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Early Mahāyāna and Gandhāran Buddhism: An Assessment of the Visual Evidence

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Hypothesis and Inherent Problems

GANDHĀRA¹ is a fascinating name—and occasionally almost like a magical word—for Buddhist scholars. Located in the center of the so-called “Northwest” of the Indian subcontinent, it was a region where Buddhism encountered the civilization from the Mediterranean world, subsequently creating multifarious ramifications, and flourished on an enormous scale for several centuries afterwards in distinctive material form, which foremost includes a peculiar hybrid artistic tradition commonly called “Gandhāran art.” It also played a dominant role in the transmission of Buddhism to the

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¹ In this paper, “Gandhāra” is used in a broader sense to designate the region encompassing the Peshawar basin, Swāt valley, Taxila and eastern Afghanistan, not in the Chinese pilgrims’ usage where it is generally restricted to the Peshawar basin. It will also be used in the sense interchangeable with the “Northwest” of the Indian subcontinent.

east, primarily to Central Asia and China, by providing scriptures, images, and missionary monks who actively engaged in the translation of the earliest Buddhist scriptures into Chinese, and by receiving numerous pilgrims from the east. Furthermore, it has been popularly suspected that some of the important, early Mahāyāna scriptures—such as the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra* and the *Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha*—originated in this area² and that the Northwest was one of the strongholds of early Mahāyānists.³

Despite this popular supposition regarding a close connection between the early Mahāyāna and the Northwest, substantial—beyond circumstantial—evidence is extremely rare, let alone any explicit testimony in literary and epigraphical sources.⁴ Given this awkward situation, visual monuments and images, profusely created in Buddhist monasteries in this region and now extant in enormous quantity, appear to be the most valuable source for the presence or activity of Mahāyānists in this region. Exploring aspects of the early Mahāyāna in such visual evidence from Gandhāra is the task this paper assumes to undertake.

In attempting a discussion in this regard, several inherent problems and difficulties should be stated at the beginning. First, the identification and reading of the theme or meaning of a visual image in artistic materials is not as simple and definite as one might hope or anticipate. It is often difficult to determine iconographically what is represented, and this is the case with Gandhāran art except for conventional narrative scenes. Explicit designations written in the form of dedicatory inscriptions might help, but in Gandhāran art extremely few, if any, images actually carry such inscriptions. Iconographical identification thus quite often operates under the influence of preconceived ideas. This means that our assessment of Gandhāran art is inevitably affected by our premises on Gandhāran Buddhism, unlike our initial anticipation that material evidence in art will clarify a number of problems in the

² Shiio 1933, pp. 82–103; Nakamura 1972, pp. 485–93. It should also be noted, however, that this popular conception has been questioned by some scholars on linguistic grounds: see Boucher 1998b, pp. 471–506.

³ Lamotte 1954, pp. 389–96; Shizutani 1980, pp. 20–29.

⁴ Shizutani Masao suggests that such passages, distinctively found in a number of dedicative inscriptions in Kharoṣṭhī as “*sarvabuddhana puyae* (= *sarvabuddhānām pūjājai*: for the worship of all Buddhas)” and “*sarvasatvana hidasuhae* (= *sarvasattvānām hitasukhae*: for the welfare and happiness of all living beings)” are formulae that expressed the devotional wish of Mahāyānists. Shizutani 1974, pp. 273–85. For such inscriptions, see Konow 1929, inscriptions nos. XIII, XVII, XXIII, XXVII, etc. Still, they have no direct reference to Mahāyāna, which leaves room for suspicion.

conception of a religion created on the basis of our knowledge of textual materials.⁵

Second, even if an art object is iconographically identifiable, it could be equally difficult to judge to what extent it is relevant to Mahāyāna. The Mahāyānist could worship or dedicate an image of a deity, whatever its true import may be, which was not exclusively referred to in the Mahāyāna textual tradition and which was thus common to both Mahāyāna and non-Mahāyāna. In such a case, it would be extremely hard, in the first place, to identify the cult as Mahāyāna without any supportive evidence, but even harder to define its “Mahāyāna-ness.” Perhaps this implies that we should not be too discouraged by the absence of explicit evidence for Mahāyāna in Gandhāran art and should be willing to interpret the available evidence in a more positive spirit.

Third, the concept of Mahāyāna itself is ambiguous and problematic, particularly outside the textual tradition and when it is used in a binary opposition between Mahāyāna and non-Mahāyāna. It does not seem clear to me how we should treat “Mahāyāna within non-Mahāyāna” or “non-Mahāyāna within Mahāyāna.” When someone who is barely aware of or perhaps cares little about what may be termed exclusively as Mahāyāna at a doctrinal level dedicates an image of a divinity that is monopolized in the Mahāyāna scriptural tradition, is he/she a Mahāyānist? Or is his/her dedication an example of Mahāyāna practice? Does the discussion of his/her activity have anything to do with that of doctrinal agenda that could have obsessed the minds of learned monastics in a limited circle?

Fourth, in the same vein, art serving a religion—although it would inevitably reflect the religion—tends to represent certain segments or aspects of religious ideas and practices better than others. Quite frequently some segment or aspect could be disproportionately magnified, while others could be entirely missing. Therefore, information deduced from artistic materials could have a limited significance, and extreme caution is necessary in linking it to that of the textual tradition. Most of the monuments and objects in Gandhāran art were related to devotional practice, and were quite conventional and stereotyped in form and iconography. There seems to have been

⁵ It is true, as Gregory Schopen points out (personal communication, May 2001), that artistic or archaeological materials have advantage in being more securely fixed in provenance and date than textual materials of early Indian Buddhism, which are notoriously hard to locate in this regard. Yet, identifying or reading a visual material thematically tends to be equivocal, while the denotation of a word or a passage in literary form is clear enough in most cases.

little room in them for sophisticated doctrinal or philosophical ideas—such as to be found in the textual tradition—to be projected properly.

The discussion in this paper does not attempt to resolve all these problems, some of which may lie beyond the capacity of the present author; but they will be kept in consideration for a critical assessment of Mahāyāna in Gandhāran art throughout this paper.

Stūpas and Monasteries

Before we move on to the discussion of visual images proper, some remarks are necessary on the role of stūpa worship in the early Mahāyāna and the situation in Gandhāra. Erecting a stūpa was a prevalent practice in Gandhāra, as at any place in Indian Buddhism, and numerous stūpas, large and small, are extant at monastery sites. Buddhist monasteries in Gandhāra usually had a dominant stūpa (very rarely more than one) as the focus of worship, along with a number of smaller ones, presumably made for the attainment of merit or in the memory of deceased monastics or laity.⁶ Such stūpas may remind one of the well-known theory by the Japanese scholar Hirakawa Akira that Mahāyāna originated and developed as an order of renunciate lay practitioners who had their base around stūpas and actively engaged in stūpa worship. First proposed by Hirakawa in the early 1960s and elaborated in a series of his later works,⁷ it has exerted a dominant influence on the conception of the early Mahāyāna among Japanese scholars. The theory has been recounted in most of the Japanese surveys of Indian Buddhism, and it has had a certain impact on Western scholarship as well.

Although Hirakawa's theory does not particularly focus on Gandhāra, he occasionally discusses the situation there. He suggests the presence of such

⁶ I essentially agree with Gregory Schopen in what he described as the function of small stūpas surrounding the major stūpa in Buddhist monasteries in India, and believe that this was also generally true with Gandhāran monasteries. See "Burial *Ad Sanctos* and the Physical Presence of the Buddha in Early Indian Buddhism," in Schopen 1997, pp. 118–123. Recently, I have been exploring in a similar vein the ramifications of the relic cult on the emergence of the image cult in early Buddhist art in Rhi 2001, pp. 89–93, and in a slightly different direction in Rhi 2002.

⁷ Hirakawa's theory is generally known to Western scholars through Hirakawa 1963, pp. 57–106. But his opinion was presented on several other occasions including "Daijō bukkō no kyōdanshiteki seikaku," in *Daijō bukkō no seiritsushiteki kenkyū* (1957), pp. 447–82, where such ideas were presented for the first time, and his magnum opus *Shoki daijō bukkō no kenkyū* (1968), which should be the most detailed source for his ideas.

Mahāyānist in this region by citing Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions that do not specify the name of a *nikāya* as the recipient of an offering.⁸ Yet, he was not really able to offer any concrete evidence or identify any such examples at extant monastery sites.⁹ This is understandable as Hirakawa was, after all, not an archaeologist. But anyone who is more familiar with archaeological remains of Gandhāran monasteries would find his suggestion profoundly skeptical. Even if one were to acknowledge—although this itself is questionable on a number of grounds¹⁰—that the worship and maintenance of a stūpa was initially assumed by the laity separately from the *saṃgha* of ordained monastics, it must be realized that a stūpa was established as an indispensable part of most monasteries by the time the earliest extant monasteries as we see now in archaeological remains were founded in Gandhāra. Although one might occasionally find a stūpa without a discernible monastic structure, there is virtually no monastic structure without an accompanying stūpa. Even in the case of a stūpa without a monastic structure, it is quite possible that such a structure simply has not yet been uncovered or has disappeared because it had been built of perishable materials. It seems hardly possible to attach a special meaning to stūpas in Gandhāra as an institutional basis of Mahāyānists. Diverse types of architectural plans involving a stūpa (or stūpas), a monastic quarter, and image chapels are discerned in Gandhāran monasteries, but it seems obvious that they are not due to a sectarian division between Mahāyāna and non-Mahāyāna.

I do not rule out the possibility that such Mahāyāna monasteries as proposed by Hirakawa on the basis of *Gocarapariśuddha* and *Ugradattapariṣcchā* were present in Gandhāra,¹¹ but it seems essentially impossible to identify them in concrete evidence among Gandhāran monasteries. At the same time,

⁸ Hirakawa 1968, pp. 652–74.

⁹ Hirakawa cites several Gandhāran monastery sites such as Takht-i-Bāhi, Sahrī-Bahlol (Mound A) and Dharmarājika in Taxila but concedes that they are probably not Mahāyāna bases (Hirakawa 1968, pp. 652–57). These monasteries were originally discussed by Takata Osamu in his criticism of Hirakawa's theory (Takata 1967, pp. 271–274), but Takata was confused in supposing that the main stūpa in the monasteries was surrounded by a number of monastic cells, which are actually a series of image chapels, a wrong conception Hirakawa had to cite credulously in his discussion. Nevertheless, the correction made here does not provide any grounds for supporting Hirakawa's theory.

¹⁰ "Monks and the Relic Cult in the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*: An Old Misunderstanding in Regard to Monastic Buddhism," Schopen 1997, pp. 99–113.

¹¹ Hirakawa 1968, pp. 483–548, 661–74. A more negative assessment on this point than mine is found in Sasaki 1997, pp. 79–113, and Nattier 2003, pp. 89–93.

I doubt that, even if such monasteries did exist, they would have had any noticeable size within Gandhāran Buddhism overall. I suspect that they were merely one of the multiple and diverse groups largely associated with Mahāyāna.

Narrative Representations of Biographical Themes

Walls of most buildings—including stūpas—in Gandhāran monasteries were lavishly embellished with reliefs of various scenes in stone and stucco. The narrative scenes from the life of Śākyamuni Buddha and his previous lives were the most popular subjects in such reliefs. Elaborately represented in numerous individual scenes, they form a prominent feature in Gandhāran art, and whether they had any relationship with Mahāyāna or not is an interesting question.

The life of the Buddha and the *jātaka* stories were widely employed in artistic representations in ancient India and later throughout the Buddhist world, which encompassed the followers of both Mahāyāna and non-Mahāyāna, and thus they do not necessarily belong to the exclusive domain of Mahāyāna. Rather, these subjects, which apparently lay much emphasis on the historical Buddha Śākyamuni, have frequently been regarded as closer in spirit to the artistic repertoire of non-Mahāyāna (or pre-Mahāyāna). Śākyamuni was, however, the focus of worship for most Mahāyānists in the early stage, perhaps except those who prayed for the rebirth in the Pure Land of Amitābha or Akṣobhya. It is also notable that scholars have pointed out the role of the biographical literature of Śākyamuni Buddha as a prefiguration of the emergence of Mahāyāna.¹² This might suggest that the remarkable popularity of such biographical themes in Gandhāran art should not be dismissed too hastily in its possible association with Mahāyānists. Yet, the relevance of this biographical literature to the early Mahāyāna is a highly debatable issue, and the judgment on this problem may well be left to textual specialists.

Compared with the Buddha's life scenes, representations of *jātakas* are considerably fewer in number and quite limited in the variety of themes. According to my database of extant narrative works, some fifty pieces, with undoubted authenticity, are identifiable, and they represent only about ten *jātakas*. Surprisingly, around two thirds of them deal with the *Dīpaṃkara-jātaka* (Fig. 1). The dominance of this theme is partly explained by the fact

¹² Hirakawa 1990, pp. 262–67; Tsukamoto 1981, pp. 235–36.

that the *Dīpaṃkara-jātaka* was firmly localized in Nagarahāra (present-day Jalālābād Valley in Afghanistan),¹³ and about a third of its extant depictions actually came from the Kabul and Jalālābād areas. But this may not be a satisfactory explanation when considering that other popular *jātakas* that were also localized in this region, such as the *Viśvantara-jātaka* (Peshawar basin) and the *Śibi-jātaka* (Swāt),¹⁴ were represented quite rarely, only in a few instances, while two thirds of the representations of the *Dīpaṃkara-jātaka* were made in the Peshawar basin and the Swāt valley, located outside the Kabul and Jalālābād areas. This indicates that the *Dīpaṃkara-jātaka* was probably perceived among Gandhāran Buddhists as imbued with a greater significance than merely that of being a delightful story, as the very beginning of the remarkable career toward the Buddhahood of Śākyamuni and as a prelude to the numerous life scenes of the Buddha in Gandhāran art.

The *Dīpaṃkara-jātaka* is recounted in a number of the biographical accounts of the Buddha including the *Mahāvastu* of the Lokottaravādins, the *Vinaya* of the Dharmaguptakas and the Pāli *Nidānakathā* of the Sri Lankan Theravādins; thus it is not necessarily within the exclusive repertoire of Mahāyāna. Hikata Ryūshō sees in this tale, however, a reflection of the Mahāyāna idea of *vyākaraṇa*, and regards its incorporation in the *Dharmaguptaka-vinaya* and the *Nidānakathā* as possibly due to a Mahāyāna influence.¹⁵ Shizutani Masao is also of the opinion that this tale is closely related to “Primitive Mahāyāna”—which he proposes as the earliest stage in the development of Mahāyāna—and to the Northwest.¹⁶ There may be reasonable grounds for suggesting an association of this theme with Mahāyāna, but not enough to regard them as definitively established. But no matter how we may define its relationship with Mahāyāna, the *Dīpaṃkara-jātaka* obviously stands out as a prominent element in Gandhāran art.¹⁷

¹³ Legge, trans. 1886, p. 38; Beal, trans. 1884, vol. 1, pp. 91–93.

