

Narrative Relief Panels from Amlukdara (Swat) Excavation 2019 2020: Reidentification and Reinterpretation

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Abstract

Amlukdara is a valley where an elevated Buddhist stupa is standing aloof at the foothill of mount Ilam in a narrow valley surrounded by high hills. The discovery of the Buddhist Stupa was followed by several excavation and restoration campaigns resulting in the discovery of a large number of votive stupas and other structures, as well as a great number of sculptures consisting of decorative relief panels, narrative relief panels, sculptures of Buddha and other divinities as well as other miscellaneous artefacts of archaeological importance. The present paper is based on the identification and reinterpretation of selected narrative relief panels published in the recent report "Amlukdara, Swat, recent excavation and conservation report 2019-2020" published by the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums (DOAM), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The present author has made an attempt to re-identify and reinterpret the scenes in the selected narrative relief panels.

Keywords: *Jātaka, Elephant, dream, Naga Apalala, Asita, Horoscope, Cremation, Ram, Lion chariot, Drum, Sūrya, Relics, Kanthaka, Chandaka, Dadhivāhana jātaka.*

Introduction

Amlukdara stupa is situated in the picturesque valley of Amlukdara in the tehsil of Barikot, Swat (the ancient Uḍḍiyāna) (Olivieri 2018: 1-105; Abdul Samad et al. 2021:11). During the reign of King Aśoka, the region was introduced to Buddhism through the missionary campaigns sent by King Aśoka to far and near regions to propagate the dogma of peace. It was during his rule that the earliest Buddhist religious monuments, Stupa and monasteries in the Uḍḍiyāna were built. In the succeeding periods, the seed of Buddhism that Aśoka sowed grew in the large shady tree that also fascinated the inhabitants of the vicinity to seek shelter beneath it. In the later period, Buddhism found extensive royal support from Kuṣāṇa, that resulted in the massive conversion of the people to Buddhism as well as the establishment of countless Stupa and monasteries in the length and breadth of the region. Buddhism bloomed in full swing in Uḍḍiyāna until the Hephthalite invasion caused the massive destruction of its religious monuments and brutal massacre of the Buddhist communities. The ruins of small and large Buddhist religious establishments are found scattered in and around the ancient region of Uḍḍiyāna. The remains of those monuments are still echoing the past glory of Buddhism and the grandeur of the civilization which was once flourishing on its soil.

Among the cluster of these remains, Amlukdara is one of the Buddhist sites where standing aloof, a lofty stupa surrounded by number of votive stupas of various dimensions. The site, dated from the 3rd -10th c A.D., was first noticed by Sir Aural Stein, who mentioned it as a lofty and well-preserved monument (Stien 1929: 32). Berger Wright, in summer 1938, conducted small scale excavation at the site and traced out remarkable architectural remains along with some sculptures. In the report, they mentioned it only as "Amluk" without adding Dara (Evert Barger 1985: 18- 24). Tucci mentioned the site without adding further details (Tucci 1958). From 1958-59 Directorate of Archaeology and Museums(DOAM) carried out the conservation work on a small scale, while in 1994, DOAM conducted excavation at the site. Italian Archaeological Mission has been carrying out research on the site since 1990 (Faccenna 2014: 171-221), and in 2011-2012, the mission conducted the first season of archaeological excavation of the site. In 2019-2020, DOAM, Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa resumed a fresh excavation of the site resulting in the exposure of several architectural elements, stupas, and, of course, a considerable number of sculptures, mostly consisted of relief panels. The excavation report published in 2021, is a praiseworthy effort of DOAM, bringing to light the new discoveries, and the opportunities for fresh research.

The present research paper is based on the identification and reinterpretation of the selected narrative panels from the report of fresh excavation at Amlukdara Stupa. Except few, the selected panels are broken and defaced. The features are hardly recognizable to determine the exact theme, event or scene. The present author has made a humble attempt to reidentify and reinterpret these panels. Uḍḍiyāna Buddhist Art is a regional variation of Gandhāra art, however, like all the Gandhāra repertoire, the main theme revolves around the Buddha, his pre-birth incarnations, his life story, his miracles and teachings. Gandhāran artists developed a specific iconography to convey the vast meaning of an event or of an elaborated story in precise manners by relegating it to minimal gestures, icons and symbols. Narrative relief panels, that are often recovered in damaged form from archaeological sites, are indeed difficult to interpret, however, thanks to the well-established iconography, which assists us well in identification.

