Problems of Chronology in Gandhāran Art

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Proceedings of the First International Workshop of the Gandhāra Connections Project, University of Oxford, 23rd-24th March, 2017

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Archaeopress Archaeology

Archaeopress Publishing Ltd
Summertown Pavilion
18-24 Middle Way
Summertown
Oxford OX2 7LG

www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978 1 78491 855 2
ISBN 978 1 78491 856 9 (e-Pdf)

This book is available direct from Archaeopress or from our website www.archaeopress.com

Buddhist art's late bloomer: the genius and influence of Gandhāra

Monika Zin

The intention of this paper is to place the art of Gandhāra in the context of the other schools of Buddhist art. As a student devoted to Andhra, Ajanta, and Kucha, I do not feel that I am in a position to address questions concerning the absolute datings of individual Gandhāran reliefs and can only provide some general – naïve and possibly controversial – remarks concerning the supposed earliest and latest specimens, while leaving a detailed investigation to the specialists.

As for the beginnings of the Gandhāran artistic production, congresses were held to establish characteristics of these earliest pre-Kushan reliefs (Srinivasan 2007). The reliefs have their own style and are ruled by their own compositional principles which do not always correlate with the principles used to establish an early dating of the 'classical' Gandhāran reliefs. Marshall proposed credible characteristics which allow us to date some reliefs early. These include cases where the figures do not overlap one another, or where the figures surrounding the Buddha are shown in the same scale as the Buddha instead of being shown much smaller (e.g. Marshall 1960: 41-42 regarding what is known as the 'Mardan group' of reliefs). These characteristics are not valid for the pre-Kushan art of Swat. Here, the Buddha might be twice as large as his worshipers, and people in the images are depicted standing in several rows. Pointing to similarities between the pre-Kushan reliefs and the earliest art of the subcontinent (e.g. Miyaji 2008) can certainly provide answers, although probably not for all questions. The iconography of the bare-chested early Gandhāran Buddhas (similar to Mathurā?),[1] which did not carry on over time or develop, leaves us with riddles.

Some issues concerning the early reliefs deserve comparative investigation. The aniconic representation of the Buddha's descent from the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven discovered in Butkara I (Figure 1),[2] is taken as coming from Gandhāra's uniconical period (cf. e.g. Van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1981: 389-90). The relief, however, represents a monastic figure – this is probably the nun Utpalavarṇā awaiting the Buddha on earth – differently from all other early representations. Note the conventionalized representation of the *pāṃśukūla*, the patchwork robe, familiar from Mathurā. One should probably say: 'already conventionalized'. As for the oldest Indian art, in not only the Buddha's descent from the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven but also in all other representations from the aniconic period, monks and nuns were not represented. They do not appear a single time in Bharhut, Sanchi, in old Ajanta paintings, etc. They only appear in art where the image of the Buddha had already been established, even though it might not always have been represented. Is the Gandhāran relief the single exception to this general rule? In my opinion, this is probably not the case. A comparison of the descent from the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven from Butkara with other reliefs from Faccenna's early 'drawing group' (e.g. Faccenna 2007: 190-191) which do represent the Buddha or the Bodhisatva in person shows no considerable stylistic differences.[3] Furthermore, the appearance of Indra and Brahma in the relief is not dissimilar to some representations of scenes of Indra and Brahma entreating the Buddha

[1] Van Lohuizen-de Leeuw (1981) understands them as being an adaptation of the earliest Mathurā Buddhas which she dates into first century BC.

[2] Butkara I, Saidu Sharif; Swat Museum, no. 2524. Illustrated e.g. in: Faccenna 1962-64, II: pl. 233; Van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1981: fig. 21; Faccenna 2007: pl. 7.39.

[3] Cf. e.g. a certainly early relief showing the Bodhisatva riding to school, illus. in: Faccenna 1962-64, II: pl. 234; Faccenna 2007: fig. 7.38.

(depicted as a person) to preach.[4] The descent from the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven excavated in Butkara I is certainly early; it appears, however, very doubtful that it can be considered as belonging to the time before the creation of the Buddha image. It should not be forgotten that Taddei (2006: 43) provided an argument for a much later dating of the 'drawing group'.

Figure 1. The Buddha's descent from the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven in a relief from Butkara I, Saidu Sharif (Swat Museum, no. 2524). (Photo: courtesy Isao Kurita).

As an outsider to research on Gandhāra, I must risk posing a sacrilegious question: could the characteristics of this 'drawing group' be signs of a specific regional style influenced by Central India, rather than an indication of their age? Comparable questions have been raised regarding several centres in Andhra, where e.g. the reliefs from Chandavaram – which appear very archaic – turned out instead to have been the products of a district which was separated from the prominent (and 'royal') centres of art (Arlt 2016). As for Gandhāra, a question arises: why was the core of the 'archaic' style in Swat and not in the capital? With this, we come to the crucial question: why was Gandhāran art so late?

We are all aware of good evidence which shows that Buddhism had an early influence in the region of Gandhāra, even if we take into consideration the fact that the archaeological evidence may not go as far back as expected.[5] However, an early Gandhāran school of art – contemporary to Bharhut, Bodhgayā, or early Amaravati – did not emerge.[6] Buddhism is not an exception here; neither Brahmanical representations, nor – and this is really astonishing – statues of *yakṣas* or *nāgas* have been recorded from Gandhāra. It is hardly imaginable that here, in the region associated with several narratives of *nāgas*[7] or *yakṣas* being subjugated by the Buddha,[8] such deities had not been worshipped. It is also hardly imaginable that the pan-Indian deities – primarily Kubera, the ruler of the North – were not venerated either. The protective deities must have been worshipped, but representations of these deities were not customary. The area, which will become one of the most prolific centres of Indian art in the second century AD – and where the *nāgas* are also depicted[9] – seems not to have an earlier artistic tradition.