¹⁴ Beal, trans. 1884, vol. 1, pp. 111–112; p. 125.

¹⁵ Hikata 1954, pp. 68–83.

¹⁶ Shizutani 1974, pp. 160–73.

¹⁷ The *Dīpaṃkara-jātaka* is quite rarely represented outside the Northwest on the subcontinent. A relief from Nāgārjunakoṇḍa that depicts a person prostrating at the feet of the Buddha has been identified as an illustration of the theme probably inspired by Gandhāran examples (Longhurst 1938, pp. 34–35). But it does not show the spreading of the hair, which could be the most distinctive iconographic sign for this theme, and this identification does not seem entirely free from questioning. A similar example, again without the spreading of the hair, is found at Ajantā (the façade of Cave 19; Huntington 1985, fig. 12.4), while another example at

The Origin of the Buddha Image and Image Worship

Gandhāra is famous for the creation of the first Buddha images along with Mathurā in northern India. Although the precedence between the two places was the issue of heated debate in the early twentieth century, scholars these days tend to support the simultaneous and independent origin of the Buddha image in both places or to favor the precedence of Mathurā over Gandhāra. This seems to me a convenient compromise not necessarily supported by definitive evidence and not entirely free from political considerations.¹⁸ Also, it is still debatable whether the concept and function of the first Buddha images—as images or material objects that had the resemblance of a human being—were indeed identical in the two regions, or whether any side took the initiative in this remarkable feat in the history of Buddhism.

In any case, the origin of the Buddha image has been frequently—although much less in recent years—attributed to the Mahāyānists, who, in the opinion of most scholars, happened to appear on the scene of Indian Buddhism around the same time.¹⁹ Perhaps this could be a prime example of “Mahāyāna” being used as a magical word, as if it held the key to everything. To the disappointment of those who hope for the decisive role of Mahāyāna in the creation of the Buddha image, the majority of dedicative inscriptions carved on the earliest extant images of Śākyamuni from Mathurā, refer to the names of traditional *nikāyas* such as the Sarvāstivāda, Mahāsamghika and Dharmaguptaka;²⁰ they also indicate the active involvement of prominent monastics from the contemporaneous *saṃgha*.²¹ Theoretically, it is not entirely impossible to question whether this phenomenon is extendable to the situ-

Nālandā (relief in stucco in a niche of a structure surrounding the main *catīya*) does have the spreading of the hair (Misra 1998, vol. 3, fig. 5). These few examples, except for the depiction of Dipamkara in a different context in the Pāla manuscripts, are all we have outside Gandhāra.

¹⁸ Supporting the Gandhāran origin would naturally have the potential risk of being equated with the position that favors the anachronistic “Greek origin” or the colonialist view over the more politically-correct nationalist view of Indians on this issue. However, one should be aware that where the Buddha image was first created remains a question related to a fact not necessarily motivated by the colonialist outlook of the by-gone era despite postmodernist criticism. See on this point, Abe 1995, pp. 63–106, cf. Nattier 1997, pp. 472–74.

¹⁹ Seckel 1968, pp. 28–172; Fisher 1993, pp. 43–44.

²⁰ Refer to the list of inscriptions with sectarian affiliation in Lamotte 1988, pp. 523–27.

²¹ “On Monks, Nuns, and ‘Vulgar’ Practices: The Introduction of the Image Cult into Indian Buddhism,” Schopen 1997, pp. 238–257.

ation in Gandhāra or not and to suppose that a different kind of religious entity was behind the creation of the Buddha image there. But such a possibility seems slim in light of the present evidence.

Aside from the origin of the Buddha image, the prevalence of image-making and image-dedication could be a question not necessarily related to the former. The dedication of images was a prominent phenomenon in Gandhāran monasteries, where a large number of images, unparalleled elsewhere, have been excavated (Fig. 2). Although there is no accurate estimation, the number seems disproportionately large compared with any other major centers of early Indian Buddhism such as Mathurā and Āndhradeśa. To accommodate such an enormous number of images, a series of small chapels—which I call “aligned chapels” to distinguish them from “independent shrines”—were commonly installed surrounding a stūpa court (Fig. 3). Particularly popular in the Peshawar basin, chapels of this type were quite a distinctive feature, to which parallels are seldom found elsewhere among contemporaneous Buddhist centers.²² The presence of numerous Buddha images at Gandhāran monasteries may appear a redundant plurality, particularly to the eye familiar with Buddhist images and shrines in East Asia, where the uniqueness of a singular image occupying a shrine is emphasized as the focus of worship. They were apparently dedicated mostly for the attainment of merit.

This phenomenon obviously reminds us of accounts in such Mahāyāna sūtras as the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* and the *Tathāgatapratibimbapratīṣṭhānuśaṃsā* (*Zuofu xingxiang jing* or *Zaoli xingxiang fubao jing*), where merit attained from making and worshipping images is lavishly discussed and enthusiastically extolled.²³ It is also interesting to note that such an account is quite rare in non-Mahāyāna scriptures. It may be argued against the significance of these Mahāyāna sūtras that they were created relatively late, so that such references to images found their way into them, whereas most non-Mahāyāna literature dates much earlier, prior to the emergence of the image worship.²⁴ But the argument seems to fall far short of explaining the conspicuous prominence of the references to image-making or image-dedication in such scrip-

²² Rhi 1994, pp. 182–84; cf. Behrendt 1997, pp. 166–93.

²³ For the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, see for example T263 (trans. Dharmarakṣa), 9:71b; T262 (trans. Kumārajīva), 9:8c–9a. For the *Tathāgatapratibimbapratīṣṭhānuśaṃsā*, see T692 (trans. anon., Later Han), 16:788; T693 (trans. anon., Eastern Jin), 16:788c–790a.

²⁴ Takata 1967, p. 275.

tures as the *Saddharmapundarika*.²⁵ It should be noted, however, that the prominent bases of image-dedication in Gandhāra, such as the monasteries at Takht-i-Bāhī, Sahrī-Bahlol and Jamālgarhī in the Peshawar basin (See their locations in Fig. 14), were possibly affiliated to traditional *nikāyas* such as the Kāśyapiya and the Dharmaguptaka. Such traditional *nikāyas* are common-sensically treated as representing the established *saṃgha* that the Mahāyānists supposedly antagonized, and this may considerably discourage anticipation for Mahāyāna having operated behind the vigorous image-dedication activity at Gandhāran monasteries, unless there is any other way to view the relationship between such *nikāyas* and Mahāyāna.

Buddha Images

Probably the simplest—albeit not the easiest—way to identify Mahāyāna in Gandhāran art would be to find the deities exclusively referred to in Mahāyāna scriptures. Amitābha Buddha has been a popular candidate because many scholars suspect that the Amitābha cult and its scriptures originated in this region, and a number of attempts have been made in this regard.²⁶ A remarkable discovery was made in the early 1980s, when a Buddha triad with an inscription that supposedly contained the name “Amitābha” along with “Avalokiteśvara” was reported,²⁷ and this piece has been accepted by a number of scholars as crucial evidence for the Amitābha cult (Fig. 4).²⁸ But unlike a similar inscription from Mathurā that records “Amitābha,” the reading of this inscription is hardly clear, as demonstrated by Gregory Schopen and Richard Salomon, who question the presence of either “Amitābha” or “Avalokiteśvara” in it.²⁹ Besides this triad, attempts have been repeatedly

²⁵ In the *Vinayas* of various *nikāyas*—and thus in those *nikāyas*—Buddha images are treated as something natural. For instance, the phrase that one should not relieve oneself holding a Buddha image is commonly found. That one should pay homage to a Buddha image before seeing a teacher is another common phrase. See for example [*Dharmaguptaka-vinaya*] T1428, 22:711c; T1429, 22:1021c; [*Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*] T1458, 24:600a; [*Samantapāsādikā*] T1462, 24:787b. However, such prominent emphasis on the dedication of images as we read in the *Saddharmapundarika-sūtra* and the *Tathāgatapratibimbapratīṣṭhānuśamsā* is seldom found elsewhere.

²⁶ Higuchi 1950, pp. 108–113; Huntington 1980, pp. 652–72.

²⁷ Brough 1982, pp. 65–70.

²⁸ See, for example Fussman 1999, pp. 543–47.

²⁹ Schopen and Salomon 2002, pp. 3–30, cf. Schopen 1987, p. 130, n. 50.

made to identify as Amitābha the central Buddha in a famous stele from Mohamed-Nari in Lahore Museum, but the identification of this piece is equally problematic, as detailed discussion will show below.

Except for the dubious “Amitābha” triad, it is extremely difficult to identify in inscribed objects any deities that would have been exclusively worshiped in Mahāyāna, since in Gandhāra very few images carry the name of the represented deities. Śākyamuni, Kāśyapa and Dipaṃkara are recorded in a few inscriptions;³⁰ but it is obvious that as Buddhas of the past, they do not necessarily belong to the category of Mahāyāna worship.

In these circumstances, a remaining option would be to explore whether there is any iconographical distinction between various deities and whether it would suggest the presence of any of them relevant to Mahāyāna. In Buddha images, however, this approach is difficult because they exhibit an extremely monotonous pattern. The standing Buddhas, which occupy by far the majority of cult statues, are all identical in their strictly frontal pose making the *abhaya mudrā* with their right hand and holding the end of the garment in their left hand (Fig. 5). The seated Buddhas are usually in *paryāṅkāsa*, and very rarely in *pralambapadāsa*, displaying three different hand gestures, *abhaya mudrā*, *dhyaṇa mudrā* and *dharmacakramudrā* (in the last instance with their right shoulder usually bare); but it is very doubtful whether different gestures were intended to signify different Buddhas, as they seem more likely to have been shared by all Buddhas.³¹

I presume that the majority of Buddha images of Gandhāra were of Śākyamuni, the central object of worship in early Buddhism. As epigraphi-

³⁰ The name of Dipaṃkara is inscribed on a stone pedestal from Nowshera, and those of Śākyamuni and Kāśyapa are on stucco Buddhas at Jauliān in Taxila. See Konow 1929, nos. XXXVI–10, 11, LXXI.

³¹ The seated Buddha making the *abhaya mudrā* must have been a counterpart for the standing Buddha, which invariably—except for an extremely small number of instances—has the same hand gesture. The one with the *dhyaṇa mudrā* seems to signify the *samādhi* state of the Buddha, which is most conspicuously presented in the narrative context as the Buddha meditating in the *Indraśailagūha* (Indra’s cave); perhaps it initially had some connection with the latter theme. For this point I have been strongly inspired by Professor Aramaki Noritoshi’s interpretation of the *Indraśailagūha* discussed in the present issue of *The Eastern Buddhist*. The seated Buddha with the *dharmacakramudrā*, which occupies the majority of seated Buddha images, is perhaps readable as signifying the Buddha awakened from the *samādhi* or activated to preach as a teacher. This interpretation may have ramifications in the discussion of complex scenes with the preaching Buddha.

cal evidence indicates, there were also Dīpaṃkara and Kāśyapa.³² A set of six Buddhas prior to Śākyamuni, which starts from Vipasyin and ends with Kāśyapa, was carved in reliefs along with Śākyamuni and the Bodhisattva Maitreya, and thus they could have existed as independent statues as well, although their number must have been small. Perhaps Maitreya Buddha images were also present, even though representing Maitreya as a Buddha rather than as a Bodhisattva would have required a leap of thought.³³ I do not rule out the possibility that such Mahāyāna Buddhas as Amitābha and Akṣobhya were represented in a minority of instances, but there is still no corroborative evidence for this. The presumption that Śākyamuni Buddha must have been the subject of the majority of Buddha images created in Gandhāra does not necessarily mean that they were worshiped only within the context of non-Mahāyāna. The likelihood equally remains that the Mahāyānists were involved in the dedication of such images.

Even if all these different Buddhas were present as images in the Northwest, one has to be reminded that they were essentially indistinguishable in iconography and would have been also to those involved in the dedication or worship of images. Perhaps it was thought that Buddhas should look identical regardless of individual identity, since they all supposedly had attained the same supreme enlightenment that would lie beyond individual specification in form.³⁴ If making a distinction in individual identity of Buddhas was hardly a concern in visual iconography, one wonders whether their individuality would have mattered as much for the contemporaneous Buddhists as it does to present-day art historians. This may be another indication that the great

³² Several Buddhas from the Kapiśi area are identifiable as Dīpaṃkara—although not specified in inscriptions—for narrative details that include Sumedha (or Megha) paying homage to the Buddha with his hair spread; otherwise they look identical with other standing Buddhas.

³³ John Huntington attempted to identify Maitreya Buddhas in Gandhāran art by equating a representation of Maitreya Bodhisattva carved on the frontal face of a pedestal with a Buddha standing or seated on the pedestal. This method seems dubious to me because the relationship between such scenes on the frontal face of a pedestal and an image on the pedestal has not been clearly established. See Huntington 1984, pp. 133–78.

³⁴ Such a unitary character of Buddha images in iconography was not restricted to Gandhāra, but a universal phenomenon wherever Buddhist art was in practice—including East Asia where a variety of Buddhas were represented in images—until a much later time when the esoteric Buddhist iconography prescribed sophisticated rules for the distinction of various Buddhas. This suggests that the question raised here may be extendable to other areas, although we would have to take into consideration regional variations.

majority of Buddha images were either intended as Śākyamuni or many of them could have been made simply as an unspecified, generic Buddha. This line of thought brings us to the question concerning our conventional, uncritical approach in search for “individual Buddhas,” e.g., from the Mahāyāna context. To this point, we will return below.

Bodhisattva Images

The situation with Bodhisattva images is quite different. Not only do we witness the deliberate intention to distinguish various iconographic types apparently meant to represent different Bodhisattvas, but also their variety seems obviously much greater than what we would normally expect within the boundaries of the non-Mahāyāna or pre-Mahāyāna tradition.³⁵

The great majority of Bodhisattva images represent a type holding a water vase and having knotted hair without a turban, which is identifiable as Maitreya since it appears consistently in the reliefs of the Seven Buddhas of the Past and Maitreya.³⁶ The dominance of this type indicates the popularity of the cult of Maitreya Bodhisattva. There was a second type, in much smaller numbers, which wears a turban and has the left hand on the waist in standing images.³⁷ It is commonly identified as Siddhārtha because of its similarity to the prince in narrative scenes from the life of Śākyamuni Buddha. Corresponding to these standing images are seated images wearing turbans and making the *dhyānamudrā*. Some examples have the plowing scene carved on the frontal face of the pedestal, which indicates that the Bodhisattva is Prince Siddhārtha in the first meditation under the Jambu tree.³⁸ On this basis, seated figures wearing turbans in the meditation pose are usually identified

³⁵ As regards to Bodhisattva images in Gandhāran art, I have discussed this in detail in relation to Mahāyāna in a separate paper; so I do not wish to repeat the details, but will provide essential points here. See Rhi 2004. Miyaji Akira has also done considerable work on this matter. I have benefited a great deal from his work, and my ideas generally coincide with his. See Miyaji 1986, pp. 23–62; Miyaji 1992, pp. 245–80.

