## THE DHARMARĀJIKA BOWL AND SLAB FROM BUTKARA I

#### STEFAN BAUMS

The excavations at Butkara I—directed by Domenico Faccenna from 1956 onwards—brought to light four inscriptions in the Kharosthī script and Gāndhārī language.<sup>1</sup> This number, which excludes simple location letters (Faccenna, Salomon 2007), is surprisingly low when compared to the 56 pottery inscriptions found at Barikot until 2021 (Baums 2020; Fussman 2020), but each of the four Butkara I inscriptions holds special interest. Two of them are on pieces of sculpture and appear to be complex mason notations (on a relief, CKI 250 in Baums, Glass 2002-, and on the shaft of a *nāgadanta*, for which see my note in Provenzali 2022). The present article focuses on the other two inscriptions, both of which make reference to the Dharmarājika stūpa of Butkara I.

The first of these (CKI 218) is painted on the outside of an earthenware bowl (inventory number 8000) found in layer 5 of Room V on the North side of the Great Vihāra. The construction of the room can be dated to Phase 1 of Great Stūpa Period 4, i.e., the middle or second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE. The bowl is orange in color and measures 26 cm in diameter and 11 cm in height.<sup>2</sup> The inscription on it was first read and published in Petech 1966 (cf. his footnote 1 for a fuller account of its archaeological context provided by Domenico Faccenna), together with a photograph illustrating one side only of the vessel (not including the end of the inscription; Fig. 1) and an eye copy of the entire inscription then known made by V. Caroli. The inscription is briefly referred to by Domenico Faccenna (2002: 108) and Richard Salomon (2011: 169).

Subsequently to Petech's article, several additional fragments of the vessel with further parts of the inscription were found. I thank Luca M. Olivieri for

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This article is dedicated to Pierfrancesco Callieri as a small token of admiration and gratitude for the indefatigable work that he and the Italian Archaeological Mission (IAM) have been carrying out in Pakistan.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Standard bowl class ABa 1 (Olivieri 2020: 111).



Fig. 1 - Dharmarājika bowl from Butkara I. After Petech 1966: fig. 1.

alerting me to the existence of these new fragments, which according to him were discovered in 1987-88, and for making first reproductions of them available to me in February 2017. These consisted of a set of photocopied photographs and an eve copy (added to Caroli's) from the ISMEO archives (Fig. 2). The inscription was illegible and in fact almost entirely invisible in the reproduction of the photographs, reducing the useable evidence to the eye copy, with all the problems of subjective and inaccurate reproduction that it entails. Nonetheless, I produced a reevaluation and discussion of the reading provided for the original fragments by Petech, and proposed a tentative interpretation of the new fragments then only known through the eye copy. Eventually, however, thanks to the permission of Mr Nasir Mehmood, Curator in charge of the Reserve Collection of the Swat Museum, Olivieri could also access the object itself in October 2022 and produce new photographic documentation (Figs 3-4). I was now in a position to check my tentative reading against the new photographs, which are not without problems themselves since especially on the new fragments the inscription is faded, but which did on the whole confirm the interpretation I had arrived at earlier from the eye copy only.

The hand of the inscription is careful, yet particularly fluid, and appears to have been painted onto the surface of the vessel with the help of a brush. The height of the *akṣaras* gradually decreases from *c*. 5 cm at the beginning of the inscription to *c*. 3 cm at its end. Notable are the well-rounded *dha*, the elongated right arm of the *ma*, and the rightward bend of the bottom of the vowel sign in *mi*. The overall impression is very close to that of Kharoṣṭhī manuscript hands of the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE.

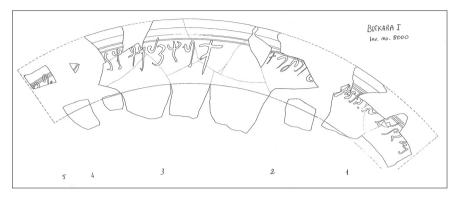


Fig. 2 - Dharmarājika bowl from Butkara I, eye copy with new fragments. Courtesy ISMEO Italian Archaeological Mission Archives, Saidu Sharif.

