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Tree and serpent worship

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Chapter II. History - Ethnography - Sculptures - Merit Of Sculptures

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CHAPTER II.

TOPES AT SANCHI.—(Plates I. and II.)

THE Topes at Sanchi, which it is proposed to illustrate in the following pages, form part of a great group of these monuments situated between the towns of Bhilsa and Bhopal, in Central India. They extend over a district seventeen miles east and west, and about ten miles north and south, in five or six different groups, and number altogether between forty and fifty tumuli of various dimensions. The smallest of them are no doubt mere burying places of local chiefs, erected over their ashes, and contain no objects of interest. Others are Dagobas, or relic shrines, in the correct sense of the word; while the great Tope itself (A, Plate I.) is a Chaitya or Stūpa,* erected apparently to commemorate some event in Buddhist history, or to mark some sacred spot.†

The great Tope at Sanchi (Plate II.) consists, first, of a basement 121 feet in diameter and 14 feet in height. On the top of this is a terrace or procession path, 5 feet 6 inches wide, within which the dome or tumulus itself rises in the form of a truncated hemisphere to a height of 39 feet. This was originally coated with chunan to a thickness of about four inches, but whether ornamented with painting or moulded plaster ornaments cannot be ascertained, owing to the very fragmentary state in which the coating now exists. On the top of the dome was a level platform, measuring 34 feet across. This was surrounded by a circular railing of stones, some of the pillars of which are still found among the ruins. Within this was a square Tee or simulated relic box, consisting of sixteen square pillars with rails, and measuring 11 feet 6 inches each way. Within this again was a circular support for the umbrella which invariably crowned these monuments. When Captain Fell visited this monument in 1819,‡ all this was *in situ* and nearly perfect; but shortly afterwards some bungling amateurs dug into the monument, and so completely ruined it, that the form of its superstructure can now only with difficulty be made out.

The most remarkable feature, however, connected with this monument is the rail which surrounds it at a distance of 9 feet 6 inches from the base, except on the south, where the double flight of steps leading to the berm or procession path reduces the width to 6 feet 4 inches. As before mentioned, it is 11 feet in height, and consisted apparently of 100 pillars, exclusive of the gateways. Each of these was apparently the gift of an individual, and even the rails between them seem to have been presented

* Vide ante, page 79.

† The whole of these Topes were carefully opened and examined by General A. Cunningham and Lieut. Colonel Maisey in 1851, and the results published by the first-named officer, in his work on the Bhilsa Topes, by Smith, Elder, & Co. in 1854.

‡ J. A. S. B., vol. III. p. 490, et seqq. General Taylor, of the Bengal Cavalry, who was probably the first British officer that visited the monument, confirms the account given by Captain Fell. He discovered the Tope when encamped near it, during the campaign of 1818. Three of its gates were then standing, and a great part of the Tee still *in situ*.

by different persons. General Cunningham collected 176 short inscriptions from this rail,* all by different individuals, and each recording that the member on which it was engraved was the gift of some pious person, male or female, but all unfortunately unknown to fame. Not one, at least, has yet been satisfactorily identified.

There is absolutely no sculpture on the rail, but fortunately four gateways were added to it about the Christian era, and these are covered with sculptured decorations of the most elaborate kind. Two of these are still standing, and the fragments of the other two are to be seen lying on the ground. The most perfect is the northern entrance, the rear elevation of which forms the frontispiece to this volume. The total height to the top of the central ornament is 33 feet 6 inches. The height to the under side of the lowest rail is 18 feet 6 inches in the centre, and the width of the opening between the two pillars is 7 feet clear. The greatest width is across the lowest rail, and measures within a fraction of 20 feet. The whole, as will be seen from the frontispiece and the photographs, is of a singularly wooden form, and is jointed and morticed together more like a piece of carpentry than a structure of stone.†

Number 2. Tope (B, in Plate I.) is very much smaller than that just described, being only 39 feet in diameter. It springs from a basement 6 feet in height, supporting a terrace or berm 5 feet 4 inches wide. Its section is that of a hemisphere stilted to the extent of $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet. Its proportional of height, therefore, is 29 feet to 39, or as 3 to 4 nearly; that of the great Tope was only as 1 to 2, showing an advance, which is an almost certain indication of a more modern age.‡ The rail is 7 feet 6 inches in height, and elliptical in plan, in order to allow a clear space of 8 feet as well in front of the ramp as round the other parts of the building. The enclosure thus measures 69 feet by $74\frac{1}{2}$ feet. As before explained, the rail is to some extent ornamented (Woodcut, No. 10), but has no gateways of the same imposing character as those of the great Tope. The angle pillars are, however, ornamented as well as the intermediate rails, and afford some indications of great value. (See Plates XLII. and XLIII., which will be noticed hereafter.)