Methodology

For the present paper the selected relief panels are thoroughly examined for minute narrative details and analysed with other published data, for accuracy and authenticity. For some of the panels with different iconographic details, related Buddhist literature is keenly studied to understand the new panels that probably didn't come to light before. The iconography of the scenes is first compared with the other sculptures from Buddhist sites of Gandhāra displayed in different museums or published in different catalogues, whereas for the missing iconographic details, literature, Buddha life stories and jātakas are studied.

Panels are mentioned along with their accession number and the title of the scene. Important physical descriptions are mentioned in the first paragraphs omitting the unnecessary physical descriptions that are not contributing to the narrative scheme. However, the published report on Amlukdara has already mentioned the complete physical descriptions of the panels.

“Conversation between the Royal Couple before the Great Renunciation” (Pl. 1 Acc. 09)

A broken rectangular panel is framed on the right side by an encased Corinthian pilaster, while the left part is broken. The panel shows a royal couple engaged in conversation. Lady is reclined on the bed on her left side, listening to a man sitting on the bed near her legs. The feet of the male figure are placed on a low stool below. To the left of the panel is a lady in dancing posture, the heads of two attendants visible in the background, and a musician lady sitting in front is beating a drum.

The scene resembles the renowned scene widely known as "Great Renunciation" one of the four major events in the life of Buddha that depict the prince Siddhārtha sitting in the same manner near her sleeping wife, Yaśodharā. What makes it different from the great renunciation scene is the lady reclining on the bed is awake and looking at the face of the male figure sitting near her legs, whose head is turned to her, gesturing in conversation; the dancer is vigorously performing a dance while the musician is enthusiastically beating drum. In certain cases, the conversation is carried out in a slightly different setting without disturbing the main iconography of the scene, the male figure reclined in bed, the female sitting near his legs while the dancer and musician performing their arts to amuse the royal couple (W.Zwalf 1996: 103,170; Rahman 2011:99-111, Pl.14,15; Stoye 2008: cat. no.156), whereas in the former scene of “Great Renunciation” the Yaśodharā, dancers and musicians are deep asleep, Siddhārtha sitting in a pensive pose or his head moved to side giving instruction to attendant or handover his turban to him (Ihsan Ali 2008:89,93,94,Pl. 5.4, 6.2; W.Zwalf 1996: 105-107, Pl.173,174,175; Stoye 2008: cat. no.182; Noguchi 1992: 21-23). A panel from the Karachi museum

is one of the fine examples accommodating both of these scenes in two registers, the upper register displays the conversation of Siddhārtha and Yaśodharā before the great departure, and the lower register shows the departure scene, Siddhārtha paying a final visit to his wife. He is sitting in pensive pose on bed near his sleeping wife. He seems grieved in saying goodbye to his family (Ingholt 1957:pl.39A, B). Therefore, (Pl.1) expresses the princely life of Siddhārtha before embracing the life of asceticism.

The great renunciation caused mental and social suffering for his family. After enlightenment, the Buddha visited his family, where his father took an oath from him to set a rule that monks would get permission from their parents before leaving home (Ann Waltner 2012).

“Horoscope of Sage Asita” (Pl. 2 Acc. 57)

The upper, right and left portion of the rectangular panel is badly broken. Panels show the lower body parts of human figures and furniture. To the right of the panel is the visible left leg of a person seated on a throne (chair?), his foot placed on a low stool. To the left is a figure draped in a long antariya seated on a cushioned stool, holding a naked child in his lap whose legs are hanging from the lap. Only the lower bodies of the figures are intact, while the upper bodies of all three figures are missing. The person holding the baby (Siddhārtha) is sage Asita, and the figure sitting on the chair is king Suddhōdana.

