



Fig.1: Full view of the banner showing Buddha and Bodhisattva figures, National Museum, New Delhi

Buddha and Bodhisattva Images Painted on a Silk Banner from Dunhuang : Copies of Famous Images from India - A Study

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This extant fragment of a large banner or hanging, measuring 154.2 x 110 cm and accessioned as Ch.xxii.0023 (Fig.1, p.120), was found by Sir Marc Aurel Stein in the Library Cave (Cave No.17) of The Thousand Buddha Caves (Qianfodong) in Dunhuang, during his visit there between 1907 and 1908. Dunhuang is situated in the northwest of Gansu Corridor and on the east of Xinjiang Province, China. The copies of famous Buddhist images in different postures and *mudrās* painted on this important banner may be dated to the 7th-8th century CE. The banner is badly damaged, and all its accessories are lost. Some parts of this large banner are now in the British Museum, London (Whitfield 1982: 126, pl.56).

The Buddha and Bodhisattva figures as well as the details drawn on this fine plain-woven silk look like sketches rather than paintings. Except for some traces of red, all other colours have faded. The extant well-defined line drawings, details of the figures and sinuous landscapes in fine black lines, are the work of a master artist. Though badly abraded, the familiar iconography, along with Chinese inscriptions written within the cartouches, helps to link these images to famous scenes from Buddha's life that were worshipped at various sacred Buddhist places in India. For example, Mṛgadāva or Rishipattana in Sarnath where he imparted his First Preaching, Śrāvastī the capital of the Kosala kingdom in Buddha's time where he performed his miracle (*yamakaprātihārya*, Fig.2a), Gṛdhrakūṭa or the 'Pure Land of Eagle Peak' in Rājagṛha, the capital of the kingdom of Magadha in Buddha's time, symbolising the Buddhaland where Buddha is said to have expounded the Lotus *sūtra* (*Saddharmapuṇḍarikasūtra*) to his countless listeners. These Chinese texts, translated by Waley, and discussions of this painting by Stein, Rowland and Soper (Waley 1931: 268-271; Stein 1921: 877-879, 1024-1026; Rowland 1947: 5-20;

Soper 1964/1965: 349-364), as well as the iconographic features help us to identify the figures in this banner. For easy reference, the banner fragment may be broadly divided into three panels and the figures arranged therein almost in a grid (Figs.2-10).

Figure No.2

The right corner of Panel I of the banner depicts a bejewelled Buddha (Fig.2) with his right hand in *bhūmisparśamudrā*, invoking Mother Earth to be the witness to his attainment of Enlightenment. His left hand is placed on his lap with the palm upward. He is seated on a flat rock in *vajraparyāṅkāsa*. The busts of two grotesque human figures, adorned with necklaces, emerge from his rocky seat.

Though they remind of gargoyles, an architectural element, they actually represent Māra's army who tries to distract the meditating Buddha. The scene of the submission of Māra and his retinue (*Māravijaya*) is indicated by these two figures. Their defeat is shown by placing them under Buddha's rocky seat. It is obvious that the humiliating defeat and the heavy pressure of



Fig.2: Buddha's enlightenment

the stone-seat of the Enlightened One are causing them great suffering. A few confident strokes (Fig.2) by the artist depict the expression of fear and pain on their faces. From early on, the Buddhist art of Central Asia has drawn its inspiration from India in general, and from Gandhāra and Kashmir in particular. Many themes related to Buddha's life have been made after the models from these two regions. The depiction of Māra's defeat is one of such favourite themes observed in the art of the Buddhist world. One finds an

intense reflection of Gandhāra art in this banner. It reminds of the Gandhāra panels showing how one of Māra's warriors is subdued and fallen under the throne of the Enlightened One.

