

An Inscribed *nāgadanta* from Butkara I and Related Questions*

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with an Epigraphic Note by Stefan Baums

L'autrice individua, a partire da un *nāgadanta* ben conservato rinvenuto a Butkara I (Swāt) raffigurante un putto su fiore di loto e caratterizzato dall'assenza di voluta, un gruppo di elementi che pur frammentari presentano le medesime caratteristiche. Questi, attribuibili verosimilmente al medesimo workshop e forse al medesimo edificio, sono inquadrabili nella produzione scultorea più antica del Gandhāra.

L'attribuzione al medesimo gruppo di due frammenti rinvenuti a Sirkap, che l'autrice colloca in un contesto di reimpiego, costituisce un ulteriore tassello nella ricostruzione dei rapporti tra lo Swāt e Taxila. In chiusura vi è una nota di S. Baums sull'iscrizione del *nāgadanta* con un confronto da Taxila (Sirkap).

Among the sculptures brought to light at the Buddhist site of Butkara I by the Italian Archaeological Mission of the IsMEO under the direction of Domenico Faccenna, a *nāgadanta* or false-bracket, Inv. no. B 7476, deserves particular attention (Fig. 1a-b).¹

The item, found in the uppermost layer ("strato 1") of square CSL, is 22.5 cm high and features a winged putto (Erotes) standing on an inverted lotus base. The tenon that serves to insert it into the masonry is conserved and bears some Kharoṣṭhī letters.²

The figure is carved in high relief on a stone block (of green schist?) smoothed on the sides and the front, between the legs of the figure. The side profile follows a curved line which ends behind the neck of the putto/Erotes with a sort of protuberance. The head is undercut.

The putto is frontal, legs slightly apart, feet resting on the lotus *karṇikā*, which forms a 45° angle with the figure and the tenon. The head is slightly lifted and turned to the left. The putto shows infantile traits: swollen thighs and folds near the groin. The white line and the belly button are carved.

The arms adhere to the torso; the hands are slightly oversized, as if to emphasize gestures and attributes. The (chipped) right hand is raised to the chest, held upright; the palm faces outwards (?) or perhaps once held an attribute/offering that is now missing.

The face is full, framed by curly hair, schematically rendered with polyhedral forms and a bundle of hair tied in a knot falling on the left side. The lips are full, over a pointed chin; the nose is broken.

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¹ The *nāgadanta* is kept in the Museo delle Civiltà, Rome (Inv. MNAOR 1153), heir to the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale; a photograph of this *nāgadanta* was first published in Provenzali 2005: 156, fig. 2.

² See Epigraphic Note below.