The established iconography of the scene clearly points out the scene known as “the horoscope of the sage Asita”, as evident from many examples from the other sites (Stoye 2008: 193-196, fig.6, cat. no.151; Ihsan Ali 2008:65-67,Pl. 4.2; W.Zwalf 1996:97,Pl.158; Ingholt 1957: pl.21,22; Faccenna 1980: Pl. CDIX).

After the birth of prince Siddhārtha, king Suddhōdana invited the sage Asita to the royal palace for the horoscope of the newborn. Sage Asita paid a visit to the royal palace along with his nephew Naradatta (Sangharakshita 2009:12,13; Pakistan Historical Society 1995:91; 1909: 82,83). The common iconography of the scene shows an aged bearded sage, his matted hair tied in a small bun at the top of the head, and clad in a single loincloth. He is usually seated on a low stool, holding the infant Siddhārtha in his hands or in his lap or a woman standing in his front offering the child to him. King Suddhōdana, in his royal attire along with the queen, sits on lavishly carved chairs. Here in the under-discussion panel, the queen is not visible; however rest of the iconographic details clearly describe the scene as horoscopes of Sage Asita, who noticed 32 (?) lakhshana of greatness in the infant Siddhārtha and prophesied his extraordinary future (Fryer 1900:77)

“Sūrya Riding Quadriga” (Pl. 3 Acc. 102)

A badly defaced panel shows the vague traces of a chariot drawn by four horses. The scene is depicted frontal, but the profile view is conceived by deploying horses to the left and right, which is usual with this scene. A man in the chariot is holding the bridles of the horses while below the traces of the charioteer can be identified. Traces of latticed chariots are visible. Despite the much-defaced state of the panel, the iconographic details of horses, chariot and person riding in the chariot indicate it's a sun god Sūrya and his charioteer Aruna.

Almost similar to the above narrative panel, two large steles from the Buddhist site of Zardheri shows a figure in the four-horse chariot holding the bridles in the same manner and accompanied by other figures. Yoshihide described the riding figure as bodhisattva as the panel also exhibits the seven symbols of the chakravartin king (Yoshihide 2008: 308-313, cat. no.215). However, the under-discussion panel is severely damaged to trace the other symbols.

Horse chariot has a long history in world religions. In Greek mythology, the sun god Helios travels across the sky in his horse chariot; In the Buddhist art of India and in Gandhāra, the Sūrya depiction is associated with the chariot of four or seven horses as a personal vehicle for the ancient Vedic deity Sūrya, a personification of

the sun god. In the present panel, four horses are surely present. In early Buddhist and Hindu art, he is commonly portrayed riding a chariot around heaven. He is often flanked by other divinities on the left and right and a charioteer Aruna holding the whip or bridles of the horses (Adams 1997:278; Geer 2008: 235,236,245; Kurita 2003: 179,320. 516,517,518; Faccenna 1980: Pl. CDXVIII, CDXIX, CDXX, CDXXI, CDXXII, CDXXIII, DLIX, DLXI; De-Leeuw 1972:26-43).

Several illustrations of a similar kind came into light from various Gandhāran sites. From the Buddhist site of Butkara I, at least seven panels show the Sūrya riding the chariot including one of the capitals displays the chariot rode by Sūrya. Like many other gods and goddesses of different religions, Sūrya is also adopted and incorporated into Buddhism. A rayed disk is a symbolic representation of Sūrya indicates the radiating sun. The earliest depiction of Sūrya's chariot drawn by four horses is found in the façade of Bhaja cave which is probably dated before the 2nd century. B.C. Another is found on the balustrade at Bodhgaya, where Sūrya is flanked by Usha and pratyusha (goddesses of day and spouses of Sūrya) discharging arrows to eliminate the darkness (1916:72,73).

“Transportation of the Relics” (Pl. 4, Pl. 5 Acc. 185, Acc. 316)

Pl.4 is a partly broken rectangular panel divided into two compartments. The right compartment has preserved the details of the narrative scene, while the compartment to the left is much damaged only shows traces of the lower body of a standing figure. The panel is enclosed within Corinthian columns on both sides. The narrative scene in the right compartment exhibits an empty chariot drawn by two lions, a charioteer in it holding the bridles of the lions in his left hand and probably a whip in his raised right hand.

