

10 Restoration Work, Deconsecration, Abandonment

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It is not easy to determine the time, or the times, at which the [Stupa] was damaged and then restored. Nor is it possible to indicate its gradual change in appearance (possibly ending up devoid of railing, column and frieze). (Faccenna 1995a, 445)

10.1 Restoration Work

Faccenna discusses the restoration works on the monument at length (1995a, 443-5). There is no need to add anything further, apart from noting that for some time the restoration works on the podium followed the original use of talc schist blocks (which means that the quarries were still active), after which reused material began to be used instead, obtained from the remains of the balustrade that had in the meantime collapsed and was also in green schist. Readers can follow these works with the photographs published in the excavation report (Faccenna 1995a, pls 23, 25c).

Other material from the Stupa – pillars, cornices and bases – is scattered all over the terrace (Faccenna 2001, fig. 80), pieces from the Frieze have also been reused, and the balustrade, as we have seen, was dismantled and reused both in shrine 54 (period II) and in the podium of the Stupa itself. This proves that partial plundering had already begun when the monuments in the sacred area were still functioning, before period II, when monuments incorporating material from the Stupa were built (Faccenna 1995a, 138; 2001, 69, 299).

According to Faccenna, towards the end of period I the Frieze was certainly reworked. Both the false railing (false-*vedikā*) and the figured panels, the assembly of which, as we have seen, was almost the result of experimentation, had problems.

Towards the end of period I the Frieze was certainly readjusted. There were problems with both the false railing and the figured panels, which, as we have seen, were not sufficiently stable. Significant evidence of this is to be seen in the re-adaptation of elements of the cornice and base of the false railing, reused as cornice and base of the panels. The tenon sockets on the pillars were adjusted to fit with the panels. This is a delicate point, we have already discussed it; I add here that if the false railing had been detached because it had partly collapsed, the Frieze would also have had static problems. Obviously for Faccenna this problem does not arise because in his reconstruction the Frieze was at the bottom. Having considered that this was not probable, I also believe that at the moment the false railing collapsed, the detachment phase of the Frieze also began. This event must be later, certainly towards the end of the second century. Elements of synchronism of the two episodes can be deduced from the simultaneous reuse of elements from the Frieze and the false railing. For the former: fragments of the Frieze are in the core of the podium of shrine 63 (period II, phase a = second-third century); for the latter: a small pillar is found in the core of the podium of shrine 36 (period II, phase b = second-third century). Towards the end of period II (and in the third century) plundering had started on the podium facing in talc schist blocks, which were reused in the restoration of other monuments, creation of small new structures in the stupa terrace, and even in some parts of the Monastery.¹ Thus we may picture the scene; restoration work continued on the minor stupas around it while the great Stupa at the centre fell ever deeper into decline or, better, was gradually demolished, taken to pieces to 'feed' its architectural *minores*. The mind turns the story of the previous life of the Buddha in which, as prince Mahāsattva, he fed the tiger and its cubs with his body (there are more *jātakas* with a similar moral). Perhaps there is no better end for a stupa.

10.2 Collapse of the Columns

The columns at the front of the monument had already fallen, too: a fragment of a lion from a column (Faccenna 1995a, 137, pls 158, 161b) was reused in restoration of the podium of stupa 27.²

With period III we see occurrences that suggest destruction through natural causes, like especially earthquakes. The most dramatic feature of the architectural landscape of this period is to be seen in the collapses in the NW sector (Faccenna 1995a, pl. 10) and collapse of columns A and C on the floors in the final phase.³ Evidence of the decline of and failing interest in

¹ See the contribution of Di Florio et al. in Faccenna 1995a, in particular p. 620. Important pieces such as the bases of the second staircase SS I 225 and SS I 226 and the fragment with the haircut SS I 66 ended up at the monastery (Amato 2019).

² To judge by the dimensions, I believe that here we have one of the medium-size lions (columns 24 and 29).

