

Gandhāran Art in Its Buddhist Context



Edited by
Wannaporn Rienjang
Peter Stewart

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of the Gandhāra Connections Project,
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Multiple image shrines in the lower *stūpa* court of Takht-i-Bāhī. (Photo: J. Rhi.)



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Note on illustrations

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Preface

Wannaporn Rienjang and Peter Stewart

This book arises from the fifth and final planned workshop of the Gandhāra Connections project at Oxford's Classical Art Research Centre, which was held online via Zoom in March 2022. For a variety of reasons, not all of the participants in that workshop were able to commit their papers to the present publication, but we were pleased that the workshop was able to contribute to the development of research which will appear in print elsewhere in due course. As a record of the workshop's original papers, a list of participants is appended to the book.

Each of the project's workshops has been devoted to a topic which we felt was crucial for understanding the ancient art of Gandhāra. Our starting point was the relationship between Gandhāra and the world of classical Greek and Roman art, but our interests have ranged much more broadly because that cross-cultural relationship can only be tackled by considering other essential aspects of Gandhāran art. Consequently, we looked first at problems of chronology; then the geography of artistic production; then at all kinds of global connections with the region; and next, in 2021, the rediscovery and reception of Gandhāran art: the processes by which our experience of Gandhāran art has been shaped and filtered in modern times (Rienjang & Stewart 2018; 2019; 2020; 2022).

For the final workshop it was proposed that we should examine a topic which is of fundamental relevance to the understanding of Gandhāran art: its place within Buddhist religion.¹ One might ask: how can this be a discrete theme, for Gandhāran art *is* Buddhist art, broadly speaking. Was Buddhism not the subject of the entire project? Yet although the immediate religious contexts of Gandhāran art and its significance for the ancient Buddhist population are of primary importance, there remains much that we do not wholly understand, and perhaps too often do not even enquire about. It is important to focus consciously on the monasteries and shrines of Gandhāra, and on the wider community of their inhabitants and visitors, to understand why religious art was made and what its iconography and stylistic repertoire meant to its original users and viewers.

This effort is hampered by comparatively limited evidence for the original settings of sculptures, the loss of less durable artistic media, huge gaps in our knowledge of the Gandhāran settlements and their mixed populations, and the restricted (though growing) body of literary and epigraphic evidence for cult practices and beliefs. At the same time, it is challenging to correlate the archaeology of Gandhāra with the vast and complex body of literary evidence for evolving religious ideas in other parts of the ancient Buddhist world.

This was the task that we set for participants in the workshop. Their responses embraced literature, art, and archaeology across a wide geographical span. The selected papers in this volume give a sense of the different approaches involved and are organized in an approximate thematic order, beginning with Gregory Schopen's study of votive practices in monasteries, continuing with critical analyses of Buddha iconography by Juhyung Rhi and Dessislava Vendova, and concluding with new perspectives on specific archaeological sites by Luca Olivieri and Fozia Naz.

¹ We were particularly grateful to Christian Luczanits and David Jongeward for their suggestions about this theme.

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Selling space at the monastery and making economic sense of the 'intrusive' at monastic sites in Gandhāra

Gregory Schopen

It is not often that a single short text might account for a whole series of different things that can be seen at a number of actual monastic sites in Greater Gandhāra – at Taxila, Butkara, Loriyān Tangai, Takht-i-Bāhī, for example – but also at widely scattered and distant sites like Ajañṭā and Kānheri, or Ratnagiri or Udayagiri in the South.¹ But that might very well be the case in regard to a little text tucked away in the enormous *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, a monastic Code of more than 4,000 folios that appears to have been redacted or compiled in North India in the Kushan Period.² This might suggest that we start in North India or Gandhāra, and yet starting elsewhere at far away Ajañṭā may provide a concept that may be useful in talking about what can be seen at Taxila, and it is probably true that Gandhāra is far too often studied in isolation.

The specifics at the various sites are not, of course, always the same, but the pattern is: in every case, whether Butkara or Kānheri, the specific elements are 'intrusive' or add-ons. Most simply put this means that they all appear not to have been part of any original plan for the site or structure, but intrude into, or even disrupt, any such plan as they were added over time. Walter Spink, if not the author of the term 'intrusive', certainly made extensive use of it in describing what he saw at Ajañṭā, and this is not entirely surprising since wall surfaces there that had originally been left bare or blank came to be sometimes crowded with haphazardly placed sculpted reliefs of various sizes, shapes and subjects – hundreds, if not thousands of Buddha images in various postures, some tiny, some not. No one it seems has ever counted them, and apart from a few exceptions most have received little or no attention, and yet photos of some good examples are easily available (Weiner 1977: pls. 16-17, of the facade of Cave XIX; 79, court of the same; Spink 2009: pls. 130, 132, facade of Cave XIX; 164, Cave XXVI facade; 181, Cave XXVI interior). But what is found in this regard 'very haphazardly disposed' on the walls of Ajañṭā, is easily matched, if not considerably exceeded, by what occurs at Kānheri. There too what was originally empty wall space can be covered with the same sort of disorganized jumble of Buddha images of various sizes – although most are small – in various shaped recesses, and in large numbers. A particularly striking example that, happily, has been frequently published is provided by Cave 67 there: in that instance the walls are almost completely covered, from floor to ceiling with such images (see Kail 1975: pl. 38b; Pandit 2015: fig. 4.2; Michell & Rees 2017: 42, 98-99, 114-115), and these 'intrusions' are found at a number of other caves at the site. As at Ajañṭā, so at Kānheri it is predominantly images of the Buddha in various postures and with various accoutrements that have been added in these recesses cut into the walls, but less often elaborate *stūpas* also occur, and particularly intriguing are tiny figures in the posture of *añjali* or homage in their own separate little recesses, but positioned in regard to the larger panel in such a way that the tiny figure appears frozen forever in the act of adoration of the image in the larger recess – these probably represent the person who commissioned the larger relief, as do the little figures in the same posture sometimes found in the larger panel itself (Michell & Rees 2017: 98-99).

Just this much already reveals the characteristics of what have been called 'intrusive' images in the Western Caves. First of all, of course, is that (1) they appear to be intrusive and not a part of the original

¹ The last two of these sites will not be further discussed here, but for some good photos of the jumble that accumulated at Ratnagiri see Mitra 1981-83: pls. ix, xxi, xxxiv, etc. For Udayagiri see Trivedi 2012: pls. iv, xxxiv, xxxv, etc. For still other sites see Oertel 1908: ii, xvi and Asher 2020: figs. 2.1, 2.13 for Sārnāth; and Asher 2015: figs. 3.15, 4.28, 4.29 for Nālandā.

² See, for example, Schopen 2004: 20-22; 208-212 and the sources cited. A significant part of the monastic Code cited here is only preserved in Tibetan translation. All citations to Tibetan sources will be from the Derge print and references will be in the following form: Sanskrit title of the section of the work – volume letter – folio number – line; e.g. *Kṣudrakavastu* Tha 225a.3.

plan or decorative scheme. (2) Their placement on the walls likewise appears unplanned and ad hoc, governed only by available wall space. The result often has the appearance of a crowded jumble. (3) They are generally, but not always, small, sometimes tiny. (4) There is little or no attempt to standardize either the shape or size of the recesses in which they occur and which in effect frame them. And (5) they occur in large numbers. The impression they leave is that they were added one after the other over time, with little or no discernable organizing principle. This lack of organization and symmetry seems to offend certain aesthetic sensibilities, but this messy proliferation of images on the walls of the monastery may have much more to do with merit and money than it does with aesthetic values.

Little interest has been focused on the question of why these images are there. Commonly they are called ex-voto or 'votive' offerings, but without any attempt to explain what either might mean in an Indian Buddhist context, and it even seems to be assumed that almost anyone could have whatever they wanted cut into the monastery's walls, however unlikely that might be.³ Kail labels the sculptures on the walls of Cave 67 at Kānheri as 'Mahayana Sculptures' (pl. 38), and he and others have assumed a 'Mahāyānization' of the site. Certainly, there is some evidence for a certain kind of Mahāyāna there, but the figures identified as Mahāyāna – Avalokiteśvara and Tārā primarily – are 'saviour' figures and evidence therefore only a narrow slice of apotropaic Mahāyāna. Moreover no one seems to have questioned the degree to which a process of Mahāyānization of the site might have occurred, and it seems at best to have been only partial, even superficial or uneven. Pandit, for example, who noted twenty-five figures of what he took to be Tārā, noted as well that they occur almost entirely in a small number of caves 'in the upper layers of excavations' (Pandit 2002: 121). Then there is the question of whether there was actually any process of Mahāyānization of the site itself, and whether or not these Mahāyāna elements might not have been brought by distant transient visitors, pilgrims as it were. There is late inscriptional evidence of donations at the site made by individuals from as far away as Sindh (Mirashi 1955: 29-32) and Gauḍa (Kielhorn 1884: 134-35), and there is robust evidence that would seem to suggest that the majority of resident monks were and remained Mainstream: there is at least not a trace of the Mahāyāna in the conceptions of religious achievements expressed in the dozens of inscribed 'plaques' from the 'cemetery' at Kānheri. In these inscriptions the vocabulary of sainthood is entirely Mainstream, and they have been assigned mostly to the sixth century, the same period to which most of the intrusive images have been assigned,⁴ making it hard to maintain that these 'intrusive' elements were connected with some shift in the affiliation of those who controlled the site. Spink, finally, treats the intrusive images at Ajaṇṭā in a volume that he subtitled *The Arrival of the Uninvited*, and he places them in what he calls 'the Period of Disruption.' He thinks that they are an indication that at this time 'the site's economic base and administrative controls collapsed' (Spink 2005:3), but neither in fact are necessarily signaled by the presence of all these reliefs. Quite the contrary, they may indicate that the monastic economy was actually flourishing, and the monastic administration was making good money selling wall space.⁵

³ A number of things suggest that there were something like standardized plans that were followed in the construction of Buddhist monasteries, starting in at least the Kushan period. Lamotte for instance summarizes what can still be seen by saying 'nothing is more like one Buddhist viḥāra than another Buddhist viḥāra' (Lamotte 1988: 179), and the monastic Code that will be the focus here already has instructions on the layout of viḥāras of several different sizes (*Śāyanāsanavastu* [Gnoli 1978: 10-11]), and actually refers to a drawn plan of the ideal monastery that was to be followed in building another (*Saṅghabhedavastu* [Gnoli 1977-78, i: 186-87]). It also has specific rules about what paintings should be placed where in a viḥāra (*Kṣudrakavastu* Tha 225a.3; Lalou 1930) and repeatedly indicates that any and all building or addition at a monastic site required a monastic supervisor or a monk 'assistant' who took charge of the project – see Schopen 2000: 169; 2014: 251-275.

⁴ For the 'epitaphs' from the monastic 'cemetery' or 'burial-gallery' at Kānheri – almost thirty have survived – see Gokhale 1991: 111-136. On the limited evidence for a Mahāyāna presence there see most recently Brancaccio 2022.

⁵ The issue and the degree of Mahāyānization at Ajaṇṭā still needs clarification, and the term 'Mahāyāna' is there, and too often elsewhere, used far too loosely. It is moreover far from clear where the old idea that is still with us came from that the use and promotion of images was characteristically Mahāyāna. It certainly was not based on good evidence and both inscriptional (Schopen 1997: 238-257) and textual evidence (Schopen 2005: 128-139; 2014: 390-403) suggest very much otherwise. Ironically,

Relief images on the walls are not, of course, the only images that seem to appear in inordinately large numbers at Indian Buddhist monasteries – images in the round do too, and often what we see is only a fraction of what once was there. At Sārnāth, for example, in addition to the large number of images that we have from there, Oertel tells us that in building a bridge ‘forty-eight statues and other sculptured stones were removed from Sārnāth and thrown into the river, to serve as a breakwater to the piers’, and in building another bridge ‘from fifty to sixty cart-loads of stones from the Sārnāth buildings were employed’ (Oertel 1908: 279). Indeed, even though the provenance of a very large number of images in the round is not actually known, it is commonly assumed that very few came from private spaces, and that the vast majority all came from monasteries. Some that have inscriptions certainly did: the accompanying inscriptions can actually say that the image was set up or established in such-and-such a monastery. There are good examples from Mathurā (Lüders 1961: §§ 1, 86, 121, 135, 136, 154, 157, 184). But even if it is true that all or nearly all the images we know came from monasteries, how are we to account for their very large numbers, far in excess of what would have been needed or used for ‘cult’ or ritual purposes. These images too – like the relief images – come not only in large numbers but in a bewildering range of sizes. Unfortunately, again, the vast majority of such images were not found *in situ* so it is hard to get an impression of just how many such images there were at a given monastery or where precisely they once were placed. Ironically, perhaps, it is from a site from which much has disappeared that we get at least a glimpse of the clutter.

Alexander Caddy ‘excavated’ what Tissot calls a ‘petit monastère’ in 1896 in what is now referred to as Loriyān Tangai. Virtually nothing is known about the little monastery – not even exactly where it was – except for the fact that a startlingly large number of images came from it, and that is known especially from two photographs Caddy took of the images he found there, one of which has frequently been reproduced (Tissot 1987: pl. 100; Luczanits 2008: fig. 5; Rhi 2018: fig. 11; etc.). Because of these two ‘group photos’ we can be sure that all these images came from the same place even if we do not know where they were placed there or their disposition. Behrendt published both photos together and counts more than sixty separate images of various sizes, but most of them small (Behrendt 2004: figs. 88-89). He says (Behrendt 2004: 297):

The diminutive Buddha images include 21 seated and six standing, while the small bodhisattvas consist of nine seated and two standing images. Devotional icons of modest size (about 1 m to life size) include 17 seated and five standing Buddhas and six seated (two with crossed ankles) and 12 standing bodhisattvas... a single monumental schist Buddha, a Śrāvastī composite image, and three Śrāvastī triad images.

Again, only a few of this bewildering array of images are likely to have been cult images in this ‘petit monastère’, so the question remains why are they all here? Five of these images are inscribed, but all five inscriptions are extremely brief and provide very limited information that even then is not always free of difficulties. In four of these little inscriptions, for example, Konow reads – sometimes with substantial reconstruction – the collocation *sadaviyari*. Senart had previously read it *sadarabhati* and taken it to mean ‘together with his wife and brother’, but Konow says it ‘means the same thing as *sārdhamcara* and *sārdhamvihārin*’ (Konow 1929: 106-110). What is at stake here becomes obvious once it is noted that the latter are decidedly monastic terms. Edgerton has for *sārdhamvihārin*, ‘(fellow-)pupil’ and ‘(co-)resident monk’. Read with Senart, then, the donors in these records would be laymen; read with Konow they are monks. Oddly enough, however, this may not have made a great deal of difference from at least one important point-of-view, as we will see, and on at least one related point the limited information carried by these records would seem to offer confirmation.

at least one early Mahāyāna text criticizes monks who put images of the Buddha on walls just ‘to make a living’ (Schopen 2005: 64-66), and this is not too far off from what in part will be suggested here.

It has already been said that few of the numerous images from Loriyān Tangai are likely to have been ‘cult’ images – there is only one ‘monumental schist Buddha’. But size too would seem to preclude all but a few being ‘private’ images – most would have been too large to have been comfortably accommodated in the typical monastic cell. The language of the inscriptions would also suggest that these were not private images. Here one example may stand for all. Konow no. XLIV can be translated, following his understanding of *sadaviyari*, as ‘The gift [*danamukha*] of Siṃhamitra, the co-resident monk of Sihilaka’. And in each and every case here the object of the inscription is to record a *gift*, the construction with *danamukha* occurring in all five. But if these were private images and inscribed, it is much more likely that they would have carried an indication or statement of individual ownership or, if gifted, that they were given to monk so-and-so. In the absence of any such indication the assumption has always been that when *danamukha* is used without a named recipient – and it typically is – that recipient is the Saṅgha or monastic Community. That in turn would mean that these were corporately owned, ‘public’ images, which while not being ‘cult’ images, were set up somewhere in the public areas of the monastery. Given their large numbers at Loriyān Tangai, and other sites like Jamālgarhī,⁶ in what must have been limited space, and given their lack of uniformity in size and shape, the impression made by all these images at these sites must have been like the impression made by the walls of Kānheri. Like the reliefs at Kānheri too these numerous images must have been added one by one over time – they certainly are not all of the same period – and must have been placed willy-nilly wherever there was room, adding to what might seem to be a haphazard organization. But even without knowing why they are there, there is a distinct possibility that putting them there created a considerable nuisance. Spink, for example, refers to ‘the incessant hammering and chiseling and the chatter of painters’ that would have been involved in putting the intrusive reliefs on the walls of Ajaṇṭā (Spink 2005: 21). And while we obviously do not know if the Loriyān Tangai images were made on site, there is some evidence from Takht-i-bāhī that suggests that much of the finishing chisel work there was done at the monastery: there is a large – almost 4 feet high – block that was found at the site, where a seated image of the Buddha is only roughed out and unfinished.⁷ But wherever they were made they were almost certainly made under monastic supervision, and their transport and installation, or the ongoing need to make modifications or additions to the site to make room for them – if space had not been left for them from the beginning – all of this and the almost constant presence of workers coming and going, must have occasioned significant disruption.⁸ In light of this it is interesting to note that it is virtually certain who, in the most important sense, put them there: the Saṅgha or monastic Community itself. Neither lay ‘donors’ nor individual monks could make or add or place whatever they might like at monasteries, in large part because these monasteries were – as both texts and inscriptions indicate – either private property or corporately owned, and any modification or addition to one would have required – as we will see – the owners’ permission or involvement, and, importantly compensation: if, for example, someone wanted to set up an image at the monastery for the benefit of their parents they would, it seems, have to acquire the space or piece of ground where they could do so there.

It is probably clear by now that the concept of the ‘intrusive’, although employed or exploited so far mostly in the study of the distant Western Caves, has much broader application, and can be useful in describing or thinking about a very different kind of site in Gandhāra. Indeed, Kānheri and Loriyān Tangai would at first sight seem to have little in common, but at both, it seems, inordinately large

⁶ For a photo of the number of images found at Jamālgarhī that is as startling as those of the finds at Loriyān Tangai see Errington 2022: fig. 6.

⁷ See most recently Dehejia & Rockwell 2016: 192–193, figs. 10.14a, b. The authors note that such evidence is rare.

⁸ It is interesting to note what has been said in this regard about medieval monastic sites in the British Isles: ‘It must have been extremely difficult to pursue a life of worship and prayer in the midst of the inevitable disruption of a construction site. The dust and dirt, the noise, and the presence of building workers whose style of life was so different to that of the monks, must have been unendurable at times’ (Greene 1992: 89). And the monks who redacted our Code seem to have been familiar with the noise and disruption of ongoing construction and the presence of workmen (*Vibhanga* Ja 37a.4–38a.2; Ca 101a.7–103b.4= Schopen 2004: 200–203).

numbers of usually small, but variously sized items seem to have been added over time in no particular order, and without any very obvious organizing principle, wherever space allowed. It is possible, of course, in both cases that space had been intentionally left vacant to receive such eventual additions, or even added to accommodate their future placement. Some of this might be clearer at some other monastic sites in Greater Gandhāra.

Images are not the only things that appear in the intrusive reliefs on the walls of the Western Caves, *stūpas* also do, although much less often (Weiner 1977: fig. 98 for an example from Kānheri), and *stūpas*, generally small but again of various sizes, were added, sometimes in staggering numbers, at various sites in Greater Gandhāra. Happily, the two best examples – the Dharmarājikā in Taxila, and Butkara I in Swat – have both been well reported. In regard to the first of these Marshall says (Marshall 1936: 42):

The Great Stūpa... was the first of the Buddhist structures to be erected on the plateau. At the time when it was constructed, the plateau around was levelled up and covered with a layer of grey river sand with a floor of lime plaster above.

It would appear from this that it may have been anticipated that the area around the Great Stūpa would eventually receive additional structures and the ground all around was carefully groomed or prepared for that; in effect, the architects of the project may have intentionally left space that – as we will see – could be sold to future donors. In any case it was not long before the space closest to the Great Stūpa was filled with a tightly packed circle of small '*stūpas*'. Marshall continues (Marshall 1936: 42):

On this [lime plaster] floor or on the debris which accumulated immediately above it there was subsequently built, in a ring around the central edifice a number of small *stūpas*, of which eleven have been laid bare.

Faccenna (2007a: 171; cf. 2007b) has said 'with a fair degree of certainty' that what Marshall took as *stūpas* were actually 'columns' with 'relic' recesses, and both Marshall (1936) and Dani (1986: 121) date these little structures to the first century BC, but it is unlikely that they were all built at the same time, and were rather added one after another: construction activity must have been almost constant around the Great Stūpa since there appear to have been many more of these little structures than the eleven Marshall cleared, and since in time – and not too long a time – as the ground level rose from accumulated debris other structures were built on top of these *stūpas*. All these structures, moreover, would certainly have been built on site, adding to the ongoing, if not constant, noise and activity. Again Marshall (Marshall 1936: 44-45):

The next stage of building around the Great Stūpa is marked by the erection of a circle of small chapels... intended for the enshrinement of Buddhist images which were set up facing the Great Stūpa... when these chapels were built, the small *stūpas* then standing, although much decayed, were suffered to remain, the ground between them being partially filled in with debris and the walls of the new chapels carried over their tops.

Both Marshall and Dani place the earliest of these structures in the first century AD, but again they were clearly added one after another, and in this case building activity continued, and these little structures continued to be added, for many, many years. Indeed, in addition to the tight circle of '*stūpas*'/columns and shrines immediately surrounding the main *stūpa*, a bewildering variety of other mostly small structures were added over time in the surrounding compound – almost one hundred appear in Marshall's site plan (pl. IV) and – although they might be disputed – Behrendt's many redrawn site plans might give a rough idea of the gradual addition of all these elements both here and elsewhere (Behrendt 2004: fig. 1; 2018: fig. 9).

What Marshall's excavations revealed at the Dharmarājikā Stūpa at Taxila is easily matched by what Faccenna found around the Great Stūpa at Butkara I: an even tighter and somewhat better organized array of smaller structures packed in around the main stūpa. In a small guide to the site that appeared in 1964, Faccenna put it this way: 'Around the Great Stūpa there stands on every side a mass of stūpas of various shapes and sizes, vihāras and columns – 215 in all' (Faccenna 1964: 27). And keep in mind that *vihāra* here does not mean 'monastery' but is used to refer to a small structure that 'resembles a chapel' (Faccenna 1964: 47). Again, according to Faccenna (Faccenna 1964: 48):

Statues were placed in the room [of the *vihāra*], provided with a door: the base of a statue was found in vihāra 94, and fragments of other statues, some of them larger than life-size, of Buddhas and of Bodhisattvas, have also been found. Vihāra 37 encloses a stūpa.

Faccenna's language in regard to what is seen at Butkara I is worth repeating. He refers in his larger report to the 'crowded numbers of secondary stūpas', to the 'dense throng of monuments', to the site as again 'crowded with monuments... of all sorts, shapes and sizes', and says they were 'built, one after the other', and that they indicate 'a certain intensity of activity' (Faccenna 1962: 4, 24, 28, 29).

The configuration that occurs at Butkara I is, then, very much like that at the Dharmarājikā: a very large number of secondary structures of a wide variety of shapes and sizes, with no real attempt at standardization, their placement having limited organization and with little space in between, and quite clearly added over time where space allowed. There is no indication that they were part of an original plan, although at both sites space may have been intentionally left for future additions. These features, clearly visible at both sites, are, of course, the features that define the 'intrusive'. But there is also one other thing that both sites have in common: in a significant number of cases these little stūpas and the columns contained things. These 'things' have generally – but probably incorrectly – been called 'relics', and the arrangements in both stūpas and columns to receive them have been called 'relic chambers' or 'relic recesses'. But as pointed out long ago (Schopen 1997: 119), it is unlikely that these are 'relics'. They are never labelled and are entirely anonymous. In fact, Jongeward says that 'less than ten per cent' of what he takes to be stone reliquaries are inscribed, and even then a significant number of those do not indicate that the remains they contain belong to the Buddha (Jongeward 2019: 26). So, until it can be proven otherwise, they are probably better called simply 'post-cremational remains'. It is certainly possible that they may have been those of, for example, the mother or father of the person who commissioned the small structure that contained them. If something like this is the case then it would appear that what we have here is – as has been argued elsewhere (Schopen 1997: 114-147) – another form of what in the Christian West was called 'burial Ad Sanctos', and a Buddhist alternative to the Hindu practice of depositing such remains in the Ganga, which was thought of as the very body of God.

If, again, this scenario is correct it would provide another reason why someone might want to put something at a monastery. It was suggested above that someone might want to set up an image at a monastery for the benefit of their parents by assigning the merit to them, but in the case of these particular small stūpas and columns the individual would seem to be doing considerably more: they would be, in effect, short circuiting the law of karma by placing their dearly departed, regardless of their moral character and whether or not they deserved it, in close and continual proximity to the Buddha himself since there can be very little doubt that the main stūpa at a site was directly equated with the continuing presence of the Buddha. In texts, for example, monks were reluctant to climb on it, or pound pegs into it, walk on its shadow, or even fart near it (*Uttaragrantha* Pa 120a.1; *Kṣudrakavastu* Tha 176a.1; Bareau 1960: 251-256). But it should also be noted that many of these small stūpas may not have had post-cremational deposits, and if they did not then this explanation of their presence would not hold. The number that had held such deposits at either site is simply not known or knowable.

Marshall, for example, can be very imprecise. In regard to the tight circle of what he took to be small *stūpas* immediately around the Great *Stūpa* he says only 'eleven have been laid bare', and then only that 'in several... were found relic deposits' (Marshall 1936: 42-43). For Butkara I the site plan published in 1962 shows eighteen with 'relic recesses' still intact, but only in nine of these was the deposit still there (Faccenna 1962: pl. III and pp. 44-45, 146-147; figs. 70-77, 185-190). At Butkara I, in fact virtually all that survives of these minor *stūpas* are their bases, and even these have been disturbed by either natural forces or the hand of man. But if at a carefully excavated site like Butkara I it is impossible to know how many of these scores of *stūpas* originally contained, or were constructed to hold, the post-cremational remains of the anonymous dead, this is even more so at a host of Gandhāran sites which were less carefully excavated or not so well reported. At some of these sites, moreover, it appears that whole 'courts' were added with no other purpose than to receive these additional little – though sometimes not so little – structures. This seems to have been the case at Jamālgarhī, for example, where in addition to a tight circle of 'chapels' immediately surrounding the main *stūpa* similar to those at both the Dharmarājikā and Butkara I, at least two large courts appear to have been added to provide additional space for the construction of even more minor *stūpas* (Errington 2022: fig. 7). This also seems to hold for Takht-i-bāhī where again several courts seem to have been added or built at the monastery for just this purpose. Virtually everywhere in Gandhāra these secondary *stūpas* were – like images – far, far in excess of what would have been needed for either private or public worship. But virtually everywhere too it is impossible to determine how many were meant to hold post-cremational remains. And there are two further considerations here: (1) even in the absence of any deposit these *stūpas* could be memorials put up in the name of the deceased; and (2) it was not necessary at Gandhāran sites to deposit post-cremational remains in a secondary *stūpa*. They could be placed in urns or pots and simply buried near sacred structures. Stein, for example, found a number of such 'cinerary urns' buried at Sahrī-Bahlol (Stein 1915: 111-112; 117), and they occur at sites as far apart as the Ghosiṭārama in Kauśāmbī and Haḍḍa, where a particularly large number were found (Schopen 2005: 351ff).

Much, then, remains unknown, but what can be said is this: what can be seen at almost any Gandhāran monastery is, in one form or another, the gradual but seemingly constant addition of what are clearly, even classically 'intrusive' elements: images of various sizes and forms in inordinately large numbers, 'shrines', 'chapels', 'vihāras' to house them packed in around the central *stūpa*, or in increasingly crowded courts; small *stūpas* of even greater variation in size and shape also in large numbers added it seems wherever there was room. More than one plausible reason for some individual wanting to set up an image or little *stūpa* at a monastery has been suggested: to make merit, to do something for the benefit of parents or others, to set up a memorial to or for them, or to place them in close proximity to the Buddha for perpetuity, and there are undoubtedly others. Without inscriptions personal motive is that much harder to get at, of course, but even if we had access to the personal motivations of 'donors' that, at best, would only tell us why some individual might want to set up an image or *stūpa* at the monastery. It would not tell us why the monks or monastic authorities might want them there, or why they might be willing to put up with the noise and disruption involved in their construction or installation. For that, it seems, we must turn to texts that monks wrote and read, and that brings us in the end to the text that we started with.

