

# **The Geography of Gandhāran Art**

**Proceedings of the Second International  
Workshop of the Gandhāra Connections Project,  
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Finally, and fundamentally, we wish to express our sincere thanks to the Bagri Foundation and to Neil Kreitman, whose generous support has underpinned the Gandhāra Connections project from the outset.

## Editors' note

### Orthography

The editors have aimed for broad, but not dogmatic, consistency in orthography and use of diacritics, as well as some other conventions, throughout this book. We have endeavoured to apply a reasonable compromise between widely varying practices, embracing inconsistency where appropriate.

### Provenance

The Classical Art Research Centre does not normally publish previously unpublished ancient artefacts which have no recorded provenance and have become known since 1970. We seek to avoid adding value and legitimacy to objects whose origins have not been properly documented. We have chosen to make an exception in the case of the heart-shaped lamp reported to have been found in Malakand District, which Stefan Baums interprets in his paper on the basis of a photograph and information provided to him. There are two reasons for this exception. Firstly, the challenges posed by the loss of provenance information are an explicit focus of the paper, which demonstrates how epigraphic evidence may be used to try and mitigate the problem and partially to re-contextualize unprovenanced objects. Secondly, the historical value of the inscription on this object makes it imperative that it should become available to scholarly discussion.

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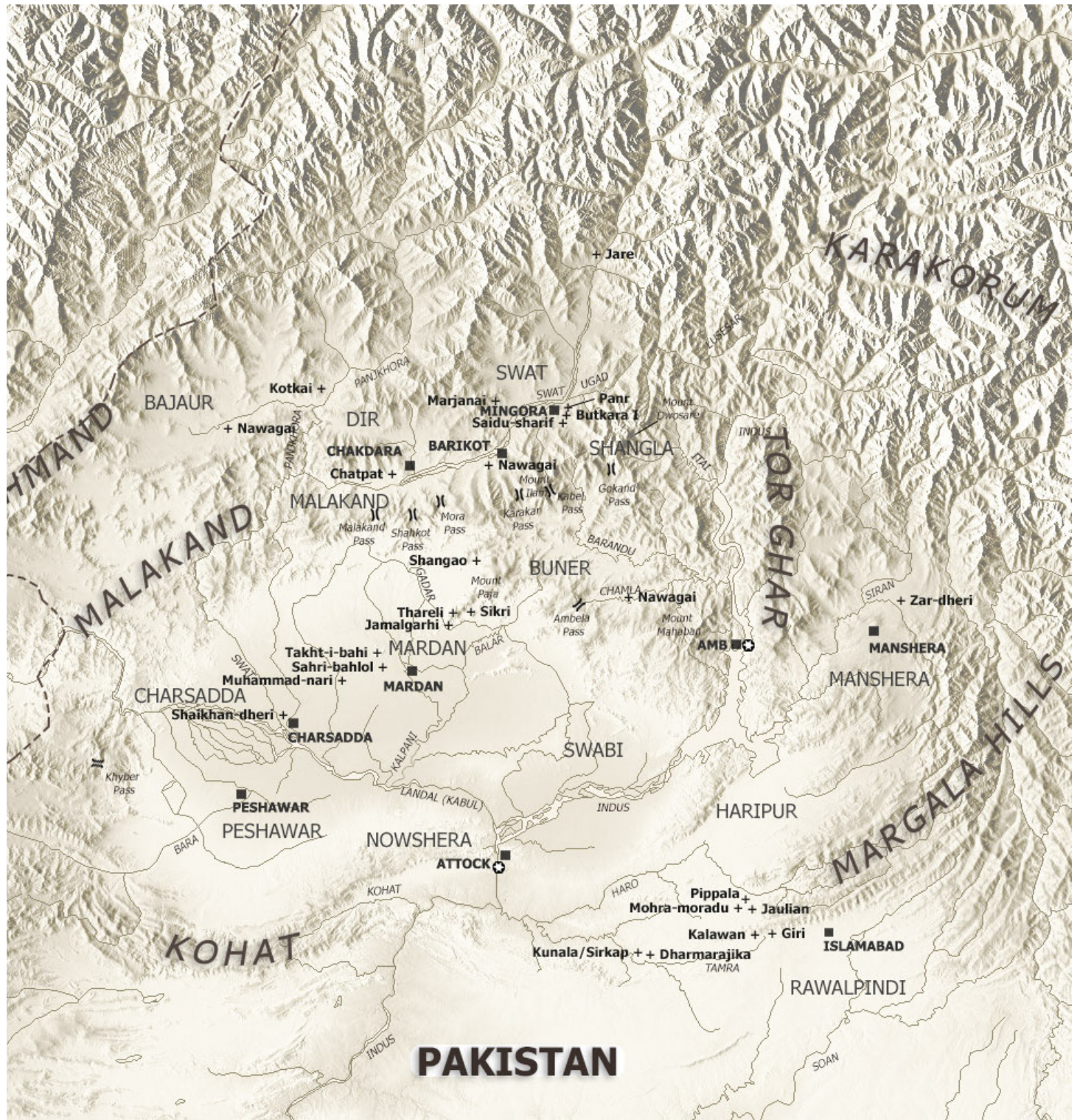
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Map of the Greater Gandhāra





