



GANDHĀRAN ART

GANDHĀRAN ART: Iranian contributions and Iranian connections. The region attained its peak of prosperity in the Kushan period (1st to 3rd centuries CE), when it became one of the strongholds of Buddhism, and developed an advanced urban life where the Gandhāra art flourished (Foucher, 1902, pp. 3-50; Deydera, 1950, pp. 1-5). In the 1st century CE, Parthian and Roman merchants brought in the art and culture of their respective lands and local Hellenistic art tradition, and Buddhist missionaries the elements of Buddhist art. This last factor was developed (in Amaravati, Mathura, and Gandhāra) into a synthesis combining eastern Hellenistic and Bactrian styles with the Indian art of anthropomorphic representations of the Buddhist personages. This background explains the difficulty of assigning a single origin to the Gandharan art. Consequently, after much scholarly debate, three different interpretations have arisen. In the first half of the 20th century, A. Foucher, 'the father of Gandhāra studies', argued that the Greeks had exerted a primary impact on the making of the Gandhāran art, and connected it with the rise of the Greco-Bactrian state and, following its fall, the influx of Greek population into northwest India. Later he expressed the view that the Hellenistic art had penetrated across Iran in Greco-Iranian form. Daniel Schlumberger developed similar ideas. Other scholars, such as B. Rowland and H. Ingholt, while admitting the initial Greek influence, emphasized the influences from the west, namely, Roman, Palmyran and Parthian. The third group of scholars prefers to look for the roots of Gandhāran art exclusively in India. In recent decades, excavations at Ai-Khanum and the Oxus temple considerably strengthened the position of those scholars who advocate the



theory of Greek influence coming from Bactria and of Bactrian contribution. At the same time, the Oxus temple provided archaeological evidence for the presence of considerable Roman influence. All these trends integrated with Indian artistic foundation within the frames of Buddhist ideology. A rapid standardization of Buddhist iconography took place. It started, as demonstrated by materials from Taxila and Butkara I, as early as the 1st century BCE. Local architects, sculptors and artists familiar with the Hellenising tradition combined these elements of different origin to create their own artistic repertoire, canons and models, and this development represent the Gandhāran style.

Nevertheless, the latest finds do suggest that the Bactrian contribution in the creation of the Gandhāran style is quite considerable. There were large Hellenistic centers in Bactria, including [Ai-Khanum](#), the Oxus temple, which produced various works of Hellenistic art. Some of these display obvious Bactrian or Parthian features. The splendid set of sculpture from Khalchayan (Pugachenkova, 1971) dating most probably from the time between the 1st century BCE to the 1st century CE, is doubtless the result of a long evolution of native Bactrian art, which by that time possessed a vast repertoire of anthropomorphic images. Close ethnic contacts between Northwest India (including Gandhāra) and Bactria at the time of the Greco-Bactrian kingdom and the nomad invasion (Chatterjee, 1970, pp. 60-69), helped to spread the penetration of Hellenistic-Bactrian ideas and images to the territory of Gandhara.

The chronology of the Gandhāran style is still debated. Any serious scheme must be based on archaeological data, numismatic evidence, the paleography of inscriptions found on certain works of art, and iconography and stylistic analysis. Local differences should also be taken into account. According to the most probable view, the chronological scheme of the Gandhāran art shows three orders: an early style dating from the second half of the 1st century BCE to the early 1st century CE, a mature style dating from the 1st to the 2nd centuries CE; and a late style dating from the 3rd to the 4th centuries CE (Zwalf, 1996, pp. 70-72).

It is likely that Bactrian Greeks or Hellenized Bactrians played a part in the creation of the anthropomorphic image of Buddha. In this connection the golden token or temple coin from the necropolis of Tillya-tepe should be taken into account (Sarianidi, 1985, pl. 131, p. 250; Fussman, 1987, pp. 71-72). On the other hand, certain iconographic elements associated with Buddhist ideology

appear in Gandhāran art in the forms derived from Iranian iconography, such as ‘fire altars’ and the flame halo (Tanabe, 1984, pp. 21-23; Verardi, 1987, pp. 363-82; idem, 1988, pp. 1533-49; Fussman, 1994, p. 35). Consequently, that the complicated ethno genesis of the population of Gandhara –with Hellenic and Iranian elements participating in a process strongly influenced by the Hellenized Bactrian and local Bactrian artistic traditions – became a prerequisite for shaping of the art of Gandhara upon the Indian background. Equally certain are the presence of a strong Roman artistic influence.

