

of the North-West. Connections between the Punjab centre and the Swāt valley are mirrored in Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions indicating significant relationships between the Apracas, Oḍi kings, contemporary Saka *kṣatrapa* and the early Kushans (see Salomon 2007: 276-279). These relationships might account for the presence at both the *Dharmarājika* and in Sirkap of precious items coming from Swāt as a result of trade exchanges, or—more probably—as gifts linked to marital alliances. Besides sacred objects (sculptural pieces and stone reliquaries), other finds from Sirkap bear evidence of contacts with the North-West. Stemmed goblets/cups (in stone and silver), probably used for ceremonies involving wine consumption, seem to have been typical of (or originated from) Swāt (see Filigenzi 2019). The *nāgadanta* with putto discovered in Sirkap, as well as all the other sculptural stone items, may be dated with reasonably certainty to the beginning or second/third quarter of the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE. None of the sculptural items from Sirkap seem to be later than the early Kushan period (at the latest). The ritual ceremonies/cults taking place at Sirkap, as well as its significance as a religious centre still await insightful analysis. I have already touched on the non-Buddhist character of the subjects decorating the stone pieces from Sirkap (although of course they possibly come from Buddhist sites in Swat). The choice involved in the reuse of images at Sirkap also bears witness to the conscious religious multivalence of figural programs decorating the Buddhist *stūpas* of the North-West in the Saka-Parthian period. Child figures, inserted as accessory figures in the earliest Buddhist *stūpas* in the North-West (the presumed place of origin of the sculptural pieces discovered at Sirkap), were meant to attract the devotion to the *stūpa* of both the Indian milieu and the Iranian tribes. Those same figures, discarded from their original context, were readily reused as auspicious deities in a different environment, an urban centre where the cults/domestic rituals practised were not exclusively—if indeed they were at all—Buddhist.

This reuse highlights some aspects worthy of attention in the Sirkap documentation and is also indicative, with regard to the selection made, of religious phenomena inherent in Gandharan sculpture. These are certainly not new aspects, since they have already been the object of numerous interventions by eminent scholars. I hope that this small contribution, which raises more questions than it provides answers, will add more food for thought.

#### EPIGRAPHIC NOTE ON THE FIGURED BRACKET B 7476

The tenon of the Butkara I *nāgadanta*—i.e., the part, rectangular in diameter, by which it was inserted into the masonry of the *stūpa*—bears a Kharoṣṭhī inscription on its left-hand surface from the point of view of somebody facing the sculpture. This inscription would have been invisible to any visitors to the *stūpa*. It is technical in appearance and thus, at first glance at least, very different from the standard, though confusingly attached, donative inscription CKI 93 on a *nāgadanta* from Sirkap.

The inscription appears to consist of three lines, the third of which starts under the end of the second one. It contains a regular alternation of Kharoṣṭhī akṣaras and what seem to be Kharoṣṭhī numbers: two such pairings in the first line, and one each in the second and third lines. The whole inscription can be read as follows:<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup> The square brackets [ ] indicate an uncertain reading, as discussed below.

1. [bu] 4 1 la 1 1
2. k[e] 4 1
3. ma 4 1

In the first line, the *akṣara bu* appears to have been constructed of an *u* followed by what looks like a small overlapping *ma* on its top left. Considering, however, that the other three pairings consist of one *akṣara* and one number each, it seems best not to read two separate *akṣaras* here. It is possible that the engraver corrected an original *u* to a *bu*; maybe more likely, however, is that he simply tackled the unique (for this inscription) curviness of the top of the *bu* by carving it in two parts that he did not succeed in joining up perfectly. The number following the *bu* is almost certainly 4 1, i.e., “5” in the Kharoṣṭhī system of number signs. What is highly unusual here is the way in which the 1 is joined to the top left arm of the 4. Its slant agrees, however, with that of the 1 signs later in this line, and no alternative interpretation of this symbol suggests itself. The second half of the first line consists of a clear *la* followed by the number 1 1, i.e., “2.” The second of the two 1 strokes is a little longer than the first, marking the two strokes as part of the same number and foreshadowing their eventual graphical connection in later and more cursive forms of Kharoṣṭhī.