region (copyright: Jessie Pons).



# Preface

Wannaporn Rienjang and Peter Stewart

This volume presents the edited papers from the second Gandhāra Connections workshop, which was held at the Classical Art Research Centre in Oxford on 22nd and 23rd March, 2018. The Gandhāra Connections project ([www.carc.ox.ac.uk/GandharaConnections](http://www.carc.ox.ac.uk/GandharaConnections)) has been generously supported since 2016 by the Bagri Foundation and the Neil Kreitman Foundation, with the aim of stimulating and supporting new research and discussion on unresolved problems in the study of Gandhāran art, and in particular the venerable issue of the cultural links between Gandhāra and the classical world. One of our primary concerns has been to make the research produced and shared within the project as widely available as possible, and consequently the workshop proceedings are freely available as open access e-books online.

As we described in the Introduction of the first volume of proceedings (Rienjang and Stewart 2018: v), several key themes were selected for particular emphasis in the planning stages of the project – themes which appeared to be fundamental for furthering our understanding of Gandhāran art in general, and not only the question of its cross-cultural connections. One of these was the geography of Gandhāran art, by which we largely mean the ‘micro-geography’ of this tradition within a region that was comparatively small, despite its immense ancient influence (on the development of Buddhist art) and modern appeal (to researchers and the wider public since the nineteenth century). Ancient Gandhāra, if narrowly defined as the region focused on the Peshawar basin, has a diameter of less than 300 km and in fact the area of the well known archaeological sites of the Peshawar valley is no more than half that distance from west to east. Yet this region saw a phenomenal efflorescence of sculptural production in the first few centuries AD.

We are used to talking about this sculptural tradition and the related traditions of other artistic media in Gandhāra as if they are straightforwardly a unified phenomenon. Gandhāran art is often referred to as a ‘school’. We sometimes take its limits for granted and assume that its definition is established. This perspective may do justice to the distinctiveness of Gandhāran art, to the special social and religious forces that gave rise to it, the patterns of patronage involved, its Buddhist functions, and so on. But in respect to formal aspects of the art, such as its styles, techniques, material dimensions, and perhaps even its iconography, the apparent consistency and coherence of Gandhāran art is accompanied by a remarkable diversity (See for example Rhi 2008). Variety exists in the styles employed for specific works, in the innovations that they sometimes embody, in the materials employed (including diverse forms of schist), and in the level of specialist technical skill invested in them (we might perceive this as ‘quality’). The paradoxical tension between the homogeneity and recognizability of Gandhāran art in general and the diversity of specific works becomes manifest if we consider any regularly reproduced iconographical type, such as scenes of the Birth of the Buddha or his Parinirvāṇa (Figures 1 and 2 and cf. Figure 1 in Zarawar Khan’s contribution; for a variety of examples see e.g. Ingholt 1957). Just like the narrative scenes being carved for Roman imperial sarcophagi thousands of miles to the west, these compositions exhibit a remarkable consistency in their arrangement of figures, gestures and attributes, the body-types and their interactions. There are ‘sub-types’ within these iconographical traditions, variants of the imagery, which only serve to emphasize the basically repetitious and typological character of the most popular scenes.

Yet, at the same time, one only needs to look at a selection of sculptures reproducing this conformist iconography to recognize the diversity inherent in the execution of Gandhāran art: differences in the rendering of the same motifs, variations in incidental elements, different levels of detail and skill. Moreover, it is interesting to note how varied the ‘classicism’ of Gandhāran art actually is – how many ways there are of drawing from Graeco-Roman artistic traditions, which themselves comprise a complex



Figure 1. Gandhāran Parinirvāṇa scene. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Florence and Herbert Irving, 2015; inv. 2015.500.4.1 (Photo: Metropolitan Museum CC0 licence).

and inventive multiplicity of styles, notwithstanding our ability to define the core characteristics of ‘the classical’ (Boardman 1993; Behrendt 2017; Nehru 1989; Rowland 1942). Gandhāran sculptures of divergent levels of quality and importance make use of the classical heritage in differing ways. Sometimes it may be the highest quality works (in respect to technical virtuosity) that are the most idiosyncratic, while humbler sculptures may appear very close to Graeco-Roman ‘models’. So it is not possible to image a homogeneous cloud of ‘classical influence’ coming over Gandhāra nor that influence ‘trickling down’ from the higher-end commissions to more common products of devotional patronage.

