

The gambling scenes of Bhrhut and Bodhgay : a critical assessment of their previous interpretations and some new suggestions

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THE GAMBLING SCENES OF BHĀRHUT AND BODHGAYĀ
A Critical Assessment of Their Previous Interpretations and
Some New Suggestions¹

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Introduction

The subject of the present investigation are two reliefs on certain architectural parts of the *stūpa*-s of Bhārhut and Bodhgayā, each of them representing figures as they are evidently engaged in playing a game in which a board is used. The gambling scene of Bhārhut depicts two pairs of two male figures placed on opposite sides of a gaming board. The ground on which the scene takes place as well as the board itself are split by a crack with the effect that the right half together with the figures on it are sinking downwards. Further details to be noticed are six small square objects at the upper left corner of the board as well as a similar single object in front of the second figure from the left; furthermore a square stone at the upper edge and a tree at the outer right part. An inscription on the upper border is intended to explain or comment on the depiction. On the other hand, the relief from Bodhgayā shows only two figures sitting opposite each other with a gaming board between them. Unlike in Bhārhut, there are no further details and also no inscription.

Especially, the gambling scene of Bhārhut has been discussed many times since its publication in the last century. Scholars have, however, not been able so far to agree on an unanimous answer to the question what kind of game it represents. The main point of their argument is whether or not it is in any way related to chess. While one group of interpreters hold that it represents a game of four-handed dice chess, which they see as the precursor of two-handed chess, this is vehemently rejected by others, and the discussion at present seems to have ended in deadlock. Similarly, the relief from Bodhgayā has been interpreted by some chess historians as a depiction of a

1 I am most indebted to the “Förderkreis Schach-Geschichtsforschung e. V.” (Kelkheim/Ts., Germany) for initiating and supporting this study. I would also like to express my thanks to the participants of the “Privatissimum ‘Indien’” arranged at Munich on 13th and 14th March, 1999, who after attending my lecture on the two artefacts put forward some interesting ideas with regard to certain difficult points of interpretation.

game of two-handed chess which, however, is doubted by others. Nevertheless, it seems worth while starting a fresh investigation of both artefacts. Going through the secondary literature one finds that the various details of which they are composed, have, if at all, in most cases been described only in a rather haphazard way. Their careful examination, however, is the indispensable precondition for any attempt to dare an answer to the question what kind of game the respective artists possibly wanted to represent. Therefore, an important aim of this investigation will be to give an account of the earlier descriptions of the various elements of the reliefs, to see whether they tally with what can be actually seen on the pictures which the present author recently managed to procure and thus to gather a number of criteria on the basis of which it can be decided which of the previous interpretations are possible and which are not.

1. The Stūpa of Bhārhut

1.1 Geographical Position

Before studying the various details of the gambling scene of Bhārhut, it seems necessary to deal with a few preliminary questions. When discussing the relief in question, previous interpreters have seldom bothered to specify to which part of the *stūpa* the artefact exactly belonged, how old it probably is, from which material it is made and of what size it is.

In order to answer these questions one should recall the following facts: speaking of the *stūpa* of Bhārhut, we mean a Buddhist religious structure the remains of which were first discovered in 1873 by ALEXANDER CUNNINGHAM, the then managing director of the Archaeological Survey of India. Once being the site of an ancient city, which according to BARUA² had an extension of about 12 miles and was situated near the ancient trade route coming from Ujjain in the South and leading to Pāṭaliputra in the east and Kauśāmbī in the north³, Bhārhut is nowadays a small village in Eastern Madhyapradesh, i.e. Central India, about 120 miles to the south-west of Allahabad. Apart from “a shallow circular depression in the ground” and some

2 1934a: 28.

3 Cf. MALALASEKERA 1966: 696.

“bricks and sandstone fragments ...strewn all around”, there remains nothing to be seen at Bhārhut⁴.

1.2 Parts of the Edifice

The main part of which the entire complex of a *stūpa* normally consists, namely the hemispherical dome-shaped structure serving to enshrine in a casket the relics of either the Buddha himself or of one of his disciples or of celebrated monks, was in the case of Bhārhut at the time of its discovery nearly in complete ruins. Therefore, it is difficult to form an accurate idea about its original size, but from the remnants found it has been concluded⁵ that it was built of bricks, measuring at least 62 feet and 6 inches in diameter which is about 19 metres⁶. This *stūpa* was surrounded by a stone fence or railing, the *vedikā* as it is called in Sanskrit⁷, the intervening space being used for the circumambulation performed by Buddhist pilgrims. Being a circular structure of a height of 2,5 to 3 metres divided by four openings into four equal segments, it was composed of a number of sculptured or ornamented upright pillars⁸, which were interconnected by three rows of cross bars⁹ and covered by the coping or continuous architrave, for which the Sanskrit term is *uṣṇīṣa*. Of the original total of 40 massive blocks of stone¹⁰,

4 Cf. MICHELL 1990: 156.

5 BARUA 1934a: 3.

6 The measures given by the individual interpreters vary. Without giving any reasons, MATHUR (1996: 26) suggests a diameter of 21,5 metres; RAU (1986: 41), a diameter of 23 metres.

7 According to BARUA (1934a: 3) it had an interior diameter of 88 feet and 4,5 inches, which is about 26,9 metres.

8 Their total amount was according to BARUA (1934a: 3) 80, 20 in each of the four segments with their respective extensions or returns, which branched off at the four gateways at right angles and evidently served to prevent a direct approach to the main sanctuary.

9 According to BARUA (1934a: 3) there were 228 rails in all, 57 rails in each quadrant and its outer extension.

10 Their measures as given by BARUA (1934a: 24) are: approximately 7 feet in length, 1 foot and 10,5 inches in height and a thickness of 1 foot, 8 inches. The total length of the coping including the returns at the four entrances is given by BARUA (ibid.) as 330 feet.

of which this *uṣṇīṣa* was composed, only 16 have been found, which means that three fifths of the entire coping are missing¹¹. Both the inner and outer faces of the coping were elaborately sculptured, but only on its inner face there were numerous reliefs mostly illustrating episodes from the life of the Buddha or from his previous existences as a Bodhisattva. The upper border of the inner side was decorated with a continuous row of stepped “merlons”¹² or “battalions”¹³, i.e. stepped pyramidal shapes with blue lotuses between them¹⁴. The outer leaves of these lotuses were depicted as swinging out at both sides, thus forming a kind of vault or roof over each “merlon”. The lower border of the inner side of the coping was adorned with a series of bells connected by a net of jewelled threads to a bamboo pole. Between these two borders there was, as also on the outer face, a long creeper-design with lotus-blossoms in each quadrant coming from the mouth of a kneeling elephant and dividing by its undulation the face into small panels. Generally, the panels with a narrative theme alternated with bunches of different kinds of fruit, necklaces, anklets, earrings and similar ornaments growing on the tendrils that came from the creeper joints. While the representation of human figures, animals etc. generally appeared in the upper panels, the bunches of fruit etc. were restricted to lower ones.

1.3 Phases of Construction

The date of the construction of the Bhārhut *stūpa* proper is not certain. While BARUA assumes that it “need not be supposed to have been built by King Aśoka or during his reign ...”, but was erected “by monks of the Bhārhut Church in a post-Aśokan time”¹⁵, Coomaraswamy thinks that “il pouvait remonter au temps d’ Aśoka ou même plus haut...”¹⁶. With regard to the *vedikā*, BARUA assumes, on the ground of inscriptional, palaeographic and stylistic evidence, three stages, the first belonging to the Mauryan pe-

11 Cf. BARUA 1934a: 24.

12 KALA 1951: 8.

13 BARUA 1934a: 25.

14 For the similarity of these stepped merlons as well as the blue lotuses with Assyrian patterns cf. MAJUMDAR 1937: 16 with further literature.

15 1934a: 32.

16 1956: 8; Aśoka reigned from 268 to 233 B.C.

riod¹⁷. It seems that at this stage it mostly consisted of rough-hewn stone while its ornamentation with the borders, the creeper-design and the narrative themes on the inner face were evidently mainly executed in the second phase around 150 B.C.¹⁸ Some pillars, rail-bars and sculptures seem to have been added in the third stage as late as 100 B.C.¹⁹ In other words, the gambling scene must be dated to the period between 150 and 100 B.C. Historically, it thus falls into the period of the Śuṅga-dynasty, which ruled over northern India from ca. 185 to 73 B.C. MURRAY's dating it to the 4th century A.D. is untenable.

1.4 The Depiction of the Gambling Scene

1.4.1 Location, Measurements, Material, Existing Photographs

The gambling scene to be discussed in the first part of this treatise was part of the inner face of the coping and is nowadays kept in the magazine of the Indian Museum of Calcutta to which the few recovered pieces—some portions of the railing and the eastern gateway—had been brought by CUNNINGHAM in 1875²⁰. Made of red sandstone, it is characterized by the elements described above: the top border consisting of stepped “merlons” alternating with blue lotuses, the lower border made up of a row of hanging bells, and the creeper design. Since the latter is conceived as a wish-fulfilling creeper (Sanskrit: *kalpalatā*), from its tendril is shown growing on the left side a beaded necklace and on the right side some fruit (cf. fig. 1). According to HÄRTEL/AUBOYER²¹ the whole scene is situated in an open valley. On the left side of the gambling scene there is another upper panel representing the roofs of houses and two birds. This scene has been identi-

17 Cf. BARUA 1934a: 36: “The first stage is Mauryan but not necessarily Aśokan; it is probably post-Aśokan”.

18 BARUA 1934a: 33; 36.

19 BARUA 1934a: 34; 36.

20 Some more pieces of the *vedikā* were recovered near the modern village of Bhārhut very much later and are nowadays exhibited in the Allahabad Municipal Museum (cf. KALA 1951: VIII; 13f.).

21 1985: 162.

fied by MATHUR²² as a representation of the Kapota Jātaka²³. According to my own measurements taken while visiting the Indian Museum in spring 1998 this portion of the coping stone in its entirety has a height of 44 cm while that of the relief itself has a height of 23 cm. (measurement taken from the upper edge of the moulding which separates the scene from the row of “merlons” to the lower edge of the creeper beneath it). The width measured from the left shoulder of the left figure behind in a straight line to the inner side of the creeper on the right is 33 cm.

Over the years, photographs of the gambling scene of Bhārhut have been published in several books and articles listed chronologically below:

1. CUNNINGHAM 1962, pl. XLV
2. BARUA 1937, pl. LXXIII, fig. 96
3. COOMARASWAMY 1956, pl. XLVIII, fig. 223
4. H. HÄRTEL/J. AUBOYER 1985, fig. 25b
5. VAN LOHUIZEN DE LEEUW 1981, 246, fig. 31.2 (after COOMARASWAMY)
6. BHATTA 1985, illustr. 4
7. PLAESCHKE 1988, fig. 12 (according to the list of illustrations on p. 183 a reproduction of CUNNINGHAM 's photo)
8. PETZOLD 1991: 39, fig. 1 (a reproduction of PLAESCHKE 1988, fig. 12)
9. EDER 1992,3:15 (side-inverted, evidently also a reproduction of CUNNINGHAM's photo)
10. NAGAR 1993, pl. 32
11. MATHUR 1996, fig. 10

Furthermore, drawings of the scene are given in Murray 1913: 40 (only the board, the altogether 7 small square objects and the numbers 1 - 4 signifying the positions of the figures); AUBOYER 1955, pl. 14, No. 1 and ROSENFELD 1960: 29, fig. 2.

22 1996: 103 and fig. 10.

23 For another photo of this scene see COOMARASWAMY 1956, pl. XLVIII, fig. 221.

During my above-mentioned visit to the Indian Museum I had the opportunity to take some detailed photos of my own on which the following discussion of the Bhārhut gambling scene is based²⁴.

1.4.2 Description of the Details

1.4.2.1 The Surface

It is generally accepted that the plane surface on which the game takes place is a rock or stone-slab which is split by a crack in two halves²⁵. Beyond that, CUNNINGHAM²⁶ and LÜDERS²⁷ explicitly mention that the right half of the broken slab is in a slanting position so that the men sitting on it are apparently sinking downwards²⁸. Only BARUA²⁹ makes further observations. He thinks that the splitting of the stone-slab “can as well be explained as a result of certain dislocation of two separate stone-pieces joined together to form the complete board”. He contends that “the dislocation may have been due to some accident befalling the man on the right, who seems to be in some sort of danger”. According to BARUA it is not a case of splitting but “of overriding of one slab upon the other, due to pressure of weight and loss of balance”. He argues that the two slabs are placed “face to face, in confrontation,” completing the square board with spaces for the players to sit. He also points out that in his opinion the slabs are placed upon small pieces of stone, several of which he sees depicted “below the slab to the left and on the right side of the piece on the right”.

These remarks made by BARUA with regard to the surface upon which the gaming board is placed are certainly right in so far as the left half of the slab seems indeed to rest upon a layer of stones and a number of similar sto-

24 I am a very much obliged to Dr. S. CHAKRABORTI, the curator of the Indian Museum, for giving me the permission to take the photos and to Mrs. M. CHAKRABORTY for her technical assistance.

