



UNIVERSITÄTS-  
BIBLIOTHEK  
PADERBORN

## **Tree and serpent worship**

**Fergusson, James**

**London, 1868**

Plate LXXI. To LXXIII. - Internal Faces Of Two Discs On Intermediate Rails  
Of Outer Enclosure. - Lithographed from a Drawing in the Mackenzie  
Collection

---

[urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-62112](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:466:1-62112)





FIG. 2.



INTERNAL FACE OF TWO DISCS ON INTERMEDIATE RAILS OF OUTER ENCLOSURE.





FIG. 2.



INTERNAL FACE OF TWO DISCS ON INTERMEDIATE RAILS OF OUTER ENCLOSURE.

## PLATES LXXI. AND LXXII. Fig. 2.

THESE three circles from the intermediate Rails of the outer enclosure are lithographed in fac-simile from drawings in the Mackenzie Collection, and represent the Trisul emblem in various combinations. It is a little unfortunate that no stone with this emblem upon it in this combination has reached this country, because, though we may feel great confidence in Colonel Mackenzie's draughtsmen, it might aid us in understanding this emblem if we could touch the real stone, and feel whether that flame-like emanation on each side of the pillars was really intended to represent fire, or what it really was. Flame occurs several times in the sculptures at Sanchi; and if this emblem was found there in that form, it would be easy to say what was intended; but flame does not occur anywhere at Amravati in an unmistakable manner, and it is impossible therefore to say how far it may have been conventionalized. I can only therefore state it as my impression that flame is here intended.

The upper part of circle, Fig. 1., Plate LXXI., is unfortunately destroyed, and we cannot therefore feel sure how the emblem terminated, but all the rest of the arrangements are easily intelligible. Both in this and in Fig. 2. the cushion-like object which I have ventured to call a "Droṇa of relics" is placed on the throne, and below it are the impressions of the sacred feet.

In the upper circle, on the right-hand side, is a group of Buddhist priests in their yellow robes worshipping. In front there are two supple women in attitudes of adoration, who occur so frequently in these sculptures, and on the left a chief in the ordinary Hindu costume presents his little son to the emblem. Around him are the women of his family.

In the lower circle the same structural arrangements occur up to the Trisul, but the whole is surmounted by the Chakra, or Wheel, which, as above suggested, I believe to be the emblem of Dharma or the Law. Here all the worshippers are men. It is, in fact, one of the very few scenes in these sculptures from which women are entirely excluded. Whether it was considered that the study of the Law was not appropriate for women, or from whatever motive, the fact of all the worshippers being of one sex and of one race is exceptional. The only other peculiarity worthy of remark is the introduction of two antelopes, one on each side of the throne.

Fig. 2. Plate LXXII. represents the Trisul ornament, not on a throne, but behind an altar. The sacred feet are there, but no relics. The principal worshippers in the upper compartment are two men with seven-headed snake hoods, and two women with single snakes. The Chaori bearers and other attendants have not this appendage.

In the centre of the bas-relief sits the principal personage, with a nine-headed snake hood, between two of his wives, and beyond, on the edge of the circle on either hand, is a female figure standing, and holding on to the branches of two trees. A girl attends on each, one of whom has a snake at the back of her head, the other has not. In front are three musicians with snakes, and on their right a

lady without a snake seems to require the assistance of a girl with a snake. Whether she is tipsy or merely faint is not clear. There is a pot on a table behind her that looks suspicious.

This distinction between people with snakes and those without is most curious and perplexing. After the most attentive study I have been unable to detect any characteristic either of feature or costume by which the races can be distinguished, beyond the possession or absence of this strange adjunct. That those with snakes are the Naga people we read of, can hardly be doubted; yet they never are seen actually worshipping the snake like the *Dasyus*, but rather as protected by it. The snake seems their tutelary genius, watching over, perhaps inspiring them; but whether they borrowed this strange emblem from the natives of the country, or brought it with them from the north-west, are questions we are hardly yet in a position to answer satisfactorily.

To revert, however, to the Trisul. It will be observed that in all the six representations of it in these three Plates the central limb terminates in a point. In this it differs essentially from those which crown the Gateways at Sanchi, though it agrees generally with the form found on the coins and elsewhere. At Sanchi (Plates VI. to IX.) it will be observed that a shield-like emblem is introduced between the outer horns. This is represented in the necklace of emblems (Fig. 4. Plate III.), the fourth from the top on the outside of the left-hand string, and the fifth on the opposite one. It occurs above the Swastika on the great Khandagiri inscription,\* and is found by itself painted on the pillars of some of the oldest of the Western Caves. If the diagram, page 106, is to be taken as an explanation of the compound emblem, it represents Ether, and is here omitted. The crescent there meant Air, the triangle Fire, the circle Water, and the square block Earth. As nothing the least resembling the triangle is found in any of these emblems, this would favour the idea that flames were really meant in these representations. The pillar would thus represent the earthy or real body with water and air. Ether was replaced by the soul divine, symbolized by the Tree, the Wheel, or such other emblem as was placed in conjunction with the Trisul on its pillar. All this, however, is so hypothetical that I would willingly refrain from entering upon it if I knew where to look for information elsewhere. Surely there must be Buddhist books that treat of emblems; but as both General Cunningham and Colonel Maisey, whose attention was turned to the subject in India, are quite at sea regarding them, I fear the requisite explanations are not easily accessible.