When it is finally fully studied – and it is a long way from that – the enormous monastic Code in which this text is found may prove to be particularly useful for the study of Gandhāra. It appears, as noted, to have been either redacted or compiled or composed in Kushan North India, and it contains, for example, both a textual warrant and name for the tight circle of what have been called 'chapels', 'shrines', or 'vihāras' that immediately surround the main *stūpas* at the Dharmarājikā, Butkara I, and Jamālgarhī. As a part of a long series of instructions on *stūpas* the famous donor Anāthapiṇḍada asks and receives permission from the Buddha 'to encircle the circumference of the *stūpa* with Perfume Chambers' (...)

mchod rten la mtha' ma dri gtsang khang gis bskor la; *Uttaragrantha* Pa 119a.7), the Perfume Chamber or *Gandhakuṭī* being, of course, the chamber or pavilion or even room that the Buddha – i.e. an image – permanently resides in. This same Code, moreover, also indicates not only that there were images in the *Gandhakuṭīs*, but also that they were painted (Schopen 2004: 118). It treats as well and in some detail two important Gandhāran image types which are not treated elsewhere: the Princely Turbaned Bodhisattva, which it explicitly identifies as Siddhārtha (Schopen 2014: 390-403), and Siddhārtha's First Meditation under the Jambu tree, which is called 'The Image of the One Sitting in the Shade of the Jambu' and is widely referred to there (Schopen 2005: 128-136). Not one but two very fine examples of the latter were found at Sahrī-Bahlol, for example (Kurita 2003: nos. 130, 131; cf. Quagliotti 2000), and in the text at least this image functioned to raise funds for the monastery.

The text of interest here is, happily, preserved in Sanskrit and is short enough to be given at some length. It may have implications for more than one aspect of the 'intrusive' at Gandhāra monasteries, but it certainly suggests at least one very good reason why the monastic authorities may have wanted the intrusive elements to be there.

When the householder Anāthapiṇḍada, having covered the land with a layer of a hundred thousand [coins], having bought it (*niṣkriya*) from Prince Jeta, presented it (*niryātita*) to the Community of Monks with the Buddha at its Head, then devout worshippers of shrines (*caityābhivandaka*) who lived in various regions came to Śrāvastī. Some of them, being deeply moved, said: 'Noble One, we too would have something made in the Jetavana for the Noble Community.'

The monks said: 'After having bought the land for a price (*mūlyena bhūmiṃ krītvā*) you may do it!'

'Noble One, for how much is it sold?' (*kiyatā mūlyena dīyate iti*)

'So much gold' (*iyatā hiranyena*).

'Noble One, where are we going to get so much? But still, if we are allowed to [build] on this spot we are going to have it done.'

The monks reported this matter to the Blessed One. The Blessed One said: 'the householder must be asked for permission. If he authorizes it, it is to be done.' (*Śāyanāsanavastu* [Gnoli 1978: 33.8-24])

Before dealing with the main thrust of the passage it might be quickly noted that the 'donors' here are not locals, but are from 'various regions'. This may make it possible to suggest that some of the 'intrusive' elements found at monastic sites may have been put there or paid for by non-resident 'pilgrims' visiting the sites – *caityābhivandaka* is probably as close as Buddhist textual vocabulary gets to the English word 'pilgrim'. Also, it might be noted that the text uses a broad generic expression for what the individuals want to do at the Jetavana: they want to make or build 'some thing', and a little later this becomes 'some thing that makes merit'. There are standard lists of such things, but the lists are not exhaustive, and the expressions used in our passage are blanket expressions that cover a wide range of 'things'.

That said, notice that selling space in the monastic complex is not delivered as a rule but as a paradigmatic action. Monks are not told that they must sell laymen the space when they want to build some thing at the monastery. They are just told that that is what monks did in the Buddha's day at the Jetavana and that, of course, is paradigmatic. In fact, the paradigm presented is twofold. To the 'donors' the monks can present the example of Anāthapiṇḍada. He, of course, is the paradigmatic 'donor' or *dānapati*, the model for all others: what he did they should do, and in the text, which has just given a detailed account of the founding of the Jetavana Monastery, he bought for an enormous price the land on which to build it, and he paid in gold. The 'good' donor, then, who wanted to do something at the monastery – put up an image in the name of his parents, or have a *stūpa* made for whatever purpose – would be expected

to repeat Anāthapiṇḍada's paradigmatic action: buy for a significant price the space in the complex on which to do so.⁹ What the monks did in the Buddha's day at the Jetavana is equally paradigmatic and should be done by 'good' monks now: they should sell land in the compound to donors – both lay and monk – where they can make what it is they want, for a considerable price. Notice that the text takes all this for granted and raises no objection here or anywhere else to the sale – buying and selling by monks for the sake of the Community is repeatedly sanctioned. The issue being adjudicated here – though unstated – is a purely legal one: can the monks sell what they do not actually or fully own, and the 'details' (not cited here) added at the end of the text clarify this: they may do so if it is for the benefit of the Community (*saṃghasyārthāya*), and in the Buddha's final ruling this does not require the permission of the 'donor', even though he continues to own it. That now is only required if it is for the benefit of an individual (*pudgalasyārthāya*). The rule here is, again, not that space in the monastery must be sold to laymen who want to build or make some thing that makes merit there. The rule simply assumes that that is done. The rule is that when it is done the owners' permission must be sought.

Little if any of these sorts of considerations, of what might be called the business side of Buddhist monasticism, has made it into general books, and even some specialized studies have been slow to acknowledge the financial, legal and administrative sophistication of this monasticism. This is not only a great disservice to the monks who crafted it and put their organization on sound financial footings, but it also has made it more difficult to understand properly what is sometimes seen at actual Buddhist monastic sites. It has made it possible, for example, to take the crowded relief panels on the walls of Ajaṇṭā as intrusions of 'the uninvited' and as signs of the breakdown of order and control, when in fact they might well be an index of the site's vibrancy and its continuing ability to attract people and money. It has made it possible to treat the unnecessarily large numbers of images at Loryān Tangai, or the even larger numbers of small secondary *stūpas* at the Dharmarājikā or Butkara I as merely ex-votos, rather than as a major source of revenue for the monastery. Indeed, it is highly likely that the large numbers of images and *stūpas* or mortuary deposits had less to do with ritual or cult, but a lot to do with the monastic economy. Monks would have encouraged people – including other monks – to put these things there because it would allow them to make merit and because they would have to pay to do so, and this would provide another revenue stream for the monastery. Making merit, it seems, was both expensive and profitable.

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⁹ The paradigmatic account of Anāthapiṇḍada buying for an enormous price the land on which he would build is told at length not once, but twice, in detail and in virtually the same words in this Code: *Śayanāsanavastu* (Gnoli 1978: 18-20), and *Sanḡhabhedavastu* (Gnoli 1977, i: 171-173). For a translation see Schopen 2000: 116-118.

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Does iconography really matter?

Iconographical specification of Buddha images in pre-esoteric Buddhist art¹

Juhyung Rhi

Identifying a figure or character is a rudimentary step in reading a visual image, but it is an indispensable foundation for a variety of more sophisticated investigations and interpretations. For Buddhist art specialists as well, identifying various divinities represented in visual images has been a major preoccupation. This task, commonly referred to as ‘iconography’, is sometimes quite straightforward but sometimes not so simple, owing to the inconsistency of visual evidence or its incongruence with literary stipulations, or the lack of sufficient specificity. Its difficulty also often varies in different classes of divinities. Minor deities are in general more easily identifiable from their idiosyncratic appearances. Bodhisattvas are often distinguishable from their special attributes but equally often pose problems, as I argued in a recent publication (Rhi 2018b). However, Buddhas are more difficult or more confusing in identification because of the lack of complexity in their appearance. They *generally* look alike despite minor differences, which are rarely indicative of separate identities. Art history students may be taught the possibility of distinguishing Buddhas according to hand gestures (*mudrā*) or attendant figures, but this method in fact works only in a limited range of instances.² In reality, Buddhas were made in indistinguishable shapes throughout most regions in the Buddhist world at least in the pre-esoteric period. This paper will explore this phenomenon in India, especially focusing on Gandhāra, and attempt to seek its ramifications for understanding the significance of Buddha images in India and other parts of Asia in the pre-esoteric phase.

In Gandhāra where the iconic representation of the Buddha was most likely initiated earlier than any other regions of the Indian subcontinent, numerous Buddha images were created as independent statues during its most productive phase, which spanned the first few centuries of the Common Era.³ They can be easily identified as Buddhas based on the iconographical conventions that presumably started in Gandhāra and continued throughout later periods in the Buddhist world. Few of them are specified by

¹ This paper was originally presented at the symposium ‘New Research on Buddhist Sculpture’ held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in November 2010, and its Korean version was published in the journal *Misulsa wa sigak munhwa* (*Art History and Visual Culture*), vol. 10 in 2011. The publication of its English version has long been delayed – despite my frequent references to it in my other works in English – because I was wavering as to whether to adapt it for more art-historically oriented audiences or whether to use it in my forthcoming book on Gandhāran Buddhas, which has been in preparation for many years. The current paper is a slightly modified version of the 2011 Korean version. I should like to record my gratitude to the late Dr John Clarke for inviting me to the symposium and enthusiastically encouraging the immediate publication of the paper, and Professor Peter Stewart for providing an opportunity to have its publication in English finally happen.

² An optimistic stance that attempts to describe various Buddhas with supposedly distinct iconographic features is found, for example, in McArthur 2002: 26–41, 110–17. One has to admit that this simplistic description is probably due to the nature of works that are intended for those at the beginner’s level. Most Buddhist art specialists are aware, though in varying degrees, of ambiguity and inconsistency in the identification of Buddha images.

³ This statement touches on two potentially controversial points. The first point is whether or not the iconic representation of the Buddha was initiated in Gandhāra. I believe that this was the case in the sense that representations of the Buddha as a fully enlightened one started in Gandhāra. The earliest attempt in contemporaneous Mathurā was restricted to representations of the bodhisattva, Śākyamuni in the pre-enlightenment stage – as their appellations in dedicatory inscriptions consistently indicate – and thus the types invented by Gandhāran Buddhists were eventually adopted in Mathurā during the middle of the first century of the Kaniṣka era (Rhi 1994a). The second point is the chronology of Gandhāran Buddhist statuary, of which the clear understanding has been problematic for many years. Several extant inscribed Buddha images and the gold coins of Kaniṣka that feature Buddha figures indicate that the major production of Gandhāran Buddha images took place during the second and third centuries of the Common Era, as I have discussed in my most recent works (Rhi 2018a; 2020).

name in inscriptions.⁴ This may not be surprising because inscribing the name of a divinity was in fact not a common practice in the dedication of images in Indian Buddhism.

Yet, if there was an intention to distinguish various Buddhas but not in inscribed designations, we might expect to be able to detect differences based on iconographical patterns shown in detailed visual features. Gandhāran Buddhas are largely classified into two types, standing and seated, and in each type there are a limited number of variations.⁵ Standing Buddhas usually show the so-called *abhayamudrā* with the right hand raised and grab the hem of the robe with the left hand, either (1) hanging down, or (2) raised to the chest level.⁶ Seated Buddhas are in three distinctive types: (1) showing *abhayamudrā* with the right hand and holding the robe with the left hand, (2) holding hands in a gesture commonly called *dharmacakramudrā* (usually wearing the robe with the right shoulder bare), and (3) in the meditation pose with *dhyānamudrā* (usually wearing the robe covering both shoulders).⁷ In an extremely small number of examples, the Buddha shows *dharmacakramudrā* while seated on a chair with the legs hanging down, in the so-called *pralambapādāsana* or *bhadrāsana*.⁸ As we will see, any of these variations seem to have been meant to signify Buddhas with particular names.

We can easily presume that the majority of Gandhāran Buddhas were Śākyamuni, the inaugurator of Buddhist teaching in the present age, who was only several hundred years apart from the Gandhāran Buddhists who were earnestly engaged in dedicating such images. Numerous extant narrative reliefs depicting the life of Śākyamuni Buddha, which decorated Buddhist *stūpas* inside Gandhāran Buddhist monasteries as a prominent part of their visual culture, support this presumption. However, there is only one extant image of the Buddha explicitly inscribed as Śākyamuni in the entire Gandhāra, a stucco figure carved on the plinth of a small *stūpa* (D5) at Jauliañ in Taxila (Figure 1).⁹ The particular Buddha, seated in meditation, does not show any features that distinguish it from other Buddhas seated alongside on the same *stūpa*.

Śākyamuni obviously would not have been the only Buddha created in Gandhāra. A number of reliefs from Gandhāra bear the seven Buddhas of the past and the bodhisattva Maitreya (Figure 2).¹⁰ The Buddhas are usually standing figures, although they are rarely seated as we can see in a relief in the Lahore Museum (Figure 5). In a relief in the Peshawar Museum (Figure 2), which probably formed the frontal part of the pedestal of an image of a Buddha or a bodhisattva, seven Buddhas stand along with Maitreya on the far right.¹¹ The Buddha next to Maitreya must be Śākyamuni, who is followed by his six predecessors in sequential order to the left. Among the seven Buddhas, we can discern three types of standing Buddhas alternating with one another:

⁴ Prior to the fifth century, when diverse elements – artistic style, language, script, etc. – from India proper in the middle Gangetic valley began to have a conspicuous impact on Gandhāra, only five Buddhist images (except for an image of Hārīti from Skaraha Dheri) are known to bear the inscribed names of the deities represented: one as Śākyamuni, two as Kāśyapa, one as Dīpaṅkara, and one as Amitābha and Avalokiteśvara. The reliability of the reading of some of these inscribed names has been questioned. This will be discussed below.

⁵ For the major iconographical conventions shown in Gandhāran Buddhas and their significances, see Rhi 2013.

⁶ Ingholt and Lyons 1957: pls. II.1-2, V3, XVII.1-4, figs. 195-223; Marshall 1960: figs. 85, 86, 110, 111, 131, 132, 134, cf. figs. 61, 63, 66; Kurita 1988-1990, vol. 2: figs. 199, 201, 206, 207, 214, 218-222, 236.

⁷ Ingholt and Lyons 1957: pls. XI.3-4, XII-XVI, XX-XXI, figs. 229, 232-236, 245-261; Marshall 1960: figs. 135, 136; Kurita 1988-1990, vol. 2: figs. 194, 203, 204, 212, 223, 225-229, 238-241.

⁸ Zwalf 1996, vol. 2: fig. 30; Ingholt and Lyons 1957: fig. 226; Kurita 1988-1990, vol. 2: figs. 247, 249. Although this pose has been linked to Maitreya Buddha by some scholars, especially those in Chinese Buddhist art, such a specified relationship never seems to have existed in India. For the suggestion to call this pose *bhadrāsana*, see Revire 2016, vol. 1: 11-13.

⁹ The inscription carved in Kharoṣṭhī below the Buddha was first read and translated by Sten Konow: Śakamu[ni] tathagato ji(?)na(?)eśa(?) da(?)ṇamukho(?) (Śākyamuni, the Tathāgata, lord of Jinas, a gift) (Konow 1929: 97, no. XXXVI.12 and pl. XVIII.12; cf. Marshall 1951, vol. 1: 375; vol. 3: pl. 109g; Tsukamoto 1996-1998, vol. 1: 971, Jauliañ 12). Gregory Schopen and Richard Salomon question the reading of Śākyamuni (Salomon and Schopen 2002: 20-21).

¹⁰ For representations of the past Buddhas in India, see Vogel 1954.

¹¹ It was found in an image niche at the site Takht-i-Bāhi in the Peshawar valley. See a photo from the Archaeological Survey of India Frontier Circle (reproduced in Behrendt 2004: fig. 51).



Figure 1. Śākyamuni (left) and Kāśyapa (right) Buddhas. Fourth to fifth century AD. Stupa D5 at Jauliañ, Taxila. (Photo: J. Rhi.)

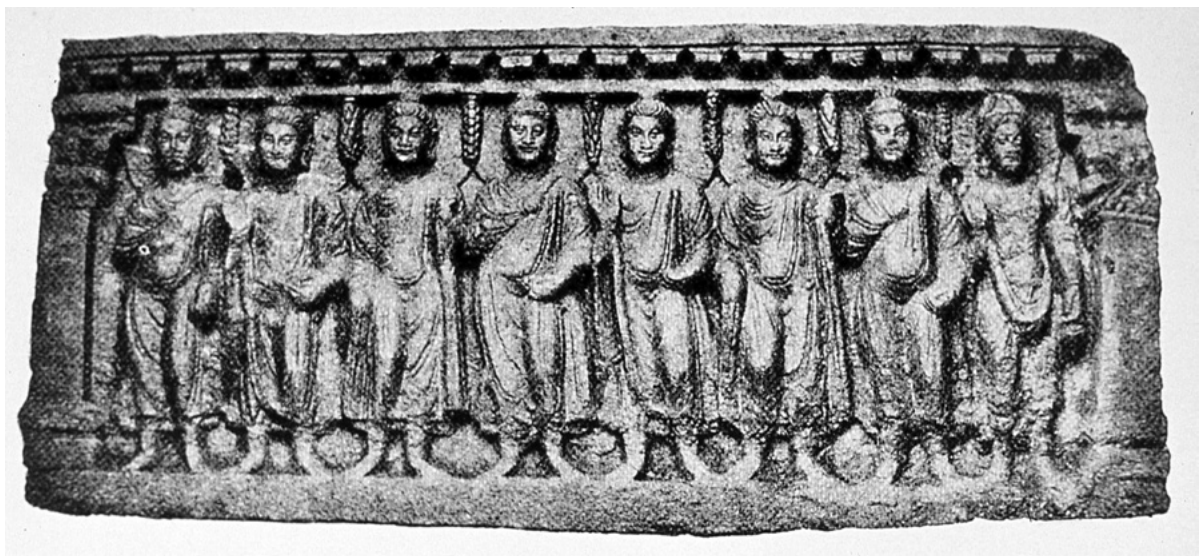


Figure 2. Seven Buddhas of the past and Maitreya Bodhisattva. From Takht-i-Bāhī, Peshawar valley. H. 27 cm. Third century AD. Peshawar Museum. (After Foucher 1905-1922, vol. 2.1: fig. 457.)

- A. The right arm raised at chest level and partly concealed inside the robe except for the right hand, and the left hand hanging down and holding the robe;
- B. The right hand hanging down but covered by the robe and the left hand raised and holding the robe;
- C. The right hand in *abhayamudrā* and the left hand hanging down and holding the robe.

The Buddhas are arranged in the order of A-B-C-A-B-C-A from Śākyamuni on the right next to Maitreya. When read in sequence, Type A was used for Śākyamuni, Krakucchanda, and Vipasyin, Type B for Kāśyapa and Viśvabhū, and Type C for Kanakamuni and Śikhin. It is apparent that the three types are alternately used simply for variation and regularity in design rather than with any intention to link each of them to a particular Buddha or Buddhas. In a relief in the Victoria and Albert Museum, the three types appear in the order of C-B-C-A-C-A-C when read from Śākyamuni placed at the second from the right after Maitreya Bodhisattva (Figure 3). Śākyamuni is in Type C, and this type alternates with Types B and A. In another relief in the Peshawar Museum, where Maitreya Bodhisattva is placed on the far left and the seven Buddhas stand in a sequence toward the opposite direction from the preceding two reliefs, all the Buddhas show *abhayamudrā* but wear the robes alternately in two different types – one with both shoulders covered and the other with the right shoulder bare – apparently again with an intention of avoiding monotonous repetition (Figure 4).¹² A small stele in the Peshawar Museum, which, although broken, originally bore in the principal scene a depiction of *Indraśailaguhā* (Buddha meditating in Indra's cave) from Śākyamuni Buddha's life, had at its base the seven Buddhas of the past and Maitreya Bodhisattva all seated (Figure 5).¹³ Śākyamuni sitting next to Maitreya holds hands in the so-called *dharmacakramudrā* (or the preaching gesture) and wears the robe with the right shoulder bare.¹⁴ This type alternates with a meditating Buddha who wears a robe covering both shoulders. In another relief in the Victoria and Albert Museum, all seven Buddhas are in identical form (Figure 6). All these examples demonstrate that no single type was exclusively used for Śākyamuni or other past Buddhas. These multiple types were obviously used rather arbitrarily without revealing any sign of individual specification of Buddhas. Two inscribed figures of Kāśyapa Buddha, one of the seven Buddhas of the past and the immediate predecessor of Śākyamuni, are modelled in stucco on the plinths of a *stūpa* (D5) at Jauliān in Taxila. One of them is seated next to the inscribed Śākyamuni mentioned above (Figure 1).¹⁵ These images of Kāśyapa are in the meditation pose with no distinction from the adjoining Śākyamuni figure, and, again, we do not read any intention to differentiate them iconographically.

The seven Buddhas of the past were possibly made in independent statues as well. At the monastery site of Takht-i-Bāhī in the Peshawar valley, six pairs of the feet of colossal standing Buddhas were found, which would have originally reached around five metres high (Figure 7).¹⁶ They are made of stucco and datable to a late phase of Gandhāran art around the fourth to fifth centuries. It seems most likely that they were part of the seven Buddhas of the past along with Maitreya Bodhisattva. We cannot rule out

¹² This relief also seems to have formed the frontal part of an image base. An inscription carved in two lines suggests that the image possibly was of a bodhisattva but states nothing about the seven Buddhas of the past and Maitreya. [Line 2] ... *satvasa sarvabudhapuyasa prastidasa ruvaśisa mahatvasa arogada...*; [Line 1] *danamukho kṣani...* ([Depiction] of the (bodhi)sattva, departed for the veneration of all the Buddhas, having assumed a pleasant body, the elated being – a religious donation for the favor of health) (reading and translation by Harry Falk in Luczanits 2008b: 270, no. 188).

¹³ For the theme *Indraśailaguhā*, Rhi forthcoming, b.

¹⁴ For the problem of the so-called *dharmacakramudrā*, Rhi 2013: 7–12.

¹⁵ The square plinth of *stūpa* D5 of Jauliān is divided into three bays in each face. The northern bay of the western face is occupied by the inscribed Śākyamuni figure mentioned above, and the central bay by one of the inscribed Kāśyapa figures. Another inscribed Kāśyapa is in the central bay of the southern face. The inscriptions of the two Kāśyapa simply record the name of the Buddha: '*Kaśavo tathagato*' (Konow 1929, 96–97: no. XXXVI.9, 11 and pl. XVIII.9, 10; Marshall 1951, vol. 1: 375; vol. 3: pl. 109e, cf. Tsukamoto 1996–1998, vol. 1: 970–71, Jauliān 9, 11). Konow suspected that the inscription below a similar Buddha in the western bay of the southern face (Konow 1929: no. XXXVI.10) also included the word '*Kaśavasa*'; however, in the relevant part the characters are barely legible. Tsukamoto (1996–1998: Jauliān 10) simply follows Konow's reading. Salomon and Schopen (2002: 20–21) express scepticism about all these '*Kaśavo tathagato*' inscriptions.

¹⁶ Hargreaves 1914: 38.



Figure 3. Seven Buddhas of the past and Maitreya Bodhisattva. Provenance unknown, Gandhāra. H. 29 cm. Third century AD. London, Victoria and Albert Museum. (Photo: copyright Victoria and Albert Museum)



Figure 4. Seven Buddhas of the past and Maitreya Bodhisattva. Provenance unknown, Gandhāra. H. 36 cm. Second to third century AD. Peshawar Museum. (Photo: J. Rhi.)



Figure 5. Seven Buddhas of the past and Maitreya Bodhisattva. Detail of an Indraśailaguhā stele. Provenance unknown, Gandhāra. H. 33 cm. Third century AD. Lahore Museum. (After Ingholt and Lyons 1957: fig. 135.)



Figure 6. Seven Buddhas of the past and Maitreya Bodhisattva. From Swat. H. 13 cm. Third century AD. Victoria and Albert Museum. (Photo: copyright Victoria and Albert Museum)

the possibility that among numerous stone statues of the Buddha created in Gandhāra a similar series of the seven Buddhas of the past existed. As discussed above, standing Buddha statues of Gandhāra were invariably made with the right hand displaying *abhaya mudrā* and the left hand holding the hem of the robe – commonly hanging down but occasionally raised to the chest level. The other two types we saw in the first Peshawar relief (Figure 2: Types A and B) are extremely rare among independent statues. Even if the seven Buddhas of the past were created in a set or individually, such monotonousness in the appearance of Buddha images overall would have made them indistinguishable from one another. Unless they were viewed in a set, it would have been impossible to identify them among individual statues.

Dīpaṅkara, another important past Buddha, was quite popular in Gandhāra, as the first in the series of past Buddhas who had presented previous incarnations of Śākyamuni – called variously Megha, Māṇava Sumati, Sumedha, etc. depending on textual accounts – predictions of his eventual attainment of Buddhahood in the future.¹⁷ The depiction of Dīpaṅkara giving a *vyākaraṇa* (prediction) to Megha was a popular theme in the Buddhist narrative art of Gandhāra.¹⁸ In these scenes, Dīpaṅkara is portrayed in a form essentially identical to Śākyamuni in his life scenes as a Buddha (Figure 8); only narrative details, such as Megha prostrating himself at the feet of Dīpaṅkara and spreading his hair on the ground, distinguish the theme. Dīpaṅkara was possibly made as independent statues as well. On a statue base found near Nowshera in the Peshawar valley, the word *Dhivhakara* was read and equated with Dīpaṅkara.¹⁹ This reading would mean the presence of an independent statue of Dīpaṅkara. However, the equation of *Dhivhakara* with Dīpaṅkara has been questioned in recent scholarship.²⁰ It came to be known in recent years that the image is a seated Buddha presently in the Pakistan Army Museum in Rawalpindi, which holds hands in *dharmacakramudrā* (Figure 9).²¹ Thus, regardless of the validity of its designation as Dīpaṅkara, the image is in one of the common types of seated Buddhas, and it is clear that the image type cannot be linked to Dīpaṅkara exclusively. Independent or semi-independent statues of Dīpaṅkara were found in the Kapiśi area in eastern Afghanistan (Figure 10) and the Swat valley to the north of the Peshawar valley.²² Their identity is indicated by an additional narrative element, Megha prostrating at the feet of the Buddha as well as/or flowers thrown by him and flowing near the head of the Buddha. Otherwise, the Buddha is no different from Śākyamuni Buddha.

Buddhist scriptures speak of many other Buddhas of the past besides the seven past Buddhas or Dīpaṅkara. The *Lalitavistara*, associated with the Sarvāstivāda names forty-eight or fifty-five or fifty-six predecessors of Śākyamuni depending on versions.²³ The *Mahāvastu* of the Lokottaravāda of Mahāsaṅghikas counts

¹⁷ For Dīpaṅkara Buddha, see Yasuda 1984; for diverse names of the previous incarnation of Śākyamuni at the time of Dīpaṅkara, see Akanuma 1967: 657.

¹⁸ Kurita 1988–1990, vol. 1: figs. 3, 7, 8, 9 (for reliable pieces); Yasuda 1984.

¹⁹ It was Sten Konow who first read and translated the inscription: *Dhivhakaraṣa Takhtidreṇa karide* (Of Dīpaṅkara [...], made by Takhtidra). Konow 1929, 134 (LXXI); Tsukamoto 1996–1998, I: 985 (Nowshera 1). Konow states that the statue base was discovered in 1912 by J.E.H. Williams, a chaplain served in the 82nd Punjab Infantry and that only the rubbing of the inscription was delivered to the Peshawar Museum (Wasi-ud-din 1913: iii).

²⁰ Salomon and Schopen (2002: 21–22) raise questions about this reading. One of the arguments is that the name of a Buddha would not have been presented alone without such epithets as Tathāgata, Buddha, or Bhagavan. However, Salomon has indicated in a personal communication (October 2010) that the assessment reflected more of Schopen's view and that he could not be sure whether the presence of Dīpaṅkara should be utterly rejected.