25 CUNNINGHAM 1962: 94; LÜDERS 1940: 117, fn. 2; 1941: 88; BARUA 1934b: 96; MAJUMDAR 1937: 53; AUBOYER 1955: 26 and description of plate 14; COOMARASWAMY 1956: 93; ROSENFELD 1960: 30; WICHMANN 1960: 13; PETZOLD 1991: 39.

26 1962: 94.

27 1941: 88.

28 CUNNINGHAM also rightly points out that the right half is smaller than the left one.

29 1934b: 96.

nes is visible on both sides of the tree-trunk depicted to the right of the two right figures. The stones near the tree, however, evidently do not serve to support the right half of the stone slab which, in contrast to its left counterpart, extends right down to the creeper design. Therefore, one has the impression that the sculptor definitely wanted to depict the right half of the slab as breaking off, which means that BARUA's assumption of a dislocation of two separate stone pieces is less probable.

1.4.2.2 The Gaming Board

Almost all interpreters also agree that the board depicted between the two groups of men seems to be scratched on the ground, i.e. the surface of the rock³⁰. LÜDERS³¹, ROSENFELD³² and in accordance with the latter also the WICHMANNs³³ give the reason why it must be incised into the ground: it is split by the same crack which also runs through the rock.

In the majority of cases, the square space is simply identified as (gaming) board. AUBOYER³⁴ and VAN LOHUIZEN DE LEEUW³⁵, however, call it without giving any reasons, a chessboard, a view which is also shared by ROSENFELD³⁶ and the WICHMANNs³⁷.

Opinions vary as to the number of cells depicted on the board. While many interpreters see 6 x 6, i.e. 36 cells³⁸, KRISHNAMURTHY³⁹ counts only 6

30 CUNNINGHAM 1962: 94; MURRAY 1913: 40; BARUA 1934b: 96; LÜDERS 1941: 88; COOMARASWAMY 1956: 93; PETZOLD 1991: 39; SCHLINGLOFF 1991: 8; VASANTHA 1996: 5.

31 1940: 117, fn. 2.

32 1960: 30.

33 1960: 13.

34 1955: 26 and description of plate 14.

35 1981: 246.

36 1960: 30.

37 1960: 13 and fn. 21 on p. 72.

38 CUNNINGHAM 1962: 94; MURRAY 1913: 40; BARUA 1934b: 96; AUBOYER 1955: 26 and description of plate 14; COOMARASWAMY 1956: 93; ROSENFELD 1960: 30; WICHMANN 1960: 72, fn. 21; SCHLINGLOFF 1991: 8; SYED 1993: 124, fn. 61; AGRAWALA 1994: 29; VASANTHA 1996: 5. ROSENFELD, however, evidently contradicts himself reproducing on p. 29 of his article the board shown in the relief with a number of 6 x 7 squares (cf. BIDEV 1988: 27).

x 5, i.e. 30 small squares. PETZOLD⁴⁰, however, speaks of 6 x 7 squares. Interestingly, LÜDERS' observations are at variance with each other: while in his article on the game of dice in ancient India he speaks of only 30 cells (177, fn. 2), he gives their number as 36 in his investigation from 1941 (88).

MURRAY contends that there is a small stick on one of the cells which he thinks might be a man in the course of the play. Considering the photos given in CUNNINGHAM's monograph on Bhārhut and in the book by the PLAESCHKES of 1988, MURRAY's observation seems to be correct: one of the cells on left side of the board—actually it is on the upper second row near the crack—there is indeed something visible which has the appearance of a small stick (cf. fig. 1). The original kept in the Indian Museum, however, does not show the slightest trace of such an item. The cell in question is as empty as are all the other cells (cf. fig. 2, 3, 6). This discrepancy can only be accounted for by the assumption of some defect in the negative of the photo used by CUNNINGHAM and evidently reproduced in PLAESCHKE 1988 and EDER 1992. There is nothing like a stick on the photos given by BARUA, COOMARASWAMY, HÄRTEL/AUBOYER, VAN LOHUIZEN DE LEEUW, MATHUR and NAGAR.

Among all interpreters it is only VASANTHA who makes out dots on the board which she interprets as pawns⁴¹. However, upon a close examination of the original relief this observation cannot be verified. There are, on the left half of the board, pinhead-like hollows which, however, are due to the porosity of or damages in the material.

If we try to evaluate the other above-mentioned observations with reference to the gaming board, one has to agree without hesitation that it is indeed incised into the ground⁴². Regarding the number of cells, it can be clearly decided that their number in each line is 6 while each row has only 5, not 6 cells. Taking as an example the two middle rows, one counts in the 3rd row from above on the left side of the crack 2 intact cells. These are followed by a 3rd cell which is nearly intact and the upper right corner of which is visible on the right side. On the right side of the 3rd row there are 2 more

39 1961: 3.

40 1991: 39.

41 1996: 5-6.

42 It is without doubt an integral part of the whole representation, and I cannot see that it was added at a later time by another artist as was suggested by one of the participants of the meeting at Munich.

intact cells, so altogether 5 cells. In the 4th row, there are on the left side 3 intact cells plus one half of the 4th cell the other part of which is visible on the right side of the crack. It is followed on the right side by only one more cell which is the 5th (cf. fig. 2, 3, 6).

PETZOLD's counting of 6 x 7 cells is simply inaccurate.

It may be also observed that the cells on the left side have rather the form of a rectangle. Only the cells on the right side are really square.

1.4.2.3 The Figures

1.4.2.3.1 Common Characteristics

While MURRAY⁴³ describes the position of the four figures as squatting in pairs on opposite sides of the board, ROSENFELD⁴⁴ and with him the WICHMANNs⁴⁵ contend that they are sitting around the board. Without giving any reasons, they identify them as kings, a view which is rejected by BIDEV⁴⁶, who delineates their outward appearance as “nearly naked, wearing short trousers and turbans on their heads” and therefore thinks they are priests.

Commenting on these opinions, one cannot but agree with MURRAY that the figures are positioned in pairs on opposite sides of the board and not around it, as has been assumed by ROSENFELD and PETZOLD.

Furthermore, BIDEV has rightly observed that all of them wear turbans. As is quite evident, these turbans have bulbous knots which are characteristic of the headgear worn by men in the Śunga-period.

What has not been noticed so far is that all of them seem to be furnished with earrings. Both together—the turbans and the earrings—make it unlikely that they are priests as has been assumed by BIDEV. If “priests”, i.e. in Indian terms “brahmins” are depicted on the Bhārhut reliefs, they generally have long hair, which is, uncovered by any headgear, wound up ending in a

43 1913: 40.

44 1960: 29.

45 1960: 13.

46 1988: 27.

top knot, and they are bare of ornaments⁴⁷. But the four figures on our relief do not seem to be kings either, as has been suggested by ROSENFELD and the WICHMANNs. Apart from their earrings, they are not equipped with any further ornaments such as bracelets and necklaces, which is often the case with royal persons depicted at Bhārhut. Moreover, the two figures in the front are only dressed in a simple knee-long piece of cloth wrapped around their loins and thighs and fastened with a kind of waistband. By way of contrast, people of the higher social classes are usually represented as wearing, in addition to the lower garment, also an upper garment, in most cases a kind of scarf. Thus, one may conclude that the men on the Bhārhut relief are relatively simply dressed and therefore appear to be rather common people, soldiers, warriors or servants, e.g. This interpretation is to a certain extent substantiated by a relief-tondo on the *vedikā* of the Bhārhut *stūpa*, which represents the donation of the Jetavana: the merchant Anāthapiṇḍika, who is shown twice, is endowed with the kind of upper garment just mentioned as well as with a kind of torque while his servants, who are unloading the cart and covering the ground with gold coins, are similarly dressed as the men in the gambling scene: the upper part of their body is naked, and their loins seem to be covered by the same type of simple piece of cloth as may be concluded from the folds and the waistbands⁴⁸.

1.4.2.3.2 The First Figure from the Left

Having examined the common characteristics, we should now direct our attention to the first figure from the left (cf. fig. 4). BARUA⁴⁹, LÜDERS⁵⁰ and SCHLINGLOFF⁵¹ have commented on the fact that it has raised its right hand,

47 Cf. e.g. COOMARASWAMY 1956, pl. XLVII, fig. 205 with description on p. 92; pl. XLIX, fig. 231 and 233 with descriptions on p. 94; pl. L, fig. 246 with description on p. 95f.; pl. LI, fig. 247 and 251 with descriptions on p. 96f.

48 See COOMARASWAMY 1956, pl. XXVI, fig. 67; PLAESCHKE 1988, fig. 9. Cf. also LOTH 1979 : 40, who with respect to the reliefs from Bodhgayā which may be generally dated a little later than those from Bhārhut (see in detail chapter 2.3) remarks that “Les hommes d’humble condition portent un court *paridhāna*, sans pan, qui est, semble-t-il, un simple ‘drape-jupe’ entourant les hanches... ”.

49 1934b: 96.

50 1941: 88.

51 1991: 7.

an observation for which two different interpretations are offered: BARUA considers it as a threatening attitude, pointing out that the forefinger of this hand is raised. For LÜDERS and SCHLINGLOFF, however, this indicates that the man wants to say something or to make a remark, from which SCHLINGLOFF concludes that he must be a “kiebitzer”.

With respect to these opinions, it has to be specified that of the hand under discussion, of which we evidently see the back, not just one but two fingers, apparently the forefinger and the thumb, are raised. For this reason it seems rather unlikely that it is a threatening attitude which is normally indicated by just raising the forefinger. I am also not sure whether the two raised fingers may be interpreted in the sense that the man wants to say something as assumed by LÜDERS and SCHLINGLOFF. Rather, one is tempted to assume that he wants to indicate to the right figure in the front, in whose direction he seems to be looking, the number two, which might have to do something with the game itself (cf. below, 1.5.1).

1.4.2.3.3 The Second Figure from the Left

Only two interpreters, BARUA and LÜDERS, have commented on the second person from the left, i.e. the one which is sitting in front of the left side of the board. They both describe its posture as sitting with crossed legs⁵², and BARUA adds that it is pointing at the small square piece in front of it with the forefinger of its right hand⁵³.

In addition to these observations it may be noticed that its look seems to be directed to the right figure behind. Furthermore, the left hand of the figure discussed here rests upon its left knee. Lastly, the gesture of its right hand has not been described quite accurately by BARUA. The man apparently does not point directly at the small square piece but at some spot on the ground, which is about 1 cm away from the lower right corner of the single object (cf. fig. 4).

52 BARUA 1934b: 96 and LÜDERS 1941: 88.

53 Cf. also AGRAWALA 1994: 29.

1.4.2.3.4 The Right Figure in the Front

Of all interpreters, again only two have described the posture of the man depicted as sitting on the right side in the front. While BARUA⁵⁴ says that he is kneeling with joined hands⁵⁵ stretched out in front, in SCHLINGLOFF's opinion⁵⁶ he seems on the point of jumping up from his sitting position and raising his arm fearfully.

In addition to these statements it may be observed that the face of the figure in question is depicted as if seen from the front⁵⁷ while the rest of its body is shown in profile. Its look seems to be directed to the first figure from the left. Evidently both its arms, of which, however, only the left one is visible, are bent at the elbows to form an acute angle. Its hands are seemingly clasped together, palms touching and fingers extended, pointing to the face of the man sitting opposite. From the comparison with other reliefs from Bhārhut it becomes quite clear that this is a gesture of worship and adoration (*añjali*)⁵⁸. I am, however, at a loss to explain the posture of this figure: its right lower leg is bent horizontally, thus forming a right angle with the thigh; of the right foot only the toes are resting on the ground. The attitude of its left leg, however, is different: it is bent in an acute angle with the entire sole of the foot resting on the ground. This might be interpreted as a kind of jumping up (SCHLINGLOFF), but taken the position of both legs together, it rather seems to be a combination of kneeling (right leg) and squatting (cf. fig. 2 and 5).

54 1934b: 96

55 Similarly, MAJUMDAR 1937: 53 describes the hands as folded.

56 1991: 7

57 The depiction of single elements as if seen from the front, although they should be expected to be represented in profile is typical also for other reliefs found at Bhārhut (cf. PLAESCHKE 1988: 58).

58 Cf. especially the right kneeling figure on a relief of the so-called Prasenajit-pillar showing the old "Aśokan" temple of Bodhgayā (cf. chapter 2.3 and COOMARASWAMY 1956, pl. VIII, fig. 23 and IX, fig. 27; also MALANDRA 1988: 15, fig. 5).

1.4.2.3.5 The Right Figure Behind

Only BARUA has commented on the depiction of this figure, which he describes as seated, holding something in its right hand and looking “towards the other man”, i.e. evidently the left figure sitting near to the board.