³⁶ For Maitreya images, see Ingholt and Lyons 1957, pl. 305; Kurita 1990, pls. 14, 22–25, 54–55. For the reliefs of the Seven Buddhas of the Past and the Bodhisattva Maitreya, Kurita 1990, pls. 289, 291, 293. I reluctantly cite illustrations from Kurita’s book because it is more readily available these days, but I must say that as a number of specialists are aware, this book includes a great many works of dubious authenticity. My citations will be limited only to the works dependable enough.

³⁷ Ingholt and Lyons 1957, pl. 315; Kurita 1990, pls. 7, 106, 109.

³⁸ Ingholt and Lyons 1957, pls. 284, 285; Kurita 1988, pl. 131.

as Siddhārtha. Both Maitreya and Siddhārtha were not necessarily the exclusive objects of veneration for Mahāyānists, although they could have been worshiped by them as well.

What interests us more is a third type, which wears a turban, holds a wreath or lotus and is clearly separable in typology from the preceding two types (Fig. 6). The identity of this third Bodhisattva is intriguing. The fact that it is not just another form of Maitreya or Siddhārtha is testified by a relief in the Taxila Museum, where standing images of these three types are placed side by side, each along with a Buddha.³⁹ Although it is not theoretically impossible to identify it as one of the Past Buddhas other than Śākyamuni, in the stage of a Bodhisattva, there is no supportive evidence at all, as no such Bodhisattvas have ever been represented in Buddhist art anywhere. The candidate should be, then, found among numerous Bodhisattvas referred to in Mahāyāna scriptures. Considering its importance reflected in the impressive size and form, it should be especially among those that became the object of ardent worship. A number of scholars have suspected that this type most probably represented Avalokiteśvara, who was indisputably the most popular Bodhisattva throughout the sphere of Mahāyāna Buddhism and was popularly worshiped in Indian Buddhism and possibly in Gandhāra as well.⁴⁰ It has also been pointed out that the lotus was a distinctive attribute commonly held by Avalokiteśvara in later Indian and early Chinese Buddhist art. Images of this type, or possibly Avalokiteśvara, exist in much smaller numbers than Maitreya, and generally exhibit inferior quality with somewhat decadent stylistic features. This may suggest that this type appeared in Gandhāran art at a relatively late stage.

Another type, which holds a book, presumably a scripture, is discernible, and it possibly represents a fourth Bodhisattva (Fig. 7). Because of its distinctive attribute, one is naturally tempted to identify it as Mañjuśrī, obviously one of the most prominent Bodhisattvas in early Mahāyāna scriptures. The iconography of Mañjuśrī characterized by a scripture is generally known from relatively late textual sources of the esoteric Buddhist phase, and such visual representations became common in a later esoteric context.⁴¹ But the *Wenshushiri*

³⁹ *Pakistan Gandhāra bijutsuten (zuroku)* 1984, pl. I–11. This piece has been discussed in Miyaji 1992, pp. 255–256 and Rhi 2004.

⁴⁰ Even Takata Osamu, who characteristically plays down the presence of Mahāyāna elements in Gandhāran art, accepts this type as Avalokiteśvara. Takata 1979, pp. 11–30.

⁴¹ Mallmann 1964, pp. 26–30. The *sādhana* used by de Mallmann is dated between the seventh and eleventh century.

bannieban jing (*Mañjuśrīnirvāṇa-sūtra*), translated into Chinese as early as the third century, had already delivered an account that Mañjuśrī held a Mahāyāna scripture in his left hand,⁴² and this suggests that such iconography could already have been in actual use from an earlier period.⁴³ Even more types are possibly distinguishable, and I would not be surprised to see that a number of other Bodhisattvas from the Mahāyāna context were also represented in Gandhāran art.

Overall in extant Bodhisattva images of Gandhāra, Maitreya takes the absolute majority, followed by Siddhārtha, Avalokiteśvara, and perhaps Mañjuśrī. The cult of the exclusive Mahāyāna Bodhisattvas seems to have emerged in Gandhāran Buddhism during a relatively late phase and on a limited scale. The dedication of larger statues of Siddhārtha is also notable. While it is natural that Maitreya is worshiped in the form of a Bodhisattva, the cult of Śākyamuni did not necessarily have to take the form of the worship of Prince Siddhārtha. I suspect that in order to attain greater merit, one would have wished to dedicate an image of Śākyamuni in a fully enlightened form. Although it might be argued that this was still due to a biographical concern, I wonder whether any strain of thought that attached great importance to the Bodhisattva's practice prior to his enlightenment, as emphasized in Mahāyāna, might have underlain the making and dedication of Siddhārtha images.

Triads

Another conspicuous group in relation to Mahāyāna is small reliefs carved with Buddha triads, in which the Buddha is seated on a large lotus blossom with his right shoulder bare, making the *dharmacakramudrā*, and flanked by a Bodhisattva (either standing or seated) on each side (Fig. 8).⁴⁴ In the triads with standing Bodhisattvas as attendants, one of the Bodhisattvas is invariably Maitreya. The other holds, in many examples, a wreath or a lotus, thus conforming to the supposed Avalokiteśvara type, or occasionally has his left hand on the waist like the standing Siddhārtha type. In the latter case, it is

⁴² T463, 14:481a. This sūtra is known to have been translated by Nie Daozhen between 280–312 CE. See *Bussho kaisetsu daijiten*, vol. 11, pp. 30d–31a.

⁴³ Anna Quagliotti also identifies a Bodhisattva figure holding a book carved in a relief in the Victoria and Albert Museum as Mañjuśrī. Quagliotti 1990, pp. 99–112.

⁴⁴ Miyaji Akira has done considerable rudimentary work on the objects particularly in the identification of Bodhisattvas. Miyaji 1985, pp. 7–24.

possible that the raised right hand originally held a wreath or a lotus, but this cannot be verified because the right hands are usually broken. The majority of these triads, then, seem to have consisted of a central Buddha and the Bodhisattvas Maitreya and Avalokiteśvara, or Maitreya and Siddhārtha. Presented in a close relationship with these Bodhisattvas, the central Buddha is most likely Śākyamuni, and scenes from his life carved on the base of some triads support this supposition. Temptation has been high particularly among Japanese scholars since Higuchi Takayasu (probably influenced by the prevalent Amitābha cult in their Buddhist tradition) to regard Gandhāran triads as a prototype for the Amitābha triad, which greatly flourished in East Asia.⁴⁵ Yet, the central Buddha in this format is hardly identifiable as Amitābha—unless a considerable deviation from the orthodox textual tradition was in practice, which seems most unlikely in this instance—because one of the attendant figures is Maitreya, not Mahasthāmaprāpta as it should be in the standard Amitābha triad.

Triads with seated Bodhisattvas generally appear to be dated later than those with standing Bodhisattvas. Although the identity of the Bodhisattvas is not easily recognizable because very few extant examples have both figures preserved, the same Maitreya-Avalokiteśvara combination seems to have been employed in examples of this format as well. But in one exception, a triad in the Indian Museum, Calcutta, a Bodhisattva holding a book appears together with another one holding a lotus; so this triad perhaps is composed of Mañjuśrī and Avalokiteśvara flanking a Buddha, possibly Śākyamuni.

In any case, the inclusion of Avalokiteśvara indicates that many of these triads were most probably dedications by Mahāyānists and that Śākyamuni Buddha, here, was presented in the Mahāyāna context. An extremely interesting motif in this regard is the large lotus blossom, conspicuously emphasized as the seat of the central Buddha. Although it was sometimes interpreted as ground for the identification of the Buddha as Amitābha, a lotus as a throne appears in a much wider and more generic context in Mahāyāna scriptures, not particularly restricted to Amitābha's Sukhāvātī. It is frequently referred to as the seat for a Buddha, where the Buddha performs a miracle or preaches the dharma of Mahāyāna.

A famous passage in the *Dazhidu lun* (*Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa*), which most probably delivers the general notion from India no matter where

⁴⁵ Higuchi 1950; Hayashi 1986, pp. 76–101; Iwamatsu 1994, pp. 209–46.

the text itself was actually compiled, explains the significance of such a lotus seat in the following manner:

“Why does the Buddha necessarily sit on a lotus while he could sit on a mat?” “[That is because] the mat is a conventional seat for the ordinary people in the world. The lotus is tender and pure, and the Buddha wishes to show his supernatural power by sitting on it without breaking it off. Also he wishes to adorn the seat of the lotus of fine dharma. Also all other flowers are small and not comparable to a lotus in fragrance, purity and size.”⁴⁶

This is followed by an account that the lotus seat of the Buddha is hundreds of thousands of times more magnificent, pure and fragrant than any other lotuses in the world, and the Buddha preaches on the six *pāramitās*, seated on such a lotus throne. The lotus seat is thus presented as a symbol for the miraculous power possessed by the Buddha and his supramundane nature.⁴⁷

The reference to such a magnificent lotus seat, commonly depicted as a “thousand-petaled lotus (*sahasrapatrapadma*),” is found profusely in Mahāyāna scriptures, but quite rarely in non-Mahāyāna ones. An exception may be the account of the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī in some textual traditions, in which the Buddha is referred to as having performed diverse miracles seated on a thousand-petaled lotus to defeat the heretics. But it seems to have resulted from considerable influence from similar accounts in Mahāyāna scriptures.⁴⁸

Despite its enormous importance in scriptural sources, the lotus was seldom used as the seat of a Buddha in early Indian Buddhist art until it began to appear prominently in the Buddha triads of Gandhāra, possibly during the second half of the second century. As regards this interesting development, it is extremely intriguing that we find remarks on the dedication of a Buddha image on a lotus in several Mahāyāna scriptures, which are summarized in the following:

⁴⁶ T1509, 25:115c–16a.

⁴⁷ Lamotte 1980, pp. 389–96. We should also note that the lotus was a popular symbol related to birth or creation in India (Zimmer 1946, pp. 90–102, cf. Miyaji 1971, pp. 57–58). Read in this manner, the preaching Buddha on a lotus in a visual image would give an impression that the role of the Buddha as a teacher or savior has been activated or the Buddha is born in such a role.

⁴⁸ Rhi 1993, pp. 189–91, cf. Rhi 1991.

**Sumatidārikāparipṛcchā*⁴⁹

Four things a Bodhisattva should practice in order to attain *upapāduka* (spontaneous birth) on a thousand-petaled lotus in front of the king of the Dharma:

- (1) Offering various lotuses to the Bhagavat or his stūpa.
- (2) Not offending other people into anger.
- (3) *Making a Buddha figure seated on a lotus.*
- (4) Attaining the supreme enlightenment and residing there with great pleasure.

**Vimaladattāparipṛcchā*⁵⁰

Four things a Bodhisattva should practice in order to attain *upapāduka*:

- (1) *Making a Buddha figure seated on a lotus.*
- (2) Offering various lotuses to the Tathāgata or his stūpa.
- (3) Having compassion for everyone.
- (4) Observing the precept and not exposing others' faults.

**Bhadrakalpika-sūtra*⁵¹

Four things a Bodhisattva should practice in order to quickly obtain a *samādhi*:

- (1) *Making a Buddha figure seated on a lotus.*
- (2) Transcribing this scripture on a piece of bamboo or silk.
- (3) Reciting this scripture day and night.
- (4) Holding this *samādhi* and explaining the meaning of all the

⁴⁹ T334 (trans. Dharmarakṣa), 12:76c, cf. T335 (Kumārajīva), 12:79b; T336 (Bodhiruci), 12:82a–c; T310 (30), 11:547c–548a (same as T336). The last one, the text compiled in the *Mahāratnakūṭa* (*Dabaojijing*), has been translated into English in Harrison 1979, pp. 201–211 and Chang 1983, pp. 256–61; but for an unknown reason the latter omits the part relevant to us. The translation in the former reads: “... the Bodhisattvas accomplish four acts to accept spontaneous generation upon lotus seats in front of me.* What are the four? (1) They offer lotuses and powdered incense, scattering it on the [statue of the] Tathāgatas and in the stūpas; (2) they will never inflict injury on others; (3) they construct statues of the Tathāgatas resting on a lotus; and (4) they have a deep and pure faith in the enlightenment of the Buddhas.” (*Although Harrison translates this part “in front of me,” it is not at all clear in the original whether the Buddha who speaks these words is identified with the one in front of which a Bodhisattva is to be reborn).

⁵⁰ T338 (Dharmarakṣa), 12:94c–95a, cf. T339 (Gautama Prajñārucci), 12:104b; T310 (33) (Nie Daozhen), 11:347c–348a. The last one is supposedly in Chang 1983, but again the relevant part is omitted.

Buddhas to people.

**Bodhisambhāra-śāstra*, attributed to Nāgārjuna.⁵²

One is able to attain *upapāduka* by making a Buddha figure seated on a lotus with gold, silver, pearls and precious stones.

These texts invariably encourage a Bodhisattva, i.e., a Mahāyānist, to make a Buddha figure seated on a lotus. The fact that these remarks appear in several texts in a virtually identical manner suggests that such dedication was widely practiced among Mahāyānists. Interestingly enough, the *Sumatidārikāparipṛcchā*, *Vimaladattāparipṛcchā* and *Bhadrakalpika-sūtra* were all translated into Chinese by Dharmarakṣa in the late third century, and their originals may not date much earlier. This date seems to coincide with that of Gandhāran triads, which I suppose were created during the third and fourth centuries. Presumably, Dharmarakṣa obtained the originals of the three texts somewhere in Central Asia during his travels in the region, and that area then was under the enormous influence from the Northwest of the subcontinent.⁵³ Although the Gandhāran examples are not single Buddha images but triads, the “Buddha image seated on a lotus” as prescribed in the texts does not necessarily mean that the image should consist of a single figure. It is difficult to tell whether the making of such images was following the textual prescription or the texts were reporting the current practice, even though I am tempted to see that the latter was the case. In any case, I believe that the popular dedication of such Gandhāran triads was closely related to these textual accounts and that its implication would be best understood with the help of textual historians through the careful investigation of the texts, which unfortunately have received little substantial attention in previous scholarship.⁵⁴

This type of triads was extremely popular in Gandhāran monasteries dur-

⁵¹ T425 (Dharmarakṣa), 14:6c–7a.

⁵² T1660 (Dharmagupta), 32:536c.

⁵³ Regarding Dharmarakṣa and his travels in Central Asia, see Boucher 1998a, especially pp. 41–43, cf. Zürcher 1972, pp. 65–70.