The present depiction shows the moment just before the attainment of his Enlightenment. He is still in his royal attire. His crown is decorated with a flaming jewel at the apex, above the grotesque demonic head flanked by an animal head with a long, open snout. A stalk, issuing from the joints of the base of the flaming jewel and the head of the demon, supports a bell-shaped tassel. This motif is repeated below, where the long stalk is emitting from the snout of the flanking animal. The drooping bell-shaped tassels of varied sizes not only form the main decorative motif of this figure, but are also used elsewhere in the same banner. The motif is seen on either side of his head, on the outer edges of his ears, reminding of ear ornaments and as a decorative border of his mandorla (Fig.2). His long earlobes are without ornaments. A necklace, made of a heavy golden plate without any decoration and a string of pearls, embellishes his neck, which shows *trivalī*, one of the thirty-two auspicious symbols a Buddhist deity may have. He wears a pair of bangles designed with pearls on plain bands. The upper portion of his body is mostly naked, only a red stole passes across his body, covering his left shoulder and arm up to the wrist. His red *dhotī*, tied with an ornamental belt (*kardhani*), is decorated or embroidered with rosette motifs around his knees. From his either knee hangs again an ornamental, bell-shaped drooping tassel, similar to those seen on his crown and along the edge of his mandorla. The way of wearing the ornamental belt is very similar to the way worn by one of Māra's soldiers depicted in Gandhāra.

He has a thin beard and wavy moustache, often seen with the Gandhāra Buddha and Bodhisattva figures. The *pīpal*-leaf shaped aureole against his head has a broad red border edged with tongues of flame. The inner field of the aureole is plain. A round mandorla, combined with the aureole, frames his body. The border of the mandorla is richly decorated with small ornamental bell-shaped drooping tassels, each being attached with a rosette. The field of the mandorla is decorated with simple concentric bands. The oblong cartouche on his left, close to the aureole, bears an inscription in Chinese, which is translated by Waley as "... Country of Magadha, light-emitting magical image. The eulogy of the picture says: This pictured form is noble and dignified. The head is spangled with bright pearls and adorned with lovely jewels. Square throne,

cornered tiers, halo ... the merit of looking up at the Blessed One's face" (Waley 1931: 268). According to Stein, this represents "a statue in the Kingdom of Magadha," which may be identified with the "Vajrāsana of Mahā-bodhi" (Stein 1921: 1025). Magadha, now Bihar, was one of the most powerful sixteen *Mahājanapadas* in Buddha's days, where he had attained his Enlightenment and spent most of his life in carrying out religious activities and preaching the Law of Dharma.

Figure No.2a

Next to the Fig.2, the figure of a Buddha (Fig.2a) standing in *samapādabhaṅga* on a fully-blossomed lotus with his feet astride, apparently is



Fig.2a: Miracle of Śrāvastī

painted in the centre of this huge banner or hanging. His right hand is in *abhayamudrā* while the left, touching part of his robe, is pendent. A single-stringed pearl necklace with an elaborately designed pendant, made of a rectangular gem and scroll motifs, is visible over his *saṅghātī*. It is interesting to observe that the artist wanted to make this pendant even more decorative by adding a rosette held by an animal head, which reminds of a dolphin. This motif, seen on the left side of the pendant, is missing on its right for lack of space, which was not preconceived by the artist. This is also clear from the length of the pearl strings, which are not symmetrically

drawn. A human or an animal motif incorporated as one of the favourite designing components of an ornament (Fig.7) travelled all the way from the Hellenistic world to Gandhāra and Central Asia. Curiously, the intricately designed pendant is surmounted by a Moon crescent holding a rosette with

lotus-like petals around instead of a Sun disc, a common motif found on the crowns of Sassanian kings in Iranian art.

In this context, mention may be made of two moon crescents found on either side of the circular aureole of a similar figure (Fig.2b) as the figure in Fig.2. Usually, one comes across the crescent of the moon on the heads of Avalokiteśvara figures or tutelary deities (Bhattacharya-Haesner 2003: 186). The Iranian concept of the sun and moon motifs has influenced both Indian and Central Asian iconographies. Apparently, it is the reminiscence of a Sassanian motif, a motif that signifies an insignia of Sassanian royal supremacy. In Indian iconography, the crescent of the moon is one of Śiva's attributes, which embellishes his matted hair. According to Indian mythology, Śiva is one of the three Supreme Gods of the Universe. Hence, he is often shown with the crescent of the moon on his head, signifying his complete supremacy over the Universe, which coincides with the Iranian concept of royal supremacy. In Indian mythology, the moon crescent on the head of Lord Śiva is related to the story of the churning of the ocean (*samudramanthana*). The poison resulting from the churning would have destroyed the Universe. Thus, in order to save the Universe, Śiva swallowed the entire poison. Besides Lakṣmī, Airāvata and Uccaiśravā, many more gems including the Moon emerged from this churning. Realizing the unbearable burning sensation suffered by Śiva, gods offered him the Moon to soothe his pain. Śiva accepted the offer and placed the Moon on his matted hair. Thus, he is known by several names, Śaśiśekhara, Candramauli, Candracūḍa or Candraśekhara (Sengupta 1973: 282). In art, the Moon is presented as a crescent not only to specify it but also to treat it aesthetically. Since the concept of Avalokiteśvara has derived from Śiva, some of his attributes are rightfully attached to Avalokiteśvara and also to other Buddhist deities, e.g. the present figure. The Moon crescent, as a part of the pendent of his necklace, indicates Buddha's all-pervasive supernatural power.

