as if each of these panels, by virtue of the rarity of its material and sacred nature of the episode depicted, became as it were a multiplication of *tabulae smaragdinae*.

**23** See also Rhi 2005, 172 fn. 16. For the mirror ceremony and the use of mirrors in re-consecration (or statue restoration) ceremonies in Buddhism from Tibet to Southeast Asia, see the fine study by Nicolas Revire (2015, in particular page 187). Evocative, in this connection, is the image reproduced here of some Buddhist steles from with eyes that seem to emerge from the darkness of the material (from Dorjay 2010, fig. 14) [fig. 62]. This image also helps us to understand that the eye ceremony was repeated on various occasions in the life of the sacred image.



**Figure 62** Buddhist stelae, Ladakh (after Dorjay 2010, fig. 14; courtesy by Phuntsog Dorjay)

The ceremony is regarded by its performers as very dangerous and is surrounded with tabus. It is performed by the craftsman who made the statue, after several hours of ceremonies to ensure that no evil will come to him. This evil, which is the object of all Sinhalese healing rituals, is imprecisely conceptualized, but results from making mistakes in ritual, violating tabus, or otherwise arousing the malevolent attention of a supernatural being, who usually conveys the evil by a gaze (*bällma*). The craftsman paints in the eyes at an auspicious moment and is left alone in the closed temple with only his colleagues, while everyone else stands clear even of the outer door. Moreover, the craftsman does not dare to look the statue in the face, but keeps his back to it and paints sideways or over his shoulder while looking into a mirror, which catches the gaze of the image he is bringing to life. As soon as the painting is done the craftsman himself has a dangerous gaze. He is led out blind-folded and the covering is only removed from his eyes when they will first fall upon something which he then symbolically destroys with a sword stroke. The spirit of this ceremony cannot be reconciled with Buddhist doctrine, so no one tries to do so. Monks say that really the whole thing is nonsense, but a picturesque tradition worth preserving. Many laymen hold the same view, and though they obey orders to keep clear, they do so with some indifference. Only the craftsman, on whom the evil influence may fall,

---

The newly painted eyes stand out on steles blackened by the oxidation of numerous layers of melted butter poured over them for hundreds of years. Particularly significant are the subsequent studies by Donald K. Swearer on the image consecration rituals in Thai Buddhism, first mentioned in a number of stimulating articles (like Swearer 1995) and subsequently developed in an important monographic study with the significant title *Becoming the Buddha* (2004).



seems really frightened, and insists on the importance of every detail of the ceremony. (Gombrich 1966, 24-5)

Further information on the practice during the days of weekly observance at Rājagṛha in Bihar is offered in the account by Yijing, another famous pilgrim slightly later than Xuanzang:

Next, one of the priests, on being requested, kneels down before the image, and recites hymns in praise of the Buddha's virtues. After this two other priests, being requested, sitting near the image, read a short Sutra of a page or a leaf. On such an occasion, they sometimes consecrate idols (lit. bless idols), and mark the eyeballs of them, in order to obtain the best reward of happiness. Now the priests withdraw at pleasure to one side of the room; and, folding up their Kashayas (i.e. yellow robes), and binding their two corners at the breasts, they wash their hands: then they sit down to eat. (IX, 46; transl. by Takakusu 1896)

On the other hand, let us take a look at an account of the 'awakening' of the statues immediately after being sculpted at Konārka in the thirteenth century.

The first opening of the eyes was performed without *mantras* by the craftsman [*śilpīns*]. It consists in drawing or sculpting the eyes. This is immediately followed by a ceremony of purification of the image from the touch of the craftsman. The second opening of the eyes is performed with *mantras* by the priest [*ācārya*] who mimes the work of the craftsman. And purifies the image from the touch of the craftsman, removes the image from the human realm and introduces it into the process of ritual divinization. (Ślaczka 2006, 187)

#### 8.4 The False Railing and the Trompe-l'œil

Before going on with the construction, we must stop a moment to consider the composition of the Frieze and the subjects in it. As we have seen, the Frieze introduces an account of the heroic life of the historical Buddha, which unfolds in space and time. It includes scenes which would become common in the subsequent art of Gandhara, but are rare in the tradition preserved in the texts and vice versa, such as the wrestling scenes, the journey by boat (S 20; \*12b), and the arrival of the relics brought by Utarasena [pt. IV]. Others are completely new and show original compositions (again in the wrestling scenes, among others).<sup>24</sup> Thus it seems to me that while following the wishes of the community and clients, the Master played an active

<sup>24</sup> At this stage we do not know whether we are witnessing a multimedia animation of the (oral?) texts and then the transfer of these into the plastic scenes, or vice versa, the animated creation of the texts (in Italian *in-segnati*, 'taught, explicated', from *insegnare*, 'to teach', which contains the term *signum*, 'sign, de-sign'). See in Squarcini 2008 the "ciclo della *imitatio*". It is also important to note again that in Bharhut the *navakarmika* is also a *bhāṇaka*, i.e. both responsible for the site and in charge of reciting/transcribing texts. See also the reflections of Cristina Scherrer-Schaub (2016, 12 ff.).

role in designing the scenes, planning the scenario and choosing the most appropriate scenes, partly on the basis of his own preferences and skills. The design of the Frieze must have been set out on the panels already prepared (with sockets and dividing elements), setting the panels around a circumference to take in an overall view of the whole. In this stage, the lay clients, the principal donors and the beneficiaries of the monastery under construction must have discussed these scenes, walking around them. I can imagine the Master taking a stand in favour of the scenes he was particularly keen on keeping, and quite possibly admitting others that he would have preferred not to include in the negotiations. The Master I visualise is an artist already aware of his own genius (in the etymological sense), and in this respect modern, a name - in short - enjoying sufficient reputation to have his own way.

There is a point to consider. On the evidence presented so far it is clear that the relationship of the Frieze to the Stupa is not exactly as a work to its cornice but more precisely as a fresco to its room. The relationship is one of reciprocal need: the fresco, or relief, arriving when the space has already been defined. The exceptional nature of the Saidu Frieze is the same as can be seen on a considerably larger scale in the great celebratory of monuments of antiquity, and lies in the fact that the building and Frieze were born together, the building as narrative, a motionless sign endowed with dynamic movement. Indeed, the narrative takes over its space to the extent, even, of conveying the illusion of being space itself (the illusion of the Frieze as continuous porch [*portico*] helps in this respect), annihilating or reducing the volumetric weight of the edifice behind the Frieze. On the other hand, the narrative needs the building just as the hands of a clock need the dial. The stupa sets the pace of observation, as the observers advance along the space around the monument.

The stupa is a non-edifice, unless we focus on that invisible hollow space, the pineal gland of the whole - namely, the relic chamber. Architecturally the stupa, being solid, lends itself to few variations, and in fact to see some change, as would be the case in the architecture of Dvaravati, Burma and Bengal in late antiquity, it had to lose its solid nature or, better, ease it into the interior, hiding it almost, denying it, to create galleries and empty spaces projected inwards by the centrifugal multiplicity of the *maṇḍala*-planimetries. It was to be a long, slow process, but here, quite abruptly, the stupa surges upwards, the experiment having possibly been first attempted at Butkara I with monument 14 (and 17?). As we have seen, the creation of this model entails the process of projection in perspective: the outer elements shift upwards in a radial direction (the stupa is the centre). The buttresses, monumental entrances and portals become - literally - stairways. Ascending the stairs, we enter the space of the stupa, the top of the stairway being analogous with the inner entrance to the Indian stupa: here upper corresponds to inner. Once we have approached the stupa, before climbing the second stairway (which leads onto the *medhi* facing the false niche with the Buddha) we find ourselves in front of another railing surmounted by lively scenes threading through a colonnade that seems limitless, and that seems almost to begin and end from behind a large false niche which is effectively a doorway, as aptly described by Elisa Iori (2018). We have already seen that there were no reasons, neither technical nor logical, apart perhaps from simple caution, to maintain that the Frieze was situated below the false railing. Placed in a low position, the Frieze would have revealed all its inconsistencies and hidden

its beauty. Faccenna's caution has to do with the stupa models in which the false railing is situated on the upper part of the drum, never below. Actually, these models represent the false railing as a sort of stupa template, never showing a figured frieze, so we cannot deduce from them a relationship between the parts (see Faccenna 1995a, pls 265-85). The example of the great stupa of Amaravati has much more to tell us, and even more that of Kanaganahalli: these we have already discussed. Now, let us take it that the false railing did in fact occupy a low position. Returning to the viewpoint in space described above, in which the horizontal became vertical, looking ahead at the top of the first stairway we see a railing, behind which can be seen in continuous colonnade set against a circular building – the stupa. The Stupa and Frieze thus appear behind the false railing.<sup>25</sup> This play of perspective had for some time been exploited in Indian Buddhist architecture: take the case, for example, of the stupa depictions on the west pillar of the north portal of Sanchi I. Here, full use is made of the scheme of placing below what is meant to be in front and above what is behind. In the design by the Master of Saidu, the horizontality of the ground is raised, but from there the vertical perspective projects a space that again appears horizontal, and concentric: internal railing, colonnade, stupa. Thus the false niche actually represents a false door before the access to the interior space which, in reality, the worshipper can only imagine. The door is open, but teaming with personages, with the Buddha in meditation at the centre: there can be no passing through, no entering the *sancta sanctorum*. Here is the stupa in its very essence, the Buddha, inaccessible, just as the relic chamber is inaccessible, imagined at the point where the axes cross behind the false niche. The architecture suggests a process of imagination so complex and at the same time evident that I can find no plain words to express it. In the meantime, all around are cast the huge shadows of the leonine columns, a symbol of the Buddha, of the kings and of the Buddha-king, whose genealogy goes back to Ikṣvāku, ancestor both of the Buddha and of the Oḍi family.