⁵⁴ Dharmarakṣa’s translations are briefly reviewed in Boucher 1998a, pp. 261 (no. 2), pp. 72–273 (no. 26), p. 277 (no. 45). Kumārajīva’s translation of the *Sumatidārikāparipṛcchā* (T335) is almost identical with Dharmarakṣa’s (T334), and Boucher is of the opinion that the former appears to be a mere reworking of the latter. One should note, however, that Kumārajīva’s text has a passage of considerable length inserted in the back, which is not found in any other versions. It should also be pointed out that in terms of the structure, the *Sumatidārikāparipṛcchā* and the *Vimaladattāparipṛcchā* are closely related each other and to a certain extent to the *Bhadrakalpika-sūtra* as well.

ing the third and fourth centuries (Fig. 9). In this period, triads seem to have been favored as popular dedications over larger independent statues. They were usually in a simple format in which a Buddha was flanked by two Bodhisattvas along with Brahmā and Indra placed in between, but they were occasionally magnified in size and elaborated in composition and details, the three figures frequently being placed inside a lavishly decorated pavilion.⁵⁵

It is also interesting to note that Buddha triads with a lotus seat in a similar form greatly flourished in the western Deccan caves during the fifth and sixth centuries (Fig. 10). In these triads, the Buddha is likewise seated on a lotus, making the *dharmacakramudrā* and flanked by two attendant Bodhisattvas on a lotus. Numerous reliefs of such triads were carved in the caves at Ajantā, Kānheri, Kārli, Aurangabad, Ellora and Kuda. They are regarded as intrusive carvings added on the walls of a cave in a rather disorderly manner once the sanctuary had been consecrated, and appear to have been popular dedications for the attainment of merit. Dated in the so-called Mahāyāna phase in this region, they are generally thought to be the dedications by Mahāyānists. The western Deccan examples could have been inspired by the Gandhāran examples, which are datable earlier by one or two centuries, and both were most likely a common form of popular dedication by Mahāyānists in the two different regions.

Steles of Complex Scenes

Still there would be no question that the most intriguing piece in the problem of Mahāyāna in Gandhāran art is the stele from Mohamed-Nari in Lahore Museum (Fig. 11). The impressive size, a little over 1 meter high, and elaborate design with many interesting details, set this stele apart from ordinary narrative reliefs or even triads, although the composition seems to have been expanded on the basis of the triad format. Its center is occupied by a Buddha making the *dharmacakramudrā*, seated on a gigantic lotus protruding out of the water, perhaps a lotus pond, and surrounded by what appear to be a multitude of Bodhisattvas. Although the scene was identified as the depiction of the Great Miracle at Śrāvastī by Alfred Foucher at the beginning of the twentieth century, its true identity has been a controversial issue, and a number of

⁵⁵ Ingholt and Lyons 1957, pl. 257; Kurita 1988, vol. 1, pls. 396, 398, 401.

⁵⁶ Foucher 1917, pp. 148–84. Various opinions by other scholars are cited in Rhi 1991, pp. 316–23.

alternatives have been presented.⁵⁶ As I previously discussed in detail in comparison with the accounts of the legend in various textual sources, it seems hardly possible that this scene represents the Great Miracle.⁵⁷ Probably the most notable alternative has been the idea that it represents Amitābha's Pure Land, Sukhāvatī. It is true that there is a remarkable resemblance between this scene and later representations of Sukhāvatī in East Asia such as in a mural in Cave 332 in Dunhuang. This made some scholars, particularly among Japanese, suggest early on that the stele may depict Sukhāvatī, beginning with Minamoto Toyomune already in the 1920s.⁵⁸ But it was in 1980 when John Huntington argued for the identification of Sukhāvatī, citing the accounts of the *Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha* as a textual source that this idea came to receive more serious attention.⁵⁹

What distinguishes Huntington's approach from the previous ones is that it focuses on finding a connection between the image and the textual account through the careful reading of a relevant text rather than citing the resemblance between the Mohamed-Nari stele and the East Asian parallels. His arguments may be summarized in four points. First, in the second row of the upper right-hand corner, a Buddha apparently speaks to a person, probably a monk, and this should be read as Śākyamuni displaying the magnificent view of Sukhāvatī to Ānanda as recounted in the *Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha*. Second, a Buddha surrounded by a number of smaller Buddhas in the form of an aureole in both the left and right upper-hand corners represents a Buddha emitting light in which numerous *nirmāṇabuddhas* are present, again as stated in the *Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha*. Third, a man and a woman in secular dress standing on a lotus in each side of the lotus seat of the central Buddha are people reborn in Sukhāvatī. Fourth, a number of birds in pavilions and on the lotus pond are representations of beautiful birds inhabiting Sukhāvatī as described in the same text.

Ingenious as they may be, Huntington's arguments are not particularly convincing. As regards the fourth point, birds on the roofs of buildings are commonly seen in Gandhāran art in numerous scenes that obviously have nothing to do with Sukhāvatī. For the second point, the account of numerous *nirmāṇabuddhas* in the light emanating from the Buddha is not specific to the Pure Land sūtras of Amitābha, but extensively found in many other Mahāyāna sūtras.

⁵⁷ Rhi 1991.

⁵⁸ Minamoto 1925, p. 51; Minamoto 1926, pp. 67–69.

The third point is interesting because a lotus was seldom used in Gandhāran art as a seat for lay people, who do not appear to be Bodhisattvas at a considerably high stage. It should be noted that the two figures are the only ones in the scene that do not have halos. But neither Huntington nor the supporters of his view were able to resolve the puzzle that there should be supposedly no women in Sukhāvātī. Although diverse recensions of the *Larger Sukhāvātīvyūha* considerably vary in contents, the absence of women in Sukhāvātī is a feature consistent in all the extant versions.

To have noticed the small scene of “the Buddha speaking to a person” as discussed in the first point is probably the most important contribution in Huntington’s thesis (Fig. 12). This part of the composition seems certainly of a different order from the rest of the overall scene and could be interpreted, as Huntington does, as directing a worshiper to the vision of the central Buddha or his surroundings (probably a buddhafield). The problem is that it cannot be easily determined who directs the worshiper and whose buddhafield it is. Gregory Schopen, questioning Huntington’s identification, pointed out that it may well be read as Śākyamuni directing Ānanda to the vision of Abhirati of Akṣobhya as stated in a number of recensions of the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra*, but that the stele may represent neither Abhirati nor Sukhāvātī.⁶⁰ I may also cite, in support of Abhirati, the *Akṣobhyavyūha* where Śākyamuni shows Abhirati to Śāriputra.⁶¹ By this I do not mean, like Schopen, that the central Buddha in the Mohamed-Nari stele is Akṣobhya in Abhirati, not Amitābha in Sukhāvātī; rather I simply wish to point out that Huntington’s argument does not hold for the identification with Amitābha and that the scene in question could be deciphered in a variety of ways. It is equally possible to read it as one of the past Buddhas giving *vyākaraṇa* to a previous incarnation of Śākyamuni and displaying the vision of his buddhafield. Or one could view it as a kind of entreaty to preach, by which the Buddha is activated as a great teacher in a magnificent form residing in his buddhafield.

Aware of the shortcomings in Huntington’s arguments, several other schol-

⁵⁹ Huntington 1980.

⁶⁰ Schopen 1987, pp. 130–31, n. 50.

⁶¹ T313, 11:759c. Schopen cites the Tibetan version of the *Akṣobhyavyūha* where Subhūti, not Śākyamuni, shows Abhirati to Ānanda, and admits that this raises no difficulties for Huntington (see n. 59). However, in the Chinese version, probably a much earlier recension supposedly translated by Lokakṣema, it is clearly Śākyamuni that shows Abhirati to Śāriputra and this would coincide with the accounts from the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtras* which Schopen cites.

ars have attempted to support the identification of the Mohamed-Nari stele with Sukhāvātī by sometimes bringing in the accounts from other Sukhāvātī texts; but none seems to have been particularly successful. Anna Maria Quagliotti, for instance, identifies the scene of the “Buddha speaking to a person” as the *Indraśailagūha*, which, she interprets, signifies “teaching of the higher order imparted to Ānanda/Śāriputra,” i.e., the vision of Sukhāvātī.⁶² However, there is no explanation why the “teaching of the higher order” imparted through the *Indraśailagūha*, even if the latter theme indeed played such a role, had to be particularly the vision of Sukhāvātī, for we do not find any necessary connection between the two in the textual tradition. Quagliotti also suggests that such motifs as *nāgas* on each side of the gigantic lotus throne may be an allusion to Śrāvastī—where the Great Miracle was performed and where Śākyamuni led Śāriputra to the vision, as specified in the *Smaller Sukhāvātīvyūha*, not as in the *Larger Sukhāvātīvyūha* in which the locality was Rājagṛha.⁶³ But one wonders why such miscellaneous details related to the Great Miracle, but not essentially to the scene of Sukhāvātī, had to be incorporated in its depiction. Some textual specialists try to explain various motifs in the Mohamed-Nari scene in the light of the earliest extant recension of the *Larger Sukhāvātīvyūha* in Chinese translations, not the later Sanskrit version Huntington referred to.⁶⁴ However, their attempts have been equally unsuccessful—at least for now. This seems most revealing in the fact that each scholar connects various motifs in the stele in a different way to the text, although they resort to the same text as their source.

Besides Sukhāvātī, a number of scholars presented a variety of interpretations regarding the identity of the Mohamed-Nari stele. Even the usually skeptical Takata Osamu describes it as “the scene of the Buddha preaching that presupposes the development of Mahāyāna ideas in its background.”⁶⁵ Koezuka Takashi calls it “the scene of the Buddha preaching to the multitude of listeners with miraculous occurrences, prefiguring the illustration of

⁶² Quagliotti 1996, pp. 284–87.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

⁶⁴ Aramaki 1999; Aramaki 2003; Harrison 2000. I am grateful to Professors Aramaki and Harrison for generously letting me cite their unpublished works. I do not go into the discussion of ideas presented in these papers because they should still be work in progress. Despite some disagreement in this issue, I admit I have been enormously inspired by their works, and hope to be able to read their arguments in a more convincing form in the future.

⁶⁵ Takata 1967, p. 263.

Mahāyāna sūtras.”⁶⁶ John Rosenfield, pointing out its affinities with the accounts in the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*, the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra* and the *Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa*, characterizes it as “the symbol of the immanence and power of the Buddhist pantheon” inspired by Mahāyāna.⁶⁷ Odani Nakao brings in, for comparison, the description of the magnificent spectacle of miraculous occurrences from the “Introduction” chapter of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*.⁶⁸ More recently Miyaji Akira, who has done considerable work on this issue, confirms the view that the stele represents the miracle of the Buddha emitting extensive light recounted in various Mahāyāna sūtras such as the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* or the *Tathāgatagarbha-sūtra*, but not necessarily based on any particular scripture.⁶⁹ Although none would be conclusive, each of these seems to point out rightly in its own way the spirit that prominently permeates the Mohamed-Nari scene. Iconography is a game of probability unless one has definitive proof, which is extremely hard to secure in most cases. The identification of the Mohamed-Nari stele with Sukhāvātī does not seem any more plausible from the present evidence than other alternatives.

Perhaps we may never be able to find a single textual source for the scene in the Mohamed-Nari stele without the support of explicit literary or epigraphical evidence. The textual source may have been one that is hardly read in present Buddhist scholarship; or it may have been permanently lost. Or there may never have been, from the outset, a single textual source for the image. The more carefully and extensively one reads Mahāyāna scriptures, the more one finds what may be possibly—but perhaps not actually—associable with the Mohamed-Nari stele. It may not be an exaggeration to say that the entire Mahāyāna scriptures are full of such descriptions and accounts. Here is one such passage from the chapter “The Emerging of the Tathāgata” (*Tathāgatabhūtatathāta?*) of the *Avatamsaka-sūtra*:

When the world is first created, the great water-wheels fill the three thousand/great thousand worlds. A great lotus called the “Emerging of the Tathāgata” appears, adorned with great treasures. It covers the three thousand/great thousand worlds, illuminating all the

⁶⁶ Koezuka 1985, p. 280.

⁶⁷ Rosenfield 1967, pp. 236–38.

⁶⁸ Odani 1967, p. 96.

⁶⁹ Miyaji 2002, pp. 19–20, cf. Miyaji 1971, pp. 40–60; Miyaji 1992, pp. 332–35. I am grateful to Professor Miyaji for timely bringing my attention to his most recent paper on this issue.

lands. At the time, *devas* such as Suddhavasadeva and Maheśvara, seeing the lotus, definitely realize that all the Buddhas will appear in the world like lotus blossom.⁷⁰ [Then, the wind-wheels by various names are activated and create various realms, heavenly palaces, mountains, seas, treasures, trees, etc.] . . . Likewise, the *Tathāgata-arhat-samyaksambuddha* appears in this world with all the great roots. [He emits the great lights by various names and thus gives *vyākaraṇa* to all the Bodhisattvas, who will become Buddhas by various names.]⁷¹

I do not intend to present this passage as a possible textual source for the Mohamed-Nari stele, but merely point out that this kind of idea among many could well have been incorporated in the image. Still, this account seems to coincide better with probably the most prominent feature in the Mohamed-Nari stele, the lotus blossom protruding out of the water. We almost have the vision of the Buddha emerging, being seated on the lotus and activated in the role of preaching, perhaps awakened from a self-contained *samādhi*.

Regardless of its textual source, I have a strong feeling that the Mohamed-Nari stele is related to a *samādhi* experience. Whether it was a visual recreation of the experience or a visual aid to such an experience is hard to tell. It could have been both. It reminds one so much of a vision that a practitioner may have had in a *samādhi*, which in its turn would have been influenced by what he/she previously had read, seen and heard. Then, it could have been transferred into a visual image by means of available artistic conventions; the visual image thus created could have served as a device that helped other practitioners experience the *samādhi*.

In this regard, the *pratyutpanna-samādhi*, or *pratyutpanna-buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi*, which Paul Harrison translates “the *samādhi* of Direct Encounter with the Buddhas of the Present,” greatly interests us. It is of course not clear whether the *Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* was known in Gandhāra. But it is intriguing that we find in it a passage similar to the ones we noted above from the *Sumatidārikāparipṛcchā*, *Vimaladattāparipṛcchā*

⁷⁰ In the Koryo edition this phrase reads “*ruo lianhua shu* 如蓮華數” (like the number of lotuses), and it should be translated, “Buddhas as many as the lotuses appear in the world.” But all the later three Chinese editions from Song, Yuan and Ming have the character “*fu* 敷” (to blossom) instead of “*shu*”; my translation follows this, since it seems to make better sense.

⁷¹ T278, 9:613b–14a, cf. T279, 10:262a–c; T291, 10:596c–597b. This passage is stated as one (the 8th) of the ten conditions for the emergence of a Buddha and the lengthiest one.

and *Bhadrakalpika-sūtra* as regards the “making of a Buddha image seated on a lotus.” The *Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* enumerates a series of four dharmas to be practiced with a view to quickly attaining the *samādhi*, and in one of the sets the making of a Buddha image is listed.

