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## **Tree and serpent worship**

**Fergusson, James**

**London, 1868**

Plate LXXVI. To LXXXI. - Elevations Of Portions Of Inner Enclosure. -  
Photographed by W. Griggs

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## PLATE LXXV.

THE inner Rail of the Amravati Tope that bounded the procession path on the side next the centre, was richer and more elaborately carved than the great outer Rail, though inferior both in dimensions and in architectural design. It was, in the first place, only half its height, or 6 feet above the path, as compared with 12 feet on the other side. It had, however, some metallic finishing on the top, which is now lost, and must have added not only to its height but to its architectural effect. The holes by which the metal cornice was fastened to the marble still remain, but no trace of the metal itself; and I have failed to detect any representation of this inner Rail from which it might be restored. My impression is that it must have been a range of Trisuls, not unlike fleurs de lys; but this is only a guess.

A portion of this Rail is restored in Plate LXXV., from fragments that undoubtedly belong to it, and its vertical dimensions and arrangements are certain, so far as it goes; but I cannot feel certain how far the Dagobas were apart, nor whether the other parts were arranged exactly as I have placed them. The arrangements probably varied in parts, but could not have been very different from what is here suggested.

My impression is that there were twelve representations of the Dagoba in each quadrant, and that they were spaced about 10 feet apart from the centre, and that the same representations were repeated four times, or once in each quadrant. My reason for this supposition is, that in the Elliot and Mackenzie Collections we have thirty different representations of Dagobas, of which twenty-seven or twenty-eight certainly belonged to this Rail, and the principal emblem on the front of each is repeated as follows:—

Buddha seated on the Naga, with hood	-	-	3	times.
Ditto, without Naga	-	-	3	„
Ditto, standing preaching	-	-	4	„
Ditto, with Horse	-	-	1	„
The Chakra or Wheel emblem occurs	-	-	4	„
The Horse	-	-	3	„
The Feet enfolded in the Naga	-	-	3	„
The Tree	-	-	1	„
The Relic Casket	-	-	1	„
The Naga Raja, with attendants	-	-	1	„
The great five-headed Naga alone	-	-	6	„
			30	„

It is with reference to the last alone I am in doubt. Some of the Naga Dagobas do undoubtedly belong to this Rail; others in the Mackenzie Collection may not. It is a little difficult to judge from the drawings; from the sculptures it is

always easy to determine to which Rail any bas-relief belonged, or whether it formed part of the decoration of some other building.

Looking at the above list, it will be seen that some subjects are repeated four times, several thrice, others, it is true, only once, and we miss one subject to make up our twelve. Still, considering how small a portion of the Rail we have, and that the subjects were not selected, but picked up by accident, the inference seems fair that there may have been twelve subjects, and each was repeated four times.\*

Whether the Chakras with their pillars, or the steles terminating in Dagobas, were placed exactly as shown in the restoration, must for the present be an open question, but one not of much importance. The frieze was certainly arranged as shown, but alas its metal crowning ornament is gone and cannot be restored. All these parts are repeated in the following Plates, where they will be again referred to. The central object has not been repeated, being too much damaged to be of much artistic importance; but it is one of the most interesting fragments of the Rail, and if it was repeated, as I suppose, in each quadrant, it would be interesting if another copy could be found. It contains the whole creed of Amravati. At the bottom we have the throne, with the relic Drona; behind that the Tree. In the central compartment the Wheel with garlands, upon or behind the throne, and men worshipping; and the whole crowned by the Dagoba with its Rail, its five steles, its lions, and the five-headed Naga in the place of honour. The worshippers, both terrestrial and celestial, have been so defaced as to be hardly perceptible in the photograph, though plain enough in the marble. We miss both Buddha and the Trisul, except around the Wheel; but otherwise this one sculpture contains a fair epitome of the religious faith to which this gorgeous monument was dedicated.