On closer inspection of the original, however, BARUA’s opinion that this figure has something in its right hand does not convince me as then its fingers should be bent. They are, however, clearly stretched out, one can even see the fingernails (cf. fig. 5). As was suggested by P. THOMI⁵⁹, this gesture may be also interpreted as an *añjalimudrā* in which one sees only the left hand, the thumbs of both hands being hidden behind the head of the right figure in the front⁶⁰.

1.4.2.3.6 Two or Four Figures?

It was BARUA who in the 2nd volume of his book on Bhārhut suggested a noteworthy interpretation with respect to the number of figures represented on the relief. He argued that each party on both sides of the board actually consists of not more than one man shown in different positions and attitudes. In other words this means that, according to BARUA, the two figures on each side of the board are one and the same person. Although this view at first sight might seem rather unlikely, it is substantiated to a certain extent by the remarks of H. and I. PLAESCHKE on two other reliefs from Bhārhut⁶¹. The first represents the above-mentioned story of the merchant Anāthapiṇḍika who is shown endowing the grove named Jetavana to the Buddhist *saṅgha* after he had bought it from the prince Jeta for so many pieces of gold coins as were necessary to cover its ground (J I,93⁶²). According to the PLAESCHKES, this scene is a good example for what they call the continuous way of narration, which is characteristic of the early Indian sculpted reliefs.

59 In a personal exchange of views during the meeting at Munich.

60 In this point I have revised my view taken in BOCK-RAMING 1999: 20; 21 that the position of the four fingers of this figure might have to do something with the act of counting.

61 PLAESCHKE 1988: 57f.

62 This quotation from the Jātaka literature as also those given in chapter 1.5.2 all refer to the edition by V. FAUSBØLL in 7 volumes (London 1877-1897).

Several successive episodes of the story are united in one and the same picture: on the right side in the foreground Anāthapiṇḍika's servants are seen unloading the money-bags from a two-wheeled cart while in the background they are shown covering the ground with the pieces of money. Also Anāthapiṇḍika himself occurs twice in the picture: in front as watching over his two servants and in the middle of the whole composition as pouring water on the hands of the Buddha, who is symbolically represented by a Bodhi-tree⁶³. The second relief discussed by the PLAESCHKES reveals another example of the continuous way of narration. It is a depiction of the Kuruṅgamiga-Jātaka, which narrates the story of the woodpecker, the gazelle and the tortoise who by helping each other escape a hunter. Again, three different episodes of the story are united in one picture: the tortoise gnawing away the strings of a trap in which the gazelle had been caught; the woodpecker who, as a bird of bad omen, delays the arrival of the hunter; and the woodpecker's conversation with the hunter. Thus, in correspondence with the text of the Jātaka the woodpecker occurs twice in the relief in question⁶⁴.

Against the background of the two reliefs from Bhārhut just discussed BARUA's assumption of the presence of not more than two persons in our gambling scene seems on the whole not improbable, although it cannot be verified on the ground of any literary description (see below, chapter 1.5.2) as in the case of the Jetavana scene and the Kuruṅgamiga-Jātaka.

1.4.2.4 The Small Square Objects

Many interpreters have identified the group of the six small square objects at the upper left corner of the board as well as the single one lying in front of the second figure from the left as either coins⁶⁵ or dice⁶⁶ or have left open both possibilities⁶⁷. Other scholars have defined both, the single piece as

63 Cf. COOMARASWAMY 1956, pl. XXVI, fig. 67; PLAESCHKE 1988, fig. 9.

64 Cf. PLAESCHKE 1988, fig. 11.

65 CUNNINGHAM 1962: 94; HÄRTEL/AUBOYER 1985: 162; SCHLINGLOFF 1991: 8; SYED 1993: 124, fn. 61.

66 AUBOYER 1955: 23; 26; description of plate 14.

67 MURRAY 1913: 40; BIDEV 1988: 27; AGRAWALA 1994: 29; BHATTA 1995: 132.

well as the group of six, as either coins or gaming-pieces⁶⁸ or have interpreted the single object as a die, the group of six as gaming-pieces, i.e. chessmen⁶⁹. Furthermore, nearly all interpreters have pointed out that the altogether seven items are engraved with dissimilar patterns which for AUBOYER are evocative of “Sanskrit characters”⁷⁰. Also ROSENFELD seems to see a connection with some sort of script, observing, however, that the marks on the pieces do not agree with the characters of the inscription⁷¹.

A quite different interpretation of the group of six small squares is offered by VASANTHA⁷²: she thinks that they represent a “‘score board’ with each pair of players marking their score on one of the two pieces on a definite side and the total score of the partners marked on the rest of the two squares, adjoining them”. Like several other scholars VASANTHA too, considers the single piece to be a die which she thinks to be “marked with the number of points related to each movement of the pawn”.

Commenting on VASANTHA’s interpretation of the six small squares as a score-board, it should be noticed in which way they are placed on the ground (cf. fig. 2 and 6): the two right ones are placed adjacent to each other in a vertical line; the two middle ones adjoin them on the left side, but they are very slightly shifted upwards. Next to them are the two left ones which, however, are positioned further downwards than the other four squares. Or, to put it more precisely, the lower left object is, compared with its counterpart in the middle, according to my own measurements 1 cm shifted downwards while the difference in height between the upper middle object and the upper left and right ones is 0,5 and 0,2 cm respectively. The upper left object is narrower than the other ones, it is perceptibly elongated. These observations make me doubt whether here we have really a board the edges of which should be expected to be straight-lined as in the case of the gaming

68 LÜDERS 1941: 88; in his earlier article LÜDERS had still rather vaguely spoken of “stones” (1940: 117, fn. 2). Also BARUA and KRISHNAMURTHY leave open the possible purpose of the pieces: BARUA (1934b: 96) just speaks of pieces giving their total number as six (!): “Counting the smaller pieces beside the game-board, we find that there are just six, one of which is shown separately and placed before the man on the left side...”. KRISHNAMURTHY 1961: 3 refers to “six little cubes”.

69 ROSENFELD 1960: 30; 32; WICHMANN 1960: 13; PETZOLD 1991: 39.

70 1955: 23.

71 1960: 30.

72 1996: 6.

board itself. It rather looks as if the six items are separate objects which have been placed together in the course of the game.

Considering the other alternatives suggested for the interpretation of the small items, it seems that identifying them as coins is the most probable solution. Already CUNNINGHAM⁷³ had observed that they are “exactly the same as the coins used for paving the Jetavana”⁷⁴, and SCHLINGLOFF has in my view rightly pointed out that they represent so-called punch-marked coins which according to recent investigations were made of gold and silver alloyed with different proportions of copper⁷⁵. They are the earliest available and known system of coinage used in various parts of India between the middle of the 4th and the middle of the 2nd centuries B.C.⁷⁶ The coins of the actual finds differ in their shapes: some of them are square, whereas others are oblong, round, oval or of irregular shape. Of these varieties, the first and second seem to be depicted on our relief. While altogether six of them are more or less square, the upper left one seems to be an example of the oblong form⁷⁷.

The suggestion to interpret the seven items on the Bhārhut relief as coins seems furthermore to be supported by the “dissimilar patterns” which are engraved on them. As is well known, real punch-marked coins usually bear symbols like the sun, the crescent of the moon on top of a hill, trees, animals or geometric shapes the significance of which has, with some exceptions⁷⁸, not been ascertained so far⁷⁹. In some cases, these symbols may occur in combination with single letters of the Brāhmī script: e.g. on one of the punch-marked coins depicted as flowing from a vase on a terracotta pla-

73 1962: 94.

74 For the Jetavana scene cf., e.g., COOMARASWAMY 1956, pl. XXVI, fig. 67; PLAESCHKE 1988, fig. 9.

75 Cf. AGRAWAL/RAI 1994: 147.

76 CRIBB 1985: 542 [8].

77 On the various forms of the Indian punch-marked coins cf. also AGRAWALA 1994: 31 and AGRAWAL/RAI 1994, chapter III, where a detailed classification is provided.

78 Cf. FALK 1996: 228f.

79 Good collections of these symbols are found, e.g., in ALLAN 1989; HANDA 1985, SHARMA 1990 and AGRAWAL/RAI 1994. For a critical assessment of the various attempts by previous scholars to interpret their meaning see AGRAWAL/RAI 1994: 153-160, who also give their own explanations which, however, do not quite convince me.

que from Tamluk, ca. 100 B.C., there seems to be a “te”⁸⁰, and in this connection one may also refer to the five signs on the so-called Rāmpūrva copper bolt of Aśoka, one of which is interpretable as the Brāhmī letter “m”⁸¹. Now with regard to the patterns engraved on the 7 small objects of our gambling scene it must be stated that none of them bears a resemblance to any of the symbols found on real punch-marked coins. In some cases, however, they seem to show a similarity with certain Brāhmī letters: the sign on the upper left coin looks like a “ta”, another variety of which may also be discovered on the right half of the middle coin in the upper row⁸² while on its left half there is another sign which I am unable to identify. The single coin before the left player in the foreground evidently shows three different signs, the upper right one of which might be a “ṭha”. I cannot account, however, for the signs on the other coins. All in all, it seems impossible to identify any of the patterns or signs on the seven coins with absolute certainty and therefore are of no use for defining the nature of the game depicted. Even if it is correct to interpret some of them as the letter “ta” or “ṭha”, it is impossible to tell what that meant in the given context.

1.4.2.5 The Square Stone at the Upper Edge of the Scene

Opinions vary how the object roughly formed like a square stone and situated at the upper edge of the whole scene on the left side of the ground (cf. fig. 4 and 7) is to be interpreted. LÜDERS believes that it is a (stone) block bearing marks shaped like tridents⁸³, which leads him to the assumption that the whole scene is situated on the mountain called Naḍoda as similar blocks also occur on certain other reliefs from Bhārhut, where this mountain is explicitly mentioned in the accompanying inscriptions⁸⁴. The majority of scholars—BIDEV, PETZOLD and SCHLINGLOFF—however, believe it to be an altar. BIDEV⁸⁵ and PETZOLD⁸⁶ interpret the marks as (sacrificial) fire, whe-

80 AGRAWALA 1994: 30.

81 Cf. JAYASWAL 1936: 437.

82 For the varieties of “ta” in (Aśokan) Brāhmī see DANI 1963: 41.

83 Cf. also HÄRTEL/AUBOYER 1985: 162.

84 LÜDERS 1941: 88f.

85 1988: 27.

86 1991: 39.

reas SCHLINGLOFF⁸⁷ defines them as blossoms, which he says are indicative of the surroundings of the holy mountain Naḍoda.

It is alone BARUA who suggests that the square object is the box for stowing away the small pieces⁸⁸.

As it is not quite understandable what an altar should have to do with gambling and as it can be quite safely ruled out that the four figures on the relief are priests (cf. chapter 1.4.2.3.1), LÜDERS' interpretation of the block as a mere indicator of the stony landscape of the Naḍoda mountain seems more convincing.

BARUA's suggestion is merely speculative.

1.4.2.6 The Tree

The tree depicted behind the two figures on the right (cf. fig. 2 and 3) is mentioned in passing by BARUA⁸⁹, LÜDERS⁹⁰, and SCHLINGLOFF⁹¹. The latter interprets it as another indication of the wooded area of the Naḍoda mountain.

In addition to this observation it may be explicitly pointed out that neither the tree nor the square stone described in the preceding sub-chapter seem to be of any relevance for the game⁹².

1.4.2.7 The Inscription

There has been a long discussion about the reading as well as the translation of the inscription evidently referring to the scene depicted beneath it (cf. fig. 7). Written in Brāhmī characters, its language is a Middle Indic dialect. As it

87 1991: 7.

88 1934b: 96.

89 1934b: 96.

90 1941: 88.

91 1991: 7.

92 I cannot see that the tree is a symbolic representation of the Buddha as was suggested by P. THOMI during the meeting at Munich. If this were the case, one would expect it to be depicted somewhere in the centre of the scene.

stands one should decipher it as one compound consisting of three parts reading as: *citu-pāda-sila*.

The first to attempt to give a translation of the inscription was made by CUNNINGHAM⁹³ who suggested that the first word stood for *chitu* which, together with *sila*, could be translated as “split(ting of the) rock”. CUNNINGHAM was, however, unable to account for *pāda*.

Two years later HOERNLE⁹⁴ refuted CUNNINGHAM’s suggestion on the ground that, if the meaning of “split” were intended, one should expect the word *chita*, the past participle of the root *cho*. Instead, he proposed to read *citupāda* “correctly” as *catuppāda* (Sanskrit: *catuspāda*) meaning “four-sided”. This he justified by asserting that double “pp” was usually written as a single “p” and that the change of “a” to “i” was a provincialism. He, however, added that “the marks of the vowel ‘u’ and the subjoined ‘r’ [were] much alike”. Therefore, he also admitted the possibility to read *citrapāda* translating as “divided into various parts” which would, like *catuppāda*, refer to the gaming board depicted on the relief. For *sila* HOERNLE suggested either *silā* (Sanskrit: *śilā*) = “rock” or *sīlam* = “practice”, “habit”, the whole inscription thus translating either as “the rock with the gaming-board” or “devotion to the gaming board”, “the practice of gambling”.

