

## Gandhāran imagery as remembered by Buddhist communities across Asia

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Gandhāran art endured and shaped Buddhist visual culture long after the great monasteries in the Peshawar Basin had fallen into ruin. Naturally, this impact is especially pronounced between the first and early sixth centuries when these Gandhāran institutions were active and connected through trade to Afghanistan (Bactria), Central Asia, and China. Artworks created for monastic complexes in the small regional centre of Gandhāra had an outsized impact on the Buddhist world because of their perceived legitimacy. Narrative formats from this region were also embraced as they effectively crossed cultural barriers. More remarkable are the Gandhāran sculptural forms that remained relevant in later centuries in far-flung Buddhist communities across Asia. For Tibetan and East Asian audiences, Gandhāra came to be equated with the region of Udayāna (the Swat valley), which sits about 20 km north of Gandhāra proper. Udayāna takes on great importance as the place where the first sandalwood image of the Buddha was sculpted – setting up a long lineage of Udayāna Buddha images across East Asia. The great ascetic Padmasambhava also hails from Udayāna to bring tantric teachings to Nepal, Tibet, and Bhutan. Bronzes cast in Gandhāra and Swat also find their way into Tibet, where they remained under veneration. Finally, in the nineteenth century, it should not be surprising that, with the discovery of Gandhāran archaeological remains, Buddhist communities across Asia once again embraced the imagery from this authoritative sculptural tradition.

Gandhāran sculpture had an immediate appeal, with patrons funding the creation of thousands of narrative and iconic images when this centre was active. The initial popularity of Gandhāran imagery in part reflects the artisans' effective rendition of complex ideas in ways that were immediately accessible. Take, for example, the Metropolitan Museum's Gandhāran narrative representation of the *parinirvāṇa*, which evocatively shows the Buddha's death in a self-evident way accessible to both lay and monastic viewers (Figure 1). The clarity of presentation is what makes this sculpture effective – for its ancient audience and today. We relate to the above mourners' grief as juxtaposed with the perfect calm of the Buddha, who is, after all, entering nirvana. The Gandhāran artisan successfully captures the audiences' attention and visually conveys rather complex Buddhist doctrine in ways that cross linguistic boundaries. Leaping to the fourteenth century and the other end of the Silk Road, a painting of the *parinirvāṇa* done in Japan, without question, is based on the Gandhāran prototype (Figure 2). While the style has changed, the organization of this narrative moment with the oversized Buddha surrounded by emotionally charged mourners is the same. It is remarkable that this comparison of works separated by time and geography is possible, and it speaks to the enduring impact of the Gandhāran narrative tradition.

In the first centuries of the Common Era, the Gandhāran image of the Buddha captured the imagination of local patrons, and the very nature of Buddhist practice changed (Figure 3; Behrendt 2017). While the meaning of these early Gandhāran representations of Śākyamuni has been much debated, the sites themselves, with their numerous image-shrines, show that sculpturally presenting the enlightened one had taken on great importance. The sites also provide evidence for the first instances of Gandhāran imagery having meaning for later Buddhist communities. With the collapse of patronage, there is a period when Gandhāran sculptures were reused and given new meanings. When Stein excavated Sahrī-Bahlol C at the beginning of the twentieth century (Figure 4) surrounding *stūpa* iii, he found a large number of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, multi-figure panels, and stucco heads (Figure 5; Stein 1915: 107-108). These images were moved from their original locations so that they could be venerated in a new



Figure 1. *Parinirvāṇa* – the death of the Buddha – in schist, from Gandhāra, c. third century AD. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015.500.4.1 (Photo: courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.)

context, a topic I have discussed in an earlier article (Behrendt 2009: 23). Here I simply want to stress the importance of these sculptures for the late Gandhāran community, who reused them presumably to honour and give importance to the relics enshrined in this small *stūpa*, which remained under veneration.