³ The stratigraphic position of the collapse of Column A in sector S of the site is more difficult to place.

the site is to be seen in the ruins of the two columns, which were not removed, unlike the other two which must have collapse earlier on.

It is interesting to observe the lie of the remains of Column C, two sections of which are to be seen. The upper section fell between monuments 13 and 16, to the north-east of the Stupa. The lower section collapsed in the SW sector, zone B, to the immediate left of the stairway. This section seems to have fallen in the opposite direction to the upper one: the former points to the west, the latter to the east. On the evidence of these two sections and their position we can advance the following hypothesis. With the collapse of the upper part, the lower part was twisted round, collapsing in the opposite direction to fall just left of the stairway (see Faccenna 1995a, pls 46-9) [figs 79-80].

When Column C collapsed it was still topped by the lion, which was in fact found in three fragments during the 2011 excavation, at a distance of about 1 m from the top disk.⁴ The upper section of Column C, collapsed between minor stupas 13 and 16, actually covered a small monument that remained hidden until excavation of the column in 2011-12. The monument, of which only the base of the podium has survived, and which appears in the numbering as 100, lies a little to the east of 13 and 16. The monument was totally shattered by the collapse of the column, only the first courses of the podium remaining. It proved difficult to make out the phasing of the pavement of monument 100 when Column C collapsed since the rammed earth floor of the terrace had been disturbed by the previous excavations, frequent cleaning and exposure to the elements.⁵ In any case, the springer of 100 seems to correspond to the level of the springer of 13 and 16, and therefore to belong to the final phases of period I. The pavement phase on which Column C collapsed (covering 100) has however been identified as corresponding to F2, i.e. the period III pavement of the stupa terrace.

The collapse of the two remaining columns (C and A) was, therefore, one of the last events in the life of the site, occurring in a phase that was not followed by any attempt at restoration but, rather, progressive and final abandonment (Faccenna 1995a, 159). This seems to bear out our conjecture that the collapse was due to one of the major earthquakes occurring in the third-fourth century, hypothesised by Faccenna at Saidu, Panr I and Butkara I (158, tab. XXI).⁶ Thanks to the excavation data on Barikot and Amluk-dara, it has been possible to detect and provide absolute dating for two destructive earthquakes that followed in the space of about 30-50 years between the end of the third and the beginning of the fourth century (Olivieri 2012; 2013; 2018; Olivieri, Filigenzi 2018; Iori, Olivieri 2020).

While large-scale restoration works were undertaken subsequent to the damage caused by the two earthquakes at Butkara I, Panr I and Amluk-dara, entailing substantial modification of these monuments, Saidu was in practice abandoned to its fate.

⁴ The fragments are SS I 29, SS I 30 and SS I 31, respectively the chest with the head, the right leg and part of the back.

⁵ Moreover, the work carried out in the period 2011-14 was on a site that had been open to the public since the 1980s, to be used as a cricket pitch during the Taleban occupation of Swat between 2008 and 2009.

⁶ For further evidence of collapses resulting from earthquakes, see the NW sector (Faccenna 1995a, pl. 10).