²¹ I would like to thank Aurang Zeb Khan, the former curator of the Army Museum, for first drawing my attention to this image by showing me his unpublished paper on Buddhist images in the Army Museum collection. The image was discussed with a reproduction in Falk 2009, 108–09. Falk reads and translates the inscription admitting the presence of Dīpaṅkara in it: *dhivhakaraṣa takhto danamukho* ([Statue] of Dīpaṅkara, a pious donation of Takhtu).

²² Meunié 1942: 33, 35, pls. X.36, XI.38; Faccenna 1962–64, vol. 2: pls. XLIII–XLV, LXXV.

²³ Among the three extant versions of the *Lalitavistara*, the *Puyao jing* (T186, 3:483b28–c16) and the *Fangguang dazhuangyan jing* (T187, 3:539b28–c15), the earlier and later Chinese translations, count forty-eight and fifty-six respectively, and the extant Sanskrit version counts fifty-five (Lefmann 1902: 4; Goswami 2001: 6–7).



Figure 7. Remains of colossal standing Buddhas in stucco. Takht-i-Bāhī, Peshawar valley.
Fourth to fifth century AD. (Photo: Archaeological Survey of India, Frontier Circle.)



Figure 8. Dīpaṅkara vyākaraṇa jātaka. On a stūpa from Sikri, Peshawar valley.
Second century AD. Lahore Museum. (Photo: J. Rhi.)



Figure 9. *Dīpaṅkara(?)* Buddha. From Nowshera, Peshawar valley. H. 53 cm. Third century AD. Rawalpindi, Pakistan Army Museum. (Photo: after Falk 2009: fig. 3).

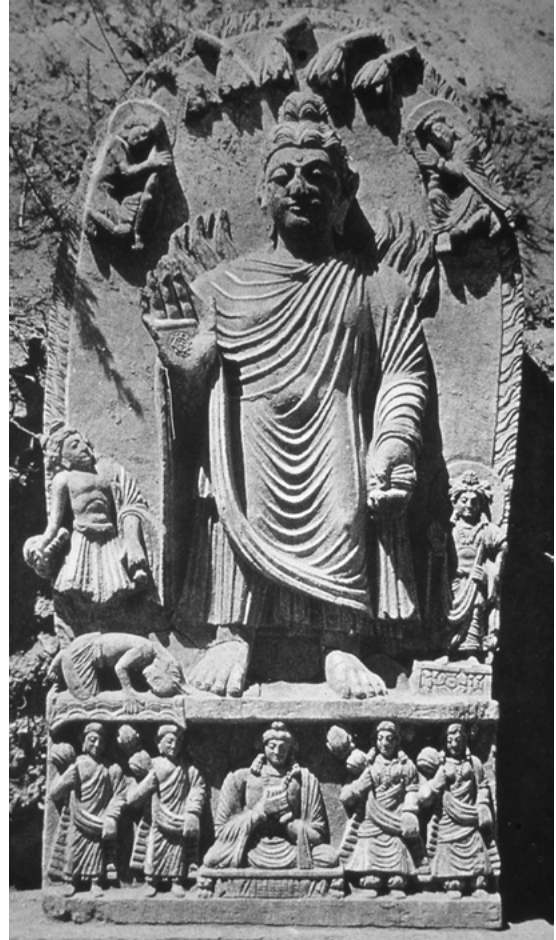


Figure 10. *Dīpaṅkara* Buddha. From Kapiśi, Kabul valley. H. 83 cm. Third-fourth century AD. Formerly Kabul Museum. (Photo: after Meunié 1942: pl. X.36.)

130.²⁴ The *Buddhavaṃsa* of the Sri Lankan Theravāda names twenty-five or twenty-eight.²⁵ These past Buddhas signify the universal presence of Buddhas in the succession of time, following the traditional idea of their continual and sequential emergence in different ages, and the numbers are simply symbolic. Gandhāran Buddhist *stūpas*, either large or small, were commonly decorated with numerous Buddha figures in various parts such as bases, drums, and false gables, and the Buddhas were usually in the identical meditation pose (Figures 11 and 12). In a conservative estimation, which emphasizes the predominance of the mainstream pre-Mahāyāna or non-Mahāyāna elements in Gandhāran Buddhism, they could be identified as representing Buddhas of the past but with no intent to specify their names.²⁶

²⁴ The *Mahāvastu* enumerates altogether 130 Buddhas from Indradhvaja to Śākyamuni (Senart 1892-1897, vol. 3: 224-40; Jones 1949-1956, vol. 3: 219-39). Puzzlingly, the *Mahāvastu* list has several names repeated twice. Although it is not easy to clarify whether this was accidental or what intent underlay it, it seems clear in any case that the actual historicity or the specificity of the Buddhas was not a serious concern in their enumeration.

²⁵ The *Buddhavaṃsa* in the Pāli canon discusses twenty-five Buddhas from Dīpaṅkara to Gotama (Śākyamuni), but its twenty-eighth chapter names in addition three Buddhas preceding Dīpaṅkara, thus altogether twenty-eight (Jayawickrama 1974; Law 1938).

²⁶ The lower drum of a miniature *stūpa* from Loriyān-Tangai in the Indian Museum, Kolkata is carved with a band of twenty-four Buddhas (Figure 11). This may coincide with twenty-four Buddhas stated in the *Buddhavaṃsa* (excepting Śākyamuni). However, the tradition of counting twenty-four (or twenty-five) Buddhas seems to have been restricted to the Pāli tradition, and it appears hard to connect the Buddhas to the Pāli tradition without other evidence. Furthermore, the number of Buddhas carved on other *stūpas* is not consistent.

Or from the same perspective, the Buddha figures could be alternatively interpreted as numerous doubles miraculously created by Śākyamuni as a demonstration of his supernatural power and for ubiquitous propagation of his teaching, a tradition commonly found in Buddhist scriptures from early on.²⁷ Or if one takes the position that Gandhāran Buddhism incorporated more advanced features of the new Mahāyāna movement, one may wish to read such Buddhas as those specifically told of in the Mahāyāna textual tradition, numerous Buddhas – not necessarily named individually – concomitantly present in buddhafiels of the ten directions. Or visualized according to a conception that the Buddhist might have had in popular belief, the Buddha may be seen as emanating from the essence of the Buddha (Śākyamuni in most instances) preserved inside a *stūpa* in the form of corporeal relics.²⁸ I find the four possibilities equally possible. Still, in all of these cases we perceive little indication that we can distinguish these multiple Buddhas carved on Buddhist *stūpas* from one another in appearance or name.

Maitreya, the best known among future Buddhas and the immediate successor to Śākyamuni, was immensely popular in Gandhāran art in the form of a bodhisattva.²⁹ But whether or not Maitreya was shown in the form of Buddha images in Gandhāra is debatable. Although early *sūtras* remarking on the Maitreya cult often focus on Maitreya's career as a Buddha,³⁰ the singular prominence of Maitreya as a



Figure 11. Miniature *stūpa* from Loriyān Tangai, Swat.
Third century AD. Kolkata, Indian Museum.
(Photo: J. Rhi.)



Figure 12. False gable of a *stūpa* from Charsada, Peshawar valley. H. 55 cm. Third century AD. Formerly Gai collection, Peshawar. (After Ingholt and Lyons 1957: fig. 169.)

²⁷ Rhi 1991: 92-93.

²⁸ Schopen 1997; cf. Aramaki 2011.

²⁹ Rhi 2006; Rhi 2018b, cf. Luczanits 2005; Luczanits 2008a.

³⁰ See for example the Chinese *Ekottarika-āgama*, *Zengyi ahan jing*, T125, 2:787c-789c, 818c-820a, as well as *sūtras* devoted to Maitreya: *Mile xiasheng jing* (T453), *Mile dachengfo jing* (T456), and *Guan mile pusa shangsheng doushuaitian jing* (T452).

bodhisattva in Gandhāran art makes one wonder whether the aspect evoked in the textual tradition is readily applicable to Gandhāra. Still, one might propose that Maitreya Buddha was the intended subject of an image whose pedestal or base bears a scene of Maitreya Bodhisattva (Figures 13 and 14).³¹ In fact, a relief carved on the frontal face of an image pedestal/base is the only place in Gandhāran Buddha images (except for the case of Megha in Dīpaṅkara images) where a clue to the identity of the Buddha could have been encoded. Among depictions on the pedestal/base, there is limited variety and a meditating figure, often wearing a turban, probably Prince Siddhārtha, accounts for by far the majority.³² In a small number of examples, bodhisattva figures identifiable as Maitreya are found.³³ However, does a Maitreya Bodhisattva figure on a pedestal/base entail the image above being Maitreya Buddha? The image could equally be Śākyamuni, while Maitreya Bodhisattva on the pedestal/base simply means his successor and thus signify the continuation or rejuvenation of the Buddhist Dharma in the future. Otherwise, even if Maitreya existed among extant Buddha images, it would be impossible to identify them by appearance alone.

Some specialists in Indian Buddhism and Buddhist art have suspected the presence of Buddhas exclusive to the Mahāyāna context such as Amitābha and Akṣobhya in Gandhāran art.³⁴ Despite their ardent anticipation, which have been growing more conspicuous in recent decades, unequivocal visual evidence still remains scarce. A Buddha triad has been reported to carry an inscription that purportedly contains the words corresponding to Amitābha and Avalokiteśvara and thus would have been a definitive piece of



Figure 13. Buddha from Loriyan Tangai, Swat. H. 138 cm. Third century AD. Kolkata, Indian Museum. (Photo: J. Rhi.)



Figure 14. Pedestal of Figure 13. (Photo: J. Rhi.)

³¹ Huntington 1984.

³² In Buddhist visual scenes of the Kushan period from Gandhāra and Mathurā, the meditating princely figure is commonly identifiable with a theme from Śākyamuni Buddha's life, Prince Siddhārtha absorbed in the first meditation under a Jambu tree (Rhi 2006: 157–58; 2018b: 250). For the examples of a meditating bodhisattva carved on the image pedestal/base, see Kurita 1988–1990, vol. 1: figs. 195, 199, 223, 227, 240–242; for the discussion of its significance, Rhi 2013: 12–13.

³³ Huntington 1984: fig. 3; for other examples, Ingholt and Lyons 1957: no. 236 and two unpublished seated and standing Buddhas in National Museum, Karachi.

³⁴ Huntington 1980; Harrison and Luczanits 2012. The possible presence of Amitābha has been more frequently and seriously explored, while that of Akṣobhya has remained simply a possibility.

evidence for the Amitābha cult in Gandhāra (Figure 15).³⁵ However, a recent study dismisses the presence of both words, especially that of the name Amitābha with greater assurance, and thus the identification of the central Buddha of the triad as Amitābha seems problematic.³⁶ Even if the Buddha of the triad were indeed intended as Amitābha – although this seems quite unlikely to me – one should note that the particular type of Buddha, which shows *dharmacakramudrā* and wears the robe with the right shoulder bare, does not have a specific tie to Amitābha. We saw that the type was used for Śākyamuni and the past Buddha Krakucchanda in a stele comprising the seven Buddhas of the past and Maitreya on the base (Figure 5) as well as possibly for a Dīpaṅkara Buddha in Rawalpindi (Figure 9). Another triad with a Buddha of the same type has diverse scenes from the life of Śākyamuni Buddha carved on its base, and the central Buddha of the triad is most likely Śākyamuni (Figure 16). One might point out a lotus throne as an additional sign specifying Amitābha on the basis that a similar, gigantic lotus frequently appears as a seat for Amitābha in later depictions from East Asia (usually datable to the late sixth century or later).³⁷ However, the lotus invariably appears as a seat for the Buddha in triads of this type, some of which definitely include Śākyamuni Buddha.³⁸ Furthermore, the lotus is hardly mentioned as a seat for Amitābha Buddha in major textual accounts of Amitābha's paradise, Sukhāvātī, except for the *Guan wuliangshoufo jing*, or the *Amitābha Visualization Sūtra*, a text of dubious Indian origin.³⁹

Complex steles such as the famous Mohammed Nari stele in the Lahore Museum (alternatively transcribed Muhammad Nari) have constantly excited a number of scholars as possible representations of Amitābha in Sukhāvātī (Figure 17).⁴⁰ This identification, however, is highly questionable, as I have argued many times elsewhere.⁴¹ In one of the complex steles, the Buddha is seated in juxtaposition with a bodhisattva placed above, probably Maitreya or a previous incarnation of Śākyamuni in the Tuṣita heaven, and, contextually, Amitābha seems to have no place in this composition; the Buddha is most likely Śākyamuni (Figure 18). In another stele, two scenes from Śākyamuni Buddha's life appear in a false gable above the Buddha, and the seven Buddhas of the past and Maitreya Bodhisattva are carved on the base (Figure 19). It is hardly likely that the Buddha in this stele is other than Śākyamuni. These examples alone effectively refute the likelihood that the Buddha on a lotus in such complex steles represents Amitābha. Some scholars might hope to find in such complex steles as the Mohammed Nari stele, Akṣobhya, another important Buddha in the early Mahāyāna, who resides in a buddhafield in the east, Abhirati. Two Gāndhārī manuscripts recently discovered in Bajaur in the west of Swat speak of Akṣobhya and Abhirati in prominent forms and thus might provide circumstantial support for such aspiration, whereas no *Sukhāvātīyūha sūtras* have so far been identified among Gāndhārī Buddhist manuscript finds.⁴² Nonetheless, identifying Akṣobhya in

³⁵ Brough 1982. The inscription was read by Brough: *budhamitrāsa olo'ispare dhanamukhe budhamitrāsa amridaha...* (The Avalokiteśvara of Buddhāmītra, a sacred gift, the Amṛtābha of Buddhāmītra).

³⁶ Salomon and Schopen 2002. Salomon and Schopen revised the reading and translation: *dhamitrāsa oloispare danamukhe budhamitrāsa amridae...* (Gift of Dhamītra [sic] ... for the immortality of Buddhāmītra...). Though agreeing with the revised assessment of the inscription by Salomon and Schopen, Asao Iwamatsu (2006) and Seishi Karashima (2017) respectively indicated that *oloispare* must be equated with Avalokiteśvara and thus the triad must be Amitābha's. Many Japanese specialists believe that the inscription must be read as relating to Amitābha and Avalokiteśvara as in Brough's initial translation. I wonder whether this tendency among Japanese scholars may not reflect the distinctive historical background of Japanese Buddhism where sectarian groups related to the Amitābha cult have thrived. In any case, the presence of Avalokiteśvara alone cannot prove the supposition that the triad must be Amitābha's.

³⁷ For example, one may note the mural of the Amitābha triad and Fifty Bodhisattvas in Sukhāvātī in Dunhuang Mogao Cave 332 in China, a bronze Amitābha triad in the Tachibana miniature shrine from Japan, and the mural of Amitābha in the golden hall of Hōryūji in Nara (Higuchi 1950; Minamoto 1926). The lotus seats in these three examples might look similar to those found in Gandhāran triads or complex steles. However, the visual affinities do not ensure that they were used iconographically for the same identities.

³⁸ Rhi 1991: 110-21.

³⁹ Rhi 2013: 8-13; Rhi forthcoming, a. The lotus seat for Amitābha Buddha is prominently described in the seventh of the sixteen visualizations in the *Guan wuliangshoufo jing* (T365, 12:342c22-343a10).

⁴⁰ Huntington 1980; Quagliotti 1996; Fussman 1999; Harrison and Luczanits 2012.

⁴¹ Rhi 1991; 2003; 2008; 2011; forthcoming, a. [For an alternative proposal see Dessislava Vendova's paper in the present volume. Editors]

⁴² Strauch 2008: 123-25; Strauch 2010.



Figure 15. Buddha triad. Provenance unknown, Gandhāra. H. 29 cm. Third century AD. Sarasota, John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art. (Photo: Daderot, CC0, public domain.)



Figure 16. Buddha triad from Sahrī-Bahlol Mound A, Peshawar valley. H. 59 cm. Early third century. Peshawar Museum. (Photo: J. Rhi.)



Figure 17. Preaching Buddha stele from Mohammed Nari, Peshawar valley. H. 105 cm. Third century AD. Lahore Museum. (Photo: J. Rhi.)



Figure 18. Preaching Buddha stele. Provenance unknown, Gandhāra. H. 85 cm. Third century AD. Chandigarh Museum. (Photo: J. Rhi.)



Figure 19. Buddha triad stele from Mohammed Nari, Peshawar valley. H. 103 cm. Third century AD. Chandigarh Museum. (Photo: J. Rhi.)



Figure 20. Pedestal of an Amitābha Buddha image. From Govindnagar, Mathurā. 26th year of the Kaniṣka era (AD 152). Mathurā Museum. (Photo: J. Rhi.)

visual remains would face the same obstacle inherent in the Gandhāran imagery of Buddhas as in the case of Amitābha.

Yet an Amitābha statue base from Kushan Mathurā is known (Figure 20). It is inscribed with not only the name Amitābha but also the date, the twenty-sixth year of the Kaniṣka era (in the reign of Huviṣka), convertible to AD 152.⁴³ Unlike the dubious Amitābha triad from Gandhāra, the reading of Amitābha in this inscription is secure. Although the cultic context in which this image was created is debatable, it is obvious that a standing Amitābha image, whose feet alone are preserved on the base, was made as early as the mid-second century. This may enable one to presume that Amitābha as well as Amitābha imagery was also known in the contemporaneous North-West. However, even if Amitābha is present among extant independent statues from Gandhāra, we would not be able to discern them owing to the lack of specificity in iconography. Several inscriptions of Amitābha are found on rock boulders in the Chilas and Thalpan areas along an old route toward Gilgit in northern Pakistan.⁴⁴ They are not accompanied by images and are dated to the sixth to the eighth centuries, much later than the proper Gandhāran Buddhist images, and seem to differ contextually from the latter.

If we take a look at other parts of India such as Mathurā, Sārnāth, Āndhra Pradesh, and western Deccan, the situations are not significantly different from what we have seen in Gandhāra. In any Buddhist centres in India, up to the sixth century when esoteric Buddhism was gradually on the rise, Buddha images were made in quite a limited number of types. In Kushan Mathurā, after the adoption of the Gandhāran Buddha type during the mid-first century of the Kaniṣka era, i.e., around AD 180, two standing types and three seated types were mainly applied to the imagery of Buddhas. The two standing types are the same as those of Gandhāran standing Buddhas: the right hand is in *abhaya mudrā*, and the left hand holding the end of the robe is either raised or hanging down (see above). Two of the three seated types show *abhaya mudrā*, and a third one *dhyāna mudrā*. The two *abhaya mudrā* types are distinguished from each other depending on the exposure of the feet.⁴⁵ None of these types were apparently associated with particular Buddhas. Besides the inscribed Amitābha base, an inscribed image of Kāśyapa is known (Figure 21).⁴⁶ It has a very peculiar form outside the norm for Buddha images.⁴⁷ It perhaps represents an awkward early attempt before the emergence of fully established Buddha types in Mathurā, or it may not be an image of Kāśyapa Buddha at all. In Āndhra Pradesh, standing Buddhas dominated among independent statues (Figure 22).⁴⁸ They are typologically so monotonous that there appears little room for iconographically distinguishing them by name.

In Mathurā during the Gupta period, Buddha images were predominantly in the standing pose (Figure 23).⁴⁹ The Buddha usually shows *abhaya mudrā* with the right hand and holds the robe with the left

⁴³ Schopen 1987.

⁴⁴ Tsukamoto 1996-1998, vol. 3: Chilas 129, 135, Thalpan 43, 44, 53. In most of these inscriptions Amitābha is mentioned merely as one of a number of Buddhas venerated in multiple directions rather than an object of individual devotion. The names of some of the Buddhas mentioned with Amitābha are similar to those found in the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa-sūtra*. See Rhi forthcoming, a.

⁴⁵ Sharma 1995: fig. 97 (a standing Buddha with the left hand raised); figs. 112, 113, 114 (standing Buddhas with the left hand hanging down); figs. 95, 96, 100, 118 (seated Buddhas with the right hand in *abhaya mudrā* and the feet covered); figs. 104, 107, 116 (seated Buddhas with the right hand in *abhaya mudrā* and the feet revealed); figs. 103, 105, 110, 111, 121 (seated Buddhas with the hands in *dhyāna mudrā*). There are two examples distinguishable by their robes stitched together from castaway rags (Sharma 1995: figs. 98, 99). It is clear that this dress type is not intended to signify any particular Buddha. In Mathurā *dharma cakramudrā* is not found in the Kushan period but only in the early Gupta period (Figure 23 in this paper).

⁴⁶ This image was unearthed near Kanskhar in the city of Mathurā. Its inscription was read by V.S. Agrawala as follows: (*Ru*) *vakasa dānaṃ Devaputro Māgho Budhasa Kaśapasa / Padramahasthakena* (Gift of an image of the Buddha Kāśyapa by Ruvaka, chief of the village, of the Devaputra Māgho). Agrawala 1937; 1948: 75-76; cf. Vogel 1954: 812.

⁴⁷ Myer 1986: 136-37; Sharma 1995: 216-17.

⁴⁸ Rao 1984: figs. 174, 250, 256, 290, 318, 333, 442-444, 446-448.

⁴⁹ Williams 1982: pls. 18, 19, 61, 62, 64.



Figure 21. Kāśyapa Buddha (?) from Mathurā. H. 60 cm. Second century AD. Mathurā Museum. (Photo: Mathura Museum, after Sharma 1995: fig. 149.)



Figure 22. Buddha from Amarāvati. H. 197 cm. Third century AD. Amarāvati Museum. (Photo: J. Rhi.)



Figure 23. Buddha from Jamalpur, Mathurā. H. 220 cm. Mid-fifth century AD. Mathurā Museum. (Photo: J. Rhi.)

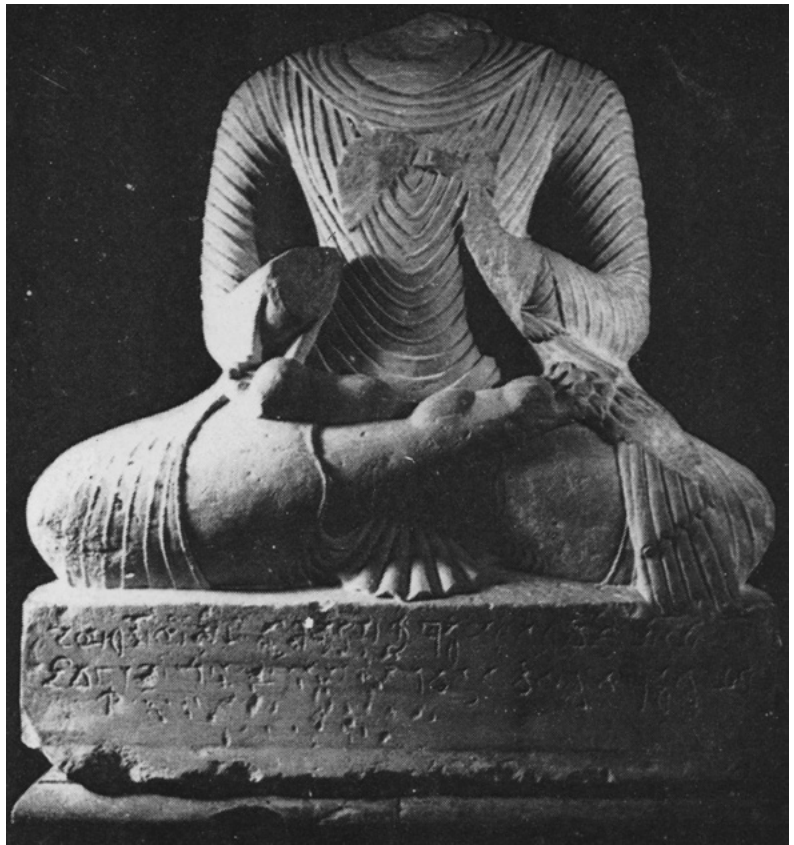


Figure 24. Dīpaṅkara Buddha(?) from Mathurā. Fourth century AD. Lucknow Museum. (After Sharma 1995: fig. 123.)

hand. Seated Buddhas were most commonly in the *abhayamudrā* pose.⁵⁰ An anomaly is an inscribed image of Dīpaṅkara Buddha in the Lucknow Museum (Figure 24).⁵¹ This Dīpaṅkara image, datable to the fourth century, is seated, wearing the robe with both shoulders covered, and the missing hands were probably held in *dharmacakramudrā*.⁵² The seated type in the preaching gesture itself is an extreme rarity in Mathurā,⁵³ and it is a puzzle why Dīpaṅkara Buddha would be shown in this rare posture, which became popular during the latter half of the fifth century in Sārnāth. In Sārnāth, which arose as another important centre of Buddhist sculpture in the Gangetic valley during the latter half of the fifth century and eventually replaced Mathurā, standing Buddhas are usually in *abhayamudrā*, but occasionally show *varadamudrā* (the wish-granting gesture) with the right hand.⁵⁴ Most of seated Buddhas hold hands in *dharmacakramudrā* (Figure 25), but a couple of them display *bhūmisparśamudrā* (the earth-touching gesture), which gained enormous popularity in the ensuing centuries in Bihar and Bengal.⁵⁵ Again, it seems least likely that any of these types were linked to particular Buddhas. At Ajaṇṭā, each of two *caitya* caves (nos. 19 and 26) created in its later phase (460s-470s) is installed with a *stūpa*, on the frontal side of which is carved a Buddha image apparently as the main object of worship.⁵⁶ It is hard to imagine that the Buddha images represent any particular Buddha other than Śākyamuni. In *vihāra* caves created in the same phase, seated Buddhas in *dharmacakramudrā* were uniformly placed inside the innermost shrines as cult statues (Figure 26). They are invariably carved with a wheel flanked by two deer on each side of the pedestal, a motif that obviously originated in the theme of Śākyamuni Buddha's First Sermon, though the motif could have been construed as a universal symbol for the propagation of Dharma by any Buddhas. Throughout these regions and periods, dedicatory inscriptions for images are extremely few compared with the number of extant images. Only a very small number of them specify the names of dedicated objects in their inscriptions. The majority of such examples are called simply the Buddha or other generic appellations such as *Bhagavan* (Blessed One), *Jīna* (Victor), and *Śāstr* (Teacher) as well as Śākyamuni and Śākyasiṃha (Lion of Śākyas).⁵⁷

What do all these examples we have seen tell us about the specification of Buddha images in Gandhāra as well as other centres of early Indian Buddhism? There were only a small number of iconographic types for Buddha images, far fewer than the variety of Buddhas we might expect to find on the basis of our knowledge of the textual tradition. Few of them are specified in dedicatory inscriptions. Only some of the inscribed examples are clearly identifiable as Śākyamuni. Even if there were other Buddhas derived from both non-Mahāyāna and Mahāyāna contexts, they all would have looked alike with little possibility of differentiation. Then, how can we explain this phenomenon?

⁵⁰ Williams 1982: pls. 22, 104.

⁵¹ This image was discovered in 1877 in the Jaisinghpura of the city of Mathurā by F. S. Growse while it was being used as a washing stone (Banerji 1912: 146-147). R.D. Banerji reads and translates the inscription: *Dēyadharmō-yaṃ Saṃ[ghatra-]kha(?) kuṭum[bi]nyā Buddha[syadhitu] Dhavaśrīyāyā // Dīvaṅkara[sya Buddhasaya pratimā] bhavatu sarva-satvānāṃ Buddhatvāya* ('This image of Dīpaṅkara [is] the votive offering of Dhavaśrīyā, the daughter of Buddha, and the wife of Saṃghatrakha (Saṃghotrāta?). Let it be for [the attainment of] Buddhahood by all sentient beings'). According to a note by Banerji, D.R. Sahni read the second line as '*Dīvaṅkara[sya bimbaṃ yadatra punyaṃ tad*'. Earlier Heinrich Lüders (1904: 155-56) was able to read only '*dā(?)va ... [sa]rvasatvānā[m] Buddhatvāya*' without the word '*Dīvaṅkara*'. This makes one wonder whether the reading of '*Dīvaṅkara*' is reliable.

⁵² R.C. Sharma dates the image to the late third or early fourth century based on the palaeography of the inscription. He also presumes that the right hand was in *abhayamudrā* and the left had been raised up to support the hem of the drapery (Sharma 1995: 201). However, the latter suggestion seems untenable.