There is also evidence of Gandhāran schist sculptures being transported in antiquity to the Buddhist centre of Mathura in north India. When I visited the Mathura Museum in 2018, there were thirty-one pieces of Gandhāran sculpture on view. While nothing is known about the find-spots of most of these sculptures, three came to the museum in 1919, having been found in a house foundation in a nearby village (Marshall 1922: 41, pl. XVII). A twelve inch tall fasting Buddha is the most significant of these images (Figure 6). As presenting the Buddha in the form of an emaciated ascetic was not done by the workshops of Mathura, this sculpture's importation has exciting implications in terms of the transmission of ideas and new image formats into north India. Another of the Gandhāran sculptures



Figure 2. *Parinirvāna – the death of the Buddha (Nehan-zu)*. Hanging scroll, color and gold on silk. Japan, Kamakura period (1185-1333), 14th century. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 12.134.10. (Photo: courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.)

sitting in the Mathura Museum depicts the flask-holding bodhisattva Maitreya. I have argued that this format for Maitreya originated in Gandhāra (Behrendt 2014: 34-35), making this image an import that, like the fasting Buddha, was introducing new ideas from Gandhāra. However, this image of Maitreya must be treated with caution, as we know nothing about its find-spot, leaving open the possibility that it was brought to Mathura in the nineteenth or early twentieth century. As most of these images on display at the Mathura Museum are poorly preserved fragments, a local archaeological source seems

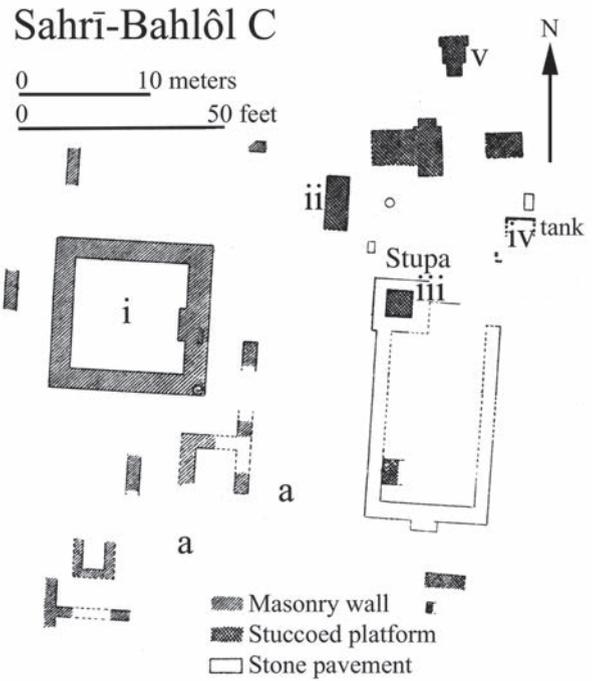


Figure 4. Plan of Sahrī-Bahlol Site C, Gandhāra (modified from Stein [1915], pl. XXXIIIa).

Figure 3. Schist Buddha figure from Gandhāra, c. third century AD. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014.188. (Photo: courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.)



Figure 5. Reused sculptures from Sahrī-Bahlol Site C surrounding stūpa iii. (ASIFC 1101, courtesy of the British Library.)

likely as these are not the kinds of works that would have been brought to this museum in modern times.

Gandhāran sculpture also had a profound impact on the imagery of Central Asia, a topic which has received considerable scholarly attention. Still, a few comments are in order where direct copies of Gandhāran artworks were made, as can be seen at the site of Miran (Stein 1921: 492-495). At this site, there is a painting of a Buddha standing with his mustache and high *uṣṇīṣa*, which looks like early narrative imagery from Gandhāra. An equally compelling translation of a Gandhāran sculpture into a painting is a fasting Buddha at Kizil in cave 76, where details such as the treatment of the torso and pelvis suggest that this painter was aware of Gandhāran images such as the one excavated at the site of Sikri (see Figure 22).