Another broken rectangular panel Pl.5 exhibits the same scene with slight variation. An encased Corinthian column divides the panel into two compartments; the right compartment is enclosed by another encased Corinthian column to the right. Both compartments depict different scenes. The right compartment displays a chariot drawn by two lions. The charioteer is sitting in it. The wheel of the chariot has been shown in the form of a four-petal rosette. Shape of the chariot (which apparently seems without the presence of any human being while the conical form seems like covered by some kind of fabric) resemble to the one used in many panels illustrated as transporting the relics. Left compartment displays three human figures, a female sitting on a low stool holding some oblong object in hands. Another standing male figure is holding a staff (spear?) in hand. The third figure is damaged, but traces show he/she is sitting on a stool or chair.

In the Buddhist Art of Gandhāra, the Lion chariot is associated with two celebrated scenes “the transportation of the infant Siddhārtha to palace and transportation of the Relics” Stoye 2008: 193-196, fig. 4.5; W.Zwalf 1996:95, Pl.154,155; Khan 2015: 55, Pl.25). Both scenes are slightly identical with major iconographic differences. In Buddhist mythology, Lion is the emblem of the Śākya clan of Buddha, a symbol of power, royalty and the lion throne, a mark of the spiritual triumph of Buddha. In the case of transportation of the infant to Kapilavastu, the procession is led by the king Suddōdana who is walking or riding a horse before the chariot. Often his upper body turned to back and pointed toward the chariot while in the chariot royal female holding the infant in her arms. The lion chariot is not the only mean of transportation illustrated carrying infant Siddhārtha to the palace, but the horse chariot, a litter carried by litter bearer, and palanquin on the back of elephant shows the diversity of the transportation utilized for the same scene according to the choice and devotion of the sculptor (W.Zwalf, 1996:89,143; Stoye 2008: cat. No. 150; Ihsan Ali 2008: 62,3.8; W.Zwalf 1996: 94,Pl. 152,156,157; Ingholt 1957: Pl. 18; W.Zwalf 1996: 97,Pl.158; Tanweer 2011: 262, Pl.6).

Iconographically the present two examples clearly show the difference as the lion chariot doesn't show the royal female holding the infant or king Suddhōdana leading the chariot. Instead, the chariot shows only a charioteer holding the bridles. Therefore, both the lion chariots probably are part of the series of Buddha's

posthumous events including the scene of transportation of the relics, although the casket is not visible clearly or might not be depicted; however, slight variation in established iconography can be noticed in narrative panels executed by different artists with diverse ideas.

The examples of the lion chariot are limited in number if compared to the other means of transportation used for the same purpose in the same event. The horse chariot was a more common means of transport. Probably to glorify the super human status of the Buddha, his miraculous birth, spiritual greatness, power and victory over the untamed, wild or negative forces and being the one making impossible into possible, the artist, probably, out of the extrem devotion used the lion chariot. Practical and realistic analysis definitely contradicts the real meaning of the lions drawing the chariot, which is idealistic rather than realistic.

“Dadhivāhana Jātaka or Viśvantara Jataka” (?) Pl. 6 Acc. 294)

A rectangular panel broken from left, right and upper side retains the traces of an elephant to the right following a man in profile whose head is broken and his hand is placed on a beating drum hung from his shoulder through a supportive strip. He is moving to the left where another figure is sitting(?) on the ground whose head is also missing. Initially, the panel gave the idea of Viśvantara jātaka, a story revolving around a rain-bringing elephant. The figure standing in front of the elephant could be prince Viśvantara, and the next person a Brahmin, just as exhibited in many narrative panels from Gandhāra (Kurita 2003: 275, Pl. 843, 844, 864; W. Zwalf 1996: 86, Pl. 137).