As before mentioned, the great Tope seems to have been a "monumental tower." Nothing was found in it. This one, on the contrary, contained four steatite boxes, in which were placed relics "of Kāśyapa Gotra, missionary to the whole of the Himawanta," and of Madhyama, both these names being mentioned in the Mahawanso as missionaries sent by Aśoka to the Himalaya country,§ thus confirming to the fullest possible extent the inscriptions on the box. Another contained relics of Mogaliputra, who was the head of the Buddhist church at the third convocation (B.C. 241), and altogether the Tope possessed memorials of ten of the principal personages of the Buddhist community during the reign of Asoka. The three named above were well known before the Tope was opened, the other seven were less famous, but their connection can now be traced.||

* Cunningham, *Bhilsa Topes*, 235, et seq.

† All the above dimensions are taken from Colonel Maisey's MS. notes.

‡ Cunningham, *Bhilsa Topes*, p. 177.

§ Mahawanso, p. 74.

|| These particulars are taken from General Cunningham's work, pages 285, et seqq. He and Colonel Maisey seem to have divided the "find" between them. Colonel Maisey's share is now on exhibition at South Kensington Museum; General Cunningham's is in his own house, Clarendon Road, Kensington.

There is another Tope at Sanchi, which is illustrated to some extent in this work. It stands near to the great Tope, and on the same platform (D 3, in plan, Plate I.) At first sight it appears only as a formless cairn of stones, but on examination it was found to consist of a dome 40 feet in diameter, standing on a base measuring 52 feet across and 6 feet high. The dome was originally crowned by a pedestal or Tee $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet square, supporting a Chatta about $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet diameter. Some fragments of the Rail are scattered about, but the principal ornament is the fragment of one of the Gateways, which is still standing (Plate XXI.) and though only about half the dimensions of those of the great Tope, is quite equal to them in elegance of design or richness of ornament.

The great interest of this Tope, or rather Dagoba, is that it was found to contain relics of Śāriputra and Mahā Mogalāna, two of the principal disciples and followers of Buddha himself.* These were probably the most precious possessions of the fraternity at Sanchi.

As the other Topes at or about Sanchi are not illustrated in this work, it would be tedious and unnecessary to dwell on them here. They are all described and delineated in General Cunningham's work, to which the reader is referred for details. Some of them are of great value for the elucidation of the history of Buddhist art, but none equal either in elaboration or in interest to the three just enumerated.

HISTORY.

Although there are no data which enable us to ascertain positively the dates of the Sanchi Topes, there are certain indications which fix them within certain limits with a reasonable amount of certainty. One of the most distinct of these is in an inscription on a representation of a Tope on the Southern Gateway (Plate XVII.) now fallen and lying on the ground. It is to the effect that the beam on which it was found was "the gift of Ānanda, the son of Vasishṭa, in the reign of Sri Śātakarṇi."† Unfortunately for our argument, there are several kings of the Āndhra dynasty who bore this name. The first reigned A.D. 10 to 28, according to my calculation; the second 64 to 120 A.D., and his long and prosperous reign would seem to afford a presumption that it was during his lifetime that these Gateways were erected. General Cunningham and Colonel Maisey both arrived at the conclusion that it was during the reign of the first that they were added to the Rail,‡ and they may be correct, but a second question arises on this point. The Gateways are not all of the same age. There is a considerable difference in style, and Colonel Maisey thinks the Gateway bearing this inscription is the oldest. On the whole I am inclined to agree with his reasoning on the point, though the data available are not sufficient to justify a positive opinion being expressed regarding it. I feel, however, little doubt but that the four Gateways of the great Tope, and the Gateway of No. 3, were all erected within the limits of the first century after Christ, and I think the probability is that the South Gateway belonged to the first thirty years of it;

* All these particulars are taken from Cunningham, *Bhilsa Topes*, p. 295, et seqq.