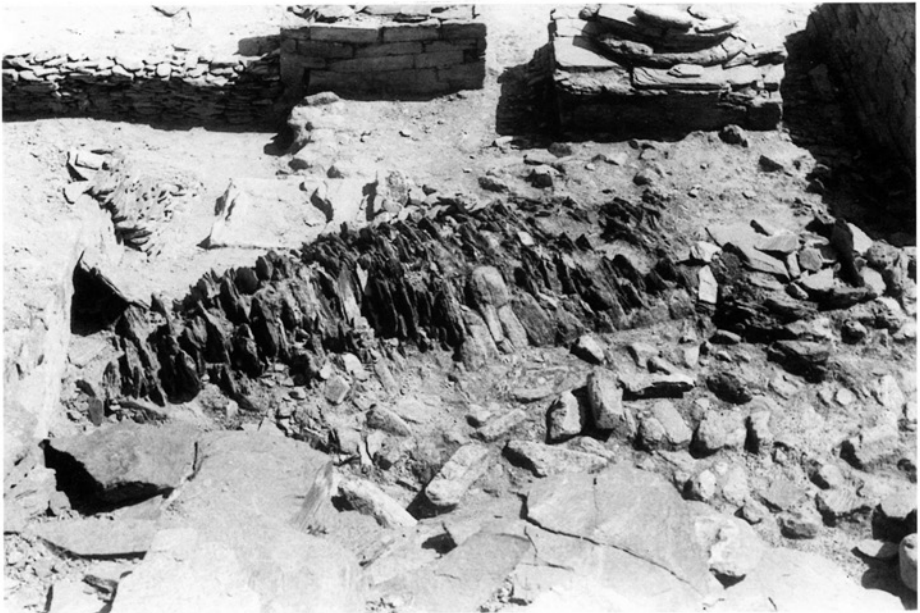


Figure 79a-b Collapse of Column C, stratigraphic evidence (= Faccenna 1995a, pl. 48)

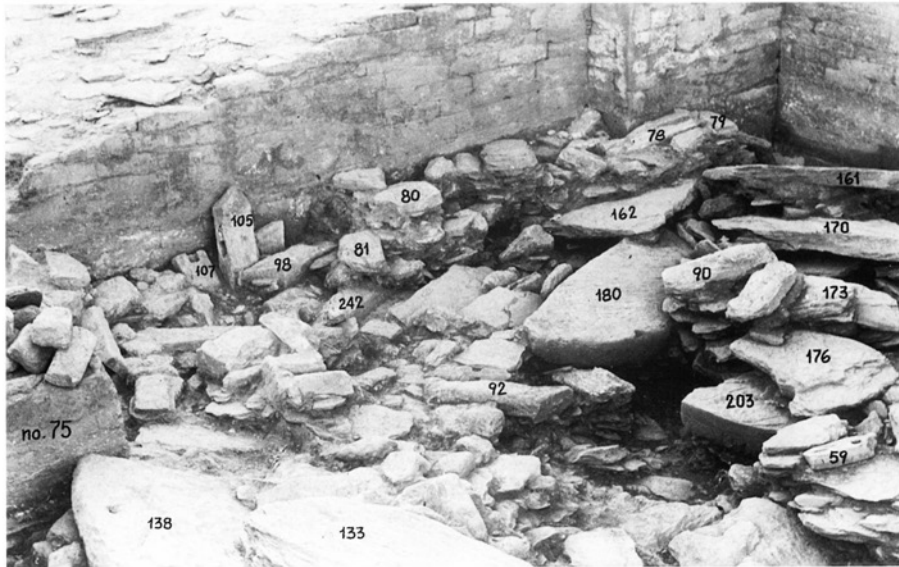


Figure 80a-b The demolition of the Frieze, stratigraphic evidence (= Faccenna 1995a, pl. 288)

10.3 Deconsecration

This phase of abandonment saw a series of events of great importance for the life of the monument. We will describe these events by following the order of the actions that accompanied them. The actions are as follows: opening of the relic chamber, removal of the reliquary, new deposit, closure, deposit in the upper antechamber, closure, and offering of bracelets.

When it was opened, the relic chamber was in such condition as to give the archaeologists the hope of finding the original reliquary. We can imagine their disappointment: the reliquary had already been taken away leaving on the bottom of the lower chamber, on the south side, nothing more than a tiny silver tin. What might they have expected to find in a chamber of these dimensions? A large pyx certainly, like the one depicted in the scene on the Frieze with Utarasena, and certainly not the tiny box left on one side of the chamber.⁷

What is certain, therefore, is that some time in the life of the Stupa, the reliquary was removed and a new deposit made. Thus, once the chamber was opened the reliquary was taken away. The bottom of the chamber, which was covered with a thin layer of ash, was not disturbed. Within the chamber, resting on the south (back) side, was deposited a small, short cylindrical silver reliquary with a diameter of 4.35 cm (S 690), which in turn contained four objects (S 691-4): a cylindrical gold receptacle of very small dimensions, diameter 2.15 cm (containing a pearl with through hole S 695), a cylindrical bead of a necklace in quartz, 6 gold bracts in the shape of a lotus flower and a similar bract in silver. Apart from these, the following objects were found deposited: two spherical necklace beads in gold (S 1425), a third, similar one (S 1862), a fragment of gold thread (S 1863), a gold leaf (S 1426) and a silver bract in the shape of a lotus flower (S 1864).