⁵³ There is one more example from Mathurā in publication that most possibly held hands in *dharmacakramudrā* though both hands are broken (Williams 1982: pl. 67).

⁵⁴ For standing Buddhas with *abhayamudrā* from Sārnāth, see Williams 1982: pls. 85, 86, 89-92, 106; for those with *varadamudrā*, Tiwari 1998: pls. 23, 27, 29, 33, 34, 35.

⁵⁵ For seated Buddhas with *dharmacakramudrā* from Sārnāth, see Williams 1982: pls. 93, 94; for those with *bhūmisparśamudrā*, Tiwari 1998: pl. 52.

⁵⁶ Huntington 1985: figs. 12.7, 12.11.

⁵⁷ Tsukamoto 1996-1998, vol. 1: Ajaṇṭā 30, 37, 43, 67; Mathurā 4, 5, 17, 65, 80, 81, 102, 104, 105, 123, 129, 130, 134; Sārnāth 20, 202, 203.



Figure 25. Buddha (First Sermon) from Sārnāth.
H. 160 cm. 470s AD. Sārnāth Museum.
(Photo: J. Rhi.)



Figure 26. Buddha. Ajanta Cave 1. 470s AD. (Photo: Wikipedia Commons CC BY-SA 4.0 – Vasukrishnan57 <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Buddha_at_Ajanta_Cave_1.jpg>)

Theoretically, one could say that all the Buddhas represented in independent statues were, in fact, none other than Śākyamuni. In this case, our expectation of finding other Buddhas such as Amitābha would be simply futile. However, we saw the strong possibility that there were past Buddhas in forms exactly identical to Śākyamuni; perhaps we merely have not been able to discern them. We do not rule out the possible presence of Maitreya as well. There was also one instance from Kushan Mathurā of Amitābha specified in a dedicatory inscription. Although it is only a single instance, it denies the total absence of such Buddhas. Thus, it would be hasty to treat the lack of distinguishability as evidence for uniformity in identity.

If we look at early Chinese Buddhist art, we witness the same phenomenon prevailing. There are only a small number of types for Buddha images, in the same way as in the early Indian tradition. Although we should be more than cautious in projecting our knowledge of the Chinese tradition back to India, it is quite possible at least in this phenomenon that the Chinese inherited the practice from India. The only difference is that the Chinese Buddhists were much more eager to inscribe their dedications and specify what they were. Interestingly enough, images of exactly identical forms are often named differently in inscriptions. For example, three Buddha images shown here (Figures 27 to 29) were made in the last quarter of the fifth century according to the dates given in the dedicatory inscriptions.⁵⁸ Two of them (Figures 28 and 29) were dedicated in Hebei province, and a third one, a gilt bronze image (Figure

⁵⁸ These three images are reproduced with the transcription of the inscriptions in Matsubara 1995: pls. 35b, 91-94 (text volume: 247, 254).



Figure 27. Śākyamuni Buddha. China. Northern Wei, dated AD 475. H. 35 cm. Hebei Province Museum. (After Matsubara 1995: pl. 35b.)



Figure 28. Dīpaṅkara Buddha. China. Northern Wei, dated AD 495. H. 370 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art. (Photo: Metropolitan Museum of Art, CC0.)



Figure 29. Maitreya Buddha. China. Northern Wei, dated AD 499. H. 95 cm. Cleveland Museum of Art. (Photo: Cleveland Museum of Art, CC0.)

27), was also most likely from the same area.⁵⁹ They show considerable discrepancies in material and size but are essentially no different in the postures and the modes of dressing. Intriguingly, they are called by different names in the inscriptions, Śākyamuni, Dīpaṅkara, and Maitreya. However, without the inscribed names, they would have been indistinguishable. Only for the Dīpaṅkara image (Figure 28), a small figure with the hands folded together in *añjali*, who must be Megha, was added below the left hand of the Buddha.⁶⁰ Except for this additional element, the Buddhas look identical in iconography. The practice of using a limited number of types for Buddhas of different names without iconographic distinctions was a prevalent phenomenon in Chinese Buddhist art, especially in its early phase.⁶¹ We could presume the identical situation prevailing in India except that the great majority of images are simply not specified in inscriptions. It may not be unimaginable that there were Buddhas other than Śākyamuni, such as past Buddhas, Maitreya, and perhaps Amitābha or Akṣobhya in Gandhāra as well as some, if not all, other contemporary centres of Indian Buddhist art.

Then, a question naturally arises: if a Buddha was made with a particular name, why would the sculptor or the commissioner/donor have run the risk of the image being confused in appearance with the images

⁵⁹ The inscriptions state that the two stone images were dedicated in Dingzhou located in central Hebei. The provenance of the third image is not given in the inscription, but most of such gilt bronze images from the late fifth century were also from Hebei.

⁶⁰ This manner of signifying Dīpaṅkara must have been derived from Dīpaṅkara images of the Kapiśi area in eastern Afghanistan (Figure 9) where standing Buddhas of identical type were used for both Śākyamuni and Dīpaṅkara, in the latter case with the insertion of Megha prostrating at the feet of the Buddha, as seen in a stele found at Shotorak (Figure 30).

⁶¹ To take other examples from a comprehensive catalogue of Chinese Buddha images by Matsubara Saburō, a Maitreya Buddha (dated 451), a Wuliangshou (Amitābha/Amitāyus) Buddha (476), and a Śākyamuni Buddha (493) are all in the same meditation pose (Matsubara 1995: pls. 20, 21, 51, 52, 85a, 85b); two stone statues unearthed at the Xiudesi site, Quyang in Hebei are respectively inscribed as Śākyamuni and Maitreya while they are identical in being seated in the same *pralambapādāsāna*/*bhadrāsāna* pose and showing *abhaya mudrā* (Matsubara 1995: pls. 175a, 175b).

of different Buddhas? A possible answer is that early Buddhists thought that regardless of differences in names, Buddhas were ultimately one and need not be configured in disparate shapes. We know that in the textual tradition Buddhas were often described in an identical manner in terms of their careers and appearances evidently modelled after Śākyamuni. For example, the *Mahāpadāna-suttanta* of the Pāli *Dīgha-nikāya* and its equivalents in the Chinese Āgamas elucidate the origin, age, family, conception, birth, physical appearance, enlightenment, and propagation activities of Vipāśyin (Vipassin) Buddha, the first of the seven Buddhas of the past, in an identical manner with those of Śākyamuni – as an exemplar of the seven Buddhas of the past.⁶² The beginning of these accounts reads:

Now Vipassi, brethren [*bhikkhave*: monks], when, as Bodhisat [bodhisattva, a previous incarnation of Vipassi], he ceased to belong to the hosts of the heaven of Delight [Tusita], descended into his mother's womb mindful and self-possessed. That, in such a case, is the rule...

It is the rule, brethren, that, on the seventh day after the birth of a Bodhisat, the mother of the Bodhisat dies, and rises again in the heaven of Delight. That, in such a case, is the rule...

It is the rule, brethren, that, when a Bodhisat issues from his mother's womb, two showers of water appear from the sky, one of cold, the other of warm water, wherewith they do the needful bathing of the Bodhisat and of his mother. That, in such a case, is the rule...

It is the rule, brethren, that, when a Bodhisat has come to birth, he stands firm on both feet and, with his face to the north, takes seven strides ... looking around on every side, he utters as with the voice of a bull: 'Chief am I in the world! Eldest am I in the world, Foremost am I in the world! This is the last birth! There is now no more coming to be!' That, in such a case, is the rule.⁶³

In the account cited above, every act of the Buddha is defined with the words 'That is the rule' (*dhammatā esā*). This means that it is performed as 'the rule for all the Buddhas', as in the expression 'zhufo changfa' used in the Chinese *Dīrgha-āgama*.⁶⁴ The same idea is found in the remark on Maitreya Buddha in the *Ekottarika-āgama* preserved only in Chinese:

All the Buddha-Bhagavan are of the same kind. Their disciplines, emancipation, and wisdom are no different. The emptiness, signlessness, and aimlessness are also the same. The thirty-two great marks and the eighty-two lesser marks, which adorn their bodies with unwearied satisfaction, are the same.⁶⁵

Accounts of Amitābha or Akṣobhya in the texts devoted to the two Buddhas may be slightly different. What directly reminds us of Śākyamuni is much less in those texts because they obviously reflect different stages and different lines of thought in Buddhist scriptural history. Their focus is generally on the description of the vows made by the previous incarnations of the two Buddhas and the depiction of the buddhafi elds they eventually achieve. However, in the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha*, prior to the account of the career of the monk Dharmakara, a previous incarnation of Amitābha, we find the enumeration of dozens of Buddhas from Dīpaṅkara to Lokeśvararāja, the contemporary of Dharmakara.⁶⁶ This indicates

⁶² DN 14, II: 11-54 (cf. Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids 1899-1921, II: 8-41); *Chang ahan jing*, T1, 1:3c-10c; *Qifo jing*, T2, 1:152b-154a; *Piposhifo jing*, T3, 1:154b-158b. The parallels of the seven Buddhas of the past in diverse aspects such as their eons, families, bodhi trees, and the numbers of their disciples are also described in the *sūtras* above as well as the *Qifo fumu xingzi jing* (T4) and the *Zengyi ahan jing* (T125.48.4). The description of this kind is extended to a thousand Buddhas in the *Bhadrakalpika-sūtra* (T425, 14:50b-58c).

⁶³ Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids 1899-1921, vol. 2: 8-12; cf. T1, 1:3c14-4c15 (the annotations in the parentheses inserted in the citation above are mine). The words 'That is the rule' are found only in the earliest part of the description of the acts of Vipāśyin Buddha owing to the change in the mood of the discourse.

⁶⁴ *Chang ahan jing*, T1, 1:3c-4c.

⁶⁵ *Zengyi ahan jing*, T125, 2:754b19-22.

⁶⁶ *Amituo sanyesānfo saloufotan guodu rendao jing*, T362, 12:300b19-c19; *Wulaing qingjing pingdengjue jing*, T361, 12:280a2-25; *Wuliangshou jing*, T266c23-267a16 (cf. Gómez 1996, 161-62); for the Sanskrit version see Kagawa 1984: 78-84 (cf. Gómez 1996:

that Amitābha was also placed in a lineage of past Buddhas in this text. The Chinese *Wuliangshou jing* and its equivalent in the Chinese *Ratnakūṭa-sūtra* describe how bodhisattvas attending the assembly of Amitābha's sermon will be born (from the right side of their mothers), attain enlightenment (by defeating Māra), give the first sermon (by the entreaty of Brahmā and Indra), and enter *parinirvāṇa* – in an identical course to Śākyamuni's.⁶⁷ In the *Akṣobhyaavyūha*, Akṣobhya Buddha is also described as descending from the Tuṣita heaven, entering the womb of the mother, being born from her right side, and defeating Māra in the same way as Śākyamuni.⁶⁸ These accounts show that the idea of Śākyamuni's life formed a fundamental basis for imagining all other Buddhas including Amitābha and Akṣobhya. If Amitābha and Akṣobhya are present among Buddha images from early India, which we have seen as being unspecified in iconography, we cannot but attribute the phenomenon to the notion that regardless of specific names such as Amitābha or Akṣobhya, Buddhas should be the one and the same in appearance.

This may answer the question to a certain extent. However, this must have had a significant but perplexing consequence. If an image was indistinguishable in appearance, would the difference in the name that might have been given to the image at the time of production or dedication have *mattered* at all? Except for the donor or others who were directly involved in making and dedicating



Figure 30. Śākyamuni (centre) and Dīpaṅkara (left) Buddhas from a triad. H. 95 cm. From Shotorak, Kabul valley. H. 71 cm. Third to fourth century AD. Formerly Kabul Museum. (Photo: after Meunié 1942: pl. XI.38.)

an image, ordinary viewers would not have had any sense of the difference, unless there was a label attached to it that manifestly stated its identity. Making distinctions would stop at the moment of dedication. Afterward, they would have looked the same as other images that were initially named differently, perhaps except for an extremely small number of instances in which the memory of special significance was deliberately cherished within the monastery or the community surrounding it. This warns us that the pursuit of iconographical idiosyncrasy, though it is often considered a major task for Buddhist art specialists, has a limited significance at least in dealing with Buddha images. Even if an Amitābha image was dedicated, what significance was there, inasmuch as it was not to be recognized by viewers?

Here it is also worth remembering that images were often made as material offerings – except for a limited number of special occasions. Especially at Gandhāran Buddhist monasteries in the central part of the Peshawar valley where such important sites as Takht-i-Bāhī, Sahrī-Bahlol, and Jamālgaṛhī are located, numerous images of the Buddha or Buddhas and bodhisattvas were dedicated apparently as

64–65).

⁶⁷ *Wuliangshou jing*, T265c26–266a24 (cf. Gómez 1996: 155–57); *Dabaoji jing*, T310(5), 11:91c23–92a14. The description of the acts of bodhisattvas is not found in other versions of the *Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha* including the extant Sanskrit version. However, it does not seem likely that such accounts were inserted by the translators of the two Chinese *sūtras*. I find it more plausible that they reflect the notion that underlies imagining the lives of various Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

⁶⁸ *Achufoguo jing*, T313, 11:754c19–755a4.



Figure 31. Multiple image shrines in the lower stūpa court of Takht-i-Bāhī. (Photo: J. Rhi.)

votive offerings and installed inside a series of small shrines surrounding stūpa courts (Figure 31).⁶⁹ In a structure like this, the individual significance or importance of each image must have been easily lost in the midst of multiple dedications in aligned shrines. Images were material objects in the first place, not replacements for particular Buddhas. This should be a part of the reason why the Buddha says in a famous passage from the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-Prajñāpāramitā* that there is no Buddha inside a Buddha image but the making of a Buddha image is encouraged simply to enable devotees to acquire merit.⁷⁰ Though our knowledge of the way Buddhist images were installed in other parts of the Indian subcontinent is scanty, the situation may not have been significantly different from Gandhāra. The fact that as many as dozens of Buddha images datable to the latter half of the fifth century were discovered at the Isipatana (Rṣipatana) monastery in Sārnāth indicates that they were most likely votive dedications made in a short period.⁷¹ In dedicatory inscriptions from India proper, we find little indication of a connection between the identity of an image and a religious benefit to be accrued by the act of dedication. A similar phenomenon is visible in a much more conspicuous and complex form in early Chinese Buddhist art. For example, the inscription of the Maitreya image dedicated in 499 (Figure 29) tells a wish that the parents, retinues, and teachers of the donor will be reborn in the buddhafiield of Wuliangshou (Amitābha/Amitāyus) in the west and simultaneously attend the three Dharma assemblies (of Maitreya Buddha) under *Longhua* (Nāgapuṣpa), Maitreya's bodhi tree.⁷² This anomaly is often construed as an indication of

⁶⁹ Rhi 1994b.

⁷⁰ "[The bodhisattva Dharmodgata said] "...After the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha, people have made his images. Anyone who sees a Buddha image kneels and pay homage. The image is good-looking and has all the distinctive *lakṣaṇas*, thus being no different from the real Buddha... O wise one, would you say that *foṣhen* [the Buddha or the deity Buddha or the spirit of the Buddha] is in the image?" The bodhisattva Sadāprarudita replied, "It is not there. The reason for making Buddha images is merely to have people obtain merit from it..." (Daoxing banruo jing, T224, 8:476b17-24; cf. Rhi 2006: 204; Karashima 2011: 525-526).

⁷¹ For the finds of Sārnāth see Sahni 1914.

⁷² For the inscription, Matsubara 1995: text volume, 254 (pls. 91, 92). In some instance as seen in a gilt bronze image from Korea dated 571, the Tuṣita heaven was named as a desirable destination in the afterlife in dedicating an Amitābha image

the lack of proper understanding of particular cults and their subsidiary elements.⁷³ However, it can be equally seen as reflecting the insufficient recognition of the specificity of individual Buddhas. In India as well, even when a particular Buddha other than Śākyamuni was created as a visual image, we cannot be sure to what extent it mirrored any serious notion of the distinctiveness of the Buddha.

In Buddhist scriptures of the pre-Mahāyāna phase, references to Buddha images are relatively rare. When they occur, they generally concern the worship, making, and adornment of images. They are usually called ‘Buddha image’ (*buddhapratimā*, *buddhabimba*, *buddhavigraha*) or its equivalents with other appellations of the Buddha such as ‘Tathāgata’ or ‘Sugata’ (*tathāgatapratimā*, *sugatabimba*, etc.), or simply ‘image’ (*pratimā*, *bimba*, *vigraha*), which can be understood contextually as signifying ‘Buddha image’.⁷⁴ As in dedicatory inscriptions, the names of particular Buddhas are attached to such words only extremely rarely.⁷⁵ The ‘Buddha image’ we find in the textual tradition may signify the image of Śākyamuni Buddha – as modern-era Buddhists commonly use ‘the Buddha’ in the sense of ‘Śākyamuni Buddha’ or reflecting the fact that the majority of Buddha images in both textual and visual traditions were Śākyamuni. However, it could also mean the image of *any*, unspecified, Buddha. As the term ‘Buddha image’ is generic, a Buddha represented in an image could be equally generic. A famous passage in the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra* enthusiastically recommends making images of Sugata (Buddha) as a method that will lead a devotee to Buddhahood.⁷⁶ The ‘Sugata image’ can be those of any Buddhas, not only of Śākyamuni.

In another early Mahāyāna *sūtra*, the *Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*, which elucidates the visualization of the Buddhas of the present age especially focusing on Amitābha, Śākyamuni Buddha speaks of the following four methods that enable one to attain the *samādhi* quickly:

1. Making a Buddha image or a picture (of the Buddha);
2. Taking a fine piece of plain silk and having somebody copy this *samādhi*(-*sūtra*);
3. Teaching conceited people to enter the Buddha’s Way;
4. Always preserving the Buddha’s Dharma.⁷⁷

Here the ‘Buddha image’ is, as usual, not specified. Despite the close association of this *sūtra* to the early Amitābha cult, there is no clue that it was meant as an Amitābha image. Rather, contextually it seems to mean images of any Buddha or a generic Buddha. Four texts I previously cited for their relevance to Gandhāran examples of Buddha triads on lotuses or complex steles representing a preaching Buddha seated on a lotus – *Sumatidārikapariṣṭhā*, *Vimaladattāpariṣṭhā*, *Bhadrakalpika-sūtra*, and *Bodhisambhāra-śāstra* – commonly recommend, also in a generic way, the making of a Buddha figure seated on a lotus as a means to attain spontaneous birth (*upapāduka*) or a *samādhi*.⁷⁸ The remark in these texts on attaining spontaneous birth might give an impression that it relates to a rebirth in a paradise such as Sukhāvatī (of Amitābha), Tuṣita (of Maitreya Bodhisattva), or even Abhirati (of Akṣobhya). However, they simply state the making of a Buddha image without any allusion to a particular Buddha. The lack of specificity

(National Museum of Korea 1990: no. 9, the inscription in 164).

⁷³ For example, see Kuno 1989.

⁷⁴ A good example is the famous passage in the ‘*Upāyakaṣṣālyaparivarta*’ chapter of *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra* that encourages the making of Buddha images in various materials for the attainment of Buddhahood. In this passage, we find ‘*bimba*’, ‘*vigraha*’, ‘*sugatāna bimba*’, ‘*sugatāna vigraha*’ being used interchangeably (Vaidya 1960: 35-36, 2.83-2.85, 2.94; cf. Kern 1884: 50-52).

⁷⁵ A cursory search of Chinese Buddhist texts of the pre-esoteric phase in the CBETA digital database yields only a few instances of Buddha images specified with the names of particular Buddhas: Vipāśyi Buddha (*Zabaozang jing*, trans. Jijiye and Tanyao, late fifth century, T203, 4:458b23); Kāśyapa Buddha (*Zhengfa nianchu jing*, trans. Gautama Prajñāruci, mid-fifth century, T721, 17:179c26; *Zazang jing*, trans. Faxian, early fourth century, T745, 17:560a12-13).

⁷⁶ See above, n. 73.

⁷⁷ *Banzhou sanmei jing*, T418, 13:906a25-28; cf. Harrison 1998: 23-24. The Sanskrit version of this *sūtra* is not extant. The Tibetan version translates the equivalent part for ‘Buddha image’ as ‘*de zin gSegs pa’i sku gsugs*’ (Harrison 1978: 40, cf. Harrison 1990: 46), which must have been *tathāgatapratimā* or *tathāgatapratibimba* in the Indic original. In checking this part in the Tibetan version and speculating as to the Indic original, Ahn Sung-doo kindly offered help.

⁷⁸ Rhi 2003: 169-70.

in the usage of the word ‘Buddha image’ and its equivalents in the Buddhist textual tradition bolsters the reasoning that the same may apply to actual Buddha images.

This leads us to a final point I wish to discuss. In pondering the identity of the famous Mohammed Nari stele from Gandhāra, I previously suggested that it must be related to a vision attained in a *samādhi* experience.⁷⁹ It was possibly the recreation of such a vision one experienced in the middle of practice or in a dream, although it must have been naturally affected by what one had previously read and seen. I have questioned whether the central Buddha would necessarily have been a particular Buddha as a number of scholars had aspired to see in this stele. It may have been initiated as Śākyamuni Buddha or even an unnamed generic Buddha. If it was used in due course for viewing or a visualization practice, it could have been open to diverse kinds of assimilation in identity – as Śākyamuni, a generic Buddha, or even Amitābha, Akṣobhya, or Dīpaṅkara. I suspect that this generic nature and deliberate ambiguity, which was an important aspect of Buddha images in early Indian Buddhism, have caused so much scholarly dispute in the attempt to pin down its identity.⁸⁰ The unspecificity of the Buddha and the consequent possibility of openness in identification may have been the destiny of most of Buddha images in the pre-esoteric phase of Buddhist art.

I have been searching for textual accounts that may support my supposition. A passage perhaps closest to my idea is found in a *sūtra* in Chinese translation, the *Dafangguangfo huayan jing busiyi fojingjie fen* (The section of the mysterious realm of the Buddha of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra*; translated by Devaprajñā, late seventh century), supposedly a chapter of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* but not actually incorporated in the current Chinese versions of this *sūtra*. The bodhisattva Samantabhadra tells another bodhisattva the following to explain how to practice *prajñā* (wisdom):

If one seeks with pleasure the supreme enlightenment and desires to have this *samādhi* [of the mysterious realm] attained, one must leave all the vain deeds, harmful words, and polluted thoughts, generate the pure mind, and embrace others with great sympathy. One must go to a temple and behold a Buddha image residing in peace and without moving, adorned with gold plates or made of pure gold, endowed with all the [thirty-two] marks, having the limbs satisfying, and [provided with] innumerable Buddhas subtly decorated in alignment in the nimbus. [One must] be seated with the legs crossed, enter the *samādhi*, venerate [the image] with sincerity, and think thus: ‘I heard that all the Buddha-Bhagavan are boundless and countless. They are namely Sarvārthasiddhi, Amitābha, Ratnapata, Akṣobhya, Vairocana, Ratnacandra, Ratnasūrya, etc. I have faith with pleasure and adore their expansiveness’.⁸¹

Samantabhadra continues to tell that if one keeps reflecting on the Buddhas and venerates the Buddha image, all the Buddhas will appear in front of one. This passage discusses the visualization of innumerable Buddhas through beholding a Buddha image. The Buddha image is not that of a particular Buddha but a kind of device that engenders the visualization of all the Buddhas. Samantabhadra also points out that even the Buddhas thus visualized as if realities are mere ‘images’. We note in this passage that specifying a Buddha in an image as any particular Buddha is not intended and is believed to be essentially futile. Though I regret that the Chinese translation of this text is dated somewhat late, to the seventh century, this kind of thought could have been inherent in Buddhist thought from early on.

Recently I encountered a passage in the *Daesheng silun xuanyiji*, a commentary on four exegetical texts of the Madhyamaka, which is dated to the sixth to the seventh century and attributed by some scholars

⁷⁹ Rhi 2003: 177-79.

⁸⁰ See nn. 34, 40 above.

⁸¹ T300, 10:907c10-20.

to a Korean monk.⁸² The text argues that the dharma body (*fashen*, *dharmakāya*) of all the Buddhas of the ten directions and its responsive applications (*yingyong*; or perhaps implying its reward body [*sambhogakāya*] and transformed body [*nirmāṇakāya*]) are the same.

All the Buddhas of the ten directions share the same dharma body, and their responsive applications are the same. If the responsive applications of all the Buddhas of the ten directions were not the same, their dharma body would not be the same.⁸³

The text goes on to say:

Next, I elucidate the perception (*gan*) with comprehensiveness (*zong*) and the response (*ying*) with separateness (*bie*). In this perception there is separateness again, and in [this] response there is comprehensiveness again. Let us clarify this with an example. If a thousand or ten thousand people create a Buddha image together, this is the perception with comprehensiveness. However, since what they pray for varies individually, some sees Śākyamuni, and some sees Maitreya. Even though they execute a single act and the meaning of their perception is comprehensive, [what they] obtain in response varies individually, and this is the response with separateness.⁸⁴

This passage states that a single Buddha image made collectively by many people can be seen by someone as Śākyamuni and by another as Maitreya, though what they see is ultimately one. It suggests that the Buddha in an image may not have the original name but that it can be viewed and prayed to with different names. It also shows that a Buddha image may not have a fixed identity at the time of creation, while its reception can vary instantly even right from the moment of its creation. Although it is a testimony in an East Asian text from the sixth to the seventh century, this remark strongly points to the possibility that a similar notion was indeed present earlier in Indian Buddhism as well. I believe that locating parallel thoughts in early Indian texts should be possible, once attention is seriously paid to this aspect.

What I have discussed in this paper mainly concerns Gandhāra. But this was obviously a prevalent phenomenon in other parts of India as well in the pre-esoteric period. All this began to change with the rise of esotericism in Indian Buddhism. In the esoteric Buddhist sources, we begin to find meticulous codification of iconographic details for individual divinities, including Buddhas assigned to the four cardinal directions and centre, within a comprehensive diagram called a *maṇḍala*. It became possible to distinguish the five Buddhas within a *maṇḍala* by their specific *mudrās*.⁸⁵ The names of various *mudrās* we use so commonly and take for granted in Buddhist art scholarship appear for the first time in esoteric sources within the Buddhist textual tradition.⁸⁶ I cannot tell precisely what generated these changes. Perhaps influence from Hinduism, where such marked ambiguities as

⁸² I became acquainted with this passage through a discussion note presented by Ch'oe Yönsik at a conference commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Art History Association of Korea in October 2010 (Ch'oe 2010) and was thrilled to find a comment that supports what I have long thought about the iconographical identification of images in Buddhist art. It was Ch'oe (2009) who published the first critical edition of the *Daesheng silun xuanyiji* and suggested that the author of the text, Hyegyün (or Huijün in Chinese), was most probably a monk from a Korean kingdom, Paekche.

⁸³ Ch'oe 2009: 249

⁸⁴ Ch'oe 2009: 250.

⁸⁵ Bhattacharyya 1968: 42-81.

⁸⁶ The word *shiwuwei yin*, a common Chinese translation of *abhaya mudrā*, seems to first appear during the seventh and eighth centuries in such esoteric texts as the *Guanzizai pusa suixinzhou jing* (trans. Zhitong, 653, T1103, 20:460a4), the *Bukong juansuo shenbian zhenyan jing* (trans. Bodhiruci, 707-709, T1092, 20:248c3, etc.), the *Dapiluzhena chengfo shenbian jiachi jing* (trans. Śubhakarasiṃha, 725, T848, 18:25a12, etc.), and the *Yijizun tuoluoni jing* (trans. Amoghavajra, mid-eighth century, T1110, 20:486a21). All other occurrences are found in the esoteric texts of the Song dynasty or later. The word *yuyuan yin* (*varadamudrā*), wish-granting gesture is also noticed for the first time in esoteric texts from the eighth century such as the *Dapiluzhena chengfo shenbian jiachi jing* (T848, 18:25a18) and the *Dapiluzhena jing guangda yigui* (T851, 18:95c28).

in Buddha images did not exist and a tendency to articulate the relationships of a large number of deities in the religious and visual hierarchy was prominent, was part of the reason. Emphasis on the identification of a practitioner with a deity represented in a visual image in Buddhist esotericism may have been another reason. The new conception of iconography dominated some sectors of Buddhism and Buddhist imagery, while old practices persisted in others. In any case, Buddhist art specialists' predilection for iconographical distinction probably started with the origin of the discipline based on its initial familiarity with the late phase of Buddhist art in India or the regional traditions in Tibet and Japan, which both were dominated or greatly affected by the esoteric tradition.⁸⁷

This paper started with a question presented in its title: does iconography really matter? To be clear, my intention is not to argue that iconography is unimportant or useless. Iconographical identification is no doubt an indispensable first step in reading visual images. I just wish to point out that in order properly to explain the complex and baffling phenomenon observed in early Buddha images, we probably need a whole new outlook in viewing iconography.⁸⁸

Glossary

bie	別
fashen	法身
foshen	佛神
gan	感
Hyegyun	慧均
shiwuweiyyin	施無畏印
ying	應
yingyong	應用
yuyuanyin	與願印
zhufo changfa	諸佛常法
zong	總

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⁸⁷ Grünwedel 1893; Foucher 1900-1905; Ono 1916; 1917.