This inner circle has been so ruined that it is difficult to make out now where the entrances were, by which access through it to the interior was obtained. Judging from what we find at Sanchi and elsewhere, we may feel certain it could not be direct. Care was taken to hide from those outside what was passing in the interior, so as to add mystery to sanctity. My conviction would be, that the entrance was past the ends of the small advanced segment shown in front of the Southern Gateway, were it not that Colonel Mackenzie's plan (Plate XLVII.) shows two slabs placed there, blocking the passage. I do not, however, gather from his descriptions that the stones marked red were actually standing *in situ* when he was there, but only that they were found lying about, and that their places could be recognized. Joining the two segments, as shown in the plan, is just such a suggestion as an over-clever draughtsman would make; but if so, it is a mistake I am afraid there is now no means of rectifying. All I know of the subject would lead me to suppose that they did not exist there, and that the seven detached stones originally stood alone in the centre of the procession path and unconnected with the rest of the Rail.

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\* If this theory is correct, the two standing Buddhas in the restoration in this Plate would not have appeared in the same quadrant. Unfortunately, they are the only two slabs in the collection which are perfect and of moderate width, so as to fit my scale.





ELEVATION OF A PORTION OF INNER ENCLOSURE.

SCALE.  1  2  4 FT.





ELEVATION OF A PORTION OF INNER ENCLOSURE.

SCALE.    4 FT.

## PLATES LXXVI. AND LXXVII.

THESE two Plates represent the two most perfect Dagobas from the inner Rail which are now in the India House Collection. They were sent home by Colonel Mackenzie, and were among the principal ornaments of the old museum in Leadenhall Street, which they reached about the year 1820. It is probable that other slabs of the same description exist in the museums at Calcutta and Madras. As their details are so minute they have been photographed to twice the scale of the others, or 2 inches to 1 foot.

For reasons to be given hereafter, when describing the central building, I believe these Dagobas to be free copies, "mutatis mutandis," of one which existed in the centre of the circle, and which, having become pre-eminent for some reason or other, in the fourth century, these Rails were erected to enclose it; but whether this is admitted or not, they are interesting as showing how Dagobas were ornamented, or how at least the Buddhists thought they ought to be ornamented, at the time this enclosure was built. If we compare the very plain Rail at Sanchi with the very elaborately sculptured enclosure at Amravati, we ought to expect the same progress towards elaboration in the Dagobas themselves. Even if we assume that the older Dagoba was as little ornamented as it now appears, it seems natural to expect from comparison with the Rails, that in the fourth century the Dagobas may have been as richly sculptured as these representations would lead us to expect they were.

All these sculptures represent the Dagobas as surrounded by a Rail four discs in height, whereas the great Rail has only three. The Rail in these representations is surmounted by a frieze, sometimes of animals, sometimes of wreaths. Inside the Rail, and to the same height, the Dagoba is perpendicular, and ornamented by pilasters, between which are the usual emblems, terminating upwards in the Dagoba, the Wheel, the Serpent, or the Tree, as the case may be. Above this are two rows of sculptures, divided into panels, the lower generally single figures or emblems, but sometimes also groups; the upper always historical groups, generally three on each quadrant. Among these it is not difficult to recognize many of the scenes described above. For instance, on each side of the five steles in Plate LXXVII. we recognize the subjects already depicted in Plates LXII. and LXV., and others may be made out. The central right-hand upper panel in Plate LXXVI. represents a battle scene, which ought not to appear on a Buddhist monument, but seems the same as that on the small pillar, Plate LXI. The medallions, also, higher up in the dome, all contain subjects which are repeated over and over again elsewhere.

One of the remarkable peculiarities of these sculptured Dagobas is the five steles which occur over the principal figure in each face, twenty in all. What they symbolize it is difficult to say. It may be the five Buddhas of the present Kalpa, or the five Dhyâni Buddhas, or the five Elements. Everything in Buddhism goes by fives.