Once the lower chamber had been closed, within the upper chamber evidence that the lower deposit suffered no further disturbance is to be seen in the following deposit objects: two identical necklace beads in gold (S 1427 and S 1868), a tiny silver bract in the shape of a lotus flower (S 1867), a pearl and a shell necklace bead (S 1866 and S 1865). With these deposits the upper chamber was ceremonially closed once again.

These findings may be a new deposition, or the remains of the original one, but they are certainly not what was left from a theft, otherwise there would be no accounting for the survival of the precious reliquary. The fact that the small silver box with its precious content remained intact and the chamber again closed appears to demonstrate that the operation was performed in a spirit of piety, doubtless to transfer the original relics to another stupa. The receptacle might have been made a gift on that occasion. Alternatively, the small box may have been in the original reliquary as an accessory deposit, from where it was removed to find new deposition *in memoriam* of the original reliquary which had been taken away.

Since then, and until the archaeologists arrived on the scene, no one had ever opened the chamber. Thus we can deduce that, although possibly already abandoned, the Stupa remained a sacred place, by virtue of its fame if

⁷ Or a reliquary-jar, like the one documented at Saidu Sharif I in the chamber (circular, however, in this case) of stupa 25, a little later than the Stupa (period Ib), containing semi-charred bones (Faccenna 1995a, 299-301).

nothing else. In fact, the operation can only have been performed at a time when the Stupa had been partly demolished, for otherwise it would have been impossible to arrive at such a depth.

As I reconstruct the episode, with the Stupa partly demolished excavation was performed from above seeking access to the chamber in order to recover the relics and deposit them elsewhere. In this phase the consecration deposit was left; it did not contain relics but might typically have belonged to that type of deposit (*garbha*) associated with consecration of buildings other than stupas. Of course, it is a very complicated issue and I have no intention of reducing it to an *aut aut*. Nevertheless, I find the distinction suggested by A. Ślaczka (2007, 9) useful.⁸

The distinction is also to be observed in the monastic literary tradition of the North-West: “One, which contains *śarīras* (relics), is called a *stūpa*; one, which does not have *śarīras* in it, is called a *caitya*” (Karashima 2018, 446). A consecration deposit is made for a building while, in the case of relics, the stupa is constructed for them. The relics are worshipped (through the stupa), while the consecration deposit is worshipped only at the moment of deposition. In many examples the deposits are placed under the relic chamber, while the relics are placed within the chamber.

The fact that the reliquary found in the relic chamber contains bracts in the shape of lotus flowers, and above all the fact that it was (carefully) placed off centre, not to replace the original reliquary, strongly suggests that here we have a consecration deposit. I hope that further study will be dedicated to this evidence in the future. In any case, if the Stupa had already been partly demolished and deprived of its Frieze, as we will see later on, it would only have been right to remove the relics.⁹ The consecration deposit may have served to ritualise the removal of the reliquary and consecrate as a memorial (*caitya*) what had once been an important stupa. Archaeological documentation must contain many of these episodes. Certainly, some of the stratigraphic evidence of Butkara I can be interpreted in this light.