The beginning of the inscription is in the shadow in Petech's photograph, but clearly visible on the new images, and we can confidently read *thobami*, as opposed to Petech's *thubami*. The spelling with *o* in place of etymological *u* is an occasional variant that occurs in the form *thobo* in the 1<sup>st</sup>-century-CE relic inscription of Naganamda (CKI 454) as well as in the form *thopo* in the 2<sup>nd</sup>-century-CE relic inscription of Khamdadata (CKI 225).

The next word was read *dhamaraï*  $\langle *a \rangle mi$  by Petech, with accidental omission of the akşara *a* by the scribe.<sup>3</sup> The space between *i* and *mi* is larger than between other pairs of akşaras, however, and Petech's reproduction as well as the new photographs contain what looks like the lower half of a very thinly outlined *a*, allowing us to read *dhamaraï[a]mi*.

Petech read the last *akşara* in this group of contiguous fragments as *da*, and tentatively reconstructed *da(\*namukhe)*. It is, however, equally possible to read this *akşara* as *na*. The inscription as known to Petech does not contain any other clear instance of the coronal nasal that would have allowed him to determine whether *na* or *na* was the spelling for it employed by this scribe. But whether the *akşara* in question is read as *da* or *na*, it may well preserve the name of a donor rather than the word 'danamuha.' I will revisit this point when evaluating the newly available fragments of the inscription.

On the right side of the same contiguous group of fragments, separated from *thobami* by a large space and thus in all likelihood the end of the inscription, another six *akşaras* are preserved. Only Caroli's eye copy was provided for these in Petech's article. The last three *akşaras* were read by Petech as *puyai*" in honor of," a common conclusion of early Gandhāran donative formulas, and this

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> The transcriptions in this article use the following symbols: [] unclear text, (\*) lost but reconstructed text,  $\langle * \rangle$  text accidentally omitted by the scribe and /// edge of support.

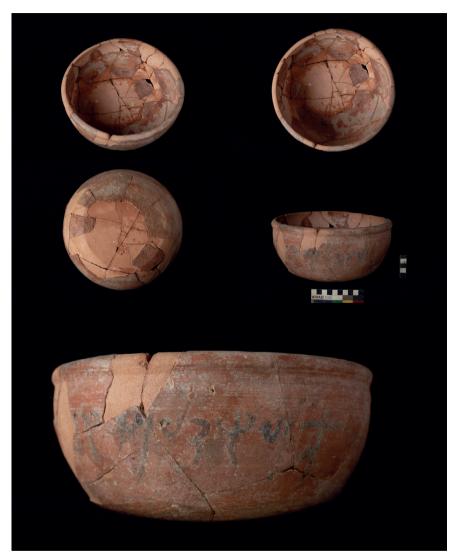


Fig. 3 - Dharmarājikā bowl from Butkara I (1). Photo Aurangzeib Khan, Courtesy Italian Archaeological Mission.

reading is now confirmed by the new photographs. Petech did not attempt to read the three *akṣaras* preceding this word that should belong to an indication of the person or persons honored in the genitive case. Graphically, the last *akṣara* is almost certainly a *ra*; it is tempting to see in it a *sa*, providing a regular genitive singular ending, but the stem of the *akṣara* is too straight to consider

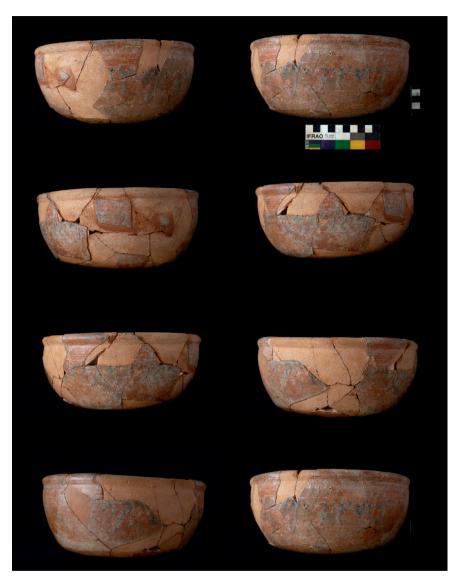


Fig. 4 - Dharmarājikā bowl from Butkara I (2). Photo Aurangzeib Khan, Courtesy Italian Archaeological Mission.

even the open-headed type of *sa*. Only a small diagonal stroke remains of the *akşara* preceding this, closer to the *ra* than to the first *akşara* at the right edge of the sherd. This first *akşara*, finally, has a stroke turning to the right from the bottom of its stem, suggesting that the letter is either a *ha*, or that it has a

subscript (post-consonantal) *ra* attached to it, or the diacritical mark indicating softening of an intervocalic consonant that is visually indistinguishable from *ra*. I here adopt the interpretation as *ra* and will justify it in my proposed reconstruction of the entire inscription, taking into account the new fragments.