This architectural design produced such an impressive and awe-inspiring effect that the Stupa of Saidu was reproduced in models and low reliefs; we may mention those from Butkara III, Malakand, Butkara I (see Faccenna 1995a, pls 274-8) and Barikot (BKG 2269) [fig. 36].

The stupa creates the time for observation, through the observer's step through the space around the monument. The space of the monument (its form in space) is marked by time (the narration) which again recalls the space, this time the geographical space of the places of events. Here one is

**25** Indirect evidence for the function of the railing as a spatial caesura comes from Zar-dheri, from the sculptural group of false niche B (Peshawar Museum, fragment S91). Here a series of characters are depicted standing behind a railing as if the scene were taking place 'behind' the fence. In a different context, that of the external body of the Augustan Ara Pacis, the concept of the fence 'behind' which the scene takes place is rendered by the lower (floral) register, 'above and behind', which the figurative scene unfolds. Inside, the lower register corresponds to a false railing/fence. Bianchi Bandinelli writes: "E che cosa rappresenta la decorazione floreale che sta sotto ai fregi figurati? Essa, che è forse l'elemento artisticamente più vivo di tutto il monumento, non sta in nessun rapporto funzionale coi fregi figurati" (Bianchi Bandinelli 1981, 190) (En. transl.: "And what does the floral decoration below the figured friezes represent? This decoration, which is perhaps the most artistically lively element of the entire monument, has no functional relationship with the figured friezes"). Apart from the comparisons with the Pergamene landscape, the comparison with the two-register painted frieze of the 'Tomba dei Tori' in Tarquinia (sixth century BCE) offers perhaps the most convincing answer to the sense of the floral register as a railing/enclosure, almost a hedge, 'behind-above' which the scene unfolds (191).

in Lumbini and Kapilavastu; then one moves to Bodhgaya, then to Varanasi, then to Kushinagara. The worshipper is transported not only back in time, but along the time of the narrative, but also and above all in the space of the mental pilgrimage. In one of the first texts of the Pali Canon to be formalised (according to Hinüber 2009), the *Mahāparinibbānasutta*, the Buddha announces that those four places of his biography, a biography that is about to be fulfilled but is not yet completed – so it is a prophecy and for this reason even more important – will be the destinations of the pilgrimage. Taddei, quoting É. Lamotte, reminds us that the biographies of the Buddha may have originated from pilgrimage guides or *māhātmyas* (such ancient ones have not come down to us, but we know the tradition and the later ones) (Taddei 1999, 75). According to Taddei (1999), the pilgrimage that retraces the biographical events is part of the formative process that leads to the biography of the Buddha, and therefore to the narrative art, of which the Frieze is one of the first attested examples. Thanks to its frieze, the Saidu Stupa preserves and represents the historical space of the Buddha: to walk around its perimeter is at the same time to travel through space, pilgrimaging from centre to centre. It should be remembered that the spread of Buddhism in Gandhara brings with it this problem of displacement or multiplication or reproduction of sacred geography.<sup>26</sup> Not being able to be part of the Buddha's biographical geography Gandhara and Swat enter into the geography of previous lives, into the *jātakas*: in these they become part of anachronisms that explain according to an inverse sense of time (which only the succession of lives can conceive), for example, the meaning of the future Kanishka in the Buddha's life (see Kuwayama 2019, 109-11). If Swat and Gandhara are the scene of antecedent episodes or journeys in spirit, such as that for Apalāla's conversion, a stupa like Saidu's thanks to its narrative frieze can thus bring the whole geography of the Buddha to a place, for the benefit of those who live there. This is a conceptually ambitious operation, and this is also why I believe that, if Saidu was one of the first places – if not indeed the first – where this took place, then behind this logical leap there must be the will of a sovereign, who to a certain extent replicates a process initiated by the multiplication/expansion of the sacred geography of Buddhism started by the sovereign-*dharmarāja* par excellence, Aśoka. There was a great tradition and memory of Aśoka and the Maurya in Swat and the surrounding valleys, as evidenced by the epigraphs of aristocratic donations.<sup>27</sup> This is also why I believe that the Saidu stupa is the 'Palatine Chapel' of the Oḍi lords.

**26** The theme is very important and concerns the creation and recreation of the sacred topography of Buddhism both in Gandhara (Fussman 1994a; Neelis 2019) and, for example, in the Chinese world where the shift of the geographical 'centre' that intervenes with Buddhism has important cultural implications (see Forte 1985). Note that some territories of ancient Burma and Yunnan (Dali) were renamed 'Gandhara' in late antiquity (see Yian 2010). Furthermore, the theme of the reproduction of reality as the creation of an equally valid reality is important in the Buddhism of our regions. For example, M.A. Stein assumed that stupa graffiti on boulders at some fording points on the Indus River near Chilas were substitutes for the construction of real stupas, which it was in fact impossible, due to frequent flooding (Stein 1944, 22-3).

**27** "[T]hese relics, from a Maurya period stūpa, on which a miracle has been performed, are established in a secure (?), safe, central (?) establishment" (CKI 242; Baums 2012, 208). See also Baums forthcoming.

### 8.5 Models

This chapter brings us to the heart of the matter represented by the Stupa and its Frieze. As we have seen, the fact that the Frieze contains a biographical narrative has no precedents in India. We are sometime after 50 CE, and to find antecedent models we must look to the Hellenistic precedents, which must have enjoyed widespread success in the Seleucid East and, from there, in the Iranian world, at least as examples. We must bear in mind, among other things, that the cultural climate in which this process developed was that of the Saka and Parthian sovereigns, the Odiraja being their vassals. In the material culture of the built-up areas of Swat in the phases associated with this period in history, we find the most evident ‘western’ evidence, both in the ceramic decoration (whether painted or stamped) and terracotta figurines (the so-called ‘Hellenistic ladies’), as well as the use of western technologies like the cooking *lāsana*, pyramidal loom weights, etc. (Coloru et al. 2022).<sup>28</sup> This process was underway while the forms of ‘pure’ Hellenism of Bactrian and Indo-Greek, particularly ceramic forms, the use of Attic metrology (Antonetti 2020) and the use of Greek in inscriptions (Tribulato, Olivieri 2017) disappeared definitively. At the same time, in the sculptural production of this period (and the “toilet trays”) we find ample evidence of an ‘Iranian’ if not actually Parthian taste in clothing and practices, like the figures of dancers called ‘Persian snappers’ discussed in an excellent article by Ciro Lo Muzio (2019). The most significant evidence of this form of dance includes sculptural fragments from the phases associated with the GST 3 of Butkara I: the large dancer B I 5938 and the *nāgadanta* B I 116 (Lo Muzio 2019, figs 4.3-4.4).

The Buddhist perception of the Saka phase was ambivalent, and this took on great significance both in the not always easy relations between élites and the various communities, and in the political value of the donations and their diplomatic importance:

The generous patronage of Buddhist institutions by Sakas and other outsiders is abundantly attested in contemporary inscriptions [...] so it is not surprising that the Sakas in the Gandhāran *avadānas* are presented in a favorable light. What is surprising, however, is that in other Buddhist traditions, the Sakas are also associated with the disappearance of the Dharma, but in a decidedly negative way. (Salomon 2018, 254)

With great insight, Faccenna views the sculptural aspect of this phase in the development of the art of Gandhara, i.e. the ‘drawing style’, in the context of the more variegated eastern Graeco-Iranian background. Here lay, precisely in the homeland of the Saka and Parthian sovereigns – the profoundly Hellenised eastern Sistan – the intermediate origin of a new language between West and East. The language was no longer Hellenistic, but already localised and transformed into a mature sensibility which may well have already found expression in the pictorial complex of the Kuh-e K̅v̅āja

<sup>28</sup> I refer the reader to the tripartition *imitatio, actuatio, replicatio* in *Time and Narrative* by Ricoeur (1990).

(Faccenna 1981, 94-5).<sup>29</sup> However, I agree with Michele Minardi (personal communication) that the raw material of this art (i.e. the stone) remains important here: we should therefore look towards places where ateliers of stone sculptors were active, thus perhaps mainly in Bactria, as we have already mentioned. In future it may be well to look further in this direction to grasp the origins of the 'western' form of the early art of Gandhara. Once again, however, we should look to the transmission of techniques (sculptural, ceramics, textile) to identify the means of this translation. These means include new tools and models to copy - thus veritable 'material agencies', already acquired, but there was also an innovative idea to be seen in the biographical dimension of the narration. This, too, is a model, or rather a macro-model, for it does not suggest a taste for individual details of treatment, but rather for plotting the general plan of a cycle, which was to transform the very history of Buddhism from within. For this reason, too, I believe, the Master of Saidu is to be considered the general designer of the work, from the architecture and frieze to the formal details. And another reason why, I believe, the Master is not to be sought necessarily among the members of the monastic community, but among the lay figures responding at the same time to the language of form in the local culture and the contents of the system of faith and thought. From then on, it would become increasingly predominant as a unifying and totalising language of faith and power for three or four centuries.