The circular aureole, within the elliptical mandorla surrounding his body, is decorated with linear and block designs, painted alternately in red and buff. The plain buff border of the aureole is outlined in fine black, and its outer edge is decorated with tongues of red flames. Radiating small Buddha figures are emitted by the miraculous act of the Buddha, who is the sole embodiment of supernatural power. Although these small Buddha figures are standing, their busts only are in view, and they cover the entire field of the mandorla. Each of

these small figures has a circular aureole with tongues of flames at its apex. From the edges on either side of Buddha's headscarf, near his shoulders, flames shoot up like wings, hinting at the twin miracles (*yamakaprātihārya*) performed by him at Śrāvastī. He wears a curious headgear, which is an iconographic feature specifically associated with the Kṣitigarbha figures from Chinese Central Asia. This Bodhisattva, one among the Eight Great Bodhisattvas (Aṣṭamahābodhisattva) in the Indian Buddhist pantheon, occupies not only an important role as a saviour of souls suffering in hell according to the Central Asian Buddhism, but also obtains a special iconographic outfit together with attributes like a flaming jewel in one hand and a staff with six rings (*khakkhara*) on the other. The headgear covers the hair of the Buddha and, like a cape, it falls behind him. The lower hem of this cape reaches up to the hem of his *uttarāsaṅga*. This depiction represents the well-known episode from the Buddha's life, 'The Great Miracle of Sravasti', and this legend is connected with the dedication of the Jetavana. Stein unearthed a similar sculptural representation in the Rawak *vihāra* near Khotan, situated on the Southern Silk Road (Stein 1921: figs.63, 64). Except for his special headgear, his physical features, posture (*samapādabhaṅga*), way of wearing the monastic robe (*saṅghāṭī*, *uttarāsaṅga*), the position of his hands and the flames shooting up from his shoulders have intense reflection of Gandhāra art showing the same theme as the figure under discussion.

Figure No.2b

On the left of Fig.2a, another figure (Fig.2b) is seated on a low platform in the same posture as the figure in Fig.2. Stein says, this figure is misplaced (Stein 1921: 1025). He wears a more elaborate necklace than that worn by the figure in Fig.2. Such broad necklaces in the form of an ornamental band are often worn by the Bodhsattvas from Gandhāra (Fig.11). His right upper arm is



Fig.2b: Buddha's enlightenment

decorated with an armlet, but his wrist is without any ornament. The figure is framed with a combination of aureole and a mandorla, both are circular and designed with flaming borders. The inner sides of both aureole and mandorla are decorated with concentric bands, and each band is further embellished with small beads, reminiscent of Sassanian roundels with beaded borders. His crown, reminding of the high crown of Indra (*kirīṭa*), is damaged and parts are missing. Within the aureole, on either side of his head, a crescent of the moon is seen.

The crescent on his right is complete, while little is extant of the one on his left. This may indicate his being Bodhisattva Candraprabha: Light of the Moon who, according to Bhattacharyya, is white in colour and holds a moon disc on a lotus (Bhattacharyya 1968: 89). The cartouche on the right of his aureole bore an inscription, which is now badly abraded. Usually, banners from Central Asia represent the Sun and Moon Bodhisattvas (Jāliniprabha and Candraprabha) against red and white discs respectively (cf. Ch.xxviii.006 in Stein 1921: pl.LXIV). But, because of his posture, i.e., seated in *vajraparyāṅkāśana* on a rectangular seat, right hand in *bhūmisparśamudrā* and the left placed on his lap like the one in Fig.2 of the present banner, the figure is more likely the Enlightened One than a Moon Bodhisattva. As already mentioned above, while discussing Fig.2a, this figure, also, shows strong Sassanian and Gandhāran art influences. Traces of a Chinese motif are seen only in the designs of his seat.

