

Gandharan Art in its Buddhist Context

The fifth workshop of the CARC Gandhara Connections Project generously supported by the Bagri Foundation and Richard Beleson

Monday 21st – Wednesday 23rd March 2022

The workshop will be held online using Zoom and Spatial Chat (details and instructions will be provided to those who have booked a place). It will also be recorded and made available on the Gandhara Connections webpages (www.carc.ox.ac.uk/GandharaConnections).

Abstracts

DAY ONE Devotional Art and the Buddhist Community

Prof Juhyung Rhi (Seoul University)

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

For Buddhist art specialists, identifying various divinities in their own visual images has been a major preoccupation. The task is sometimes quite straightforward but sometimes not so simple due to the inconsistency of visual evidence or its incongruence with literary prescriptions or the lack of enough specificity. Its difficulty also often varies in different classes of divinities. Buddha images are more difficult or more confusing in identification due to their lack of complexity in appearance. They generally look alike despite minor differences, which are rarely indicative of different 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 in a limited range of instances. 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 Gandhara, and attempt to seek its ramifications for understanding the significance of Buddha images in India and other parts of Asia in this overall period.

Dr Henry Albery (University of Ghent)

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

Monasticism in Gandhara cannot be understood apart from art. It is prevalent both materially in the carvings, reliefs, paintings, etc., unearthed from monastic and stupa sites and textually in the *vinayas* of all the monastic institutions (*nikāya*) active in the region around the turn of the Common Era. But the relation between the two was never an easy one. Aesthetic, cultic, and didactic concerns collectively demanded an acute awareness and deliberative orchestration of monasticism *vis-à-vis* different modes of representation, with each mutually shaping the other. Such issues resulted in numerous rules codifying the creation, content, and consumption of art, not only within the regimented space of the monastery, but without also, determining, in this case, how monastics were to respond to the art that lay beyond their walls. Through a series of cases studies comparing the different voices present in the *vinayas*, this paper shall point to some of the tensions concerning the relation between monasticism and art, focusing on the introduction of art to the monastery, the aesthetics of monastic art and fashion, and the conundrum of figural imagery.

Prof Muhammad Hameed (University of the Punjab, Lahore)

The Lost Buddhist Art of Gandhara

The well-versed Gandharan glory has been highlighted through the study of the huge amount of cultural material recovered from the monastic settlements in the region. The religious architecture of Buddhism has remained the core focus of worldwide scholarship. The origin, growth, development, diffusion, and decline of Buddhist philosophy, art, and architecture in and around Gandhara are based upon the evidences from stupas and monasteries. Is this the right approach to understand Buddhist society in Gandhara? Is the information derived from these shrines helpful for reconstructing the socio-economic, political, and religious stratigraphy of the Buddhist community of that period? If not, then what do we need to do to get the complete picture? Is there anything or many things that we are missing in the whole thread of studying Buddhism and Buddhist art? Do we need to contextualize or recontextualize our perspective and approach to understand everything about Buddhism and Buddhist art? Which elements are missing and what has been left untouched in Gandhara art? The present paper is intended to pinpoint the unexplored paradigm of Buddhist art. The main objective of the research is to revisit our approach and start thinking beyond the monastic areas and beyond Gandhara. Life outside Gandharan stupas and monasteries needs to be studied because society played an integral part in the sustainable development of monastic life. Owing to its significant contribution, Buddhist heritage enjoyed a prosperous period in Gandhara. The art and architecture of the people living around the shrines is also a part of Gandharan heritage and it deserves similar attention.

Prof Gregory Schopen (UCLA)

On Selling Space at the Monastery: Making Economic Sense of 'Intrusive' Images and Stūpas at Monastic Sites in āra

Many monastic complexes like the Dharmarājika in Taxila or Butkara I are, more often than not, crowded, even cluttered with secondary elements. These can be small stūpas or far more images than could ever have been used. To talk about them a term more typically used in discussion of the Western Caves is useful and these elements might be called 'intrusive'. That marks them as add-ons that were not part of any original plan and are disruptions to any ordered layout. Several reasons have been cited for why donors might have wanted them there. But given that their constant construction and carving, and

the continual presence of workmen and the delivery of materials would have created a considerable nuisance, why the monks might have wanted them there has remained unexplained. One good reason is suggested here: they could be an important source of revenue for the monks.