- (1) *Making of a Buddha image or a picture.*
- (2) Taking a fine piece of silk and copying this *samādhi*(-sūtra).
- (3) Leading conceited people to the Buddha’s way.
- (4) Always preserving the Buddha’s dharma.⁷²

The structure is quite similar to those of the three sūtras, and even closer to that of the *Bhadrakalpikasūtra* in the content of the four dharmas and the statement of its purpose as “quickly attaining a *samādhi*.” Although other aspects of the texts should be carefully examined in order to clarify this connection, I suspect a possibility that the accounts of the making of a Buddha on a lotus found in these three sūtras have their origin in an account like the one in the *Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*. We may recall that the complex scenes such as the Mohamed-Nari stele are most probably derived from the triad format, which is identifiable with the “Buddha image on a lotus.” If the triad was a popular form of Mahāyānist dedication encouraged in the three sūtras, one developed out of an earlier form as prescribed in the *Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*, could the larger complex scenes possibly have been a recreation of the vision of the Buddha a practitioner attained in such a *samādhi*?⁷³ Although this may be a conjecture by a specialist in visual monuments, it would be worthy of more serious exploration with the help of textual specialists. This supposition, of course, does not mean that the *Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra* was the source for the Mohamed-Nari stele, but merely indicates that an idea, not a textual account, similar to the one as we find in this sūtra, was possibly incorporated in the image.

The question remains, then: Who is the central Buddha in the Mohamed-Nari stele? It may perhaps have been Amitābha, if we note its relative importance in the context of the *Pratyutpannasamādhi-sūtra*; but Amitābha is

⁷² T418, 13:906a, cf. Harrison, trans. 1998, pp. 23–24; also see T419, 13:923a; T416, 13:877b; Harrison, ed. 1978, p. 27; cf. Harrison 1990, p. 32.

⁷³ The earliest Chinese translation, the *Banzhou sanmei jing* (T418) is attributed to Lokakṣema and dated to c. 179 CE. Paul Harrison tentatively dates this sūtra some time between the beginning of the Common Era and 179 CE. (Harrison 1990, p. xvii). It is quite possible that the sūtra was known in the Northwest and particularly during the second to fourth centuries when the complex steles were created.

merely adduced in this text as an example, the Buddha of the Present *par excellence*.⁷⁴ Could it be instead any Buddha of the Present whom a practitioner could visualize in a *samādhi*? Here, one needs to recall that Buddha images in Gandhāra were presented in an essentially identical manner, that is to say, iconographically indistinguishable. Again, if the iconographic distinction did not matter, the individuality of Buddhas may not have mattered seriously either, as we suspected with Buddha images. If the Mohamed-Nari scene is to be a depiction of Sukhāvātī, one should be able to find distinctive features of that buddhafield, which unfortunately do not seem securely recognizable. On the contrary, the gigantic lotus throne, so prominent a feature in the Mohamed-Nari stele, is actually not referred to in any of the two principal texts of the Amitābha cult, the *Larger Sukhāvativyūha* or the *Smaller Sukhāvativyūha*, as the seat of Amitābha, despite the fact that it is stated invariably as the seat of those who are reborn in Sukhāvātī.⁷⁵

I am tempted to read the Buddhas in each upper corner as those in other buddhafields or the rest of the Buddhas of the Present. Two pairs of Bodhisattvas in the pavilions perhaps represent those in different stages, the preaching, crossed-legged pose above the pensive pose, as I have noted their hierarchical difference elsewhere.⁷⁶ A man and a woman standing in each side of the lotus throne could be practitioners who gained rebirth on a lotus throne now meeting the Buddha, as stated in the *Sumatidārikāpariprcchā* and *Vimaladattāpariprcchā*.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Harrison, trans. 1998, pp. 2–3.

⁷⁵ The lotus throne is indeed recounted with prominence in the *Guan wuliangshoufo jing* as one of the sixteen visualizations (T365, 12:342c–343a), but the relevance of the *Guan-jing* to the early Mahāyāna in Gandhāra during the second-fourth centuries is not at all clear.

⁷⁶ Rhi 2004.

⁷⁷ See above ns. 49, 50. In the *Sumatidārikāpariprcchā* a practitioner makes a Buddha image to attain *upapāduka* seated on a lotus in front of the “king of Dharma” (or the “Buddha” in Bodhiruci’s translation). The *Vimaladattāpariprcchā* simply states the “attaining of *upapāduka*,” although Gautama Prajñāruci’s translation has an additional phrase, “constantly remaining in the place (or land) of the Buddha.” Although the remark on the attaining of *upapāduka* (in front of the Buddha or in the land of the Buddha) strongly reminds one of the rebirth in Sukhāvātī and Amitābha, intriguingly enough, neither the place nor the Buddha (or the king of dharma) is specified. Could this be another sign that the Buddha or the buddhafield (where a practitioner is to be reborn) stated in the texts can be any Buddha or buddhafield or that they are generic Buddhas or buddhafields, unspecified or yet to be specified. It would be interesting to note in this regard that even the *Smaller Sukhāvativyūha* states at the end, although briefly, other Buddhas and buddhafields equal to Amitābha and Sukhāvātī. I would not rule out the possibility that the Mohamed-Nari stele was the representation of Sukhāvātī but not in the way it has been argued in previous scholarship.

Besides the Mohamed-Nari stele, several more such steles are extant in complete or fragmentary forms (Fig. 13).⁷⁸ They do not seem to belong to the stage of the most vigorous activities in Gandhāran art, and could be datable to the third century (at the earliest) or afterwards. Similar complex scenes of the Buddha seated on a gigantic lotus surrounded by numerous Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and *devas* are also found in the western Deccan caves, most prominently in Kānheri (Fig. 15). It is possible that they were created with similar implications and functions like the Gandhāran examples.

Mahāyāna in Gandhāran Monasteries

In this brief survey, I have presented a number of iconographic types that could be possibly identified as Mahāyānist dedications in Gandhāra, in which certain Bodhisattva types, Buddha triads and steles of complex scenes were most prominent. On stylistic grounds, they obviously do not belong to the early phase of Gandhāran art, but seem to have been increasingly popular during the third and fourth centuries, when the dedication of larger, independent statues was considerably in decline. Besides, the *Dīpaṃkara-jātaka* and the flourishing of image worship, though not themes exclusively in Mahāyāna, could be potentially interpreted in positive terms in relation to Mahāyāna.

In what manner, then, did these visual materials have bearing on the way Mahāyānists existed in Gandhāra? If we investigate the provenance of triads and steles of complex scenes, they originated, surprisingly enough, from quite a limited number of monastery sites. Buddha triads and steles of complex scenes assembled in my database and dependable enough in authenticity (since an enormous number of fakes are circulating even in scholarly publications) amount to 109 pieces.⁷⁹ There may be some pieces not counted here, but their number must be quite small. Of the 109 pieces, 13 are from Takht-i-Bāhī, 36 from four mounds (A-D) at Sahrī-Bahlol, 6 from Loriyān-Tangai, and 3 from Mohamed-Nari. Ten other pieces come from Jamālgaṛhī (2), the Tordha village, Yakubi (both in Swābi), Jauliān (2), Dharmarājikā (2) (both in Taxila), Muftipur, and an unknown site in Swāt. The provenance of the remaining 41 pieces is unknown, but a number of them show distinctive stylistic features attributable to Takht-i-Bāhī, Sahrī-Bahlol or Loriyān-Tangai.

⁷⁸ Another complete piece is in the Chandigarh Museum (Kurita 1988, pl. 399). Numerous fragments that once formed part of such complex steles are known through photographs kept in the Archaeological Survey of India and the India Office Library.

⁷⁹ See the list in Rhi 1991, pp. 197–204.

The absolute majority of the pieces whose provenance is known (56 out of 68) originated from the Peshawar basin. Furthermore, they are concentrated (52 out of 56) in Takht-i-Bāhī, four monasteries of Sahrī-Bahlol and Mohamed-Nari in the northern part of the Peshawar basin (Fig. 14). Another important provenance site, Loriyān-Tangai, is located near the Shāhkot pass over the Mālākand range toward the Swāt region, but it had a strong tie in sculptural style with Takht-i-Bāhī and Sahrī-Bahlol rather than with the Swāt region. The apparent concentration of triads and steles of complex scenes in Takht-i-Bāhī, Sahrī-Bahlol and Loriyān-Tangai may be partly due to the fact that these sites—excepting Loriyān-Tangai—were excavated in a relatively (although not very) scientific manner and thus their finds are fairly well documented.⁸⁰ However, the fact that only two pieces are known from Jamālgarhī, another important provenance site of stone sculpture in the Peshawar basin along with Takht-i-Bāhī and Sahrī-Bahlol, seems to indicate that these statistics are significant enough.⁸¹

Not just triads and steles of complex scenes but larger statues of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have also been abundantly discovered at Takht-i-Bāhī and Sahrī-Bahlol. Indeed these two places are indisputably the most important provenance in Gandhāran art along with Loriyān-Tangai and Jamālgarhī at least in stone statues. The dedication of images was particularly prominent here, and two larger groups among the four dominant stylistic types of Buddha images I have identified were related to these two places.⁸² A series of “aligned chapels” surrounding a stūpa or a stūpa court, which is rarely found outside the Peshawar basin, was an important, distinctive structure in the monasteries of these places designed to install an enormously large number of statues discovered there. Many of the Bodhisattva images identified above as Avalokiteśvara also came from these two places. In many ways, the monasteries at Takht-i-Bāhī and Sahrī-Bahlol are highly important for our concern.

Neither place is recorded in any of the currently known literary sources.

⁸⁰ Spooner 1906–07 (1909), pp. 102–18; Spooner 1907–08 (1911), pp. 132–48; Spooner 1909–10 (1914), pp. 46–62; Hargreaves 1910–11 (1914), pp. 34–39; Stein 1911–12 (1915), pp. 95–119. Also see photo records currently kept in the office of the Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi.

⁸¹ Cf. Errington 1987.

⁸² Rhi 1998, pp. 5–39; an abridged version was presented at the biennial conference of the American Council for Southern Asian Art, May 2000, Philadelphia. I have a hypothesis that what we normally call Gandhāran sculpture was regionally quite a limited phenomenon in actuality.

Takht-i-Bāhī is probably the best preserved—or most-extensively reconstructed (in recent years)—site in the Peshawar basin and consists of many sectors constructed and composed on an impressive scale; it is somewhat strange that it evaded the attention of Chinese pilgrims. Remains at Sahrī-Bahlol consist of some ten monastery sites, on a smaller scale than Takht-i-Bāhī, surrounding a large mound where the present Sahrī-Bahlol village is located.⁸³ Nothing is known regarding the relationship among the monasteries at Takht-i-Bāhī and Sahrī-Bahlol, which are only one kilometer from each other, and the relationship between the monasteries surrounding the Sahrī-Bahlol village. But the sculptural finds from these two places exhibit close affinities in style and iconographic themes, hardly distinguishable in most instances, and thus they seem to have had a close connection in whatever manner. Mohamed-Nari, famous for the complex stele in Lahore Museum discussed above, is located not far from Takht-i-Bāhī and Sahrī-Bahlol, although the exact location of the monastery is unknown.

Also at another important site, Loriyān-Tangai, numerous statues of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas (including a number of those identifiable as Avalokiteśvara) were found along with Buddha triads. Stone sculptures from this site, which display distinctive stylistic features, are generally dated later than those from the most active period at Takht-i-Bāhī and Sahrī-Bahlol. Most artifacts from this site were excavated by J.E. Caddy in 1896, but little documentation is preserved regarding the site itself, and even its exact location is no longer known.

How could the sculptural finds that I suppose to be Mahāyānist dedications have found their way to these monasteries in such large numbers? Were they, then, Mahāyāna monasteries? These sites yielded, however, absolutely no epigraphical evidence to support this supposition. On the contrary, a potsherd found at Takht-i-Bāhī has a dedicatory inscription that could possibly be read as having been intended for the Kāśyapīya,⁸⁴ and this may indicate that this monastery was affiliated to this school, which we would normally regard as non-Mahāyāna. In four inscriptions from Sahrī-Bahlol (Mounds 1085, A, B,

⁸³ Tissot 1983 (1985), pp. 567–614.

⁸⁴ Konow 1929, no. XXII. Konow read in this inscription, “*saṃghe chadudise ka . . .*” (in the *saṃghe* of the four quarters). There is no question regarding this reading. Konow interprets “*ka . . .*” as “*Kāśyaviyana*” (= Kāśyapīyānām). In Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions, the phrase *saṃghe chadudise* was usually followed by the words indicating the place and the school. Therefore, “*ka . . .*” equally could have been a place name. But this formula appears most frequently in the inscriptions of the Kāśyapīya, and this inscription would have continued like “*Kāśyapīyānām parigrahe.*”

C), Sten Konow noted a similar pattern, and suspected that they had also originally contained the word *Kāśyapīya*.⁸⁵ Although Konow's supposition is not altogether free from question, it seems plausible because the sites at Sahrī-Bahlol were closely related to Takht-i-Bāhī in many aspects. Out of ten inscriptions from the Northwest that record the name of *nikāyas*, five belong to the *Kāśyapīya* (besides Takht-i-Bāhī and Sahrī-Bahlol, from Palātu-Dherī and Bedadi in the Peshawar basin and Mahāl in Taxila),⁸⁶ while five others belong to the *Sarvāstivāda* (3),⁸⁷ the *Dharmaguptaka* (1)⁸⁸ and the *Mahā-saṃghika*.⁸⁹ The five inscriptions of the *Kāśyapīya* are all that are known in association with this *nikāya* in Indian Buddhism, and this seems to indicate that the *Kāśyapīyas* were quite active in this region.

If the monasteries at Takht-i-Bāhī and Sahrī-Bahlol belonged to the *Kāśyapīya*, how could such objects associated with Mahāyānists have been dedicated inside these monasteries? The central sector of Takht-i-Bāhī consists of three parts (Fig. 16): (1) the main stūpa court, (2) the monastic quarter, and (3) the court of minor stūpas located between the first two structures.⁹⁰ Statues, triads, and steles were installed in image chapels surrounding the main stūpa court and the court of minor stūpas. Although they are clearly demarcated from the monastic quarter, they are closely connected to the latter structurally. In order to reach the monastic quarter, one could not avoid passing through the court of minor stūpas. There seems hardly any possibility that the main stūpa court and the court of minor stūpas were maintained separately from the monastic quarter. Whoever the donors may have been—be they monastics or laity—the dedication of visual images would not have been possible without the involvement of the monastics in the monastery—whether this was in the form of direct undertaking, indirect encouragement or support, or reluctant tolerance. The monastic community of Takht-i-Bāhī must have been deeply implicated in the process of making and dedicating images.

Like other monastery sites that would have existed on the plains in the

⁸⁵ Konow 1929, no. LVI.