After HOERNLE it was HULTZSCH who in a longer article on a collection of Indian manuscripts and inscriptions suggested to read the inscription as *citupādasila* and to translate it as “[the rock] where wonderful *portenta* happen”⁹⁵.

In 1926 the Indian scholars BARUA and SINHA partly resumed HOERNLE’s attempt to interpret the inscription and suggested to correct its actual reading *citupādasila* either into *citupādasīlam* or *citupādasīlā*. Like HOERNLE equating the last word, *-sila*, with Sanskrit *-śīla* = “habit”, “custom”, which, when used at the end of a *bahuvrīhi*-compound, means “habituated” or “accustomed to”, “disposed to” or “addicted to”, BARUA/SINHA translated the first of their alternatives as “the habitual playing of the square-board game”, the second as “the gamblers devoted to the square-board game”⁹⁶. At the same time, the authors also reckoned the possibility

93 1962: 94.

94 1881: 119.

95 HULTZSCH 1886: 63. HULTZSCH repeated this suggestion once more in his later article on *Bharaut Inscriptions* (HULTZSCH 1892: 229 with fn. 25).

96 BARUA/SINHA 1926: 82

that *-sila* might stand for *-silā* meaning “rock” in which case *citupāda* in their opinion had to be equated with Pāli *cittūpāda* meaning “thought generating”, “thought reading” or *citruppāda* meaning “picture-producing”, “variegated”⁹⁷. Moreover, BARUA/SINHA hinted at the possibility that the inscription stood for *citra utpāta yatra sā silā* = “the rock where miraculous portents happen” without, however, referring to the articles by HULTZSCH who had made this suggestion earlier. Similarly, MAJUMDAR proposed the translation “miracle-producing rock”⁹⁸.

In his later publication on Bhārhut from 1934 BARUA evidently admitted only the reading *citupādasila* as correct which he translated as “the gambler fond of the square-board game”⁹⁹. This interpretation evidently also influenced AUBOYER who gave the meaning of the inscription as *le joueur aimant le jeu à l'échiquier carré*¹⁰⁰.

HOERNLE’s as well as BARUA’s assumptions were categorically rejected by LÜDERS¹⁰¹ who left the reading *citupādasila* unchanged and argued that it corresponded to *citrotpātasilā* in Sanskrit meaning “the rock of miracles and extraordinary phenomenons”. As mentioned above, this possibility had similarly already been suggested by HULTZSCH, BARUA/SINHA and MAJUMDAR. LÜDERS, however, substantiated his proposal by pointing out that this translation fitted in with the Naḍoda mountain which also in other reliefs of Bhārhut is represented as a place of marvels.

In spite of this—rather convincing—argumentation later scholars evidently found HOERNLE’s suggestion more attractive. In 1956 it was adopted by COOMARASWAMY (93f.) who argued that, if *catu* were read for *citu*, *catupāda* would then refer to *caturāṅga*, the four-handed game of chess played with dice. Furthermore, he held that there was also an analogy between *catupāda* and *aṭṭhapada* = Sanskrit *aṣṭāpada* and that *catupāda* could simply signify a board used for the game of draughts, hence “chess board”. Similarly, AGRAWALA¹⁰² spoke of “the stone for the game Chatushpada”, leaving, however, open what he meant by that.

97 BARUA/SINHA 1926: 83.

98 MAJUMDAR 1937: 53.

99 1934b: 95. This is exactly the same translation which Barua had already suggested in an earlier article of his (1925: 246).

100 1955, description of pl. 14.

101 1941: 88f.

102 1994: 28

Quite similarly ROSENFELD¹⁰³ contended that *citupāda* stood for *catupāda* which in the case of the Bhārhut relief meant four-handed game, i.e. dice-chess. In his opinion *citupādasila* would then have to be interpreted as “the rock splitting during the game of chaturanga”.

This view was adopted by PETZOLD in his monograph on *Das Königliche Spiel* from 1987. In his later article from 1991, however, he evidently changed his mind and without any further explanation followed LÜDERS saying that the inscription points to a rock of mysteries and bad omens.

Thus, all in all the following five major lines of interpretation of the inscription have to be taken into account:

1. “split(ing of the) rock” (CUNNINGHAM 1962)
2. *citupāda* either as a misspelling of *catuppāda* = Sanskrit *catuṣpāda* translating as “four-sided”, thus referring to the gaming board shown on the relief (HOERNLE 1881) or to *caturaṅga*, the four-handed dice game (COOMARASWAMY 1956, ROSENFELD 1960, PETZOLD 1987); or as standing for *citrapāda* meaning “divided into various parts” likewise referring to the gaming board (HOERNLE 1881)
- 3 a) “devotion to the gaming board”, “practice of gambling” (HOERNLE 1881), “the habitual playing of the square-board game” (BARUA/SINHA 1926)
- 3 b) “the gambler(s) devoted to/fond of the square board game” (BARUA 1925; BARUA/SINHA 1926; BARUA 1934b, AUBOYER 1955)
4. “thought generating/picture producing (rock)” (BARUA/SINHA 1926)
6. “rock of miracles and extraordinary phenomenons” (LÜDERS 1941, PETZOLD 1991; followed by HÄRTEL/AUBOYER; similarly already HULTZSCH 1886 and 1892; BARUA/SINHA 1926).

Commenting on these suggestions I think that LÜDERS still offers the most convincing interpretation. Of course, it is theoretically possible that the reading *-sila* might stand for Sanskrit *-śīla* meaning either “habit, custom” or at the end of a *bahuvrīhi* “(someone who is) devoted to something” (cf. nos. 3a and b); but in view of the fact that on the relief itself a rock is actually depicted I consider this possibility rather far-fetched; it makes much more sense to equate *-sila* with Sanskrit *-śilā*, the word for “rock”. As far as the two words *citū* and *pāda* are concerned it is hard to believe that they are a

103 1960: 29ff.

scribal error or a provincialism respectively for *catuppāda* = Sanskrit *catuṣpāda* (HOERNLE 1881). CUNNINGHAM's suggestion to read *chitu* with an aspirated "ch" instead of *citu* with an unaspirated "c" and to translate it as "splitting" is untenable: firstly, because for an aspirated "ch" with a following "i" one would not expect a character as it is seen at the beginning of the inscription above the relief, but rather a sign like this: ϕ ; secondly, because the Middle Indic equivalent for "split", the meaning of which I see more suitably represented in *chinda(t)i* = Sanskrit *chid* = "to split, pierce" rather than *cho* = "to cut (off)" (cf. above, Hoernle's suggestion), should be "chinna".

BARUA/SINHA's suggestion to interpret *citupāda* as "thought generating" seems in view of the elements of which the gambling scene is composed devious.

1.5 The Interpretation

1.5.1 Type of Game

Almost all explanations which have been offered in the past concerning the questions what kind of game is depicted on the Bhārhut relief and according to which rules it is played proceed from the assumption that there are four players. This, however, seems rather improbable. Agreeing with SCHLINGLOFF¹⁰⁴ and SYED¹⁰⁵ I take the view that, if all four of them took part in the game, each of them would sit at one side of the board. In the present case, however, there are most probably just two players on opposite sides of the board. The other two figures positioned behind or beside them respectively—if they are not the players themselves shown in different positions¹⁰⁶—do not seem to be actively involved in the game but may be either "kiebitzers" or "helpers" which have the task to assist the others in playing the game successfully.

104 1991: 7.

105 1993: 124, fn. 61.

106 Cf. above 1.4.2.3.6.

If in all probability there are only two players, it can be safely ruled out that the Bhārhut scene depicts a game of chess played with dice, as has been assumed by ROSENFELD¹⁰⁷, the WICHMANNNS¹⁰⁸ and PETZOLD¹⁰⁹.

Apart from the evidently untenable thesis that the Bhārhut relief depicts a board game in which four persons are equally involved, other suggestions for the interpretation of the game have been made:

a) A number of scholars assert that the scene represents a (board)game without offering any further explanations, however, of what type it is¹¹⁰.

b) A. CUNNINGHAM¹¹¹ holds that the gambling scene of the Bhārhut *vedikā* shows two parties of two men playing some game like draughts without giving, however, any explanation why he thinks so. This view is quoted by BHATTA¹¹².

c) VASANTHA, like ROSENFELD, the WICHMANNNS and others proceeds from the assumption that there are four players and asserts that they are playing with pawns depicted as dots on the board¹¹³, the moves of which in her opinion “might have been horizontal, vertical or diagonal”¹¹⁴. She furthermore assumes that the four players, two of whom “possibly played as partners... might have started the game from the four corners of the board, each player moving his pawns towards his opponent on the opposite side”¹¹⁵ and trying to checkmate the latter’s pawns. The marks on the single square piece in front of the left player in the front are interpreted by VASANTHA as “numbers

107 1960: 29f.

108 1960: 13.

109 1987: 33. Similarly, for AVERBACH (1991: 57) the depiction is a proof of the priority of four-handed chess. Also EDER (1992: 15) considers the possibility that it might represent a game of four-handed dice-chess. VAN LOHUIZEN DE LEEUW (1981: 246) refers to the relief as “game of chess” without clarifying, however, whether she means two-handed chess or the four-handed game of chance played with dice, while AUBOYER simply speaks, without any further explanation, of a game of dice (1955: 23 and description of pl. 14).

110 LÜDERS 1940: 117, fn. 2; 1941: 88; BARUA 1934b: 97; BIDEV 1988: 27; SCHLINGLOFF 1991: 7f.; SYED 1993: 124, fn. 61: definitely excluding *caturāṅga*.

111 1962: 94.

112 1985 :4 ; 1995: 132.

113 Cf. above, chapter 1.4.2.2.

114 1996: 6.

115 Ibid.

of points related to each movement of the pawn”¹¹⁶. As already mentioned, VASANTHA considers the six small squares as a score board on which each pair of players marked their score. In her opinion the game ended with a checkmate.

d) MURRAY in his book on the *History of Chess* from 1913 compares the gambling scene of Bhārhut with Sīga, a race game of Śrī Lankan provenance played in combination with dice. Apart from the observation that Sīga is, like other board games coming from Ceylon and Southern India such as Sadurangam and Gavalata¹¹⁷, played on a board of 5 x 5 cells and therefore is quite similar to the gaming board of the Bhārhut gambling scene with its 6 x 5 cells, MURRAY’s assumption is mainly based on the “short stick [which] has been set up on one of the squares which—from the analogy of Sīga—probably represents a man in course of play”¹¹⁸.

Examining these different interpretations more closely, one must come to the conclusion that those given under a) and b) are too vague and unspecific to count for a serious attempt to explain the nature of the game. On the other hand, VASANTHA’s view is purely speculative while MURRAY’s argument for comparing the Bhārhut game with Sīga and Sadurangam is, as we have seen above, simply non-existent: there is nothing like a stick depicted on the Bhārhut relief.

Trying then to give an interpretation of the scene, we should first of all concentrate once more on the elements which can be clearly recognized on the relief. Among them, the seven small squares seem to play a crucial role. If I am right in identifying all of them as coins, this allows the conclusion that the game was played for money. Now with regard to the six coins in the upper part of the relief it seems striking that they are all positioned on the left side which might be interpreted in the sense that this side is the winner’s side; and as always two coins—the two right ones, those in the middle and the two on the left side—are lying neatly side by side, they might be regarded as the stake: one coin from each party which has been won by the player on the left in each of the three previous rounds and then been put aside. Now at the end of the game or its present round the winning side might be waiting for the loser and his companion to give them their part of the stake: one coin, i.e. one half of the stake is already placed on the ground, but the se-

116 Ibid.

117 Cf. MURRAY 1978:131f.

118 MURRAY 1913:40.

cond is still missing. Thus, the gesture of the left player in the front, who, as I have mentioned, is pointing to a spot near the single coin, might indicate that he is waiting for his opponent to put his stake there. Possibly, also the gesture of the first figure from the left, which has, as mentioned above (cf. 1.4.2.3.2), two fingers of its right hand raised, may be interpreted in the sense that it wants to signal to the loosing party: “We expect you to give us the second coin, that is your part of the stake”.