To return to the question of the model in terms of the idea, let us, as Maurizio Taddei suggested, turn to the most celebrated of narrative friezes, that of the deified hero of the Attalids, the Telephos cycle on the altar of Pergamon (about 160 BCE):<sup>30</sup>

a significant precedent can be recognized in such Hellenistic narratives as the story of Telephos in the Pergamon Altar (presumably 165-156). But one should remember that the Telephos frieze is continuous in its composition not divided into neatly individualized scenes. (Taddei 2006, 46)

In the preceding pages we have illustrated the role played by the dividing elements, which had already made a showing at Butkara I; here they serve both for the visual programme (scenes divided into narrative units), and for the ritual component (each panel represents a mnemonic key), as well as the kinematic effect (action-pause-action) developing around the Frieze. Although thus divided, as we have seen, the Frieze was conceived and designed as a continuum of images unwinding behind a long colonnade which begins and ends with a door (the central false niche). The figures in the

<sup>29</sup> On chronological issues developed on the basis of recent radiometric dates, and in general on the context of the first phase of this site, see Callieri 2021. On Sakastan (Sistan), Daffinà 1967 remains fundamental. On the artistic component see also Filigenzi 2006a, 29-35. On Elymais and the role of the local elites, see the fine work of archaeological analysis of the sacred open space of Hung-e Azhdar in Khuzestan (Messina 2015). As for the cultural temperament of Iran at the turn of our era, see the pages of Arnaldo Momigliano on "Iranians and Greeks" (Momigliano 1975), and in general most of the contributions published in Pierre Leriche's work on the "orient hellénisé" (Leriche 2014).

<sup>30</sup> The first reference to comparison with the Telephos frieze finally appeared in Faccenna 2001 (182-3), and was subsequently played down in Faccenna (2002, 139) in favour of the Via Portuense tomb in Rome. Among the technical components shared with the Hellenistic world of Asia Minor is the language of markings discussed above.

middle ground and background – figures that move behind the dividing elements (the columns of the colonnade, but also the architectural structures and the trees) – suggest a before and after along the sequence. The scene of exit from the city gate (S 709, \*37) [fig. 57] and the panel with the wrestlers S 1128 (\*50) offer two clear examples of this. In both cases, now from the right, now from the left, there are figures that come from behind (corresponding to before or after according to whether they come from the right or from the left). In the first panel the rider who comes from behind practically conveys the impression that we need only wait a second to see him move on and another arrive from behind, following him. In the second case, the same convention (half the face visible) – we expect to see him coming towards the observer, in the meantime moving in his direction. More examples are to be seen in panels S 1112, S 1412 (\*47, \*61b) and SS I 3.<sup>31</sup>

If, then, this is the conception of the Frieze, how does it compare with the Telephos frieze? To what extent can the latter be considered a ‘continuous frieze’ compared with the former?

Actually, the Telephos frieze, too, consists of a series of exemplary scenes in a biographical cycle divided by conventional architectural and landscape elements. Take, for example, panel 3 (following the new 1995 numbering, Pergamonmuseum) where the two figures (Neaira and Heracles) are back to back, but separated by an architectural element and an overhanging plant element. The scenes involving the former and the latter are separated in time. Elsewhere the dividing elements take the form of columns (*trennende Säule*), as in the case of panel 44-45 with the scene of two seated men facing one another on two rocks (let us keep this scene in mind), and so forth. In other panels the architectural elements are enhanced with the presence of birds (panel 49), as are the trees in the Saidu Frieze (S 1128, \*51d). Thus, while the Saidu Frieze shows evident, regular division, the Telephos frieze hides the division, but cannot be considered a continuous frieze – a term that could be applied only to Trajan’s Column and the Column of Antoninus, if even to them. The concept behind the great friezes is the same – a heroic narrative that begins with the oneiric artefacts and concludes with the heroic death on the *kline* amidst the mourning of those left behind.

The Pergamon altar had just been built when at Barikot-Bazira and Charsadda-Puṣkalāvati the Greek king Menander or one of his successors set to work on that great plan of organisation of the Indo-Greek territories that came to be under way subsequent to the victory over Eucratides, after 150 BCE. Speaking of conceptual contaminations, let us take a look at Plutarch’s account of Menander at a distance of a century and a half; actually, his life story mirrors that of the Buddha (moderation in life, death and contention over the relics, division of the relics and creation of commemorative mausoleums):

a un certo Menandro, invece, che aveva ben regnato sulla Battriana ed era morto nel corso di una spedizione militare, le città resero in comune i rituali onori funebri, ma poi se ne contesero i resti e a fatica pervennero a un accordo, stabilendo di ritirarsi dopo aver equamente suddiviso le

**31** Here one could even imagine the possibility of multimedia fruition of these otherwise mute artefacts, which, like the exposed edicts of Aśoka, could be the ‘seat’ (or the ‘set’) of an animation of the scene, with bards, musicians, readers and bystanders, scopic supports capable of scenic evocation, a true place of *kinēma gráphein* (I thank here F. Squarcini).

ceneri, e di erigere ciascuna un monumento in suo onore. (Plutarch, *Moralia* 821d-e; transl. by G. Pisani, in Lelli, Pisani 2017)<sup>32</sup>

If Menander undergoes through this shift into the intellectual world of Plutarch, we might reasonably imagine that echoes of the heroic cycles, men of moderation, offspring of the gods and founders of dynasties (Aeneas, Telephos) could make themselves felt – through tales of the deeds of other heroes who traversed Asia recounted by storytellers – also in the Buddhist environment of the Iranizing populations of Gandhara. This is one possibility. The other lies in the echo of the wonder of the monument itself. It may, indeed, be the Pergamon altar that was anathematised as the “throne of Satan” in the *Apocalypse* of John (2, 113).<sup>33</sup> After all, do we not find echoes of the art of Pergamon still resonating in the small ateliers working for the shrines of Panr I, Gumbatand Abbasaheb-china in Swat? Let me recommend the study published by Pia Brancaccio with a contribution by myself (Brancaccio, Olivieri 2019). In Rome, the art of Pergamon, and precisely the art of the altar of Telephos, was to inspire the Late Republican celebratory of monuments in which Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli insightfully detected the principle of what is called *arte plebea*. Significantly, this tradition had its beginnings after 191-190 BCE, after the war against Antioch III and the conquest of Asia Minor. Sixty years later the Attalid kingdom of Pergamon, with its newly built Altar, came under Roman administration (133 BCE).

Non ci sorprenderà il fatto che da questo clima del tutto particolare non sia sorta, ancora nel I secolo a.C., una visione artistica nuova, una espressione originale e che domini invece un singolare eclettismo che porta ad accostare, in una stessa opera, parti eseguite secondo tradizioni artistiche del tutto diverse tra loro. Questa dell’eclettismo è la prima caratteristica che distingue l’arte romana da quella medio-italica che aveva sopperito fino ad allora alle necessità artistiche di Roma. Potremmo aggiungere, anche, che essa distingue l’arte romana da ogni altra cultura artistica, perché di solito l’eclettismo sta alla fine di una civiltà, è un fenomeno di esaurimento e di intellettualismo. Qui, invece, lo troviamo all’inizio. (Bianchi Bandinelli 1981, 51-6)<sup>34</sup>

This eclecticism “was prompted by the craze [of the new élites] to take material possession [...] of the heritage of classical and Hellenistic Greece”

**32** En. transl.: “To a certain Menander, however, who had ruled well over Bactria and had died in the course of a military expedition, the cities jointly dedicated the ritual funerary honours, but then fell into contention over the remains and with difficulty arrived at an agreement, determining to depart after having made fair division of his ashes, and each to raise a monument in his honour”.

**33** See the study by Kristen Seaman on the ‘fortune’ of Pergamon (Seaman 2016).

**34** En. transl.: “It is hardly surprising that no new, original artistic vision had yet emerged in the first century BCE in this very particular climate where a singular form of eclecticism predominated, leading to the juxtaposition in a single work of parts executed in accordance with highly diverse artistic traditions. This eclecticism is in fact the first characteristic that distinguished Roman art from the Middle Italic art that had so far served for the artistic needs of Rome. Indeed, we might add that it distinguished Roman art from every other artistic culture, since eclecticism usually marks the end of civilisation, resulting from exhaustion and intellection. Here, however, we find it at the beginning”.



(51).<sup>35</sup> It is in the origins of this eclecticism, as also of its secondary technical and formal manifestations, that, as I see it, lie the reasons that – paraphrasing – “distinguish the art of Gandhara from every other artistic culture”. I would add to the observations of the great Italian archaeologist that, in reality, the “plebeian” art of Rome and the art of Gandhara were, behind the ruffled surface of formal eclecticism, the new form of art that had yet to come into its own but was moving in that direction.<sup>36</sup>

In Rome – Bianchi Bandinelli notes – this ‘eclecticism’ found its first openings in funerary – i.e. ‘plebeian’ – art, as for example in the Lusius Storarx monuments (Chieti), with its (strikingly ‘modern’) group scene showing an assembly of magistrates. The first public monument that comes close to the style of Pergamon is the so-called ‘altar’ of Domitius Ahenobarbus, where we find the same formal dichotomy observed in the Altar of Pergamon between the Gigantomachy of the principal frieze (= procession of Poseidon and Amphitrite in the ‘altar’) of a mature and major master, and the more restrained story of Telephos (= civil ceremonials seen in the ‘altar’) attributed to a young master. The dating of the Altar, “the earliest of the public monuments adorned with sculptures which we have for Roman art” (Bianchi Bandinelli 1981, 56) is attributed to the very last years of the second century BCE.

