

¹GARLAND BEARER RELIEFS FROM BUTKARA III, SWĀT *

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The site of Butkara-III located on a mountain cliff and buried under a thick natural deposit was a well preserved Buddhist site in the Swāt Valley² (see Map). It was explored by Professor Abdur Rahman³ and subsequently excavated by him in 1982 and 1985 respectively. There are a monastic and a stūpas' establishment (called 'Area B' and 'Area A' correspondingly by the excavator) both separated by a hill torrent called Narey Khwar, which at sometime was dammed as a stone lining of the sides of the Khwar and remnants of the dike suggest. The establishment of stūpa has two constructional divisions: a covered area on the north, east and south and an open courtyard in the centre (see Butkara III: Ground Plan). The covered area represents cells either free standing or hewn out of the living clay-rock (see Pl. A). Almost every cell is provided with a porch, facade and an entrance in early diaper masonry. Some of these cells have stūpa and they are called shrines. The courtyard has also a number of stupās which are later in date from those of the shrines. According to the excavator, who based his conclusion on stratigraphy, masonry of the structure, numismatic evidence, and life of the site witnessed at least four phases. As no coin was found in Phase I it is called pre-Soter Megas in relation to the succeeding Phase II from which a coin of Soter Megas was collected. Phase III yielded a coin of Vāsudeva, while the last or Phase IV like Phase I did not yield any numismatic find and is relatively dated to Post-Vāsudeva period.⁴ Due to limitation of this paper we are not going into structural, sculptural or any other detail rather than to highlight the salient features and classification of a few carved panels called garland bearer reliefs.

Garlands were one of the essential items for decorating stūpas and honouring relics in the context of Buddhism and thus became a cult object. A large number of carved relief panels representing this subject in a variety of forms is proof of this ritual. This was an act of merit for devout Buddhists who carried on this process with a religious zeal:

...ornamented with banners, sounding to the noise of bells, it is this that is rendered to the stūpas, containing my relics, honours of various kinds, in their offering of flowers, incense, perfumes, garlands, unguents, fragrant powders, clothing, parasols, drapery, standards.....⁵

The relief panels depicting garland-bearers recovered from Butkara III can be distinguished into four different varieties on the basis of schematic and stylistic rendering. 'Variety 1' depicts an undulating garland lifted by *amorini* on their shoulders. The troughs of the garland are filled with birds or flowers. 'Variety 2' exhibits an undulating garland, also carried by *amorini*, the trough of which has a winged figure in *anjali mudrā*, while the upper border of the panel is decorated with lion heads or masks. 'Variety 3' combines the features of 'Variety 1 and 2'. It is more refined than that of 'Variety 2' and the winged figure, seen in the trough of the garland of the preceding variety, changes into a winged cupid. The last one or 'Variety 4' represents *amorini* carrying a garland on their shoulders, but the trough of the garland is provided with a well-dressed human figure holding something in hand—instead of birds, flowers or a winged being seen in the other examples.

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Variety 1

1.1 Phase I (Dated to Pre-Soter Megas Era)

Variety 1 from Phase I represented by well preserved fourteen relief panels found at Stūpa No. 16, Shrine C, shows segments of a huge garland carried by *amorini*. Executed in bluish-green schist stone, they are curvilinear pieces found dismantled from the drum of the stūpa. Their exquisite carving brings them closer to naturalism and perfection than any other relief panel from all the four phases of the site. Although found in an earliest context, Phase I, they seem to be a later addition belonging to the period of art-maturity (the Kuṣāṇa period) in the region. And, also, they depict greater sculptural quality and are more finely and impressively realistic as compared to other reliefs from the same phase.

Except for one relief panel showing a single curve of the garland shouldered by lonely leaning *amorino* (BK-III 103, Pl. 1), the remaining thirteen panels depict a couple of curves lifted by a couple of *amorini* on their shoulders. Each relief panel shows a segment depicting three curves of the garland (the side one erected and central one inverted). The whole segment (that is all the three curves) has five decorative sections separated by a broad plain or patterned fillet. Flaps of the fillets fall freely on the ground around the feet of the *amorini* with their ends curling up. Each section is embellished with a design different from that of the adjacent one. The repertory of designs seen on all the segments are—alternating rows of beads and a real, acanthus leaves, laurel leaves, four-petal rosettes, round rosettes (both kinds of the rosettes have a central disc), *pīpal* leaves, and compound leaves with a stalk (or a branch of a palm tree). From the troughs of the garland are suspended by stalks two inverted lotus buds and an upright lotus flower. Two of the relief panels, BK-III 102 and 104 (Pls. 2, 3), portray the left and right end-segments of the garland respectively. The cord of the left segment is broken off, while that of the right one is twisted and terminates in a tuft of a lotus flower. The latter is held by an *amorino* in his right hand. These relief panels are supposed to have bracketed the remaining twelve, which encircled the stūpa drum.