⁸⁸ The problem of iconographical distinguishability may not be limited to Buddha images. I have discussed it regarding bodhisattva images as well in a recent work (Rhi 2018b).

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Solving the riddle of the ‘Muhammad Nari Stele’: a new look

Dessislava Vendova

The Muhammad Nari Stele and its Mahāyāna connection: a different view

The so-called ‘Muhammad Nari Stele,’¹ one of the most famous Buddhist artefacts from Gandhāra, has long been the subject of scholarly disagreement. This richly and elaborately carved ‘complex stele’ has long puzzled art historians and Buddhologists ever since its discovery in what is today Pakistan’s Peshawar region. Scholars have unsuccessfully tried to match it to various textual sources, but the mystery of what and who is represented in the stele is still an unanswered riddle.

The earliest and long-held identification has been that it depicts Śākyamuni Buddha’s Great Miracle at Śrāvastī, an interpretation first put forward by Alfred Foucher more than a hundred years ago (Foucher 1909).² Still, that interpretation has been challenged in recent years, and other interpretations have been suggested instead. Among some of the newer interpretations is that the scene depicted is of Amitābha’s paradise Sukhāvātī, or of Akṣobhya’s paradise Abhiratī, or finally, of the preaching of the Lotus Sūtra.³ Various texts (such as chapter twelve of the *Divyāvadāna* (*Prātihārya-sutra*), the *Lotus Sutra*, The Larger and Smaller *Sukhāvātīvyūha* sutras, *Aṣobhyatathāgatasyavyūha*, etc.) have in turn been suggested as the sources for this and similar artworks (Miyaji 2011: 128). A critical component in the identification is to determine who is the Buddha represented in the centre of the stele. Since all buddhas look exactly alike, it is difficult to give a definitive identification, and thus the different interpretations have each suggested different Buddhas. Various textual sources have been considered, many of them belonging to the Mahāyāna.

As already mentioned, the initial and long-standing identification for this and other similar steles was put forward by the famous art historian Alfred Foucher, who saw them as an elaborate representation of the Great Miracle of Śrāvastī (Foucher 1909). Japanese scholars, such as Nakao Odani and Akira Miyaji, ‘also [identified] the central figure as Śākyamuni, but Śākyamuni in the radiant form he displays before teaching such Mahāyāna sutras as the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, the *Sandhinirmocana*, the *Tathāgatagarbha* and so on. Miyaji refers to this event as the “Miracle of Great Light” (Harrison and Luczanits 2011: 72).

In a paper of 1980, John Huntington was the first to argue that the Muhammad Nari stele represented the Buddha Amitāyus in Sukhāvātī, using as his textual source the Sanskrit text of the *Larger Sukhāvātīvyūha* (Huntington 1980). In particular, his very important contribution to the study of the stele is his attention to a small scene of the Buddha speaking to a person (probably a monk; see Figure 5 below for an image of the detail), which Huntington has suggested indicates that the Buddha is directing a worshipper to the vision of the central Buddha. This direction according to Huntington should thus be read as Śākyamuni displaying the magnificence of Sukhāvātī to Ānanda as recounted in the *Larger Sukhāvātīvyūha* (Huntington 1980: 658; Rhi 2003: 173). As we will see, Huntington was correct to point

¹ It should be noted that this name is somewhat misleading, as it is not the only image of this kind found at Muhammad Nari (also sometimes spelled ‘Mohammad Nari’ or ‘Mohammed Nari’), but since the name is commonly used to refer to this particular stele, it is retained here.

² For a discussion of the Śrāvastī miracle representations in early Buddhist art see Brown 1984.

³ I will not be going in detail about the various interpretations. For a detailed recent overview of the different interpretations of this stele, and for their own interpretation in favour of its representing Amitābha’s Sukhāvātī, see Harrison and Luczanits 2011.

out that the Buddha (indeed Śākyamuni, as we will see) is directing someone, a specific monk in fact (his disciple Mahā-Maudgalyāyana) toward the narrative represented in the stele.⁴

Questioning Huntington's identification of the stele, Gregory Schopen points out that it may also be read as Śākyamuni directing Ānanda to the vision of Abhirati of Akṣobhya as stated in the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, but that the stele may represent neither Abhirati nor Sukhāvati (Schopen 1987: 130-131, n. 50; Rhi 2003: 173). Schopen points out that there is no tangible evidence to suggest that any of those Mahāyāna cults were in existence in India until a few centuries later, and certainly not in the early centuries AD (Schopen 1987).

Importantly, Schopen stresses, 'if we are to make any progress in our understanding, we may have to finally and fully realize that the history of Mahāyāna *literature* and the history of the religious movement that bears the same name are not necessarily the same thing.' (Schopen 1987: 125). After these pertinent and important remarks by Schopen, that the early existence of Mahāyāna texts does not necessarily indicate that they were influential for the practice on the ground, including image-making, we can now again return to the discussion of the Muhammad Nari stele and what could be represented on it.

Huntington's interpretation did not find a big following at that time, as '[his] treatment of this topic appeared to go against the grain of studies of Gandhāran art, which tended to explain that art entirely in terms of Mainstream Buddhism' (Harrison and Luczanits 2011: 72). As we will see, this scepticism was possibly warranted. Following Huntington's approach, further scholars consequently have attempted to understand the stele. Anna Maria Quagliotti (1996) came to largely the same conclusion as Huntington, while Gérard Fussman first accepted Huntington's view, but later distanced himself somewhat from it in favour of a more generic Buddha-field (Fussman 1987; 1999).

Juhyung Rhi (2011: 115) takes the stele to represent possibly a vision or a visual aid, writing:

... the Mohammad Nari stele can be best understood as a grand vision of a Buddha (Shakyamuni or a generic Buddha without a specific name or potentially with diverse names) who has been elevated to the status of a supramundane being. It is possible that the stele is a recreation of a wondrous vision that a practitioner experienced or was anticipated to experience in a visualization practice, which is attested to in early Mahayana scriptures as constituting an important concern of Mahayana.⁵

Another recent attempt at interpreting the stele was undertaken by Paul Harrison together with Christian Luczanits, who offer a detailed study of the stele and also compare it with similar complex steles. At the outset of their study they remark of the earlier interpretations that while some are more plausible than others, none are entirely satisfactory, 'the main problem being that none really explains all the major features found on the stele' (Harrison and Luczanits 2011: 73).

One of the major features they note is the giant lotus (on which the Buddha sits) and the pond from which it rises (Harrison and Luczanits 2011: 82):

Certainly more significant for an interpretation of the Muhammad Nari stele is the lotus pond from which the main lotus and many minor ones grow. In fact, the pond takes up the whole width

⁴ What distinguishes Huntington's approach from some of the previous ones is that he focuses on finding a connection between the image and the text through the careful reading of a relevant text, rather than simply citing resemblances between the Muhammad Nari stele and other East Asian parallels depicting Buddha fields and pure lands that came later, which suggests the correct way to approach this question.

⁵ See also his earlier article that tackles the stele (Rhi 2003) and his contribution to the present volume. For other publications by Rhi discussing the stele see also the bibliography at the end of this paper.

of the base of the stele and lotuses grow all along its surface. It is inhabited by ducks, fish and a second couple of nāgas.⁶

As we will see, they, and others may have been looking for the wrong lotus ponds in the wrong sort of texts. I will not go into further detail about the different interpretations of the stele, and instead in the remainder of this chapter, I will be offering my own, and to my knowledge, entirely novel, interpretation of what is depicted, which I believe is not Mahāyāna-informed.

Who is the Buddha on the lotus?

My initial hunch about the Muhammad Nari stele was that it might represent Śākyamuni preaching to the *devas* in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, during the rain retreat he spent there immediately after the performance of the miracles at Śrāvastī. However, my second idea provided a much better and more satisfying explanation, which could potentially resolve the debates surrounding this stele and some of the other Gandhāran images akin to it. My thought process was to look for a simple answer to a simple question. For which other Buddha, apart from Śākyamuni, do we have solid evidence that he was worshipped in Gandhāra? The answer was quick: Dīpaṃkara, for whom there was a well-attested cult in the Gandhāran region.

There are numerous depictions of the fateful encounter between Dīpaṃkara and the Buddha-to-be Śākyamuni during which Śākyamuni (in a birth as a brahmin ascetic) meets Dīpaṃkara and receives a prediction of his future Buddhahood, thus commencing his long path as a bodhisattva, or it would be more accurate to say, the Bodhisattva. It was obviously a very popular story in Gandhāra. The Buddha in those depictions is easily identified as Dīpaṃkara, which otherwise would be very difficult to do without the narrative context of the story familiar to us, since all Buddhas essentially look exactly the same—this is not just an iconographical feature, but a soteriological one. All Buddhas are depicted the same because they possess the same Buddha body. Identifying inscriptions are extremely rare for Gandhāra, and so the only reason we know that the Buddha represented is Dīpaṃkara is because of the other narrative elements that identify the story with his encounter with the brahmin ascetic Sumedha (Megha).

Then I asked myself, apart from this story about Dīpaṃkara what else do I know about his life and where would be a likely place to find something about it? The second source I checked, looking for narrative about Dīpaṃkara's life, was the *Mahāvastu* (Jones 1949-1956; Senart 1882-1997) and the chapter dedicated to the Buddha Dīpaṃkara which turned out to be the key to unlocking what is depicted in the Muhammad Nari stele.⁷

Before comparing the text and the visual depiction on the stele, I would like briefly to point out some details depicted in the stele to keep in mind (Figures 1 and 2; see also Rhi's Figure 17 in the present volume).

The stele depicts a pond from which a large lotus stalk forming a very large lotus seat emerges. On that lotus is the central and largest figure in the relief depicting a Buddha who is seated in a meditation pose making a gesture which can be interpreted as that of teaching.

⁶ Harrison and Luczanits detail their own search for the textual sources on which these representations might be based, including the study of other connected reliefs in their discussion, such as those of so-called Buddha triads. They favour Mahāyāna texts as sources, and their interpretations seem to continue Huntington's hypothesis that the stele (and similar ones) are representations of some sort of (Mahāyāna-informed) Buddha-field.

⁷ See the chapter entitled 'The History of Dīpaṃkara' in Jones 1949-1956.



Figure 1. The so-called 'Muhammad Nari Stele'. Found at Muhammed Nari, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, c. third to fourth century AD. Schist, H. 119 cm, W. 97 cm, D. 28 cm. Lahore Museum (Inv. no. G-155). (Photo: Lahore Museum, from Google Arts & Culture <<https://artsandculture.google.com/story/5QVRhMVC0XR1Jw>>.)



Figure 2. The Muhammad Nari stele. (Photo: courtesy of the Warburg Institute, London.)

At the base of the lotus two small *nāgas* with distinguishable *nāga* hoods are depicted half emerging near the base of the stalk looking up towards the seated Buddha, and two other figures – one male and one female, again on both sides at the base of the giant lotus stalk and nearer to it – are also depicted only to the waist as if emerging from the pond and looking up. The male figure, who has one hand placed at the lotus stalk, is bearded and seems to be holding a horn of plenty. The female figure on the other side holds her hands in *añjali* gesture of veneration. Two larger venerating figures also without halos, one male and one female are standing on both sides and at the level of the giant lotus and are looking up with their hands held in adoration, standing on small lotuses emerging from the pond. These two figures have iconographical features resembling depictions of the earthly semi-divine beings, the *yakṣas* Pañcika and Hārītī (Figure 3).⁸ There are at least two more *nāga* beings submerged in the pond looking up with their hands clasped in veneration.

The rest of the stele comprises divine beings (who have halos) carrying flowers and garlands which they are offering to the prominent meditating Buddha figure. Two of the celestial beings are more prominent than the others and are nearest to the central Buddha, offering him garlands. They have the iconography of Brahma and Indra (Figure 4).

Some of the other divinities, which I must point out are not bodhisattvas, are seated in separate divine pavilions, suggesting that they reside in different heavenly abodes. Some of these divine figures are looking at the central Buddha, but several seem to be turned away from the main figure and engaged in conversation or some sort of interaction with each other. As we shall see, this element is also explained by our text. We also notice that some of the various *devas* are depicted as either the so-called *brāhmaṇa* (i.e., with the 'Apollo hair knot' and resembling the god Brahma) and others as *kṣatriya*-type iconography (with turbans, and respectively resembling the god Indra). This is not an unusual iconography for distinguishing *devatas* as belonging to different heavenly abodes.⁹

For example, a relief in the Victoria and Albert Museum, which depicts the Buddha's descent at Sankisa from Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, showing the Buddha flanked by Brahma and Indra on the heavenly staircase, with the three of them pictured three times to indicate movement, also has on the side of Brahma many *devatas* resembling Brahma, and on the other side, that of Indra, many *devatas* resembling Indra.¹⁰ This image is an example of how *devas* in certain heavens share visual characteristics with each other. Heavenly *devas* with halos are also a common iconographic element of which there are many examples. The assumption that only the Buddha (or the Bodhisattva/a bodhisattva) is depicted with a halo is not consistently observed in Gandhāran art.

Further visual evidence of how various *devatas* and *devas* such as Indra and Brahma are represented, often with a halo, can be easily found, illustrating that we cannot presume that the beings depicted in the Muhammad Nari stele are bodhisattvas. This mistake results from applying later iconographical developments (which evolved from these earlier ones) and applying them retrospectively. Since the later

⁸ This reading is also confirmed by a palatial type complex stele from a private collection on loan to the University of California Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive (BAMPFA) recently exhibited at BAMPFA as part of the 'Beyond Boundaries: Gandharan Buddhist Art' exhibition where Pañcika and Hārītī are featured at the lower part seated together. See image of it on page 19 in *Beyond Boundaries* 2021. See also Guy 2022: 120, fig. 7.

⁹ There is a figure holding an object that looks like a book, which has led some scholars to identify him as the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī (Quagliotti 1990; Zin 2018: 109–110). There are several problems with this identification. One is that there are at least two figures holding objects that look like books in the same stele (second row of divinities from the bottom), and, moreover, they are represented with very different iconography (they have different hairstyles, and one has jewelry, the other does not, for example) suggesting they are just different *devas* belonging to two different heavenly abodes. To my knowledge we have no evidence of the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī being depicted in the region in this early period at least, especially holding a book. What is far more probable is that in later centuries the iconography of Mañjuśrī holding a book borrowed an earlier iconography such as the one seen in the stele, something we know happened with the imagery of Brahma and Indra.

¹⁰ London, Victoria and Albert Museum, acc. no. IS.11-1947.



Figure 3. Detail from Figure 1. Earthly devas worship Dīpaṃkara.



Figure 4. Detail from Figure 1. Indra and Brahma offer flower garlands to Dīpaṃkara.

Mahāyāna iconography shows many bodhisattvas surrounding the Buddha in depictions of one or another Pure Land, or bodhisattvas flanking a Buddha (also a later development adapted from an earlier one, in which these spots contained divine beings such as Indra and Brahma), we can make the methodological error of applying later iconographical and doctrinal developments onto the earlier, original ones, which had a very different religious pantheon.

There are examples of even less distinguished divinities that have that 'bodhisattva look,' with crowns, jewelry, and halos. However, these are not bodhisattvas, but heavenly divine beings, often primary audience members and witnesses for many of the Bodhisattva and the Buddha's activities in mainstream Buddhist iconography.

Before we delve further into reading the stele together with our text, an important detail worth noting is a small scene near the top right corner of the stele, depicting a much smaller-sized Buddha seated under a tree who seems to be in a conversation with another figure kneeling with hands clasped in a gesture of veneration. The Buddha is gesturing towards the scene with main, large Buddha and his head is turned downwards toward the kneeling figure, who is looking up (Figure 5). This smaller kneeling figure's head is unfortunately broken, but from what remains (and compared with some of the other similar steles) it looks like the figure is dressed in a monk's robe and thus may indeed be a monk. As already mentioned earlier, this small scene was first astutely noted and identified by John Huntington in his 1980 article. A third figure (with its head damaged) standing to the side and behind the kneeling figure seems to be that of Vajrapāṇi holding his typical *vajra*, thus further supporting the interpretation that the Buddha in this small 'inserted' scene is indeed Śākyamuni.



Figure 5. Detail from Figure 1. Śākyamuni tells the story of Dīpaṃkara's Enlightenment to one of his main disciples, Mahā-Maudgalyāyana.

This, as we will see, is indeed the Buddha Śākyamuni addressing one of his chief disciples, Mahā-Maudgalyāyana, to whom he relates the major scene depicted in the rest of the stele, which is in fact the events of the Enlightenment of the Buddha Dīpaṃkara from the *Mahāvastu*.

The Muhammad Nari Stele and the Buddha Dīpaṃkara's Enlightenment

Dīpaṃkara's Enlightenment as told in the *Mahāvastu* is unique and very much differs from the account found in other early comparable sources such as the Theravādin *Buddhavaṃsa*, for example. However, the unique circumstances of his Enlightenment favour our interpretation, as the events described in the *Mahāvastu* fit as closely as a text can fit with the imagery of the Muhammad Nari stele. In this version, the bodhisattva prince does not depart his palace grounds to renounce, and his renunciation takes place in a lotus pond in his palace.

The story of Dīpaṃkara's life begins in a familiar fashion – he is described in detail as a Bodhisattva Deva in Tuṣita heaven just about to be reborn one last time, and is choosing the family in which to be born. The story of Dīpaṃkara in the *Mahāvastu* begins with a description of his (future) father, a *cakravartin*

king named Arcimat, his seven treasures, his wealth and his country, his royal city, etc. (Jones 1949-1956, vol. 1: 152):

An immeasurable, incalculable *kalpa* ago, Mahā-Maudgalyāyana, there was a universal king, named Arcimat, who was virtuous, mighty, possessing the seven treasures, sovereign over the four continents, triumphant, blessed with devoted subjects in town and country, righteous, a king of righteousness, and pursuing the ten right ways of behaviour.

What should be noted is that the entire story is framed as told to Mahā-Maudgalyāyana by Śākyamuni Buddha himself, who addresses his chief disciple multiple times throughout the text. This narrator's point of view is skillfully represented in the Muhammad Nari stele with the small scene with the Buddha Śākyamuni addressing his disciple and gesturing toward the unfolding narrative. This unique visual shorthand is not dissimilar to a modern-day comic book frame or panel where a segment of an action is contained, while the main action takes place on the rest of the page. The artist who created the stele wanted us to be reminded that this is a story told by Śākyamuni, just as the text constantly reminds us within the textual narrative as well. Just as in the text we are constantly reminded that Śākyamuni is the one telling the story, the inclusion of the small scene in the stele serves as a similar visual reminder (Figure 5).

Let us return to the *Mahāvastu* and the story of Dīpaṃkara's life. Little is said of Dīpaṃkara's youth, apart from that he is a prince living in every luxury, and his renunciation is both similar to, but also very different from that of Gautama. In fact, rather than leaving the palace (an important narrative event for Gautama), prince Dīpaṃkara's renunciation takes place within his palace's pleasure grounds.¹¹ Here is the paragraph most interesting to us (Jones 1949-1956, vol. 1:183):

Then the Bodhisattva in great regal pomp, magnificence and splendour went with the women for diversion in the pleasaunce [*sic*] of the Lotus Grove, and King Arcimat bade the women amuse the young man well. After sailing on the lake in boats which had platforms fore and aft, enclosed by railings, with canopies spread above, and were draped in flowing bands of fine silk, carpeted with glittering cloth, scented and strewn with bright flowers, crescents and pearls, the Bodhisattva with the women disembarked on the shore. His female escort fell asleep from weariness, one holding her chin, another leaning on her arm, another clasping a cymbal, another a flute, another a guitar, another a lute, another a trumpet, another an anklet, another a tabor, another a *lālāghara*. And when he saw them thus, there came over him an awareness of the burial ground.

The female harem being present at Dīpaṃkara's Enlightenment would explain well the presence of women in some of the other complex steles, such as the one shown in Figure 14, which include palatial architectural elements with columns and railings.

The lotus pond is the significant detail, as immediately after observing his sleeping harem, Dīpaṃkara renounces there and then and achieves perfect Enlightenment. Here begins the crucial part of the story which starts to correspond with our stele (Jones 1949-1956, vol. 1: 183):

In the middle of the lotus-pond a lotus appeared with petals as large as chariot-wheels, and surrounded by thousands of other lotuses. The Bodhisattva sat cross-legged on that lotus, which immediately closed up to form a peaked roof over him.

¹¹ This is not uncommon for past Buddhas, who in several cases also renounce while at home (even if this sounds a bit contradictory) and some even receive their Enlightenment meal from a wife or another female relative.

All the outward marks of a layman vanished from the Bodhisattva's person, and he appeared in the yellow robes of a recluse. Then, Mahā-Maudgalyāyana, the Bodhisattva Dīpaṃkara entered and abode in the first meditation, which is aloof from sense desires and from sinful and evil ideas, is attended by applied and sustained thought, and is born of solitude and is full of zest and ease.

The parallels between the text and the scene depicted on our stele are obvious. We have a giant lotus that emerges from the middle of a lotus pond, out of which thousands of other (smaller) lotuses emerge (on which many of the *devatas* are standing). Dīpaṃkara is sitting cross-legged on that lotus dressed in monk's robes. He begins meditation, entering the first trance state, followed by the usual three more stages. Then, as with Gautama, he proceeds to attain some of the supernormal abilities and superknowledges that all Buddhas obtain on the night of their Enlightenment.¹² This is described in detail as the experience of Dīpaṃkara (Jones 1949-1956, vol. 1: 184-185):

Thus with heart composed, purified, cleansed, without blemish, free of the lusts, supple, ready to act, firm and unperturbed, he, in the first watch of the night, turned and applied his mind to acquire the sight of the deva-eye. By means of his deva-eye he sees fair beings and foul beings passing away and coming to birth, perceives how they go to bournes [*sic*] of good and to bournes of ill in accordance with their karma.

Then the Bodhisattva, with heart composed, purified, cleansed, without blemish, free of the lusts, supple, ready to act, firm and unperturbed, in the middle watch of the night, recalled to mind his many different sojournings on earth, to wit, one birth, two births, three births, five, ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, hundred, thousand, many hundreds, many thousands, many hundred-thousands. He recalled to mind *kalpas* of the world's dissolution, *kalpas* of the world's evolution, *kalpas* of both evolution and dissolution, many *kalpas* of the world's dissolution, many *kalpas* of the world's evolution, and many *kalpas* of both dissolution and evolution...

Then the Bodhisattva, with heart composed, purified, cleansed, without blemish, free of the lusts, firm and unperturbed, in the last watch of the night, in the flush of dawn towards daybreak, woke up to all that the 'elephant-man', the 'lion-man,' the 'bull-man,' the 'red-and-white-lotus-man,' 'the white-lotus-man,' the 'man of the yoke,' the 'true man,' the 'noble steed of a man,' the peerless driver of tameable men, the Sugata, the mindful, the steadfast, and the intelligent man has at all times and everywhere to know, attain, become aware of and become fully aware of; he awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment by insight gained in a momentary flash of thought.

What follows in the *Mahāvastu* text also aligns very well with the rest of our visual tableau, as it depicts the worlds of the different *devatas*, the earthly ones (such as *nāgas* and *yakṣas*), and the heavenly deities in the different *deva* heavens depicted on different levels or within heavenly pavilions.

The Enlightenment of a Buddha is an event that brings portents that inform the world of this immense achievement; the earth shakes in a great earthquake, and the light of the Buddha's body illuminates the worlds, even the darkest ones (Jones 1949-1956, vol. 1: 185):¹³

And then this great earth trembled and quaked six times, and the devas of earth raised a shout and made it heard in heaven, as they cried, 'This exalted Dīpaṃkara, friends, will become

¹² John Strong aptly describes three of these superknowledges of the Buddha that are usually part of his meditative experience in the night of the Enlightenment as follows: recalling one's own past lives, or 'karmalogical knowledge' the 'Divine eye,' or knowing others' karmic destinations; and 'cosmological knowledge,' or seeing all beings in samsara; and 'dharmalogical knowledge,' or direct understanding of the world as it is. (Strong 2009: 98)

¹³ We are reassured, of course, that these sorts of great earthquakes are not in the least destructive events, lest we think that the Enlightenment of the Buddha is a calamity, and are instead an auspicious portent of an incomparable and glorious event.

awakened to the unsurpassed perfect enlightenment for the welfare and happiness of man, out of compassion for the world, for the sake of the great multitude, for the welfare and happiness of devas and men.’ When they heard the shout of the devas of earth, the devas of the heavens, namely, the Trāyastriṃśa devas, the Yāma devas, the Tuṣita devas, the Nirmāṇarati devas, and the Paranirmitavaśavartin devas, at that moment, at that instant immediately raised a shout that reached the devas in Brahma’s world, crying, ‘This exalted Dīpaṃkara, friends, will become perfectly enlightened. And he will become so for the welfare and happiness of men, out of compassion for the world, for the sake of the great multitude, for the welfare and happiness of devas and men.’

Then a great radiance, immense and sublime, shone forth in the world. And all the intervals between the spheres, regions of blackness lapped in blackness, of gloom lapped in gloom, and of eternal darkness, where the moon and sun, powerful and majestic as they are, with all their brilliance cannot make their brilliance penetrate, with all their light cannot exert their light, even these regions become suffused with this radiance.

There are several things to unpack from this passage. An element of interest is the presence of the earthly *devatas* who we saw are also depicted in the stele, represented by *nāga* beings in the pond and emerging from it, and also other earthly *devatas* such as the *yakṣas* Pañcika and Hārītī which were shown standing on both sides of the giant lotus. Especially significant in the above narrative description are the many (and very specific) *devas* who are enumerated, which explains the various iconographies of the different figures depicted in the stele, with *devas* seated in different pavilions (which likely suggest separate heavenly worlds). We should note, too, that some of the *devas* in the stele (which we now see are not bodhisattvas at all) resemble the iconography of Brahma and some of Indra, something which, as pointed out, is not unusual.¹⁴

The light of the Buddha’s body is often also described as the ability of a buddha to send an image body of himself that can be seen in the different worlds at the same time. This is one of the supernormal abilities that every buddha gains at the moment of his enlightenment. This is represented in the stele by two symmetrically depicted small meditating buddha figures emanating buddha bodies seated on lotuses under canopies carved at the two topmost corners of the stele (Figure 6).¹⁵ A *devata* is shown seated under the top left corner one looking up at the small buddha and is depicted as if holding a hand shielding his eyes from the light. This could possibly be a representation of dark realms being suddenly flooded by the Buddha’s radiance as narrated in the passage.

And this radiance of the Buddha, which allows all divine beings to see him, also allows them to see other *devatas* residing in their own worlds and those in others. The text describes it as a scene of multiple worlds becoming visible to each other which translates to the busy visual depiction of the stele (Jones 1949-1956, vol. 1: 186-187):

The beings who had been reborn in those spheres became aware of one another (and cried), ‘Lo! There are other beings reborn here. Lo! There are other beings reborn here. Lo! There are other beings reborn here.’ Now all these beings were for that moment, for that instant, immersed in bliss. Even those reborn in the great hell *Avīci* excelled the splendour of devas, of *Nāgas*, and of *Yakṣas*.