Figure 6. Emaciated Buddha, found adjacent to the villages of Maduban and Maholi near Mathura (Marshall 1922, pl. XVIIc).

Leaving aside the well-documented direct contact with Central Asia, let us turn to northern China, where a body of bronzes exhibits a clear awareness of Gandhāran prototypes (Rhie 1995: 86-98), such as the fourth- or fifth-century piece-moulded example illustrated here (Figure 7). Here the lion throne and elaborate pleated robes recall Gandhāra. A possibly later inscription provides a date of AD 521 and identifies the figure as Maitreya (Leidy and Strahan 2010: 50). Like the Gandhāran Maitreya in the Mathura Museum, here we again see the introduction of iconography and ideology in association with a Gandhāran-style image. Another Chinese Buddha, identified by inscription as the Buddha Maitreya and dated to AD 524, exhibits considerable Gandhāran iconography (Figure 8). At first glance, it would appear to be fully transformed to suit Chinese taste, with its attenuated body and cascading robes. However, at his feet are four *lokapāla* guardian kings who bring alms bowls, a Gandhāran iconography that marks the moment after reaching enlightenment when the Buddha breaks his fast (Figure 9). In East Asia, such guardian kings continue to be important in later centuries, but the bowl holding iconography is abandoned in favor of other attributes. Among the attendant figures at Maitreya's feet are a pair of bodhisattvas, who sit in contemplation with a hand held to the cheek and one leg pendant (Figure 10). This posture traces back to a format that emerges in Gandhāra (Lee 1993: 314-315), as can be seen in an 1880s photo taken by Alexander Caddy at the site of Loryān Tāṅgai (Figure 11). The meaning of pensive bodhisattvas is debated, but they are associated with the heavens and perhaps with the potential for enlightenment. This iconography becomes especially popular in Korea (see Rhi 2013), a good example being a mid-seventh century bronze in the Metropolitan Museum (Figure 12). This image type appears in conjunction with the introduction of Buddhism in this region. In turn, pensive bodhisattvas become important in Japan, with numerous examples produced during the Asuka period (AD 592-645). Significantly in both Korea and Japan, these icons are today often associated with the future Buddha Maitreya. In contrast, the Gandhāran prototypes often hold lotuses, possibly identifying them as early examples of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. While all trace of the original Gandhāran style has disappeared in these



Figure 7. Chinese Buddha, Sixteen Kingdoms period (AD 304-439), late fourth to early fifth century. A possibly later inscription identifies this figure as Maitreya and provides a date of 521. Gilded bronze, piece-mould cast. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 1974.268.8a-c. (Photo: courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.)



Figure 8. Buddha Maitreya, China, Northern Wei dynasty (AD 386-534), dated AD 524. Gilt bronze. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 34.158.1a-n. (Photo: courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.)

East Asian examples, it is significant that the concept of representing a bodhisattva in a pensive mode can be traced back to this critical Silk Road centre.

In China and more broadly across East Asia, Gandhāra was remembered as a real place because of Buddhist pilgrims and translators' accounts, the most important being the Chinese monks Faxian (AD 337-c. 422) and Xuanzang (c. AD 602 – 664) (Li 1995; Li 2002: 157-214). Especially Xuanzang, brought many texts back to China, which he subsequently translated, and as a result, he profoundly impacted East Asian Buddhism. This is important for Gandhāra as descriptions of images, relics, and places preserved in his accounts and those of Faxian remained significant for East Asian Buddhists in the following centuries. Gandhāra was also visited by many other Chinese monks in the fourth and fifth centuries as a place of pilgrimage, as recounted in their biographies preserved in the *Gaoseng zhuan*, edited in AD 519 (Kuwayama 2002: 20-21).