1.5.2 “Literary Background” and Underlying Meaning

In their attempt to account for the meaning of the gambling scene in question some interpreters have also tried to trace it in the Buddhist literature. The first suggestion was made by CUNNINGHAM in his book on Bhārhut originally published in 1879. Although he admits that he has “not succeeded in discovering this legend”¹¹⁹, i.e. the scene depicted on the coping stone, he associates it with the Cetiya-Jātaka, thus interpreting the falling down of the party on the right side of the board as “the first occurrence of cheating, and the consequent punishment of the offender”¹²⁰. For those who are not familiar with the contents of this Jātaka a short summary may be useful. The story deals with a king named Upacara who is endowed with four supernatural powers one of which is to walk in the air. Already as a young boy he has promised Korakalamba(ka), a friend of his youth, that, when he takes over the reign from his father, he will confer upon him the office of the family priest (*purohitaṭṭhānam*) which at that time is still held by Korakalamba’s elder brother Kapila. Later however, when Upacara indeed has succeeded his father, he is not able to remove Kapila, and when the latter finally decides to take up the ascetic life of a mendicant (*isipabbajjam pabbajitvā*), he lets his son take his place. Nevertheless, Upacara still adheres to his promise to make Korakalamba the family priest. He declares that he will simply tell a lie (*musāvādam*), saying that of the two brothers Korakalamba is the elder (and therefore entitled to the desired position), Kapila the younger. When being asked by the latter, who has been informed by his son about the king’s intention, whether he has really told the lie that Korakalamba is the elder of the two brothers in order to make him the family priest, Upacara answers in

119 1962: 94.

120 1962: 95. Also quoted by ANDERSON 1883 : 109.

the affirmative. Kapila then instructs him in the first stanza (*gāthā*) of this Jātaka not to violate the moral law (*dhamma*), because, if violated, it will itself strike down the offender¹²¹; and although in twelve more *gāthā*-s he tries to make clear to Upacara how a liar is punished and warns him that, if he tells a lie, he will enter into the ground (5th *gāthā*)¹²² and even sink further into it (7th, 9th, 11th and 13th *gāthā*-s)¹²³, the king sticks to his false testimony. Thus, Kapila's prediction comes true: Upacara, who at the beginning of their conversation had placed himself in the air, falls down to the ground, and each time he repeats his lie he sinks further down into it until he is finally devoured by the glowing fire coming from the hell Avīci (J III 459,30).

After CUNNINGHAM, also BARUA interpreted the scene in the sense that the right party is guilty of cheating, but, challenging CUNNINGHAM's association with the Cetiya-Jātaka, he connected it with another literary background, namely the Litta-Jātaka¹²⁴, in which he was later followed by COOMARASWAMY¹²⁵. The main points of this story are that the Bodhisattva once is born in a rich family and becomes, when he has grown up, a dice-player. He plays together with another gambler who has the habit of cheating. Whenever the latter emerges as the winner, he does not break the circle of the game, but when he loses he puts one of the dice into his mouth, saying that it has got lost. The Bodhisattva becomes aware of the deceit, takes the dice to his house, paints them with poison and waits till it has become dry. Then he invites the cheat for a new round of dicing. When the latter loses again and puts one of the dice into his mouth, the Bodhisattva speaks the *gāthā*: "This person does not know that the die he is swallowing is 'coated with the highest power'. Swallow, swallow, wicked rogue, afterwards it will be pungent of taste for you"¹²⁶. The prose then continues that the cheat loses his consciousness because of the strength of the poison with which the die has been painted and falls to the ground. The Bodhisattva,

121 *dhammo have hato hanti nāhato hanti kañcinam, tasmā hi dhammam na hane mā tam dhammo hato hanīti*, J III 456, 25-26 (Cf. fn. 62).

122 *musā ce bhāsase rāja bhūmiṃ pavisa Cetiya 'ti*, J III 458,17.

123 *musā ce bhāsase rāja bhiyyo pavisa Cetiya 'ti*, J III 458,24; 459,6; 16; 25.

124 1934b: 97; cf. also BARUA/SINHA 1926: 83, where it is suggested that "the label"—i.e. the inscription—"seems to refer to a scene of the Litta-Jātaka".

125 1956: 93.

126 J I 380,8-11.

however, restores him to life by making him vomit and giving him cleared butter, honey and sugar to eat. Finally, he exhorts him never to cheat again (J I 380,21).

Finally, another literary source for the gambling scene has been suggested by PETZOLD: he thinks that there might be a connection with a passage of the *Dīghanikāya*, where the monks are advised not to divert themselves by playing any games¹²⁷.

BARUA's view that the scene is connected with the Litta-Jātaka was rejected by LÜDERS who pointed out that it was not attested in any literary source¹²⁸, in which he was later followed by AUBOYER¹²⁹ and similarly by SCHLINGLOFF¹³⁰. Nevertheless, the idea that the right party is guilty of cheating and is therefore punished was again taken up by later interpreters without relating it, however, directly to either of the two above-mentioned Jātakas: while ROSENFELD¹³¹ and the WICHMANNs¹³² speak of a lying king and his friend who are devoured by the earth, for SCHLINGLOFF¹³³ their falling down means an act of justice by which the two men on the right are being punished for not playing honestly.

Examining the various suggestions to connect the Bhārhut relief with a particular piece of literature, one must clearly state that all of them have to be rejected as untenable. As far as the Cetiya- and Litta-Jātakas are concerned, it should be remembered that, when comparing Jātaka stories with the pictorial representations of Bhārhut, only the *gāthā*-s may be drawn upon for

127 1991: 40; cf. also PETZOLD 1987: 38 where, without referring to any particular text, he speaks of the possibility that the Bhārhut relief could be a condemnation of playing games which would be in accordance with the attitude of the Buddha. The passage quoted by PETZOLD in his article of 1991 is *Dīghanikāya* I 6,23 and runs: "They (some ascetics and Brahmins who do not live in an exemplary way) play the *aṭṭhapada* = *aṣṭāpada*- and *dasapada* = *daśapada*-[games]". For textual parallels with the Vinaya-piṭaka where, however, not games, but boards with eight times eight and ten times ten squares are mentioned see BOCK-RAMING 1999a : 43.

128 1941: 89.

129 1955: description of plate 14.

130 "Literary version of the story not preserved", 1991: 7.

131 1960: 30.

132 1960: 13.

133 1991: 8.

such a comparison, as they alone are old and therefore canonical¹³⁴. The prose of the commentary called “Atthavaṇṇanā”, which once replaced an old Atthakathā now lost, is of late and therefore secondary character, as it was composed not earlier than the 5th century A.D. in Ceylon, i.e. a very long time after the Bhārhut reliefs were fashioned. Such being the case, neither of the two Jātaka-stories can be considered as the literary source of the Bhārhut gambling scene. While the *gāthā*-s of the Cetiya-Jātaka do not mention any game at all, the only *gāthā* of the Litta-Jātaka admittedly might refer to a game, as it speaks of a die being swallowed by a person who possibly is a player, but the essential details of the depiction on the coping stone—the rock or stoneslab split into two halves, the gaming board and the coins—are conspicuous by their absence.

Of course, it is imaginable that the sculptor of the Bhārhut scene wanted to express that the falling down of the right party is caused by their possibly deceitful game as has been suggested by SCHLINGLOFF and others. The combination of the narrative elements of telling a lie and sinking to the ground as attested in the *gāthā*-s of the Cetiya-Jātaka seems to justify such an argumentation. But in the last end the gambling scene itself does not give us any clear hint that the idea of cheating actually is intended, and there may be another and perhaps simpler explanation for the right party’s falling down: if I am right in interpreting the two figures on the left as representing the winners’ side, the downward movement of the players on the right might most vividly symbolize their ruin, their “downfall”.

PETZOLD’s suggestion to associate the relief with the Dīghanikāya passage quoted above is purely conjectural.

Thus, one cannot but agree with LÜDERS’ view that it is indeed impossible to connect the Bhārhut scene with any literary source.

1.5.3 Final Conclusions

After having examined the scholarly discussion on the question what type of game is shown on the coping of the Bhārhut *vedikā* and whether or not the depiction is related to any Indian text, the present paragraph aims at putting

134 On the relationship between the reliefs and the texts see especially LÜDERS 1941, chapter 8.

together all the relevant points which the investigation so far has yielded. In subchapter 1.5.1 I have tried to make plausible that

1. on account of the arrangement of the figures the game depicted is not four-handed dice chess;
2. the game is shown at its end or at the end of its present round with the second figure from the left being the winner and the right figure in the front the loser;
3. it was played for money, the coins in the upper left half of the picture being the stake won by the left player in the previous rounds. Furthermore,
4. from the inscription it can be concluded that something supernatural, a kind of magic is involved.

Giving attention to what I have called the “supernatural” or “magical element” mentioned under point 4, we find that in the older Indian literature it is not seldom related to a particular Indian way of dicing. According to recent investigations, this game of dice was played by two players surrounded by curious onlookers and consisted of several rounds (cf. point 3). A relatively large amount of dice (*akṣa-s*) was required the total of which had to be a multiple of 4 + 1, 49 or 101, for example. One of the two players grasped a portion of these *akṣa-s*, threw them into the air and counted them after they had fallen down. If the amount of dice he had grasped was divisible by four, he was automatically the winner, his opponent, to whom accrued the total of a multiple of 4 plus one more *akṣa* called *kali*, the loser. Both of the players made stakes which were often enormous¹³⁵. As there were no pieces involved in this type of game, it was evidently different from such “modern” games of dice like *Sīga* and *Sadurangam* mentioned above. Sometimes, also a board was used which, however, only served as a surface on which the dice were thrown. In connection with the present investigation it is also important to point out that the players of this old Indian game of dice often tried to influence the result by cheating or with the help of magic¹³⁶.

a) Already in the *Atharvaveda Samhitā*, which can be dated to around 1000 B.C., certain passages mention in connection with dicing so-called *Apsaras*, that is female creatures who are endowed with supernatural capacities. They help the gambler to bring his opponent under his sway; making use of their witchcraft, they influence with their invisible hands the dice in such a way

135 SYED 1996: 282 and 1997: 253f.

136 SYED 1997: 267ff.; 271.

that they fall to the advantage of the gambler to whom they give preference. In another passage of the Atharvaveda they are implored to forgive the frauds which have been committed by the players during the game¹³⁷.

b) Supernatural powers also play an important role in the Buddhist Jātaka literature. In the Vidhurapaṇḍita-Jātaka we are told that on account of Puṇṇaka's magic power the dice are falling to the king's disadvantage which, however, is perceived by the latter through the magic power of his tutelary goddess. Therefore, the king catches the dice by grasping them together in the air and throws them once more. When Puṇṇaka realizes that his opponent is protected by a supernatural being, he scares it away. When the king throws the dice a third time, he again sees that they are falling to his disadvantage, but because of Puṇṇaka's magic power he is not able to stretch out his hand and catch them¹³⁸.

c) In the Aṇḍabhūta-Jātaka the king is winning on account of the use of a magic formula.

d) In a quite different way, the element of the supernatural is also present in the epic story of Nala: the reason for his being defeated again and again by Puṣkara is that he is possessed by Kali.

Thus, it is quite evident that magic as an important element in the Indian dice game has a very long tradition. Therefore it seems possible that the sculptor of the Bhārhut relief wanted to depict just this game of dice in which the falling down of the right party might symbolize their defeat in the game, which is at the same time brought about with the help of the magical power of the mountain Naḍoda—a force which seems to be implicated also in the other Naḍoda-scenes depicted on the Bhārhut *vedikā*¹³⁹—working in favour of the winners on the left side. The *añjalimudrā* of the two figures on the right seems to show that they are willing to submit themselves to the superiority of their opponents. These considerations would also entail the conclusion that the gaming board shown in the depiction possibly served as a surface on which the dice were thrown (cf. above).

What makes these statements resulting in the interpretation of the Bhārhut gambling scene as a simple game of dice admittedly disputable is that there are no dice or similar implements of chance which should be expected to be represented. Thus, in the last end one must say that any inter-

137 Cf. LÜDERS 1940: 112.

138 VI,281, 9 - 282, 11; cf. LÜDERS 1940: 110.

139 LÜDERS 1941: 89.

pretation of the Bhārhut gambling scene lastly restricts itself to a weighing of various aspects and probabilities precluding absolute certainty.

2. Bodhgayā

2.1 Geographical Position

Bodhgayā, to where the second gambling scene to be discussed here belongs, is situated near the site of the ancient Uruvilā on the river Nairañjana (nowadays called Phalgu) approximately 13 kms to the south of Gaya, a district town of Bihar. In contrast to Bhārhut, Bodhgayā is of special religious significance as it is the place where the Buddha obtained his enlightenment. It was again CUNNINGHAM who towards the end of the last century took up extensive excavations of the site. The results of his work have for the most part been laid down in his book: *Mahābodhi or The Great Buddhist Temple Under The Bodhi Tree At Buddha-Gaya* originally published in 1892.

2.2 Parts of the Edifice

Today, Bodhgayā is a large complex essentially consisting of a *stūpa*, i.e. the so-called Mahābodhi temple, and a stone fence surrounding it. The Mahābodhi temple has a height of about 160 feet or 50 metres and is shaped like a square pyramid the four sides of which are covered with several tiers of niches containing figures of the Buddha¹⁴⁰. While the railing of Bhārhut was a circular structure (cf. above, chapter 1.2), the present *vedikā* of Bodhgayā has a quadrangular shape. Originally, its height measured, according to CUNNINGHAM¹⁴¹, altogether about 10 feet = 3 metres, and a considerable number of its pillars were made from granite while the rest consisted of sandstone¹⁴². Both their inner and outer sides are decorated with three different types of medaillons: at the bottom there are half-lotuses; in the middle full circular lotus medaillons in the pericarp of which are represented ani-

140 ANSARI 1990: 60.

141 1961: 11.