† Cunningham, *Bhilsa Topes*, p. 264.

‡ *Bhilsa Topes*, p. 265.

in other words, was being carved while Christ was preaching at Jerusalem. The presumption is confirmed to the fullest possible extent by the style of architecture and of the sculpture, though it is difficult to make this argument available with those who are not intimately acquainted with the Caves of Karlee, Ajanta, and other contemporaneous examples.

The inscriptions on the Rails, though so numerous, do not contain a single historical name that can be recognized with certainty; but the style of the characters in which they are written is very similar to that used in the inscriptions of Aśoka, and never employed,—so far as is at present known,—after the Christian era.

For the Tope itself we have neither inscription nor architectural mouldings, and our Chinese travellers fail us here, as neither of them visited Sanchi, nor did any other mediæval writer, and no tradition exists among the Brahminical or Mahomedan inhabitants of the country as to the origin or date of this memorial of a long-forgotten faith.

In this difficulty the Mahawanso helps us a little.* It relates that when Aśoka was sent by his father to be governor of Ujjéni he tarried some time at Chaitiyagiri, or, as it is called elsewhere, Wessanagara,† the modern Besnagar, close to Sanchi. He there married Devî, the daughter of the chief, and by her had twin sons, Ujjenio and Mahindo, and afterwards a daughter, Sanghamitâ. The two last named afterwards entered the priesthood, and played a most important part in the conversion of Ceylon to Buddhism. Afterwards "when Mahindo visited his royal mother at Chaitiyagiri," before setting out for Ceylon, she established the thero in the superb Chaitya Vihâra, which had been erected by herself.‡ In all this it is true there is no mention of the Chaitya itself, and it may have existed before Aśoka's time, but there is absolutely no proof of this, and till some one stone monument is discovered in India with an ascertained date anterior to 250 B.C., we must be content to commence our history there. On the other hand, the capital of the pillar (Plate XXXIX. Fig. 1.) and the lions which surmount it are so similar to the works we know to be Aśoka's elsewhere, that we may safely assume they belong to his age. There is also a mutilated inscription, on which General Cunningham reads doubtfully his monumental title of Devânapriya.§ If this is really his, it settles the question that the Tope was erected by him, though for what purpose he has not attempted to explain.

Without going further into the evidence, which is not necessary in this place, it may fairly be assumed that the great Tope is one of the 84,000 which Asoka is traditionally said to have erected. If so, it is the only one of them all still remaining in India, and the oldest stone building in the country.||

The Rail may have been commenced immediately afterwards by the faithful of the congregation, and completed in 50 or 100 years. The Gateways were probably added to the then existing Rail at the time when the languishing religion of Buddha

* Mahawanso, p. 76.

‡ Mahawanso, p. 76.

† Turnour, Pali Annals, J. A. S. B., VII., p. 930.

§ Bhilsa Topes, p. 259.

|| General Cunningham's dates are, for the Gates, 19 to 37 A.D.; for the Rail, 250 B.C.; and for the Tope itself, 500 B.C. (page 270, et seq.) With regard to the two first I agree with him, but I think he exaggerates the age of the Tope, without assigning any valid reason for so doing. Assuming the Tope to have been erected by Aśoka, which I see no reason for doubting, this would hardly interfere with his date for the Rail.

was restored to its pristine position by the eloquence of Nāgārjuna, backed by the political influence of the Turushka Kanishka. Everything about them seems to indicate such a revival. If I might be allowed to state what I cannot prove, I would suggest that they must have been completed before the death of Śālivāhana, 78 A.D.

The superb Vihāra erected by the lovely Devī was, I am afraid, entirely of wood, and no trace of it consequently now remains.