⁸⁶ A jar from Palātu-Dherī (Ibid., no. LV); a copper ladle from Mahāl, Taxila (Ibid., no. XXIII); a copper ladle from Bedadi near Mansehra (in the Chalmā valley) (Ibid., no. XXXIV).

⁸⁷ Kaniška casket from Shāh-jī-Dherī (Ibid., no. LXXII); a copper plate from Kālāwān, Taxila (Marshall 1951, p. 327); a stone from Zeda near Uṇḍ (Peshawar basin) (Konow 1929, no. LXXV).

⁸⁸ A stone from Jamālgarhī (Konow 1929, no. XLV), cf. Brough 1962, p. 44, n. 3.

⁸⁹ A relic vase from Wardak in Afghanistan (Konow 1929, no. LXXXVI).

⁹⁰ Sehrai 1986, pp. 61–69.

Peshawar basin, the monasteries at Sahrī-Bahlol were in a miserably ruinous state already at the time of excavation at the beginning of the twentieth century, and even they disappeared quickly afterwards; thus it is difficult in most cases to figure out their structural plan as clearly as Takht-i-Bāhi. However, in the examples in which both the stūpa court and the monastic quarter are discernible, they never appear to have been separate. In these monasteries as well, the objects we equate with Mahāyānist dedications seem to have been closely associated with the monastic community there.

How should we, then, explain this apparently contradictory situation—the Mahāyānist dedications within the monastic community that would be normally defined as “non-Mahāyāna” in our traditional conception? A key to this question may lie, as I pointed out on a number of occasions, in the conception of the relationship between traditional *nikāyas* and Mahāyānists.⁹¹ Although it has been a general notion among Buddhist scholars to view Mahāyāna as socially separate from or antagonistic to the established *saṃgha* consisting of traditional *nikāyas*, one feels obliged to question how much of that conception can be justified. The early Mahāyāna was apparently a religious movement that consisted of a number of different groups. They may have shared the general ideal in a broad sense, but most probably never formed a single social group. Gradually they began to call themselves “Mahāyāna” and slightly later used the depreciatory word “Hīnayāna” to designate the conservative group they criticized. It is questionable, however, whether “Hīnayāna” ever meant the entire organization of the traditional *saṃgha* and was used in an institutional sense. If I am not mistaken, I have not yet seen any unequivocal evidence which demonstrates that the entire Mahāyānists criticized and antagonized traditional *nikāyas*. Based on the situation I encounter in visual materials from Gandhāra, I suspect that a considerable number of the early Mahāyānists lived and were active within monasteries officially affiliated with traditional *nikāyas*.⁹² I do not rule out the possibility that some Mahāyānists could have lived in independent Mahāyāna monasteries, as described in the *Ugradattaparipṛcchā* or the *Gocarapariśuddha*, which became one of the bases for Hirakawa’s grand theory. But they must

⁹¹ Rhi 1991; Rhi 1996, pp. 131–166; Rhi 1999.

⁹² Textual specialists, Étienne Lamotte and Heinz Bechert, have also expressed similar ideas. See Lamotte 1970, pp. xiii–xiv; Bechert 1973, pp. 11–14. My idea based on visual materials seems to coincide with the opinions of other textual specialists such as Sasaki Shizuka and Shimoda Masahiro who participated with me in the Tōhō Gakkai Conference: see Sasaki 2003, and Shimoda 2003.

have been quite few in number, and the majority of Mahāyānists were based at monasteries of traditional *nikāyas*.

The fact that no explicit epigraphical evidence for the presence of Mahāyānists is found until the fourth century on the entire subcontinent, including the Northwest, I believe, is not due to the insignificance of their number or activity, but due to the scarcity of monasteries officially declared as Mahāyāna. As is well known, the Chinese pilgrim Faxian, who visited the Peshawar basin in 402, reported that the majority of Buddhists there studied Hīnayāna.⁹³ Although it sometimes became grounds for the skeptical assessment of Mahāyāna in this region,⁹⁴ this testimony may well be interpreted as reporting that only a small number of Mahāyāna monasteries were declared independent from traditional *nikāyas*.

The extent of the activity of Mahāyānists within traditional *nikāyas* could have been considerably different, depending on the *nikāya*, region and individual monastery. For instance, a great deal of affinity has been pointed out by Buddhist scholars between Mahāyāna and the accounts in the scriptures of the Mahāsaṃghika and the Dharmaguptaka. Regionally, the Northwest appears one of the prominent bases for the activity of Mahāyānists, and particularly the monasteries at Takht-i-Bāhī, Sahrī-Bahlol, Mohamed-Nari and Loriyān-Tangai stand out in this regard.

The Kāśyapīya, which was dominant in Gandhāra and possibly owned the monasteries at Takht-i-Bāhī and Sahrī-Bahlol are also notable. Only fragmentary information is known regarding this *nikāya*.⁹⁵ It is reported as having been founded by a monk by the name of Kāśyapa around the first half of the first century C.E. The *Samayabhedoparacanacakra* describes the doctrines of this school in five points, and indicates their similarity with those of the Dharmaguptaka, which, judged by the literary tradition, also seems to have been related to the Mahāyāna. The *Jietuojie jing* 解脫戒經 (*Pratimokṣa-sūtra*) in Chinese translation (T1460, trans. Gautama Prajñāruci, the first half of the 6th century) is the only extant work attributed to this school. It is said that its content is quite similar to that of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda-vinaya*, but considerably different from that of the *Sarvāstivāda-vinaya*. This point would need

⁹³ T2085, 51:858a-b (Legge, p. 32). Faxian remarks on Gandhāra, “*duo xiaocheng xue* 多小乘學” (Many of them practice Hīnayāna), while he describes in Uḍḍiyāna, “*jie xiaocheng xue* 皆小乘學” (All practice Hīnayāna). This may be interpreted as indicating that there were some independent Mahāyāna monasteries besides the majority of Hīnayāna monasteries.

⁹⁴ Krishan 1964, pp. 104–19.

⁹⁵ Bareau 1955, pp. 201–03; Shizutani 1978, pp. 201–13.

further investigation, because the Mūlasarvāstivāda appears to be another important school to be considered in association with Buddhism in the Northwest. Also a version of the *Samyuktāgama* preserved in Chinese translation (T100) is sometimes attributed to the Kāśyapīya.⁹⁶

It is interesting to note simultaneously that Jamālgaṛhī, another important site in Gandhāran art and possibly affiliated to the Dharmaguptaka, is almost negligible as a provenance site of the objects we have identified as Mahāyāna dedications. But I believe it premature to conclude that Jamālgaṛhī has little bearing on the activity of Mahāyānists. It may be due to the fact that the Buddhists at Jamālgaṛhī simply did not employ such types as Buddha triads and steles of complex scenes as a popular form of dedication. Perhaps one should remember that art reflects reality in certain aspects, not in its entirety.

⁹⁶ *Busho kaisetsu daijiten*, vol. 2, p. 62 (article by Akanuma Chizen).

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FIGURES

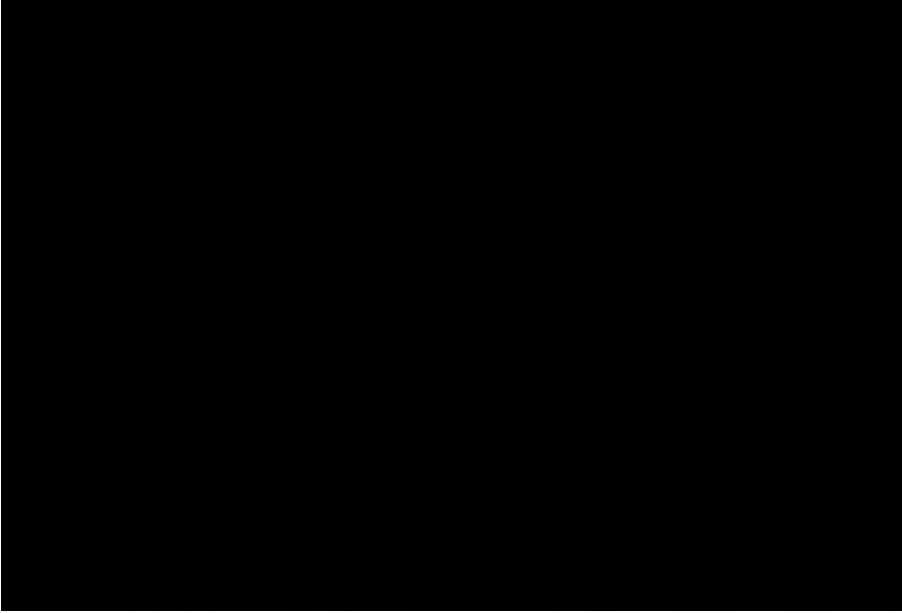


Figure 1. Dīpaṅkara-jātaka, on a stūpa from Sikri, 2nd-3rd century, Lahore Museum. (Rhi)

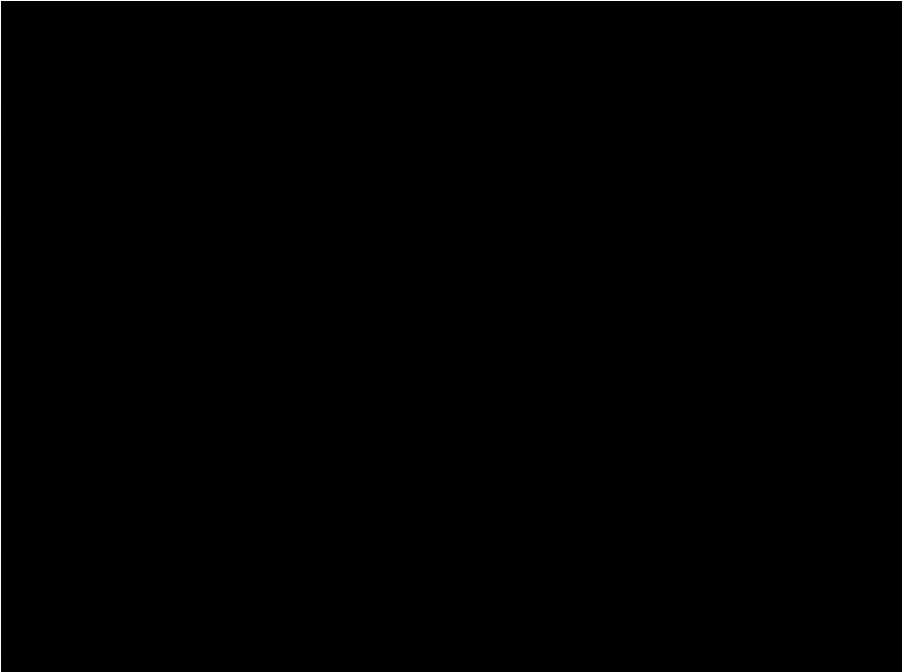


Figure 2. Images excavated at Loriyān-Tangai in 1896. An old photo kept in the India Office Library, London.

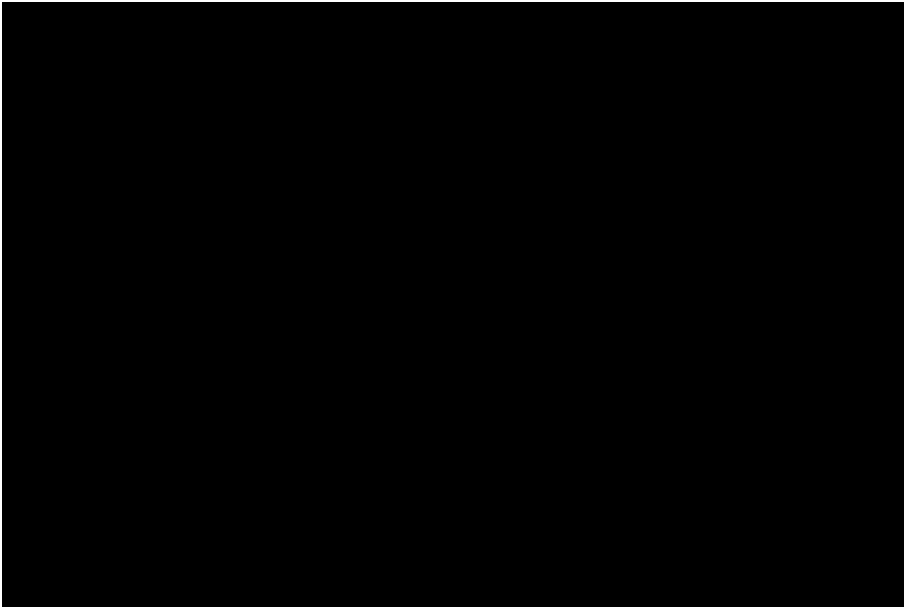


Figure 3. Image chapels in the court of minor stūpas at the Takht-i-Bāhī monastery. (Rhi)



Figure 4. Triad. 3rd-4th century, John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, Florida. (J. Leroy Davidson, *Art of the Indian Subcontinent from Los Angeles Collections*, 1968, pl. 23.)