Generally the central one is crowned by a Dagoba, and on their lower parts are represented Wheels, Trees, Dagobas, and other emblems, sometimes singly, sometimes in pairs. In Plate LXXVII. by an inscription recording the donation.\*

Inside the Rail are generally four other pillars or lâts, bearing figures or emblems.

The dome is always surmounted by a Tee with an umbrella and flags, and when the slab is perfect, floating figures, but without wings or griffins to ride upon, as is generally the case at Sanchi, are always represented as worshipping the Tee. That they are intended as celestial beings is certain, and this being so, perhaps the best name to give them is *Devas* or *Devatâs*.

As before mentioned, the principal figure is generally varied. On Plate LXXVI. it is Buddha seated on the folds of a great Naga, with an inner hood of seven and an outer of fourteen heads, with the usual worshipping figures. In Plate LXXVII. it is Buddha standing with his right hand raised. The worshipping figures on his left are Nagas, on his right a man and woman in the usual Hindu costume.

Outside the Rail a man or a woman on either side of the entrance is always represented either as purchasing offerings from persons who are selling them, or are bringing offerings, generally borne on the heads of dwarfs. On either side of the entrance is always placed a vase,† which will be alluded to hereafter.

All this is practically new to Indian antiquaries. Hitherto our ideas regarding structural Dagobas have been derived from the present appearance of those at Sanchi or Manikyala, or from the very imperfect representations we possess of those in Afghanistan, and these are all now at least plain or nearly so. The one which it seems was intended to have been as richly ornamented as these was that at Sârnâth; but it was left incomplete, probably in the tenth or eleventh century, which seems to be the age to which its decoration belongs.‡ Had it been completed it would have been even more elaborately decorated than those at Amravati. Those in Caves hardly help us in this respect; they probably were painted, and the colours having perished, there is nothing left from which to form an opinion. Those in Ceylon, too, are in much too ruinous a state to aid in this inquiry, so that these representations on the inner Rail are really the only authentic documents we have, and they thus become in this respect invaluable.

\* Appendix E., No. VIII.

† One which belonged to the central building is shown on Plate XCVI. It is photographed to the usual scale.

‡ Asiatic Researches, IX. 203.





FIG. 1.

FIG. 2.



FIG. 3.



ELEVATIONS OF PORTIONS OF INNER ENCLOSURE.  
SCALE 1 INCH TO 1 FOOT.

## PLATE LXXVIII.

THE upper figure in this Plate is the only slab in the India Museum representing the Naga in the place of honour on the Dagoba.\* But there are among the drawings in the Mackenzie Collection six others similar to this, with merely such variations of detail as occur in all these representations. Generally speaking, the Naga Dagobas are less profusely ornamented with sculpture than those more essentially Buddhistical in their arrangements, but the subjects all belong to the same class. In this one, for instance, we have Mâyâ's dream, the birth of Buddha, and other well-known subjects in the medallions on the dome, and the Wheel, the Tree, the Trisul, and other familiar emblems on the band under the five steles. The Serpent of course occurs there also. The Rail, too, is identical with that of the other Dagobas. The frieze is generally of the roll pattern (Plate LVI.), and there are the four Lions as usual, belonging to each entrance.

What we really do miss, and what seems the characteristic distinction between the two, is the absence of worshippers. As will be observed, the panel under the Naga is blank. In a more purely Buddhist Dagoba it would have had two or more kneeling or worshipping figures. There are no persons outside the Rail bearing offerings, and there are no historical bas-reliefs. The Nagas had no history apparently. All this makes it difficult to say whether these purely Naga Dagobas were worshipped generally or were appropriated to a particular class like the Dasyus or Takshaks.† My impression is, that at the time these sculptures were executed the Naga and the Buddha were so mixed up together, and so nearly equal, that it is impossible to draw any distinction between them, either as to the worship or their worshippers.