The age of the second Tope seems intermediate between these dates. Its taller form shows it to be more modern than the great one, and the more ornate character of its Rail is a strong indication in the same direction. On the other hand, the character of its sculptures and the form of the letters in its inscription show that it is older than the Gateways of the large Tope, if we might guess, say by 100 to 150 years. It cannot well be more, for the ten persons whose relics it contains were all alive in the reign of Aśoka; and men do not become saints, and little bits of bone or beads that belonged to them do not become valuable, till their corporeal form is forgotten. Had they been buried here, it would have been otherwise; but we must allow a hundred years to have passed since their death before these relics were enclosed in steatite boxes and a Dagoba built over them. As a mean date I would be inclined to place No. 2 Tope at from 100 to 150 years B.C.

The third Tope is so ruined—as mentioned above—that there is nothing in its architecture that would enable us to fix its date. The Gateway may be of the same age as those of the great Tope, or slightly more modern; but even if this were ascertained it would not enable us to determine the age of the Tope itself. It may have been added afterwards, as those of the great Tope certainly were. The fact of its containing relics of the companions of Buddha is equally useless for the purpose of fixing its date. They may have been brought here at any time. If, however, I am correct in a suggestion I will make in describing Plate XXXVIII., it may go some way towards settling this question. My impression is, that the scenes there depicted have reference to the acquirement or recovery of these very relics; and if this is so, the erection of this Tope is probably about contemporary with that of the greater one. If it should turn out as I believe that Aśoka is the hero of the sculptures of the historical scenes in the Gateways of the great Tope, the probability is that, after erecting it to commemorate some miracle or event, he sought further to sanctify the place by adding a relic shrine. According to this hypothesis, he conquered or recovered these relics from their original possessors, and erected this smaller Tope as a chapel for their reception. The Gateway, in that case, is at least two centuries more modern than the building to which it is attached.

There are six or seven other small Topes on the same platform as the great Tope (Plate I.) They are all, however, now merely formless heaps of loose stones, and none of them yielded any results to their explorers.

ETHNOGRAPHY.

It would add very much to the clearness of what follows, if, before proceeding to describe the individual bas-reliefs, it were possible to determine even approximately the races of the people represented in the sculptures at Sanchi, as well as to what epoch of history the events depicted should be ascribed.

Even on the most cursory glance, there is no difficulty in discriminating between the two principal races who take the most prominent part in all the events depicted. There is a third, probably a fourth, race represented, but as they occur only once, there are no sufficient means of comparison to determine who they may be, and it will therefore be sufficient to allude to them when describing Plates XXVIII. and XXX.

Of the other two there can be little difficulty in recognizing one as "Hindus," meaning by that term the civilized race who, at the time when the Gateways were erected, occupied the valley of the Ganges, and who, from their capitals of Ayodhyá and Indraprastha or Pátaliputra (Palibothra), had been the dominant class in India for at least 2,000 years before the time to which we are now referring. Originally these people were no doubt pure immigrant Aryans; but before Śákya Muni preached his reform, their blood had become so mixed with that of the aboriginal and inferior races as to render the success of that new gospel possible. They still, however, retained the civilization and the pre-eminence which the original intellectual superiority of the Aryans had imparted to them.

In the sculptures they are easily recognized by their costume. This consists of the dhoti, wrapped round the loins in precisely the same manner as it is at the present day; sometimes they have also a chudder over their shoulders; and all wear the turban. This last seems to be mingled with the hair, and twisted into the most fantastic shapes, more resembling the form now seen in Burmah than those usual in Bengal; but still it is fundamentally always a long strip of cloth wound round the head in what was no doubt then considered an elegant and fashionable form.

The costume of the women is more difficult to describe, though this is principally in consequence of its scantiness. Both at Sanchi and Amravati the women always wear enormous bangles about the ancles and wrists, and generally strings of beads round the neck, but their body clothing generally is limited to a bead belt round the body below the waist. From this belt slips of cloth are sometimes suspended, more generally at the sides or behind than in front, and sometimes also a cloth, worn something like the dhoti of the male sex, is also added, but when that is the case it is represented in the sculptures generally as absolutely transparent.

The most remarkable part of the female costume is the head dress, which is as voluminous as the body dress is scant. It is represented, Figs. 1., 2., and 3., Plate III., and seems to consist of two long plaits of hair mixed with beads, and a thick roll of cloth, so as to form a sort of tippet, almost covering the whole of the back of the wearer.

