

IN MEMORY OF
DOMENICO FACCENNA
(CASTEL MADAMA 1923–ROME 2008)

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ON OCTOBER 15, 2008 A GREAT SCHOLAR and a real gentleman passed away: Domenico Faccenna, to whom the scientific community owes broad and fundamental contributions, among which the first consistent and extensive archaeological approach to the *vexata quaestio* of the origin and development of Gandharan art. Those like me who had the chance to work with him and share with him the harshness and zest of field work in a faraway country owe even more to Domenico Faccenna, not only in terms of professional development but also in terms of human experience.

It is difficult to me to separate the scholar from the generous mentor, the severe boss, the paternal friend. I shall not even try to do it. When the editors of this periodical asked me for some pages to dedicate to him, I gratefully agreed, pushed more by my personal feelings than by a clear intention or real capability. I apologise in advance to the readers for presenting here a portrait of Domenico Faccenna submerged in the emotional flow of memories, memories that are intertwined by now with half of my life, but I am confident that, in due time, more precise and systematic biographies will pay him a more objective and comprehensive tribute.

Domenico Faccenna was a young and brilliant classical archaeologist when, in the mid-1950s, he met Giuseppe Tucci, the founder and then president of the Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (IsMEO; now Istituto per l’Africa e l’Oriente, IsIAO, after its merger with the Istituto Italo-Africano in 1995), who in 1956 entrusted Faccenna with the direction of the Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan. The aim, based on a scholarly project inspired and initiated by Tucci himself, was the reconstruction of the cultural history of Swat, the prosperous region lying between the foot of the mountain range connecting the Hindukush with the Karakoram and the Peshawar plain, the *Uḍḍiyāṇa* (lit. “garden”) of ancient Sanskrit sources. And indeed this “garden”, lying as it does

between the severe landscape of the mountains and the sunny expanses of the plains, is a green corridor between India and Central Asia that many great empires (Macedonian, Maurya, Indo-Greek, Kushan, Kushano-Sassanian, Hephthalite [?], Shahi) tried to include in their realms, but never managed to subdue completely.

The challenge, in the 1950s, was to give shape to the hypotheses that had been made about the ancient topography of the region, having as a point of departure some key-references in the modern-day names and the physical environment. There were towns, peoples, cult sites and pilgrimage routes, rivers and mountains to be re-discovered or identified, following the clues — often vague and contradictory — from the classical sources, such as those dealing with the itinerary of Alexander the Great, or the accounts of Chinese and Tibetan pilgrims who traversed the region, which was regarded in the past as one of the principal holy lands of Buddhism.

Domenico Faccenna brought to this project his great skill as archaeologist paired with a rare far-sightedness. In his view, archaeology was like one organ of a living body, an organ whose specific function is essential but nevertheless inseparable from the complex of the vital system it belongs to.

The history of human societies is a very complicated matter. The number of possible variants and shades exceeds the limits of single disciplines. Domenico Faccenna was always looking around, peering at the world, and not only with “professional” eyes. A walk down a road with him was a constant exercise of attention: attention to building techniques, ergonomic or odd uses of materials, traditional crafts and activities, habits. Looking at the present and trying to remember it when you investigate the traces of the past: this is what he always invited us young beginners to learn, and to learn not only from him, but from life. And life is everywhere, in the present as in the past. Understanding a human phenomenon in its historical and social perspective implies a complex analytical process, with the cross comparison and interpretation of a wide range of sources: the written, iconographic and material culture can prove insufficient or even deceptive if no comparisons are made between them and, moreover, if they are not approached with attentiveness to their specific nature, language and meaning.