[4] Faccenna 2007: fig. 7.41; Kurita 2003, I: figs. 245, 247; several examples in Van Lohuizen-de Leeuw 1981.

[5] The Dharmarājikā *stūpa* in Taxila, believed to be an Aśokan foundation, turned out to be a post-Mauryan monument, cf. Thapar 2012: 5.

[6] Cf. e.g. Rosenfield 2006: 22, 'Surprisingly, however, this was not the case in Gandhara. No significant works of art datable prior to the first century AD have been found there, even though excavations at Taxila and in the Swat Valley provide abundant evidence of Buddhist religious activity as early as the third century BC.'

[7] For the narrative of Apalāla of Swat cf. Zin 2006: no. 3.

[8] For Hārītī cf. Zin 2006: no. 2; the earliest literary sources naming Hārītī seems to be a Kharoṣṭhī inscription of Senavarma, king of Oḍi from the 1st century, cf. Hinüber 2003.

[9] Cf. Zin 2009; the massive statues of the *nāgas* were, however, never produced in the area.

It cannot be supposed that this lack of depictions can be traced back to a deficiency in the skills of the local artisans, but instead is probably due to the religious framework which prevented the development of visual arts. The framework here was evidently quite different from how it was in other areas of South Asia and is probably linked to the predominant supremacy of Brahmanism.

In his controversial book *Greater Magadha*, Johannes Bronkhorst points to the deep dissimilarities between the culture of this area and the Vedic culture of the 'land of the Āryas' (*āryavarta*) which was defined by the grammarian Patañjali (after 150 BC) as a region to the east of where Sarasvatī disappears, to the west of the Kālaka forest, south of the Himalayas, and north of the Pāriyātra mountains.[10] Even if the designation of the western and southern limits is not clear, it is evident that the *āryavarta* was limited to certain territory. This territory was expanding; in the second century AD, in the *Mānava Dharma Śāstra* 2.22, it is defined as the land between Himalaya and Vindhya reaching from the eastern to the western sea. Using an impressive number of quoted sources, Bronkhorst delivers several examples illustrating vast dissimilarities between the areas, and the intellectual culture of 'Greater Magadha' as area of emergence of heterodox movements. The distinctions are revealed through the language, as Māgadhī was apparently not easy to understand for people from other areas.[11] The differences in cultures can, according to Bronkhorst, be identified through several aspects, such as in the differing approaches to medicine, which was 'magico-religious, using sorcery, spells and amulets' in the west and 'empirico-rational' in the east (Zysk 1991; Bronkhorst 2007: 56-60). Another difference could be found in the funerary praxis: the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (13.8.1.5) orders sepulchral monuments in the form of the four-cornered burial places and adds: 'those who are of Asura nature, the Easterners and others, make them round (*parimaṇḍala*)'. The forms of the sepulchral monuments are indeed different in the west, a fact which is documented in representations in art.[12] The most important distinction in the culture of the 'Greater Magadha' makes its appearance in the territories of the religious movements based on a belief in rebirth and karmic retribution – a Sāṃkya philosophy, which is connected with the sage Rishi Kapila (*īśvaramaharṣi*), Ājīvikism, Jainism and Buddhism.

Bronkhorst's book faced critical opinions, such as for example the fact that there is no evidence to support the claim that all the changes and innovations leading to the appearance of heterodox movements based on a belief in rebirth came solely from the 'Greater Magadha' (Neelis 2008). This critique is convincing, and many of the features presented by Bronkhorst as Magadhan in nature might well stem from much a larger cultural group over a longer period of time. The present paper does not ask, however, about the 'Greater Magadha' but is concerned instead with its counterpart, the land of the Āryas. The intellectual culture of this land, as Bronkhorst has shown, stood in opposition to the outer world – including the 'Greater Magadha' and a much larger territory beyond them.

In Appendix VII of his book, *Brahminism in Gandhāra and Surrounding Areas*, Bronkhorst (2007: 357-362) lists some interesting references. The *Baudhāyana Śrautasūtra* (18.13) lists the names of the tribes which a Brahmin should not visit, and includes the land of the Gāndhāras in the north-west. This may be in agreement with the *Mahābhārata* (12.65.12ff) which describes Gandhāra as being beyond the system of *varṇas*. Patañjali describes the lands to the west of the Thar Desert as non-Brahmanical territory,

[10] *Vyākaraṇa-Mahābhāṣya* 1, p. 475 l. 3 (on Pāṇini 2.4.109; III p. 174 l. 7-8 (on Pāṇini 6.3.109), ed. F. Kielhorn, Bombay 1880-85; cf. Bronkhorst 2007: 1.

[11] *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* 1.337-38; transl. Bodewitz 1990: 191, 'Now this Brahmadatta Caikitāneya was appointed Purohita by the king of the Kosalas Brahmadatta Prāsenajita. His (i.e. the king's) son talked like the Easterner. He (Caikitāneya) spoke: "This man (i.e. the son of the king) is not to be understood. Yoke my chariot. I shall come back." He went away.' Cf. Bronkhorst 2007: 8.