---

\* J. A. S. B., vol. VI. plate LVIII.





FIG. 2.



INTERNAL FACE OF TWO DISCS ON INTERMEDIATE RAILS OF OUTER ENCLOSURE.

## PLATE LXXII. FIG. 1., AND PLATE LXXIII.

WITH the upper circle in Plate LXXII. we return to one of those domestic scenes which it is easy enough to understand, though it is difficult to assign names to the principal actors.

Above, a Raja, with two females behind him, is seated on an elephant in a boat, being apparently ferried across a stream—the Kistnah? Two of the females who accompany him jump on shore the moment the boat reaches land, and embrace two other females who seem awaiting their arrival. The Raja's ladies are easily distinguishable by their allowing their long back hair to hang loose behind them. Those who receive them have a roll, something like a comb, at the back of their heads.

In the foreground a lady is seated, with her attendants; on the left, as usual, are the musicians, and above the two "dames d'honneur." On the right one attendant offers her something apparently to eat, and another something to drink out of a small pot slung on her arm.

The story seems simply to be, that a certain Raja, whose name we cannot guess, comes across the river to demand the hand of the fair lady in the foreground, but beyond that we cannot at present go.

The story of the bas-relief, Fig. 1. Plate LXXIII., is likewise simple enough, except perhaps the name of the principal figure. From the glory round his head, however, he is either Śuddhodana or his son Siddhārtha, before he became Buddha. If the upper part of the bas-relief were complete, we might speak with certainty, but from what we see I fancy it more likely to be the king than his son.

Whichever it is, he is represented seated on the throne between his two principal wives on high-backed chairs, and surrounded by the ladies of his court, some seated, some standing in pairs, but all collected to witness a wild dance performed by six men in the centre. The left, as usual, is occupied by the musicians, who are all women, and the dancers are certainly exerting themselves in a manner quite unknown in the East in modern times, and which could hardly be surpassed in the ballet of a modern opera house. No religious significance seems to be attached to the ceremony. It appears to be only an amusement of the palace.

This cannot be said of the lower circle, Fig. 2. of Plate LXXIII. Here five men in the centre dance wildly while upholding a tray, on which is a cup, possibly the begging dish of some Bodhisattiva. It may even be supposed to be that of Buddha himself. Seventeen men, with various head-dresses, though in the same Hindu costume, dance wildly in front of these three. The women dance in the background, and behind the tray, in the centre, is seen the head of the principal personage of the ceremony, among the ladies and gentlemen of his court. He has no emblem, so it is impossible to say what his rank may be.

(4799.)

B B

There can be little doubt but that this sculpture is intended to represent a great religious ceremony, on the occasion of the public display of a much-valued relic.\* The wildness with which the men dance in these two sculptures is very unlike anything we are accustomed to in India at the present day among the Hindus. All the hill tribes, however, from Beerbhoom westward, to the extreme limits of Gondwana, are passionately addicted to dancing. The young men and women of the villages meet on all festal occasions, and at certain seasons of the year dance all the night through, and with as much zest and as violent action as any Celtic Highlander could display.† We must never overlook the fact that these sculptures do not represent the Aryans—at least certainly not in their purity—but the aborigines, or tribes of very mixed blood, and dancing with them was a passion. I am afraid drinking was so also.

As before remarked, this bas-relief is an exact reproduction of the central circle of the pillar, Plate LXVII., except that there a man with a seven-headed snake hood appears among the performers. From this circumstance, and others to be mentioned further on, I am inclined to believe that if we had the whole Rail we should find the same subjects repeated possibly as often as four times, once in each quadrant, and with very little variation. This I think is almost certainly the case with the inner Rail, but this is the only instance of a duplicate which I have yet found belonging to the outer enclosure.

---

\* Fa-Hian mentions having seen the begging dish of Buddha in Afghanistan, and also "un vase où Foë a craché ; il est de pierre et de la même couleur que le pot de Foë" (page 27), and he describes the honours paid to them and to other relics which he saw, but he does not mention dances as part of the ceremonies. According to the usually received tradition, the form of the pot here displayed is not that of the begging dish of a priest, but it may be his spittoon !

† Campbell's Ethnology, J.A. S. B., Special Report, 1866, page 182., et seq., and the Government Reports on the Central Provinces, *passim*.