The whole of the inscription as it was known to Petech, but with the modifications indicated above, accordingly reads:

thobami dhamaraï[a]mi [na] /// ... /// .[ra] ? ra puyaï "At the Dharmarājika stūpa ... in honor of ...."

Approximately one half of the circumference and a little more than half of the inscription was lost when Petech wrote. On the basis of the general donative formula, the missing part should have contained the conclusion of the specification of the donor followed by the word 'danamuha,' and then possibly one more *puyai* expression in addition to the one that is partially preserved.

The new eye copy (Fig. 2) shows three new inscribed fragments numbered 1, 4 and 5 (in addition to the original group of contiguous fragments numbered 2 and 3) that are now also documented by the new photographs. Of these, fragment 4 contains only a small remnant of one *akṣara*, and both its interpretation and its original placement must remain uncertain. Fragment 5 contains parts of two *akṣaras*, and fragment 1 between ten and twelve *akṣaras*, depending on interpretation.

Fragment 1 starts off in a peculiar manner, with what in the eye copy looks like a lowened *ta* or *ra* followed by the bottom of a *ha*, or possibly a cursive *e*. Since interlinear insertions in Kharosthī writing are, however, almost invariably made above the line rather than below it, this interpretation seemed unlikely from the beginning. The newly available photographs confirm this doubt in that they show a shape that appears to be a single *akṣara*. Its precise interpretation remains difficult: the top of the *akṣara* is lost, and the middle obscured by abrasion. One possible reading is *ca*, even though the top left portion of the *akṣara* contains an unexpectedly thick ink stroke, and the interpretation of the inscription.

The next word is beyond reasonable doubt a form of 'danamuha.' The first akşara *da* appears to have a footmark to the right and is followed clearly enough by a *na*, then a *mu*, and then a final *akşara* that both in the eye copy and on the photograph is more likely to be a *he* than the *kho* that occurs in the other common spelling of the word.

The first *akşara* of the following word can be interpreted as a *ma*, in spite of the surprisingly thickly-drawn left part of the *akşara*, and the second *akşara* has the general shape of a *da*, even though its lower part is indistinct. This in turn is followed by a fairly clear *pi*, and then a *du*. The last *akşara* on this fragment appears to be a *pu*. Taken together, this results in a reliable reading and likely reconstruction [*mada*]*pidu* [*pu*](\**yai*) "in honor of mother and father." The same expression using the same word forms occurs in four other

Gāndhārī dedicatory inscriptions: CKI 60 (Taxila) *matapitu puyae*, CKI 178 (Charsadda) *madapidu puya (\*e)*, CKI 328 (findspot unknown) *matrapidu pujae* and, in extended form, CKI 251 (Bajaur) *matipidu bhar[y]ae putrana mahavermasa mahimdrasa puyee* "in honor of mother and father, his wife and his sons Mahāvarma and Mahendra."

The entire text of fragment 1 would then be:

/// [ca] danamu[he mada]pidu [pu](\*yaï) ///

"... donation of ... and ... in honor of mother and father ... "

This reading is compatible with an interpretation of all five fragments as belonging to the same vessel, as physically reconstructed. In this case, fragment 1 confirms the use of *na* for the coronal nasal by the scribe, which suggests that the last *akşara* on fragment 3 should, in fact, be read *na* rather than *da*. That it is most likely the beginning of the name of a donor, and cannot be that of the word 'danamuha,' is clear from the appearance of this word further down the line on fragment 1. The word *[ca]* in front of *danamu[he]* would then follow the lost name (or other specification) of a second donor.