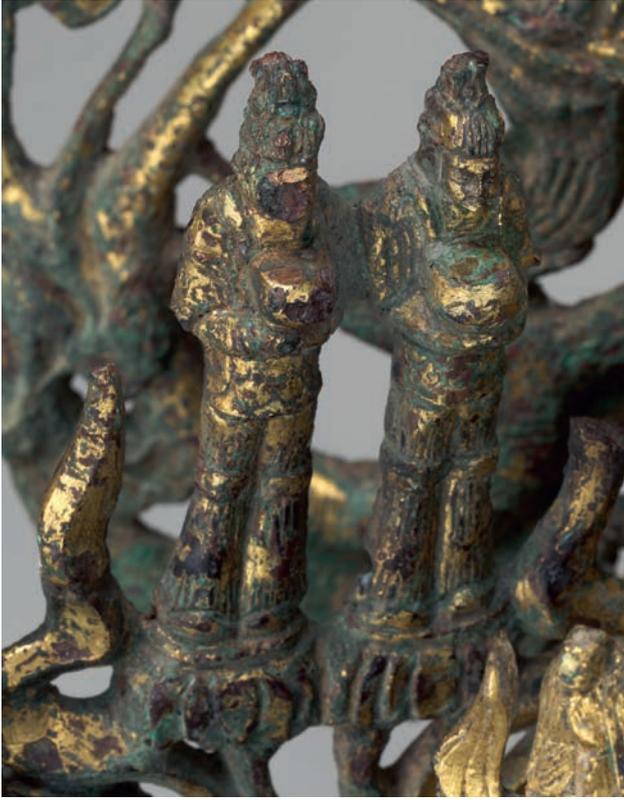


Figure 9. Two of the four lokapāla guardian kings carrying bowls: detail of Figure 8. (Photo: courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.)

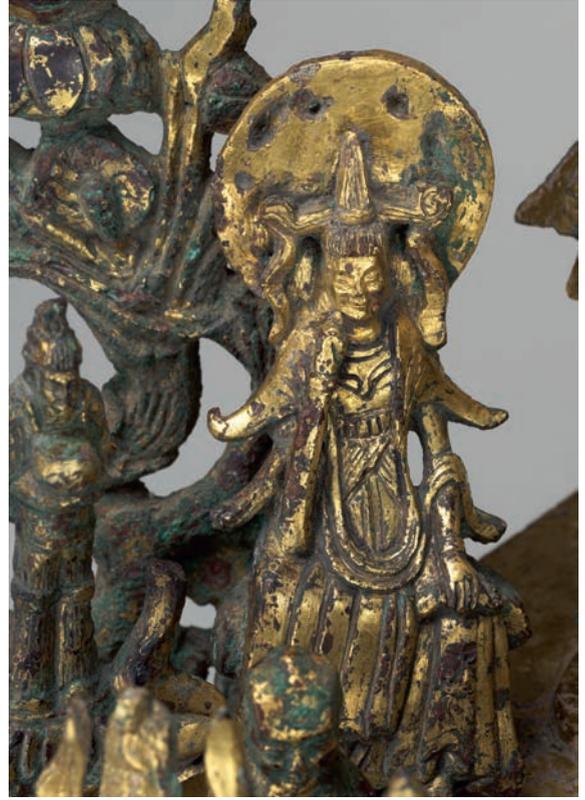


Figure 10. Pensive bodhisattva: detail of Figure 8. (Photo: courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.)



Figure 11. Schist Buddha flanked by two pendant bodhisattvas, from the site of Loriyān Tangai, c. fourth century AD. (Photo: courtesy of the Warburg Institute.)