A number of parakeets are sitting on the crests of the curves of the garland. Some of them sit on inverted lotus flowers⁶ held up by stalks that bloom up from the troughs of the garland. In a single case (BK-III 99, Pl. 4), there is sitting on such a flower a monkey with stretched legs to the right holding some kind of fruit in its fore-limbs. In one instance (BK-III 100, Pl. 5) in the trough of the garland a parakeet sits directly on the garland and turns its face to the left. In one example (BK-III 105, Pl.6) an *amorino* carries a baby chick in his hand. In majority of the cases, those birds sitting on the inner crests of the garland are fluttering their wings as if to settle down or to balance themselves against the rocking garland as it is carried about by the *amorini*. All of them are normally shown in profile except one bird in frontal position (BK-III 122, Pl. 7) hovering above in the middle of the trough.

Next to the garland itself in importance are the so called *putti or amorini*⁷ acting as garland bearers. It is difficult to determine their sex from their features, although, they are likely to be males. As mentioned above, except for a single relief panel (BK-III 103, Pl.1) depicting a single leaning *amorino*, all the remaining ones exhibit them in couples shouldering the massive garland. Each *amorino* has a distinct type of dress, pose and an object in his hand.

Two of the *amorini* are completely nude (BK-III 99 and 105, Pls. 4 and 6, the left one). Two others put on two pieces of clothes: one of them wears a tunic and a scarf, wound round the waistline and hangs between his legs (BK-III 107, Pl. 8, the left one); and the other wears a shawl and a dhotī (BK-III 108, Pl. 9, the left one). All others wear only one garment—either a shawl (BK-III 100, 104 and 106 left; 101, 102, 107, 109, and 122 right *amorini*, Pls. 5,3 and 10; 11,2,8,12 and 7 respectively), or a dhotī (BK-III 101, 109, 122 and 124 left; 99 and 123 right *amorini*, Pls. 11, 12, 7

and 13; 4 and 14 respectively), or a short/ long sleeved shirt (BK-III 103 and 104 right amorini, Pls. 1 and 3), or a sleeveless long tunic (BK-III 102 and 123 left; 100, 105, 106, 108 and 124 right amorini, Pls. 2 and 14; 5, 6, 10, 9 and 13 respectively). *Dhotīs* and shawls are worn in a variety of styles. The ornaments they wear are ear-pendants, beaded-necklace, armllets, bracelets and anklets. The hair of the *amorini* is dressed in different ways: cut-round (cut short to the level of neck and combed radially); front-Knotted (combed from behind to the front and tied in a knot at the forehead, while a love-curl is falling before the ears); front-stranded (combed from behind to the front and braided across the forehead tapering as it passes round the ears); free-falling (combed backward and falling on the shoulder); or free-falling with a top-knot (combed radially and partly tied in a top knot).⁸

The *amorini* bear the garland in various modes. They are about to raise it up; holding it up in an easy mode, keeping the feet apart; or even moving it away on their shoulders. A few of them are shown in profile, others in three quarters front and still others in three quarters back. Apart from the garland they also carry objects like a reliquary, beaded necklace, bough, ring-shaped object, bunch of flowers, bouquet, acanthus leaves, parakeet-chicks or a bow-harp in their free hand. Others, who do not carry anything in their hand, show different poses such as bending their legs either backward or forward to remove something that has pricked into the sole with the right hand, keeping their hand akimbo, holding the tail of a parakeet, putting hands on the knees or the garland or hang them freely, and holding the cord of the garland.⁹

The in-exhaustible wealth of diversity in the dress, poses and actions of the *amorini* in these relief panels make them very attractive, although they might not exhibit perfection in the carving. The proportion of the body parts and their movements, sensual appearance of the fleshy young looking skin, depth in carving, finishing details of decoration or jewellery, etc., symmetry and naturalism are some of the characteristic features of these relief panels.