The two lower photographs in this Plate represent the obverse and reverse of the same slab. The Dagoba itself is the duplicate of that represented in the last Plate, and is so very nearly similar that at first sight they might be mistaken for the same. On close examination, however, the differences are easily detected. The Rail in Plate LXVII. has an animal—this has a roll frieze. The Naga worshippers are on Buddha's right instead of his left. The position and character of the upper range of bas-reliefs are slightly altered. The subjects of the medallions are changed. In the last Plate the subjects represented in them were Buddha seated, and on either hand the men dancing, and bearing the relic trays on their heads. In this Plate the scenes are the Annunciation and the birth of Buddha. The two may, however, be taken as a fair example of the extent of variation with which the same design was repeated four times, once in each quadrant of the Rail.‡

\* I of course except the central slab in Plate LXXXV., and such representations as occur in Plate LXIV., and elsewhere, where the Dagoba with the serpent occurs in conjunction with other objects.

† In the Mackenzie Collection, Plate XIII., two Hindus are worshipping a Naga Dagoba; but from their position it is not quite clear that they are worshipping the Naga.

‡ The reader will of course bear in mind the scale to which the one is photographed is double that of the other.

The great interest of this slab, however, resides in the sculptures on the back of it. They are very much larger and ruder than anything else at Amravati, and so different in design that they must evidently belong to another age than those we have been describing. On the other hand the figures, the tree, even the flying harpy-like figures above, are so nearly identical with what are found at Sanchi (Plates XXIV., XXV., XXVI., XXVII., XXVIII., and XXIX.), but not found elsewhere at Amravati, that we can hardly help ascribing them to the same age; obviously executed by an inferior artist, but still nearly identical.

The question thus arises, Was there an older building at Amravati, contemporary with the Gateways at Sanchi, which was desecrated when the inner Rail was erected, and its slabs used up for the new buildings? Or, was it *in situ* when the elaborate sculpture of Fig. 3. was added on the other side of it? Taking all the circumstances of the case into consideration, my impression is that the latter may be the true solution of the difficulty. According to this hypothesis, that which is now the inner Rail was originally the outer Rail of the Tope, sculptured, like Fig. 2., on the inside, but probably plain on its outer face. When the great outer Rail was added in the fourth century, and the procession path carried outside this Rail, then these elaborate sculptures were added to match those of the great outer Rail then being erected. All this is so completely in accordance with what we find being done in Hindu temples in the south of India down to the present day, that I can hardly bring myself to doubt that this was what took place in this instance.

On the other hand, however, it may also be that both these Rails are parts of an entirely new design commenced only in the fourth century, and that this slab belonged to some building which may have been removed in order that it might not interrupt their alignment. Whichever hypothesis we adopt, the conclusion is the same as regards the age of the sculptures on the front and back of the slab. It proves incontestably that there was at Amravati a building as old as the Gateways at Sanchi, if not older. My impression, indeed, is that this sculpture is the most ancient of any represented in this volume. It is so difficult, however, to know what allowance should be made for locality or the personal equation of the artist, that it is impossible to speak positively on such a subject.

As before remarked (page 155) the coins found by Colonel Mackenzie would lead us to suppose that Amravati was a place of importance as early at least as the Christian era; this sculpture, therefore, not only tends to confirm that surmise, but aids us materially in understanding the history of the place.\*

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\* A curious piece of collateral evidence to the same effect is obtained from the inscriptions at Karlee and those Western Caves which date from about or before the Christian era. The name of Yavana Dhanaka cheka frequently occurs in them either as an artist or a benefactor, but whether as one person or several has not been determined. Dr. Stevenson (J. B. B. R. A. S., vol. V., pp. 11, 20, &c.) translates the name as the "Greek Xenocrates." General Cunningham, with much more probability, makes it the "Yavana of Dhanaka cheka"! The first reading we may safely reject. If the second is established, it will be interesting to find our city on the Kistnah sufficiently important and artistic to have lent assistance to these great undertakings. At present, however, the indication is too vague for much reliance to be placed upon it.

