

Stoneyards and Artists in Gandhara

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Sabrina Rastelli

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The Buddhist Stupa
of Saidu Sharif I, Swat (c. 50 CE)

Luca M. Olivieri

Venezia

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Luca M. Olivieri

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Luca M. Olivieri

Abstract

The work presented here advances a hypothetical reconstruction of the planning and programming of the building site, the executive process, the construction and decoration, and ultimately the deconsecration and abandonment of an ancient Buddhist stupa. The chronological context is that of the mid-first to the early fourth century CE. The geographical context is the fertile and rich Swat valley, at the foot of the Karakoram-Hindukush, to the north of the ancient region of Gandhara (today in Pakistan). The study is based on archaeological excavation data conducted over several seasons, including the most recent seasons from 2011 to 2014. During the latter excavations, conducted by the Author, new data that allowed additions to be made to Domenico Faccenna's previous studies were brought to light. Among these new insights, there are some of great importance that indicate the existence of a large central niche at the top of the stupa's upper staircase, the key to the stupa's figurative frieze. This frieze, which represents one of the highest moments of Gandharan Buddhist art, still imitated centuries later by celebrated artists in inner Asia (at Miran), is the product of a sculptural school guided with a sure hand by an anonymous Master, to whom the responsibility for the entire project should be attributed – architect, master builder and workshop master all in one. The existence of this so-called 'Master of Saidu', admirably intuited and elaborated by Faccenna, finds in this volume, if possible, further support, demonstrating the capacity of the archaeological school inaugurated by Faccenna himself to answer with ongoing excavation data the many questions that the enigma of Gandhara art still poses to scholars all over the world.

Keywords Gandharan art and archaeology. Buddhism. Stupa. Gandhara. Swat. Oḍḍiyāna. Oḍiraja. Seṇavarma. Saidu Sharif. Domenico Faccenna.

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The Buddhist stupa of Saidu Sharif I, Swat (c. 50 CE)

Luca M. Olivieri

Editors' Foreword

Sabrina Rastelli

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The Department of Asian and North African Studies (DSAAM) at Ca' Foscari University of Venice is one of the "Departments of Excellence", a financial plan launched by the Ministry of Education to fund the top State University departments that stand out for the quality of their research, didactics and development project. As a "Department of Excellence", DSAAM aims to intensify its research interests on the transcultural dimension of historical, religious, philosophical, literary and artistic processes between Asia, the Arab world and Europe. To this end, the DSAAM has established the Marco Polo International Research Centre (MaP) for Global Europe-Asia Connections, whose primary mission is the understanding of the dynamics underlying the cultural, political and economic interactions and connections between and within Asia, Europe and the Arab-Islamic world. To foster international scientific cooperation and the dissemination of up-to-date research results on topics that are supported by the Centre, the latter has conceived a new publication called *Marco Polo. Studies in Global Europe-Asia Connections*.

In dialogue with the intellectual tradition of the Centre, our research interests are vast, spanning manifold spaces (from Japan to the Mediterranean Sea), times (from Neolithic times to today, and possibly the future), and themes (from modern geopolitics to religious identities to climate change to archaeological sites), with particular attention to trans-Eurasian interactions. This emphasis on intercultural contact and exchange, especially at the crossroads of the ostensible European-Asian divide, is evoked through the title of the series: indeed, Marco Polo travelled all the way from Venice to Beijing at the end of the 13th century, engaging with many different political contexts, nations, and civilisations along the land and sea routes later jointly known as the 'Silk Road' (or, better, Silk Roads). This concept, with its underlying reference to the exchange of things and ideas across socie-

ties, is a historical phenomenon of great significance associated with a distant past; however, the vital energy of the Silk Road(s) has never dwindled. The People's Republic of China announced the "Silk Road Economic Belt" (now known as the "Belt and Road Initiative") in 2013. In other words, the distant historical traditions of the Silk Road(s) continue to penetrate discursive reality in our own day and age. Globalisation - with its various and contradictory connotations - is an overarching motif that links the Silk Roads of the past and the present.

Inspired by the famous Venetian merchant, our book series prioritises studies that are inquisitive, bold, and dynamic, with a preference for transcultural and interdisciplinary studies. We welcome manuscripts that are grounded in rigorous scholarship and speak to international academic conversations within and across diverse disciplines, including history, international relations, economics, environmental studies, literature, languages, archaeology, art history, philosophy, religion, anthropology, geography, music, performing arts, social sciences, and the digital humanities. The books in this series will focus on specific research topics but will range from single-authored monographs to edited volumes with multiple authors, each contributing a chapter to an organically conceived whole.

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Luca M. Olivieri

Preface

Roderick Whitfield

SOAS, University of London, UK

The *Marco Polo. Studies in Global Europe-Asia Connections*, under the auspices of Ca' Foscari University of Venice, is intended to provide a means of publishing scholarly research related in one way or another to the Silk Road. It is a forum open to all, but it seems particularly important that the first contribution should be the fruit of decades of work in Pakistan by Italian archaeologists from ISMEO, and that it should concern a once monumental Buddhist stupa decorated with narrative and iconic reliefs carved in stone, including a seated figure that, although fragmentary, now proves to be one of the earliest images of the Buddha in human form. The image was to spread along the Silk Road right across Asia to reach China, Korea and eventually Japan, and to leave innumerable traces of this transmission in the form of scriptures written in many languages, cave temples richly decorated with narrative and iconic images, sculptures in diverse materials, and archaeological monuments, including both monastic buildings for the *sangha* and buildings for ceremonial purposes.

Among the latter, the most ancient form is that of the Indian stupa, a hemispherical structure of cosmic significance, which was adopted by Buddhism as the repository of relics of the Buddha. The investigation of such a stupa is the object of Luca M. Olivieri's study presented here. Surrounded by many smaller stupas, the great stupa at Saidu Sharif has been excavated over many years by numerous Italian archaeologists, whose work is acknowledged throughout the study. Olivieri's accomplishment is to have brought all their materials together so as to reconstruct the original form of the stupa and the placement of the reliefs that ornamented the drum at the second level, where they would have been seen by those performing *pradakshina*, the ritual circumambulation in a clockwise direction, from the stairway on the north side of the stupa. Although only a small number of fragmentary reliefs survive, they are clearly of high quality, and Olivieri argues that they show the planning of a master architect who supervised

every aspect of the construction, including the sourcing of materials as well as the layout of the iconographical programme. By relating the site to other well-known monuments, this study should be of signal interest to scholars in many fields, a work proper to inaugurate *Marco Polo. Studies in Global Europe-Asia Connections*.