As for the eclectic evocations of the scenes used to convey the visual message, suffice it to take the fine and telling example chosen by Tonio Hölscher, the Aeneas relief (one of the heroes represented with ‘biographical’ narration) on the Ara Pacis (Hölscher 1993, 61; 2004, 82).<sup>37</sup> Each of the parts forming the relief in question harks back to different traditions, each chosen on the basis of the most suitable model to convey the intended message. The idyllic landscape, distant and serene, is represented with a Hellenistic approach (as also to be seen in the Telephos frieze), Aeneas is represented as an austere, classical figure, best suited to conveying the sense of *auctoritas* which the Augustan adoptive genealogy is meant to evoke, while the more vibrant, frowning non-classical attendant recalls the figures we find

<sup>35</sup> The Italian original reads: “nasce dallo smanioso desiderio [da parte delle nuove élites] di appropriarsi materialmente [...] l’eredità della Grecia classica e ellenistica” (51).

<sup>36</sup> Both arts seem almost to be “precursors of the late antique”. On the incipient phases of the formation of an artistic phenomenon, I find enlightening what Mario Sironi wrote in *I maestri antichi* (1936, in Sironi 2000): “Erratissimo il giudizio sull’arcaismo, cioè di risorgenza dal nulla. Si rifletta che cinque secoli di arte bizantina precedettero queste opere [...]. Queste sculture del lombardo Antellami [sic], il meraviglioso, il perfettissimo maestro che inizia quasi la serie gloriosa delle grandi figure italiane, dopo Roma, i bizantini e i primi gotici, hanno respiro altissimo e delicatissima bellezza” (Sironi 2000, 98) (En. transl.: “The judgement on archaism, that is of resurgence from nothing, is very wrong. Consider that five centuries of Byzantine art preceded these works [...]. These sculptures by the Lombard Antelami, the marvellous, the most perfect master who almost began the glorious series of great Italian figures, after Rome, the Byzantines and the early Gothic, have the highest breath and most delicate beauty”). On this and the criticism of the *ex novo* birth of artistic phenomena, the Renaissance for example, see Didi-Huberman 2009, 90-1: behind it there is no ‘miracle’ as Vasari writes, but imitation through reproduction, formal study, casts, transmission of images, the ‘techniques of the imprint’, which will be briefly discussed in the following pages.

<sup>37</sup> On the contribution by Hölscher, see the study by Martina Stoye (2020), whose conclusions were anticipated by Maurizio Taddei (1963a; 1963b; 1964-65). Both Tonio Hölscher and Maurizio Taddei worked on the lines of Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli. Domenico Faccenna, taking a different angle, started from the approach of the same school, which looks back directly to Alessandro Della Seta. As far as I know, it was Marco Galli who first in Italy pointed out the importance of Hölscher for studies on Gandhara. The first German edition of Hölscher’s *Römische Bildsprache als semantisches System* was published in 1987.



**Figure 63**  
Émblema, plaster, Termez  
(after Leriche 2015, fig. 24)

in the Hellenistic scenes of sacrifice: “at every stage, the entire repertoire of the Greek art was available for use, to be applied in accordance with the intended message of the subject” (Hölscher 2004, 82).<sup>38</sup>

That this phenomenon of formal citation, as described by Hölscher, i.e. the phenomenon of eclecticism mentioned by Bianchi Bandinelli, was a new (and technically innovative) phenomenon in Rome is confirmed by the way it was received by Pliny, who criticised the inauthenticity of the portraits of the newly rich superimposed on copies of Greek athletes, heroes and gods, illegitimate images according to him, which he contrasted with the severe portraits of ancestors from the good old days, painted or made in wax (*Naturalis Historia* XXXV, 4).<sup>39</sup>

In non-Greek (or no longer Greek) Asia, the lure of citation - which is at one with the process of social emulation, hence with elites and urban centres - would seem less visible than in Rome. This is not the case, and its history can be read through the transmission of models by means of casts, copies and cartoons. Let us take the Pergamene reference: the fact that it was present is proven by the discovery in northern Bactria at Termez (Uzbekistan) of a plaster cast or model depicting a scene from Gigantomachy. [fig. 63]. Although it was duly published (Leriche 2015), it seems to have attracted scant attention. Termez was a capital city located along the course of the Amu Darya (Oxus); the cast was found in Chingiz-tepe and is comparable for material, and possibly also function, with the plaster casts or medallions from the urban site of Begram II (another large capital in the

<sup>38</sup> In the Italian edition we read: “[P]er ogni livello [fase] era a disposizione tutto il repertorio dell’arte greca, applicabile a seconda del contenuto del messaggio da trasmettere” (Hölscher 1993, 62). See Pappalardo, Messina 2019.

<sup>39</sup> *Expressi cera vultus and imagines pictas* (*Naturalis Historia* XXXV, 6). See Didi-Huberman 2009, 57-65. See also Settis, Anguissola, Gasparotto 2015.

south of the Hindukush, in Kapisa, not far from Kabul).<sup>40</sup> In both cases the finds are attributable to the ‘Kushan’ phase of the two cities, between the second and third century. These medallions, like the medallions of Alexandria, Baia and Sabratha, are associated with a production of models that remained in use from the Hellenistic period onwards, and indeed for a long time. These two-dimensional and three-dimensional plaster models were used by sculptors together with the cartoons and toolkits. They served to create both counter-casts for modelling and the bases for embossing in goldsmithing (see, e.g., Baratte, Falk 2001; Lone, Khan 2019). In a recent article Anna Filigenzi, presenting sculptural models and casts as vectors for the transmission of scenes and iconographic models, took the case of a cast of a decorative mask with Okeanos, showing a Hellenistic approach, which is found to have been applied in exactly the same way in the same period of Late Antiquity at Mes Aynak and Tapa Sardar (two sites in eastern Afghanistan), again in a Buddhist environment.

The Termez model must have been the result of a progressive copying process, but its origin is certainly to be sought in the principal frieze of the altar of Pergamon, perhaps precisely in one of the missing panels (as seen on the north side of the great frieze would be a likely hypothesis). Again, in connection with the Pergamene themes, see, for example, a figure of Rhea-Cybele (south side of the great frieze), which we find echoed on a small Gandharan dish in schist no later than the mid-first century CE, now in Rome (MNAOR 14849; Lo Muzio 2002, pl. XIII.B). Minor Pergamene themes, like those of the painter Sosus, or the sea *thiasoi*, proliferated in the Gandharan art of Swat in the second century (see, e.g., Brancaccio, Olivieri 2019; Olivieri, Iori 2021). On this the exegetes of Gandharan classicism offer ample material, and I hardly need go further here.

## 8.6 Scenes

There are four points that I will try to summarise having got so far. The first is that the art of Gandharan did not owe its artistic maturity to a passive formal contamination. The second point is that a positive contamination was already under way in Gandhara before the Kushan period. Thirdly, as has already been demonstrated by Anna Filigenzi, what we have here is not so much classicization of Gandhara as the birth of a new art in India, to which the creation of a mobile geography of pilgrimage spaces also contributes (narrative friezes allow for a pilgrimage in time and space made at

<sup>40</sup> Begram II is a phase of Begram, the most important one in terms of findings and data, dating between the end of the Saka-Parthian period (i.e. Begram I) and the Kushan-Sasanian period (c. 300 CE). On the chronology of Begram III (post fourth-fifth CE) there is still no unanimous consensus. As for the Begram II medallions, I will recall the study by Alessandro Adriani published in *Archeologia Classica* in 1955, which first presented this material to Italian scholars. Among the materials of Middle Asian import or Hellenistic-Roman influence, I would not want to forget the bronze handles from Charsadda (Coarelli 1966) “that were greeted by scholars with surprising coolness” (Taddei 1990, 355). On Begram see (for the time being) Morris 2021. A digression: on Hellenistic survivals in Inner Asia one should quote Salviati 2021 (361, pl. 5.1) and the tomb of General Huo Qubing (140-117 BCE) and the comparison with the Amazon and Barbarian from Anzio (copy from a Greek original of the second century BCE, Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo, Rome) (Salviati 2021, pl. 5.2): “Granite sculptures such as these [...] have no precedent in Chinese stone art [where] there are no examples of statuary in the round and of large dimensions” (see Nickel 2020, 114). The translation from the original Italian is mine.

a single site). The fourth point, which links up with the first, is that the art of the Frieze already shows artistic maturity and mastery. The local context that saw its development was characterised by the presence of élites responsive to Graeco-Iranian taste that had already been formed.

As we have seen, this new artistic creation already revealed an eclectic side in which, rather than the effects of a process of 'acculturation', we find the results of a contamination not passively experienced but sought after. This development appears to have come about in the ateliers thanks to artists able to interpret the sensibilities of court élites. Particularly relevant here are Bianchi Bandinelli's observations on the 'plebeian' art of Rome and, above all, Maurizio Taddei's insights in two masterly articles (Taddei 1963a, 1964-65).