[12] Cf. Zin 2010, in Buddhist narrative reliefs from the first century BC until the third century AD there are several representations of Brahmanical *āśramas* characterized as such by representations of sepulchral monuments, apparently graves of the deceased teachers. In representations in Mathurā, the objects are square and similar to the 'pyramids' build till modern times in Nepal (De Marco 1987), while in other parts of India (preserved are representations in Sanchi and Andhra), the graves are round.

which he confirms by naming the Śakas and Yavanas as people living beyond this limit. According to the definition provided by Patañjali, Bronkhorst believes that Gandhāra does not belong to the *āryavarta*.

It appears, however, that the 'territory belonging to the *āryavarta*' and the region which was home to the extraordinary Vedic culture were not one and the same, as there is a great deal of evidence for a strong continued Brahmanical culture in this territory, as we can see, for example, in the narrative literature in which, particularly in the *jātakas*, Taxila is delineated as a centre of Vedic education.[13] As Witzel (2006: §2.1) has shown, Gandhāra played an outstanding role in the formation of the Vedic canonical tradition. Vedic texts, such as the *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa* (7.7.36-39), present a picture of Gandhāra, or more generally, *udīcya/udīca*, 'northern', as a traditionally conservative area, where the 'best speech' could be found, and where one would send one's sons for study – a conviction which goes back to the *Upaniṣad* era (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* 3.3, 7; cf. Witzel 2011: 493). Pānini, who, in his *Aṣṭādhyāyī,* formulated the Sanskrit grammar which remains normative today, came from this area, specifically, from the village of Śalātura at the convergence of the Kabul and Indus rivers (*ibid.* 494).

The seeming contradictions about Gandhāra in the records as both a 'non-Brahmanical territory' and as the area with 'best speech', where the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* was formulated and where 'one should send one's sons for study' seems to indicate a region dominated by isolation – not to say 'apartheid' – in which the extremely conservative authorities of Sanskrit and the Vedic culture held firm to their tradition notwithstanding the foreign surroundings.

Witzel (2011: 494) underlines the fact that Pāṇini knew the words for script, *lipi* or *libi*, and even for book, *grantha*, 'bound together', and yet composed his *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, consisting of extremely short formulas, for the oral tradition, meant to be learnt by heart. He states: 'Pāṇini composed his grammar right *inside* the Persian province of *Gandāra*. He lived in a culture that was aware of and used writing and books' (Witzel 2011: 494). One might suggest that such a conservative attitude towards scripts could also be indicative of a general approach which included the prohibition of visual illustrations. This would explain the lack of representations, an absence which appears to have existed beyond the timeframe of the Brahmanic religion when we call to mind the nonexistence of *yakṣa* and *nāga* statues as well as the late beginnings of the visual representations in Buddhism. The question of whether Butkara was early, or instead, the product of a local style, should perhaps be reformulated: was Butkara early because it was remote from Brahmanical centres?

The immediate reasons for the sudden and dramatic appearance of Gandhāran art are not known, but it appears that they were somehow related to the religious polity of the Kushan empire. One begins to feel as if the sculpture workshops were simply ready and waiting to produce art *en masse*. In fact, the objects themselves can be understood as testimony for the lack of an earlier Indian pictorial tradition in the area. The artists, whose aesthetic was that of the Mediterranean, were illustrating Buddhist or Hindu material. The art of Andhra under the Sātavāhanas also had a strong influence from the Mediterranean world;[14] let us therefore discuss western 'influences' in Gandhāra. The visual world of the Mediterranean was part of the area. It was not foreign. The question presented earlier could be simply repeated: why did the art of the region appear so late and not before Bharhut?

As we know, the art of Gandhāra used Mediterranean models to represent narrative content. The models are well-chosen, but interpreting the meaning of the depictions is not always a straightforward task as the representations are often based on associations with represented items which are not self-explanatory. As an example, we can examine the scene showing the approaching Buddha crossing the

[13] Cf. s.v. Takkasilā in Malalasekera 1937-38: vol. 1, 982-983.

[14] Cf. Stoye 2006; Zin 2015a-b; and works of Elisabeth Rosen Stone: e.g. 2006 and 2008, with references to the earlier research.

Figure 2. The Buddha crossing the river Nairañjanā. From Sikri. Lahore Museum, no. 1277, G-6. (Photograph by Muhammad Hameed.)

Figure 3. The Buddha crossing the river Nairañjanā. Nagarjunakonda, Archaeological Site Museum, no. 614 (depot). (Photo: Wojtek Oczkowski.)

river Nairañjanā on his way to the tree of enlightenment.[15] The story tells us that Kālika, the *nāgarāja*, emerged from the river and praised the Buddha with a song. What we see (Figure 2)[16] is the Buddha standing on dry ground in front of a fenced-in enclosure, inside which we see a couple of *nāgas* standing and a tree (it is possible that the tree is behind the enclosure). The *nāgas* emerge here from a well, which stands a substitute for the river. The identification of the enclosure as a well is suggested by means of the Graeco-Roman fountain placed on the fence, which has the form of a lion's head with water flowing from the lion's open mouth. The crossing of the river is not depicted at all, and only the western pictorial element indicating water makes it possible for us to recognize the episode. A comparison with a depiction of the same occurrence from Nagarjunakonda (Figure 3)[17] underscores the skills of the Andhran artists: the well or other adaptations from the West were not necessary here. The future Buddha stands surrounded by the *nāgas* who are emerging from floods of water. For the artists in Andhra, the representation of the episode was unquestionably less problematic than for their colleagues from Gandhāra. It should not surprise us, as the iconography of *nāgas* emerging from water had already been used in an early relief in Kanaganahalli.[18]