It is, however, not only in the Topes that this absence of dress is so conspicuous. In all the sculptures at Karlee, or Ellora, or Mahavellipore, or in the paintings in Ajanta, the same peculiarity is observable. Everywhere, indeed, before the Mahomedan conquest, nudity in India conveyed no sense of indecency. The wife and mother of Buddha are at times represented in this manner. The queen on her throne, the female disciples of Buddha, listening to his exhortations, and on every public occasion on which women take part in what is going on, the costume is the same.* It is equally remarkable that in those days these unveiled females seem to have taken part in every public transaction and show, and to have mixed with the men as freely as women do in Europe at the present day.†

All this is the more remarkable, as in Buddhist books modesty of dress in women is frequently insisted upon. In the Dulva, for instance, a story is told of the King of Kalinga presenting to the King of Kośala (probably Oude) a piece of muslin, which afterwards fell into the hands of a lewd priestess. She, it is said, wore it in public, while it was so thin that she, notwithstanding this, appeared naked, to the great scandal of all who witnessed the exhibition.‡ The probability is, that the story and the book that contains it are of very much more modern date than our sculptures. It certainly is in direct conflict with their evidence.

The other race above alluded to is very easily distinguished from that just described, both in appearance and in their social status. The costume of the men consists of a kilt, literally a kilt, not a cloth wrapped round the loins, but so far as can be judged from the sculptures, needle made, and fastened by a buckle or string. They also wear a cloak or tippet, which seems to be equally shaped and sewn, a thing apparently utterly unknown in India till the fashion of shaped garments was introduced by the Mahomedans.§ Their head dress is also very peculiar; either it is that their hair was twisted into a long rope or plait like a Chinaman's, and then bound round the head in a conical form, or a piece of cloth or rope was similarly twisted. Their most marked peculiarity, however, is that they all wear beards, whereas no single individual of the other race either at Sanchi or Amravati has a trace of a beard or of even a moustache. This is the more remarkable, as Nearchus tells us that the Indians daub their beards with various colours, so that some are white, others black, some red, some purple, and others green! || Curtius tells us they never shave.¶ Diodorus assures us that they nourish their beards during their whole lives, and received this custom from Bacchus, whom they call the bearded deity; and Strabo tells us they suffer their beards to grow without cutting, and dye them various

* When we first visited Japan in 1860, the females were seen "tubbing" in the public streets in the open light of day. Whatever it may be now, nudity conveyed no idea of indecency to the Japanese ten years ago.

† In India there are some tribes where the females still go nearly naked. The Putoos, for instance, described by Mr. Samuells, *J. A. S. B.*, XXV. p. 295, have no other dress than a string tied round their waists, from which every morning they suspend a fresh bunch of leaves in front and another behind; literally the costume of our first parents in Paradise. In the south of India some of the females, of the races on the west coast especially, wear nothing above the waist, in curious contrast to the countries where the Mahomedans have held sway, where the women are now generally secluded, or, if appearing in public, are completely veiled.

‡ Asiatic Researches, XX. p. 85.

§ Buchanan Hamilton, in *Martin's Eastern India*, II. 699.

|| Arrian, *Indica*, XVI.

¶ Q. Curtius, VIII. 9. 22.

** Diodorus, IV. 5.

colours by way of ornament;* and Solinus gives the same testimony. It is true all these authorities may have copied from one another, and that they may only refer to one people on the banks of the Indus, but the shaven condition of all the Hindus on our monuments and the universal prevalence of beards with the other race are very remarkable.†

The costume of the women differs from those of the Hindus even more than that of the men. They wear a petticoat striped like that of the other sex, and apparently gathered in at the knees, so as to form a neat and modest dress, and a cloak or tippet similar to that of the men is thrown generally over one shoulder so as to leave one breast bare, but sometimes both are covered. On their heads they wear a neat and elegant turban (Plate III., Figs. 4. and 5.). They wear no bangles nor ornaments of any kind.