The eclectic nature of Gandhāran art is intriguing in itself, but it must reflect a complex underlying picture of patronage, artistic formation, and transmission of ideas and methods (Neelis 2011). How much of the variety in Gandhāran sculpture is the result of conscious choices or habitual preferences on the part of customers or artists, or those rather fuzzy entities often called ‘workshops’? How much does it relate to the availability of skilled craftsmanship in particular places and times? Or to the degree of exposure



Figure 2. Gandhāran Parinirvāṇa scene. Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum, no. I 80  
(Photo: courtesy of the Warburg Institute, London).

of craftsmen and their patrons to outside influence and imported artefacts? And how much is due to geography? It may be that if we knew more than we do about the provenance of Gandhāran artworks we could develop a very fine-grained picture of how they came to be produced and what factors led to their variety. The work carried out in recent decades in the Swat valley, to the north of the Peshawar basin, has demonstrated the potential in thinking about the distinctiveness of artistic production on a very local level (about which Pia Brancaccio and Luca Olivieri, and Abdul Ghafoor Lone write in this volume).

Further questions arise when we focus on production. To what extent can geography help to explain differences in technical methods or abilities in Gandhāran art? Does distance matter, and how much is the connectedness of Gandhāra distorted by physical and political geography? How can new research on quarries or other sources of artistic materials illuminate the development of art? To what extent did the artists themselves move around? How useful are notions of artistic centres and peripheries within such a small region?

Looking at the inner workings of Gandhāran art in a spatial framework may help us to reconstruct how the dissemination of imagery and forms occurred. We might therefore consider how artists, their products and materials, and their customers interacted in relation to one another and their environment. For

example, we can consider the differences and similarities in art produced in the same period, both at specific and different sites within and between the Peshawar valley, the Swat valley, the Taxila valley, and Afghanistan. This is to say nothing of the wider geographical context of 'Greater Gandhāra' and other parts of the Kushan empire.

The general issues and some of the specific answers to these sorts of questions are the subject of this book. The workshop on which it is based ranged widely, but it is not possible for the contributions to address the geography of Gandhāran art comprehensively, or indeed to do more than scratch the surface of the problems summarized above. The papers that follow are, however, a starting-point, and a stimulus, for thinking about the regional shape and texture of the Gandhāran tradition.

The book is loosely divided into three parts. In the first chapter Jessie Pons adopts a broad view of the challenges and priorities of Gandhāran artistic geography. This programmatic study might serve as prolegomena for the study of the subject. It is complemented by Satoshi Naiki's discussion of contemporaneous stylistic and technical features in sculptures across the three main Gandhāran regions, the Swat valley, the Peshawar valley, and the Taxila valley. His work shows that while similar stylistic developments could be detected in all three regions, certain technical methods appear to have been confined to specific areas. Might this imply the greater mobility of artefacts than the artists who made them or vice versa? The second part of the book provides some of the granularity required to understand Gandhāran art on a micro-geographical level. The editors (and workshop organizers) were keen to emphasize some of the archaeological research on the ground which is being carried out continuously in Pakistan, and the contributions in this part offer short summaries of new material and fresh perspectives on specific localities in the greater Gandhāran region, including the Taxila valley (Muhammad Ashraf Khan), the Peshawar valley (Muhammad Habibullah Khan Khattak, Zarawar Khan), the Swat valley (Pia Brancaccio and Luca Olivieri, Abdul Ghafoor Lone) and the Buddhist remains of Afghanistan with their flourishing tradition of stucco sculpture (Alexandra Vanleene). The final part of the book deals with a virtual geography of Gandhāran art, a view of geography at one remove through textual traces of place-names and the religious associations of particular places in both inscriptions and literary sources (Stefan Baums, Jason Neelis).

A common theme in these studies is the obstacle posed by fragmentary evidence, lost provenances, selective excavation and recording. We see Gandhāran art through a glass, darkly. But what the contributions also demonstrate is that sometimes our view can still crystalize into clarity.

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