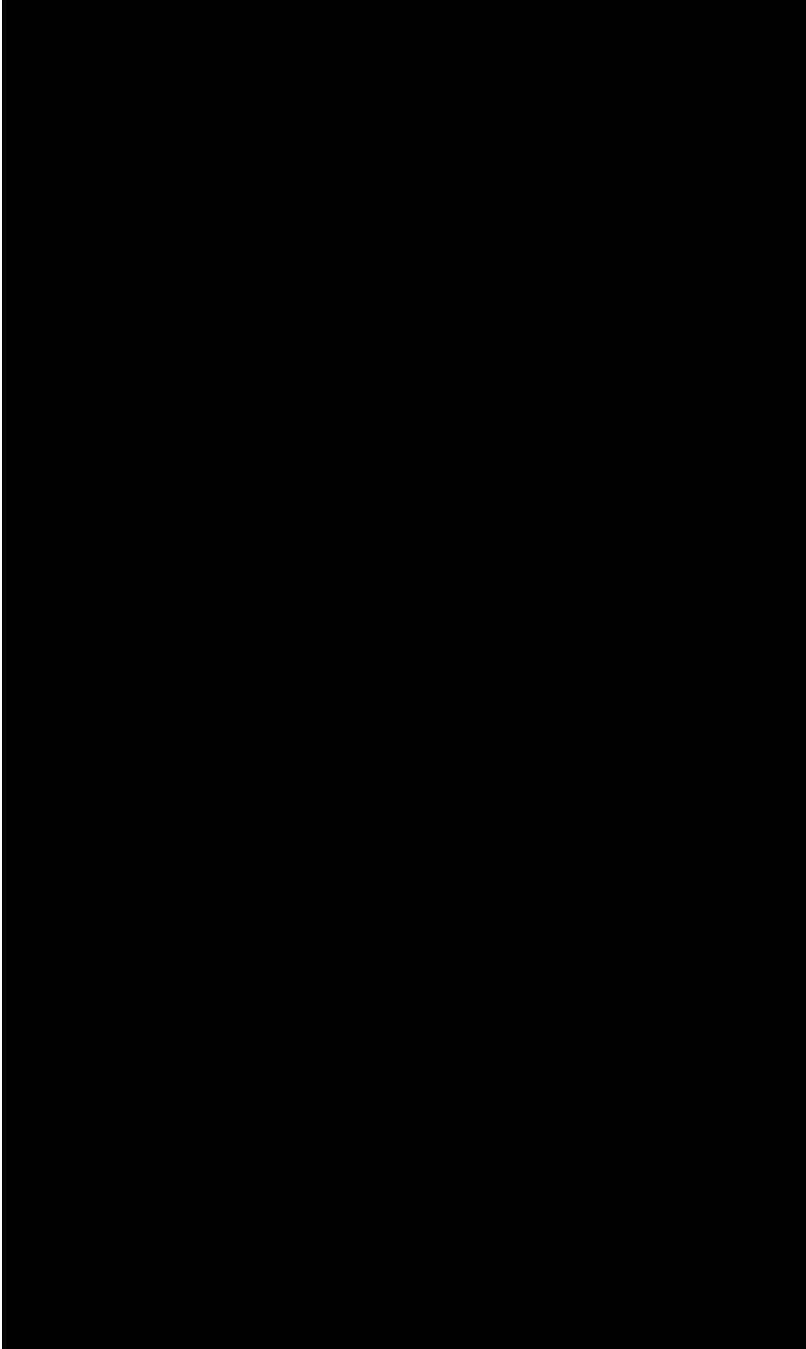


Figure 5. Buddha, from Sahrī-Bahlol Mound B, 2nd century, Peshawar Museum.
(Rhi)

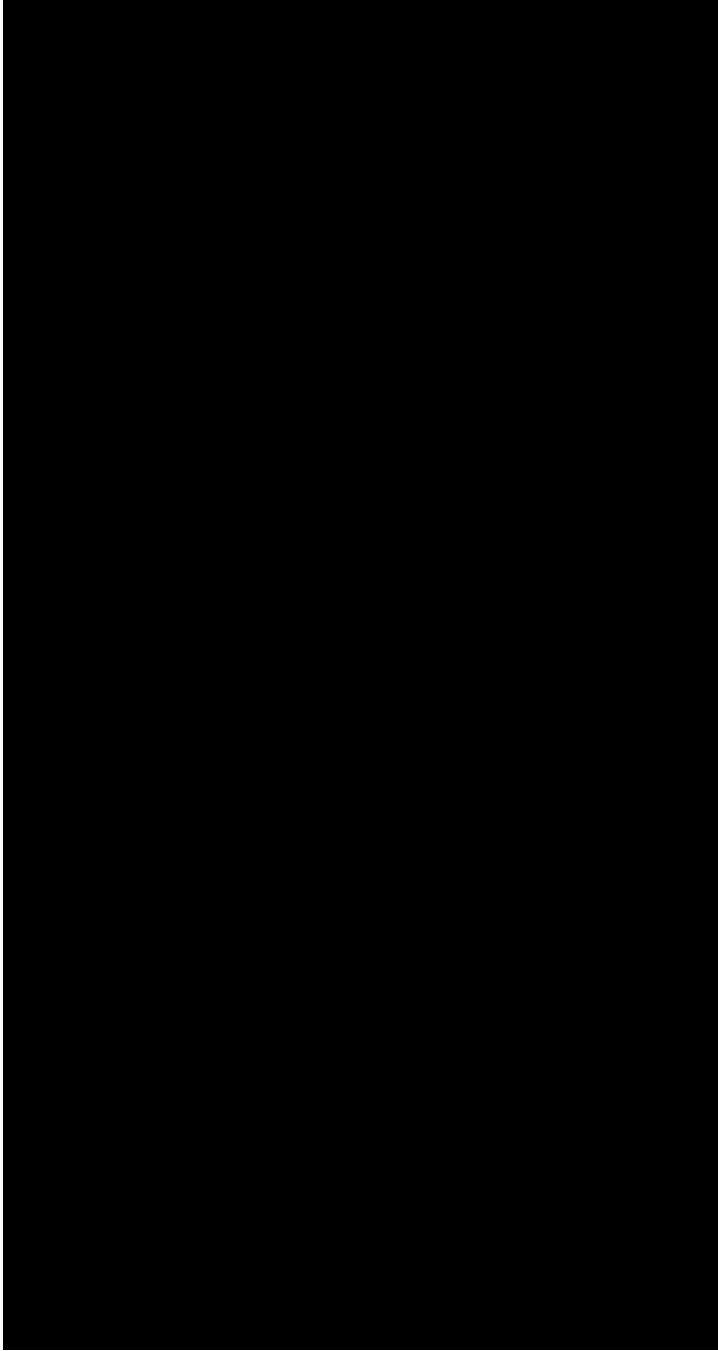


Figure 6. Bodhisattva with a wreath, 2nd-3rd century, Los Angeles County Museum of Art. (Courtesy LACMA)



Figure 7. Bodhisattva with a book, detail of a stele, from near Yakubi, 3rd-4th century, Peshawar Museum. (Rhi)

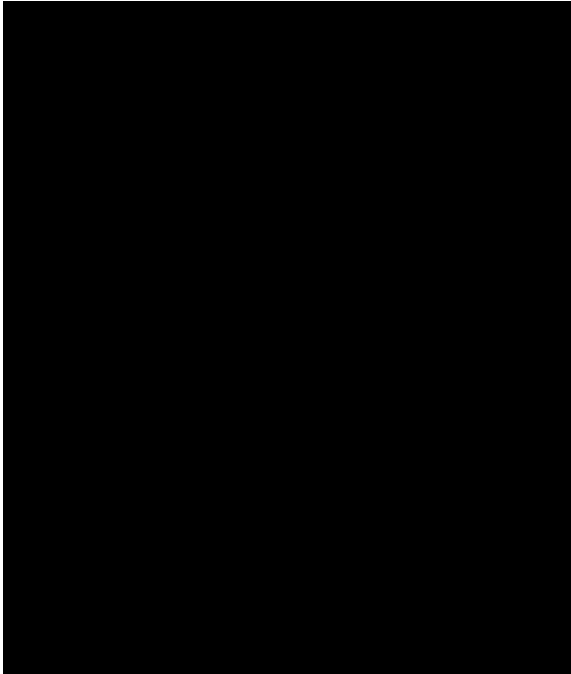


Figure 8. Triad, from Sahrī-Bahlol Mound A, 2nd-3rd centuries, Peshawar Museum. (Rhi)

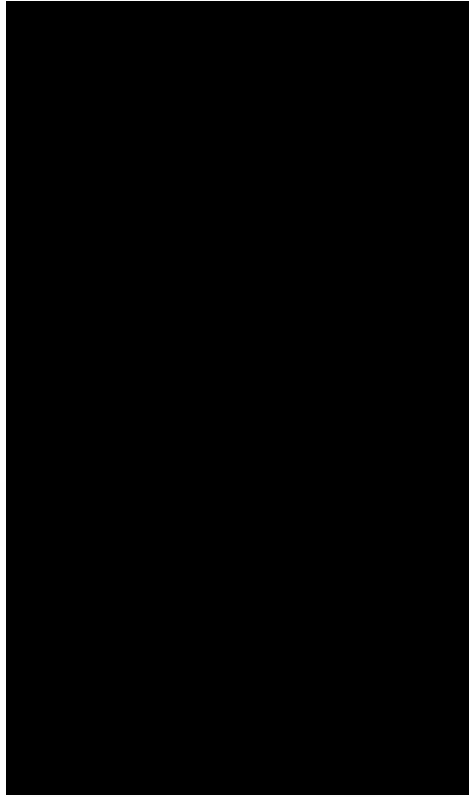


Figure 9. Triads, 3rd-4th century. An old photo of the exhibits in Peshawar Museum in the early 20th century, kept in the Archaeological Survey of India, New Delhi.

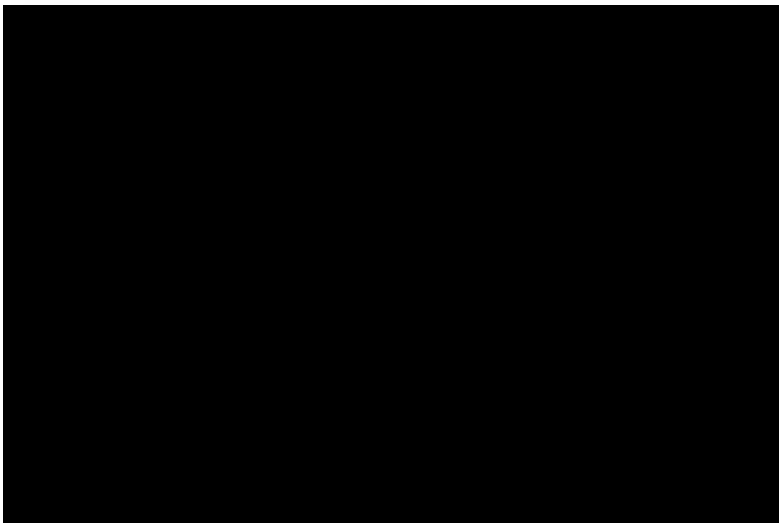


Figure 10. Triads in Cave 2, Kālī, western India, late 5th-6th century. (Rhi)

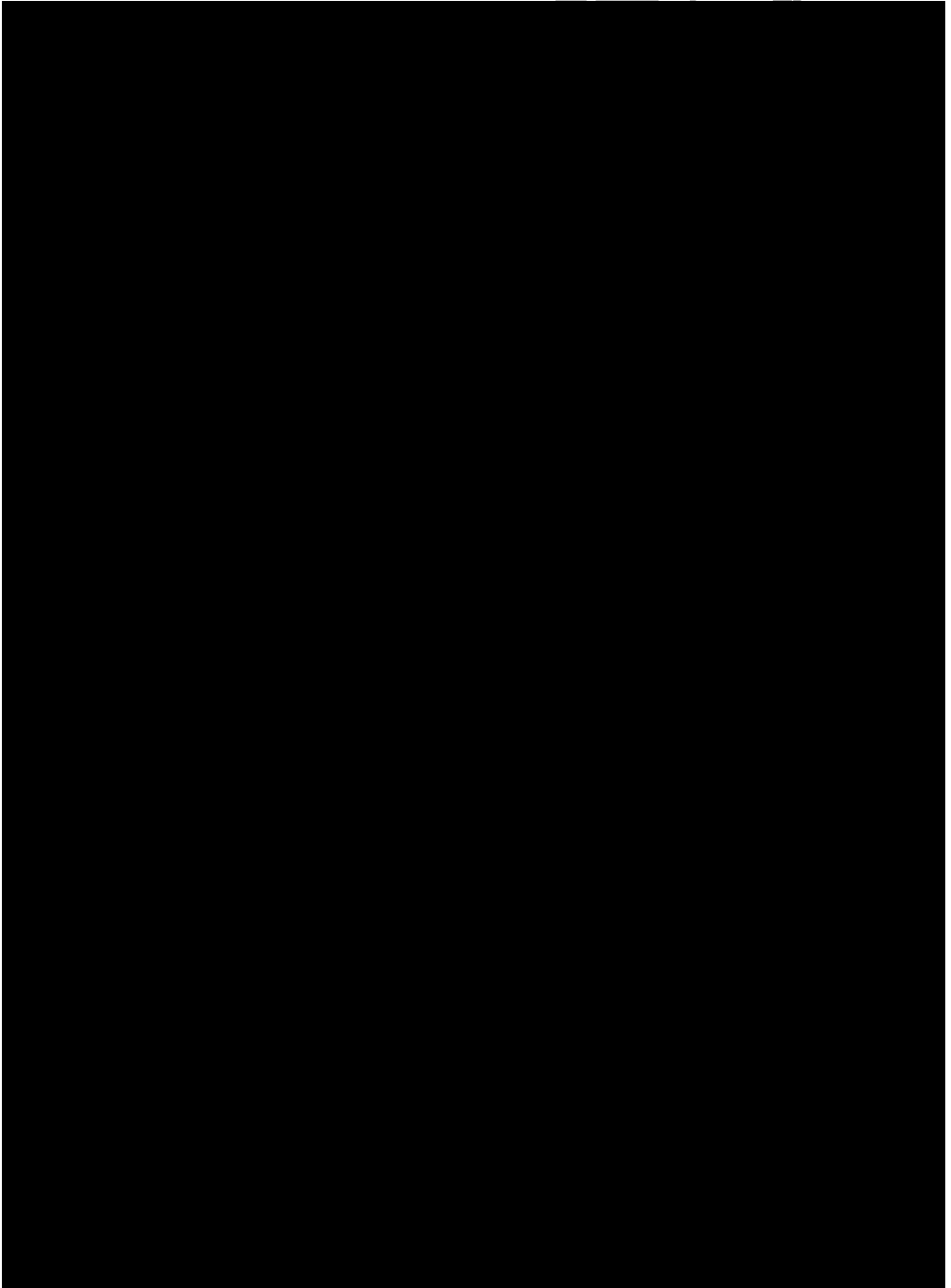


Figure 11. Stele, from Mohamed-Nari, 3rd-4th century, Lahore Museum. (Rhi)