1.2 Phase II (Dated to Soter Megas Era)

Out of the three relief panels of this variety the first two (Bk-III 30, 39) are only fragments, while the last one (Bk-III 58, Pl. 15) is a well preserved frieze, showing a complete undulating garland, framed by plain upper and lower borders. It has four upright crests and three troughs and is carried by four *amorini* on their shoulders. The whole is divided into nine sections. Each section has a different decoration separated by a ribbon, the flaps of which swing about the feet of the *amorini*. The decoration carved on the sections of the garland is in laurel leaves, twigs, strip and beads, rosettes in lozenges, acanthus leaves, bands and disc-beads. The dress, jewellery and hairdo of the *amorini* are the same as those of 'Variety 1'.

2. Variety 2

2.1 Phase I (Dated to Pre-Soter Megas Era)

A damaged relief panel (BK-III 63, Pl. 16) showing garland bearers also found at Stūpa No. 16, Shrine C, is quite distinct in every respect from the preceding variety. It is provided on the top with a well decorated border which shows, from left to right, two full and one half masks or heads of lions. These heads are separated by a honey-suckle and a rosette respectively. The main scene depicts two *amorini* carrying a garland on their shoulders. The garland, having a laurel-leaves decoration, is hanging down in a single trough between them. The *amorino* to the left is standing erect with a club in his right hand, while the one to the right inclines forward in a way that the garland falls on his sloping back from his shoulders down to the feet. Furthermore, he keeps his right hand akimbo while carrying a bouquet of lotuses in the left. Both the *amorini* are nude and have a round haircut, ending in curls. In the trough of the garland there is a winged figure, a *gandharva* or *deva* or *amorino*, in *anjali mudrā* looking to the right. He sits upon his right shank on a

fall bloomed lotus flower, while on the pendant knee of his left leg he supports his clasping hands. He wears a sleeveless tunic and his hair is done like that of the amorini just mentioned above. From the trough of the garland hangs something down which could be either wreaths, bunches of flowers or grapes. This relief panel creates the impression of vertical space, although the degree of carving may not look impressive as that of 'Variety 1', above.

The depiction of the lion heads separated by floral designs and of a winged cupid on a lotus flower are Greco influence.¹⁰ The artistic and schematic rendering of these lion heads is quite similar to those carved on the relief friezes of Stūpas No. 14 and 17 at Butkāra I,¹¹ situated in the proximity of Butkāra III. On stylistic as well as decorative motifs, the Butkāra I frieze is dated to the end of the first century B.C.¹² Our relief, on the same basis, can also be dated to the same period. The similarity of the lions' heads from Butkāra I to those carved on the gateways of Sāncī might exist, however, they may not necessarily be later in date than those at Sāncī as proposed by C Fabregues.¹³ Such influence is traced to the Bactrian Greeks who were next door neighbours of Uḍḍiyāna. This suggests, more logically, that such influence might have gone from Bactria to Sāncī, situated further east in the interior India, via Swāt (in Uḍḍiyāna) rather than to Sāncī first and back again to Swāt especially when the latter was as important centre of Buddhism as Sāncī since the beginning of the third century BC onward.

3. Variety 3

3.1 Phase II (Dated to Soter Megas Era)

This relief panel, lying in the debris above Stūpa No. 1, shows a fragment of an undulating garland framed by plain upper and lower borders (BK-III 20, Pl. 17). It depicts a winged Cupid in profile to the left with body inclined forward. He is carrying a branch in his right hand while keeps the left one akimbo. His hips are touching the left end of the garland and his heels its cord below. The cord, thick and twisted, after taking a U-turn ends up in a tuft which is held by an *amorino* shown in profile to the left in his left hand. Both Cupid and the *amorino* are nude and their features and jewellery resemble those of 'Variety 1'. However, a different execution of laurel-leaves, hollowed out, of the garland and the depiction of a winged Cupid clearly brings it under a separate variety.

4. Variety 4

4.1 Phase II (Dated to Soter Megas Era)

Two relief fragments, found in the debris in front of Stūpa No. 10, define a fourth Variety of the garland bearer reliefs (BK-III 148, 166; Pls. 18, 19). Here in the trough of the garland is depicted a nicely dressed female figure instead of birds or winged beings which are usually shown in the preceding varieties. In the trough of the first example (BK-III 148, Pl. 18), is exhibited a frontally posed female figure, wearing a tunic and ear-pendants. Her symmetrically parted hair falls in a curly strand on either side of her face. She also wears a head-gear of some kind. She is holding a round object, most probably a bunch of flowers, in her right hand. An *amorino*, shown in front of the garland in three quarters profile to left, is lifting the garland on his right shoulder. He is nude except for wearing ear-pendants, a necklace, bracelets and anklets.