Who then are these people? From their dwelling in the woods and the peculiarity of their costume both General Cunningham‡ and Colonel Maisey are inclined to regard them as priests or ascetics, though the latter remarks, "they are nowhere seen worshipping Topes, trees, wheels, or the disc and crescent symbols. In one compartment they may be seen worshipping the serpent in a fire temple,"§ &c. It is curious that in their only appearance at Amravati (Plate LXX.) they are equally worshipping the serpent, but never mixed with those paying respect to the other objects of adoration.

After a careful study of all the bas-reliefs bearing on this subject, it does not appear to me doubtful that the sculptors at Sanchi meant to represent this people as the aboriginal inhabitants of the country of Malwa, to whom the Hindus came either as conquerors or as missionaries. The Topes were erected of course and Gateways sculptured by the latter race, and they represent the other as always inferior and engaged in servile employments, but they do not represent them as converted to Buddhism. As just mentioned, they nowhere join in worship with the superior race, and the only act of adoration in which they are engaged either here or at Amravati is the adoration of the five-headed Naga. This is the more remarkable, as we shall see hereafter, that both at Sanchi and Amravati the Naga is the tutelary deity and emblem of the other, or at least of another race.

The circumstances which apparently induced General Cunningham and Colonel Maisey to regard them as priests, was that their costume resembled that of ascetics in Burmah and other Buddhist countries at the present day. This hardly, however, seems a sufficient reason for the purpose. From their appearing so frequently on Buddhist monuments, we may certainly assume that they were converted eventually to Buddhism, and being a tribe dwelling in woods their priests may have become forest ascetics as contradistinguished from the monastic orders of the more civilized race. If this were so they may have retained the form of dress, and it may have become the fashionable costume of ascetics in future ages. One such certainly

* Strabo, XV. 1024.

† Only two instances of bearded men occur at Amravati. Both of them appear to be the same people as those so frequently represented at Sanchi.

‡ Bhilsa Topes, pp. 204. 208. 210, et passim.

§ M. S., 20.

appears at Amravati (Plate LXXXVI.), but at Sanchi they seem most unmistakeably to be represented as a tribe, not as a priesthood.

It would be extremely convenient if there were any local name which we could use in speaking of this people. To call them, however, either Gonds or Khonds, Bhils, Meenas, or by any other name, would be begging the question, and putting forward an hypothesis for which no grounds have yet been obtained. In the following pages I propose to call them *Dasyus*, not because there is any local or traditional authority for such a name, but because in the Vedas and the heroic poems such a term seems to be applied to the aboriginal people of India as distinguished from the Aryans.* It is here used for non-Aryan as distinguished from Aryan, and involves no theory and interferes with no name appropriated to any known tribe, and as such may be conveniently employed till some better is suggested.

If I were asked to give them a distinctive name I would unhesitatingly suggest *Takshaka*, or, to adopt Colonel Tod's spelling, *Takshac*, as the most appropriate, his description of that race seeming to apply in almost every particular to this people. They were essentially Serpent worshippers, "Naga and *Takshac* being synonymous appellations in Sanscrit for the Snake, and the *Takshac* is the celebrated *Nagvansa* " of the early heroic history of India."† They were also essentially the artificers and architects of India,‡ and lastly, they are known to have possessed *Assergurh*§ in this neighbourhood in the Middle Ages, and may have been settled there from time immemorial. Their original seat was *Taxila*, which was also the metropolis of Serpent Worship, and the spot whence it spread all over India.|| On the whole, however, it is probably better to avoid affixing any definitive name to them in the present stage of the inquiry.¶

SCULPTURES.

Although anyone may, by a careful study of the drawings and photographs, learn to discriminate between the different races of men represented in the sculptures, the task becomes very much more difficult when we attempt to ascertain what particular event each bas-relief represents, or to give a name to each individual scene. About one-half of the bas-reliefs at Sanchi, however, represent religious acts, such as the worship of the *Dagoba* or of *Trees*. Once or twice the *Wheel* is the object of adoration, and once the *Serpent*. In all these cases there is no doubt or difficulty. There are also half-a-dozen scenes that can be identified with more or less certainty as representing events in the life of *Śākya Muni*, and a considerable number of representations of scenes in domestic life, regarding which it will probably be impossible ever to feel sure that we know who the actors in them are. Nor is it of

* I make this statement on the authority of *Muir's Sanskrit Texts*, vol. I, 2nd edition, *passim*. See also *Vivien de St. Martin, Géographie du Vêda*, p. 98, et seqq.