As far as I can remember, only one similar case comes to mind, from Sirkap, in the secondary deposition of the Block A stupa:

The stūpa in the centre had been despoiled of its relics: but the relic chamber still contained, among other objects, some broken pieces of what must once have been a singularly beautiful crystal casket, the fine workmanship of which suggests that it dates from Maurya age. From the fragments remaining it is evident that the casket, when intact, would have been too large to go inside the relic chamber; and it must be inferred, therefore, that it was enshrined there in its present broken condition. The probability is that the relics were taken from some much older monument and that, the crystal casket in which they had reposed having been broken, the fragments of it were scrupulously preserved. That contact with the relics would invest such fragments with a special sanctity. (Marshall 1960b, 80)

⁸ According to this study, the deposition of pieces of gold leaf belonging to a lotus flower was made in the context of the ritual consecration or reconsecration of a non-stupa monument. I would recommend to the reader the more accessible Skilling 2018. Fogelin and Schiffer (2015), with reference to the Indian world, use the expression “termination ritual” for these cases. For a study on relics as deposit in the Buddhist world, see the contributions in Stargardt, Willis 2018.

⁹ The Stupa may have suffered further demolition in part to have access to the relic chamber.



Figure 81 Whetstones from Saidu (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri)

Figure 82 The assemblage of the false railing (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri)



Figure 83 The assemblage of the brackets (MAIP; photo by Michele Minardi)

Figure 84 SS1 227 (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri)

Figure 85 SS1 231 (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri)

Figure 86a-b SS1 340 (MAIP; photo by Aurangzeib Khan)



Figure 87 SSI 229 (MAIP; photo by Aurangzeib Khan)

As we have seen, deposition of the consecration deposit was usually performed with a rite. Here this might be attested to by the find of fragments of twisted bracelets in blue glass over the second covering of the chamber (Faccenna 1995a, 441 fn. 1). The stratigraphic picture was tellingly traced out by Faccenna.¹⁰ Having been reopened and the new deposition made, the chamber was again closed under its lid. Some more precious objects of diminutive proportions were deposited in the upper chamber, which was closed with its square slab. The hole made for access was carefully sealed with stones, and some bracelets were deliberately broken in honour of the deed. At this point the preserved top of the Stupa rose 150 cm above the relic chamber, with neatly laid slabs of stone between the two. The bracelets were found among the stones at about 70 cm above the relic chamber. On the evidence of this connection it is clear that they were of a type of material safely datable to the late third-early fourth century, certainly not corresponding to the date of the building of the Stupa but perfectly in line with the date estimated for the abandonment of most of the monuments at Saidu.¹¹ In Buddhist ritual contexts, women's bracelets have been found intentionally broken on the benches in the courtyard of temple B at Barikot (third century), around the altar (Olivieri 2016), or, both broken and intact, inserted into the floor of the *pradakṣiṇāpatha* in the Dharmarajika stupa at Taxila (Micheli 2020; Marshall 1960b, 104). The ritual breaking of brace-

¹⁰ Despite the painstaking excavation, Faccenna wondered whether the bracelets might be modern, and thus "intruders" (1995a, 441 fn. 1). We are now certain that the bracelets are typical of the Kushan and late-Kushan phases, well attested in the urban excavations.

¹¹ Date of abandonment established by Faccenna and Callieri in the fourth-fifth century. See Olivieri, Filigenzi 2018. The chronology of the coins later associated does not go beyond the fourth century (Faccenna 1995a, 158-63).

lets is evidently associated with female rituals, possibly involving the female monastic communities and having to do with the abandonment of family life (marriage), as if entering into a state of symbolic widowhood (hence the breaking of the bracelets) and into the community of the *bhikṣuṇī*.¹² The deconsecration of the Stupa and secondary consecration of the monument as memorial, *caitya*, might (let me stress 'might') have been performed by a female community. The fact that possible evidence of female monasticism – supposing my interpretation to be right – appeared in Swat only in this late period casts revealing light on the orthodoxy (or rather on conservatism) within the communities of Gandharan Buddhism: with a few exceptions, such as Utpalavarnā, who played an essential role in the story of the Buddha (see Bopearachchi 2011), female figures are absent from the monastic life, nor in the donee inscriptions, in contrast with the practice in India, do they find any mention as far as I can remember (with the exception of CKI 226 discussed in Salomon 1995).