The technical process applied in the art of Gandhara is, therefore, the same which we find utilised in Rome, developed through abstraction of the forms (from the original context), to be standardised in use. Let us briefly return to Hölscher: in what appears to the art historian to be a theoretical process, he clearly identifies an essentially practical approach deriving from the combination of client and atelier:

Roman sculptors were certainly as a rule not theoreticians, but manual workers, who did not think about aesthetic value-systems; the same was true of the general public. But what the writers on art had formulated in theory could have, indeed must have, resulted in unpremeditated, spontaneous practice. The commissioning of a statue, it goes without saying, affected the subject in the first instance. The sculptors, seeking a suitable model for it, could doubtless perceive by pure intuition which models from Greek art were, according to the popular ways of thinking in his time, the most appropriate ones. (Hölscher 2004, 98-9)<sup>41</sup>

A similar cultural process has been recognised in the Arsacid world of Western Iran:

Arsacid artisans were able to select those subjects, spread in Hellenistic Mediterranean, useful to the communication needs of the new ruling class. A precise form of resilience occurred in second / first century Central Asia, whose result was the birth of a totally new, independent form of art. (Pappalardo, Messina 2019, 78)

As for the clients, what sort of awareness might we attribute to them – how might they have contributed to the choice of subjects adopted by the sculptors of Gandhara, and in particular here in the Frieze? Many of these artists, and certainly the Master himself, were professionals who had their portfolios of cartoons and models, their leather cases with their chisels, their toolboxes with their drills and bags with mallets. Thus it seems to me that

<sup>41</sup> In the Italian edition we read: "Di solito, però, gli scultori romani non erano dei teorizzatori, bensì artigiani che non stavano a meditare su sistemi di valori estetici; e lo stesso vale per gran parte del pubblico. Quanto era stato formulato in via teorica dagli scrittori d'arte, può e deve essere avvenuto in materia del tutto irriflessa e spontanea nella pratica. La commissione di un'opera d'arte ovviamente concerneva innanzitutto il tema. Lo scultore che poi cercava per esso un prototipo adeguato poteva senz'altro riconoscere intuitivamente quali modelli dell'arte greca fossero i più adatti secondo le idee correnti del tempo [...] In maniera analogamente irriflessa doveva procedere la comprensione dell'osservatore" (Hölscher 1993, 81).



**Figures 64a-b** Panel (Victoria and Albert Museum, online collection [V&A Owned Content [V&A Owned Content, © Victoria and Albert Museum, London]], VAM IM 93.1939 = Ackermann 1975, pl. XXV1b) – Saka coin (Azes) (BM online collection, BM IOC.197; reproduced with the courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

they played an active role in proposing the models they knew to suit best to this or that scene. Of course, the clients must also have played their part, while the artist had the task of understanding and directing their taste. We might take, for example the case of the statues of Kushan officials and sovereigns from Mathura, Peshawar and Surkh Kotal (Olivieri, Sinisi 2021). Both at Mathura and at Peshawar, where major schools of sculpture were well established, but also at Surkh Kotal, where both Gandharan and Bactrian sculptors were at work, it seems evident that the artists did not seem very happy about the precise formal and iconographic indications of their clients, formalised rigidly, it seems to me, individual communication deliberately conveyed through the coin models. There is, in fact, a flourishing literature on the issue of relations between sculpture and iconographic coin models, for example in the images of the Kushan kings,<sup>42</sup> or the Buddha images on Kushan coins (Tanabe 1974 et al.). Above all in the Kushan environment, which was in practice a great ‘common market’ from Bactria to the Ganges plain and, through intermediaries, to the Indian Ocean, coins were the physical connectors and ideal vectors of the ‘models’ throughout the networks in physical space.

Coins, as a possible iconographic source having widespread circulation may well have also had a major role in the dynamic economy of the Saka-Parthian period. This was a time when the market first appeared to be soundly based on regular issues in copper alloy, and so on a fiduciary type of economy that might be described as ‘proto-financial’.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> See the observations by Fabrizio Sinisi, in particular in Olivieri, Sinisi 2021.

<sup>43</sup> See the reappraisal of the issue of the ‘Great Debasement’ concerning Saka period copper alloy issues in the contribution by Omar Coloru in Coloru et al. 2022.



**Figures 65a-b** Bimaran casket, detail (BM OA 1900.2-9; GNU Free Documentation License; reproduced with the courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum). Butkara I, B 3215 (after Faccenna 1962-64, pl. CCLXXXIX); details

Here is an example from this period, namely the panel we have already seen showing the scene of the sovereign returning with the relics, or a procession with relics, on the back of a Bactrian camel (VAM, IM 85.1939, Ackermann 1975, 89, pl. XXXIb). The sovereign may in fact possibly be a king of the North or West, like our *Utarasena*. The image, which appears to evidence the work of the school of the Master, clearly owes much to the rare iconography of an *esachalch* (1.9 gr.) of *Azes* (Saka sovereign) (type Senior 81.10).<sup>44</sup> The two images are shown above [figs 64a-b].

While on the subject of ‘symbolic capital’ we have a major contribution by Marco Galli who first used it for the art of Gandhara and the cultural climate of the *Qdiraja*.<sup>45</sup>

The process of affirmation and consolidation of the new form of power also came about through a calculated use of images. Certain themes were selected from the traditional mythological and religious patrimony and transformed into an effective expression of the new ideology of the Hellenistic kings. For this reason the creation of a new visual language occurred in a climate of fierce rivalry and great experimentation.

What dynamics and what connections between social context and intellectual activity can be identified within the Gandharan milieu? Schol-

<sup>44</sup> British Museum, IOC.197. The obverse bears the legend “ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ / ΑΖΟΥ” ([coin] of the Great King of Kings *Azes*); on the reverse the same appears in *Kharoshthi*. See Kadgaonkar 1996-97.

<sup>45</sup> Then followed by Elisa Iori (see Olivieri, Iori 2021). The concept was first formulated by Pierre Bordieu in 1979 (see Bordieu 2013).

ars will have to concentrate their future studies on this question in order to identify the connection between forms and artistic production on one hand, function and artistic perception on the other. (Galli 2011, 282, 286-7)

Thus, to paraphrase Bianchi Bandinelli, the artistic phenomenon of Gandhara as we see it manifested at Butkara I and Saidu arose from the “*smanioso desiderio*” (‘eager desire’ or ‘craze’) of the local élites to appropriate and represent themselves materially through the forms of the “symbolic capital” of Hellenistic Greece and Hellenised Iran, to which ritual innovations (the creation of mobile geographies of pilgrimage) undoubtedly contributed. We must bear in mind that the concept of ‘symbolic capital’ as a combination of material and intangible resources is associated with the concept of ‘exclusiveness’. By this we mean the capacity of the élites to take over the vectors – above all the human vectors, the artists – able to express this capital of images and forms through their artistic production, having in their possession the techniques and basic models.<sup>46</sup>

While on the subject of the circulation and use of models within the Gandharan artistic tradition, I might cite the example of the Bimaran reliquary. Here I am referring to both the architectural framing with the carinated arch and the iconography of the Buddha, both appearing in comparable form on a decorated doorjamb from a Butkara I (B 3215; Faccenna 1962-64, pl. CCLXXXIX) belonging to the latest phases of the first century or, probably, the second century. Note that in this case the figure of the Buddha is very close to that of the Bimaran reliquary except for the position of the right hand and feet, as well as the presence/absence of the moustache (an important detail present only in the reliquary). As for the feet (in both cases showing a *lento pede* movement) it feels like a mirror image: at Bimaran the left foot is shown sideways, the right standing, while at Butkara I it is the opposite. Note that the hand gesture at Butkara I is backwards: it shows the back instead of the palm. These small but revealing differences might constitute evidence that both images derived from the same model. Again, these two images are reproduced above [figs 65a-b].<sup>47</sup>

In this first century CE in the Saka-Parthian territories, work in the atelier may have proceeded as a sort of universal practice that had taken on a particular form in Gandhara. It would be reductive to sum this up as a process of so-called ‘influences’ and formal acculturation between the two ends of southern Eurasia. If we could see how the Buddhist art of Swat arrived at the Frieze, we might also appreciate the sense of the conceptual revolution which, importing celebrated models and adopting them with authoritative flair (as authors), also imported the sequence, arriving at a new synthesis in which the events in the life of Siddhārtha, as in the case of Telephos, take the form of a heroic tale, an exemplary biography, becoming the *acta* of the Buddha. The *acta* represent the transmission of the story (oral/visual)

<sup>46</sup> For this region and for some of the major monuments it is quite possible that there was the sort of ‘competition’ among clients to secure the services of the best and perhaps most renowned of the artists. A similar competition, but without rivals, could have taken place, for example, at Surkh Kotal (see Olivieri, Sinisi 2021, fn. 6).

<sup>47</sup> Of the fragments from the Butkara I, I recall one (B 4324) that is particularly close (Faccenna, Taddei 1962-64, pl. CCV). We shall be returning to it with A. Filigenzi in a future study. About the position of the right hands of the two Buddhas: the position showing the palm is what was later codified as *abhayamudrā*, while the one showing the back can be identified as *namaskāramudrā* (personal communication by Ciro Lo Muzio).

in a new phase of 'reproduction': not only beyond time (through narration) but also beyond space (with the multiplication of the sacred topography).<sup>48</sup>

We are in a phase that can be defined, as a cultural context, as 'Saka', a term that defines Scythian populations, who may have been present in these regions as early as the end of the second millennium.<sup>49</sup> In their wanderings, these peoples have widely shared a *koiné* of images and models, the origins of which are rooted in the visual communicative language of southern and inner Eurasia and which was formed throughout the first millennium BC. Alongside the almost paroxysmal taste for decoration, which seems to be an end in itself but derives from their textile, felt and toreutic art, we find in their language - which brings together the best of sedentary peoples - models of near-eastern, Achaemenian, classical and Hellenistic visual communication. The classical and Hellenistic baggage, which is at the origin of the formal choice of Frieze art, was therefore not necessarily a reflection of a cultural dependence on the Hellenistic world, as we have been accustomed to think, but - perhaps more simply - a part of that wider symbolic capital that could be used for the self-representation of the elites. In that historical moment, the Swat elites found in that classical and Hellenistic baggage the most expressive language to render what they perceived as their special religious identity - Buddhism - and their political role, which they felt increased by it (the *Senavarma* inscription proves it). Moreover, behind them in Gandhara and Swat there was no definite artistic tradition to refer to. Indeed, we have no evidence of any pictorial art or modelling prior to these phases, if we exclude terracotta figurines and rock shelter art - both effective to the eye but crude -, the geometric decoration of necropolis vessels and the earliest Bronze Age vase painting. This should be remembered: Buddhist art from Gandhara and Swat are the earliest forms of elaborate art that have come down to us (excluding any art on perishable media that has now disappeared). Remaining with stone sculpture, which is not perishable, the phylogeny of Buddhist art is not at all clear; we do not recognise the pre-formative phases, except for those of the movement that has already begun. In architecture, monumental constructions, stupas and city walls had already been built by the third and second centuries BCE. As far as sculpture is concerned, however, nothing: here we do not have the geometric *kouroi* of the protohistory of Pheidias modelling.