Figure No.3

In the beginning of Panel II, four small Buddha figures are seen (Figs.3 to 6). The Fig.3 is seated in *vajraparyāṅkāśana* on an elaborately decorated lion throne (*siṃhāsana*) supported by two lions. The



Fig.3: Buddha under a parasol

depiction of lion plays a significant role in Buddhist art. The Buddha known as Śākyasimha is the Lion of the Śākya clan. His preaching is likened to a lion's roar (Soka Gakkai 2002: 365-366). His right palm near his chest is in *abhayamudrā*, while the left is turned inward. The well-decorated umbrella-like canopy above his head signifies his control over the Universe like the King of Kings (*Cakravartin*). The canopy has a *stūpa* at its apex, which is placed on a single-petalled lotus. It is shaped like a tassel, a motif frequently used in various ways in this banner. A moon crescent embellishes it in the middle. The canopy has traces of an orange central part, demarcated from its lower portion with a white band outlined in black. Its lower portion is divided into several blocks, alternately painted red, orange and olive-green. Its edge is decorated with bell-shaped motifs, reminding of the Chinese musical bell instruments. They seem to be made of brass, indicated by the remains of yellowish buff.

His aureole has a plain, yellowish-buff border, the inner side of which is decorated with white pearls, reminding of Sassanian beaded borders. The backrest of his throne, painted brown, is plain and has a simple orange horizontal bar on top, projecting symmetrically on either side, which rests on two similar vertical bars. On either end of the horizontal bar, busts of two male *courī* bearers are symmetrically arranged. They gaze at the Buddha seated below. They are not *nāga* figures as suggested by some scholars (Lokesh Chandra et al. 2012: 68, 69, pl.11.4). Below them, two legendary winged animals – an Iranian feature, composed of the head of a bird with a hooked beak and the foreparts of a horse, decorate the throne serving as a bracket to support it. The space under their raised forelegs is filled with scroll designs, indicating the stylized cumulous clouds. This suggests that they are celestial beings floating in the space above the clouds, a motif frequent in Central Asian art. These legendary winged animals remind of the *vyāla* motifs used as brackets in Indian architecture. Two grotesque lions and their forelegs form the legs of the throne. Their scroll-like manes reflect Chinese elements. These lions with comical facial expression reflect the artist's fascination for caricature. A much-effaced cartouche on its right bears a Chinese inscription, translated by Waley as: “Kapilāvastu ... silver image. The eulogy of the picture says ... true appearance ... image ... then ... merit” (Waley 1931: 269).

Figure No.4

On the left of the Fig.3, another Buddha figure, larger in size, perhaps Amitābha (Fig.4), is seated in *dhyānāsana* on a lotus with drooping petals. The upper part of his body is surrounded by a large circular mandorla embellished with a flaming border. The painting apparently intends to depict the Buddhist Triad, often depicted in Indian Buddhist art – Amitābha being flanked by two of the Eight Great Bodhisattvas



Fig.4: Buddhist Triad

(Aṣṭamahābodhisattva). On Amitābha's either side a dancing Bodhisattva is seen. The one on his right, carrying a small Buddha figure in *dhyānāsana* on a long lotus-stalk, perhaps is Avalokiteśvara, and the other one, much damaged and almost untraceable, may be that of Mahasthamaprāpta.