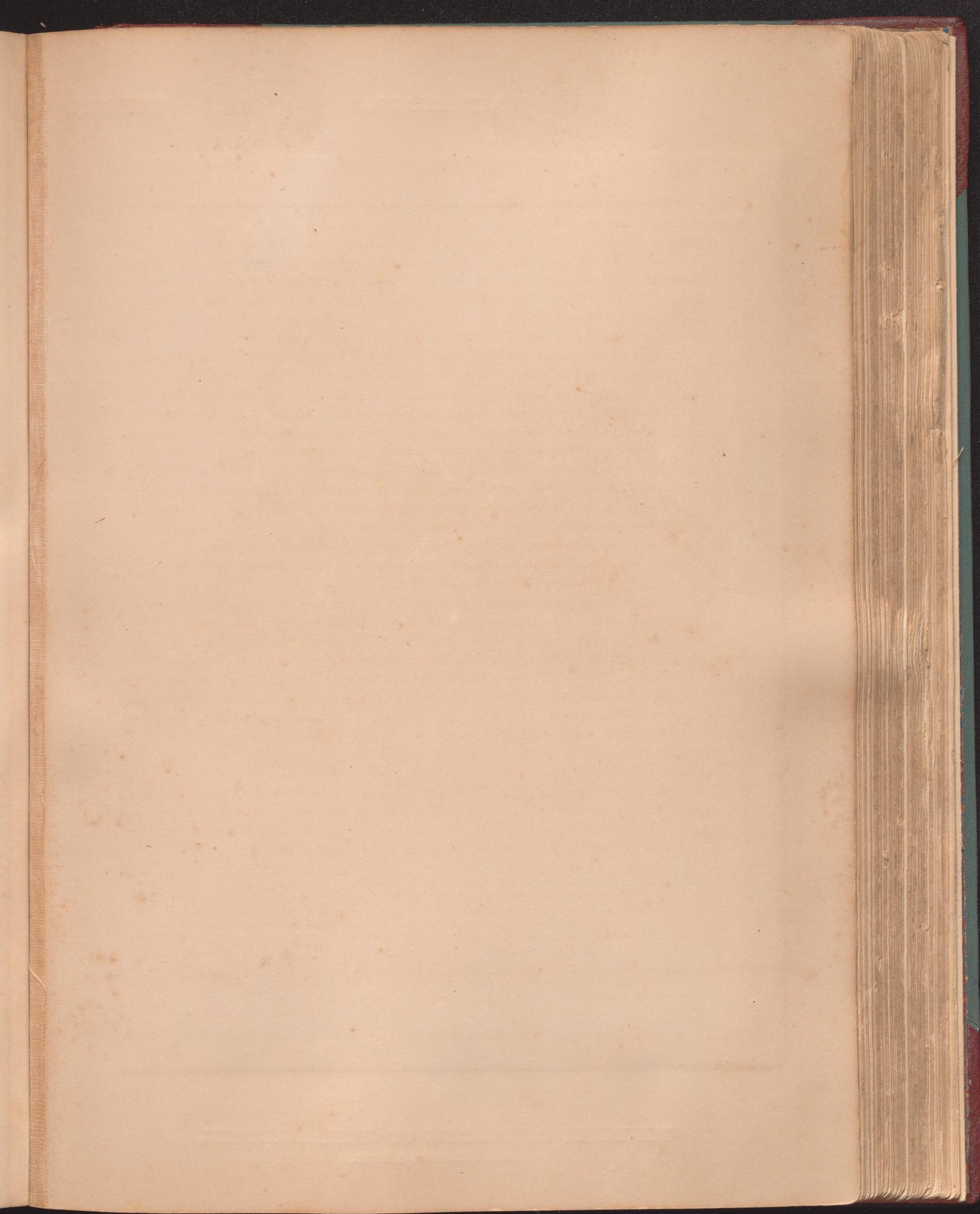


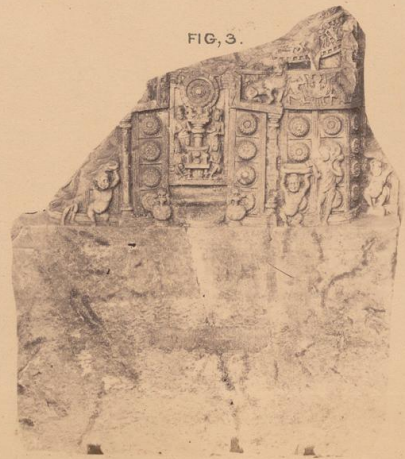


FIG. 1.

FIG. 2.



FIG. 3.