The following [mada]pidu [pu](\*yaï) suggests that the second puyaï expression of the inscription also refers to a relative of the donors. A possible reconstruction is (\*bh)[rada]ra "of (their) brother." The brother of a donor, where he is mentioned, usually occupies the position immediately after the parents, as in CKI 257 (Bajaur?) matapita pujayita bhrada imdasene ... pujayidu "mother and father are honored, (his) brother Indrasena ... is honored" and CKI 159 (Wardak) madapidara me puyae bhavatu bhradara me hasthunaḥmaregasa puyae bhavatu "may it be in honor of my brother Hasthunaḥmarega." This last example also provides a parallel for the unusual genitive singular form (\*bh)[rada]ra that we have to assume in our inscription. Examples with only one parent are CKI 242 (Bajaur?) pidu a puyae viṣūvarmasa avacarayasa bhrada vaga stratego puyaïte "and in honor of (his) father, the Apraca king Viṣūuvarma, (his) brother Vaga the general is honored" and CKI 401 (Swat) *ihaya[te] madara bhadara śpasa dara ya puyaïto* "(his) surviving mother, brother, sister and wife are honored."

The inscription as preserved on fragments 2, 3 and 1 can then, with all due caution, be reconstructed and translated as follows:

thobami dhamaraï[a]mi [na] /// ... /// [ca] danamu[he mada]pidu [pu](\*yaï bh)[rada]ra puyaï

"At the Dharmarājika stūpa, donation of Na ... and ..., in honor of (their) mother and father, in honor of (their) brother."

The position of the small fragment 5 in this reconstruction remains uncertain. It contains what is likely to be the top of either a base of an *akṣara a* or a *ha*, followed by the two tops of one or two indistinct further *akṣaras*. If

it is correctly placed between fragments 3 and 1 as in the eye copy, then it may preserve part of the name of the second donor. It seems just as likely, however, that its proper position is between fragments 1 and 2, in which case it may provide the final *i* of the first *[pu](\*yai)* The indistinct shapes at the left edge of this sherd would then have to be interpreted as the top of the *bhra* of *[bhrada]ra*, which seems graphically possible. In this case, fragment 5 would be contiguous with fragment 2 on the left, and the space of only a single *akşara* (the *ya* of *[pu](\*ya)[i]*) would remain between it and fragment 1 on the right.

In addition to the bowl, the title of the Butkara I Dharmarājika stūpa<sup>4</sup> is attested in an inscription on a schist slab that had been repurposed as part of a minor stūpa (no. 133 [23]) (Fig. 5) in Phase 3 of Great Stūpa Period 3 in the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE. Images of this slab showing the inscription were published in Faccenna 1980-1981, pl. 315c and pl. 315d (here reproduced as Figs 6-7), and the content of the inscription was referred to indirectly by Faccenna: "Questo è indicato col nome di Dharmarajika da due iscrizioni più tarde (una su lastra di scisto, riusata in un monumento, n. 133, del Periodo 3 di GSt. 3, con il pavimento F3; l'altra dipinta su vaso rinvenuto in strato associato con la prima fase di GSt. 4)" (Faccenna 2002: 108). I take the opportunity to provide here a formal transcription:

dhamaraï[a] ///

This can be reconstructed without doubt to dhamarai[a](\*mi) "at the Dharmarājika," as on the bowl. The continuation of this inscription, however, remains as unclear as its original function. It is executed in large, generously spaced letters that in themselves do not provide any additional dating information, but are compatible with a date in or prior to the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE for the production of the inscription.

Both the bowl inscription and the slab inscription reveal then that Butkara I, as one of the most ancient centers of Buddhism in Gandhāra, held the distinction of having a Dharmarājika stūpa.<sup>5</sup> The other well-known stūpa in the region to

<sup>4</sup> The title is probably best understood as an intentional double reference to the Buddha as the original Dharma King and Aśoka as his successor in the role of spreading the dharma throughout the world (so Strong 1983: 117-118; 2004: 136; cf. Konow 1929: 75 for the arguments in support of both interpretations and the entries *dharmarāja* and *dharmarājikā* in Sircar 1966: 94). In early Gandhāra, the word is only attested as an adjective in the masculine gender, with reference to implied or present 'thuva.' In the inscriptional record of mainland India, the word also occurs as a noun in the feminine (e.g., *dharmarājikā* in the 11<sup>th</sup>-century inscription of Mahīpāla at Sarnath; Hultzsch 1885).