It is a generally known fact that Gandhāra was adopting pictorial motifs from the West, but Gandhāra was, of course, also adopting elements from the art of the subcontinent. One should be aware of the fact that even fundamental elements, such as the preaching gesture of the Buddha, the so-called *dharmacakrapravartanamudrā*, were used in Andhra generations earlier than they were in Gandhāra (cf. Zin forthcoming a; Zin forthcoming b), however, this particular gesture was never used there in representations of the Buddha. This gesture, clearly denoting teaching, was used in representations of monks, or for Vidhura, preaching to the *nāgas*.[19] The representation can be found as early as Kanaganahalli.[20]

Often, Gandhāran artisans were not inventing but rather incorporating pictorial elements to create their own sophisticated visual language. We can, however, also find examples documenting experimentation with new forms once the iconography was already established. One peculiar late example – apparently one of a kind – was discovered in the Hyderabad area (Figure 4).[21] The relief, showing the birth of the Buddha, is unquestionably an adaptation from Andhra (Figure 5),[22] but it is modified for the Gandhāran viewer. Queen Māyā is standing in the 'Gandhāran way', with the right side of the body exposed towards the gods; she is holding the branch of a tree with her right hand (in Andhra, the gods always stand on the side where her arm is held akimbo). The gods, carrying a long fabric, are – as is always the case in Andhra – four in number. However, the first of the gods is Indra (wearing his characteristic crown), as it is Indra in Gandhāran reliefs who receives the new-born Bodhisatva. The biggest alteration is the new-born himself, who was never depicted in Andhra in person. It is an astonishing object of art, providing, once again, a testimony to Gandhāra's ability to generate its own formula from adopted forms.

As we can observe in Figure 4, the legacy of early Gandhāran artists adopting the forms and re-using them to represent specific narrative contexts continues in later examples. This also seems to be the case

[15] For the literary sources cf. Vogel 1926: 97-102; Zin forthcoming a.

[16] Sikri, Lahore Museum, no. 1277, G-6; illustrated e.g. in: Kurita 2003, I: fig. 202.

[17] Nagarjunakonda, Archaeological Site Museum, no. 614 (depot); illustrated in Yaldiz 1992: no. 16; Rama 1995: pl. 18.

[18] Kanaganahalli, slab no. 10, *in situ*. Illustration: Aramaki, Dayalan & Nakanishi 2011: 67; Poonacha 2011: pl. 40; Zin forthcoming c: no. 7(7), pl. 5 (drawing).

[19] For comparison of Gandhāra and Andhra cf. Zin forthcoming a.

[20] Kanaganahalli, slab no. 57, *in situ*. Illustration: Aramaki, Dayalan & Nakanishi 2011: 90; Poonacha 2011: pl. 80; Zin forthcoming c: no. 2(2), pl. 2 (drawing).

[21] The image here is taken from the database of the Leiden University Libraries, 1034, P-036683, where it is labelled 'Birth of the Buddha, Tul Mir Rukhan', apparently meaning Thul-Mir-Rukhan, Hyderabad District in Sindh. I would like to thank Dr Gudrun Melzer (Munich) for bringing this relief to my attention.

[22] Amaravati, Archaeological Site Museum, no. 19; illustrated by Rosen Stone 1994: fig. 72.

in the group of reliefs whose narrative content has been a matter of scientific controversy for generations.[23] The most beautiful example is the famous stela of Mohammed Nari (Figure 6).[24] The traditional explanation for such reliefs, provided by Foucher (1909), and enduring in further research (e.g. Schlingloff 1991; 2015: 50-68), sees in them representations of the miracle of Śrāvastī in which the Buddha – to defend the heretics and for the salvation of hundreds of people – performed a miracle in which he multiplied himself. The explanation is convincing if one sees the reliefs as a continuation of the earlier models depicting the Buddha surrounded by radially ordered emanations, as such representations are found on the stelae in Mohammed Nari in both upper corners. Several other details in the stela correspond precisely with descriptions of the Śrāvastī miracle in the texts,[25] for example, that the Buddha was performing the miracle while sitting on a lotus with a stem made of precious stones which was being held by the *nāgas*.

Both the stela from Mohammed Nari as well as similar reliefs contain, however, several details which do not correspond with descriptions of the Miracle of Śrāvastī nor in general with the literary tradition of the Śrāvakayāna Buddhism: there, we see preaching bodhisatvas and bodhisatvas holding a book that is displaying the iconography of the Bodhisatva Mañjuśrī. Explanations of the stela using the textual tradition of the Mahāyāna or of the Mahāyāna imagery (i.e. not connected with any

Figure 4. Relief of the birth of the Buddha from Thul-Mir-Rukhan, Hyderabad District, Sindh. (Photo: Leiden University Libraries, 1034, Kern Collection, P-036683, with kind permission of the Friends of the Kern Institute.)

Figure 5. Birth of the Buddha. Amaravati, Archaeological Site Museum, no. 19. (Photo: Wojtek Oczkowski.)