Figure No.5

Below the Fig.3, another Buddha figure (Fig.5) of similar size as Fig.4 is seated in *dhyānāsana* on a lion throne (*siṃhāsana*). The high throne, made of a rectangular plaque being supported by two lions, is placed on a fully blossomed lotus. His right hand is placed on his right knee,



Fig.5: Buddha

while the left, near his chest, is in *abhayamudrā*. It is curious to notice that the drawing was probably made with the help of a stencil that was wrongly placed over the silk and dabbed. Thus, the present positions of his hands do not match with the convention, i.e., showing the right hand in *abhayamudrā* and the left placed on the left knee. This wrong depiction of his hands is further confirmed from the folds of his *saṅghāṭī* on the upper portion of his body. The lions of his throne are verged more on caricature than natural. It is interesting to observe the cushions placed on the seats of the figures in Figs.3 and 5. They resemble *namdā*. They are made of pressed wool and are well known as *namdā* in Kashmir area. This term is found in a slightly varied form in wooden documents of the 3rd and 4th centuries CE from Niya, an archaeological site on the Southern Silk Route (Bhattacharya-Haesner 2013: in press). Ever since antiquity, great quantities were produced in Kashmir as well as in Khotan, another important site west of Niya on the Southern Silk Route.

Figure No.6

Below Fig.4, a small Buddha (Fig.6) is seated on a three-headed elephant. The entire figure with the elephants is depicted on a *damaru*-shaped throne, which in turn is placed on a raised platform, designed in a fashion similar to the seat of the figure in Fig.2b. Such designs with some variations are found on Chinese furniture. The trunk of each elephant head is raised and curved. The head facing spectators bears an expression of agony. The head on either side emits a lotus stalk with a Buddha



Fig.6: Subjugation of Nalagiri

seated in *dhyānāsana*. The *ḍamaru*-shaped throne, resting on a plain platform, is fastened in the middle with a red band. Busts of two male figures are leaning at the narrow middle portion of the throne to their sides in almost horizontal position, and supporting the walls of the throne with their hands. In the centre of the upper portion of the throne a simple lotus with long stalk is drawn, apparently to signify the lotus throne of the Buddha. On the right of the platform a male devotee is kneeling with hands in *añjalimudrā*. Traces of folded knees, similar to this devotee, are observed on the left of the platform. Both wear red *dhotīs*. The cartouches are badly abraded, hence it is difficult to identify this figure. Apparently, this representation depicts the subjugation of elephant king Nalagiri by the Buddha at Rājagṛha. Buddha is riding on the wild elephant, which expresses its agony executed skillfully by the artist.

Figure No.7

On the left of the group of the four figures (Figs.3 to 6) described above, is a Bodhisattva figure (Fig.7) seated in *vajraparyāṅkāsa* on a raised throne borne by a dragon. The throne, shaped like a chalice, is decorated with small flowers and geometrical patterns, painted alternately with red, maroon



Fig.7: Bodhisattva Maitreya

and orange and defined with fine black lines. The central portion of the throne is designed with linear and circular motifs. The base of the throne is ornamented with stylized lotus petals with rosette on each petal. The entire throne rests on the back of a fierce dragon. According to Rowland, "this may be a replica of the image of Buddha subduing the dragon of Nagarahāra, the ancient name of Hadda in Jalalabad, Afghanistan, which was among the trophies brought to China by Hsüantsang" (Rowland 1947: 12; Pinyin spelling: Xuanzang).

The Bodhisattva's hands, with fingers interlaced and thumbs joined at the tips, rest on his lap. He is richly adorned with ornaments, viz., armlets, bangles and a heavy necklace made of several strings with two grotesque lion heads, or *kīrtimukha*, serving as spacers, who are spitting strings of this necklace. These *kīrtimukha* motifs are one of the auspicious decorative architectural designs, often used on the lintels of Indian temple entrances. The ends of the necklace strings joined with two dragonheads (*makaramukha*) and the busts of two small human figures, who may be identified as Buddha figures by their simple *uṣṇīṣa*. The dragonheads and the human figures form a fascinating pendant of the Bodhisattva. The arms of the Buddhas are crossed on their chests. The thorny horns of the dragonheads are scrolled at the ends. They open their jaws in a rage, and are ready to attack the busts of the Buddha figures in the centre of the pendant, who remain unperturbed. Symbolically, this composition may be interpreted as Māra's attack. The Bodhisattva wears elaborate armlets and a pair of wristlets on each wrist.