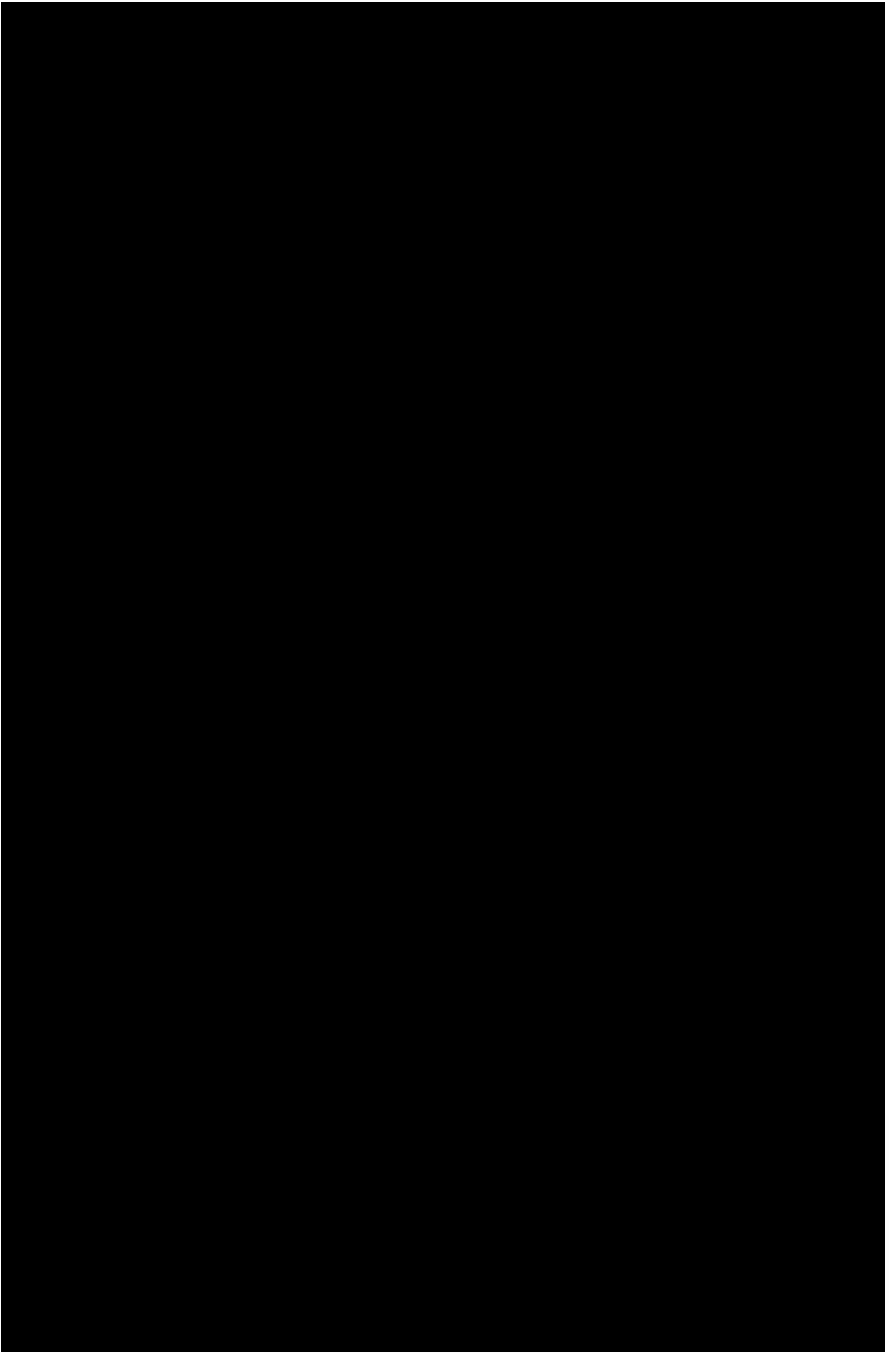


Figure 12. Detail of Figure 11. (Rhi)

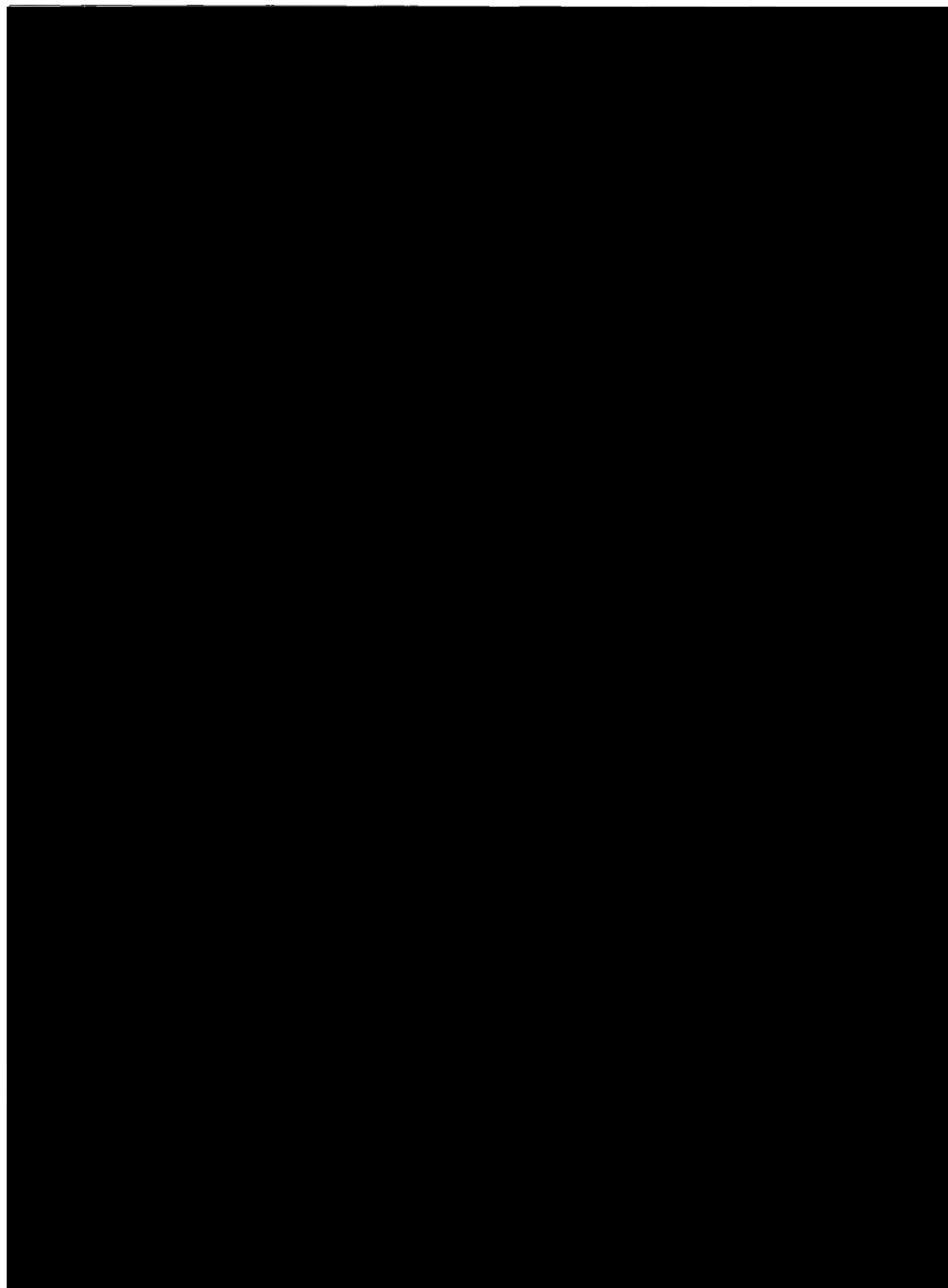


Figure 13. Stele, provenance unknown, 3rd-4th century, Peshawar Museum.
(Rhi)

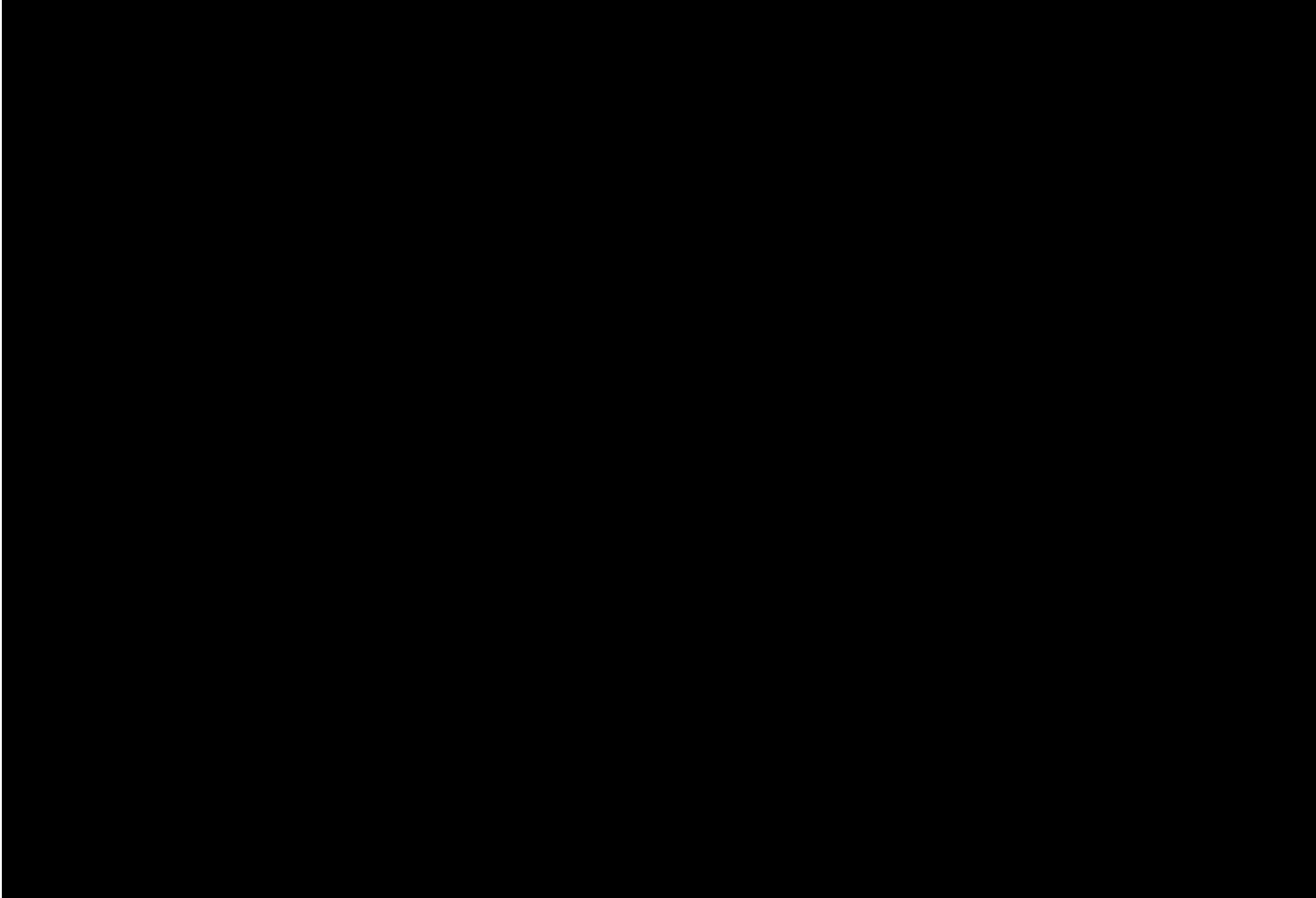
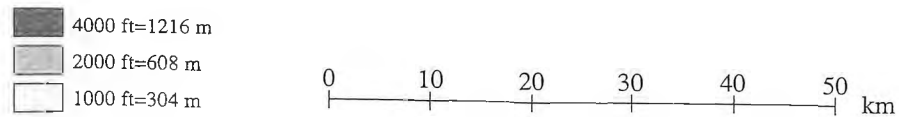


Figure 14. Map of the Peshawar basin. (Based on the map in F. Tissot, *Gandhāra*, 1985.)



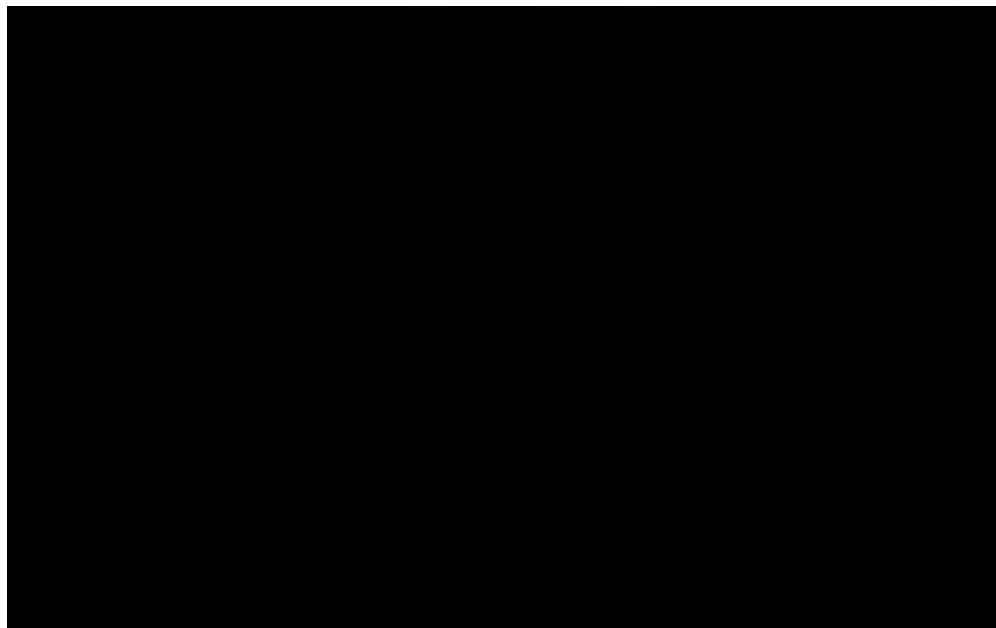


Figure 15. Complex scenes in Cave 90, Kānheri, western India, late 5th-6th century. (Rhi)

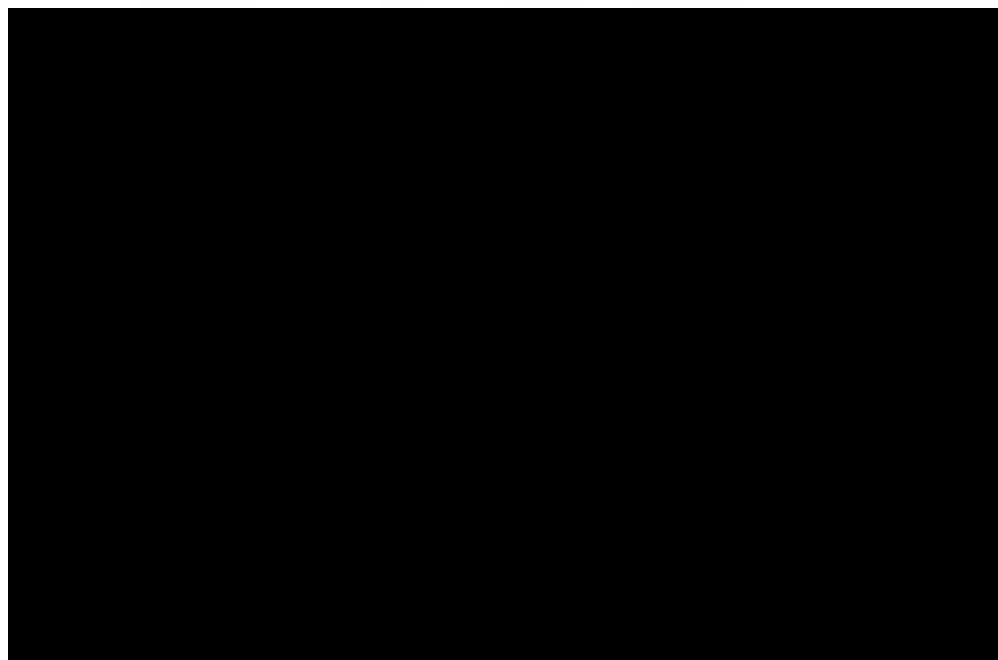


Figure 16. Central quarter of the Takht-i-Bāhi monastery. (Rhi)