[23] Summary of the previous research in Rosenfield 2006: 20-21; Harrison & Luczanits 2011: 71-72.

[24] Lahore Museum, no. 1135, G-155; illustrated e.g. in Kurita 2003, I: fig. 395; Harrison & Luczanits 2011: figs. 1-4.

[25] Cf. e.g. *Divyāvadāna* XII: 143-166; transl. Rotman 2008: 253-287.

Figure 6. Relief Mohammed Nari. Lahore Museum, no. 1135, G-155. (Photo: Muhammad Hameed.)

Figure 6a. Detail of Figure 6.

particular text) fit very well with the representations.[26] One gets a feeling that it is not possible to come up with generalizing explanations of such representations, or of representations of triads of a Buddha and two accompanying bodhisatvas. There are cases (Figure 7)[27] in which the difficult conversions represented on the pedestal – the subjugation of Apalāla and the conversion of Aṅgulimāla – provide a clear link to suggest that the teaching Buddha in the middle is Śākyamuni performing the great miracle through which he will convert hundreds of people (Zin 2006: 7-8). On the other hand, other representations give us nothing which could constitute a barrier to identifying them as depictions of Amitābha flanked by Avalokiteśvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta – giving them the meaning such representations have in Tibet or China. It appears that the connotation of the reliefs has been changed, even if the form remains that of the tried-and-tested visualisation of the Śrāvastī miracle. The Mohammed Nari stela incorporates an element which seems to point a finger for us. The upper left corner (Figure 6a) shows the miracle with emanations around the central Buddha and a person with their right arm held above their head. The same gesture is repeated by a male person sitting to the right of the lotus (from the viewer's perspective) of the main Buddha.

The gesture – which is in fact self-explanatory – is documented in Indian culture as a sign of desperation,[28] and it is repeated many times in exactly the same context by defeated heretics watching

[26] Huntington 1980; Miyaji 2002; Rhi 2008a-b; Harrison & Luczanits 2011.

[27] From Sahrī Bahlol; Peshawar Museum, no. 02770 (158); illustrated e.g. in Kurita 2003, I: fig. 403; Rosenfield 2006: fig. 1.3; *Gandhara. Das buddhistische Erbe Pakistans* 2008: 275; Zin 2006: 7, figs. 1-2.

[28] Cf. Schlingloff's 'Index of Pictorial Elements' of the Ajanta paintings, in Schlingloff 2000 and 2013, II: no. 135, 'Being horrified'.

Figure 7. Buddha triad stela from Sahri Bahlol. Peshawar Museum, no. 02770 (158). (Photo: Muhammad Hameed.)

Figure 8. Miracle of Śrāvastī. Ajanta, cave XVII, antechamber, right side wall. (Griffiths copy no. 17 M, photograph in India Office, vol. 70, no. 5972, 5977.)

Figure 8a. Drawing of Figure 8 by Monika Zin.

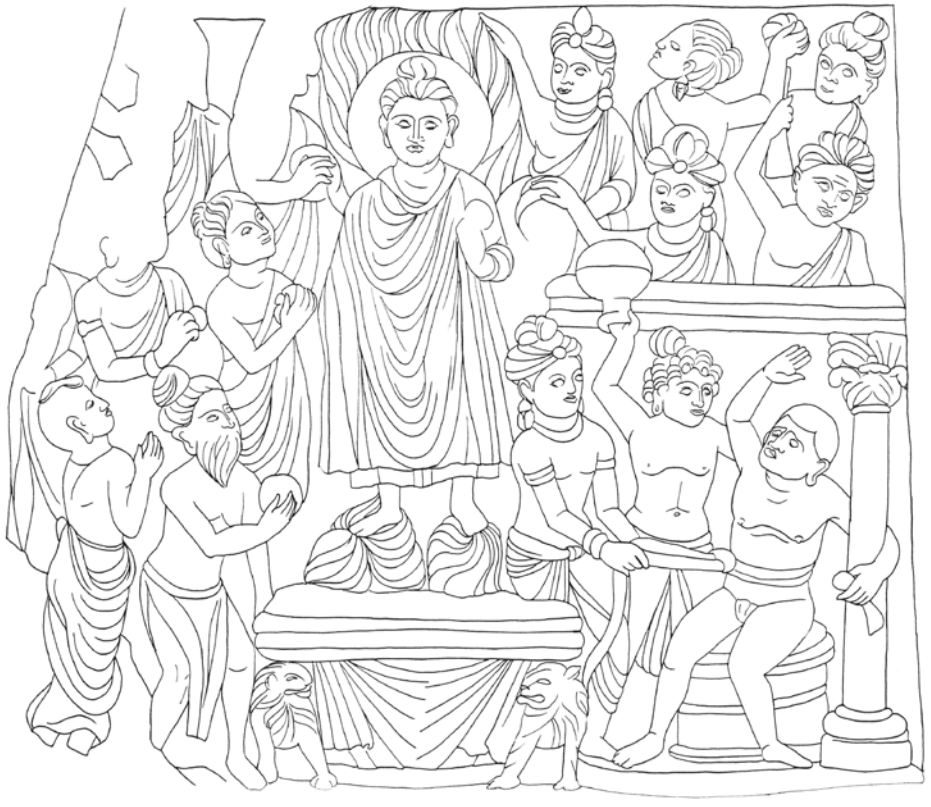

Figure 9. Relief in private collection in Japan. Drawing after Schlingloff 2000/2013, II: p. 101 [47].