The trough of the garland of the latter example (BK-III 166, Pl. 19), depicts a female figure in profile to the right. She wears a sleeved tunic and ear-rings, and her hair is done in the same fashion as mentioned in the preceding example with slight difference in that the strands of her hair do not fall at the sides of her face. She also wears a pointed head-dress of hair-style which is difficult to determine because of surface damage. She carries a bow-harp in her right hand. An *amorino*, head and feet missing, is shown in three quarters profile to the right. He is nude but wears a necklace and a bracelet. He is holding stick-like object in his right hand. All the figures of this variety have physical features distinct from those mentioned above.

4.2 Phase III (Dated to Vāsudeva Era)

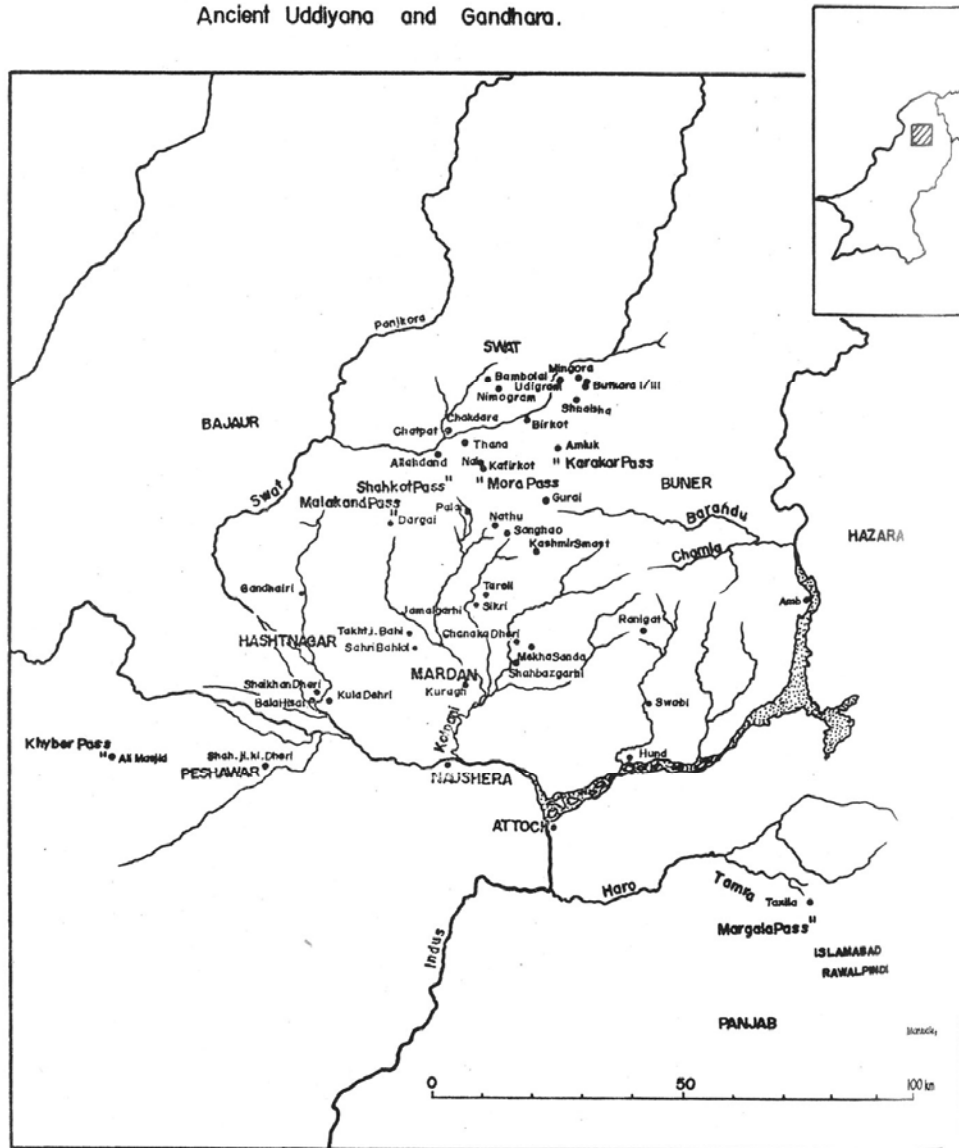
A fragment of a relief panel, found at floor level of Shrine E, shows an *amorino* in *abhaya mudrā* almost in frontal pose carrying a garland on his back (BK-III 136, Pl. 20). He is nude except for a bracelet and a double stringed necklace—supporting a jewel or a bowl-like object at the middle. His swirling hair, falling down to the end of his ear-lobes, is combed back. His features and style suggest that he could be the Buddhist version of Cupid. Though the *amorino* is proportionate, the parakeet shown in the trough is much bigger in size as compared to the garland or its bearer. The garland, executed with laurel-leaves, has a gadrooned band, while from its trough are suspended with stalks cone-like buds or bunches of grapes.