¹⁴ While we know from other visual examples what Trāyastriṃśa, Tuṣita and Brahma *devas* look like, we have little to go on to identify and distinguish the other *devas*, if they are meant to be distinguishable at all.

¹⁵ This reading is supported by the stele in Figure 12 where instead of a buddha with emanating bodies, there is a ‘floating’ small buddha with a head halo and a full body halo carved at a similar position in the stele.



Figure 6. Detail of Figure 1. Small meditating buddha with emanating buddha bodies.



Figure 7. Detail from Figure 1. Celestial Coral-tree.

The parallels between text and image do not end here; the next passage can also directly be observed, visually transferred in our stele:

There in his lotus pavilion, Mahā-Maudgalyāyana, the exalted Dīpaṃkara was attended by the Four Royal devas, by Śakra, the lord of devas, by the devas Suyāma, Santuṣita, Vaśavartin, Great Brahmā, and a company of many other devas. They paid sublime homage to the exalted Dīpaṃkara. They scattered on, about, and over the exalted Dīpaṃkara flowers of the celestial coral-tree, of the great coral-tree, of the *karṇikāra*, of the *rocamāna*, of the *bhīṣma*, of the great *bhīṣma*, of the *samantagandha*, of the great *samantagandha*, and powder of the sandal-wood tree, of the aloe-wood tree, of *keśara*, and of *tamāla* leaves. They worshipped him with thousands of celestial musical instruments.

Once again, the text aligns very closely to the visual depiction found in the stele. The figures of the gods Brahma and Śakra (i.e. Indra) are seen as standing on both sides of the enormous Buddha and offering him flower garlands. Other *devas*, including those above the head of Dīpaṃkara, hold more flowers, wreaths, and garlands. The celestial coral tree is also represented (Figure 7) and it bears strong resemblance to the 'earthly' Indian Coral tree (*Erythrina variegata orientalis* [*E. corallodendron orientalis* L.]), and so the artists were able to render a close likeness.

One last and important element to mention is the gesture the Buddha Dīpaṃkara makes, associated with the *dharmacakramudrā*. Immediately after the last paragraph quoted above follows this description (Jones 1949-1956, vol. 1: 187):

And then he was entreated by Great Brahma to set rolling the incomparable wheel of dharma. The exalted Dīpaṃkara silently intimated his assent to Great Brahma. When the devas understood that he assented, rejoicing, delighted, enraptured, joyous and content, they bowed at the feet of the exalted Dīpaṃkara, saluted him three times from the right, and departed.



Figure 8. Coral-tree (*Erythrina corallodendron*). (Photo: Anna Anichkova CC BY-SA 3.0, from <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Erythrina_5203.jpg>.)

We now have a new answer to the visual puzzle of the Muhammad Nari stele that has been the subject of a long debate among art historians, and more importantly, we know with unexpected accuracy exactly what and who is on the stele – it is the Buddha Dīpaṃkara and depicts his Enlightenment.

As already mentioned, in addition to the Muhammad Nari stele, there are several other complex steles that can be identified as depicting the same narrative contents.¹⁶ (For examples see Figures 9 to 13).¹⁷

The interpretation of the Muhammad Nari stele as representing the Enlightenment of the Buddha Dīpaṃkara following the description in the *Mahāvastu* is further confirmed by one of the other similar steles, which also has a visual representation of Dīpaṃkara as a bodhisattva in *Tuṣita*, a narrative episode that is also depicted in detail in the beginning of our *Mahāvastu* source text (Figure 9).

After giving an introduction with a description of Dīpaṃkara's father Arcimat and his royal city, Śākyamuni's continues the story with the description of Dīpaṃkara being a *deva* in *Tuṣita*, his interactions with the other *devas* there, and the familiar trope of observing the world to choose his last birth. It is an established belief that the penultimate rebirth of all Buddhas prior to their descent to be reborn one final time, is to reside as *devas* in the heaven of *Tuṣita*. This was the penultimate existence of the Bodhisattva Siddhartha and was the case for Dīpaṃkara as well (Jones 1949-1956, vol. 1: 158-159):

Then, Mahā-Maudgalyāyana, when it became time for the Bodhisattva to leave his abode in *Tuṣita*, he made four great surveys, to wit, of the time, the region, the continent, and the family in which he should be born...

As he contemplates the world he sees in Arcimat's court Sudīpā, a woman like the consort of an immortal, radiant as the lightning's flash.

Seeing in her his mother he says to the immortals, 'I am passing hence. For the last time I take up my abode in a woman's womb for the sake of devas and men.'

¹⁶ I will be discussing these, and some other relative images related to the Muhammad Nari stele in more detail in a forthcoming journal article tentatively titled 'A New Look at the "Muhammad Nari Stele" and Other Complex Steles from Gandhāra.'

¹⁷ For one more very similar to the Muhammad Nari stele, whose present location is unknown, formerly at the Peshawar Museum, see Marshall 1960: plate 110, fig. 151. For a list and description of several complex steles and relevant reliefs see Ingholt and Lyons 1957: 120-125; pls. 252-263.



Figure 9. Stele, Chandigarh Government Museum and Art Gallery (acc. no. 572).
(Photo: courtesy of Christian Luczanits.)



Figure 10. Detail of Figure 9. The interlocutor whom the Buddha addresses is a monk as he is wearing a monk's robe with the shoulder bared.



Figures 11 and 12. Lotus Pond stele formerly in the Peshawar Museum (among sculptures from case 71). Provenance and current location unknown. (Photo: courtesy of the Warburg Institute, London.)

The deva host, arrayed in fine jewels, raised their joined hands and answered him saying, 'O man supreme, whose beauty is sublime, may thy vow prosper.

'And we also, for the world's sake and to do thee honour, thou deva above all devas, shall renounce the sweet enjoyment of the pleasures of sense and go to dwell in the world of men.'

Exultantly they rained down from the sky a shower of spotless, bright and pure flowers of the coral-tree, speaking sweet words the while:

'How marvellous it is that thou dost not delight in the abodes of the immortals, where sweet peace reigns, where is no tribulation nor sorrow, and dost not indulge in the pleasures of sense.

'Marvellous is it, too, that, excelling the deva hosts and shining like a mountain of gold, mighty Sura, thou illuminest the ten quarters of the world...

'How can we then not be loth to part from thee. Master of all that is? For thou, lotus-eyed, wilt become the bourne of devas and men.'

Thus, at the time and on the occasion of the descent of him whose eye was like the bright hundred-petalled lotus, did the glad hosts shout through all quarters of the world.

As we see, among the devas in Tuṣita, the Bodhisattva (i.e. the Buddha Dīpaṃkara to-be) is praised by the other *devas* as surpassing them, including in beauty. The description of the *devas* as arrayed in fine jewels, living in their heavenly abode, and raising their hands in reverence are well-established tropes for the depiction of this scene. As we see, the fact that Dīpaṃkara's life story begins with his sojourn in Tuṣita is significant for unlocking the identification of the Muhammad Nari stele. The story of the life of Dīpaṃkara in the *Mahāvastu* matches the top part of the stele (Figure 9) well and further supports our interpretation of the main scene as being Dīpaṃkara's Enlightenment and the *Mahāvastu* as the source text.

The description of Dīpaṃkara as a bodhisattva in Tuṣita, his descent into his mother's womb, the birth, and the enumeration of his thirty-two bodily marks, are very similar to the description of those same events in the life of Gautama himself found in the *Mahāvastu*.¹⁸

The combination of the two episodes in the Chandigarh stele (Figure 9) – on the top, the bodhisattva Dīpaṃkara-to-be in Tuṣita, and in the centre, Dīpaṃkara's Enlightenment – follow the text from the *Mahāvastu*. Adding to that, in this stele and in the Muhammad Nari one, and corroborated from the *Mahāvastu*, the story is framed as being told by Śākyamuni to one of his Chief Disciples – Mahā-Maudgalyāyana. In the stele from the Chandigarh Museum, we again find the small scene of Śākyamuni Buddha seated under a tree pointing towards the scenes unfolding (Figure 12), very similar to the one found in the Muhammad Nari stele. The monk's figure Śākyamuni addresses (if the *Mahāvastu* is our source text as it indeed appears to be), is then Mahā-Maudgalyāyana.

In this stele, rather than a lotus pond, the lowest register features a bowl being worshipped, probably by *nāga* beings, further supporting the main idea behind the stele – it is a story of lineage told by Śākyamuni.¹⁹

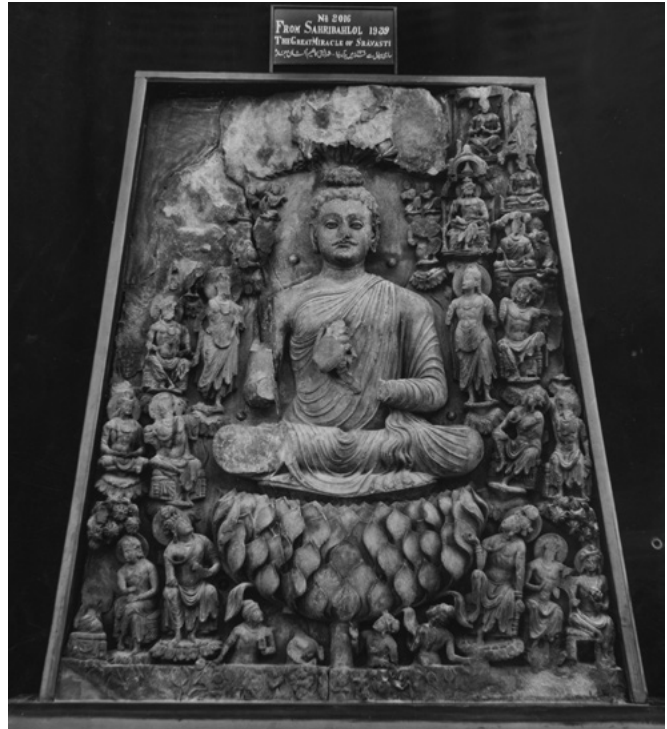


Figure 13. Large, fragmentary lotus pond stele from Sahrī Bahlol. Grey schist. H. 150; W. 117 cm. Peshawar Museum, inv. no. 2785 (old 2016). (Archival photo: Warburg Institute, London.)

¹⁸ See the chapter 'Birth of Gotama,' in Jones 1949-1956, vol. 2: 1-26.

¹⁹ A bowl submerged in water and worshipped by *nāgas* is a narrative related to Śākyamuni's own Enlightenment as told in the *Nidānakathā* (Rhys Davids 1880: 94-95). After having a meal of milk rice prepared for him by the girl Sujātā, Gautama casts his bowl in the Nerañjarā river where it floats upstream after which it sinks and reaches the royal abode of the Nāgarāja Kāla where it strikes three other bowls cast by three previous bodhisattvas on similar occasions (i.e. just prior to their Enlightenment).

The depiction of these two episodes on the same stele and corroborated from the *Mahāvastu* definitively indicate that the stele represents two narrative events from the life of Dīpaṃkara; it is not a Mahāyāna Pure Land of some kind. The depiction corresponds very well to the text as we have it today in the *Mahāvastu*, meaning the stele was either based on it, or on another very similar text.

The new reading of the Muhammad Nari stele as representing the Enlightenment of the Buddha Dīpaṃkara can also account for the presence of episodes from the life of Buddha Śākyamuni in some of the other complex steles, such as the one from the Chandigarh Government Museum and Art Gallery also from Muhammad Nari, where in the upper part we have scenes depicting Siddhartha on the eve of his renunciation and the Great Departure (Figure 14).²⁰

If the central Buddha seated on a lotus is indeed Dīpaṃkara, then the presence of scenes from the life of Śākyamuni is not strange or inexplicable, but rather is very logical in terms of the *Mahāvastu* and how the events from the life of Dīpaṃkara are used as a preamble to the life of Śākyamuni himself.

Indeed the cult towards Dīpaṃkara should be seen as part of the larger and main cult of Śākyamuni, where Dīpaṃkara plays the role of the first Buddha giving the Bodhisattva the first prediction of his future Buddhahood. Dīpaṃkara's significance as an important link in the lineage of Gautama is further corroborated by the presence of the seven Buddhas and Maitreya shown in the lower part of this Chandigarh stele. This provides a further evidence that the Buddha on the lotus is indeed Dīpaṃkara and the steles are part of the mainstream cult of Śākyamuni and his lineage as one of several Buddhas of the past, and even the future. Thus, I suggest that these complex steles from Gandhāra should be seen as 'lineage steles' of a sort and as part of the mainstream Buddhist worship of Gautama and his predecessors, with Dīpaṃkara being singled out for his crucial role in Śākyamuni's path towards his own Buddhahood, and also as a buddha whose worship is well-attested in Gandhāra.



Figure 14. Palace-type stele with Seven Buddhas and Maitreya from Muhammad Nari; Chandigarh Government Museum and Art Gallery, inv. no. 1134 (Photo: courtesy of Christian Luczanits.)

Just as the turban of the Bodhisattva is worshipped by the celestial *devas* in the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven, the bowl of the Bodhisattva is an object of worship of the earthly semi-divine *nāga* beings in their water abode(s). Both the turban and the bowl are also symbols of renunciation that are worshipped by non-humans.

²⁰ Another such example is a more stylized and simplified 'Buddha triad' version of the Muhammad Nari stele from Sahri Bahlol in the Peshawar Museum (no. 02770 [158]), which features scenes from the life of Śākyamuni in its lowest register. See Zin 2018: 111, fig. 7. See Rhi's paper in the present volume, fig. 16.

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Early Gandhāran art: artists and working processes at Saidu Sharif I

Luca M. Olivieri

Preamble

The *Festschrift* published in 2006 by Pierfrancesco Callieri to celebrate Domenico Faccenna's eightieth birthday (Callieri 2006), represented an important novelty amongst the studies on Gandhāra and Hellenistic Asia.¹ In fact, for ancient Indian art and architecture, and Gandhāra in particular,² studies on stone-processing techniques, organization of building sites, guilds of craftsmen (apart from epigraphic and textual documentation), were (and still are) rare. This is why I attempted to present a reconstruction of the working process at Saidu Sharif I in a recent study (Olivieri 2022a). The latter, I hope, will be considered more as a practical working model for future studies than for the hypotheses it contains. That study is based on Faccenna's (1995; 2001) data, to which I have added other, new data, from the excavations I directed at the Buddhist sanctuary of Saidu Sharif I from 2011 to 2014 (henceforth abbreviated as Saidu). From that study originates much of what follows, which focuses on the early phases of the Saidu sanctuary (c. second half of the first century AD, period Ia).

The site and its location

Saidu Sharif is a small but important urban centre of the Swat valley (Pakistan, province of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa). The town, which served as the capital of the Yusufzai State of Swat under the Miangul dynasty from 1917 to 1969, is located at an altitude of about 1,000 metres. Just outside the town, to the north, are the excavated ruins of a Buddhist sanctuary located at the bottom of a side valley, not far from the Swat River.³ The sanctuary is located south-east of an ancient settlement, a large capital known in early Chinese sources as Mengjieli, the remains of which extend beneath the urban fabric of the modern city of Mingora. In addition to the extra-urban sanctuary of Saidu, other Buddhist religious centres were located in Mengjieli, including two extra-urban sanctuaries located on the heights surrounding the town, Panr I (north-east of the town) and Butkara III (south-east), while on the eastern outskirts was a celebrated ancient urban sanctuary, Butkara I.⁴

The sanctuary of Saidu, whose ancient name is not preserved (some considerations are in Olivieri 2022a: 15), consists of two parts, a monastery and the *stūpas* area, built on two artificial terraces. The monastery – square with a central courtyard – was built on the upper terrace, while the lower terrace (3 metres below) shows the sacred area with the central *stūpas* (henceforth: *Stūpa*), which stands on a high podium with four columns at the corners, and minor monuments (*stūpas*, chapels, columns). The creation of the two parts of the sanctuary was coeval (Figure 1).

¹ The edited volume bore the title *Architetti, capomastri, artigiani* chosen to honour the innovative line of study of the great Italian archaeologist.

² With a few exceptions: e.g. Dehejia 1992, Rockwell 2006, 2016, and Schopen 2006.

³ The sanctuary of Saidu was discussed in the 2020 volume of this same series, Haynes, Peverett & Rienjang (2020).

⁴ Pānr I and Butkara I were excavated by Domenico Faccenna (IsMEO); Butkara III, by Abdur Rahman (University of Peshawar) (see notes and refs in Olivieri 2022a).

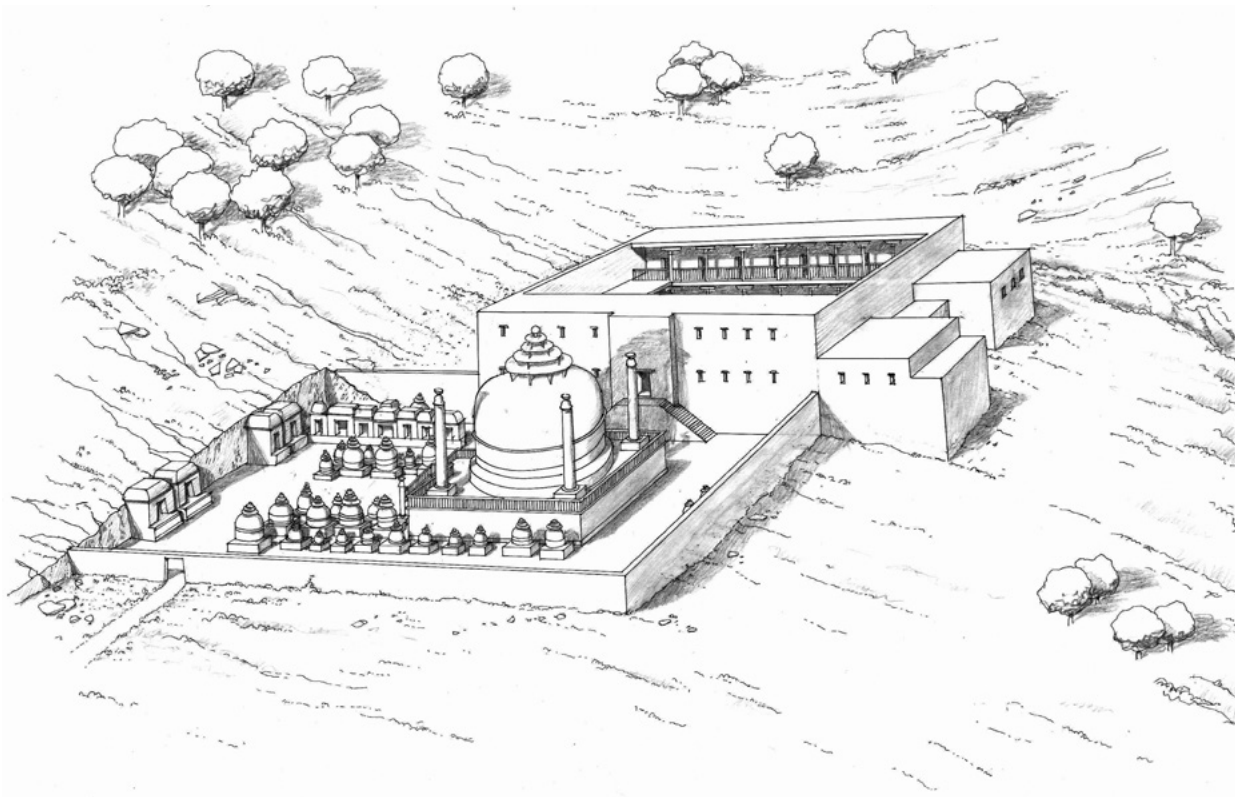


Figure 1. Saidu Sharif I: stupa terrace and monastery, ideal reconstruction (view from SW). (Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan [MAIP]; drawings by Francesco Martore.)

Chronology

The early chronology of Saidu concerns the final phase of the ‘Saka-Parthian’ period, or rather of what could best be described as the ‘Oḍiraja’ period. This is a particularly important historical phase in Swat, characterized by a great deal of building activity that is amply reflected in the archaeological stratigraphy, with religious foundations, extension of fortification walls and re-foundation of towns (Coloru, Iori & Olivieri 2022). This phase, which shows the highest degree of westernization of material culture, is characterized by the use of the Azes era in inscriptions and the beginning of an economy based on copper alloy coinage. Radiocarbon dating of the stratigraphies in association with both these coins and the typical material culture leads us to a period from the middle of the first century AD to the second half of the first century AD.

Fragments of a single cornice found in the L shrine at Dharmarājikā (Taxila) can help us to make the context more certain. On the basis of the inscription, the quality of the stone (schist) and the style, the cornice was certainly imported and possibly donated to Dharmarājikā by inhabitants of the north-west (Figure 2). Both Faccenna (2005) and Chantal Fabrègues (1987) have emphasized how close these pieces are to the decorated cornices of monuments 14 and 17 from Butkara I period 3. The cornice bears a dedicatory inscription: on fragment B (CKI 195) the year is mentioned, which Stefan Baums translates as ‘in the ninety-third year’ (Baums and Glass 2002-), presumably calculated with respect to the beginning of the Azes era: we are in the middle of the first century AD.

This same date can also be assigned to monuments 14 (and 17) of Butkara I (Figure 3). At this stage, however, the figurative and decorative language of Butkara I has not yet reached the fluidity we see attained in the art of the Saidu Stūpa. Saidu must have arrived a little later, just enough time (a

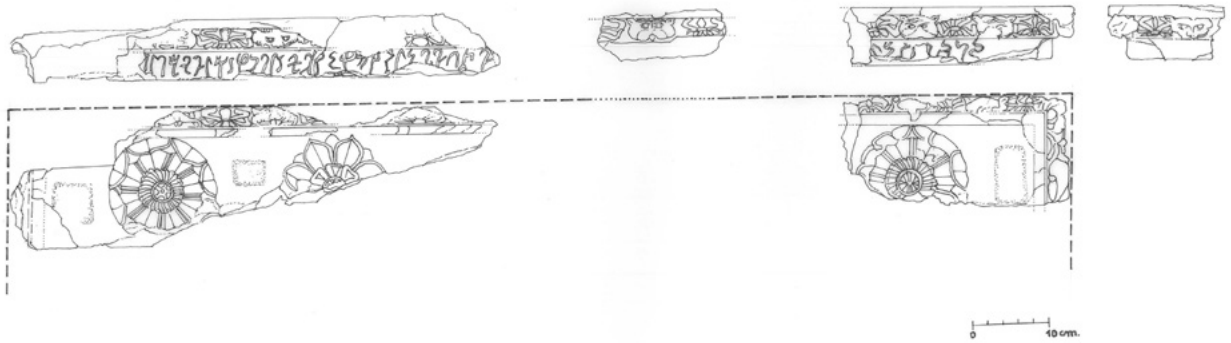


Figure 2. Dharmarājikā (Taxila): three segments of a cornice. (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore.)

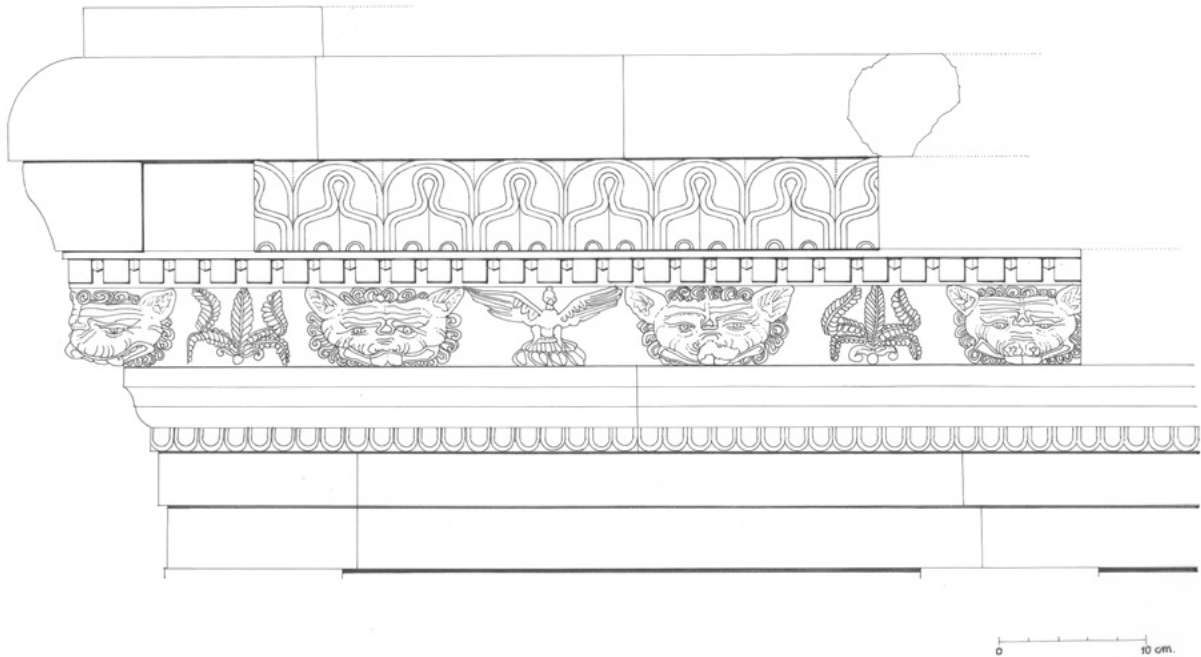


Figure 3. Butkara I: stūpa 14, detail of the cornice on the west side. (MAIP; drawing by Francesco Martore.)

generation later, as Faccenna says, perhaps less) for both artists and patrons to become familiar with such totally innovative language. We can propose a period after the middle of the first century AD as reasonable for the foundation of the Stūpa, a few years later than Faccenna (2007) proposes. The Stūpa, as we will see later, was abandoned towards the end of the third century AD, a few decades before the entire site was abandoned.⁵

Innovations

Although we do not know its name, the sanctuary must have had a great reputation in antiquity (see details in Olivieri 2022a). Many innovations were first attempted at Saidu, many were replicated several times, others were forgotten. In terms of architectural innovations, the Saidu Stūpa is the oldest known large stūpa built on a high square podium with a central staircase. The Stūpa stands on a square podium (c. 20 x 20 metres), with a flight of steps on the north side. The latter leads to the upper paved level of

⁵ Date of abandonment established by Faccenna and Callieri in the fourth-fifth century (see Olivieri and Filigenzi 2018). The chronology of the coins associated with the later layers at the sanctuary does not go beyond the fourth century (Faccenna 1995: 158-163).

