

Classical Art Research Centre

Gandhara Connections



2019 International Workshop:

The Global Connections of Gandharan Art

Oxford, 18th-19th March, 2019

Gandharan art is often regarded as the epitome of cultural exchange in antiquity. Gandhara is the 'crossroads of Asia', and its art exhibits extraordinary connections with other traditions across Asia and as far as the Mediterranean.

Since the nineteenth century, the Graeco-Roman connections of Gandharan art have attracted particular attention. Classically educated soldiers and administrators of that era were astonished by the uncanny resemblance of many works of Gandharan art to Greek and Roman art made thousands of miles to the west. More than a century later we can recognize that the Gandharan artists' appropriation of classical iconography and styles was diverse and extensive, but the explanation of this 'influence' remains puzzling and elusive. A key aim of the Classical Art Research Centre's Gandhara Connections project is to cast new light on this problem.

Since the start of Gandharan art history there has been a divide between those who see the 'classicism' of Gandharan art as a legacy of Greek rule in Hellenistic Asia (by the successors of Alexander the Great) and those who attributed it to contemporary exchanges with the Roman Empire. Today scholars increasingly see the links between the co-existing empires of the first centuries AD as an important part of the explanation. There is beginning to be a move a way from the imposition of clearcut but misleading labels – 'Greek', 'Roman', 'Indian' – to a more nuanced evocation of globally connected cultures. But many (perhaps most?) key questions remain unanswered.

At the same time, over the past several decades there has been a growing recognition that at different stages much Gandharan art was connected with other artistic traditions in the Iranian sphere, Central Asia, China, and the Indian Subcontinent. Some of these connections have been comparatively neglected in the past but call for closer attention, for they are part of the phenomenon of ancient 'globalization' to which Gandhara arguably belongs.

The third international workshop of the Gandhara Connections project addresses these centrally important themes with contributions from scholars across a variety of disciplines and subject areas.

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