



# Problems of Chronology in Gandharan Art

*The first workshop of the CARC Gandhara Connections Project generously supported by the Bagri Foundation and the Neil Kreitman Foundation*

The workshop will be held in the Lecture Theatre, Ioannou Centre for Classical and Byzantine Studies, 66 St Giles', Oxford, OX1 3LU.

## Abstracts

### DAY ONE

**Joe Cribb (formerly Keeper of Coins and Medals, British Museum)**

*Numismatic Evidence and the Date of Kanishka*

The dating of sculpture from Gandhara and its related regions is a difficult thing. Any attempts at such dating rely on a series of understandings, based on archaeological context, material and stylistic analysis and iconographic development. What is often presumed without comment is the underlying chronological structure which gives such dating a relationship with the eras in use today. This structure has largely been constructed from four sources of evidence: dated inscriptions, numismatic sequences, the scarce references in historical texts and attempts to match the era used by the Kushans with other Indian eras. Unfortunately the underlying chronological structure built from these has been in a state of flux since it was first attempted. The proposal made in 2003 by Harry Falk that Kanishka I's first year was in AD 127 was based on the information about the relationship between the Kushan and Shaka eras in an astrological text. This proposal has become widely accepted, even though its implications have not yet been fully assimilated into the discourse on Gandharan art. This date has also not yet been applied to the broader chronological structure, as it comes from a different form of evidence. So parts of the chronological structures are still attached to earlier solutions, based on different resolutions of the evidence. This paper attempts to show that the solution reached by Falk from the astrological text can also be demonstrated by recourse to the use of numismatic and inscriptional evidence, thereby strengthening the claim for Falk's proposal as the key to Gandharan chronology.

**Prof Monika Zin (Saxon Academy of Sciences, Leipzig)**

*Buddhist Art's Late Bloomer: The Genius and Influence of Gandhara*

Rather than a separate school, Gandhara has always been viewed within the context of its synthesis of Western art and its creation of a visual language that spread with Buddhism across Asia. Because hundreds of reliefs have survived, as well as literature in the area's vernacular language, it is tempting to believe that we have nothing more to learn. But is it really that simple?

Texts from the region include the earliest written testimony of Mahāyāna Buddhism. For the time being, however, we still face a dilemma: we have neither the narratives in Gāndhārī that are illustrated in art, nor any artistic renditions of the Mahāyāna *sūtras* before the 4<sup>th</sup> c. CE. There are also unresolved questions about Gandhara's role as the initiator of art on the Northern Silk Road. A gap exists of at least 100 years between Gandhara and Kucha, and Kucha did not adhere to the Mahāyāna tradition. In addition, the Kucha paintings reveal such a strong and direct Indian influence that it is impossible to view Gandhara as the sole initiator of artistic activity in the region.

Furthermore, uncertainty remains over the origins of Gandharan art: this settled, culturally active region appears to have generally dispensed with art for a long period of time. Nothing testifies to the presence of archaic representations from the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BCE, as found on the subcontinent. Was the lack of a tradition of craftsmanship the reason why artistic production in Gandhara was so dependent on figurative models from the Mediterranean region? Within this debate, it is often overlooked that Gandharan artists took their cue not only from the West, but also from Andhra.

**Dr Abdul Samad (Director of Archaeology & Museums, Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa)**

*Recent Archaeological Excavations and their Relevance to Chronology (title t.b.c.)*

**Dr Anna Filigenzi (L'Orientale, Naples) & Dr Luca M. Olivieri (Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan)**

*On Gandharan Sculptural Production from Swat: Recent Archaeological and Chronological data (in absentia, read by Peter Stewart)*

This contribution is based on the results of the latest archaeological excavations carried out in Swat by the Italian Archaeological Mission in Pakistan, namely at the urban site of Barikot and at two nearby Buddhist complexes, Gumbat and Amluk-dara. In particular, the remarkable discovery of cultic monuments within the urban perimeter of Barikot offers an unprecedented opportunity to cross-examine decorative assemblages from both urban and non-urban contexts and to establish significant correspondences in their stratigraphy-based chronology. The resulting context of implications is another firm step towards widening the perspective on the chronological and cultural stages of the 'Gandharan' artistic idiom, both within and without Swat.

**Prof Ciro Lo Muzio (La Sapienza, Rome)**

*On Some Similarities between Gandharan Toilet-Trays and the Earliest Buddhist Art of Northern India*

The Classical component has long been and still seems to be a major driving factor in almost any analysis of Gandharan toilet-trays, being assigned a leading role in the typological classifications, and, in general terms, in any effort to understand the very nature of these elusive artifacts. As far as chronology is concerned, however, the Greek element is unlikely to serve as a reliable tool.