the Great Miracle (Figure 8),[29] including examples from Gandhāra (Figure 9).[30] The only difference is that the two persons in the Mohammed Nari stela are not heretics, but instead bodhisatvas adoring the Buddha. They are represented as richly ornamented with heads surrounded by nimbi. Their gesture is apparently a remnant of the older iconography of the Śrāvastī miracle, while the Buddha in the middle or the representation of the emanations might now have a different meaning, and illustrate the Buddha Amitābha or Akṣobhya.[31] We should probably stop searching for a textual tradition that directly and entirely corresponds with the representations. Just as we will never find a source describing the Nāgarāja Kālika emerging from a well with a fountain in the form of a lion face, the literary sources for stelae, like the one from Mohammed Nari, most likely never existed. The representations are probably utilizing the visual phenomena and not the literary descriptions, giving them new meanings. Sometimes, one has the impression that the literary works – such as the 'Appearing of the Tathāgata' quoted by Rhi[32] which recounts the appearance of the great lotus ornamented with jewels which the Buddha, surrounded by adoring gods, is sitting on – are themselves secondary, and describe the art objects. If we were to go back to the beginnings of such pictorial representations we might, generations earlier, find depictions of the miracle of Śrāvastī.

Even in its form and composition, the stela from Mohammed Nari has a different character than the narrative reliefs. What it shows is, first and foremost, the Buddha, even if he is surrounded by scenes. The form is shifting the general function of the object from the narrative to the devotional. Furthermore, the physical form of the relief is not that of the familiar bearers of narrative scenes (such as 'false niche') which were located on the domes of *stūpas*; the relief was probably standing inside a shrine – this is all the more likely when considering the excellent state of preservation (Rhi 2011). The art of Gandhāra produced earlier specimens – which might perhaps be understood as preliminary stages of this manner of representation – standing somewhere between an illustration of a narrative and an image meant for worship. Taddei (1993) makes a distinction between 'narrative representation' and 'icon'. We can think, for example, about the Buddha with the converted Kāśyapa ascetic who can be depicted so small that he only reaches to the Buddha's knees,[33] so that the sculpture primarily features the Buddha; the narrative subjects are reduced to a less important addition. One might risk making a general statement, and surmising that the character of the Gandhāran reliefs was developing from narrative to devotional. This seems to be true for later representations as well, which still carry narrative content, such as in the case of the *parinirvāṇa*s which turn into massive implementations – the form which will be adopted by other art centres, including in Central Asia (cf. Behrendt 2016).

While reading Gandhāra as a source of iconography for other areas, it is of greatest importance to establish which forms or – as in the case of the Miracle of Śrāvastī vs. Sukhāvatī – which meanings had already been established in Gandhāra. It seems that many of the pictorial patterns are creations of Gandhāra, although this cannot always be demonstrated. I once presented the hypothesis that there must have been later Gandhāran art which is no longer extant. It might be useful briefly to repeat the thesis from my paper on the 'lost Gandhāran School of Paintings' (Zin 2013), written as a contribution to Central Asian studies, as it is relevant to the aim of the paper at hand – analysing Gandhāra in the context of other schools of Buddhist art.

[29] Ajanta, cave XVII, antechamber, right side wall; cf. Schlingloff 2000 and 2013, I: 514, no. 92; illustrated in Yazdani 1930-55, IV: pls. 42-44.

[30] Private Collection in Japan; illustrated in Brancaccio 1991: fig. 1.

[31] Cf. Harrison & Luczanits 2011: 112-13, for possibilities of different explanations.

[32] Rhi 2008b: 258; T 278, vol. 9, 613b-614a.

[33] Cf. Karachi, National Museum, no. P 1865, illustrated e.g. in Ingholt 1957: fig. 437; Kurita 2003, I: fig. 312; Peshawar Museum, nos. 1373 and 1378, illus.: Ingholt 1957: figs. 87-88; Kurita 2003: fig. 310.

Figure 10. Painting from Kizil, cave 184(?): Maitrībalajātaka. (Photo: copyright Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst, no. III 8888; by Jürgen Liepe.)

To state that the art of Central Asia comes from that of Gandhāra is to state an oft-repeated truism. When making more precise comparisons between Gandhāra and the paintings of Kucha and trying to adjust for Kucha as continuation of Gandhāra, the issue is, however, far from being simple. What we know today does not make it possible for us to date the earliest Kuchean paintings (in what is known as the first Indo-Iranian style) any earlier than the second half of the fifth century. At this time, Gandhāra was still active, but no longer producing representations of *jātaka*s, or scenes from the Buddha's life; such pictures were absolutely typical of Kucha. We can not only conclude that a gap of some hundred years lies between similar representations in both regions, but also observe that development took place during that time. This development is most observable in representations of the *jātakas*. In Kucha, the (human) Bodhisatvas in *jātaka* stories are, as a rule, depicted with nimbi. In the Gandhāran reliefs, we encounter a nimbus in a late representation of Viśvantara.[34] The biggest difference between representations of the *jātakas* in Gandhāra and in Kucha manifests itself in the composition of the scenes. While in Gandhāran reliefs, the Buddha in his former existence was never placed in the middle of the composition (even when the *jātaka* was only represented in one scene), in Kucha the Bodhisatva is most often placed in the centre. The representations of the *jātakas* in Kucha often use a composition which is reserved for

[34] Cf. Viśvantara in the British Museum, acc. no. 1913,1108.21, illustrated e.g. in Zwalf 1996: fig. 139; Kurita 2003, II: pl. 846.

the Buddha only in Gandhāra (Figure 10).[35] There, the Bodhisatva of a *jātaka* is placed in centre of the composition; he is shown with a nimbus, and is also larger than the other figures. These figures are arranged around him, frequently revealing different episodes from the narrative in the conflated mode of representation, in the same manner as, for example, the *Māravijaya* is depicted.

