

Classical Art and Ancient India



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**Proceedings of the Workshop held in Oxford,
21-22 March 2023**

Edited by
Peter Stewart

ARCHAEOPRESS ARCHAEOLOGY



ARCHAEOPRESS PUBLISHING LTD

First and Second Floors
13-14 Market Square
Bicester
Oxfordshire OX26 6AD

www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978-1-80327-963-3

ISBN 978-1-80327-964-0 (e-Pdf)

DOI:

<http://doi.org/10.32028/9781803279633>

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Front cover: Queen Māyā's Bath from Amarāvati. Chennai, Madras Government Museum.

(Photo: C. Luczanits 2006, courtesy of the Government Museum, Chennai.)

Back cover: Gold necklace including pendant housing Roman *aureus* of Severus Alexander

(RIC IV 52 and 140), Egypt (?), AD 222-8. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 17.190.1655.

(Photo: Metropolitan Museum of Art CC0 licence).

Published as part of the Ancient Art Connections initiative of the Classical Art Research Centre,
University of Oxford

With the generous support of the Bagri Foundation



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Contributors

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Monika Zin studied literature, art history and Indology in Krakow and Munich, where she taught the art of South and Central Asia for twenty-five years. She has contributed to numerous studies on Buddhist narrative art and is author of books on Ajanta, Kanaganahalli and Kucha. Since 2016, she has been heading the research group 'Buddhist Murals of Kucha on the Northern Silk Road' at the Saxon Academy of Sciences and Humanities.

Note on Object Provenances

The Classical Art Research Centre does not normally publish previously unpublished ancient artefacts which have no recorded provenance and have become known since 1970.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 documented. Occasional exceptions are made on a case-by-case basis, where the scholarly value of referring to an artefact justifies inclusion and where problems of provenance are explicitly addressed. In the present volume, this principle applies to Jeremy Simmons's paper, where five coins in a private collection are illustrated and two further coins from the market are cited.

Preface

Peter Stewart

This book captures the exchange of ideas and lively debate that took place at the hybrid workshop of the same title, in Oxford University's Classical Art Research Centre (CARC), 21-22 March 2023. The event brought together speakers from three Continents under the umbrella of CARC's Ancient Art Connections initiative. This effort to stimulate research on cross-cultural connections in ancient art built upon the success of a previous CARC project, *Gandhāra Connections*, which ran from 2016 to 2022. Like our Gandhāran events, the 'Classical Art and Ancient India' workshop – and the resulting publication – were made possible by the generous support of the Bagri Foundation. We are deeply grateful for all the Foundation's assistance and encouragement, which have underpinned the expansion of CARC's art-historical horizons. In particular I should like to acknowledge Dr Alka Bagri, Alessandra Cianetti, and Dr Juan De Lara. I am also very grateful to the various colleagues who made the workshop and preparations for the publication possible, especially Sarah Knights Johnson.

Throughout the earlier *Gandhāra Connections* project (which resulted in five sets of open access conference proceedings in a similar format to this volume), a subject that was raised time and again was the wider relationship between the Graeco-Roman world and the Indian subcontinent as a whole. These events raised questions that applied to material far beyond Gandhāra and the neighbouring regions of Central Asia and across a much broader chronological span, from the age of classical Greece (fifth-fourth century BC) or even earlier, to late antiquity and the early Middle Ages.

Throughout these eras, India was more or less connected with the world of the Mediterranean and Western Asia, sometimes by land or through direct conquest, sometimes through the maritime links of the Indian Ocean. In the Hellenistic and Roman Imperial periods the movement of artistic ideas intensified. Notably, it appears to be vividly attested in the earliest cave-paintings at Ajanta in Maharashtra and in the Buddhist sculpture of Andhra Pradesh. In the first two centuries AD, when trade with India was central to Roman luxury consumption and brought colossal revenue to the Empire, Roman coins and other artefacts reached India in abundance. However, the *artistic* connections are subtle and elusive, demanding detailed analysis and prompting debate, including discussion about the very premises embodied in terms such as 'classical' or 'Indian', or implied in the pursuit of cross-cultural 'influences'. In contrast to the conspicuously 'classicizing' aspects of Gandhāran sculpture (themselves contentious and difficult), the art of the rest of the subcontinent affords only puzzling glimpses of the possible influence of Graeco-Roman traditions. Conversely, the impact of Indian products and ideas on the classical world has to be teased out of challenging and fragmentary evidence and individually exceptional cases.

The character of the links between Graeco-Roman art and ancient India, and the appropriate methodology for explaining them, is therefore a frontier for new research, fuelled by a rapidly increasing body of evidence from different areas and periods and a growing consciousness of the global nexus of ancient art.

The purpose of the workshop was to contribute complementary – and competing – ideas about cultural contact within this sphere of artistic production, some of them building on decades of research, others questioning traditional interpretations of evidence or proposing different paradigms. Besides William Dalrymple's opening contribution, which is a lightly modified version of his keynote lecture delivered to the workshop (with the addition of some supporting footnotes), the papers published here have been revised in various ways, but they preserve the character of the original workshop and its conversations,

recording differing perspectives and approaches both within and between academic disciplines, and occasionally contradicting one another. As editor, I have sought neither to synthesize the papers, nor to suppress disagreement, nor homogenize the plurality of voices. These are offered as fascinating insights into the material, provocations to thought, and stimuli for further research in a rich and expanding field of inquiry.

Peter Stewart

Oxford, November 2024