

FOREWORD

The project that has given birth to this long-awaited volume has its roots in the very beginning of the Italian activity in Swat. The first rock reliefs, not counting those introduced by Sir Aurel Stein, were in fact published in 1958 by Giuseppe Tucci in his seminal Preliminary Report on an Archaeological Survey in Swat which presented to the scholarly community the results of his survey of 1955.

Belonging to a late chronological horizon close to that of Padmasambhava, these Buddhist sculptures were no doubt one of the reasons that led to IsMEO's decision to invest efforts and resources in Swat.

The dates of arrival in the IsMEO photographic archive of images of rock reliefs from Swat gives a clear idea of how since 1955 more than one generation of scholars has shown an interest in this class of artefacts, if only in the shape of photographs and a few notes on the discovery of new reliefs: from the 1950s to the 1980s, new records were accumulated by Domenico Faccenna, Francesca Bonardi, Maurizio Taddei, Alfredo Vallazza, Pietro Guj, Enrico Cimmino, Umberto Scerrato, Francesco Noci and Pierfrancesco Callieri. In 1987, in his capacity as director of the IsMEO Italian Archaeological Mission, Domenico Faccenna set up a comprehensive project to survey and study these rock reliefs, entrusting its execution to Anna Filigenzi and Luca Maria Olivieri, who had both recently joined the Mission. Anna Filigenzi had been one of the most brilliant students of Maurizio Taddei at the Oriental University of Naples, while Luca Maria Olivieri was a graduate of the Department of Historical, Archaeological and Anthropological Sciences of the University of Rome La Sapienza. The choice was intended to provide the study with a global approach in which the record of the topographical context was accorded equal importance with the iconographic interpretation of the reliefs.

Since 1987 the systematic activity of surveying and recording carried out by Luca Maria Olivieri has made considerable progress. Along with the main groups of reliefs already known, which were surveyed again using a new and more thorough methodological approach, further complexes as well as isolated reliefs were identified and surveyed, and the area of research was extended to new areas adjoining Swat, in particular Puran and Buner. The study of the topographical distribution of the reliefs has proved to be of the greatest interest, suggesting new functional interpretations.

Most of the activity of survey and recording was completed in a relatively short space of time, as it was merged with that undertaken for the project of the Archaeological Map of Swat. The long hiatus between that period and this publication is due not only to the political events which have affected the recent history of Swat but also to the reasons that Anna Filigenzi describes so effectively in her Preface and Introduction and which allowed her to resist with incredible tenacity the continual requests from her Italian and foreign colleagues to put the final results of her research at disposal of the scholarly community, given that various other publications on the same subject had started to appear.

Now even Anna Filigenzi has concluded that the time is ripe for this publication, and we can be sure that every possible attempt at interpreting this complex repertory of elegant yet enigmatic figures has been made, yielding a satisfactory understanding of the complex codes of this fascinating visual language.

The publication came about as part of a stand-alone research project funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF Project no. P 21902) that at Anna Filigenzi's request was affiliated to the Numismatic Commission of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (from 2013 the Working Group on Numismatics of the Documenta Antiqua department at the Institute for the Study of Ancient Culture). Anna Filigenzi's expertise has constituted a welcome addition to the research programme of the Numismatic Commission, particularly as one of the special focuses of the numismatic research undertaken by the Commission has long concentrated on the coinage of the so-called Iranian Huns in Bactria and India. It has provided the unique opportunity of subjecting the archaeological finds made by the Italian expeditions in Swat to a comparative analysis with the numismatic findings. This scholarly discourse has proved to be exceptionally fruitful and has led to completely new perspectives for

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both groups of scholars. In this connection it should not go unmentioned that we were here reviving a tradition that goes back to 1976, when Domenico Faccenna asked Robert Göbl to publish the coins found during his excavations in Butkara I.

In conclusion, it is to be hoped that this fruitful cooperation and interdisciplinary collaboration can also be continued in the future.

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