

ART. VI.—*Opening of the Topes or Buddhist Monuments of Central India.* By MAJOR A. CUNNINGHAM, *Bengal Engineers.*

[*Read July 5th, 1851.*]

AMONGST the many interesting monuments of India, the most remarkable, as well as the most ancient, are the cave-temples and topes of the Buddhists. The former have been made known by the pictorial illustrations of Fergusson; but the curious paintings which adorn the interior must be copied, and the numerous inscriptions must be deciphered, before the world will appreciate the full value of these works as illustrations of the religious belief and every-day life of the Indians of Alexander's time. Of the topes, none have yet been described, excepting the largest of the Sanchi group, near Bhilsa. An accurate plan and section of this building, with a short account of the various subjects represented in the sculptured bas-reliefs of the gateways, was published by my brother, Captain J. D. Cunningham, in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. On his solicitation and earnest representation of the great value of these bas-reliefs, the Court of Directors were induced to employ Lieutenant Maisey to make drawings of the building and of its sculptured gateways. In January last I joined Lieutenant Maisey at Sanchi, and I am therefore able to speak positively of the value of his drawings, which cannot be surpassed for strict fidelity of outline and minute accuracy of detail. The groups of topes around Bhilsa will now be illustrated in a manner worthy of their value and importance.

The large tope at Sanchi had been breached on the southern side by Sir Herbert Maddock about thirty years ago, but the centre of the building had not been reached. The second sized tope had also been breached; but, although the centre of the building must have been laid open, no relics were obtained, and these clumsy excavations were fortunately abandoned. Lieutenant Maisey and myself determined to proceed in a different manner, by sinking perpendicular shafts down the middle of each tope, so as not to injure the external appearance of the building. In this way we opened nearly thirty topes, of which about ten yielded relics of different kinds, although most of them had certainly been opened before by the villagers.

There are five distinct groups of topes near Bhilsa, all situated on low sandstone hills, more or less inaccessible.

- 1st.—*Sánchi*, $5\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the S.W. of Bhilsa ;
- 2nd.—*Sonári*, 6 miles to the S.W. of Sánchi ;
- 3rd.—*Satdhára*, $6\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the W. of Sánchi ;
- 4th.—*Bhojpur*, 7 miles to the E.S.E. from Sánchi, and 6 miles S.S.E. from Bhilsa ;
- 5th.—*Andher*, 4 miles to the E.S.E. from Bhojpur, and 9 miles S.E. from Bhilsa : the extreme distance from west to east, from Satdhára to Andher, being 17 miles.

A *tope* is a solid hemispherical building, varying in size from the great Sánchi *chaitya*, which is 106 feet in diameter, to the smallest at Bhojpur, which is only 6 feet in diameter. The most ancient topes were simple hemispheres, such as the great Sánchi *chaitya*, which most probably dates as high as the middle of the sixth century B.C. The next in point of antiquity are most of the Bhilsa topes, which date from the end of the third century B.C. In these the hemisphere is raised a few feet above the plinth by the addition of a cylindrical portion. The third class of topes is found in Afghanistan, and dates about the commencement of the Christian era. In these the hemisphere is raised considerably above the plinth. The last class, of which the Sárnáth tope, near Benares, is a magnificent specimen, has the hemisphere raised to an height equal to its own diameter.

A *tope* is a religious edifice dedicated emphatically to Buddha, that is, either to the celestial Ádi-Buddha, the great first cause of all things, or to one of his emanations, the *Mánushi*, or mortal Buddhas, of whom the most celebrated is *Sákya Muni*, who died in B.C. 543. Topes were also dedicated to the most illustrious of Sákya's disciples, and to those other Buddha priests, who, through superior sanctity, were believed to have attained complete absorption into the divine self-existent spirit from which they originally sprang.

In the topes dedicated to the celestial Buddha, the invisible Being who pervaded all space, no deposit was made, but the divine spirit, who is *Light*, was supposed to occupy the interior, and was typified on the outside by a pair of eyes placed on each of the four sides, either of the base or crown of the building. Such is the Great *Chaitya*, near Kathmandu, in Nípál, dedicated to *Sambhu* or *Svayambhunáth*, in which the eyes are placed on the sides of the crown of the building. Such also are the numerous *chhodtens* (*m-Chhod r-Ten*) in Tibet, which are dedicated to the celestial Buddha, in contradistinction to the *Dung-tens* [*g-Dung r-Ten*], which are built in honour of the mortal Buddhas. The first means simply "an offering" to the Deity, the latter, as its name implies, is a "bone [*g-Dung*] receptacle," that is, a building containing the bones or relics of one of

“[relic] of the emancipated MOGALIPUTRA, of the family of GOTI, race of ATRI.” I have ventured to take *Atevásino* as the equivalent of *Atrivansya*, because I find it coupled with *Pándukula* in one of the inscriptions from No. 2 tope, which will be mentioned hereafter. The chief objection, if not the only one, to this reading, is the statement of the Mahawánso that *Maggali*, the father of *Tisso* (or Mogaliputra), was a Brahman. *Sapurisasa* I take to be the equivalent of *Sapuruśasya*, “joined with the Supreme Being,” or “emancipated.”

The relics next in importance are those of the *missionaries* who were despatched to various countries for the propagation of the Buddhist religion immediately after the close of the Third Convocation in B.C. 247. Of these great men we have the relics of two who are mentioned in the *Mahāvansa* (pp. 71, 74), as having been deputed to the *Himavanta* country, or *Himālayan* region. These are *Majhima* and *Kāsapa*. The relics of the first, were found only at Sānchi, with a simple inscription; “[relic] of the emancipated MAJHIMA.” Those of KĀSAPA were found both at Sānchi and at Sonāri, each inscription distinctly mentioning the mission to the Himavanta country. The Sānchi inscription is

[illegible]

SAPURISASA KÁSAPA GOTASA SAVA-HEMAVATÁCHARIYASA.
 “[relic] of the emancipated KÁSAPA GOTA, the Missionary to the whole Himavata.” The Sonári inscription merely adds the name of his father, *Koti-putasa*, the son of Koti ; the rest of the legend being exactly the same.