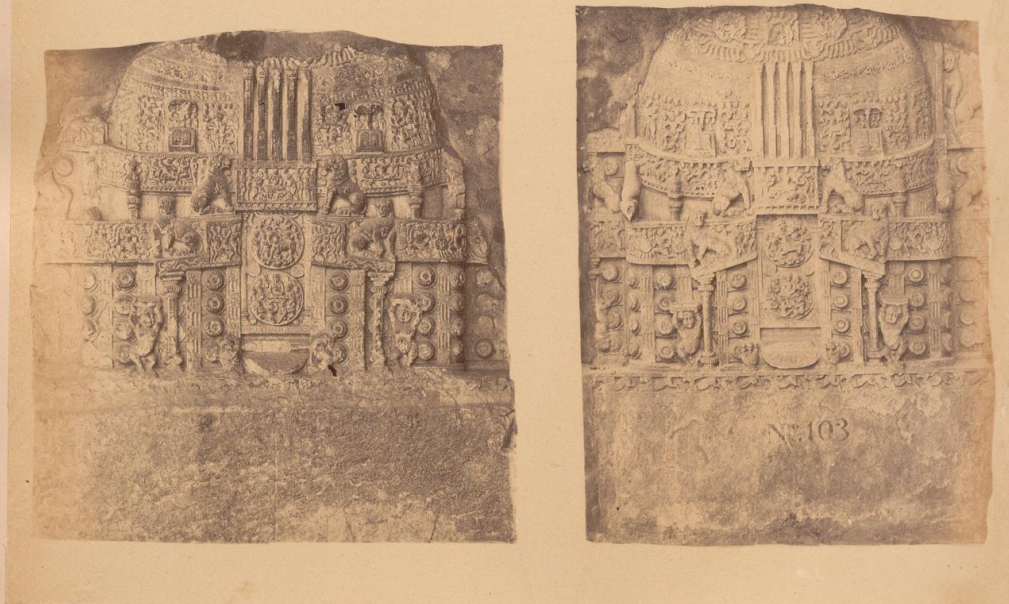


ELEVATIONS OF PORTIONS OF INNER ENCLOSURE.

SCALE 1 INCH TO 1 FOOT.