Although the narrative panel is severely damaged and it is hard to draw any inference from the scene to reconstruct the whole narration. My humble attempt may not be entirely correct as the elephant is a part of many jātakas and life events of the Buddha.

The established iconography of Viśvantara jātaka depicts the prince in royal attire standing gracefully in front of an elephant, pouring water from a flask on the hands of Brahmin as a gesture of generosity. Usually, the scene shows at least two figures in front of the elephant. Here two figures are present, but first, the drum-like object in the hands of standing figure, secondly his slightly bent posture makes it doubtful, which differs from the established iconography of the Viśvantara Jātaka.

The drum in the hand of a figure can be the iconography of the Dadhivāhana jātaka. Said jātaka is dated to the period when the king Brahmadatta was ruling the Banaras. During that time, four Brahmins renounced the world for ascetic life and settled in the Himalayan mountains. After some time, the eldest one died and was born as god Sakka. Using his divine powers, he was able to pay visits to his other three ascetic brothers. Among them, the one asked him the elephant path nearby his hut is disturbing him when the giant creature marches. Therefore he asked for the help to resolve the problem. Sakka gave him a drum with the instruction if you beat the drum from one side, it will make your enemies run away; however, if you beat the other side of the drum, it will make the enemy befriend you (THERA 2009: 148-156; Viggo Fausbøll 1880: xvi-xxii). In the above scene, the slightly bent figure absolutely cannot be the prince on account of the standing posture but the Sakka carrying the drum. This is probably the first depiction of Dadhivāhana jātaka in Gandhāra.

“Meeting with Brahmins” (Pl. 7 Acc. 313, Pl. 8. Acc. 136)

A broken panel enclosed by encased Corinthian column at the right, shows four human figures in different postures and mudrā. Vajrapāṇi standing to the right, is clad in a long exomis, holding a vajra in his left hand. Before the Vajrapāṇi, haloed Buddha clad in tricivara, is sitting on a stool and his right hand is in the gesture of conversation toward a standing figure to the left. A bearded ascetic is sitting on a stool to the left end, posing his hands in a conversation gesture.

Another broken panel Pl. 8 portrays four standing ascetic Brahmin. Young Brahmin alternating the aged Ascetic. Young ascetics have erected postures while aged ascetics are bearded with bent body posture.

These scenes are among many of the scenes illustrating the visits and meetings of the Buddha with Brahmins, ascetics like kaśyapa, and Bāvarī and their conversion to Buddhism. In former case, the Buddha is visiting old Brahmin (kaśyapa), while in later the young and old ascetic seems paying visit to Buddha (Tanweer 2011: Pl.23,24,25,26; Khan 2015: 105, Pl.64,71; W.Zwalf 1996: 124, Pl.203).

“Conversion of Naga Apalal” (Pl. 9 Acc. 324)

A broken relief panel retaining many clear details of the narrative scene. Buddha standing in the centre of the composition is accompanied by three defaced standing figures on the right, and Naga Apalala, along with his spouse, squatted on the floor(or their lower bodies submerged in water?) with their hands in añjali mudrā. In the background, a flying apsara venerating the Buddha with something, probably flowers in his hands whereas the flying Vajrapāṇi striking the mountain is visible above. High tides of the flooded lake is demonstrated by a curvy screen behind the Naga couple.

Chinese pilgrims Fa-Hian and Yuan-Chwang mentioned the naga Apalal in their records (Ireland R. A. 1903: 87; Beal 2013). Naga Apala was a serpent of enormous size, who was troubling the population of Uḍḍiyāna by causing the flood in the river. Buddha subdued and converted him. The event is among one of the most famous events of conversion in Buddhist history.

The general iconography of the scene in the sculptural art illustrates Buddha standing in the centre of the scene, whereas flying Vajrapāṇi is striking the mountain with his Vajra. Naga Apala with his spouse standing or kneeling in front of Buddha in devotion; the lower bodies of nagas submerged in the water while the high tides of water are portrayed at the back of the nagas formed in an undulating wave (Wilson 2009: 674,675; Zin 2009: 73-88; Ihsan Ali 2008:237, Pl 11.6; W.Zwalf 1996: 130-132, Pl. 214,215,216).

