

# **Gandhāran Art in Its Buddhist Context**

**Proceedings of the Fifth International  
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Cover: Barikot: panel BKG 2269. (MAIP; photo by Aurangzeib Khan.)  
Multiple image shrines in the lower *stūpa* court of Takht-i-Bāhī. (Photo: J. Rhi.)



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## Illustrations

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## Contributors

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## Preface

Wannaporn Rienjang and Peter Stewart

This book arises from the fifth and final planned workshop of the Gandhāra Connections project at Oxford's Classical Art Research Centre, which was held online via Zoom in March 2022. For a variety of reasons, not all of the participants in that workshop were able to commit their papers to the present publication, but we were pleased that the workshop was able to contribute to the develop of research which will appear in print elsewhere in due course. As a record of the workshop's original papers, a list of participants is appended to the book.

Each of the project's workshops has been devoted to a topic which we felt was crucial for understanding the ancient art of Gandhāra. Our starting point was the relationship between Gandhāra and the world of classical Greek and Roman art, but our interests have ranged much more broadly because that cross-cultural relationship can only be tackled by considering other essential aspects of Gandhāran art. Consequently, we looked first at problems of chronology; then the geography of artistic production; then at all kinds of global connections with the region; and next, in 2021, the rediscovery and reception of Gandhāran art: the processes by which our experience of Gandharan art has been shaped and filtered in modern times (Rienjang & Stewart 2018, 2019, 2020, 2022).

For the final workshop it was proposed that we should examine a topic which is of fundamental relevance to the understanding of Gandhāran art: its place within Buddhist religion.<sup>1</sup> One might ask: how can this be a discrete theme, for Gandhāran art *is* Buddhist art, broadly speaking. Was Buddhism not the subject of the entire project? Yet although the immediate religious contexts of Gandhāran art and its significance for the ancient Buddhist population are of primary importance, there remains much that we do not wholly understand, and perhaps too often do not even enquire about. It is important to focus consciously on the monasteries and shrines of Gandhāra, and on the wider community of their inhabitants and visitors, to understand why religious art was made and what its iconography and stylistic repertoire meant to its original users and viewers.

This effort is hampered by comparatively limited evidence for the original settings of sculptures, the loss of less durable artistic media, huge gaps in our knowledge of the Gandhāran settlements and their mixed populations, and the restricted (though growing) body of literary and epigraphic evidence for cult practices and beliefs. At the same time, it is challenging to correlate the archaeology of Gandhāra with the vast and complex body of literary evidence for evolving religious ideas in other parts of the ancient Buddhist world.

This was the task that we set for participants in the workshop. Their responses embraced literature, art, and archaeology across a wide geographical span. The selected papers in this volume give a sense of the different approaches involved and are organized in an approximate thematic order, beginning with Gregory Schopen's study of votive practices in monasteries, continuing with critical analyses of Buddha iconography by Juhyung Rhi and Dessislava Vendova, and concluding with new perspectives on specific archaeological sites by Luca Olivieri and Fozia Naz.

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<sup>1</sup> We were particularly grateful to Christian Luczanits and David Jongeward for their suggestions about this theme.

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