142 Regarding the present state cf. below, subchapters 2.3 and 2.4.1.

mals such as winged horses, lions etc. or female busts; and at the top semi-circular reliefs often depicting scenes from the life of the Buddha (e.g. his birth; the donation of the Jetavana grove), the worship of the Bodhi tree or the wheel of law, but also narrative themes from everyday life. Also the gambling scene to be discussed in the second part of this contribution is represented in such an upper relief of a pillar. In contrast to Bhārhut these narrative scenes are never commented by any inscriptions.

As far as the coping of the Bodhgayā railing is concerned, it may be mentioned that its inner face shows a long frieze with animals like elephants, bulls etc. or fabulous creatures like winged horses while its outer face is decorated with continuous bands of lotus flowers¹⁴³.

2.3 Phases of Construction

Bodhgayā has had a long history of construction which is far from being clear in detail. For the purpose of the present article it may suffice to call to mind that the present Mahābodhi temple was preceded by a much smaller structure the erection of which is attributed by a Burmese inscription, which records the successive repairs of the temple, to the Mauryan emperor Aśoka who reigned over India from 268 to 233 B.C.¹⁴⁴ Probably it was a roofless two-storeyed temple resembling a gallery and surrounding the “adamantine throne” (*vajrāsana*) with the Bodhi tree behind it, as may be inferred from an inscribed Bhārhut relief evidently representing it¹⁴⁵. Also the present railing had an older enclosure as its predecessor counting altogether 64 pillars. While CUNNINGHAM was of the opinion that a certain number of the medallions of this first “Aśokan” railing were “at least 100 years older than the bas reliefs of the Bhārhut Stūpa”¹⁴⁶, COOMARASWAMY more convincingly argued that the old stone fence because of stylistic reasons and inscriptional evidence belonged to the Śūṅga period and was built in its entirety between

143 For a detailed description see CUNNINGHAM 1961: 11f.

144 Cunningham 1961: 4.

145 Cf. CUNNINGHAM 1961: 4f. with pl. II; COOMARASWAMY 1935: 7f. For a photo of this relief see e.g. COOMARASWAMY 1956, pl. VIII, fig. 23 and pl. IX, fig. 27; also MALANDRA 1988: 15, fig. 5.

146 1961: 12.

125 and 75 B.C.¹⁴⁷ If this is correct it means that the old stone fence of Bodhgayā was begun 25 years later than the second phase of the Bhārhut railing and was finished 25 years after the third stage of the construction of the latter.

In the further history of Bodhgayā the Aśokan temple was replaced by a much larger building which may have been in existence as early as the 2nd century A.D.¹⁴⁸ From later times we have a report on the post-Aśokan *stūpa* by the Chinese pilgrim HSIUEN-TSANG who travelled in India from 630 to 643 A.D. From the numerous measurements and other details of HSIUEN-TSANG's report CUNNINGHAM had concluded "that the present temple in spite of repeated repairs and additions is actually the same building that was seen by the pilgrim in 637"¹⁴⁹. The erection of this new temple involved, besides a removal of the diamond throne and the Bodhi tree, a dismantling of the old railing, the elements of which were re-used in the construction of a larger fence of nearly 530 feet and just the double number of pillars. Again on the ground of stylistic reasons COOMARASWAMY dated the new components of this second railing as late Gupta, which means around 500 A.D.¹⁵⁰ while D.K. BARUA opines that it was erected not earlier than the 7th century under the reign of king PūrṇAVARMAN of Magadha¹⁵¹. In other words, this later railing of the beginning of the 6th or even 7th century seems to be "nothing but the Old Stone-Railing re-erected on a much wider plinth around the Mahābodhi Temple and the later Bodhi Tree with some granite additions adjusted within the framework of the earlier railing in sand-

147 COOMARASWAMY 1956: 8-11. Cf. BACHHOFER 1929: 24: "1st half of the last pre-Christian century" and ANSARI 1990: 70: "end of the 2nd century B.C." MALANDRA 1988 : 16 places it, however, between the first century B.C. and the first century A.D. and CHAKRAVARTY 1997: XVI between 75 and 25 B.C. BHATTACHARYYA 1966: 12 assumes that in addition to the old railing around the main temple there were also fences round other structures in its vicinity.

148 COOMARASWAMY 1956: 11; similarly HARLE 1994: 201 ("second or third century"); cf., however, BARUA 1934b: 41 ("between the 5th and 7th century A.D."); ANSARI 1990: 57 ("between 420 A.D. to 600 A.D."); BHATTACHARYYA 1966: 39 ("later on in the 12th century by some foreign hands").

149 CUNNINGHAM 1961:17-18.

150 COOMARASWAMY 1956: 12.

151 D.K. BARUA 1981: 162.

stone.”¹⁵². But also this second railing was in the course of time subject to many restorations, renovations and relocations which evidently were carried out even in this century (cf. subchapter 2.4.1).

2.4 The Gambling Scene

2.4.1 Number of Pieces, Material, Photos

Studying the relevant secondary literature one finds that all researchers when referring to the gambling scene to be dealt here clearly mention one relief only. As far as I can see, the first, however very short, description accompanied by a photo is given by COOMARASWAMY in his publication from 1935: *La Sculpture de Bodhgayā*¹⁵³. From this photo and the ground plan of the temple complex together with the elevation of the four sides of the railing also contained in COOMARASWAMY’s book it becomes clear that the relief described by him is located in the upper semicircular medaillon of the inner face of pillar no. 9 belonging to the southern *vedikā*¹⁵⁴. A close inspection of the site of Bodhgayā carried out in spring 1998 by the present author revealed, however, the somewhat astonishing fact that there is not just the relief described by COOMARASWAMY, but altogether seven more completely identical pieces of the same scene which are, like the relief on pillar no. 9, always contained in the upper medaillon of a pillar¹⁵⁵. Figure no. 8 shows on which of the pillars of the fence the single pieces, in this article indicated by the letters A to H, are found: the southern *vedikā* has, besides the one described and published by COOMARASWAMY (“A”, pillar no. 9, inner face), one more (“B”) on the outer face of pillar no. 24; the third medaillon (“C”) is found on the outer face of pillar no. 53 (no. 52 according to COOMARASWAMY’s counting¹⁵⁶) belonging to the western side of the *ve-*

152 D.K. BARUA 1981: *ibid.*; cf. also ANSARI 1990: 70: “The carvings on the sandstone (material) pillars are definitely earlier but the reliefs on the granite stone are of the Gupta period”.

153 COOMARASWAMY 1935: 32 and pl. XII, “poteau 9, face intérieure”. Another photo in COOMARASWAMY’s book shows this pillar together with the pillars 4 to 8 and 10.

154 This is also substantiated by an earlier photo found in BACHHOFER 1929, pl. 38.

155 This is not the only case of the reproduction of a narrative scene at Bodhgayā: there are also three identical specimens of the Jetavana relief (cf. fig. 8).

156 For the differences in the counting of the pillars see the following footnote.

dikā; that part of the stone fence which lies to the north has three pillars with the relief in question: no. 75 (“D”; no. 71 according to COOMARASWAMY’s counting) and no. 83 (“E”; no. 78 according to COOMARASWAMY’s counting), both showing the gambling scene on their outer faces, and no. 97 (“F”) on the inner side. Finally, there are two more representations of the scene in the eastern part of the *vedikā*, namely no. 105 (“G”) and no. 111 (“H”), both on the inner faces of the respective pillars.

The question arises how the absence of any mention of the other seven pieces in the secondary literature may be explained. Considering once more the elevation of the four parts of the *vedikā* as given by COOMARASWAMY, one comes to the conclusion that at his time many of its pillars were evidently either not upright or very badly preserved. To put it more exactly, all those pillars on which the further pieces mentioned above are found today were at COOMARASWAMY’s time either dilapidated or missing at all. This is very clear in the case of the pillars no. 24 and no. 53 (no. 52 according to COOMARASWAMY’s counting) belonging to the southern and western part of the railing respectively, and as far as the *vedikā* lying to the north of the temple is concerned, of most of its pillars evidently only a small part of their lower portions was upright while the eastern fence had altogether not more than two upright pillars. It seems likely that the restoration of the whole railing to its present state was accomplished after the constitution of the Buddha Gaya Temple Management Committee in 1953. In the course of the various works of repair initiated by this committee—renovation of the main building of the temple and its precincts, installation of electric lamps for the illumination of the temple etc.—according to BARUA also “the construction work in connection with the old dilapidated Aśokan railings with their concrete replica had been undertaken”¹⁵⁷, and in still more recent publications it has been pointed out that nowadays many of the pillars of the old railing have been shifted to the Archaeological Museum of Bodhgayā and have been replaced by casts¹⁵⁸. Only a small number of the original pillars is standing *in situ*.

157 BARUA 1981: 135. Evidently because of the reconstructural work the number of pillars in the western, northern and eastern portions as given by COOMARASWAMY and as counted by me is different. Only the southern railing had already at COOMARASWAMY’s time the number of pillars it has today.

158 Cf. AHIR 1994: 149 and CHAKRAVARTY 1997: 1.

These facts give rise to the question whether among the 8 identical pieces of the gambling scene one of them can be determined as the original and if yes, which one it is. Trying to answer this question, it can be relatively clearly decided that none of the pieces on the pillars of the western, northern and eastern parts of the railing is the original. Relief C on pillar no. 53 belonging to the *vedikā* lying to the west must be considered as a cast which is proved by the fissures and blisters visible in the material (cf. fig. 11), and for the same reasons, the pieces of the northern and eastern parts of the *vedikā* are equally casts: cf., e.g., the heavily weather-beaten relief F (fig. 12) and relief H on pillar no. 111 belonging to the eastern *vedikā* (fig. 13). Thus, only one of the two reliefs on the pillars of the southern railing, A or B, might be the original. Let us at first consider B which in comparison to the other pieces is quite well preserved. On closer inspection one must come to the conclusion that it is a cast, too, which is proved by the joint visible at the outer left edge (cf. fig. 9) and blisters in the material (cf. fig. 10: both feet of the figure on the right and its left knee). The only candidate then being left for the original is A on pillar no. 9, the medaillon described and reproduced as a photo by COOMARASWAMY. Comparing, however, COOMARASWAMY's photo (fig. 14) and the one taken by the present author (fig. 15), it seems striking that on the latter there are joints in the pillar—one extending from left to right above the rosette in the middle and two vertical ones on each side—which are conspicuous by their absence on the photo taken by COOMARASWAMY and which are so characteristic of the other casts of the Bodhgayā *vedikā*¹⁵⁹. So the only possible assumption is that the photo taken by COOMARASWAMY shows the original—which seems to be sandstone and therefore evidently belongs to the old part of the railing erected between 125 and 75 B.C. (cf. subchapter 2.3)—and that this original relief was, for whatever reasons, removed to a so far unknown place and substituted by the cast to be seen on the photo of fig. 15¹⁶⁰.

159 E.g., the depiction of the donation of the Jetavana - which we have already met with on the stone fence of Bhārhut - on the outer face of pillar no. 10.

160 On my visit to Bodhgayā in 1998 it was impossible to find out whether the original pillar is housed in the local Archaeological Museum.

2.4.2 Description of the Details (Relief B)

If it is right to assume that none of the eight identical pieces of the gambling scene is the original, it principally makes no difference which of them is used for the description and interpretation of the gambling scene of Bodhgayā, but it seems practical to choose the one which is best preserved. This is without doubt relief B in the upper semicircular medaillon on the outer face of pillar no. 24 of the southern railing (cf. fig. 16).

2.4.2.1 The Surface

None of the previous interpreters has mentioned that the two figures together with the gaming board are depicted as sitting on a flat seat (in Sanskrit normally called *pīṭha*) which is 0.5 cm set off against the ground.

2.4.2.2 The Gaming Board

While COOMARASWAMY¹⁶¹ refers to the gaming board depicted between the two figures as a chessboard with 64 cells, SCHLINGLOFF¹⁶² speaks of a “real” *aṣṭāpada* consisting of 8 x 8 squares, and SYED¹⁶³ sees a gaming board or field that is scratched on the ground.

As far as the number of squares is concerned, there can be no doubt that their number is indeed 8 x 8. The board is, however, not scratched on the ground as assumed by SYED, but is clearly represented as a flat surface which is set off against the above-mentioned seat by 0.2 cm. Furthermore, it may be observed that the single squares are demarcated by small lines carved around them. The corners of the board, especially the two lower ones, are slightly stretched and its lower as well as its right and left edges are slightly concave (cf. fig. 16).

161 1935: 32.

162 1991: 8.

163 1993: 105.