In this context, it must be admitted quite simply on one hand that if the artists, the artisans, were local, their *Maestro* must have been trained elsewhere, and that - on the other hand - the elites chose to involve workers accustomed to working with a baggage of exotic models, in this case the classical and Hellenistic one, with its instruments and forms. With these premises, a complex, contaminated and new form of art cannot but be born.

We will approach the subject of contamination starting from the iconographic material in the *Telephos* frieze as mentioned above - the two men sitting on the rock almost mirroring each other. This recalls the widespread model of a man seated on a rock, weary, one leg stretched forward, foot resting easily on the heel, the other bent somewhat back, instep bent, toes set firmly on the ground. At Pergamon, too, this scene echoes earlier scenes. My

<sup>48</sup> Obviously here I am quoting Walter Benjamin.

<sup>49</sup> As studies of the ancient genome of ancient Swat inhumates tell us (Narasimhan et al. 2019). With reference to the so-called toilet trays, read the final considerations in Lo Muzio 2002.



knowledge of classical and Hellenistic art may be somewhat rusty, but my thoughts turn, for example, to the example of the two Pelasgians on panel B of the Ionic Temple of Ilisos in Athens (Beschi 2002, fig. 6; D'Agostino 2017). The two Pelasgians, rather like the two men on Pergamon panels 44-46, are of different ages, one young, one old, the latter looking ahead, the other seemingly turning his head. In the Telephos cycle the Pelasgians are not present, so the young master who sculpted the frieze used here an earlier formal model, taken as genre (youth and age),<sup>50</sup> outside the narrative context referred to. Quite possibly at Ilisos earlier models were echoed, subsequently formalised in the wounded Philoctetes model, familiar as from the Homeric epic and Attic vase painting onward, and eventually reechoed in the numerous many seated heroes of ancient visual narrative, all seated in the same way, be they Greek, Roman, Scythian.<sup>51</sup> This scene of Philoctetes prompted a major study by Taddei published – significantly – in 1963 in *Dialoghi di Archeologia*, the journal edited by Bianchi Bandinelli (Taddei 1963a).<sup>52</sup>

Taddei's study starts from a silver *skyphos* found at Hoby in Denmark (Kopenhagen Nationalmuseet). This precious artefact of the Julio-Claudian period shows two episodes in the mythical life of filler detectors Philoctetes: still young, suffering from a snakebite, a companion holding him from behind, and in his old age seated on a rock, leaning on a stick, facing a companion who is also seated on a boulder. The second scene is reminiscent of the highly successful iconographic model we have already met, while the first harks back to another successful model which reappears in the scenes known as the *Helfergruppe*. Both scenes, as Taddei observes, show contaminations insofar as neither is a replica or copy of another, but both emerge from the coexistence of various scenes that had already become canonical, combined to create a new scene representing a narrative context different to that of the precursors. The process seems to be complicated, intellectual, almost, and would indeed be so as seen from an iconological point of view. But if, like Taddei, we conclude that it was all the result of what we might call a 'universal practice', which boils down to the atelier routine, we can appreciate how naturally it came about. The ateliers of the artists and stonecutters had various models at their disposal, some three-dimensional of important or well-known works, which were used to put together scenes as if they were (in fact they were) repertoires. Thus we see in the Hoby *skyphos* a scene harking back to Phidias (the young man supported by his companion) added without responding to any specific narrative need, nor adding a new episode to the story, but simply being congenial and fitting in with the narration: "[l]'inserzione di questa figura è del tutto superflua ed ha la sua giustificazione soltanto come puro elemento di gusto compositivo" (Taddei 1963a, 202).<sup>53</sup>

**50** See the images reproduced here of the two small metopes from Amluk-dara representing these genres: the old man and the young man, the young Brahman and the aged ascetic.

**51** See the famous vase from the Scythian necropolis of Kül Oba near Kerch in the Crimea (Rostovzeff 1922, pl. XXII).

**52** Particularly useful is the first footnote where Taddei's thanks go to Faccenna but also to "il Prof. R. Bianchi Bandinelli che cortesemente ha voluto leggere il dattiloscritto di questo articolo e mi è stato generoso di utili consigli" (Prof. R. Bianchi Bandinelli who kindly read the typescript of this article and give me a great deal of useful advice).

**53** En. transl.: "The inclusion of this figure is perfectly superfluous and finds justification only as a simple element of compositional taste".



Figure 66 S 800 (after Faccenna 2001, tab. 120a)

There is in fact a connection between this and the artistic production of Butkara I coeval with the Frieze. The four reliefs considered by Taddei show wrestling scenes, competitions associated with the cycle of the youth of Siddhārtha. In particular, we will dwell on the last three, the first being of minor and possibly later production, while the others clearly belong to the phase in which the 'drawing style' reached maturity, and which can be placed close to the period of execution of the Saidu Frieze, possibly shortly after.<sup>54</sup>

Su ognuno di essi è rappresentata una scena che, per quanto mi risulta, non è nota da altri rilievi del Gandhāra. Un giovane, vestito col solo *paridhāna*, si abbandona a terra privo di sensi mentre un compagno, alle sue spalle, lo sostiene afferrandolo sotto le braccia. (Taddei 1963a, 198)<sup>55</sup>

<sup>54</sup> B 3982, B 4100, B 5896, B 7743: respectively figs 1-4 in Taddei 1963a.

<sup>55</sup> En. transl.: "On each of these is depicted a scene which, as far as I know, does not appear in the reliefs in Gandhāra. A young man, wearing only a *paridhāna*, falls fainting to the ground while a companion behind him supports him, holding him under the arms".



Figure 67 S 1124 (after Faccenna 2001, tab. 49)

Here, too, let me repeat, paraphrasing the above observations, the scene was added without responding to any specific narrative (we do not find it in the Buddhist texts). However, here it adds to the story a new episode which would in fact be repeated, to become canonical in Gandharan art.<sup>56</sup>

To the four reliefs presented by Taddei we may add some others from Saidu which also led to another model. The relief from a minor stupa at Saidu (S 800; \*120) [fig. 66], discussed in a second study (Taddei 1964-65), is of exceptional importance: two groups of wrestlers as seen from behind. The first, following the small frieze from the left, shows a triumphant wrestler lifting his opponent up by the belt; the second shows a wrestler who has passed out, bent head supported (from the left) by the shoulders of a companion, while the third, in front of him, revives (from the right), pouring water onto his back from a vessel which he holds raised over his enfeebled companion. The frieze combines the *Helfergruppe* model with that of the *famulus* pouring water over his older companion, and the model scene of Hercules holding Antaeus up by the belt. Interestingly enough, the role of Hercules is played by Siddhartha, recognisable even from behind by his powerful shoulders, voluminous curls (two of the *lakṣana*, or signs of the Buddha) and the nimbus around his head, while his defeated opponent's face is attributed with the same wild features as Antaeus - a triangular face with chin pointing upwards in the effort to escape from his opponent's hold. The relief is clearly subsequent to the Frieze, but it must have found inspiration in it, divided as it appears between two Gandharan-Corinthian semi-columns (one lost). The scene of Hercules and Antaeus also recurs in one of the reliefs at Butkara (B 7743): it appears to be the same scene, observed from behind at Saidu, in front at Butkara I. It also seems to be by the same hand, as if they were artists specialised in certain scenes, as appears to be confirmed for the minor scenes looking back to classical models, studied with Pia Brancaccio, in pieces from Panr I, Gumbat and Abba-saheb-china (Brancaccio, Olivieri 2019). The conclusion Taddei comes to is as simple as it is striking: this scene, depicted from the two sides, can be accounted for with the use of a three-dimensional model (Taddei 1964-65, 177). Thus these contaminations come from the ateliers. As for the chronology, it is worth noting that this iconography of Hercules and Antaeus, familiar as from the Hellenistic age, only found real circulation in the Roman world as from the first century BC, continuing to occupy a place in West-

**56** Quotation as creation, copying as art, can be found in Homeric and oral poetry in general according to Milman Parry (*rhapsōidein* means 'to sew together a song'). Homeric poetry was the result of formulaic thinking, the stitching together of 'prefabricated parts', pre-existing images. I have already partly quoted the following passage, which I quote here in full: "The oral poet had an abundant repertoire of epithets diversified enough to provide an epithet for any metrical exigency that might arise as he stitched his story together - differently at each telling, for, as will be seen, oral poets do not normally work from verbatim memorization of their verse". "In any case, in the Iliad and the Odyssey Homer was normally taken to be fully accomplished, consummately skilled. Yet it now began to appear that he had had some kind of phrase book in his head. Careful study of the sort Milman Parry was doing showed that he repeated formula after formula. The meaning of the Greek term 'rhapsodize', *rhaps idein*, 'to stitch song together' (*rhaptein*, to stitch; *ide*, song), became ominous: *Homer stitched together prefabricated parts. Instead of a creator, you had an assembly-line worker*" (Ong 2002, 22-3; italics added). I would like to mention at this point the relationship between technical action, visual creation, memorisation and the creation of 'songs': Minardi (2020, 18), points us to Tuck's (2006) work on textile art and the creation of the ancient epos ("Singing the Rug"), which went unnoticed by many colleagues despite the fact that it also speaks of India. Cf. *sūtra* (\**syū-*, *suēre*) = to sew. Finally, once again we refer the reader to Cristina Scherrer-Schaub's (2016, 26 ff.) reflections on this topic.

ern art up to the Renaissance and beyond. With interesting synchrony, this model then arrived in Gandhara, turning up in many scenes, not necessarily concerning competitions.<sup>57</sup>

In the Saidu Frieze, too, we find traces of similar compositional patterns, with scenes harking back to models like those we have already seen, but also to others yet to be clarified with precision. Of the former, I will mention three parts of the Frieze in which these models are hard to make out in the fragmentary material but seem to show through: S 727 (\*40a), S 792 (\*40c-d), and above all the superb relief S 1124 (\*49) [fig. 67]. Here we find both the exhausted companion and the scene of the pouring of water, in a scene showing exceptional sculptural qualities, particularly powerful in the *disiecta membra* emphasised by the fragmentary state of the panel, but elegant in the sinewy musculature. Everything that needs be said about this piece is to be found in Faccenna's study (2001, 265).