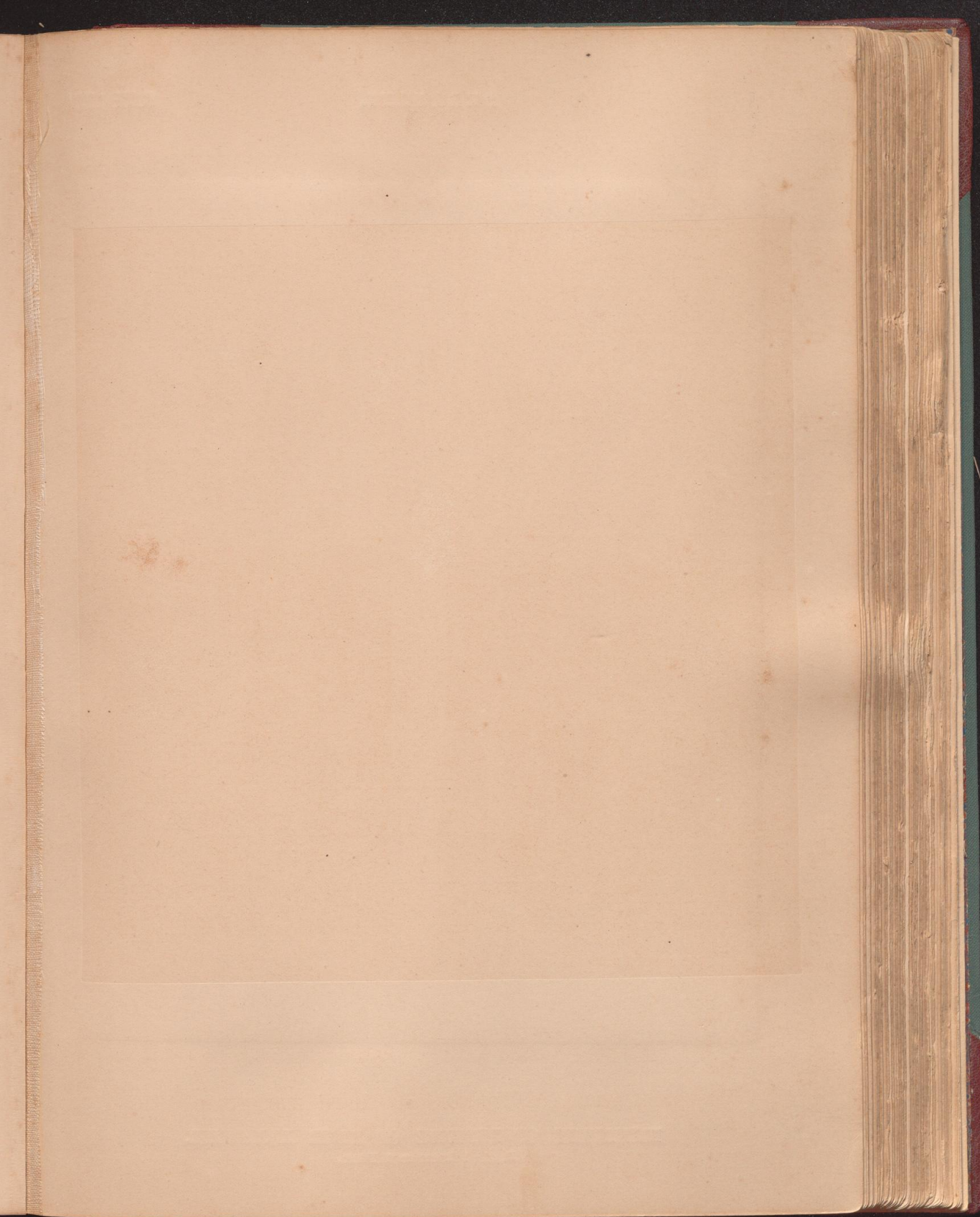






ELEVATIONS OF PORTIONS OF INNER ENCLOSURE.

SCALE 1 INCH TO 1 FOOT.





ELEVATIONS OF PORTIONS OF INNER ENCLOSURE.  
SCALE 1 INCH TO 1 FOOT.

## PLATES LXXIX., LXXX., AND LXXXI.

THESE three Plates contain nine photographs of fragments of the Dagobas of the inner Rail, all to the scale of 1 inch to 1 foot. They are not all the examples which the Museum Collection contains, but they are probably sufficient to illustrate the variety as well as the monotony of these representations.

In Fig. 1., Plate LXXIX., the principal object of worship is the Wheel, but the Naga appears very prominently on the Dagoba.\* The same object is repeated in Fig. 3., which, though very much broken, is a better and more perfect piece of sculpture than the other, tending to show, as other circumstances do, that the different quadrants were not all exactly of the same age.

