

GANDHARAN ART AND THE CLASSICAL WORLD



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A Short Introduction

Peter Stewart

ARCHAEOPRESS ARCHAEOLOGY



ARCHAEOPRESS PUBLISHING LTD

Summertown Pavilion
18-24 Middle Way
Summertown
Oxford OX2 7LG
www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978-1-80327-694-6

ISBN 978-1-80327-695-3 (e-Pdf)

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Published in association with the Gandhara Connections
project of the Classical Art Research Centre



With the generous support of the Bagri Foundation



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Preface

The idea for this book emerged from the Gandhara Connections project at Oxford University's Classical Art Research Centre, which was launched in 2016 with generous funding from the Bagri Foundation and the Neil Kreitman Foundation, and was subsequently also supported by Richard Beleson. The general aim of this initiative was to support and stimulate study and research on an endlessly fascinating and appealing subject: the ancient Buddhist art of the Gandharan region. Our more specific purpose was to cast new light on a question which had puzzled and preoccupied researchers since the earliest studies of Gandharan art in the nineteenth century: why does Gandharan art seem to have drawn so extensively from the art of ancient Greece and Rome?

In the course of its six years the Gandhara Connections project generated a wealth of resources for the study of this subject, including a series of open access volumes of academic papers presented at its annual international workshops, which I edited together with my colleague Wannaporn Rienjang. These resources are permanently available on the project's website (<www.carc.ox.ac.uk/GandharaConnections>). However, one question I was repeatedly asked through the course of the project was: 'What can I read as a short and accessible introduction to Gandharan art?' There was not an easy answer to this question. There are only a few introductions to the subject in any language which are accurate and up-to-date, combining detailed academic information with accessible summary. The conclusion of the Gandhara Connections project therefore seemed a fitting opportunity to write this small volume and to present it in a similar open access format, as well as in print, so that it could reach the widest audience possible.

It cannot claim to be an introduction to every aspect of Gandharan art. As a specialist in Greek and Roman art and archaeology, I am not qualified to write such a survey. The book's focus is the theme of the project itself: the relationship between this Gandharan art and the classical tradition, which is to say, the art traditions of the Graeco-Roman Mediterranean, several thousand kilometres to the west. Nevertheless, I have placed some emphasis on explaining Gandharan art to begin with in its own, immediate context. It was, first and foremost, Buddhist, Asian art. It should not be defined by its relationship with the classical world, no matter how intriguing and exciting that connection is.

This book is not intended for one type of reader. It is for anyone and everyone interested in finding out more about Gandharan art. I have attempted to convey information as concisely and clearly as possible. At the same time, I have included in the footnotes selective references to the academic literature that has specifically informed me, or that will permit the reader to find out more. The book concludes with guidance on further reading from the rich bibliography of Gandharan art.

I owe my own understanding of Gandharan art not only to this body of scholarship, but to the friends and colleagues, too numerous to list in full, who have taught me so much in the course of the Gandhara Connections project. The study of Gandharan art is one of the most inclusive and welcoming disciplines I know. Above all I thank Wannaporn Rienjang, who sustained Gandhara Connections throughout as part-time Project Coordinator and Project Consultant, Stefan Baums, Kurt Behrendt, Shailendra Bhandare, Robert Bracey, Pia Brancaccio, Joe Cribb, Elizabeth Errington, Anna Filigenzi, David Jongeward, Rafiullah Khan, Christian Luczanits, Lolita Nehru, Luca M. Olivieri, Jessie Pons, Juhyung Rhi, Abdul Samad, Martina Stoye, and Yang Juping. Luca M. Olivieri generously commented on the manuscript from Barikot and Sarah Knights Johnson cast a critical eye over the proofs. I must record my particular gratitude to Andrew Wong, whose advice crystalized the concept of this book in my mind and improved the final text, and to the Bagri Foundation, whose generosity and enthusiasm have enabled it to come to fruition.

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September, 2023