Figure 12. Pensive bodhisattva, Korea, Three Kingdoms period (57 BC- AD 676), mid-seventh century AD. Gilt bronze. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003.222. (Photo: courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.)

considerably later to find a Buddha definitively identified as a copy of the one made in Udayāna. A Japanese monk named Chōnen commissioned an Udayāna Buddha in China in 985 (Figure 15), which he then brought back to Japan and installed in the Seiryōji temple in AD 987 (McCallum 1996: 51-52). While it is difficult to argue that Chinese artisans still had an understanding of Gandhāra forms in this period, the physical appearance of this figure is very similar to the Chinese Maitreya produced 500 years earlier. The looping drapery of the chest and the treatment of the garments that cover their legs are very similar. Details like the swirling hairstyle are also common to both of these sculptures. In Japan, making Udayāna copies continued through the Kamakura period, and other sculptures following this pattern are known from the temples of Saidaiji, Toshodaiji, and Eikoji (images dated to 1249, 1258, and 1273, respectively). The significance of the Udayāna Buddha in medieval Japan is based ultimately on the veracity of a portrait of Śākyamuni made in Gandhāra. The fact that Udayāna was understood as an authentic source for this portrait is interesting as this is not where Śākyamuni reached enlightenment, but rather is a significant trade artery that came to be known to East Asia as a source of true Buddhism.

Here I want to focus on the sandalwood Udayāna Buddha that many of these travelers report seeing. According to legend, when Śākyamuni ascended to the Trāyastriṃśa heaven for three months to teach the *dharma* to his mother Maya, the king of Udayāna (Swāt) had a sandalwood image of Śākyamuni carved. Faxian and Xuanzang report seeing copies of this Udayāna image at the Jetavana vihāra in Śrāvastī. Again at Kaushambi, they report seeing a sixty feet tall sandalwood version, the original purportedly having flown over the mountains to the Central Asian site Khotan. In turn, Faxian and Xuanzang also visit Khotan and mention seeing this image. Furthermore, copies of the Udayāna sandalwood image are reported to have been brought back to China by both Kumarajiva (AD 344-409) and Xuanzang, though these images have not survived (Wriggins 1996: 87-88).

At roughly the time these Udayāna Buddha images were being brought back to China, a massive gilt bronze image of Buddha Maitreya, dated by an inscription to AD 486, was cast (Figure 13). While the treatment of this Buddha, with his elaborate robes and distinct hairstyle, can be related to Gandhāran prototypes, the style of this statue is Chinese. Significantly, this Chinese bronze can be productively compared to a seventh- to eighth-century seated Buddha from Udayāna (Figure 14). Note especially the distinct u-shaped pattern of drapery on the torsos of these two Buddhas – a particular drapery arrangement that comes to be associated with the East Asian Udayāna Buddha typology (Carter 1990: 21). We have to move

Figure 13. *The Buddha Maitreya, from China, Northern Wei dynasty (AD 386-534), dated AD 486. Gilt bronze with traces of pigment; piece-mold cast. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 26.123. (Photo: courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.)*

While the rock-cut Swat Buddha can be related to the East Asian Udayāna image tradition because of its distinctive drapery, this is rather unusual. At this time, a corpus of sixth- to seventh-century classically Gandhāran bronzes were cast with elaborate robes that relate well to earlier schist sculptures (Figure 16). These images range a bit in style, and their specific place of production is unclear. Two of these bronzes were reportedly found at Sahrī-Bahlol (Barrett 1960: fig. 33; Errington and Cribb 1992: 218-222), and a further example is currently sitting in the Srinagar Museum in Kashmir, so a production centre in Gandhāra is possible. Motifs like the *bodhi* leaf and pearl in the halo appear at the site of Bāmiyān (Behrendt 2007: 78), and thus the Afghan site of Mes Aynak, with its vast copper reserves, might be a possible production centre for these bronzes. Ultimately, the radiate full-body halo became extremely popular at sites across Central Asia, suggesting that these portable Gandhāran bronzes must have freely moved along the Silk Road.