The lowest figure on the left hand of the same Plate contains a form we have not yet met with. The principal object here is a representation of the sacred feet enveloped in the folds of the Naga, and worshipped by Naga men and women.

The emblem has unfortunately disappeared from Fig. 1., Plate LXXX. This is to be regretted, as it seems a beautiful fragment, and the two children below, the panel in which it ought to appear, betoken something new.

Fig. 2. and 3. of this Plate, and Fig. 3. of Plate LXXXI., instead of the emblems we are usually accustomed to, contain two medallions. The upper, representing the worship of the Horse, the lower Buddha seated cross-legged, surrounded by listeners or adorers.

As we have frequently had occasion to remark, the Horse plays an important part in the sculptures at Amravati. It is once represented as honoured at Sanchi (Plate XXXV.), but this form of worship occurs here several times, but nowhere so prominently as in these three Dagobas. (It is to be presumed that there was a fourth.)

It is not easy to say what we are to understand from the prominence of the Horse in such a position as this. Is it an importation from Scythia, brought by immigrants from that country? Is it the Horse of the Sun, or of Poseidon? Is it the Avalokiteśvara of the Thibetan fables? Some one must answer who is more familiar than I am with Eastern mythology. At present it will be sufficient to recall to memory how important a part the Horse sacrifice or *Aśwamedha* plays in the *Mahābhārata*, and in all the mythic history of India. What is still more curious is that the worship of the Horse still seems to linger in remote parts of India. At least in a recent work by Mr. Hislop, missionary at Nagpore, edited by Sir R. Temple, he describes the religion of the Gonds in the following nine words:—"All introduce figures of the horse in their worship." Other instances might no doubt be found if looked for, but the subject is new and unthought of.

In all these Dagobas in which the horse occurs, the objects next in importance

\* This slab has been so long exposed on the external wall of Fife House, that it is nearly destroyed, and its details can but with difficulty be made out.

are the sacred feet. They occur on each side of the five steles under a great umbrella, but what the connexion between the two may be is by no means clear.

The principal representation on the Dagoba, Fig. 1., Plate LXXXI., is a repetition of the scenes depicted in the upper circle, Plate LXII.,—the worship of the relic casket by the Naga Raja; but so far as can be made out, there does not seem to be anything in the other bas-reliefs on this Dagoba which would enable us to identify the relic, or say whence it came. So far as execution is concerned, this is one of the most delicate as well as one of the best preserved examples belonging to the series.\*

The remaining Dagoba, Fig. 2., Plate LXXXI., is the most essentially Buddhist of the whole, using the word in the sense in which we now understand it. Buddha is seated in his usual cross-legged attitude in the place of honour, and reappears in easily recognizable forms in the sculptures above. Yet, if I mistake not, on the very top of the dome there are the remains of a great Naga, in a position more prominent than on any other Dagoba of this class.

In all these Dagobas, when sufficiently perfect to enable the emblems to be made out, it appears that the central stele of the five was crowned by a miniature Dagoba. But on the lower part of the steles (Plate LXXX.), on the left-hand lower corner, there are in the centre a Dagoba, on each side of that the two Wheels, and then two Trees, and in others, a figure adorns the base of each stele, but without any mode by which he or they can be distinguished. Other combinations are found, both on those represented here and on those in the Mackenzie drawings, but all of the same character, and apparently without any important significance.

We shall have occasion to refer again to these miniature Dagobas when speaking of the central one, for the restoration of which they are most important. Even in themselves, however, they are as interesting as any of the slabs at Amravati, and as important as illustrations of the form of Buddhist art in the fourth or fifth century of our era.

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\* After they were photographed, the marbles were returned to the coach-house, and afterwards were transferred to the Military Stores, when the Fife House establishment was broken up. In neither position were they, nor are they accessible; there are, consequently, many points which my more educated eye might enable me now to detect, which I overlooked when I had access to them.