DOI: 10.32028/9781803272337-01

Preface

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Previous volumes of workshop proceedings for the Gandhāra Connections project have addressed themes of fundamental importance for understanding Gandhāran art in its ancient contexts: the chronology of the tradition, its regional geography, and the links between Gandhāra and the art of other parts of the ancient world. In this we chose to defer consideration of a topic that might be regarded as equally fundamental, indeed perhaps as 'the elephant in the room' in this field: the historiography and reception-history which has mediated our experience of Gandhāran art and determined its significance in the modern world.

We are concerned here with two closely related aspects. By 'rediscovery' we mean primarily the history of Gandhāran archaeology (broadly defined). We are concerned partly with the early discovery and display of artefacts against the background of British rule in nineteenth-century India, at a time when the potential meaning of Gandhāran art was being constructed and debated. This is a story of pioneering expeditions, but also haphazard methods and often poor or non-existent documentation, ineffective efforts to stem the smuggling of antiquities, and the nascent development of Gandhāran art collecting. The 'looting' of Gandhāran artefacts, which has had such a ruinous effect on our understanding of Gandhāran art in context, has flourished almost since the outset, as the studies in this volume demonstrate, and the recent work of researchers in Pakistan aims to recover lost knowledge from recently confiscated antiquities as much as from the bureaucratic documents of a century ago.

'Rediscovery' is largely a matter of uncovering and putting together information from objects and documents. It concerns the material of Gandhāran art history and archaeology. This is the focus of the first part of the book. In the longer, second part our concerns are subtly different. By 'reception' we mean the diverse and developing story of how Gandhāran art has been *made to make sense* by different observers, whether in the academic or popular domain, by researchers, museum curators, collectors, artists, from the nineteenth century to the present day. Inasmuch as anyone approaching Gandhāra does so with their own priorities and through their personal perceptual filters, the rediscovery of its antiquities is hardly to be separated from its reception, but the emphasis here is on modern history, notably in the British Raj and the decades following the Partition of India and the creation of Pakistan.

Sometimes the modern reception of Gandhāran art has been a matter of conscious deliberation – of decisions about why it is important and worthy of admiration, or about what perspectives can most usefully be adopted in its study. (This is, of course, the process through which we have gone in shaping the Gandhāra Connections project). But just as often, the conceptual construction of Gandhāran art has been a less self-conscious process of shaping in the modern imagination. This is an inevitable aspect of historical study. There simply *cannot exist* an objective image of Gandhāran culture, which is in so many ways irretrievably foreign to modern ideas and sensibilities, and which is illuminated for us in any case by very fragmentary evidence. Yet it is all the more important for that reason to spotlight the motivations of those who have sought to cast light on Gandhāran art – our own and those of the previous generations responsible for leaving us the body of evidence we have to work with.

In view of this we should highlight the institutional setting of Gandhāra Connections itself: a project based in a British department of Classics – of Graeco-Roman studies – which is nevertheless preoccupied with the Buddhist art of Central and South Asia. Moreover, while we are proud of the very international character of the conversations we host, which include researchers from many countries and not just Pakistan and its neighbours, nevertheless, the global interest in Gandhāra and its 'western' links in

antiquity are certainly revealing about what sort of 'legacy' Gandhāra has become for the world, about the distribution of its artefacts and what they have come to signify.

There are, in fact, a variety of individual and institutional reasons why the Gandhāra Connections project has come to fruition where and when it has. To be clear, these do not include any aspiration to appropriate Gandhāran art for the Graeco-Roman world. Yet in various ways this has been attempted in the past, as the following papers repeatedly reveal. It was towards the end of the nineteenth century that the rather awkward term 'Graeco-Buddhist art' gained popularity – a phrase that implies that Gandhāran Buddhism was poured into a mould of Greek expression – that it was a hybrid, half Greek, half Asian. While it is much rarer in scholarship today, it is still very regularly used in popular references to Gandhāra, and as much in Pakistan and India as in the west.

When the importance of contemporary contacts between Kushan Gandhāra and the Roman Empire started to be emphasized in the explanation of its apparently 'western' style, rather than merely a Hellenistic Greek legacy in Central Asia, some went so far as to refer to Gandhāran art as a provincial form of Roman art. Paradoxically, however, from an Indian nationalist perspective, Ananda Coomaraswamy was dismissive about Gandharan art on *exactly* the same grounds: that it was merely imitative of Roman art (e.g. Coomaraswamy 1913: 53-54).[1]

In more recent decades, there has been a strong tendency to see Gandhāran art in rather more pluralistic terms, as the result of a variety of cultural influences, or perhaps we should say artists' responses to other cultural traditions. It is neither Greek nor Roman, but its own tradition, albeit drawing in fascinating ways upon the art of the wider ancient world (see e.g. Rienjang and Stewart 2020; Nehru 1989 for an overview of contributory influences). But the historiography of this attitude is itself not entirely disinterested, as Michael Falser has brilliantly explained (Falser 2015). And today, when we talk – as many of us tend to do – about the cosmopolitanism of Gandhāra we are surely describing an intrinsic quality of Gandhāran art but also idealizing it in terms that, culturally at least, have a broad modern appeal. In a similar way, the anachronistic labels 'globalization' and 'the Silk Road' have much to offer in capturing the nature of Gandhāran culture, but it need hardly be said how heavily loaded they are with the concerns of today's world.

This brings us to the sensitive matter of cultural heritage within Asia. What can and should Gandhāran art mean today in its own countries – where the archaeological sites exist or have existed – principally in Pakistan and Afghanistan? What stories are told about it to visitors, to tourists, including religious tourists from places with large Buddhist populations? And what do we actually mean by heritage? Is it a safe, catch-all term for the archaeological remains which a modern nation-state has responsibility for protecting, or does it – *should* it – involve a more visceral sense of identification with ancient culture? An interesting and difficult aspect of this subject is the slippage that often occurs today between the term India, referring to 'ancient India' in general, and the modern state of India. What is the relationship of Pakistan to this ancient 'Indian' heritage?

These and many other questions are explored by the contributions to this volume. The answers often differ from place to place, from decade to decade and – there is no doubt – they will continue to do so.

1 Compare the discussions by Andrew Amstutz and Shaila Bhatti in the present volume.

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