<sup>5</sup> The slab inscription is mentioned by Cristina Scherrer-Schaub (2014: 169). Further confirmation may be provided by a potsherd from Gogdara III, some ten kilometers from Butkara I, an image of which Luca M. Olivieri sent me when this paper was already in draft form (GIII 119; III-IV, D10, September 9, 1960 = list 1975). At the left edge of this sherd, the *akşaras dhamara* /// are clearly visible, and a reconstruction to *dhamara*(\**ia*)- (with unclear case ending) suggests itself. In view of the proximity of Gogdara to Butkara and the presumed rarity of Dharmarājika stūpas, the reference of the Gogdara sherd may then well be to the Butkara stūpa.

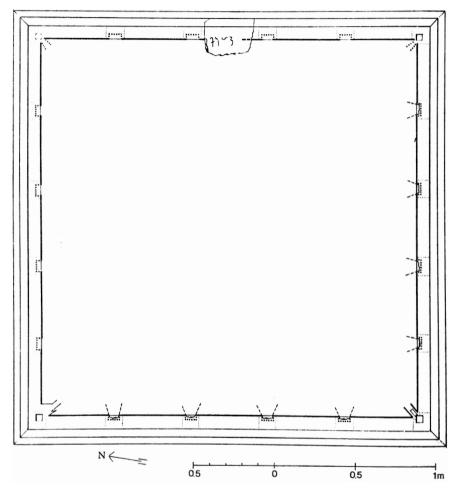


Fig. 5 - Butkara I, stupa 133 [23]. After Faccenna 1980-1981: fig. 115.

bear this designation is the Dharmarājika of Taxila. As in the case of Butkara I, the title is there attested by two inscriptions, the relic dedication of Urasaka (CKI 60: *dhamaraïe takṣaśi (\*la )e* "in the Dharmarājika at Taxila") and an inscribed lamp (CKI 68) that provides the closest parallel to the Butkara I vase:

takşaïlaami dhamaraï[e dhamadasabhikşun]o [eşa] saputrasa danamukh[e] "At the Dharmarājika of Taxila, this is the donation of the monk Dharmadāsa together with his son."

Petech (1966: 81) was the first to point out that the spelling *takṣaïlaa*without *s* in this inscription should be taken seriously (see now also Salomon



Fig. 6 - Dharmarājikā slab from Butkara I (context). After Faccenna 1980-1981: pl. 315c.

2005, and Baums 2019: 168-169), showing the soundness of his intuitions about the Gāndhārī language.

A more recent discovery, the inscription on the halo of the Asoraya buddha image (CKI 256), reads *[tra]matithaṇaṇagarammi dhamaraïammi asorayapraïstavidami* "in the capital city Trama, at the Dharmarājika established by King Asoka." As argued by Salomon (2007: 267-276), Trama (which remains unlocated) was probably the capital of the Apraca dynasty of Bajaur, and it would thus appear to be the case that both neighboring kingdoms of Bajaur and Swat laid claim to a Dharmarājika in their main cities, as did Taxila further East.<sup>6</sup>

One further reference comes from a Gāndhārī manuscript in the British Library collection containing, as its secondary text, a series of brief avadāna sketches (CKM 5 in Baums, Glass 2002-). In one of these *avadānas* (Lenz 2009: 138-141), a stone pillar at a local *caitya* is compared to the stone pillar

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Two further Kharosthī inscriptions preserve words that resemble the stūpa title Dharmarājika: a lamp from Malakand (CKI 465: *dhamaraïņa malaśpaņa*) and a rock inscription at Shatial (CKI 582: *dhama[raï litaņaśe]*...), but in both cases the readings and word divisions are uncertain so that it remains unclear whether the reference is to stūpas.



Fig. 7 - Dharmarājikā slab from Butkara I (close-up). After Faccenna 1980-1981: pl. 315d.

*nagarami dharmarayigami* "in the city, at the Dharmarājika." The fact that this city with its apparently well-known Dharmarājika is not named suggests that it was the one major city in the region where the manuscript was produced. Unfortunately, this scroll, like all recent Gāndhārī manuscript discoveries, is not the result of proper archeological excavation and its findspot remains the matter of speculation. Nonetheless, an argument can be made (Baums 2012: 209-210) for Swat as the origin of the British Library collection, and if this is true, then the Dharmarājika of this manuscript may very well be the one of Butkara I, located in the major city of ancient Swat.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> On Butkara I as an urban sanctuary see Iori 2016 and Olivieri 2019.

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