Gandhāran culture in general and Gandhāran art in particular were the products of urban life, and urban life was highly developed both in Gandhara proper and in its surrounding regions. Numerous population centers, large, medium-sized and small, flourished. It appears that the cities and the urban life in Gandhāra had many similarities and connections with ancient Central Asian cities (Fussman, 1993, pp. 83-100; Litvinsky, 1994, pp. 291-313).

In Gandhāran art, specific types of Buddhist cult structures were elaborately constructed. Paintings, bas-reliefs and sculpture richly decorated secular and especially cult buildings. Columns, pilasters (mainly derived from the Corinthian order) and other architectural elements usually had magnificent plastic arrangement. Temples built in the area influenced by Gandhāran art normally included central square structures with circumambulatory corridors (Haḍḍa, Swāt, Miran). The idea of circumambulatory corridors was undoubtedly of Iranian origin, since fire temples with such corridors appear in Iran from the Achaemenid time. The Buddhist architects of Central Asia, where Buddhist shrines with circumambulatory corridors continued to be built down to the 7th–8th century accepted this pattern.

Schemes for the ground plans of monasteries display many varieties. When the space was limited, ‘glued’ plans could be applied, combining two or three isolated parts with different functions: the sacred one (temple) with a large stupa in the middle; living quarters with monks’ cells and a prayer-hall, etc. This architectural pattern was widespread in Central Asia both in the Kushan period (as in Fayāz-tepe) and later (as in Ajina-tepa).

Stupas founded as early as the Maurya time continued to exist and function in Gandhāra till the 1st to the 2nd centuries. They became the basis for the development of a new type of stupa– the classic terrace stupa. Side by side round stupas, square ones came into fashion, with one or two or more stepped basements surmounted by cylinder drums, divided by convex rings into



several sections or steps), with masts of umbrellas on top. The basement and the cylinder were usually decorated with arcades and bas-reliefs, and the arches crowned on pilasters or Corinthian-style semi-columns. Gandhāran stupas of this type became widespread in the areas inhabited by Iranian peoples in Afghanistan, from southeast (Haḍḍa, Jalālābād) to the region of Kapisa (modern Kabul) and southern Bactria (modern Kunduz). They appeared also in Central Asia – in northern Bactria (e.g., Termez, Oštor-maḥalla). Iranian Buddhists built stupas of this kind in Sinkiangá (Miran).

Gandhāran-style paintings, sculpture and architecture penetrated to Central Asia. The paintings of the Buddhist Bactrian monasteries of Termez (especially Fayāz-tepe) were executed in the Gandharan style. Gandharan artistic tradition came to Sinkiang where, as in Bactria, it was accepted by the Iranian-speaking population of the southern oases (the paintings of Miran present the most vivid example). The similarity between the art of Miran and Gandhāra (especially of Swāt) is quite striking. It has been rightly said that the works of art from Miran and Swāt “could have been executed by the same hand” or “by painters from one and the same artistic workshop” (Rowland, 1970, S. 35). The influence of Gandhāran art can even be traced in the later Buddhist art of Central Asia, from Adzhina-tepe to Dunhuang. The presence of Iranian features in Gandhāran art of Central Asia is particularly noteworthy (Haessner, 1987, pp. 107-11; Scott, 1990, pp. 49-70).

Sculpture was one of the principal categories of Gandhāran art. It is represented by isolated statues and by bas-reliefs decorating buildings, especially cult edifices. Statues and bas-reliefs were made in stone, stucco, alabaster, clay, gold, copper, etc. They represent numerous Buddha images, bodhisattvas, gods, devātas (deities of the Buddhist pantheon), demons, priests, monks, donors, laymen, animals, monsters, buildings etc. A considerable number of these are connected with Buddhist legends and religious life. A number of fine Gandhāra statues and bas-reliefs have been discovered in Afghanistan and in the southern parts of Central Asia – in Airtam, Termez (Qara-tepe, Fayāz-tepe, etc.), in Tadzhikistan (Shahrinaw [Šahr-e now], Kobadian [Qobādiān]) and in Sinkiang.

Iranians and Iranian art made a considerable contribution to the development of Gandharan art. In its turn it later affected the culture of the regions inhabited by Iranian peoples.



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