DAY TWO Iconography and Objects

Dr Christian Luczanits (SOAS, London)

On the Language of Gandharan Buddhist Art

Be it the assessment of depictions of a flask holding Bodhisattva in the context of the Buddha's life (Luczanits, 2005), the reading of the interaction of multi-figured representations in terms of their Buddhist meaning (Luczanits, 2013), or the close analysis of the figuration of the Muhammad Nari stele (Harrison and Luczanits, 2012), in each of these works I employ the principle that a particular element depicted in these works points towards a specific meaning that remains consistent in its range. For example, I take it for granted that the flask held by Brahmā, brahmanic ascetics and Maitreya is shared between them due to their brahmanic character, and that it thus cannot simply be put in the hand of Śākyamuni who does not share this character. In other words, in my reading, a sign used in Gandharan art signifies a specific meaning, the signified, and that signified remains fairly consistent. Of course in the later depictions of Maitreya the simple water flask has become bejewelled, and that new flask potentially has a new meaning, such as carrying the nectar of immortality, but this new meaning builds on and is consistent with the older one. The three works mentioned above demonstrate that this approach can yield rich results for our understanding of specific aspects of Buddhism as it was practised in Gandhara.

In my contribution, I will reflect on this methodology, its background, its implications for my own research, and for our understanding of Gandharan Buddhist Art more broadly.

Harrison, Paul, and Christian Luczanits. 2012 March. New Light on (and from) the Muhammad Nari Stele. In *2011 nendo dai ikkai kokusai shinpojiumu puroshōdingusu: Jōdokyō ni kansuru tokubetsu kokusai shinpojiumu*, 69-127, plates 197. Kyoto: Ryukoku University Research Center for Buddhist Cultures in Asia.

Luczanits, Christian. 2005. The Bodhisattva with the Flask in Gandhāran Narrative Scenes. *East and West, dedicated to Maurizio Taddei* 55, no. 1-4: 163-188.

Luczanits, Christian. 2013. The Buddha Beyond. Figuration in Gandharan Cult Imagery. In *Nepalica-Tibetica. Festgabe für Christoph Cüppers*, eds. Franz-Karl Ehrhard, and Petra Maurer, 28, 2, 1-21. Andiast: International Institute for Tibetan and Buddhist Studies.

Dr Wannaporn Rienjang (Thammasat University, Bangkok)

The Bimaran Casket and its Buddhist Context

Since its discovery in the early nineteenth century, the Bimaran casket has caught attention of scholars working on the development of Buddhist imageries. Made of gold and inset with gemstones, the casket bears images of the Buddha, Brahma, Indra and an unidentified figure. This gold casket was found inside a Buddhist *stūpa* near Jalalabad in eastern Afghanistan along with an inscribed stone reliquary and coins of late first to early second

century AD. While arguing that the Bimaran casket may have been made in the reign of Kanishka I or Huvishka and probably enshrined in the *stūpa* in the later period, this presentation attempts to offer some possibilities for its use and cultic implication within the Gandharan Buddhist community.

Alice Casalini (University of Chicago)

Framing and Reframing: Architectural Legibility in Gandharan Art

Framing devices have a unique position in the scholarly debate on Gandharan art. The architectural elements, classified within the terms of classical orders, have often been employed as evidence of the hybrid and proto-global nature of Gandharan art. Non-architectural motifs have also been identified as imports from other artistic traditions through their nomenclature. Figures of *yakṣas*, *yakṣiṇīs* recall the Indian cultural milieu, while caryatids, atlantes and putti refer to the Greco-Roman tradition. The resulting discourse is one that conflates form, style and iconography with ethnic identity, as it is based on the assumption that it is possible to locate ethnicity in visual forms. In this paper I move away from the preoccupation with issues of origin and ethnicity, and discuss instead the ways in which architectural motifs frame relationships of beholding in a religious setting. I contend that framing devices built an horizon of expectations for the beholders, by providing keys of legibility that would aid in navigating the rich visual cosmos on the stupa surface.

Dr Dessi Vendova (Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley)

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

The so-called ‘Muhammad Nari Stele,’ a famous Buddhist artefact from Gandhara, discovered in what is now Pakistan, 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 but scholars have yet to come up with a satisfying interpretation as to what is depicted on it. 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.

A critical component to determine is the identity of the Buddha represented in the centre of the stele. One early long-held interpretation has been that the stele depicts Shakyamuni Buddha’s Great Miracle at Śrāvastī, an interpretation first put forward by the famous art historian Alfred Foucher. This reading has been challenged in recent years, and among the newer interpretations is that the scene depicted is of Amitābha’s paradise Sukhāvātī, or of Akṣobhya’s paradise Abhirati, or of the preaching of the *Lotus Sūtra*. As a result, various texts have been suggested as the sources for this and similar ‘complex steles’, the majority of them belonging to the Mahayana tradition.

With my paper, I hope to provide a definitive answer to the riddle of the identity of the Buddha represented in the ‘Muhammad Nari Stele’ and propose a text that exactly matches the narrative programme of the stele and demonstrate that these steles were part of non-Mahayana, mainstream Buddhist practices. These findings have the potential to drastically change our understanding of early Buddhist art and Gandharan art in particular and put under question and challenge the interpretation that these steles are evidence of Mahayana Buddhist practices and cults.