Some of these late Gandhāran bronzes exhibit a distinctive band hairstyle that appears to originate in Swat/Udayāna (Figure 17). This hairstyle in Swat continues and seems quite specific to this region, as



Figure 14. *Marble seated Buddha flanked by bodhisattvas, from the Swat Valley (Udayāna), Pakistan, seventh-eighth century AD. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1995.570.2. (Photo: courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.)*





Figure 15. *Wooden Udayāna Shaka Buddha, Seiryōji, Kyoto, Japan. Made in 985. (Reproduced with permission from Artibus Asiae.)*



Figure 16. *Bronze standing Buddha with radiant halo and mandorla, Pakistan, Gandhara, c. late sixth century AD. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1981.188a, b. (Photo: courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.)*

in the eighth-century example illustrated here (Figure 18). Consequently, it may be the case that at least some of these late Gandhāran bronzes were cast in the Swat valley. A Swat/Udayāna production centre is significant as this valley provides access to upper Indus to centres in Gilgit, Ladakh, Western Tibet, and ultimately, Lhasa, where several Gandhāran bronzes have remained under continuous veneration, and are today part of the Potala holdings in Lhasa (See Schroeder 2001: 30-31). These bronzes in the Potala are the only Gandhāran sculptures that have remained in continuous use since their creation.

The movement of late Gandhāran bronzes onto the Tibetan plateau occurred at about the same time as the quasi mythic tantric master Padmasambhava travelled from Udayāna to the great Himalayan Buddhist centres of Tibet, Bhutan, and Nepal in the eighth century. While his historicity is accepted today, he is primarily remembered as an enlightened supermundane master, a mahasiddha, who brought tantric practices to the Himalayas and violently subjugated demons (Dalton 2011: 67). The veneration of images



Figure 17. Detail of brass standing Buddha, Swat Valley (Udayāna), c. late sixth century. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003.593.2. (Photo: courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.)



Figure 18. Seated Buddha, Swat Valley (Udayāna), eighth century. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987.218.3. (Photo: courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.)

of Padmasambhava is pervasive across the Tibetan plateau, a dramatic example being this monumental c. seventeenth century sculpture from the Hemis monastery in Ladakh (Figure 19). Numerous temples across the Himalayan landscape mark places where Padmasambhava subjugated a demon, meditated, or performed meritorious actions. In light of Gandhāra, his legitimacy can be traced to original practices established in the powerful land of Udayāna. For example, when describing the demon pinned down by eight self-arisen *stūpas*, a twelfth-century Tibetan text places the demon's penis in the land of Udayāna (Dalton 2011: 117). Over time Padmasambhava's power comes to be associated with true enlightened teachings, with twelfth-century texts stating that he is either an emanation of Śākyamuni or the Buddha Amitabha (*Brill's Encyclopedia of Buddhism* 2019: 1199). While his biography transforms over time, his association with Udayāna as a place of legitimacy continues to be emphasized. An excellent example of this trend is the seventeenth-century Drukpa Kagyu monk Taktsang Repa (1574-1651), who went on pilgrimage to the Triloknāth Mandir in Himachal Pradesh thinking he was visiting Udayāna (Linrothe 2019: 178).

In modern times Gandhāra has reemerged as an important artistic centre and place of authentic Buddhism for monastic communities across Asia. Complicating this picture is Gandhāra's long excavation history and the dispersal of sculptures across the world (see Almond 2009; Errington 1987). In the nineteenth century, sculptures and relics found at sites in India and in Gandhāra came to the attention of Buddhist communities, especially in Sri Lanka, peninsular South-East Asia, and Japan. In the course of excavating the massive Shāh-jī-ki-ḍherī *stūpa*, on the outskirts of the city of Peshawar, David Spooner found the famous Kanishka reliquary (Figure 20; Spooner 1912; Errington 2002: 127-146). A small crystal reliquary that was part of this assemblage was then given to a Buddhist Theravādin community in Mandalay,



Figure 19. Monumental Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche), Ladakh, India, c. seventeenth century. (Photo: author.)

where it remains under veneration today (Figure 21). This Gandhāran example is just one of several early relic deposits that came under worship by modern Buddhist communities in the late nineteenth century. Although the site of Shāh-jī-kī-ḍherī had been lost to history, the recovery of this relic at a Gandhāran site gave it legitimacy and tremendous importance as a true relic of the Buddha Śākyamuni.