The study of these garland-bearer reliefs gives us a rough picture that in due course of time, roughly from the first century BC to the Kuṣāṇa Period, the workshops of Butkara III presented the same subject matter in a variety of forms showing their evolutionary stages. The artist exercised his talent within the sphere of his immediate cultural environment, adulterated with alien mythology of the west. The religious legends included attractive subjects like garlands, *amorini* or *putti* and Cupids, etc., all engaged in the service of Buddhism.

Notes and References

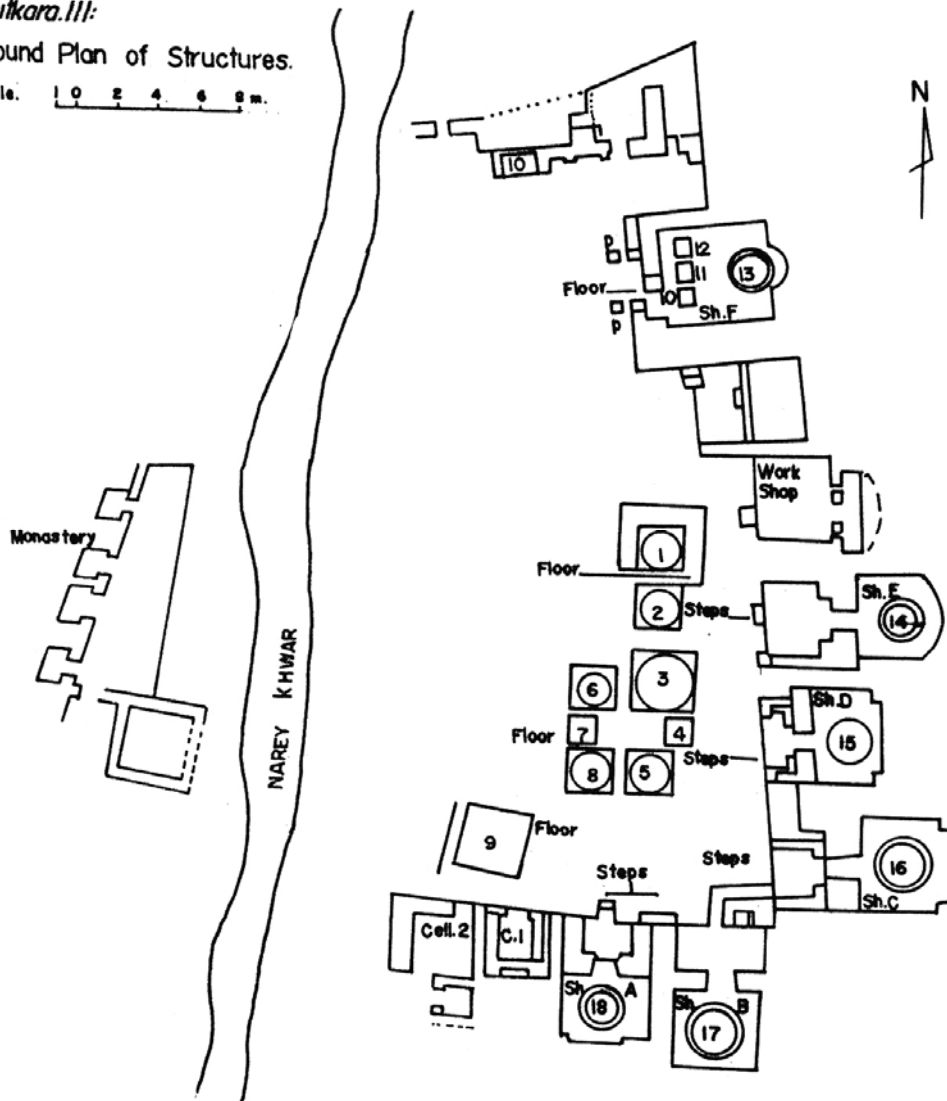
- ¹ I had already prepared this article before I could see the one written by Dr. Abdur Rahman, “Garland-Bearer Reliefs from Shrine C at Butkara III (Swat), *Lahore Museum Bulletin*, Vol. VIII, No. 1, January-June 1995, pp.5-15, Pls. I-VI. However, due to different approach of description and the inclusion of other such reliefs from the same site, the present author wishes to bring it forth the readers.
- ² Abdur Rahman, “Butkara III: A Preliminary Report”, *South Asian Archaeology* 1987, Part 2, 1990, pp. 693-705
- ³ Dr. Abdur Rahman was a professor and former chairman of the Department of Archaeology, University of Peshawar
- ⁴ Abdur Rahman, 1990, pp. 701-02
- ⁵ E. Burnouf, *Le Lotus de la Bonne Loi* (Paris, 1852), 205, quoted by G.Combaz; “L’évolution du stupa en Asia: Etude d’architecture bouddhique”, *Melanges chinois et bouddhiques* 2, 1932-1933, p. 175.
- ⁶ In BK-III 102 and 124 there are two inverted lotus flowers on each of which is sitting a parakeet, while in BK-III106 there is a single flower with a Parakeet.
- ⁷ The association of putto or amorino with garland is very old and can be traced to the ancient Mediterranean world. See Abdur Rahman, 1995, pp. 5-7.
- ⁸ Round cut: BK-III 99, 104, 107, 108, 109, 122, 124, the left amorini, BK-III 100, 102, 106, 107, 108, 122 and 123 the right amorini; with front knot: BK-III 101, 102, 103, 106 and 123 the left amorino, BK-III 99, 101, 104 and 124 the right amorini; with front strands: BK-III 100 the left amorino; free-falling: BK-III 105 the left amorino; long with a top-knot: BK-III 105 the right amorino.
- ⁹ Objects in hand: Reliquary, 99; beaded necklace, 102; twig, 102, 108, 122; ring object (bracelet or armlet), 104; bunch of flowers, 107; bouquet, 105, 107; acanthus leaf, 108; parakeet chicks, 99, 101, 105; and bow-harp, 109.,
Poses and actions: bending leg, 100, 101, 122; hand akimbo, 100, 106; holding tails of parakeets, 104, 123; hand/s on knees, on garland or extending, 103, 106, 124, respectively; and holding cord of the garland, 124.
- ¹⁰ C. Fabregues, “The Indo-Parthian Beginnings of Gandhara Sculpture”, *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, Vol. 1, 1987, p.35.
- ¹¹ D.Faccenna et al, “Reports on the Campaigns 1956-58 in Swat (Pakistan)”, *Reports and Memoirs*, Vol. I, Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente (IsMEO), Rome, 1962. Figs. 47, 51.
- ¹² Fabregues, *ibid.*
- ¹³ Fabregues, *ibid.*