† *Tod's Annals of Rajasthan*, I, p. 104.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 671.

§ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

|| *Cunningham's Report*, 1863-64, p. 5.

¶ Another element of identification is to be found in their beards. The Greeks, who practically only knew the Indians of the North West (*Taxila*), represent the Indians as bearded. These people are the only ones in our sculptures with hair on their faces.

much importance here. Eating, drinking, and making love are occupations so common among mankind, that it matters little who the parties are who are so engaged in the Sanchi sculptures. But besides all these, there are several important bas-reliefs representing historical events, which it would be very interesting to identify if it were practicable. Generally the lowest architrave in each of the Gateways is so occupied, sometimes both in front and back, as in the Northern Gate, and the two lowest in front of the Eastern, and two historical scenes are represented in Plate XXXVIII., one from the Western, the other from the Southern Gateway, both of which have fallen.

The two latter represent the siege of a city in order to recover and to obtain possession of some relics, and the triumphal return of the army with the precious deposit; and, as will be afterwards explained, it is probable that the caskets contain the identical relics that were enshrined in No. 3 Tope, and are now in this country. Be that as it may, the question is, who is the hero of the fight? and who brought home the relics to Sanchi? Assuming the sculpture to have been executed about the Christian era, does it represent a transaction in the reign of Aśoka more than two hundred years earlier, or did the king who erected the gates order these bas-reliefs to be executed to commemorate some great exploit of his own? If the king had engraved his own name on the gate, the latter would have been the probable solution, but the inscription states that the sculpture is the "gift of Ānanda, the son of Vasishtha, in the reign of Śrī Śātakarṇi." On the whole, therefore, considering that it is a religious monument, and the general self-denying character of Buddhism, it is more probable that the events represented had passed into the domain of religious history before they were sculptured on the Gateways, and that they were actions sanctified by time.

Unfortunately the other inscriptions, though so numerous, afford us no assistance in this inquiry. It is probably correct to assert that there is not one single inscription, either at Sanchi or Amravati, which has any reference to the subject about or upon which it is engraved. They all record gifts, and gifts only, and it would be as reasonable to look for an explanation of the Resurrection or the Last Supper from the inscription of a memorial window in modern times as to try and find out from those on the Topes what the sculptures represent.*

We are thus left pretty much to conjecture; but we shall probably not err far if we consider Aśoka as the hero in all, or nearly all, the purely historical bas-reliefs. Not only was Aśoka the great apostle of Buddhism before the Christian era, but, as before mentioned, he was especially connected personally with Sanchi. He resided here during the life of his father, when he was only governor of Ujjain, and before his conversion to Buddhism. He married the daughter of the Setṭhī, or Śhreshṭhī, of the place, and she at least continued to reside here after her children

* Another circumstance of a mechanical and it is hoped temporary nature adds to our difficulties here. When Colonel Maisey was at Sanchi he was unable to procure wood either in sufficient quantities or of sufficient lengths to get up near enough to draw the historical bas-reliefs. We are forced, therefore, to depend on Lieutenant Waterhouse's photographs, which are on too small a scale to be distinct, and on Colonel Maisey's verbal descriptions for our information. Both are excellent in their way, but till they are photographed to a larger scale, or drawn, they cannot be compared with the others in such a manner as to detect minute differences, on which the whole question frequently hinges.

had grown up, and had not only been converted, but had assumed the priesthood in the Buddhist hierarchy. It was probably, therefore, through the influence of Aśoka that the inhabitants of Malwa first heard of Buddhism, and if so, there is no one so likely to have become a popular local hero, nor any one whose acts would more probably be represented on the religious edifices of the place.

To this may be added, that the bas-reliefs, in so far as they can be made out, do represent just such an advent of the Hindus, and the conversion of the natives of the country to Buddhism, as is involved in this hypothesis. It serves at least to explain all we now know of them, and may, therefore, be usefully employed till at least some other is started from information not at present available.