The second, line begins with the *akṣara ke* with a rather short but distinct vowel mark *e*. A second, even shorter vertical line to the left of the *e* mark is much less distinct and likely to be a defect in the rock rather than part of the *akṣara*. The top of the *ke* is angular, and the construction of the letter is based on the handwritten type in which the head and right arm of *ka* are formed in one single stroke, and the remainder of the stem attached below in a separate stroke (type 2 in Glass 2000: 49-52). The *akṣara ke* is followed by the same number 4 1 as in the first pairing in the first line.

The third line commences under the 4 1 of the second line, apparently because the large *ke* already consumed all vertical space at the right edge of the surface. It consists of a clear *akṣara ma* followed, again, by the number 4 1.

Paleographically, the inscription agrees well with a dating in the first century CE as suggested by the type of object it is attached to, though the shapes of letters on their own could also occur in an older, and even in a younger, inscription. The *nāgadanta* has the regular bowl shape of *ma* rather than the flatter shape of *ma* on the Butkara I Dharmarājika slab inscription; the head of the *nāgadanta*'s *ba*, while curvy, is less deep than the one painted onto the Butkara I vase (CKI 218; both discussed in Baums forthcoming).

The interpretation of the inscription presents great difficulty and must remain speculative. The only comparable piece is the inscribed *nāgadanta* from Sirkap (CKI 93), bearing a peculiarly arranged donative inscription *savatrataṇa niyatito vihare matapitu puyae* “offered to the monastery by Savatrata in honor of mother and father” on its visible top, with *savatrataṇa ni* also occurring sideways on that surface of its invisible tenon corresponding to the one on which the Butkara I inscription is attached. I would like to suggest a different sequence of events from that outlined by Konow for the inscribing of the Sirkap piece. The engraver may have begun attaching the donative inscription on the tenon, but then thought better of it, either because it would have been invisible there, or because running it around the tenon vertically would have required breaking it up several times in the middle of words. Instead, he then started over and chiselled the donative inscription onto the top of the *nāgadanta*—but

not without again underestimating the available space, forcing him to add its conclusion *pitu puyae* out of sequence to the right.<sup>43</sup> The engraver finally added, in the same line but on the invisible part of the tenon, what appears to be a personal name in the direct case *devadato* “Dedadatta.” Konow (1929: 99-100) speculated that this could be either a label inscription (unlikely given its location) or (more likely) the name of a *navakarmika* “superintendent of construction” or somebody else involved in the production of the piece.<sup>44</sup>

Applying this information to the Butkara I piece then, we are left with two possibilities: The inscription there could refer either to a donative act or to the construction of the piece, irrespective of its invisible location. In either case, it seems at least possible that the four akṣaras *bu*, *la*, *ke*, and *ma* are abbreviations of personal names. (For *bu*, at least, the numerous monastic names starting with Buddha- suggest themselves.) The general practice of initial akṣaras serving as abbreviations of names is attested elsewhere in the Kharoṣṭhī scribal world, most notably in the Central Asian document CKD 661 in which the names of the witnesses Nani Vadhaga, Śaśivaka, and Spaniya are abbreviated *na*, *śa*, and *spa*. The numbers following each of the four abbreviated names on the Butkara I inscription may then be a measure of the proportion of their respective contributions to the donation or construction, possibly with an implied monetary unit. The practice of communal donation by members of a family (e.g., nos. 8, 9, 15, 21, 25, and 33 in Baums 2012) or by “companions” (*sahayara*; cf. Baums, Glass 2002– a s.v.) is well-attested in Gandhāran epigraphy. It seems comparatively less likely that the akṣaras on this piece are to be taken as location markers (cf. Salomon 2006, Faccenna, Salomon 2007), since their reference would then be to four widely divergent locations, while of course the *nāgadanta* was attached in a single place at the stūpa, and also because this would leave the numerals entirely unexplained.

S.B.

<sup>43</sup> This seems more likely than Konow’s suggestion that *savatrataṇa ni* was secondarily added on the invisible tenon merely to indicate which words the inscription’s formula starts with.

<sup>44</sup> See Baums 2012: 212, 241 for epigraphic additions naming a *navakarmika*.