Because such compositions of the *jātaka* representations do not appear in the Gandhāra reliefs (which is true of all of Indian art) one might think that they are an invention of Kuchean artists. However, in all probability this is not the case. One surviving painting from Gandhāra (Figure 11)[36] displays all the characteristics of a 'Bodhisatva-centric' composition; the longish eyes of the central person signal the Gupta period. The painting represents the *Śibijātaka*. King Śibi, with his head surrounded by a large nimbus, is placed in the centre of the composition. The dove is represented at least twice: sitting on the king's lap and sitting on the scale-pan. It is possible that the dove was represented once more while escaping from the falcon (there are still some lines visible in front of the bird of prey). To the (viewer's) right we see the scene depicting the cutting of the king's flesh and the man with the scales. The figure of an old man with long hair standing in a sort of entryway(?) on the left side is striking. The man is stretching his right hand towards the king in a demanding gesture. Such a personage does not belong in the story of King Śibi giving his flesh to the falcon to save the dove. It is evident that the person, apparently a begging Brahmin, illustrates an additional line of the narrative. One might conceive that it is a representation of the general generosity of the king towards all those in need. Might it also, perhaps, be a particular Brahmin? Perhaps the Brahmin who claimed King Śibi's eyes?[37] The idea seems odd as it is a story from another *jātaka*, i.e. another incarnation of the future Buddha Śākyamuni. The idea appears less illogical once we are familiar with the paintings of Kucha which often work with highly complex visual conventions and can represent, for example, not only the preaching Buddha but also the context of his sermon in the very same pictorial unit. The paintings occasionally show individuals in two different incarnations in the same picture – such as in the story of the *nāga* Elapatra (Figure 12).[38] In the story, as a punishment for destroying leaves of the *ela* plant during his existence as monk during the lifetime of the Buddha Kāśyapa (upper right corner), the *nāga* Elapatra was reborn with the *ela* plant on his head, which caused severe pain (lower left corner, the *nāga* is represented twice here, in his animal form with a tree growing on his head and in his human-like form with cobra hoods).

Such sophisticated pictorial language was only partially an invention of Kuchean painters; most of the methods already existed in Gandhāra. It is only possible to understand these methods when comparing them with Kucha. The comparative analysis, for example, of the representations of the *Parinirvāṇa* (Zin forthcoming d) demonstrates that, in Gandhāra, the scenes around the dying Buddha show different time periods and different places from the narrative in one pictorial unit; individual figures might even be substituted for one another.

If we are aware of the use of such refined and highly conventionalized methods, it appears conceivable that the painting of King Śibi from Gandhāra could be a combination of two narratives into one depiction.

The Gandhāran model for painting King Śibi was repeated in Kucha (Figure 13)[39] and in Dunhuang (Figure 14).[40] The Brahmin, stretching the hand towards the king, also appears in the last representation (lower right side), demonstrating that the genius of Gandhāra is responsible not only for the composition of the pictures but also for the manner of representation which intertwines different re-births as well as different stories.

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[35] *Maitribalajātaka*, Kizil, cave 184(?). Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst, no. III 8888; illustrated in: Le Coq & Waldschmidt 1928: pl. 2.14; *Kizil Grottoes* 1983-85, III: fig. 207.

[36] Kyoto, Ryukoku Museum (depot); illustrated in Kurita 2003, II: fig. 868 (without right part); Zin 2013: fig. 3.

[37] For the representation of the story in Ajanta XVII cf. Schlingloff 2000 and 2013, II: 233-237, no. 49; comparative material in the paintings in Kucha, II: 46.

[38] Kizil, cave 206 (Foot-Washing Cave); Berlin, Asian Art Museum, no. III / IB 8649/2.

[39] Kizilgaha, cave 13; illustrated in *Mural Paintings in Xinjiang of China: Kucha* 2008: fig. 327; Zin 2013: fig. 2.

[40] Dunhuang, cave 254; illustrated e.g. in *Mogao Grottoes of Dunhuang* 1980-82, I: fig. 32; Zin 2013: fig. 1.

Figure 11. Painting of the Śibijātaka from Haḍḍa? Kyoto, Ryukoku Museum (depot). (Drawing by Monika Zin.)

Figure 12. Painting from Kizil, cave 206 (Foot-Washing Cave) showing the story of the nāga Elapatra. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst, no. III / IB 8649/2 (partially lost in World War II. (After Grünwedel 1920, pl. 28-29.)