Archaeology is worth nothing without an anthropological and environmental perspective. This was the orientation Domenico Faccenna imprinted on the research in Swat from the very beginning in 1956: anthropologists, geologists, archaeozoologists, paleobotanists, historians as well as philologists always took part in the work of the Italian Archaeological Mission, something that sounds quite normal today but that was not so common

fifty years ago. The archaeological research promoted by Domenico Faccenna in more than forty years of activity in Swat as the director of the Mission (from 1956 to 1995) and then up to his last day as a strong supporter of his successors (first Maurizio Taddei and then Pierfrancesco Callieri) was a “territorial” archaeology. Although personally involved above all in the investigation of Buddhist sacred sites, he enlarged the focus of the Mission’s activities to the entire region and its cultural history, in a diachronic and synchronic perspective that encompassed both prehistoric and historic times, religious and civil settlements, as well as both monumental and small-scale relics. Scholars of different specialisations and, may we say, different personalities took part in this project. All were encouraged, their intellectual freedom was respected, and at the same time all were guided by Faccenna’s uncompromising commitment to an all-embracing point of view. The archaeological map of Swat, which is about to be completed thanks to the arduous commitment lavished on it during the last decade by a new generation of archaeologists, is an achievement that is a result of this penetrating and far-sighted beginning.

The rigorousness of Domenico Faccenna was legendary and it was often directed more towards himself than towards others. Teaching lessons was not his style, but everyone who ever worked in association with him certainly learned a lot, from the scholar as much as from the human being. His excavation work is a model of scientific precision, which served the objective reconstruction of the material evidence (archaeological layers and artefacts, architecture and architectural elements). In itself this does not guarantee an objective reconstruction of the facts — and nobody more than Domenico Faccenna was conscious of this — but is, at least, an antidote against groundless assumptions. This is particularly true of Gandharan art, as well as with the so-called Hellenised Orient in general, which has often been regarded from an outside viewpoint and placed into Western categories and parameters.

Domenico Faccenna was a scholar with a solid training in classical art and archaeology, but he never misused this as a shortcut. On the contrary, he always used his Western culture as a clear model for comparison with the Indian world, in an attitude of a dialogue free of any intellectual prejudice. This conscious, radical receptiveness and strict methodological discipline have transformed the sites he excavated (Butkara, Saidu Sharif, and Pānṛ to list only the most famous) into clear and detailed repositories of data that not only illuminated the physiognomy of an artistic province, with its technical, stylistic, cultural aspects, but constitute, now and for many years to come, a fundamental reference for any study on Gandharan art and archaeology.

Reserved and disliking public events, Domenico Faccenna acknowledged the tributes paid to him with absolute modesty and, at the same time, with heartfelt reverence. He was awarded rare honours (he was a member of the Accademia dei Lincei, of the Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia and of the German Archaeological Institute, Rome Section, and was decorated in Pakistan with the prestigious Sitara-i-Imtiāz) that he in turn held in the highest regard, seen through his love for his work and his ethical and passionate sense of commitment. People who did not know him may have misinterpreted his shy nature and the meticulous discipline of his work: he always avoided spectacular or emphatic accents. It is exactly this aspect of his work ethic that inspired his monumental works such as the excavation reports of Butkara I, Saidu Sharif I, and Pānṛ I: they are detailed accounts in which every element (stratigraphy, monuments, single architectural components, finds) is precisely described in association with its specific archaeological context. These works were a generous gift to the scholarly community, a gift in which Domenico Faccenna did not bestow his personal interpretation of the data, but the data themselves, along with all the information necessary for their understanding. The objective data and their interpretation are never mixed together. This is the reason why Domenico Faccenna spent so much of his time and effort to publish the archaeological setting of the data first and only later their exegesis.

This is for instance the case of Saidu Sharif I: the publication of the archaeological report — *Saidu Sharif I (Swat, Pakistan). 2, The Buddhist Sacred Area: The Stūpa Terrace: With contributions by M.R. Di Florio, C. Faccenna, G. Ioppolo, S. Lorenzoni, G. De Marco, F. Noci, E. Zanettin Lorenzoni*, 2 vols., Reports and Memoirs 23.2 (Roma: IsMEO, 1995)— was followed by one of the most beautiful works that ever appeared in the field of Gandharan art: *Il fregio figurato dello Stūpa principale nell'area sacra buddhista di Saidu Sharif I (Swat, Pakistan): Con contributi di Riccardo Garbini e Piero Spagnesi*, Reports and Memoirs 28 (Roma: IsIAO, 2001), where one can read Domenico Faccenna's own opinion concerning the purpose archaeology must serve. Here in a monumental scale, as elsewhere in his many other "minor" works — minor merely meaning devoted to a single aspect or element — a powerful portrait takes shape from the meticulous and painstaking archaeological approach, a portrait of art and of an artistic season, with its technical, stylistic, iconographic features, and with all the extrinsic aspects involved: workshops, artists, and donors, each with their own cultural, social, aesthetic backgrounds. An entire world comes back to life, sometimes with still undecipherable meanings, which Faccenna acknowledges without thrusting his attempts at interpretation upon us.