Of the other scenes, our attention is drawn to the scene with a boat (S 20, \*12b), for which one is tempted to seek easy comparisons in the West, above all in mosaics and megalographic wall paintings on Nilotic subjects.<sup>58</sup> But we need not necessarily look so far. Faccenna finds the most significant of the comparisons in India (Faccenna 2001, 216-17). The eastern portal of stupa 1 at Sanchi (a little earlier than the Frieze) portrays a boat with the same system of planking held together by plates and three frontal figures, strongly reminiscent of the frontal figures in the scene at Saidu.

### 8.7 The Fortune, the Copies. Swat, Miran

Discussing what I have defined as 'universal practice', we have already considered the question of the transfer into the Frieze of repetitive elements such as trees, for example, and indeed semi-columns and capitals. Undoubtedly a system of cartoons (patterns) was used, using very fine parchment or birch bark. The design could come out in positive as many times as required: it sufficed to apply a little wax and then press over with a stylus, possibly of lead. This way the image was transferred onto the slab. There can be no doubt that the scenes best preserved, like those of the trees on the right, were designed only once and then replicated. Superimposing the images of various different panels, the trees match perfectly [fig. 56]. The process was also applied in the reverse. Anna Filigenzi has ascertained without a shadow of doubt that the paintings in monastery V at Miran, signed by the painter Tita, derived in part from the Saidu Frieze (Filigenzi 2006a). Here the same process took place by virtue of which certain Hellenistic stereotypes – the seated Philoctetes, Heracles lifting Antaeus – found their way to Saidu, and not only Saidu, and were used for scenes which have nothing to do with the personages portrayed. This is a case of contamination of subject matter, as Alessandro Della Seta thought, conveyed at the technical level rather than by content, for we find models circulating from one atelier to another. In

<sup>57</sup> I am thinking of a step-riser with exergue showing a scene of snakelike Tritons fighting (Christies, New York, Asia Week 2020, fn. 2007, NYR 01953\_0204). The model found many applications; see the embossed production certainly from Gandhara in Baratte, Falk 2001, figs 2 ("Le groupe du centaure âgé") and 3 ("Le groupe du jeune centaure").

<sup>58</sup> But not only; I am in fact also thinking of the scenes with Ulysses and the Sirens on the urns from Volterra.

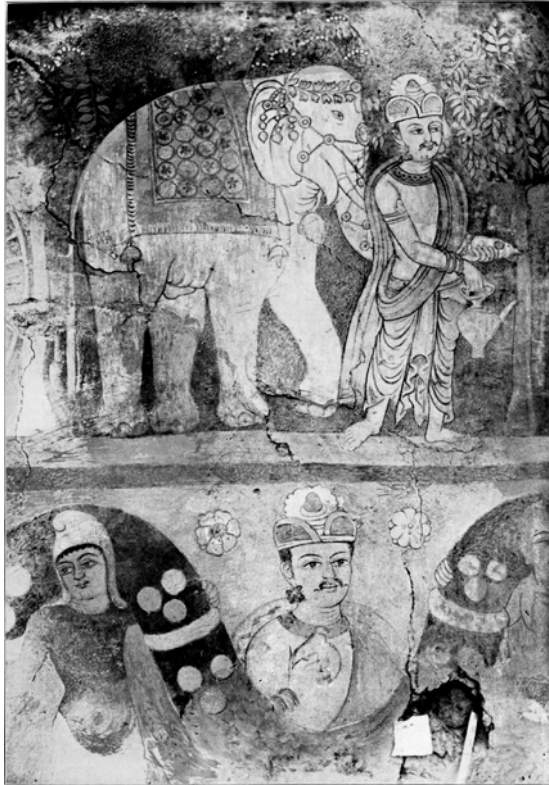


Figure 68

Miran V (after Stein 1912, pl. 136)

the course of time, with the series of transfers, the actual contents may be lost or forgotten, but it does not matter: the model will in any case be transformed and of the various models preference will go to those that have something to say to the new user (*in primis* the artist, and then the client). Thus, as I see it, the selection process takes place in the ateliers, and from there, with an understanding of how the clients will feel about them, the models will be proposed and worked on. Behind the success of the Corinthian capital may well lie the vases of flowers set on columns (*urnagatha*), behind the flying Erotes obviously the *gandharva*, and behind the Gandharan atlas figures the squatting *yakṣa*. Moreover, the Atlas and telamon figures in Western art are never squatting, but always standing: thus the squatting Atlas is the product of a contamination not only completed, but completed in Gandhara, on a subject that was and remains Indian.

Just as scenes reinterpreted from Western models turned up at Saidu and Butkara I, in the temples of Miran, in the fourth-fifth century, when the Saidu Stupa had already been deconsecrated, they found their way to the hands of the painter Tita. He was a professional painter, handsomely paid for his work as he himself pointed out in his inscription painted in Kharoshthi, the established script of Gandhara, between the paintings. Tita's scenes were reinterpretations of models in the Frieze, which the painter kept in the form of cartoons, as revealingly described by Anna Filigenzi (2006a). There can be no doubt about the fact that they were models, for the originals are preserved at Saidu. Panel S 1112 with the gift of the elephant



Plate XX Saidu Sharif I, Frieze, panel S 1112 (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri)

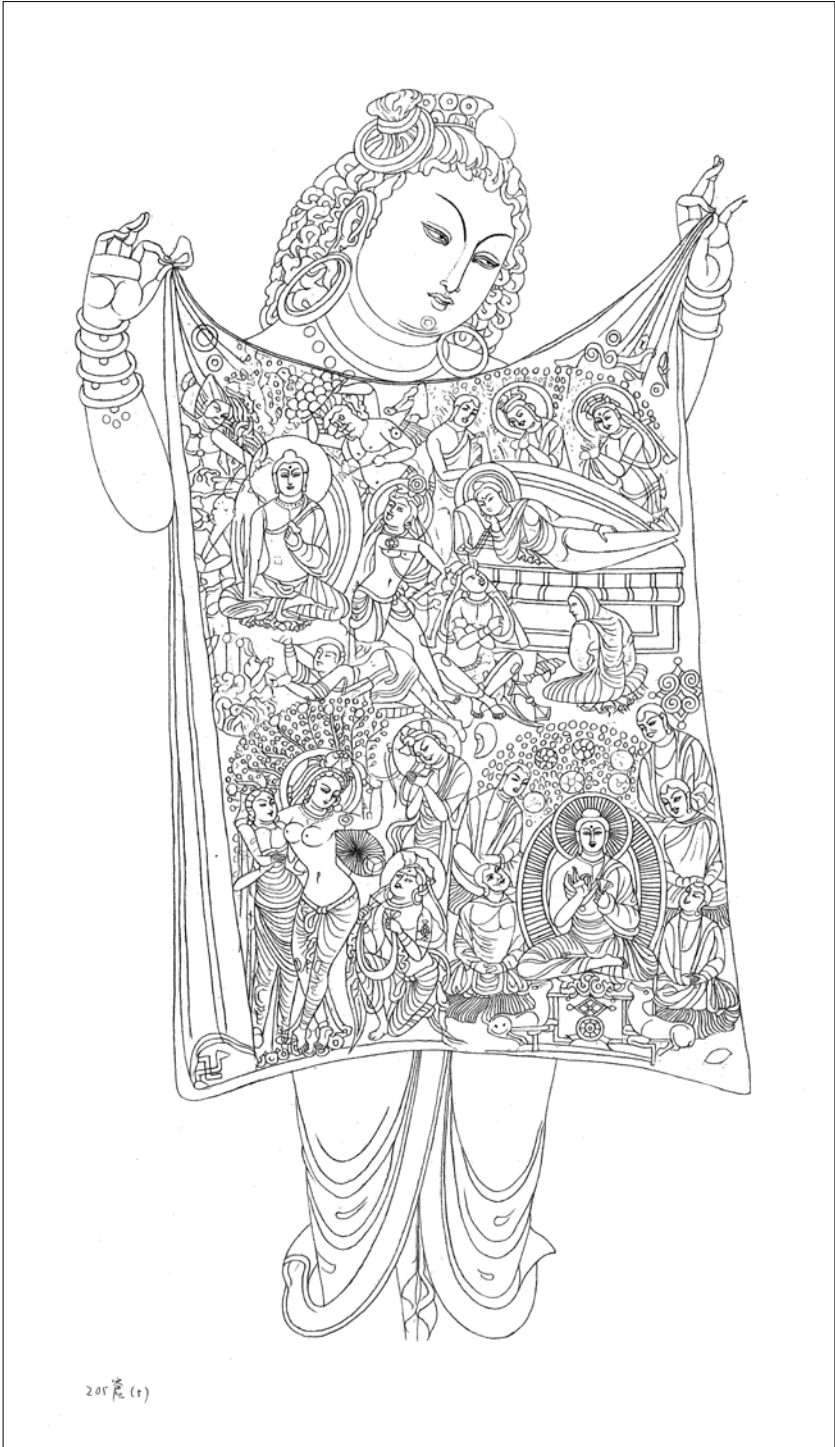


Figure 69 Kizil Cave 205 (drawings by Guo Feng, 微信图片)



