

PREFACE

The work presented here essentially draws on the documentation collected over the years by the Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan of the Italian Institute for Africa and the Orient (IsIAO, formerly IsMEO, Italian Institute for Middle and Far East). In addition to specific research projects, the Mission has also always carried on a constant activity of territorial survey in Swat, where it is based. It thus sometimes happens that randomly collected data merge little by little into the Archaeological Map of Swat and become significant clusters. This is the case with the rock sculptures analysed in this work.

In 1987, Domenico Faccenna – at that time Director of the Mission – entrusted Luca M. Olivieri and me with the comprehensive survey of these monuments, convinced of its potential bearing on the cultural history of the region. After an initial survey carried out by Olivieri and me that same year Olivieri made other survey campaigns in the following years. He was always accompanied by our Pakistani collaborators, who were as persevering as he in walking throughout the country and sifting evidence and information. These surveys completed the documentation previously available and at the same time provided a more accurate mapping of the sculptures.

The analytical study, topographic positioning, and a partial graphic reconstruction of the sculptures are finally presented here as a systematic and comprehensive work. The volume is divided in two parts. The first is dedicated to the iconographic exegesis of the sculptures, their particular features, geographical context and cultural relevance, with the inclusion of a Graphic Summary and a note on the technique. The second consists of the analytical catalogue, which groups the sculptures according to topographic criteria. These criteria are illustrated by specific entries at the beginning of each grouping.

In order to facilitate consultation, the illustrative apparatus has been divided in three parts, each one with its own independent numeration. Comparative materials are inserted into Part I (Analytical Study) and simply referred to in the text as “Fig. *”. The photographic documentation of the rock sculptures is assembled in a specific section in Part II (The Corpus of the Sculptures) and referred to in the text as “II: Fig. *”. The drawings, which have been assembled in Appendix I (Graphic Summary), are grouped according to a categorisation based on iconographic types and are referred to in the text as “GS *”.

The long delay in the publication of this volume is solely my responsibility, and the reasons for this are partly subjective, partly objective. The first objective reason is the elusiveness of the iconographic details. Damages inflicted by the natural process of erosion and repatination as well as by iconoclastic disfigurement have severely reduced the legibility of the reliefs. Nevertheless, more consequential has been my initial inability to detect, in the seeming monotony of subjects and lack of spatial rules, the sense and coherence of this “strange” artistic phenomenon.

My study thus started with the objective of realising a “mere” catalogue of the sculptures. At the time I considered this a quite reasonable undertaking, but now I recognise my miscalculation. Compiling a catalogue requires a thorough familiarity with the subject matter, which I was far from possessing. Nor can I pretend now to present this work as complete and conclusive. Nevertheless, the descriptions are quite different today than what I would have considered correct and exhaustive in the past. The analytical study of the subjects, with their iconographic and stylistic details (often retrieved with the help of cross-comparisons between specimens with different degrees of legibility, or between the rock sculptures and other, related classes of materials), and their spatial and topographic distribution, have radically changed my initial perceptions and re-directed the research towards new and more complex goals. Over the course of the years some results concerning specific aspects have been published. Revised and enlarged, they are now incorporated into this work, whose completion is the result of support provided by a dedicated research project on the cultural history of Uḍḍiyāna.¹

¹ Namely, the FWF Stand-alone Project P 21902 “The cultural history of Uddiyana 4th to 8th century CE”, hosted by the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Institute for the Study of Ancient Culture, Division Documenta Antiqua.

During these years I have accumulated many debts of gratitude that I can repay only with my sincere thanks. Let me start with Luca Maria Olivieri, who demonstrated generous confidence and friendship by accepting such a slow elaboration of the data provided by his surveys. Thanks to Peter Rockwell for his prompt response to my request for a technical opinion, something that nobody else could have provided with the same competence and sensibility. Thanks to Pierfrancesco Callieri and Giovanni Verardi, who, though pressed by innumerable other commitments and tasks, gave me the support of their invaluable advice. From Valeria Benedetti, the true “living archive” of our archaeological Missions, I received the usual indispensable collaboration in the retrieval of the relevant documentation. Special thanks go to our Pakistani collaborators and friends, in particular Dowar Khan, Akhtar Manir and the late Fazal Wahid, who, besides taking part in the surveys, constantly and actively collected essential information for us.

Thanks to the colleagues of the Italian Archaeological Mission Matteo De Chiara, Massimo Vidale, Piero Spagnesi, who provided additional information. Thanks to Harald Hauptmann, Martin Bemann and John Falconer, who actively contributed to the photographic documentation.

Thanks to Gérard Fussman, whose invaluable scientific advice and support accompanied my first steps in this research. Thanks to Deborah Klimburg-Salter and Michael Alram, who gave me the opportunity of expanding my interests and refining my research tools. Thanks to my dear friends Erika Forte, Fabrizio Sinisi, Jürgen Schörflinger and Sara Marsano, and to my husband, Bernardo Velletri, for their help, advice and support.

Lastly, my thoughts go to two people who have since passed away: Domenico Faccenna, who has inspired this work, and Maurizio Taddei, who welcomed and encouraged my first “non-traditional” interpretations. Both awaited the publication of this work with unflagging patience, and to both I owe more than I could now express in words. I would like to say “thank you” to them, but I cannot. I can only say to those who now read these pages that my gratitude to these wonderful teachers (and great human beings) is sincere and unchanging, and that I feel honoured to have had them in my life.