2.4.2.3 The Figures

2.4.2.3.1 The Figure on the Left

Only two interpreters, namely COOMARASWAMY¹⁶⁴ and SYED¹⁶⁵, have commented on this figure. Both of them see a headless male figure while COOMARASWAMY additionally observes that it is only clad with a *dhotī* (fig. 16 and 9).

Besides the fact that this figure has no head—apparently, it is demolished—one may observe some more details. The upper part of its body is shown in front view. Its right arm is bent in an obtuse angle with its right hand resting upon the thigh of its right leg. Its left arm is directed to the upper left corner of the board, but the hand which should belong to this arm is missing. Strictly speaking, of its left arm only the upper part is visible which ends in a not clearly identifiable projection. The figure is seated in a posture which in Indian iconography is called *lalitāsana* or *paryāṅkāśana*: one leg—in the present case the right one—is bent upon the seat with the knee resting on the *pīṭha* while the other leg hangs loosely from the seat. According to LIEBERT¹⁶⁶ this attitude is symbolic for serenity. The figure's upper part of the body is naked, but on its left thigh one can clearly see 6 folds of a garment. Round its waist there is a double-corded girdle¹⁶⁷. Thus, it is similarly dressed as the left and right figures in the front of the Bhārhut relief, i.e. with a simple knee-long piece of cloth wrapped around the loins called *dhotī* by COOMARASWAMY.

2.4.2.3.2 The Figure on the Right

There are two characteristics which have been associated with this figure (fig. 16 and 10) by all interpreters: its being a women and its having a horse's head. While for COOMARASWAMY¹⁶⁸, ANSARI¹⁶⁹, PETZOLD¹⁷⁰ and

164 1935: 32

165 1993: 124.

166 1976: 21f.

167 Its end shows some affinity with the one described and illustrated by LOTH 1979, pl. 4, no. 4.

168 1935: 32.

169 1990: 76f.

SYED¹⁷¹ there seems to be no doubt that it definitely represents a woman, SCHLINGLOFF¹⁷² only speaks of a deity. On the other hand, its horse-headedness is evidently considered a fact by ANSARI, SCHLINGLOFF and SYED while COOMARASWAMY uses the slightly more careful wording that it seems to have the head of a horse, and PETZOLD speaks of a hairstyle which is suggestive of the head of a horse. Apart from that, only COOMARASWAMY has pointed out that the figure wears a *dhotī* and a tunic fastened with a girde around its waist while SYED has made the additional remark that it has opened its right hand “which shows that it is throwing small objects which are invisible to us, may be *akṣa*-s, on the gaming board”¹⁷³.

On the ground of my own observations it can be confirmed that the figure is indeed to be identified as a woman, as the upper part of its body, which, like that of its counterpart on the left is shown in front view, clearly shows a female breast. Its head, however, seems either largely demolished or strongly weather-beaten. There is only an unidentifiable area which is 0.5 cm set off against the background. The measurements of this area, which at the top is tapering to a point and on the left side is indented, are disproportionately large: the largest width is 4.5 cm, the largest height 5.5 cm. Even after a close inspection in its present state it is not clearly identifiable as a horse’s head. On the other hand, it has been pointed out¹⁷⁴ that the gambling scene under discussion has a certain relationship to the Padakusalamānava Jātaka represented on pillar no. 5 of the Bodhgayā railing in so far as the latter also shows a man and an *aśvamukhī*, i.e. a female being endowed with the head of a horse. This *aśvamukhī* has grasped with her right hand the left forearm of the man, her future husband, and is evidently trying to drag him along¹⁷⁵. So from this scene one might conclude that the female being of the gambling scene, too, once was horse-headed¹⁷⁶.

170 1991: 41.

171 1993: 124, fn. 59.

172 1991: 8.

173 Ibid.

174 Cf. BARUA as quoted by ANSARI 1990: 76f.

175 Cf. COOMARASWAMY 1935, pl. LIII, fig. 3.

176 I would perhaps not go so far as Prof. SCHLINGLOFF who communicated to me (letter from 7/3/99) that he thinks it impossible that the female being of the gambling scene was not an *aśvamukhī*.

Besides the female breast of the upper part of the figure's body only the base of its right shoulder is perceivable. Its right upper arm and forearm form a right angle. The hand belonging to it is represented with all its five fingers stretched out, covering an area of 3 x 4 squares of the gaming board. Of its legs, which are shown in profile, the right one is bent forming an angle of 90 degrees with the right foot extending beyond the seat. The figure's left leg is hanging down with its foot reaching still further beyond the seat than the corresponding foot of the figure sitting opposite. For the rest, on both feet of this figure—in contrast to the one on the left—anklets are visible which supports the assumption that it is a woman¹⁷⁷.

The figure is clad in an upper garment which COOMARASWAMY has called 'tunic'. It is evidently held together by a girdle round the figure's waist. The garment clearly shows five folds and extends just beyond the buttocks and the privy parts. Furthermore, on the figure's left thigh there are 6 folds evidently belonging to what COOMARASWAMY has described as *dhotī*. Looking, however, at this garment very closely, one has the impression that it is covered by a very thin, transparent trouser-leg the hem of which seems to be visible at a short interval above the anklet. Both garments together, the 'tunic' and the trousers, are definitely un-Indian and may allow the conclusion that a person of foreign origin is depicted. As has been pointed out by A.-M. LOTH in her investigation on the Indian costume, in the 2nd century B.C. clothes like the tunic and trousers were normally worn by nomads like the Scythians and Sarmatians and possibly also the Parthians¹⁷⁸.

2.5 The Interpretation: Type of Game

In view of the fact that there are no such implements as coins or dice, no inscription and no literary source to which the gambling scene represented at Bodhgayā might be traced back, it is not surprising that the suggestions regarding the question what kind of game is depicted have mostly been rather vague. While COOMARASWAMY thinks of a game of chance¹⁷⁹, ANSARI just refers to a square-board game¹⁸⁰. Only PETZOLD interprets the scene as

177 Cf. LOTH 1979: 27.

178 LOTH 1979: 31; 34-35; cf. also her remarks on pl. 37, no. 4.

179 1935: 32.

180 1990: 76.

a game of chess, explaining the absence of chess figures on the relief with the assumption that they would have been too difficult to depict on the relief¹⁸¹. Similarly, EDER refers to the possibility that a depiction of two-handed chess might be intended¹⁸². Against this SYED argues that the kind of gaming board shown in the scene does not necessarily presuppose *caturāṅga* (=two-handed chess) as numerous other games, the names and rules of which are unknown to us, may have been played on it¹⁸³. At the “privatissimum” at Munich (cf. fn. 1), where the scene was also discussed, it was even suggested that it has nothing to do with a game at all. P. THOMI thinks that the male being on the left and its female partner are representations of the two principles of the Sāṃkhya philosophy, i.e. the inactive soul of the universe (Sanskrit: *puruṣa*) and the active *prakṛti*, the primordial substance from which all material things of the universe are evolved. According to THOMI, the board would then have to be interpreted as a symbol of the world. On the other hand, R. SYED, revising her above-mentioned opinion, argues that no game, but some sort of divination is represented because in ancient India women were never allowed to gamble.

Considering the suggestion made by THOMI, it seems tempting indeed to assume that the male being corresponds to the Sāṃkhya *puruṣa* as that would fit in with its attitude of serenity (cf. 2.4.2.3.1) and apparent indifference to what is happening on the board. But on second thought this interpretation does not seem probable because in this case the scene under discussion would be the only relief on the *vedikā* of Bodhgayā which relates to a system of Hindu philosophy in an entirely Buddhist context.

The argument put forward by SYED that in India women were not allowed to partake in games may be certainly right but does not invalidate the assumption that here a game is actually represented as in subchapter 2.4.2.3.2 it has been made quite plausible that no “normal” Indian woman is depicted but a female being of foreign origin.

Trying to solve the problem what kind of game is represented at Bodhgayā, it has to be pointed out that the new pictures made available by the present author have revealed some interesting details which had not been noticed by previous interpreters. However, they do not seem to be of any use for solving the problem what kind of game is actually depicted. Whether the

181 1991: 41; 1994: 8.

182 1992: 15.

183 1993: 105 with fn. 59.

un-Indian dress of the figure to the right is intended to indicate that also the game is of non-Indian origin is imaginable but unprovable and must be dismissed as mere speculation. In the last end one must therefore come to the conclusion that the game on the relief may indeed be any kind of board game; that it is chess or any game played with pieces is, however, the least probable of all possibilities. If it is accepted that the hand of the right figure has anything to do with the act of playing, it does not seem to be shown touching or grasping a piece as in that case one would expect to see only one or two fingers stretched out: cf., e.g., a relief from Sondnī (Mālwā, Western India) with the depiction of a gambling scene¹⁸⁴ in which Śiva and Pārvatī are engaged in moving a piece on the board with the outstretched index and middle fingers of their right hands¹⁸⁵. The fact that on the Bodhgayā relief all five fingers of the figure on the right are stretched out rather seems to speak in favour of SYED's assumption that it is opening its right hand in order to throw a number of dice (cf. 2.4.2.3.2)—which are, however, not depicted—onto the board. So in the last end it may be a dice game not substantially different from the one represented at Bhārhut.

Summing up, it may be said that on both the reliefs, that of Bhārhut as well as that of Bodhgayā, a game is represented in which a board was used. For the reasons adduced above it is, however, rather improbable that the depictions refer to the board game 'chess' as there is also no real evidence that they have something to do with divination (cf. above) or mathematics.

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184 Illustrated in COLLINS 1988: 281, fig. 49, according to whom the works of sculpture at Sondnī are from the second quarter of the 6th century A.D. (97).

185 According to SYED the game may be a kind of running game (1994:124). Cf. also the further depictions of Śiva and Pārvatī gambling discussed by SYED 1998.

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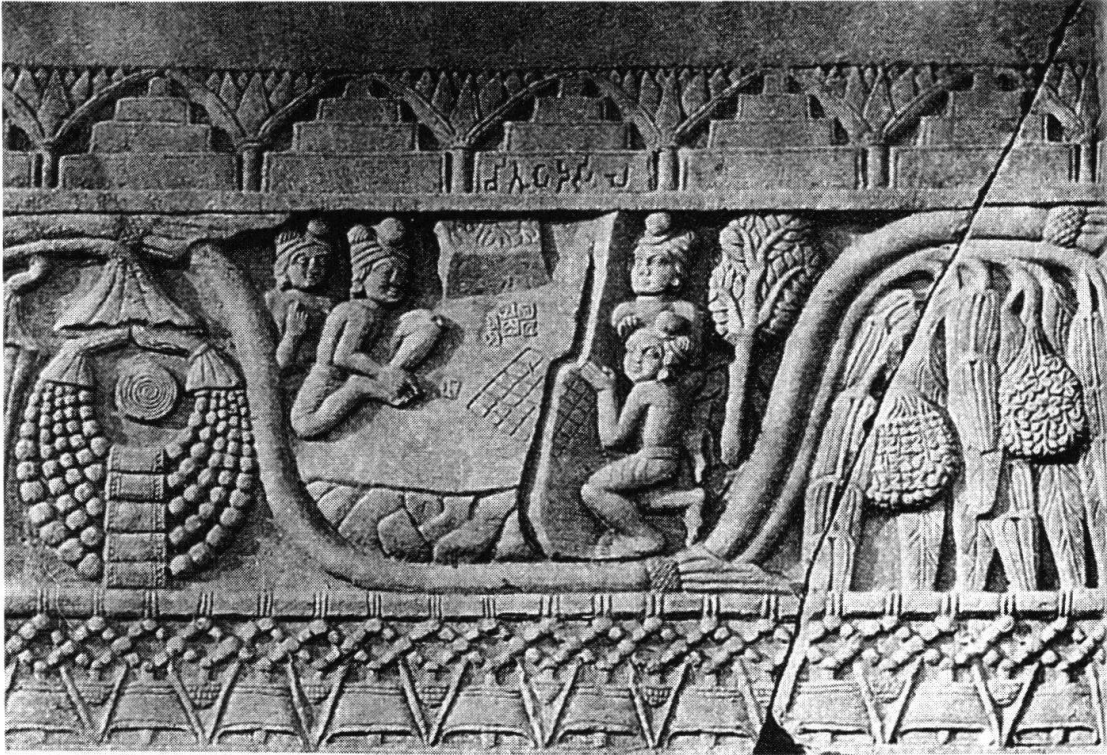