As we have seen, it is not very clear whether the reconsecration of the (semi-demolished) Stupa was made during or at the end of the life of the sanctuary. The former hypothesis is more probable.¹³

10.4 Abandonment

However, the Frieze had already been scattered by then. I will conclude this study with an account of what we know of the fate of the Frieze. Some of the panels collapsed and were found at the base of the podium, in particular on the east side, also under the remains of the lower section of Column C, in sector NE/B, to the left of the stairway. Most of the fragments must have been moved there, deliberately brought together, both in sector NW/A of the excavation (to the right of the Stupa stairway) and in sector NE/B (to the left of the stairway), which was excavated in 2011-12. From there the specimens by the least worthy of the sculptors following in the steps of the earlier masters were taken to patch up the masonry of the shrines and minor stupas for which no better treatment was reserved (Faccenna 1995a, pls 288-96).

Two fragments of the Frieze (one uncertain: S2341, Faccenna 1995a, 167a; S 1163, *55c)¹⁴ appear to have been reused before the final abandonment of

¹² On the female monastic communities, see the first eight chapters of Schopen 2014.

¹³ I excavated some of these phases in 2015: they are very simple structures built on the ruins of the sanctuary shrines, as is the case of the earthen stupa 80 (period III), built on the ruins of shrine 54 (Olivieri 2019a, 115-16; see Faccenna 1995a, 427). Belonging to these final phases (period IV), too, are the simple burials of jars with semi-charred bones 19 (Faccenna 1995a, pls 194c-d). In this phase many of the rooms in the sanctuary were reoccupied: see the fine example of shrine 45, where, in a phase of reuse, we find large pebbles used as grinding stones, piles of shards, bones, possibly of animals, and the remains of architectural elements (*chattrā* and spacers) (Faccenna 1995a, pl. 192a): it looks rather like the cranny of one of those hermits or *siddha* of Vajrayāna. The ruins of the monasteries and sanctuaries of Swat, with all their memories, must have been ideal places of hermitage for the *siddha* of late Buddhism: magically evocative places, *loci sacerrimi*, as subsequently recorded in the toponymy and folklore of the Pashtun. This atmosphere is effectively conjured up in the accounts of the Tibetan pilgrims in Swat (Tucci 1940).

¹⁴ S 2341 does not appear in the listing of the Frieze in Faccenna 2001, it can hardly be associated with the panels of the Frieze given its small dimensions, but it could be by the school of the Master.

the sanctuary. Fragment S 2341 was found reused within shrine 28, which belongs structurally to period Ib (but in the latest phase of the shrine), certainly corresponding to period III. Moreover, the main object of cult in the shrine in this phase is a stele with Buddha (possibly a bodhisattva, holding something in his left hand), which we know to be a production no earlier than the early third century.¹⁵ Fragment S 1163 was reused in the pavement deposit of shrine 63 (period II).

Of great importance here is the fate of the mutilated relief (S 305), which certainly belongs to the central false niche and was found on the east side of stupa 32. The large-scale, heavy-handed reworking that eliminated most of the figures on the left offers potentially highly significant information, besides telling us that the central group, once removed in the phases of restoration, was treated as material for reuse. In fact, we have to think of what lay behind the violent chiselling of the piece, which cannot be explained as technically necessary for reuse. If confirmation were to come for our conjecture that the Stupa of Saidu represented, as it were, the 'Palatine Chapel' of the aristocratic élites of Swat (the Oḍi), then we might see in this an act of *damnatio memoriae* perpetrated at a time of dramatic political upheaval. It might have been the very time that saw the collapse of the urban élites and abandonment of the urban settlements in the north of Gandhara and beyond, attested to by the archaeological excavations at Udegram, Barikot and Shaikhan-dheri (Olivieri 2021). In which case we should be dealing with a well-defined archaeological phase of this region, to be placed chronologically well before the mid-fourth century CE.

¹⁵ Stele S 2338; Faccenna 1995a, pls 167c-d. On the late Gandharan stelae see: Olivieri, Filigenzi 2018, with refs, but above all Moscatelli forthcoming.