The border of the aureole is embellished with a beaded band, reminiscent of a Sassanian decorative motif, and these, in turn, are engulfed in tongues of fire. Right above his crown is a *stūpa*, badly damaged, with parts missing. On the flaming border, divine musicians, dancers and devotees are seen. Their stoles are floating in the air like the tongues of flames. The figure under discussion may be identified as Bodhisattva Maitreya, the Future Buddha, and not Buddha, on the basis of the iconographic attributes like the *stūpa* (Bhattacharyya 1968: 80) and the figural representations of musicians with musical instruments emerging from the flames. Such a joyous scene on the flaming border may be interpreted as the descent of the Future Buddha, Maitreya, from *Tuṣita* heaven to Earth after the *Mahāparinirvāṇa* of the Buddha. The figure of this Bodhisattva is truly modelled after the Gandhāra Bodhisattva figures.

Figure No.8

On the left of Fig.7, a standing Buddha (Fig.8) is framed against a circular aureole combined with an oval mandorla. The top of the mandorla is again extended to form an ogee, and thus the entire frame is shaped like a stylized lotus petal. The Buddha stands on a lotus with drooping petals. The *saṅghāṭī* covers his both shoulders. The lower hem of his *uttarāsaṅga* is visible, which is longer than his *saṅghāṭī*. The right arm is held out sideways and the hand is opened, showing the palm. His aureole is decorated with sunrays in the centre and encircled with a black band, indicating his race (*Sūryavamśa*). An ornamental outer band is composed of several compartments demarcated with thin double lines in black. A rosette decorates the centre of each compartment, alternately painted dark brown and orange. The edge of the aureole has a red flaming border. The mandorla is ornamented in a similar way as the aureole, but each compartment has a circular motif instead of a rosette design. Between the aureole and mandorla, the miniature figure of a devotee (?) is seen, clad in a typical Kuṣāṇa warrior's dress, viz. tight-fitting tunic, pants and high boots. Unfortunately, the head of the figure is missing. The space between the tip of the ogee and the aureole is filled with the scene of Buddha's First Preaching in the Deer Park (*Mṛgadāva*) at Sarnath. It is a pity that almost half of this illustration is missing. The small figure of the Buddha seated in *paryāṅkāsaṇa* shows his right hand in *vyākhyānamudrā*. He sits on a high lotus throne with scroll designs underneath. Apparently, a standing Bodhisattva was drawn on each side of the Buddha together with a kneeling deer near the lower legs of the extant Bodhisattva, a conventional depiction of the First Preaching of the Buddha found in Indian Buddhist art.



Fig.8: Standing Buddha

Figure No.9

Below Fig.6, a bejewelled three-eyed Avalokiteśvara (Fig.9) stands on a lotus. His crown is embellished with a standing Buddha figure, his spiritual father Amitābha. Another example of similar representation is observed in a banner from the same site, belonging to a later period. According to Waley, the *Amitayurdhyānasūtra* mentions a standing Buddha on Avalokiteśvara's crown (Waley 1931: li). In the same context he further says, "Such small figures on the front of a tiara are not confined to Buddhist art; they occur also in the funerary statues from Palmyra, where they presumably represent the deity to whom the deceased was principally devoted" (*ibid.*). Avalokiteśvara holds a long stalk with a drooping lotus in his right hand, a feature found in Indian Buddhist art, and a vase (*amṛtakalaśa*) in his left. His third eye on the forehead and matted hair with strands of hair falling over his shoulders remind of the hair-dress of Śiva in Indian art. He is richly adorned with ear ornaments, armlets and wristlets. His elaborate necklace is made of beaded strings and bell-shaped tassels, one of the ornamental motifs, repeatedly used in this banner.



Fig.9: Standing Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara

He has a circular aureole combined with a plain elliptical mandorla resembling a stele. Above his aureole, two flying figures amidst three lions carry a crown, a motif known from Gandhāra art (Fig.12). Below on his right, a bird – apparently a white dove is playing a lute, a lion is relaxing on a rocky surface, and a group of three devotees are kneeling with hands in *añjalimudrā*. The bird, the lion and the three devotees are shown one below the other. Most of the portions on either side of Avalokiteśvara are missing. In the nooks of

hilly landscape are seen monks, clad in saffron robes, attended by worshippers. There are two small cartouches, placed one above the other. The lower one is blank, while the upper one bears four lines of faded inscriptions in Chinese. They are translated by Waley as “Middle [India] Vārāṇasī [Benares] country, Deer Park ... image. The eulogy of the picture says ...” (Waley 1931: 270; Soper 1964: 362). Apparently, the text on this cartouche is appropriate for Fig.8, where the well-known scene of Buddha's First Preaching is depicted.