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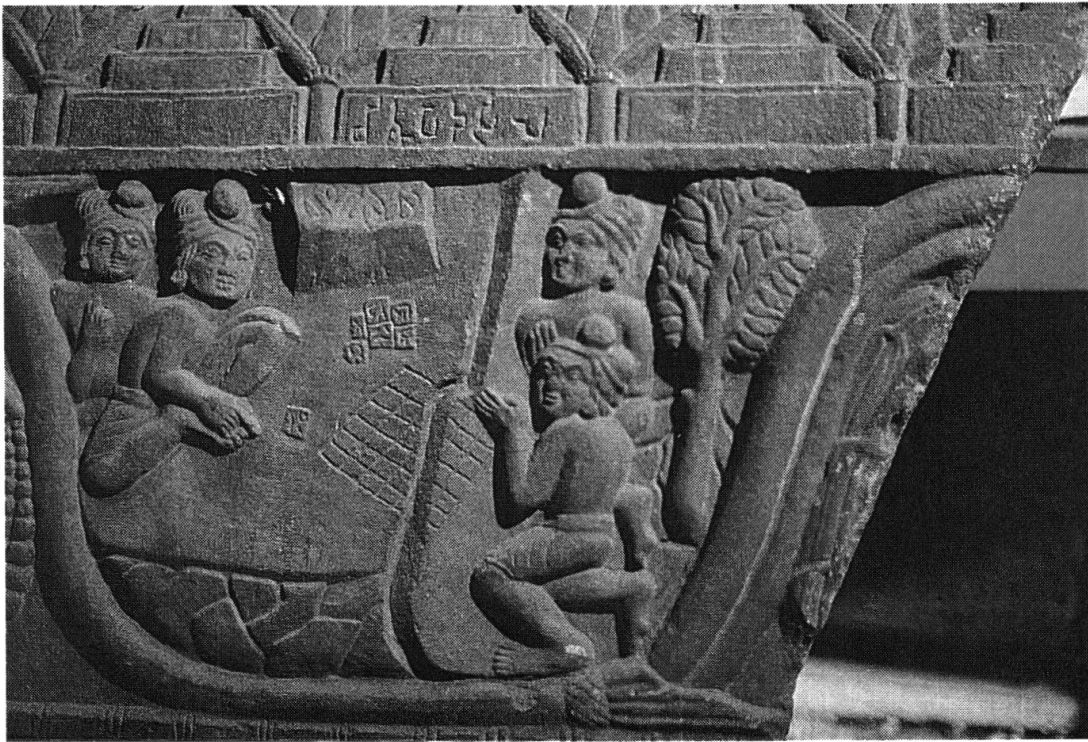


Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

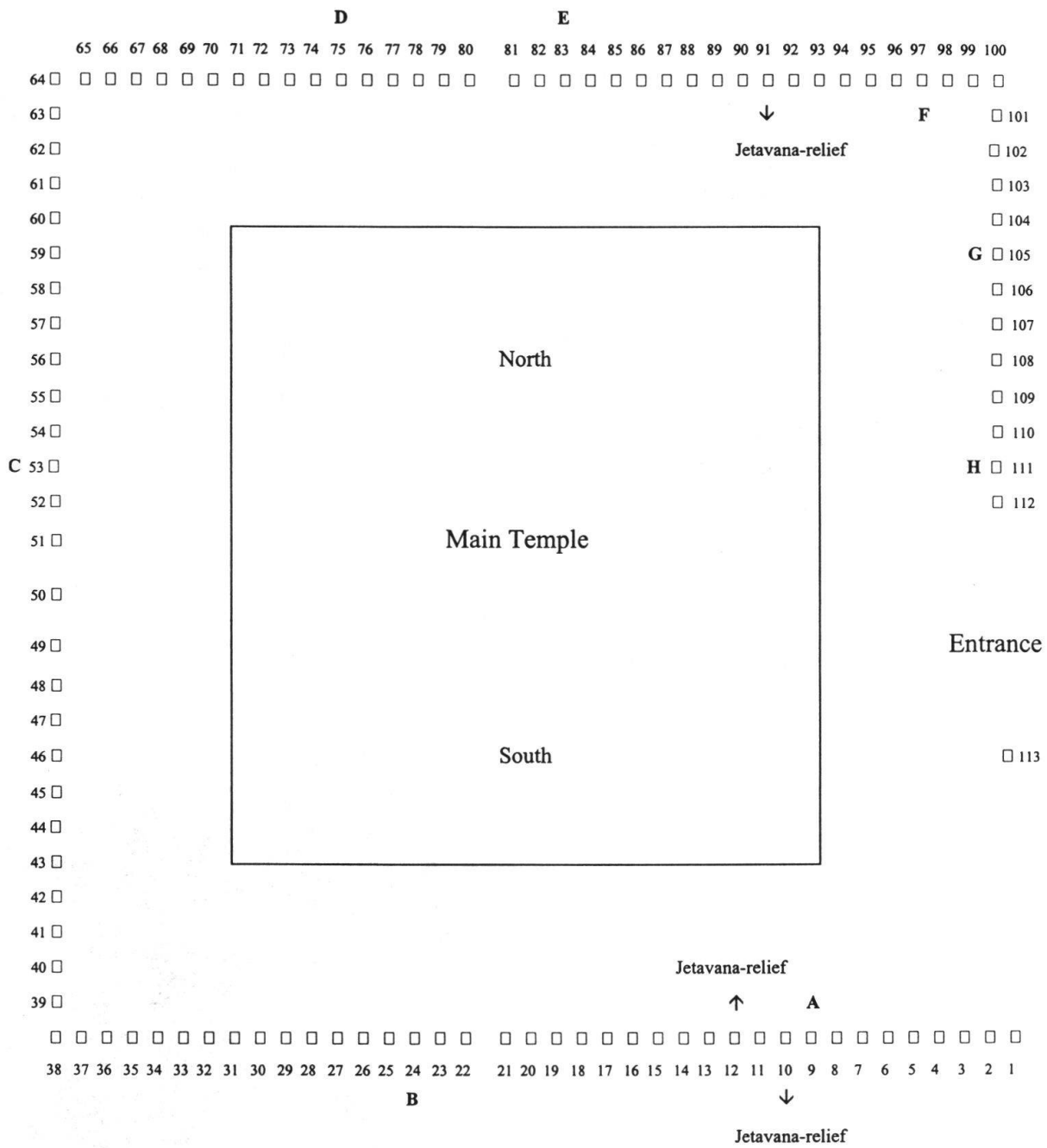


Fig. 8



Fig. 9

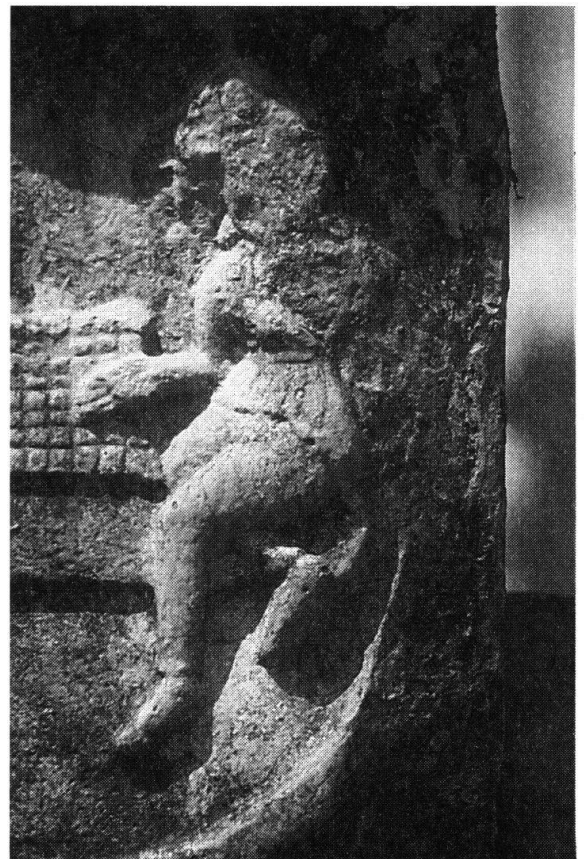


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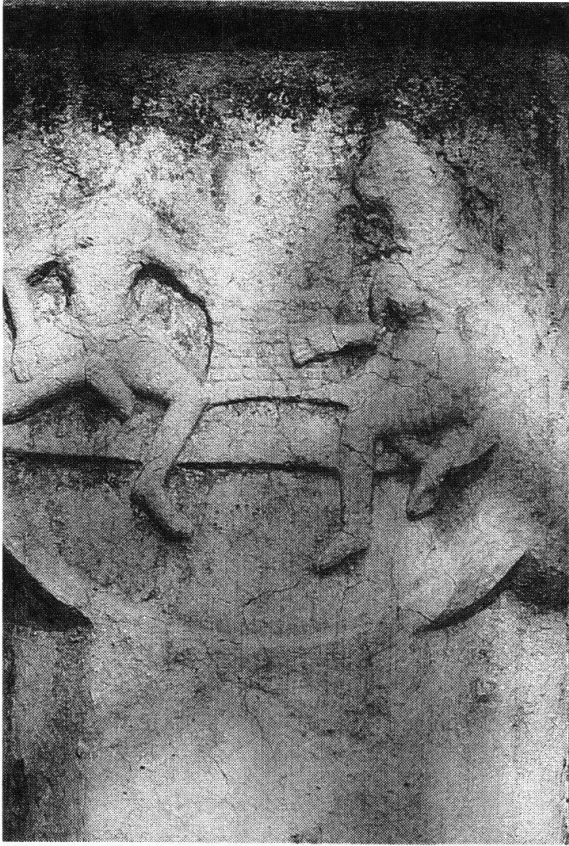


Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13

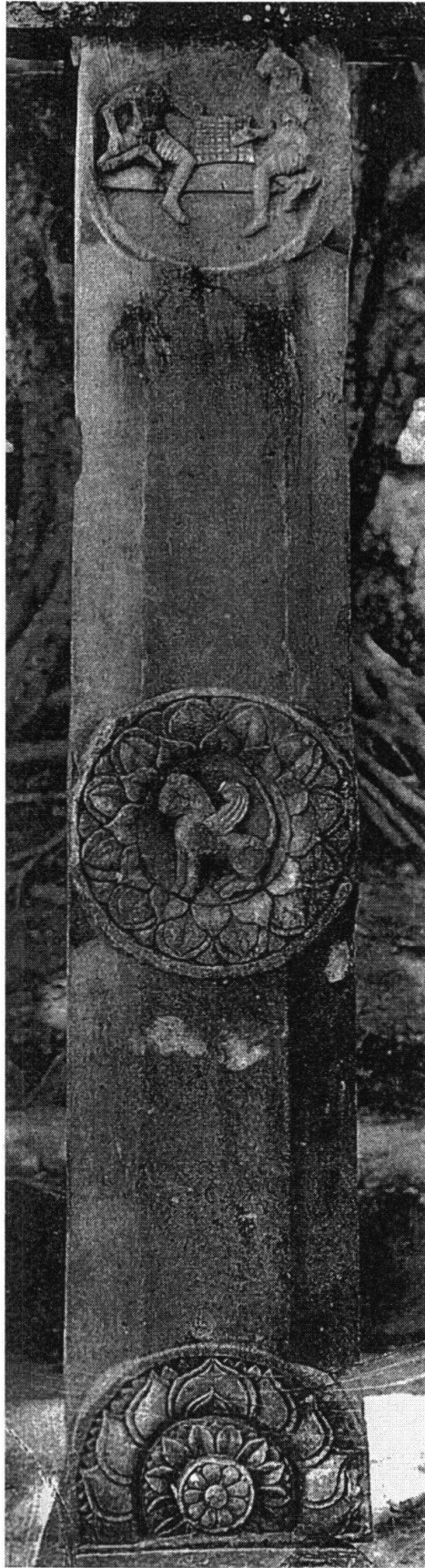


Fig. 14

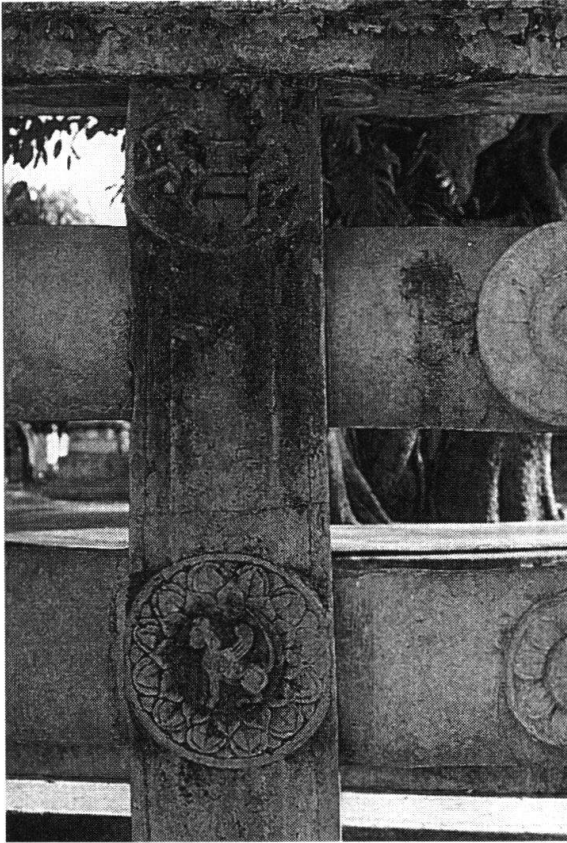


Fig. 15



Fig. 16