While the recovery of relics naturally was of great interest, at the end of the nineteenth century, Asian Buddhist communities also turned their attention to newly discovered sculptures from Gandhāran archaeological sites. In this context, let me focus on the actions of Prisdang Chumsai (1851-1935), a grandson of the Thai King Rama III. In the 1890s, after an early career as an ambassador in Europe and falling out of favor with the royal family, he travelled to Uttar Pradesh in north India, where he traded a valuable stamp collection for three bone relics from the Piprahwa *stūpa*. He then attempted to restore his standing with King Rama V by presenting these relics to the Thai court but was instead accused of their theft (Loos 2016: 137). Ultimately, Prisdang fled to Sri Lanka, where he was ordained as a monk in

1896. All of this is significant as while in north India, he appears to have also visited the Lahore Museum, where he saw the Sikri Fasting Buddha (Figure 22). At this time, he must have obtained a plaster cast that he brought to Sri Lanka and installed in the Dipaduttama Monastery in Colombo (Figure 23), where it survives today (Martinus 1907: 20). The emaciated Buddha came to be understood by the Theravādin community as representing the Buddha's six-year fast that followed his great departure from the palace and preceded his enlightenment. Around this time fasting Buddha sculptures start to be created and installed in several temples in Thailand, such as the example from Wat Suthat dated to 1905-6 (Figure 24). These emaciated Buddhas from Thailand are stylistically different from the one excavated at Sikri, but they are loosely based on Gandhāran fasting Buddhas, especially in how the body is rendered. While it is impossible to relate the Thai images directly to Prisdang, and to my knowledge, no plaster casts are known from Thailand, this new Gandhāran iconography became established and popular. Given the emphasis on the Buddha's life story in Gandhāran narrative art, it is not surprising that the emaciated Buddhas in the Theravādin communities of Thailand and Sri Lanka was understood as representing his six-year fast. Moreover, this episode appears in the various biographies of the Buddha, including the popular *Lalitavistara* and *Buddhacarita*. These images provided an opportunity to show the Buddha as a great renouncer and as an ascetic of unquestioned resolve, ideas important to the Theravādin Buddhist communities.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I want to thank Donald Stadtner for his help with the above inscribed date, and for his many insights with the fasting Buddha imagery in Sri Lanka and Thailand. I would also like to thank Juhjung Rhi for confirming that the Lahore Museum did indeed produce plaster casts of the Sikri Fasting Buddha.



Figure 20. *Shāh-jī-kī-ḍherī* relic deposit. (Photo: courtesy of the British Museum, Department of Asian Art, J. Marshall Photograph collection.)

In contrast, the Gandhāran fasting Buddha images appear to have been linked to the enlightenment cycle, not the six-year, fast as Robert Brown has compellingly argued. He also notes that the seventh-century Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang saw a fasting Buddha at Bodhgayā as part of seven shrines marking the forty-nine days associated with the enlightenment when the Buddha did not eat (Brown 1997: 107, 112-14). The importance of asceticism within the Gandhāran tradition is complex and is a feature that has an enduring appeal for later Buddhist communities in Kashmir and the north-west (Behrendt 2010: 299-328). It is worth noting that fasting Buddhas do again appear in the twelfth- to thirteenth-century sculpture of



Figure 21. *Shāh-jī-kī-ḍherī* crystal reliquary, with modern gold lid and wire. (Photo: courtesy of Donald Stadtner.)



Figure 22. Schist sculpture of the fasting Buddha, from Sikri, Pakistan, c. third-fourth century AD. (Photo: courtesy of the Warburg Institute.)



Figure 23. Fasting Buddha in the Dipaduttama Monastery, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Plaster cast of the Sikri Fasting Buddha, made c. 1890. (Photo: courtesy of Donald Stadtner.)