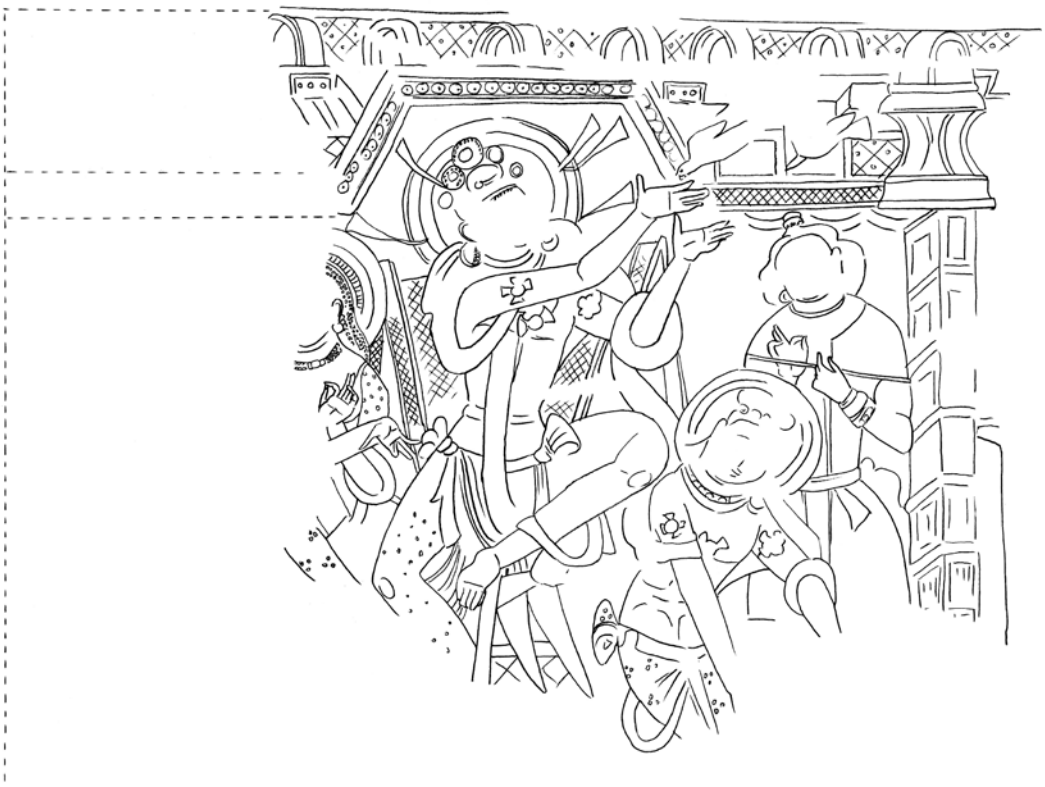

Figure 13. Painting of the Śibijātaka at Kizilgaha, cave 13. (Drawing by Monika Zin.)

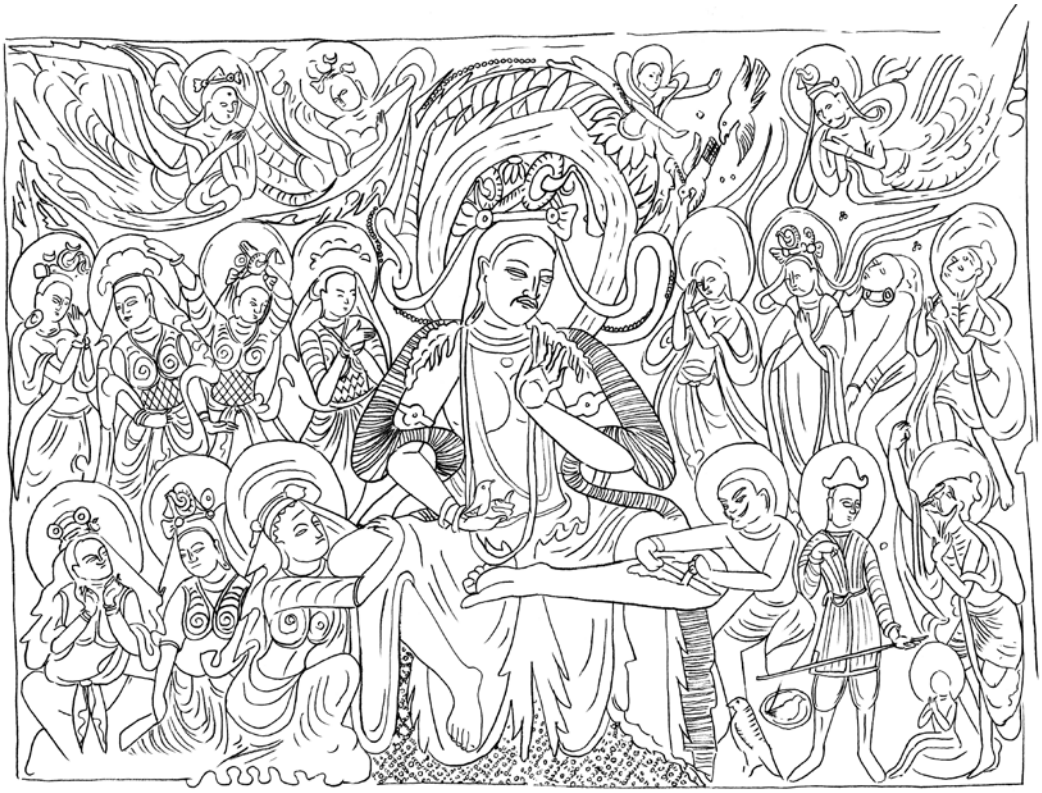

Figure 14. Painting of the Śibijātaka at Dunhuang, cave 254. (Drawing by Monika Zin.)

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