to Siddhārtha (\*47) was transformed at Miran V into a scene of the gift of the elephant by Viśvantara, the generous prince and previous incarnation of Siddhārtha [pl. XX, fig. 68]. Other scenes from the Frieze were transformed and used on a number of occasions. Exit from the city gate (S 709, \*37) reappeared at Miran V. The scene of the figure seated with left hand resting on thigh was repeated twice at Saidu with variants (S 246, \*22, S 1246, \*58c-d), offering further evidence of the use of cartoons at both Miran V and Miran III (Stein 1921, fig. 143). At the same time, as noted by Arcangelo Santoro (2006), in the case of Miran we find marked anachronisms, the scenes reproduced have no sequential narrative relationship with the story of Viśvantara, nor – Filigenzi adds – with those of the models. I find both observations entirely cogent.

Another form of contact between Swat and Miran (and Khotan) must have been made through portable models, on parchment or as actual scale models; such is the case of the unmistakable example pointed out by Anna Filigenzi of the Buddha with whiskers and tall *uṣṇīṣa* bound by a lace with a square knot, an original model of which may be seen, for example, in the face from Butkara I ‘drawing style’ (B 2540), and which we again find centuries later in Central Asia in a bronze from Kothan and, indeed, in a painting at Miran III (in the order in Filigenzi 2020, figs 1-3).<sup>59</sup>

If not through cartoons, at least we have irrefutable evidence of the use of textiles for the reproduction of paintings thanks to the findings in the corridor of the K-complex in Gaochang (Qocho) in the Turfan basin.<sup>60</sup> Of these forms of transmission of models, we may have an echo from that famous painting from Kizil, the great site of monasteries and rupestrial cells on the northern banks of the Tarim.<sup>61</sup> In Cave 205, in the first half of the seventh century, a fabric with four scenes of the life of the Buddha painted with Indian overtones is displayed by a female figure holding it at the top, almost as if it were an Eastern Veronica (Bussagli 1954, fig. 37) [fig. 69].<sup>62</sup>

Copy of the Saidu Frieze must have already been underway in an early period, as early as the second century, in the area of Barikot. See, for example, the fine relief with hunters from the area around Barikot (on the left bank of the river Swat facing Parrai), already discussed by Faccenna (2001, 220).<sup>63</sup> That this relief is later we can tell by many aspects, and in particular by the convention of the irises (projecting, globular) which is typical of Butka-

<sup>59</sup> See the various examples presented in Faccenna 2001 (pls 102-10) of both the ‘Mathura’ type Buddha with right shoulder bare and the Gandharan type (see also the hypotheses offered in Rhi 1994). More examples are to be found in Srinivasan 2006, figs 11.3, 11.7. On Miran it is also worth noting the study by Francfort (2014).

<sup>60</sup> See Ruin K: Le Coq 1913, 8, pl. 45e (ca. eighth-ninth century CE).

<sup>61</sup> For Gandharan ‘contaminations’ in the paintings of Kizil, see Santoro 2001 (with refs) and, for minor wooden production, Bhattacharya 1977. As for the ‘classical’ themes for seventh-eighth century Sogdiana, the considerations in Compareti 2012 are interesting.

<sup>62</sup> On the Difference in style between the Kizil painter and that of the scenes reproduced on material, Mario Bussagli observed: “The artist thus succeeded in combining different lines while imitating the style that he was well acquainted with, and which he must have felt to be very different from the forms he himself was creating” (Bussagli 1954, 122).

<sup>63</sup> VAM, IS.143.1961 (Ackermann 1975, 96-7) (h. 22 cm). Faccenna presents further examples of similar but not identical compositions (2001, 220). Here I would also add a relief reflecting a somewhat Gandharan style recently found at Semthan (Kashmir): it represents to huntsmen on elephant-back. Here, too, the debt to formal characteristics typical of Saidu seems to be evident in certain details: the turbans with chin-straps, the cassock of the torso, the tunic under the sewn tassels (the fragment is at present preserved in the Shri Partap Singh Museum at Srinagar).



Figure 70a S 48 (after Faccenna 2001, tab. 13)



**Figure 70b** Panel IS.143.1961 (Victoria and Albert Museum, online collection [V&A Owned Content, © Victoria and Albert Museum, London])

**Figure 70c** Miran V (Stein 1912, pl. 141)

ra production, and of that of the stupas in the valleys of Barikot in the second century (Brancaccio, Olivieri 2019). Apart from this, in terms of general composition and details it is clearly a copy of the Saidu Frieze. Compare this relief with both panel S 1162 (with two soldiers, \*55b-c) and, above all, panel S 48, which illustrates the episode of Siddhārtha's meeting with three huntsmen (\*13-14) [figs 70a-b].

In the Barikot relief and in S 48 the three huntsmen turn to the left, the first with his face raised (see also S 1162). At Saidu we have two trees: one in the middle ground between the two figures at the sides on the left, and one to the right, like the wings of a theatre. At Barikot the relief shows a tree between the two lateral figures on the left. It looks practically as if the relief from the Barikot area replicates a portion of S 48, the part with the two figures further to the left, behind which we see the second tree. The second figure from the right at Saidu bears also a bow on his shoulders, while in the Barikot relief the corresponding figure bears a bow of the composite type. The outmost figure to the left at Barikot may be offering garments to Siddhārtha with arms slightly bent forward, exactly like the corresponding figure at Saidu, although there the arms are badly damaged. Thus we can complete the Saidu panel on the evidence of the later copy of it at Barikot. In both pieces huntsmen wear armour with overlapping scales depicted with lozenges.<sup>64</sup> The armour only covers the bust and is worn over a tunic consisting of fringed leather tassels sewn together, emerging on the arms like short sleeves with a band, and like a short skirt protecting the waist. Finally, the turbans with chin-band (type 3 of Faccenna 1999-2000) are the same as used at Saidu in general, and possibly also in S 48 (although it is damaged). Both have certain details missing. Missing at Barikot is the rolled *uttariya* at the waist and the *dhoti* emerging under the tunic. Missing in S 48 is the detail of the armour with pectoral disc, although it is present in other panels at Saidu (S 1112 \*47-48a).

Apart from the armour, which is of the anatomical type, all these details of the huntsmen's clothing reappear in the clothing of the huntsmen on the north wall of Miran V. Moreover, one of the soldier-huntsmen (Stein 1912, fig. 141) is carrying on his back what looks like a prey [fig. 70c]. The story of Viśvantara takes place entirely against a forest background – note the young man clinging onto a deer – like the story of Siddhārtha at Saidu, where representation of the forest is characterised by the cliché of the trees. Thus, in this case we seem to have two copies of the same panel, S 48, one in stone from second-century Swat, and a painted from fourth-century Miran.

Below, reproductions are provided of both S 48 and the Barikot relief, as well as the painting on the north wall of Miran V.

Let us now go on to the technique used for the copies, some evidence of which can be deduced in the light of the relations of symmetry (direct or reverse) and the proportional relations between copy and original.

In the case of the double gift of the elephant [pl. XX and fig. 68], between Saidu and Miran, it is worth noting a very interesting aspect: the figures are perfect mirror images. At Saidu, an individual to the left (face turned, almost in profile) holding a ewer in his left hand with the spout towards the

<sup>64</sup> Armour with overlapping scales is well represented at Saidu (S 708, \*36; S 1164, \*55d) and finds an interesting parallel in the flakes of armour already present in Macrophase 3b (Saka-Parthian) from the Barikot excavation (Olivieri 2011b).

right; elephant on the right, advancing towards the left. At Miran, an individual towards the right (face semi-frontal) holding a ewer in his right hand, spout towards the left; elephant on the right advancing towards the left. We have the same scene with some variants but as mirror images. At Miran the scene is about three times larger (3:1), calculating on the evidence of the scale given in the lower right-hand corner of one photograph by M. Aurel Stein (1912, fig. 147), and of the ratios that can be deduced here and there in the text. Curiously, the Miran paintings have been lost, while their older models survived at Saidu.

In the case of the Barikot copy, we have a relief that is exactly half as high as the Saidu relief (1:2), and we can therefore deduce the use of a pantograph or, more likely, division into squares reproduced in a pattern on very fine parchment, which could be used, for example, for transfer onto the plastered walls of Miran with the technique of pouncing. Moreover, the choice to reproduce some models in mirror image must have to do with the fact that at Miran V the scenes are painted on the walls of the cell that contains the stupa, and not on the stupa itself and so the worshipper would have found them to their left when performing circumambulation (Santoro 2006, 32 fn. 7). Thus these images are not to be considered as a guide for the *pradakṣiṇā* (being situated to the left), and in fact are not in narrative order (32 fn. 7). However, since they are to be viewed from left to right, the artist appropriately created mirror images of the original models.