Bengal and in Burma at Pagan, where they seem to show the six-year fast (Bautze-Picron 2008: 77-78), or a scene where youths taunt the Buddha during this fast (see Wujastyk 1984: 192-94). However, it seems the fasting Buddha imagery of north India and Burma was subsequently forgotten before being reintroduced at the end of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the modern interpretation of the fasting Buddha as representing the six-year fast, as advocated by the Theravādin Buddhists, is how such images are understood today. Take, for example, a twenty-first century emaciated Buddha in the courtyard of the Mahābodhi temple at Bodhgayā (Figure 25). This image is part of a long narrative series, where it immediately precedes the breaking of his six-year fast.

## Conclusion

This paper attempts to trace the impact of Gandhāran art through time and identify some of the multiple Buddhist audiences across Asia that looked back at this great tradition. Remarkable is the extent to which Gandhāran art was recontextualized, remembered, and given new meanings by the Greater Buddhist world. The initial reuse and the export of actual Gandhāran sculptures rapidly gave way to making copies of Gandhāran images, narrative formats, and iconography. Even the idea of the first true portrait of Śākyamuni can be traced back to a sandalwood image from Udayāna (Swat) that was reproduced in China and which became important in Japan long after Gandhāra lay in ruin. Padmasaṃbhava, who purportedly brought esoteric practices to the Himalayas, also hailed from Udayāna. In this sense,

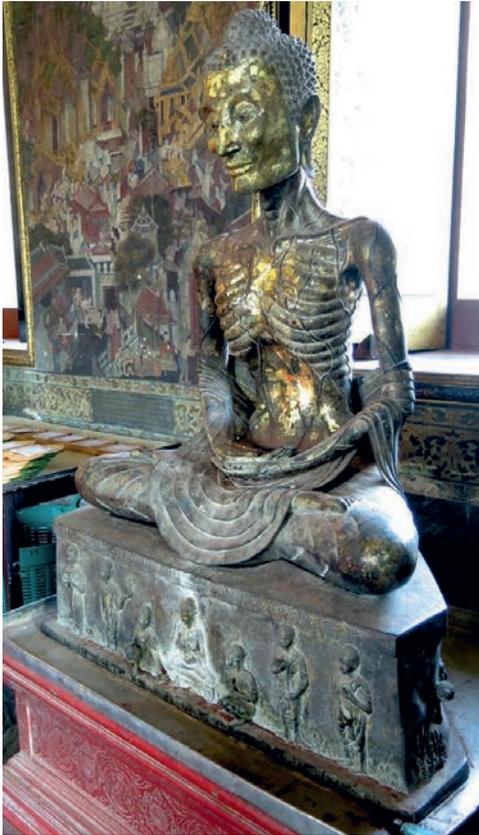


Figure 24. Bronze fasting Buddha, Wat Suthat, Bangkok, Thailand, dated by inscription to 1905-1906. (Photo: courtesy of Donald Stadtner.)



Figure 25. Fasting Buddha showing his six-year penance, scene from a narrative cycle of the Buddhas life, India, Bodhgayā, courtyard of Mahābodhi Temple, early twenty-first century. (Photo author.)

the region of Gandhāra was given great importance as a node of power, and its very geography was considered sacred. It is probably not coincidental that late Gandhāran bronzes remain under worship in Tibetan monasteries even today. With the archaeological discovery of Gandhāra in the nineteenth century, Buddhists again embraced its imagery. Notably, fasting Buddha images, based on the one excavated at Sikri, appear in devotional contexts in Thailand, Sri Lanka, and India. While beyond the scope of this paper, the Gandhāran sculpture housed in museums across the world continues to have this kind of impact on Buddhist traditions. Finally, with the recent discovery of the earliest Buddhist texts in Gandhāra (Salomon 2018), this region and its artistic tradition are today profoundly impacting the understanding of early Buddhism for twenty-first century communities across the world.

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