

Arts of Asia Lecture Series Fall 2018
Desert Encounters: Arts, Cultures and Kingdoms of the Silk Roads
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Spread of Gandhara Art in Iranian and Central Asian Context

Osmund Bopearachchi, UC Berkeley

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Both maritime and inland trade brought peoples of many cultures, languages, beliefs and aesthetic aspirations together. Traders were the mediators of these cultural interactions, because Buddhist monks, nuns, philosophers, artists and diplomats as well travelled together; and as a result, not only goods, but also philosophical thoughts and iconographies were exchanged. Likewise, Buddhism was introduced to China at a very early date by enthusiastic travelling monks, who may have accompanied traders and caravaners. Not only Buddhist philosophy, but also Buddhist iconographies were transmitted along the Silk Roads to Buddhist centres in Bāmiyān in Afghanistan, Kizil Caves in Xinjiang and Dunhuang in north-western Gansu Province in Western China.

The main aim of the talk is to discuss the diffusion of Indian, very particularly Gandhāran and Iranian motifs along the Silk Road. The events related to the life of Gautama Buddha or stories of his previous births (*jatakas*) were of Indian origin, but their iconographic rendering in a Chinese context have additions and omissions corresponding to the taste of the donors who commissioned them and of the artists who visualized them. Pious traders who sponsored these sumptuous mural paintings to acquire merits may have preferred stories where the ultimate sacrifice of the Buddha and Buddha-to-be are well-idealised. A special attention will be given to the origin and development of the beribboned diadem also known as fluttering ribbons and flying streamers, emanating behind the heads of the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, gods, nobles and traders, on the paintings of Bāmiyān, Kizil and Dunhuang. Although the first motifs have originated in Central Asian and Gandharan region, as they travelled in space and time along the Silk Roads to the Buddhist centres in distant lands they developed in cross-fertilized contexts, ingeniously incorporating the sentiments and aesthetics of their respective populations creating new forms of art.

Part One: Development of Buddhist Iconography in a Cross-Fertilized Context

Shibi Jataka. Gandhara, 2nd–3rd century CE, British Museum.

Shibi Jataka. Mogao cave complex, cave no. 254, Mogao Caves, Dunhuang, Western Wei period (535-556 CE)

Bodhisattva. 5th century CE, cave 272, Mogao Caves, Dunhuang.

The passing away of the Buddha. Parinirvana Cave no. 158. Mogao Caves, Dunhuang.

Part Two: Hellenistic Art Forms Along the Silk Road

Helios. Athenian red figure krater. 5th BCE. British Museum, London

Helios, driving his quadriga. Unearthed by Schliemann at Troy. 280-300 BCE. Pergamon Museum, Berlin

Sun god Sūrya riding a *quadriga*. The Mahabodhi temple in Bodhgaya 2nd-1st century BCE

Part Three: Origin and Development of the Sassanian Beribboned Diadem

Tetradrachm of Lysimachus. Successor of Alexander the Great, ruling Thrace, Asia Minor and Macedon (circa 360 BC – 281 BCE)

Investiture relief at Naqš-i Rostan. Ahura Mazda handing the beribboned diadem to Ardašir I.

The triumph relief of Shapur I (241-272 CE). Naqš-e Rostam. The defeat of two Roman emperors: Gordian III & Philippos Arabs.

The Buddha in a Dragon Boat. Cave of the Musicians (Cave 38), Kizil, (419-535 CE).

Dance of princess Chandraprabha, Indo-Sasanian inspirations. Cave 83, Kizil. Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin. 5th or 6th century CE.

Maitreya with Attendants. Kizil, Maya Cave 38. Turfan Collection, Berlin (III 8836). Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum für Asiatische Kunst. 5th or 6th century CE.

The Bodhisattva Maitreya. Ceiling of Cave E. Bamiyan. 5th or 6th century CE.

Flying apsarasas. Cave 285, Mogao caves, Dunhuang. Western Wei dynasty (535–57 CE)

Suggested Readings:

Boardman, John, *The Diffusion of Classical Art in Antiquity*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1994.

Jewel of the Silk Road. Buddhist Art from Dunhuang, edited by W. Xudong & T. Lippiello, Dunhuang Academy & Ca'Foscari University of Venice, 2018.

Klimburg-Salter, Deborah, *The Kingdom of Bamiyan, Buddhist Art and Culture of the Hindu-kush*, Istituto universitario orientale (Naples, Italy), 1989.

Sérinde, Terre de Bouddha. Dix siècles d'art sur la Route de la Soie, Réunion des Musées Nationaux, edited by J. Giés & M. Cohen (ed), Paris, 1995.

Zhan, Yuanlin, “Images of Sun and Moon gods in Dunhuang murals between the sixth and tenth centuries”, In *China and Beyond in the Mediaeval Period. Cultural Crossings and inter-Regional Connections*, edited by D.C. Wong & G. Heldt, Manohar, 2014, pp. 151-170.

Zhang, Yuanlin, “Dialogue Among the Civilizations: the Origin of the Three Guardian Deities’ Images in Cave 285, Mogao Grottoes,” *The Silk Road* 6/2, 2009, pp. 33-48.

Zin Monika, “The Identification of Kizil Paintings VI (11. The Descent of the Buddha from the Trāyastriṃśa Heaven of the god Indra, 12. Crossing of the River Gaṅgā – The Legend of the Umbrellas)”, In *Indo-Asiatische Zeitschrift*, 17, Berlin 2013, pp. 5-15.

Zwalf, Wladimir, *A Catalogue of the Gandhāra Sculptures in the British Museum*, 2 vol., British Museum Press, London, 1996.