Another eminent missionary of the same period was GOTT-PUTRA. He is not mentioned in the Maháwanso; but the inscription on a small piece of steatite, from Sonári, enclosed in a crystal box with his relics, leaves no doubt upon the subject. It is as follows:—

ሒሳብ ለጽሑፍ ገጽ ፩ ለጽሑፍ ፩ ለጽሑፍ ፩ ለጽሑፍ ፩ ለጽሑፍ ፩

SAPURISASA GOTI-PUTASA HEMAVATASA DADABHISARA DÁYÁDASA.
 “[relic] of GOTI-PUTRA, the brother-of-religion, to *Dardábhísara* of the
 Himavata.”

The meaning of *dāyāda* (literally, son, offspring, relative) is best illustrated by the following anecdote from the Mahāwanso, p. 36. When Asoka had dedicated his son Mahindo and his daughter Saughamittā to the priesthood, he enquired from the great priest, Mogaliputta, "whose act of pious bounty to the Buddhist religion had been the greatest?" The crafty priest, "foreseeing that it would tend to the advancement of the faith," replied: "Ruler of men! a greater donor and benefactor to the faith even than thou art, can be called

The inscriptions, which are found upon the rails, pillars, and coping-stones of the colonnaded enclosures at Sānchi, amount to about two hundred and forty. Some of them are of course of but little value ; but the whole, taken together, are of considerable importance, as they record the names of cities and of races, and exhibit the language and alphabet of India at the time of Alexander and his successors. Every letter of the alphabet which James Prinsep found in the longer inscriptions, I have found in these short ones. Lastly, they prove most unmistakeably the predominance of the Buddhist religion by the use of names and terms peculiar to that belief ; and they establish the early existence of the Buddhist triad of *Buddha*, *Dharma*, and *Sangha* by the frequent occurrence of such names as

Budha Pálita	Dhama Pálita	Sangha Pálita
Budha Rakhita	Dhama Rakhita	Sangha Rakhita

A few of these inscriptions are partly obliterated ; but I have copied and translated the whole, as I consider that every word of the language will lessen the difficulties of translating the longer inscriptions. A few specimens may be interesting :—

No. 90 of my list. *Upedadatasadánam.*

“Gift of Upendradatta.”

No. 62. *Ujeniya Upedadatasā pajavataya Mâyádataya dānam.*







“Gift of MÁYÁDATTÁ, the mother of UPENDRADATTA, of Ujain.”

No. 63. *Ujeniya Upedadatasā Bhaginiya Himádataya dānam.*

“Gift of Himádatá, the sister of Upendradatta, of Ujain.”

I cannot now attempt any description of the numerous bas-reliefs further than to state generally that they exhibit the adoration of topes, of bo-trees, and of wheels, processions escorting relic boxes, apparently after a successful campaign for their acquisition ; ascetic life in the woods, where both the *Srámanas* and *Srámanás* (*Σρμνοι* and *Σρμνας*) are represented in various acts of meditative abstraction, &c. These are the *Gymnosophists* of the Greeks ; for I believe that the term *Buddha* (the “wise”) was *literally translated* by the Greeks, and that *Sophists*, *Philosophers*, and *Gymnosophists*, all equally mean “Buddhist Priests.”

The most remarkable object of adoration is a peculiar emblem which is found upon most of the old Hindoo coins, and upon all the

coins of the Indo-Scythian Kadphises. This emblem is It surmounted each pillar of the Sanchi gateways; it forms the top of every standard and banner in the processions; it is carved upon the sword-scabbards; and, lastly, it is an object of worship *singly* and also as a *triad*, where three of these emblems are represented on an altar, side by side, thus  After much consideration I have come to the conclusion that this holy emblem is nothing more than the *monogram*, formed of the radical letters (*vija mantra*) of the names of the four elements, which form "MATTER," joined to that of *manasa* or "MIND:" thus  *ya*, air;  *ra*, fire;  *va*, water;  *la*, earth. These are the names of the four *material* and visible elements; and these four letters when combined together form the above monogram; in which also is  *ma*, the radical or initial letter of *MANASA*, or mind. The fifth invisible element of "infinite space" could not of course be represented.

The three monograms arranged together, I take to represent the Buddhist Triad, or *Buddha*, *Dharma*, and *Sangha*. *Buddha*, or Supreme Intelligence, represents the *Mind* and the five *senses*; *Dharma*, or Matter, represents the *Body* and the five *objects of sense*; and *Sangha*, or *Union*, represents the junction of *mind* and *matter*, or of soul and body in the human being. Singly, therefore, the monogram represents the Triad of Buddha and Dharma united in Sangha, while the triple monogram represents each member of the Triad separately.

This explanation is fully borne out by the proof which I have before given of the early existence of the Buddhist Triad, as evidenced in the frequent occurrence of the names of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha in the inscriptions. Its simplicity is also in its favour.

But the most curious fact connected with this triple monogram, is the certainty that the three famous figures now worshipped at Jagannáth are *identically* the same, as a single glance at any sketch of those figures will show. There is a *wheel* also on the summit of the Jagannáth temple.

Both Lieutenant Maisey and myself agree in identifying Sanchi with the Chetiyagiri of the Maháwanso.

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Gwalior, 26 March, 1851.

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