Map
Ancient Uddyana and Gandhara.



Site Plan

Bulkara III:
Ground Plan of Structures.
Scale. 1 0 2 4 6 8 m.



Pl. A – Shirines of Butkara III



Pl. 1. BK-III 103.

Pl. 2. BK-III 102



Pl. 3. BK-III 104.

Pl. 4. BK-III 99.



Pl. 5. BK-III 100.



Pl. 6. BK-III 105.

Pl. 7. BK-III 122.



Pl. 8. BK-III 107.



Pl. 9. BK-III 108.

Pl. 10. BK-III 106.



Pl. 11. BK-III 101.

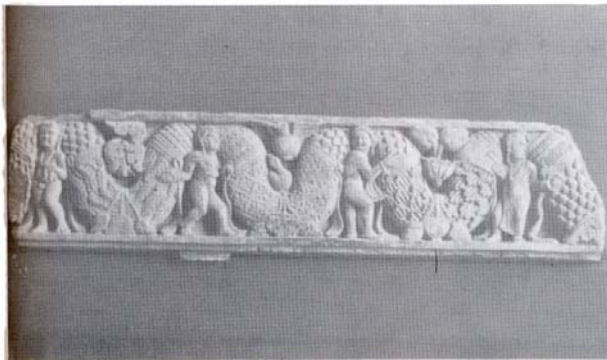


Pl. 12. BK-III 109.

Pl. 13. BK-III 124



Pl. 14. BK-III 123.



Pl. 15. BK-III 58.

Pl. 16. BK-III 63.





Pl. 17. BK-III 20



Pl. 18. BK-III 148



Pl. 19. BK-III 166.



Pl. 20. BK-III 136.