DAY THREE Sites and Production

Dr Abdul Samad (Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, KP Province)

Latest Discoveries in the Buddhist Archaeology of Gandhara

Abstract to follow.

Dr Shailendra Bhandare (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford), Prof Marianne Bergmann (GAU Göttingen) and Martina Stoye (Museum für Asiatische Kunst Berlin, SMB, SPK)

Indian Dedications at Berenike on the Red Sea

Berenike on the Red Sea was one of two ports through which in the Roman Empire the seaborne trade between the Mediterranean Sea and Arabia, East Africa and India passed. Everybody working or living there was directly or indirectly engaged in trade or in ensuring the relevant taxes for the Roman government. Activity was in sync with the monsoons. Excavations at Berenike begun in 1994 are ongoing by the Universities of Delaware (S.E. Sidebotham), Heidelberg (R. Ast), Leiden (O.E. Kaper) under the auspices of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology. This joint presentation focuses on a number of figural representations and one Brahmi inscription, connected with Gandharan culture. Most of them were found recently in the context of the settlement's main temple, a temple of the Egyptian goddess Isis, where they had been dedicated as votives. Four of them are fragments of representations of Buddha: two heads and two headless statuettes. They were not imported, but made locally on commission, using different materials, of different quality and by local workshops as well as by seasonally working sculptors. Especially the statuettes are interesting, which translate the rarer of the two main Gandharan types of the standing Buddha, the one used on Kanishka's gold coins, into the styles of the 'copyists'. Most probably they were commissioned by traders from India. As many other votives in the temple, the Buddha-votives seem to have served the dual purpose of representing the traders to others at probably the most public place of the settlement and of expressing thanks and prayers for a safe journey. A terracotta warrior in Greco-Roman armour with parallels in the region of Ter, however, is an import and represents the Satavahana region of the Indian trade. A votive stele featuring the Indic triad of Vasudeva-Balarama and Ekānamśa is a very significant find. Here again, comparisons with the occurrence of these deities from Gandhara provides a worthwhile context.

Dr Fozia Naz (London)

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

The Gandhara region was a major hub of Buddhist culture. This platform expedited the transmission of Buddhism and its art from India through the Silk Road to Central Asia, China, and the Far East. In the Gandhara territory, the ancient Uddiyana is fortunately very rich in terms of archaeological remains. Archaeologists frequently discover buried structures, sculptures, and coins, from various areas. The focus of the present research paper is the Buddhist art

in the Malakand district. Although, most of the cultural assets are preserved in the Swat and Chakdara Museums, and the structures, are protected, nevertheless there are still some ancient remains that are gradually vanishing because of various factors, the most significant of which is the furtive diggings and modern constructions on ancient sites. Almost all archaeologists in the region have documented and presented exploration reports about the abundant Buddhist and Hindu Shahi period sites which are currently turned over to modern construction of houses, mosques, and community graveyards, with the carvings and paintings defaced or decayed. In this relation, one of the best examples is the Muslim graveyard of Alladand Dherai village in Malakand district. Therefore, this research paper presents the preliminary survey report of the documentation of some graves in the above graveyard. The graves have been decorated with the extracted stones from a Buddhist stupa and still possess the original carvings of decorative and architectural representations of Buddhist art.

Prof Luca M. Olivieri (Università Ca' Foscari, Venice)

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

This paper discusses a hypothetical reconstruction of the planning and programming of the building site, the executive process, the construction and decoration, and ultimately the deconsecration and abandonment of an ancient Buddhist stupa. The chronological context is that of the mid-first to the early fourth century CE. The geographical context is the fertile and rich Swat valley, at the foot of the Karakoram-Hindukush, to the north of the ancient region of Gandhara (today in Pakistan). The reconstruction is based on archaeological excavation conducted over several seasons, including the most recent campaigns carried out from 2011 to 2014. During the latter excavations, conducted by the speaker, new data were brought to light that allowed additions to be made to Domenico Faccenna's previous studies. Among these new insights, there are some, of great importance, which indicate the existence of a large central niche at the top of the stupa's upper staircase, the key to the stupa's figurative frieze. This frieze, which represents one of the highest moments of Gandharan Buddhist art, still imitated centuries later by a celebrated artist at Miran, is the product of a sculptural school guided with a sure hand by an anonymous Master, to whom the responsibility for the entire project should be attributed, architect, master builder and workshop master all in one. The existence of this so-called 'Master of Saidu', admirably intuited and elaborated by Faccenna, finds in this short talk, if possible, further support, demonstrating the capacity of archaeological fieldwork to help answer the many questions that the enigma of Gandhara art still poses.