“Hurling of the Dead Elephant” (Pl. 10 Acc. 312, Pl. 11 Acc. 323)

Broken panel Pl.10. retains only the right part, shows a man whose left hand is supported on the thigh of his slightly bent left leg while his right hand is stretched out to his right side in a gesture of pulling something heavy. In the background city wall is visible. Another panel Pl.1. in a poor state of preservation, retaining the traces of the chipped-off upper bodies of three humans and one elephant in the foreground standing and facing to the right. Ears and trunk are broken. At left is standing a defaced figure, probably of a male. In the background, the city entrance is depicted with a projected balcony from which a human figure is watching out. Two more figures are also looking down from the city wall.

In an archery contest, the Buddha defeated his cousin Devadatta. In reward for this victory, the king sent a state elephant for the prince to mount. Infuriated by the defeat and overcome by the jealousy, the Devadatta killed the elephant and left it in the city. Buddha grabbed the dead elephant from its tail and hurled it across the city wall to prevent the odour of the rotten flesh from spreading in the city (Stoye 2008: cat.no. 153; Evert Barger 1985: pl.5.1; Ingholt 1957: pl.30; Faccenna 1980: Pl.CCCLXXXVIII; Khan 2015: Pl.17; W.Zwalf 1996: 99,Pl.161,162)

The iconography of the scene often shows the four, three or single episode of the event with the elephant in the foreground along with the three main characters of the scene, Devadatta, Anada, and Buddha, while the city wall, entrance and balconies in the background. Above two scenes from Amlukdara can be related to one of the scenes of the hurling of the dead elephant. The standing posture of the figure in Pl.10. closely resembles the posture of Siddhārtha when he is hurling the dead elephant from its tail.

Even though panel Pl.11 is in a more devastated state of preservation but on, probability can be denoted to the part of the same event.

“Dream of Queen Māyā” (Pl. 12 Acc. 344)

Broken and defaced rectangular panel shows a standing female guard to the right. Her left hand is akimbo and holding a spear in her right hand. Traces of another human head are visible in the background. In the foreground, a female is lying on a bed, her head is placed on a high pillow and her back is turned to the viewers. Above are the traces of a defaced small circle, probably showing an elephant.

The scene is without any doubt the widely produced scene of Dream of Queen Māyā, abundantly recovered almost from every Buddhist religious site. Iconography of the scene shows Queen Māyā sleeping in her bed and a round circle above accommodating a miniature figure of white Elephant (Stoye 2008: 193-196, fig.no.1, cat. No. 121. 145,146; Ihsan Ali 2008: 49, Pl.3.2; Foucher 1917: Pl.III.A.1; W.Zwalf 1996: 88, Pl.141,142,143; Kurita 2003: 189,Pl. 545; Ingholt 1957: pl.9,10; Faccenna 1980: Pl. CLII, CDLVIII; Ghani-ur-Rahman 2011: 157-172, Fig. 1)

“Birth of Kanthaka” (Pl. 13 Acc. 350)

A broken relief panel enframed within encased Corinthian columns from both sides, display two male figures sitting on a low stool to the right of panel. One man is holding an infant baby in his arm seems presenting to the other person sitting on a stool in front of him. To the left of the panel, a mare is standing, feeding her foal.

The is doubtlessly the birth scene of Kanthaka, the Siddhārtha’s horse and Chandaka, the groom of Kanthaka and charioteer of Siddhārtha. Both the horse and groom were born on the same day the Siddhārtha was born (Ihsan Ali 2008: 57, Pl. 3.5; Ingholt 1957: Pl.19; Faccenna 1980: Pl. CDIX; Geer 2008: 241).

“Distribution of the Relics” (Pl. 14 Acc. 365)

A rectangular panel enclosed within encased Corinthian columns on both sides exhibits a male figure standing at the entrance of the city gate, holding a pot in his hands. In the background, the rectangular entrance of the city and city wall with bastioned are visible with domical vaults.