On this occasion, the Hellenistic or Greco-Roman *facies* of toilet-trays will be set aside in order to highlight a few unnoticed (or not properly stressed) formal, ornamental and iconographic links with some among the earliest Buddhist monuments of India, i.e. Sāncī (*stūpa* 2), Bharhut and Bodhgaya. The possible chronological implications of such similarities will be considered keeping in mind the recent efforts aimed at rectifying the historical and chronological context of these monuments, in particular their long-assumed relationship with the Śunga period.

## **DAY TWO**

### **Wannaporn Rienjang (Classical Art Research Centre, University of Oxford)**

*On the Chronology of Stupa Relic Practice in Afghanistan & Dharmarajika, Pakistan, and its Implications for the rise of Popularity of Image Cult*

Relics are arguably representations of the Buddha and important monks, thus serving as a focal part of Buddhist rituals. Coin evidence suggests that stupa relic worship in greater Gandhara took place at least from the first century BC at the Dharmarajika in Taxila, and about a century later in eastern Afghanistan. The nature of the relics enshrined in stupas at the Dharmarajika and in eastern Afghanistan appears to have shared some common features at least until the time of the fifth Kushan king, Huvishka (c. AD150-90). These common features include the corporeal remains (principally bone fragments and ashes), which were often accompanied with beads. These corporeal remains and beads were often placed inside one or more metal caskets, which were almost invariably placed inside a relic container, next to which coins were generally placed. After Huvishka's time, relics enshrined in stupas apparently show a poorer nature and are fewer in number. Towards the end of the fourth century AD, however, the elaborate arrangement of stupa relics seems to have revived, although in a different form and even much fewer in number. Did the change in the nature of the stupa relic deposits and its decreased number after Huvishka's period reflect the more popular practice of image cult? This paper presents the changing nature of stupa relic deposits in relation to their associated coin evidence. It encourages us to ask if the change in stupa relic practices, by and large non-figural in nature, has any implications for the rise of popularity of image cult.

### **Dr Stefan Baums (LMU, Munich)**

*How Can We Use Inscriptions to Help us Date Gandhāran Art?*

Inscribed pieces of Gandhāran art hold particular interest for art historians, archeologists and epigraphers alike, with the promise that in these particular confluences of physical and textual evidence the inscription may help date the art work, or the other way around. In this presentation, speaking as an epigraphist, I will provide a survey of the various ways in which epigraphic information can be used to date Gandhāran artwork, and will attempt to show the limits of epigraphic arguments and the assumptions on which they rest. The range of evidence that can be used includes explicit dates (with or without eras) given in inscriptions, reference to historical figures, the state of religious ideas referred to, the development of the language and formulas used, the changing shape of letters, and different physical techniques of production. I will illustrate the interaction of these different types of evidence by demonstrating how I arrived at the datings (absolute and relative) for the items in my recent edition of the corpus of Gāndhārī reliquary inscriptions as well as in a survey of the Gāndhārī inscriptions on image pedestals. I will discuss how changing particular variables (such as the dating of an era) affects the overall chronological equation, and conclude with an assessment of the degree of reliability and accuracy that we may have achieved in our dating of Gāndhārī inscriptions and the objects to which they are attached.

**Robert Bracey (British Museum)**

*Is it Appropriate to Ask a Celestial Lady's Age?*

This paper will examine a sculpture in the Cleveland Museum which is executed in Gandharan style but which was made in the city of Mathura. Though the two 'schools' (really only an accurate term for Mathura) undoubtedly influenced each other it is very unusual for a piece of this type (a railing pillar with female figures) to be carved in a Gandharan style. The chronology of Buddha images in Mathura and Gandhara present very different sorts of problems as the former are frequently inscribed with dated inscriptions while the latter are not. However, secondary images like these are much more commensurable - dating depends in both cases on stylistic criteria and archaeological inference. This piece will be used both to explore the difficulty in establishing a chronology but also to ask whether chronological questions are really the right ones to ask.

**Prof Juhyung Rhi (Seoul National University)**

*Positioning Gandharan Buddhas in Chronology: Significant Coordinates and Anomalies*

This paper will examine Gandharan Buddhas, focusing on dated images and related examples. It will relate these specific examples to the broader picture of chronology in Gandharan art.

**Dr Kurt Behrendt (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)**

*Late Gandharan Chronology: The 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> Century Period*

Focusing on the latter half of Gandhara's activity this paper attempts to characterize the sculptural and architectural production. Evidence from outside of Gandhara preserved in India, Central Asia and China is a useful place to begin as it sheds considerable light on the importance and nature of the post-Kushan period. In turn, considerable architectural evidence provides a picture of the late Buddhist activity in Gandhara. Expanding on the limited *in situ* stucco sculpture found in these late sacred areas, an attempt will be made to characterize the less easily dated artistic production done in stone and bronze. Ultimately, I believe a significant body of Buddhist sculptural production can broadly be attributed to the late Gandharan tradition. Given the longstanding bias to date most Gandharan production to the time of the Kushans, reattributing some of this material to later periods has the potential to bring the entire tradition into sharper focus.