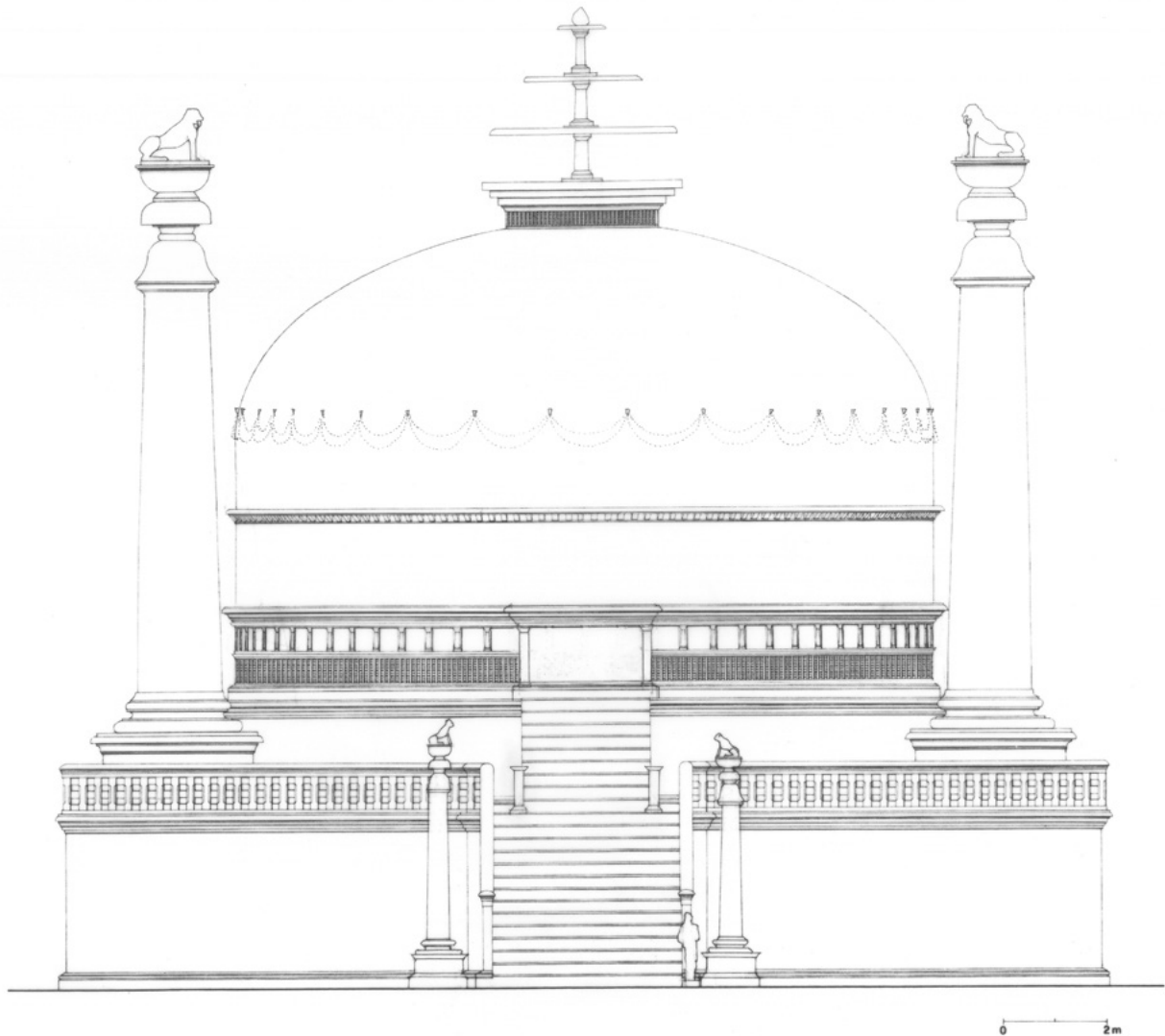


Figure 4. Saidu Sharif I: Stupa, front view (N) reconstruction. (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore.)

the podium, each corner of which is marked by a tall column topped by a seated lion facing the centre of the Stūpa. The staircase and podium have a stone railing (*vedikā*). The first cylindrical body (here the *medhi*, the podium being a kind of raised ground), which had a diameter of sixteen metres, is accessible by a second staircase aligned with the main one. At its summit is the path for ritual circumambulation or *pradakṣiṇāpatha*. The Stūpa proper has a circular plan with a diameter of fourteen metres. The total height is estimated to be less than fifteen metres. This type represents the first and most substantial evidence of a *stūpa* pattern that later became a standard in Gandhāra (I have discussed it at length in Olivieri 2022a) (Figure 4).

Innovations, or rather technical experiments, include the railing above the square podium (a gamble never repeated from the second century onwards)⁶ and the four tall columns rising on the podium

⁶ It is not found, for instance, in the other major *stūpa* I excavated at Amluk-dara I and Gumbat/Balo Kale I, nor does it appear in the reports of other excavations. I do not consider here the cases of two small monuments at Sirkap. Consider also that the parts of the enclosure (posts or *stambha*, the cross-bars or *suci*, as well as the bases and coping or *ūṣṇiṣa*) are large and would hardly have gone unnoticed. Moreover, being parts not of interest to the unfortunately flourishing antiquities market, they would have escaped the rapacious attentions of clandestine excavators.



Figure 5. Saidu Sharif I: Frieze, the return with the relics (S241, Swat Museum). (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri.)

stūpa terrace (perhaps set directly on the rocky outcrop) would have resisted much better than columns (or the enclosure) built above the podium.

In respect to the visual programme, the greatest innovation, the earliest and largest evidence of which is found at Saidu, is the figurative programme decorating the *Stūpa*: it is a narrative frieze (henceforth: Frieze) consisting of 60 large panels, illustrating the main events in the life of the historical Buddha, partitioned by semi-columns of the Gandhāran-Corinthian order. The art of the Frieze, the earliest example of a narrative frieze known to us, became a standard pattern in Gandhāra, so famous that copies of it on other media surface even several centuries later in the wall-paintings of Miran, Xinjiang (Filigenzi 2006a).

In the detail of the scenes in the Frieze, there are some that we find for the first time in Saidu, while others actually appear only in Saidu. These include, for example, the hair-cutting scene, of which only two examples survive: one in the Ashmolean Museum and the other in the Swat Museum, from the Saidu Frieze (Amato 2019). Another unique scene depicts the return of King Utarasena (Uttarasena) to Swat (Figure 5). Utarasena is mentioned in the inscriptions of the Oḍi, who ruled in Swat at least until the time of Kujula Kadphises, as the progenitor of the family reigning in the region. Oḍi by the way is perhaps the name attributed to the Swat region, known in later sources as Oḍḍiyāna or Uḍḍiyāna.⁷ This panel, following the biographical narrative order, was probably the last of the Frieze. Faccenna's identification of the latter as the return of Utarasena with the relics is, of course, a conjecture, which is not only attractive but also convincing (2001: 229). The king, seated cross-legged on a large throne placed as a palanquin on his elephant, keeps the reliquary in his left hand, while his right hand is held in front as if to protect carefully the precious gift during the long journey home.

⁷ According to a tradition reported by Xuanzang, Utarasena was a contemporary of the Buddha, also of Śākya lineage. Utarasena obtained and carried to Swat on the back of his elephant a remnant of the relics as foretold by the Buddha himself before the *parinirvāṇa* (Carter 1992).

corners. The construction of the columns on the podium represents a rarely repeated technical hazard, which finds few comparisons after Saidu: from memory, I can only recall the slightly later cases of Tokar-dara I and Gumbatuna (also in Swat; see Faccenna 2006), while at Panr I, for example, the architects more wisely thought to build the columns outside the podium, well grounded on the floor level. Consider, in fact, that the Swat region is highly seismic: the construction of free-standing structures (be they high or low, columns or enclosures), in any case with a high centre of gravity, above a large built structure (like the *stūpa* podium) would have exposed them to the seismic amplification caused by the internal structure of the podium: multiple layers of pebbles and slabs. This means that, given the same seismic wave, columns built on the

The constants of the work

The art of the Saidu Frieze is recognizable at a glance; where the formal element does not help us, the choice of material certainly does, which helps us recognize in small, shapeless fragments, parts of the Frieze. The entire Frieze is in fact carved in a soft but compact schist, with a characteristic shade of green. This stone is rather rare and can only be obtained from a few outcrops located not far from Saidu. The choice of stone is the first constant, from which derive, by way of corollary, a series of technical constants. Indeed, these are constants that only that stone can allow. In this sense, the choice of material has a direct effect on the sculptor's technique: the choice of this material, although difficult to find, is therefore conscious and purposeful, regardless of the economic investment forced upon the work's financiers. Technique and style find perfect correspondence in the chosen material; indeed, we can say that the incomparable style of the Frieze (and annexed parts) is due as much to the technique as to the material. The material's response to mechanical stress and transformation is always secure, reliable, never unpredictable.

Let us now return to the technical constants of work of the Frieze and annexed parts. It is thanks to these that we can also attempt to recognize the school of the Frieze in pieces from both Saidu and outside. The first characteristic is the ability to work where the thickness of the stone slabs is negligible: five centimetres on average (Figure 6a-b). This is a lower average thickness, net of surface, than any other Gandhāran production. The second characteristic concerns the regular treatment of the back and the sides, which is always very confident and 'economical' in respect to the working process. Nothing excessive or casual: competent flat chisel cuts, never overlapping, safe, parallel, precise as the gouges of a skilled carpenter. The chiselled surface of the sides is always flattened with a rasp or abrasive tool.⁸ There are other constants: some are purely formal (headgear, hairdress treatment, armour and weapons, horses and horse harnesses, swallow-tailed crenulated drapery, etc.), others refer to the sculptural technique, which involves certain tools, including the drill, or rather two types of drill, as pointed out in a previous volume in this same series (Brancaccio and Olivieri 2019) (Figure 7). There are also things that were constantly better or worse: e.g. the modelling of feet and hands respectively. Another important constant, almost a kind of 'signature' of the main artist, concerns the treatment of



Figure 6. Saidu Sharif I: (a) detail of the rear slab (SS I 2; Main Niche, Swat Museum); (b) detail of the rear slab (S241; Frieze, Swat Museum). (MAIP; photos by Luca M. Olivieri.)

⁸ On this issue, see below.



Figure 7. Saidu Sharif I: Frieze, panel SS I 3, detail (note the use of drill in the hair). (MAIP; photo by Edoardo Loliva.)

standing, and mounted *a giorno* against the second body of the Stūpa, slightly detached from it (Figure 8). Another technical gamble, which perhaps only the mind of an artist at ease with the art of cabinet-making could have imagined making.

Incidentally, there are several clues and some evidence pointing to the existence of a carpentry tradition behind the training biography¹² of the main artist and Saidu's craftsmen.¹³ Apart from the same

the eyes of the larger figures.⁹ This concerns the final process of the sculptural activity, which in my view was carried out when the pieces were in place, well positioned, as we shall see, at eye level. The eyes of the larger figures are marked by a double blow of the pointed chisel, so that a horizontal triangular mark is engraved to define the pupil. In this way, the artist has succeeded in suggesting the gaze, in reviving the blindness of the image, in enlivening the immobility of the figure represented, in vitalizing, albeit illusorily, the scene into a dynamic and mesmerizing whole. Thanks to these characteristics or constants, together with the quality of the stone, we can recognize the hand of the school in two pieces far from Saidu, for instance: in one from Parrai and another from a site near Barikot (located opposite each other on the right and left bank of the Swat river).¹⁰

The Frieze and the accessory register

Around the second cylindrical body, next to the *pradakṣiṇāpatha*, were the Frieze register and the accessory register decorated with a false railing, also in green schist (henceforth: first register).¹¹ The accessory register is the same height as the frieze and depicts a false railing (*false-vedikā*). It is made up of a numerous series of up-rights and cross-bars, all parts carved one by one, as if free-

⁹ Domenico Faccenna calls the main artist the 'Maestro of Saidu'.

¹⁰ These pieces were collected in 1938 by E. Barger and Ph. Wright (Barger and Wright 1941), and are now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London: VAM IM 85.1939 and IS 129.1961 (respectively published in Ackermann 1975: pls. VIIIb and XXXIIb). In these pieces, however, the hand does not seem to have achieved the same mastery and maturity that is evident in the Saidu Frieze.

¹¹ At this point I must add a detail that might prove interesting. The frieze and the false railing were interrupted at the front, where the staircase was located, by a large central composite panel. The existence of a false central niche had not been ruled out by Faccenna, but today, in light of the new fragments that have emerged from the excavation I conducted at the site between 2011 and 2014, it has become practically a certainty (see Olivieri 2022a).

¹² In the Goethian sense of *Lehrjahre*.

¹³ We have no evidence of carpenters' workshops in Swat and Gandhāra, where, however, there is a well-attested tradition of wooden craftsmanship from the Śāhi period (see the wooden pieces from Kashmir Smast in the British Museum) to the modern age (Olivieri 2022b; Scerrato 2009); on slightly earlier wooden materials, see the evidence from Mes Aynak (some fundamental annotations on perishable architecture and art are in Filigenzi 2015: 46-47). There remains the negative fact of the false-niches of the major stūpa of Amluk-dara 1 (see Olivieri 2018) and Tokar-dara 1 (Faccenna and Spagnesi 2014), of which only the large recesses or central projections at the upper staircase remain. No traces of these structures, which must have been very large, have been found in the excavations; in the case of the main stūpa of Amluk-dara 1 the niche must have been eight metres high.



Figure 8. Saidu Sharif I: the assemblage of the false-railing; the cross-bars are digitally reproduced. (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri.)

operational sequence of drawing, roughing and finishing the panels (which I mentioned above), the main evidence is to be found in the system of assemblage used in the accessory register, in the register of the Frieze, and to assemble the two together and connect them to the body of the Stūpa.¹⁴ Both registers use exclusively continuous sockets and tenons (both horizontal and vertical), support rails, with wooden clamps on dovetail sockets to connect the upper part of the Frieze (a cornice with row of acanthus leaves) to the wall body (Figure 9). Significantly, metal brackets are never used in the Frieze. Such a system of assemblage, in its complexity of separate parts, is hard to find in any other (later) Gandhāran monument.¹⁵ What we find instead is, so to speak, the crystalization of those systems: the registers of the false-railing are henceforth always carved, despite the scale, as single pieces in high relief, never open and in separate parts to be assembled;¹⁶ the system of rectilinear tenons and sockets continues to be used, but more frequently single tenons and sockets are preferred for the easier assembly of multiple panels; the use of metal cramps in standard sizes is then introduced on a massive scale, which in my view, goes hand in hand with the standardized production of sculptural elements

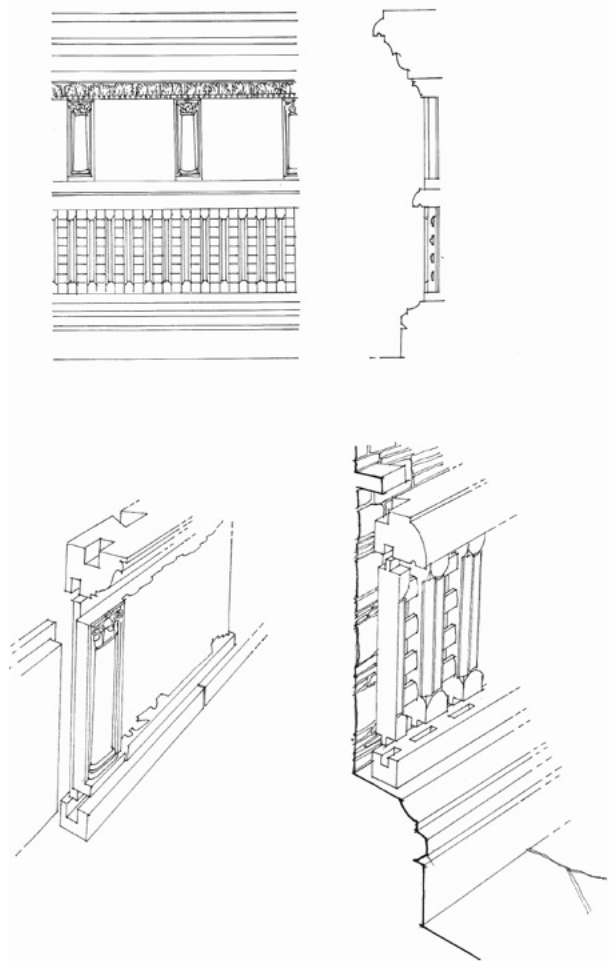


Figure 9. Saidu Sharif I: Frieze and false-railing, assemblage of registers (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore.)

Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that they might have been constructed of perishable materials, such as wood.

¹⁴ An important point that we will not deal with here, concerns the presence of masons' marks (location markers) and other carving instructions, such as guidelines. Those refer us to an assemblage technique, well attested in the Mediterranean (Salomon 2006), and typical of the work of the carpenter, which implied in my view a plan view of the operations by the sculptor, who at least in Saidu was certainly also the architect and responsible for the building yard (see Hahn 2001 with references).

¹⁵ This statement should be tempered when one considers that no sculptural programmes of this size have come down to us, with the exception of the large false niches of Zar Dheri 1, which deserve a separate technical study.

¹⁶ At Kanaganahalli (in Karnataka), for example, the false-railing register is carved on the same slab on which the two upper figured registers are carved.

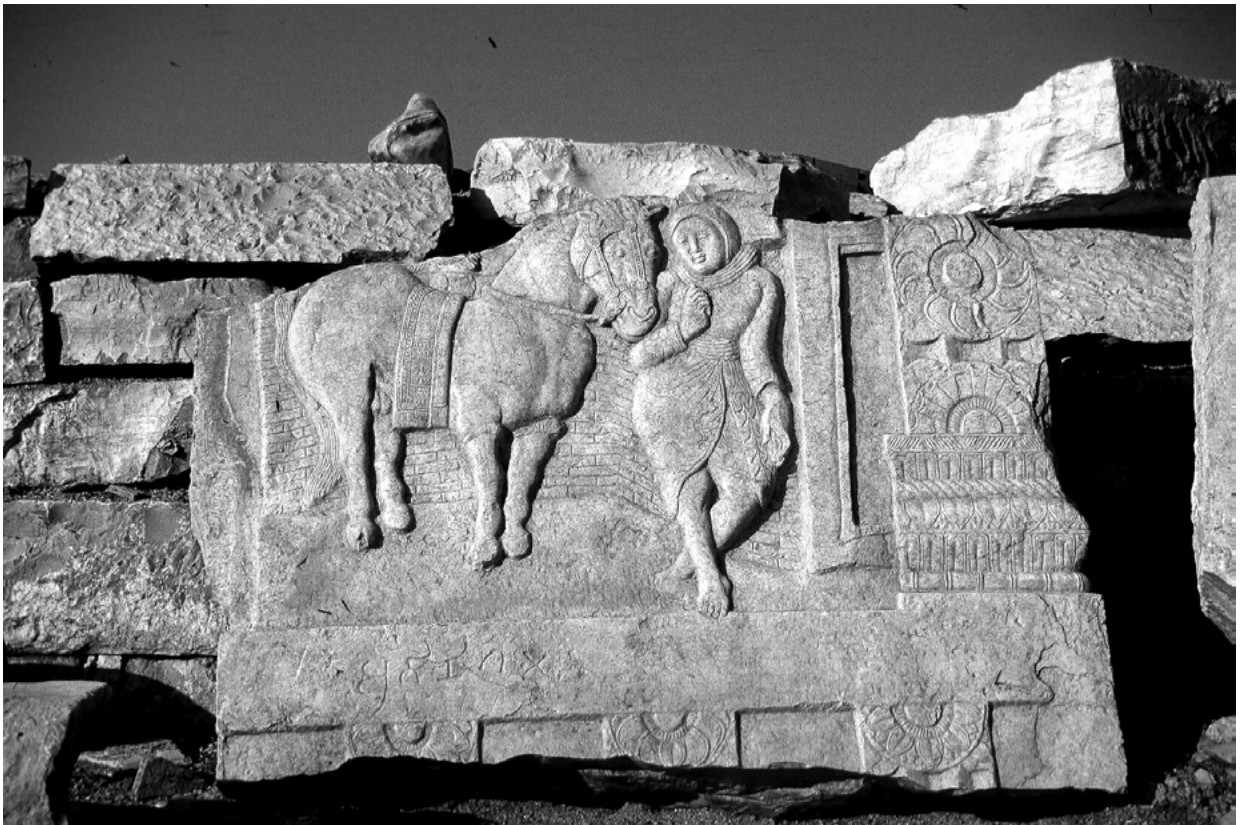


Figure 10. Kanaganahalli: main stūpa, (a) panel 05 (Zin 2018: pl. 10); photo CL00 36.23; (b) panel 08 (Zin 2018: pl. 10) CL00 37.06. (Photo by and courtesy of Christian Luczanits.)

out of work, produced individually and applicable to monuments built independently of a particular decorative design.¹⁷

In the reconstruction proposed here, the Frieze has been placed above the false-railing (accessory register). This has already been discussed in this same series in my notes to Haynes, Peverett and Rienjang 2020. There are no reasons, either technical or logical, other than perhaps simple prudence, to argue that the Frieze was located below the false-railing (Faccenna 1995: 525-545). Faccenna's caution has to do with *stūpa* models in which the false-railing is located at the top of the drum, never underneath. However, these models represent idealized *stūpas*, and what is more, they never show a figurative frieze. I therefore believe that we cannot deduce an unequivocal relationship between the parts from these models. A decisive comparison can be drawn with the panels at the main *stūpa* of Kanaganahalli (which had a phase coeval with Saidu), where the double-figured frieze is found above the reproduction of the false-railing (Zin 2018: 185-214 [pls.]) (Figures 10a-b).¹⁸ Returning to Gandhāra, the interesting correction that an unknown but careful hand made on a panel from Barikot (BKG 2269) is also worth mentioning in partial support of this hypothesis (Figure 11). The panel depicts a *stūpa* with columns (placed outside the podium of the *stūpa* as at Panr I, not above the podium as at Saidu).¹⁹ The panel was found reused in the decoration of chapel 527 in courtyard 28 of Block D in the excavation of the ancient city (Olivieri 2011: figs. 5, 9-11). The *stūpa* depicted features the false-railing placed along the second cylindrical body. In a phase probably connected with the time of reuse, an unknown hand engraved faint but sure vertical lines interspersed with short parallel horizontal lines, which clearly represent false-railings. One is engraved on the podium, as if surrounding it by a fence in the fashion of Indian *stūpas*; the other is engraved on the first body in the free space, just below the false-railing carved by the sculptor, as if to say (perhaps) that that feature was rather there! The corrective intervention can be dated to the time of the re-consecration of the panel, which, together with other heterogeneous pieces, forms the pastiche of reused images assembled for the chapel.²⁰

In the *Stūpa* of Saidu, with the false-railing at the bottom, the visitor, the devotee, looking ahead at the top of the first flight of steps, would have the illusion that the false-railing was a screen behind which was a continuous colonnade, like a *portico* or *veranda*, set against the *Stūpa*. The *Stūpa* and the Frieze thus appear behind the false-railing. This perspective play was very well known in Indian Buddhist art, but it is part of a universal category: in Western art and architecture, it appears for instance in the lower register of the Ara Pacis, but also in the earlier Etruscan tombs, etc. The artistic universal referred to



Figure 11. Barikot: panel BKG 2269. (MAIP; photo by Aurangzeib Khan.)

¹⁷ This issue of metal cramps is discussed in more detail in Olivieri 2022a: 63-64.

¹⁸ Kanaganahalli hosts a figurative programme that begins (according to the inscriptions) as early as the mid-first century BC, with revivals until the mid-second century AD (Zin 2018: 4-5).

¹⁹ I correct here what is written in Olivieri 2022a: 116.

²⁰ The dating of this small chapel, on stratigraphic grounds and from absolute chronology, lies within the third century AD.

involves in a two-dimensional representation placing below what would be in front in three-dimensional reality, and above what would be behind.

In this way, among other things, the Frieze, thus positioned above the false-railing, would not only have been clearly visible, at eye level, to those walking along the ambulatory path, but would also have been perfectly visible from the terrace level up to the projection of the staircase. In this reconstruction, therefore, the Frieze also had a public function; the figures of the Frieze would have been at eye level for observers, who would have crossed their gaze with the gaze skilfully engraved on the images, in a living dialectic of perceptual relationship between the two subjects.

Art in motion

The uniqueness of the Saidu Frieze is the same that can be found, on a considerably larger scale, in the great commemorative monuments of antiquity, and lies in the fact that the building and Frieze were born together. While the narrative reduces the volumetric weight of the building behind it, just as the hands of a clock need the dial, the building dictates the rhythm of observation. In Saidu, the figures in the background of the frieze, as Anna Filigenzi first suggested (2006b), seem to appear *from behind* the semi-columns. In this way, I would add, it is as if the artist had conceived the partition in the foreground, while behind, as in a continuous strip, the figures actually move from one panel to another. This narrative device has an obvious dramatic effect. In reality, I can therefore conclude, it is as if the entire Frieze were conceived as a single scene unfolding behind a portico punctuated by columns (Figure 12).

The Stūpa, although static, is built to be perceived through movement: this is an important fact in design, because the architect already knows how the construction will be perceived, knows its paths and – here is the point – the obligatory points of viewing/observation. I recently made the comparison

with the phonograph record (Olivieri 2022a). This in fact only emits a sound (or rather the right sound) if it is turned, and only in one direction, so here the Stūpa is only experienced in motion, in one specific direction. This has a very important association with the fact that when we walk around the Stūpa, in the shadow of an ideal portico, and always and only in one direction, we ‘read’ a story, a narrative, unfolding before our eyes. Indeed, one might say that the story is coming towards us, from left to right, as in the illusion of movement that one has when sitting in a stationary train, while the one next to it that is leaving appears stationary. Note that, in fact, in the Frieze the artist seems aware of the illusory effect, since the main characters, not all but the majority, look to the right and meet with their gaze (as mentioned above) the gaze of the incumbent observer (Figure 13a-b).

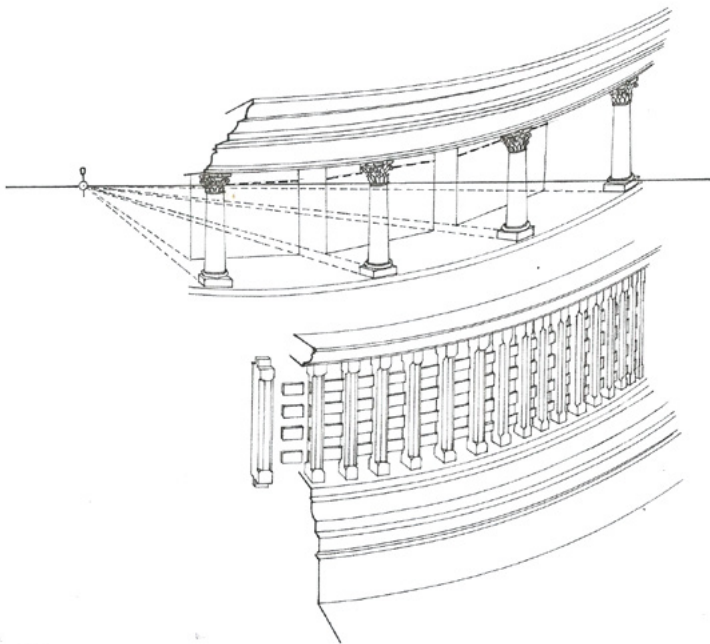


Figure 12. Saidu Sharif I: Stupa, the false portico and the false railing; the dotted line indicates the sculptor's point of view. (MAIP; drawings by Francesco Martore.)



Figure 13. Saidu Sharif I: Frieze, (a) panel S 1112 (Swat Museum); (b) detail of the same. (MAIP; photo by Luca M. Olivieri.)

The dividing panels with Gandhāran-Corinthian half-columns, which will become later so common as to be taken for granted, was also unprecedented in Gandhāra.²¹ In Saidu, the dividing device has the same function as the natural division with trees or the framing of scenes. When it appeared, perhaps for the first time in the Saidu Frieze, it must have had an extraordinary visual impact. The interlude serves both as a technical expedient, to address the aspect of time as a *continuum* to be translated into spatial terms, and to resolve the spatial void resulting from temporal gaps. In short, the interlude makes it possible to dissolve one episode and the other, distinguishing them but at the same time projecting them in their continuity.

In this way, the *stūpa* (this *Stūpa* first and foremost) becomes, so to speak, ‘a space/time machine’, which places this monument in a dimension of extraordinary innovation, which explains both its longevity as a model and its replicability *ad libitum*. The space of the monument (its form in space) is punctuated by time (the narrative), which again recalls space, this time the geographical space of the places of events. Here one is in Lumbini and Kapilavastu; then one moves to Bodhgayā, then to Varanasi, then to Kushinagara. The devotee is transported not only back in time, but along the time of the narrative, but also and above all in the space of a mental pilgrimage.

²¹ At Butkara I, in the immediately preceding phases, this partitive scheme is still not developed to the completeness we find at Saidu. At Kanaganahalli, the figurative scenes, which are not organized in a linear narrative sequence, are separated by architectural dividing elements. These (pillars imitating *vedikā* up-rights) do not mark out a continuous or syntactic scene as it would appear at Saidu, but instead separate different scenes that are juxtaposed paratactically. Similar partitions are recorded in many Buddhist *stūpas*, e.g. at Jaggayyapeta and Nāgārjunakoṇḍā in Andhra Pradesh (see Zin 2018: figs. 1, 2). In the former case, partitions with elaborate Indo-Persepolitan semi-columns are applied as dividing panels to the first cylindrical body or drum (or *medhi*?).

The artist

The evidence of synchronism that places the Frieze and its Stūpa roughly at AD 70, brings us to an exceptional and fortunate moment associated with the apogee of the Oḍiraja dynasty, at the time of the last king Seṇavarma (Falk 2015: no. 064). According to the relative date of his celebrated inscription, he must have ascended the throne around the mid-first century AD. This means that, in principle, Saidu's construction can be placed during his reign. It is therefore not unreasonable to imagine that Seṇavarma or his court were the interlocutors of the artists working at Saidu.