Figure No.10

On a rocky landscape with a grotto, representing the Gṛdhrakūṭa hill in Rājagṛha, stands Śākyamuni on a lotus in *samapādabhaṅga* pose (Fig.10), on the left of Fig.9 and two cartouches. His pendent right hand is in *varadamudrā*, while the left, placed near his chest, holds the skein of his robe. He is framed by a large elliptical mandorla including a circular aureole. Both are plain and demarcated with parallel black lines. The field of the mandorla was apparently planned to be filled with small Buddha figures, but due to lack of space the artist gave up the idea and left it with an isolated small Buddha seated in *dhyānāsana* on a lotus at the juncture of the Buddha's right shoulder and his circular aureole. The outer edge of the mandorla is elaborately decorated with long tongues of flames in red. The Buddha's feet and the major part of the mandorla are missing. The right shoulder of the Buddha is uncovered. The *uttarāsaṅga* passes across his body and over his left shoulder. The way of wearing the *uttarāsaṅga*, holding the part of it including the upper hem from his right armpit to his left shoulder, the folds of his robe below his lower left arm and those seen along his left leg, is so



Fig.10: Buddha in Gṛdhrakūṭa

similar to an embroidered banner (Ch.00260, now in the British Museum, London), as to suggest that it is by the same artist or atelier. A Buddha torso, 8th-9th centuries CE, from Toyuk (MIK III 6163, now in the Museum of Asian Art, Berlin) may be mentioned in this context. Several questions do arise after looking at these paintings and the embroidered banner. The Toyuk fragment was made by an expert artist, who was well versed in depicting the Buddha images in Dunhuang style,



Fig.11: Animal and human figures on crown and necklace pendant, Gandhāra (by the author at Musee Guimet, Paris)

particularly of those types as in Ch.00260 and the present banner under discussion. The question is whether all three, i.e., one from Toyuk and two from Dunhuang were made by the same or by three different artists belonging to the same atelier or they were copied by an expert hand at Toyuk or was it brought from Dunhuang to Toyuk? The last question is answerable. With the opening of the Silk Routes, exchange of material culture was made possible through these trade routes (Bhattacharya 2003: 105, 106, pl.76). Curiously, the facial features of the London banner do not match with those of the present banner. Unfortunately, the face of the Toyuk Buddha is missing. This may suggest that both Delhi and London banners were not made by the same artist, though both followed the same style

of wearing the robe, the stylized folds and the position of the arms and hands, prevalent among the artists of the time.

Conclusion

This painting is important and of great interest not only for the depictions of various important scenes related to Buddha's life and the valuable inscriptional information mentioning the places in India frequently visited by the Buddha, but also for its style and iconography. Chinese pilgrims to India made drawings of important Buddha figures with the intention to reproduce them in their country. Chinese artists were more concerned with the general proportion and attributes of the icons than the peculiarities in style.

However, some of their paintings or sculptures show remarkably faithful reproductions of the Indian originals, e.g. Figs.2, 2a, 2b, 7 and 8. The artistic representations in this important

banner unfold a skilful blending of Hellenistic, Iranian, Indian, Central

Asian and Chinese elements. Figure Nos.7 and 8 are the best examples to show the artistic elements from India and Hellenistic world. They show a strong Gandhāran influence, which in turn is inspired by the Graeco-Bactrian art tradition in their treatment, e.g. ornaments (*makara* and human motifs as a special type of pendant of a necklace or a broad band as a necklace), armlets and wristlets, the anthropological features, the moustache and way of wearing the monastic robes and folds of their garments. This banner under discussion has not only shown the important images of the Buddha and the Bodhisattva figures but also informed laymen about the legends associated with Buddha's



Fig.12: Flying figures carrying wreath above Buddha's head, Gandhāra
(by Christian Haesner at Chandigarh Museum)

life in India, which are mentioned in various Indian Buddhist texts. The incidents related to Buddha's life presented here are briefly explained in Chinese, written on the cartouches corresponding to the figures on this banner. This is specially made for explaining and informing people about the Buddha, his life and his teachings. Such banners served as one of the mass media to spread Buddhism in Central Asia.

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