It may seem premature, before describing the sculptures, to attempt anything like a criticism of their merits. It may, however, add to the intelligibility of what follows to point out how extremely different these are to the usual sculptures brought home from India, or represented in Hindu drawings. Neither at Sanchi nor at Amravati are there any of those many-armed or many-headed divinities who form the staple of the modern Hindu Pantheon. There are none of those monstrous combinations of men with heads of elephants or lions or boars. All the men and women represented are human beings, acting as men and women have acted in all times, and the success or failure of the representation may consequently be judged of by the same rules as are applicable to sculptures in any other place or country. Notwithstanding this, the mode of treatment is so original and so local, that it is difficult to assign it any exact position in comparison with the arts of the Western World. It certainly, as a sculptural art, is superior to that of Egypt, but as far inferior to the art as practised in Greece. The sculptures at Amravati are perhaps as near in scale of excellence to the contemporary art of the Roman empire under Constantine, as to any other that could be named; or, rather, they should be compared with the sculptures of the early Italian renaissance, as it culminated in the hands of Ghiberti, and before the true limits between the provinces of sculpture and painting were properly understood.

The case is somewhat different as regards the sculptures at Sanchi. These are ruder, but more vigorous. If they want the elegance of design at Amravati, they make up for it by a distinctness and raciness of expression which is wanting in these more refined compositions. The truth seems to be that the Sanchi sculptures, like everything else there, betray the influence of the freedom derived from wood carving, which, there can be little doubt, immediately preceded these examples, and formed the school in which they were produced.

There can now be very little if any doubt but that this school of Indian art owes its origin to the influence of the Greek kingdom of Bactria. Of late years considerable collections have been made of Buddhist sculptures from ruined Topes in the neighbourhood of Peshawer.* These are in many respects extremely similar to those at Sanchi, but more closely allied to the classical type. In many of the

* I speak confidently of these sculptures, as I have photographs of a considerable number, and specimens of others exist in this country. Unfortunately, no means exist as yet of conveying a knowledge of them to the public.

Punjab examples the costumes and mode of treatment is almost purely western, but we are always able to trace the steps by which the Grecian design becomes Indianized, and changed into the type we find at Sanchi and Amravati.

Perhaps, however, the crowning point of interest in these sculptures is, that they complete our knowledge of the history of stone art in India. Hitherto we have been groping our way backwards with uncertain steps, never knowing at what conclusions we might ultimately arrive. As far back as the tenth or eleventh centuries we had abundant examples of structural buildings, and we found that each was perfect in the direct ratio of the age. The history of art in India, so far as we could trace it, was written in decay, and finding each example more perfect than the one that followed it, there was reasonable hope that some day we should find something that would stand comparison with the arts of the Western World.

Beyond the tenth century we were left for guidance almost wholly to the rock-cut examples. These, however, owing to the coarseness of the material out of which they were excavated, and the difficulties inherent in Cave art, could not be depended upon as trustworthy indications of the state of refinement of the arts in their age. In so far, however, as architecture is concerned, we learned from them that stone was first thought of as a building material about the age of Aśoka, certainly after the time of Alexander, and the commencement of the first intimate intercourse between the Western and the Eastern World.*

The knowledge that we have now gained of the early history of the art of sculpture in India, from the study of the examples at Sanchi and Amravati, enables us to point with equal certainty to Bactria as the fountain head from which it was introduced. We can thence follow it through the time when, from being a rude and imitative art, it rose to its highest degree of refinement in the fourth or fifth century of our era, at which time it had also become essentially localized. From that point our history is easy, though somewhat discouraging, from its downward tendency towards the present state of art in India. We are now also able to trace the Yavanas step by step, as they penetrated over the Upper Indus, and spread their influence and their arts across the continent of India to the very shores of the Bay of Bengal, at Cuttack, and Amravati. With almost equal certainty we can follow them as they crossed the bay, and settled themselves in Cambodia and Java. But the people who did all this were not Greeks themselves, and did not carry with them the Pantheon of Greece or Rome, or the tenets of Christianity. They were a people of Turanian race, and the form of worship they took with them and introduced everywhere was that of Trees and Serpents, fading afterwards into a modified form of Buddhism.

* See History of Architecture, by the Author, II. 455, et seqq.