Overall, the archaeological evidence unequivocally shows that the sculpted parts display a distinct stylistic signature, the signature of a single hand, and that they were conceived as parts of a single visual project, closely linked to the architecture. The project was centralized under a single hand right from the choice of materials, which were rare and valuable: green schist for the decorative parts, light talc schist for the facings and columns. The final implication is that the author of the Frieze was probably also the architect who designed the Stūpa. From the evidence of the data, it was possible to detect a close collaboration between that individual and the sculptors and quarrymen (for the choice of materials), between him and the master masons and workmen (for the execution phase). The entire process can only be seen, yet as the product of a complex collective activity, but coordinated by a single specialist, artist and technician, who was responsible for the entire process: from the design to the choice of materials and the final execution of both the construction and the sculptural components.

As we know, in Gandhāra and the surrounding regions, part of the construction of religious buildings was in most cases a work in progress, which was returned to at intervals. The construction of the Saidu Stūpa did not follow this pattern: the undertaking was also completed because it probably had a main source of funding through a high-ranking group or individual, perhaps a king. The connection between the various phases of the Saidu Stūpa is so close that we must necessarily recognize the entire monument as the work of a single enterprise whose main artist, perhaps even the leader, is to be seen in the Master (*Maestro*) of Saidu identified by Domenico Faccenna.

To what extent was the Master involved in the Buddhist community that consecrated and managed the monument? The Master certainly had a long professional career behind him and all evidence suggests that Saidu was his main enterprise, if not his masterpiece. It seems less likely that the Master already belonged to that or some other emerging monastic community, but this is just a guess. As we have seen, the frieze includes scenes that would become common in later Gandhāran art, others quite rare, others completely new, such as the return of Uṭaraseṇa, or showing original compositions, e.g. the wrestling scenes, which are so dependent on Western models. It therefore seems to me that, while following the wishes of the patrons (whether they were laypersons or monks), the Master played an active role in the design of the scenes, choosing the most appropriate ones on the basis of his own preferences and expertise. Definitely the Master was an artist who enjoyed sufficient reputation to impose his own point of view and sensibility.

Epilogue: redemptions, collapses, deconsecration

The importance of Saidu, as we have anticipated, is also linked to the decidedly short life of the site. At one point, first the Stūpa was demolished (and deconsecrated), then the sanctuary was abandoned. While the life of Butkara I and most of the great sanctuaries of Swat remained in operation well into the late ancient age, Saidu was abandoned three centuries after its foundation. In the second century, the railing, and then the components of the frieze collapsed. Elements of synchrony of the two episodes can be deduced from the contemporary reuse of these elements in buildings of the

sanctuary's period II.²² Around the third century, the spoliation of the podium began, whose blocks were reused in the restoration of smaller monuments and even in parts of the monastery (Faccenna 1995: 443-445). Thus, we can imagine that while the Stūpa was gradually being demolished, parts of its body were being used to restore the minor stūpas around it: the major Stūpa torn to pieces to 'feed' its architectural *minores*, as in the story of the Mahāsattva prince, who fed the tiger and its cubs with its body. As I have said on another occasion, perhaps there is no better end for a stūpa.

With period III, elements that suggest earthquakes intervene, as we shall see.²³ The most dramatic moment is represented by the collapse of Columns A and C on the floors of the final phase.²⁴ It should be noted, in fact, as evidence of the decline and disinterest in the site, that the ruins of the two columns were not removed, unlike the other two, which must have collapsed earlier. Interesting is the arrangement of the remains of Column C, of which we find two trunks. The upper section collapses between the two monuments to the north-east of the Stūpa, while the lower one collapses immediately to the left of the Stūpa's staircase. We see here the effects of transverse seismic waves that caused the column to undergo a torsion phenomenon that resulted in its collapse in two opposite directions.²⁵

While in Butkara I, Pāṇṇ I and Amluk-dara, following the destruction caused by the two earthquakes, major restoration works began, substantially altering those monuments, Saidu was in fact left to its fate. During this phase of abandonment, a very important event in the life of the Stūpa occurred, involving the spoliation of the relic chamber in ancient times. When the relic chamber was opened, archaeologists saw that the reliquary had already been removed, leaving only a tiny silver box next to a side of the lower chamber. I think the latter was left there intentionally when, *in antiquo*, the main reliquary was removed.²⁶ More deposit objects were found inside the upper chamber, proving that the lower deposit was no longer disturbed once it was reclosed.²⁷ After these deposits were made, the upper chamber was ceremoniously closed again (Figure 14).

It must be said that the operation could only have taken place at a time when – as we will see – the *aṇḍa* of the Stūpa had been almost completely demolished but the sacred area was still in use (period IV).²⁸ Incidentally, if the Stūpa had already been partially demolished and deprived of the Frieze, as we shall see later, it would even have been right to remove the relics.²⁹

I have just said that a ceremony took place at the time of the secondary deposition. This could be evidenced here by the finding of fragments of blue glass twisted bracelets above the lid of the upper chamber (Faccenna 1995: 441, n. 1). These were found inside the cavity or shaft made to reach the reliquary chamber for the

²² For the former: fragments are in the core of the podium of shrine 63 (period II, phase a = second-third century AD); for the latter: a pillar in the podium of shrine 36 (period II, phase b = second-third century AD).

²³ Their collapse can be related to one of the large earthquakes of the third-fourth century, hypothesised at Saidu, Pāṇṇ I and Butkara I (Faccenna 1995: 158). With the data from Barikot and Amluk-dara, two destructive seismic events that occurred over a period of approximately thirty to fifty years between the end of the third and the beginning of the fourth century have been identified and dated absolutely (Olivieri 2011; 2012; 2018).

²⁴ The columns at the NE and SW corners of the Stūpa podium.

²⁵ At the time of the collapse, Column C still had the lion on its top, which was in fact found in three fragments during the 2011 excavation, about one metre away from the top disc. These are fragments of the chest with the head, the right paw, part of the terga.

²⁶ This was a small cylindrical silver reliquary with a diameter of 4.35 cm, which in turn contained a small cylindrical gold box with a diameter of 2.15 cm (which contained a pearl with a hole through it), a cylindrical quartz necklace bead, six gold bracts in the form of a lotus flower, a similar silver bract. In addition to this, the following objects were found in the chamber: two spherical gold necklace beads, a third similar one, a fragment of gold thread, a gold leaf, a silver bract in the form of a lotus flower.

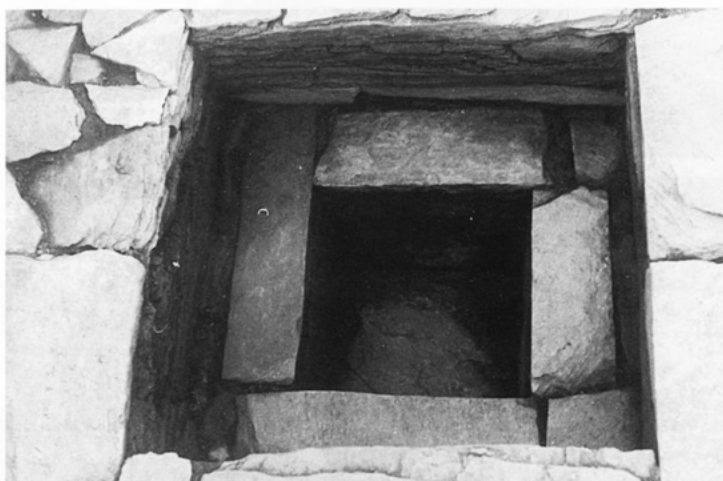
²⁷ It consists of two identical gold necklace beads, a tiny silver bract in the form of a lotus flower, a pearl and a shell necklace bead.

²⁸ Otherwise, it would not have been possible to reach the relic chamber.

²⁹ In addition, from the razed surface a shaft was dug into the Stūpa to reach the relic chamber.



a - ST. MS, reliquary recess; lower compartment and relic-casket Inv. no. S690. See pp. 51, 433, 441.



b - ST. MS, reliquary recess; upper and lower compartments with relic-casket and contents removed. See pp. 51, 433, 441.



c - ST. MS, reliquary recess with lids and contents removed; general view. See pp. 51, 433, 441.

Figure 14. Saidu Sharif I: Stūpa, the reliquary recess. (Photos: after Faccenna 1995: pl. 44.)

break-in.³⁰ The preserved razed top of the Stūpa is 150 cm above the relic chamber. Between this and the conserved top were slabs of stone that were well bedded. The bangles were found between the stones about 70 cm above the relic chamber. Their presence and position in the post-deconsecration stratigraphy suggests the idea that the bangles were intentionally broken and intentionally deposited.³¹ It is possible that the ritual breaks of the bangles relate to female ritual contexts, perhaps to women's monastic communities, connected to the abandonment of family life (marriage), the state of symbolic widowhood (hence the breaking of the bangles), and entry into the *bhikṣuṇī* community.³² The deconsecration of the Stūpa, the removal of the reliquary and its secondary consecration somewhere else, may have therefore been performed by a female community, but this is another story.

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³⁰ Faccenna wonders whether the bracelets are not modern and therefore intrusive (1995: 441, no. 1). We now know that they are typical bracelets of the Kushan and late Kushan phases, well attested in Barikot (see Micheli 2020).

³¹ Bangles in other late Buddhist ritual contexts in Gandhāra have been found intentionally broken. For instance, on the banks and around the altar (Olivieri 2012), of the first courtyard of Temple B in Barikot (see Cristiano Moscatelli, PhD dissertation, University of Naples, 'L'Orientale' 2022). Other occurrences include broken and whole bangles, embedded in the late *pradakṣiṇapatha* floor of the Dharmarājikā stūpa in Taxila (Micheli 2020).

³² On women's monastic communities, see Schopen 2014.

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Buddhist art of Gandhāra: a catalogue of newly documented sites in Malakand District

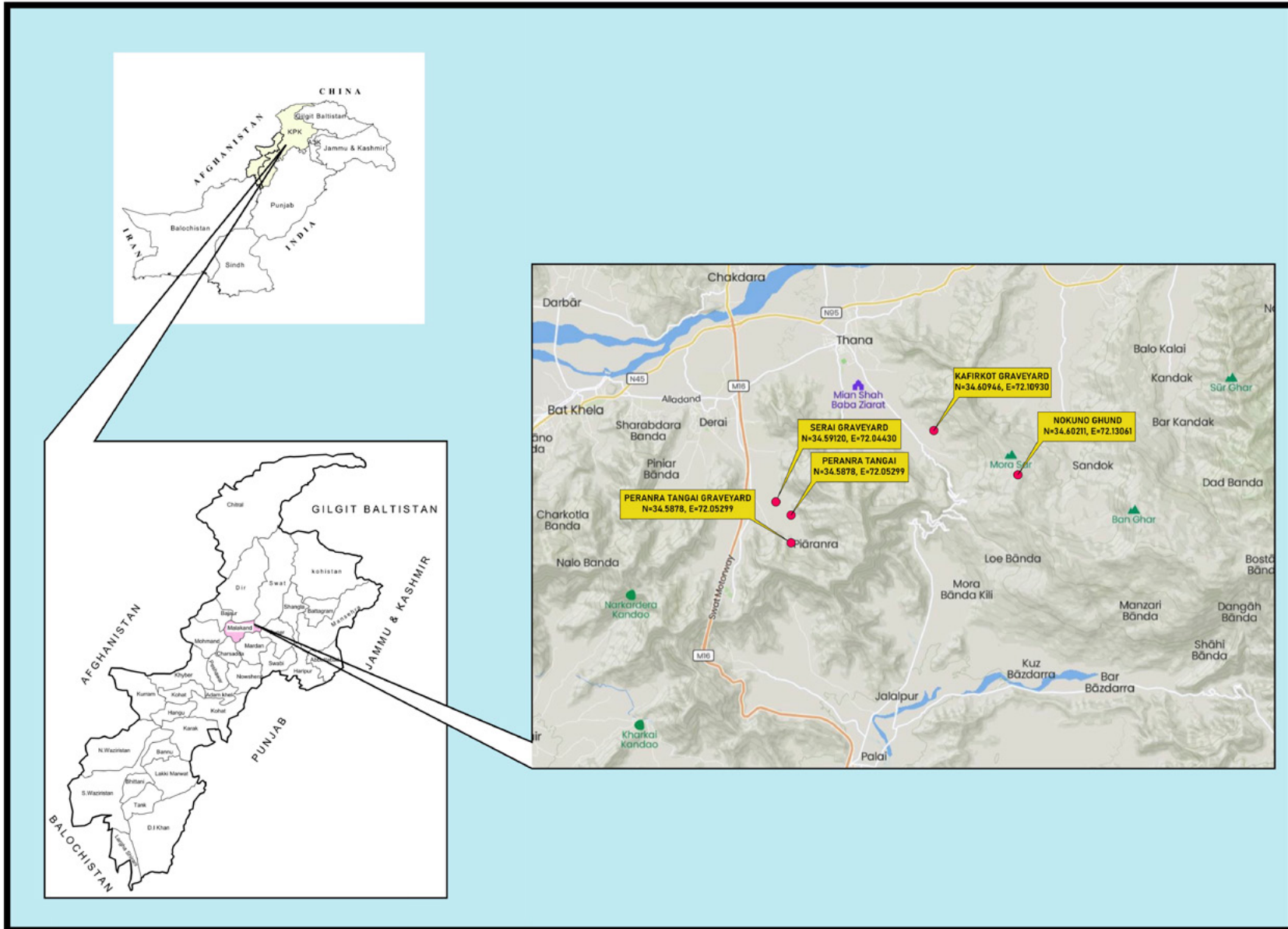
Fozia Naz

Introduction

In respect to Gandhāra civilization, antiquarians and archaeologists have made many discoveries in ancient Uḍḍiyāna (Swat) and the present-day Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region of Pakistan. Historically and geographically, ancient Uḍḍiyāna (Swat) occupies an important position in South and Central Asia. From the nineteenth century, archaeological explorations have entailed surveys and excavations of many sites within the confines of Uḍḍiyāna (Faccenna 1980; Stacul 1989; Callieri 2005). These sites included structural remains and cultural artefacts, consisting of pottery, coins, Buddhist sculptures, decorated stone fragments, and jewelry. The region remains rich in archaeological evidence for the explanation of the Buddhist period. The district of Malakand is one of the most important valleys among the archaeological sites of the Gandhāra region. Many examples of Buddhist-period rock art have also been reported there and their relevance to Gandhāran art has been discussed in previously published survey results (Naz 2020; Naz and Sardar 2021). The present paper will summarize Buddhist art recorded from different sites in Malakand District (Map 1). A newly documented Muslim-period graveyard with abundant, reused Buddhist sculptural fragments is also included in this article. The Gandhāran art collections in Swat, Peshawar and Chakdara Museums are not included in this paper.

An historical account of Buddhist art exploration in Malakand District

Prior to the modern Malakand District Survey (2016-2017, 2020-2021), H.W. Bellew (1864: 73-76) visited the Dir and Swat regions to explore and document the position of the Aornos Mount attacked by Alexander the Great, as described by Greek historians (Khan 2017: 62). The geographical position of Uḍḍiyāna was recorded by Alexander Cunningham (1871: 81-82). Likewise, H.A. Dean and his military officers explored and excavated Buddhist-period sites in Malakand (Dean 1896: 655-675; Olivieri 2015; Morgan and Olivieri 2022). A.H. Dani excavated the Buddhist sites of Chatpat, Ramora and Andan Dherai in 1968 (Dani 1968a; 1968b). From 1991 to 1994, the Federal Department of Archeology and Museums carried out the 'Gandhāra Archaeological Project', aimed at studying rock carvings in the Swat Valley. The rock carvings and stelae in the Swat Valley were first reported by Sir Aurel Stein in 1926 and Barger and Wright in 1938, followed by the Italians in the 1950s. In the latter survey, new rock carvings were documented, representing Mahāyānic and Brahmanical features (Khan 2011: 82). Another archaeological investigation entitled, 'The Gandhāra Archaeological Project' in Malakand was carried out by the same department in 1992-93 (Khan 2015: 77-78). Several Buddhist archaeological sites were listed in a survey-based project for the documentation of Malakand sites and monuments by the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Pakistan in 1999 (Bahadur Khan et al. 1999). Further rock art explorations carried out by Olivieri (Vidali & Olivieri 2002; Olivieri 2010; 2014; 2015), Nazir Khan (1995) and Bahadur Khan (1999) have documented numerous rock art sites. In addition, the Malakand District includes great surviving Gandhāra *stūpas* and monastic ruins like the votive *stūpa* of Loriyān Tangai (Behrendt 2003: 25-26). Finally, in the recent past, several painted rock shelters and structural remains from the Buddhist period have been documented by the ISIAO mission in the lower Swat Valley (Olivieri 2006: 119-120; 2010).



Map 1. Map showing key sites discussed (F. Naz).

Catalogue of newly explored sites in Malakand District

In identifying new Buddhist sites between 1926 and 2011, the main objective of archaeologists was to investigate the Buddhist *stūpas* and monasteries of the area. They surveyed and excavated major Buddhist religious sites and the sculptures, decorated stone fragments, coins and other items found were placed in museums. As mentioned above, the museum collections and topographical maps of these sites are not included in this research. The short catalogue that follows is intended to augment the existing record by adding some newly explored sites with Buddhist artistic representations.

Kafirkot village, Malakand (34.60946, 72.10930)

This site is situated near to Nalo village. A.H. Dani excavated this Buddhist settlement site and the sculptures extracted were sent to the British Museum. Pieces of stone carved with Buddhist images and floral designs have been collected from the surface of the site (Figures 1 and 2). At the time of writing, a Muslim graveyard is being built on the site and several graves are furnished with reused decorated stones excavated from Buddhist establishments (Sardar 2016: 128-130) (Figure 3). Some graves are furnished with reused of stone slabs decorated with floral designs (Figure 4). There are also numerous panel fragments of stone carved with geometrical and floral designs (Figures 5 and 6).



Figure 1. Carved schist stone with defaced Buddhist images, Kafirkot site. (Photo: F. Naz.)



Figure 2. Carved stone pieces with floral designs, Kafirkot site. (Photo: F. Naz.)



Figure 3. General view of Kafirkot graveyard. (Photo: F. Naz.)



Figure 4. Carved stone slabs with floral design, Kafirkot graveyard. (Photo: F. Naz.)



Figure 5. Carved stone panel pieces with geometrical and floral designs, Kafirkot graveyard. (Photo: F. Naz.)



Figure 6. Another grave decorated with carved stone panel pieces with geometrical and floral designs, Kafirkot graveyard. (Photo: F. Naz.)



Figure 7. A decorated portion of stone at Serai Graveyard. (Photo: F. Naz.)



Figure 8. Close-up view of a decorated stone fragment at Serai Graveyard. (Photo: F. Naz.)

**Serai, Alladand Dherai, Malakand
(34.59120, 72.04430)**

The Muslim cemetery is built on the Buddhist ruins. Serai Cemetery is located about three kilometres east of Alladand Dherai. From its centre the cemetery extends approximately thirteen metres to the north-west, twelve metres to the south-east and thirteen metres to the north-east. The sarcophagus of some graves represents the reuse of Buddhist stone panels and cornices decorated with floral and geometric designs (Figures 7 and 8).

**Nokuno Ghund (painted shelter), Malakand
(34.60211, 72.13061)**

This painted rock shelter is situated near to the Nokuno Ghund-I site (Kafir-kot 1). Painted images of small *stūpas* on the surface of the shelter are rendered in red (Nazir Khan 1995: 333; Vidale and Olivieri 2002: 189; Sardar 2016: 128-130; Olivieri 2015: 7, with previous references) (Figures 9 and 10).

Peranra Tangai, Malakand (34.5878, 72.05299)

Peranra Tangai was a Buddhist-period site located to the left side of Nallah and opposite Peranra village. A Buddha in *dhyānamudrā* is represented on a stone panel (Figure 11)



Figure 9. Coloured figures of *stūpas* and other images with red pigment, Nokuno Ghund site. (Photo: F. Naz.)



Figure 10. Rock painting depicting *stūpas* in red (the blue additions are modern). (Photo: F. Naz.)

inserted into the entrance to a small room in the house by Anzar Gul Baba (owner of the site). Some carved images of the Buddha in a meditation pose were also found in Ghaligai village, Swat (Sardar 2006: 133).

***Peranra Tangai Cemetery, Malakand
(34.58411, 71.05395)***

Peranra Tangai Muslim Cemetery in Malakand District is one of the exceptional Muslim graveyards decorated with stone slabs bearing Buddhist designs (Figure 12). Previously no investigation had been carried out on this cemetery. In 2020, it was surveyed and documented by the present author. Prior to this exploration, the Muslim



*Figure 11. Defaced Buddha sculpture in a wall, Piranra Tangai.
(Photo: F. Naz.)*



*Figure 12. Muslim graves decorated with stone slabs bearing Buddhist designs, Peranra Tangai site.
(Photo: F. Naz.)*



Figure 13. An old graveyard of Peranra Tangai adorned with decorated stone slabs. (Photo: F. Naz.)



Figure 14. Reused decorated stone slabs from Buddhist architecture, Peranra Tangai. (Photo: F. Naz.)



Figure 15. Reused decorated stone slabs from Buddhist architecture, Peranra Tangai. (Photo: F. Naz.)

cemetery in the village of Ziyarat in the Talash Valley was partially documented by Professor Abdur Rahman of the Department of Archeology at the University of Peshawar (Rahman 1979: 279-280). Abdul Nasir Khan (former head of the Taxila Museum) and his nephew Hamad Nawaz reported that this graveyard was very old and adorned with decorated stone slabs (Figure 13). In order to confirm their statement, the present author visited the site and was surprised to see that decorated stone slabs, which were originally used in Buddhist architecture of some kind, were now reused in the decoration of Muslim graves (Figures 14 and 15). An attempt is made in the following pages to highlight various interesting aspects of the cemetery under discussion.

The architecture and artistic decoration of the graves

In respect to the architecture of the graves, their sarcophagus is in the form of a rectangular box, made of a pile of earth extracted from the crypt and girdled by stone masonry walls all around (Figure 16). Sometimes it has two recessed terraces with tall standing stones each at the top and bottom (Figure 17). Although no mortar or other binding material appears to have been used in the masonry, some graves are nonetheless preserved in their original form. In the lines of masonry are inserted many blocks and slabs of decorated stones extracted from Buddhist monuments, which bear carved floral and geometric patterns (Figure 18), as well as architectural elements such as pieces of base moldings, cornices, *harmikās* and replicas of the *āmalaka* (Figure 19). Additionally, an attempt was made to adopt the old style of cut stone and layered masonry for the construction of these graves.

It is also evident that in some cases the figurative and anthropomorphic designs of the decorated stone blocks are defaced before fixing into the masonry (Figure 20), as the use of such designs is prohibited in Islam.



Figure 16. Rectangular box form, made from a pile of earth extracted from the crypt and girdled by stone masonry walls all around. (Photo: F. Naz.)



Figure 17. Two recessed terraces with tall standing stones each at the top and bottom. (Photo: F. Naz.)



Figure 18. Decorated stones extracted from Buddhist monuments bearing carved floral patterns. (Photo: F. Naz.)



Figure 19. Architectural elements such as pieces of base moldings, cornices, harmikās and replicas of the āmalaka. (Photo: F. Naz.)



Figure 20. Figurative and anthropomorphic designs on the decorated stone blocks have been defaced before fixing into the masonry. Peranra Tangai site. (Photo: F. Naz.)

The following pieces are representative examples of the finds from other locations.

1. Fragment of the dome of a votive stūpa decorated with lotus petals (Figure 21)

Material: Steatite or talc schist (?)

Measurements: L. 25.4 cm; W. 17.7 cm.

Provenance: Kandaro-Lashona, Buddhist settlement.

Details: This may be a broken fragment of a small stūpa model decorated with incised leaves. It is broken irregularly on the left, right, and lower side. A central leaf marking is flanked by two broad leaves. Another small narrow leaf is also present at the top right and left of the sculpture.



Figure 21.

2. Atlas figure (Figure 22)

Material: Green schist.

Measurements: L. 12.44 cm; W. 12.9 cm.

Provenance: Stray find from Girbanr Sar, near the village of Nalo, Mora Banda.

Details: A small stone representing a winged Atlas. His face is damaged. It is in a reclining posture with a muscular body and projecting wings. Curly hair falls over his shoulders. His right hand is raised in the air as if holding something while the left rests on his left thigh. But the stone panel is irregularly broken on the left and right side.



Figure 22.

3. Sculptural fragment (Figure 23)

Material: Black schist.

Measurements: L. 16.5 cm; W. 11.4 cm.

Provenance: Stray find from Girbanr Sar site

Details: A stone panel showing a standing figure with a broken head. The left and right arms are downward, but the right hand is holding something. The figure wears a short tunic with loose pleats. The feet are missing; the right leg is slightly, and the left is completely split.



Figure 23.

4. *Decorative relief (Figure 24)*

Material: Green schist.

Measurements: L. 11.9 cm; W. 12 cm.

Provenance: Stray find from Girbanr Sar site.

Details: A piece of stone relief decorated with scroll-shaped pipal leaves. Four pipal leaves are intact while the two upper leaves and one lower leaf are broken.



Figure 24.

5. *Corinthian capital (Figure 25)*

Material: Green schist

Measurements: L. 25 cm; W. 15.2 cm.

Provenance: Unknown (donated by the local resident to the survey team and placed in Chakdara Museum reserved collection).

Details: The acanthus leaves are damaged at the right corner. The sculpture contains an off-white encrustation all around. The size of the capital increases as it rises. The upper part is plain. There is a rectangular socket in the centre to secure the pillar above.



Figure 25.

Conclusion

In the recent survey of 2016-2020, artefacts from the Buddhist period were mainly collected from Gir Banr Sar, Kafir Kot, and Kandaro Lashuna (Naz & Saradar 2021). These Gandhāran works of art intimate the artistic expertise of the Buddhist period. The results obtained from the research also show that in the past the region was not only inhabited by the Muslims, but was a significant sacred place for Hindu and Buddhist communities. On the graves the inserted decorated panel in the masonry shows the love of Muslims for decorated designs of floral geometrical and floral designs regardless of their production by non-Muslims. However, the obliteration of figural images also reflects the fact that anthropomorphic representation is forbidden in Islamic laws which were still followed by the Muslims even in the twentieth century.

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List of participants in the workshop

Juhyung Rhi

Does Iconography Really Matter? Iconographic Specification of Buddha Images in Pre-Esoteric Buddhist Art

Henry Albery

Artistic Tensions: On Some Uneasy Relations between Monasticism and Art in the Vinaya

Muhammad Hameed

The Lost Buddhist Art of Gandhāra

Gregory Schopen

On Selling Space at the Monastery: Making Economic Sense of ‘Intrusive’ Images and Stūpas at Monastic Sites in Gandhāra

Christian Luczanits

On the Language of Gandhāran Buddhist Art

Wannaporn Rienjang

The Bimaran Casket and its Buddhist Context

Alice Casalini

Framing and Reframing: Architectural Legibility in Gandhāran Art

Dessislava Vendova

Solving the Riddle of the ‘Muhammad Nari Stele’: A New Look

Abdul Samad

Latest Discoveries in the Buddhist Archaeology of Gandhāra

Marianne Bergmann, Shailendra Bhandare, and Martina Stoye

Indian Dedications at Berenike on the Red Sea

Fozia Naz

Buddhist Art outside the Sacred Premises in Uddiyana Region: An Overview on Fresh Documentation in Malakand District

Luca M. Olivieri

Artists, Workshops and Early Gandhāran Buddhism: The Case of Saidu Sharif I

Gandhāran Art in Its Buddhist Context is the fifth set of papers from the workshops of the Classical Art Research Centre's Gandhāra Connections project. These selected studies revolve around perhaps the most fundamental topic of all for understanding Gandhāran art: its religious functions and meanings within ancient Buddhism.

Addressing the responses of patrons and worshippers at the monasteries and shrines of Gandhāra, these papers seek to understand more about why Gandhāran art was made and what its iconographical repertoire meant to ancient viewers. The contributions from an array of international experts consider dedicatory practices in monasteries, the representation of Buddhas, and the lessons to be learned from excavations and survey work in the region.



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