From these works I learned that there is a way of looking at things that reveals their most intimate beauty. But it requires an uncommon gift of sensitivity and a process of refinement that can span a lifetime. This is probably why Domenico Faccenna postponed his publication of the sculptures from Swat. He had begun to prepare this volume after completing a study on the Gandharan monuments that unfortunately will be published only posthumously: D. Faccenna and P. Spagnesi, *Architetture buddhiste nella valle dello Swat, Pakistan*, Reports and Memoirs, New Series (Roma: IsIAO). Whoever knew him well enough to appreciate his alert approach to problematic issues can easily imagine how he might have planned this enterprise: as a precise and thorough classification of thousands of pieces that were found for the most part separated from their original context. This classification would have been made according to intrinsic values — which can be grasped only after a great deal of effort — as well as accurate comparisons. This last work remains now incomplete, although we hope not to the extent that it cannot be completed by his closer collaborators without misinterpretation or a twisting of the author's concept.

Far-sightedness can only arise from deep insight and the extent Domenico Faccenna possessed such insight is demonstrated by his ability to transcend personal choices and limits. Although personally resistant — and jokingly nearly hostile — to the dominance of the computer, at least in the sphere of his private life, Domenico Faccenna was one of the first scholars to exploit the possibilities offered by applying computer science to archaeology and art history. At the end of the 1980s he promoted, in collaboration with the Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and the National Research Council (CNR), a project of computerizing the corpus of Gandharan sculptures, beginning with the materials housed by the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale "Giuseppe Tucci" in Rome (of which he was one of the initiators and the first director, from 1957 to 1977). This project was then extended to the Archaeological Museum of Swat, another institution that Domenico Faccenna actively took part in establishing.

He committed all his experience to this project and provided a legacy that must still be developed in the future: rigorous classifications and a meticulous dictionary, which took shape as a systematic thesaurus — D. Faccenna and A. Filigenzi, *Repertorio terminologico per la schedatura delle sculture dell'arte gandharica: sulla base dei materiali provenienti dagli scavi della Missione Archeologica dell'IsIAO nello Swat, Pakistan / Repertory of Terms for Cataloguing Gandharan Sculptures: Based on Materials from the IsIAO Italian Archaeological Mission in Swat, Pakistan*, Reports and Memoirs, New Series 5 (Roma: IsIAO,

2007). My association with this work (which he strongly and generously supported) is for me an honour, although my contribution, compared to his, is only an offshoot of the tree he planted and watered.

Being involved in this project since the very beginning, I can say that his obstinacy was often a cause of discussion. Only now, many years later, are we approaching a system that meets his demands. These were, in the end, exactly what makes a computerised cataloguing system useful for scientific purposes.

As usual, his mind had simply been further ahead. One cannot adjust possible goals to the useless dimensions imposed by obstacles. One should rather try to adjust the tools to the goal, something that Domenico Facenna tenaciously worked for throughout his life, until his very last day.

After leaving the directorship of the Mission in Pakistan, other than rare visits he no longer joined the excavation work. In his silent way, this step back was a tribute of respect to the new director, to whom he always offered every sort of generous support and advice, nonetheless without interfering. When he was not at a site for a close examination of particular details or in a museum to inspect the materials, he stayed at home, busy with his studies.

My room was across from his, and every morning, leaving at dawn for the excavation site, I opened my door with the greatest care and walked on tiptoe in order not to disturb him, but every morning, as I was about to turn the corner, the fond crusty voice resonated in the silence: "Buongiorno, Anna!". I will miss it forever.