In the life story of Buddha, the distribution of the relics is in the category of the posthumous events. After the cremation of the Buddha’s mortal body, the relics were brought to Kusinagar, where a Brahmin darona, distributed them among eight states to cease the conflict that was instigated over the distribution of the relics. Second scene after the distribution of relics, is often depicted as figure or figures holding relic pots in their hands standing at the city entrance. Another similar scene previously interpreted as transference of the relics to Kusinagar city. In that scene men carrying pot in hands stands at the city entrance. In Gandhāra art, the scene is depicted with variation, however, based on the main iconography of the scene, we place it in the posthumous events where a figure or figures holding relic pots stands at the entrance of the city and in the background city gateway, fortification walls of Kusinagar along with its bastions and vaulted balconies are clearly visible (Stoye 2008: 193-196, cat. no.179; Luczanits 2008: 314-320, cat. No. 213).

“Siddhārtha Going to School” (Pl. 15 Acc. 397)

The broken and defaced rectangular panel retains the traces of few defaced figures. A male (female?) figure to the right is holding some stick like objects in both hands. In the foreground, haloed Siddhārtha is riding a ram to the left. Ram is identifiable by its bulky body, low height (suitable to carry only a small child) and the trace of a horn still retains the curved shape despite its chipped off condition. Another defaced figure is standing to the left, whose only loincloth is identifiable.

Buddha going to school is a record of his education attained from a well-learned teacher of that time. In Gandhāra narrative panels, his school-going event is immortalized by showing a young Siddhārtha riding a ram or a ram-chariot to attend school. He is accompanied by attendants and fellows, while on some occasions, the king Suddhōdana also appears in the scene to see off the young prince (Stoye 2008: 193-196, fig.no.7, cat. no.121, 152; Ihsan Ali 2008: 68, Pl. 4.3.1; Ingholt 1957: pl.23; Khan 2015: Pl.13).

“Cremation of the Corpse of Buddha” (Pl. 16 Acc. 403)

A broken panel retains the traces of the upper body of a man to the right holding a stick with an attached pot from which he is pouring inflammable liquid over the pyre where the dead body of Buddha is laying. Flames are emerging from the pyre, while the traces of another hand holding stick with an attached pot pouring inflammable liquid over the pyre is visible to the left. This is the cremation scene; Buddha’s body is being cremated according to their rituals.

On the death bed, the Buddha expressed his desire to be cremated after death and his relics enshrined in a stupa. After attaining the parinirvāṇa, following the Buddha’s wish, his mortal body was shrouded and coffined. During the funeral ceremony to dispose-off the dead body, coffin was placed over the bier and oil was poured on it to burn it to ashes (Ihsan Ali 2008: 262, Pl.12.4; Ingholt 1957: PL.146; Faccenna 1980: CCCLXXXIX(b); Khan 2015: Pl.23)

Conclusion:

Amlukdara is a rich archaeological site. Every season of excavation has brought to light new discoveries that not only contributed in enriching the Gandhāra collection, but also provided more data to researchers. Recent excavation and the publication of “Amlukdara Swat, Excavation and Conservation Report 2019-2020” has continued the past tradition of bringing new artefacts to limelight. The panels are physically well elaborately described in the report that helped the present author to clearly understand the scene in selected narrative panels that are not identified before. Reidentification of the above narrative panels is an attempt to open a new window for more discussion.

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Plates



Plate 1: Conversation between Royal Couple



Plate 2: Horoscope of the Siddhārtha



Plate 3: Sūrya riding Quadriga



Plate 4: Transportation of the Relics



Plate 5: Transportation of the Relics



Plate 6: Dadhivāhana jataka



Plate 7: Buddha visit to Brahmin



Plate 8: Brahmin visiting Buddha



Plate 9: Conversion of Naga Apalala



Plate 10: Hurling of the Dead Elephant



Plate 11: Hurling of the Dead Elephant



Plate 12: Dream of Queen Māyā



Plate 13: Birth of Kanthaka and Chandaka



Plate 14: Relic Distribution



Plate 15: Siddhārtha going to School



Plate 16: Cremation of the Buddha's body