

History of the Art of India, Part I: Origins to Mughals



OLLI
Spring 2024

Week 3



Sātavāhana and Kushan Art and Architecture

Sātavāhana and Kushan Art and Architecture

- A. Sātavāhana: Sanchi
- B. Sātavāhana: Amarāvati
- C. Kushan: History, Trade, Buddhism
- D. Kushan: Gandhara
- E. Kushan: Mathura

A. Sātavāhana: Sanchi

Review of Week 2

- Sātavāhana kingdom in W India extended control across India 1C BCE
- **Undertook major work on Sanchi Great Stupa (Week 2)**
 - Increased size, added gateways...
 - Carved stone reliefs... scenes from the life of the Buddha
 - Patronage “ordinary” and “local” rather than aristocratic or royal

B. Sātavāhana: Amarāvati

B1. Introduction: Amarāvati stupa

B2. Relief sculptures

B3. Patronage

B. Sātavāhana: Amarāvati

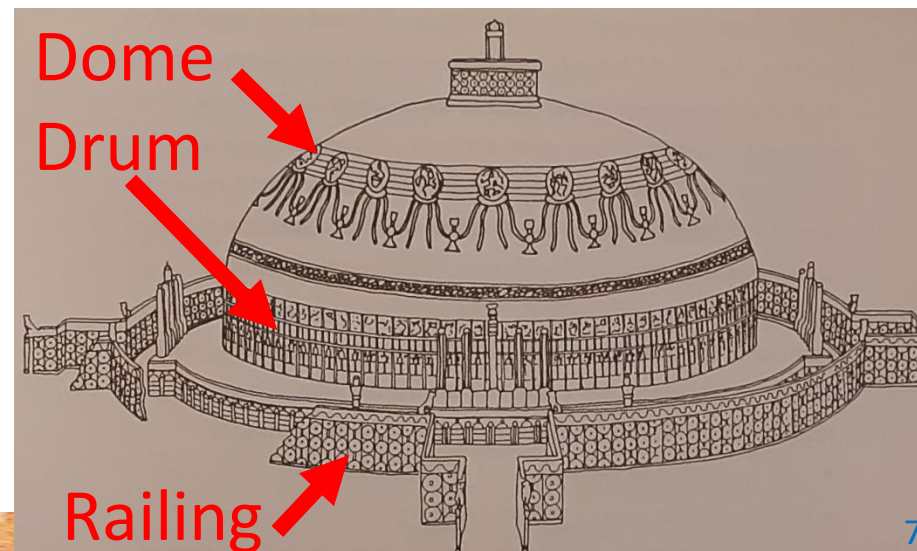
B1. Introduction: Amarāvati stupa

- Sātavāhana dynasty (Andhras) in S India (week 2)
- Many monuments, 1-3C CE in Amarāvati, ca.500 m S of Sanchi
- Excavations reveal Roman coins, confirming sea trade
- Stupas at Amarāvati now ruins but some reliefs and sculptures remain
- Stupa destroyed in 19C, material used for building



B1. Introduction: Amarāvātī stupa

- Great Stupa at Amarāvātī largest in Sātavāhana times... begun early 1C CE, completed late 2C
- **Drum** below dome 162 ft dia... outer railing 192 ft dia... 20 ft high walkway for circumambulation
- Sculptures on railing, **drum**, and dome
- Evolution of Buddha image: symbol > human form
- Relief sculptures of lotuses on railing pillars:
Symbolism: As lotus emerges pure from muddy water, so Buddha emerges from corrupt world



B. Sātavāhana: Amarāvati

B2. Relief sculptures

B2a. Narrative reliefs on stupa railing pillars

- cf. Sanchi pillar narrative reliefs: Discrete rectangular sections
- VS Amarāvati: Entire pillar tells one story
- Sequence top > bottom, bottom > top, or center out
- Pillars: Carved limestone, 2C CE, ca. 9' high

B2a. Narrative reliefs... pillars

- One pillar (2C) narrates events from Buddha abandoning austerity (top)... bathes in and crosses Neranjara R
- Start & end symbolized by **footprints**



Buddha Abandoning His Austerities..., carved relief on Great Stupa, Amarāvati, ca. 9 ft. 2C CE

B2a. Narrative reliefs... pillars

- Center: Buddha receives rice pudding from village girls, first meal after abandoning austerities
- Cf. text says: one girl (SO: artistic liberty)
- Buddha symbolized by seat with cushion under a tree



B2a. Narrative reliefs... pillars

- People/deities worshipping Buddha after his enlightenment
- Buddha symbolized by **footprints** under a pipal tree



B2a. Narrative reliefs... pillars

- **Roundel on another pillar: Buddha in human form (6) subduing a mad elephant (sent by his jealous cousin)**
- **LT: Elephant rushes forward... drags one person with trunk (1), steps on another (2), others flee (3), others watch from windows (4)**
- **RT: Elephant kneels (5) in homage to Buddha (6)**

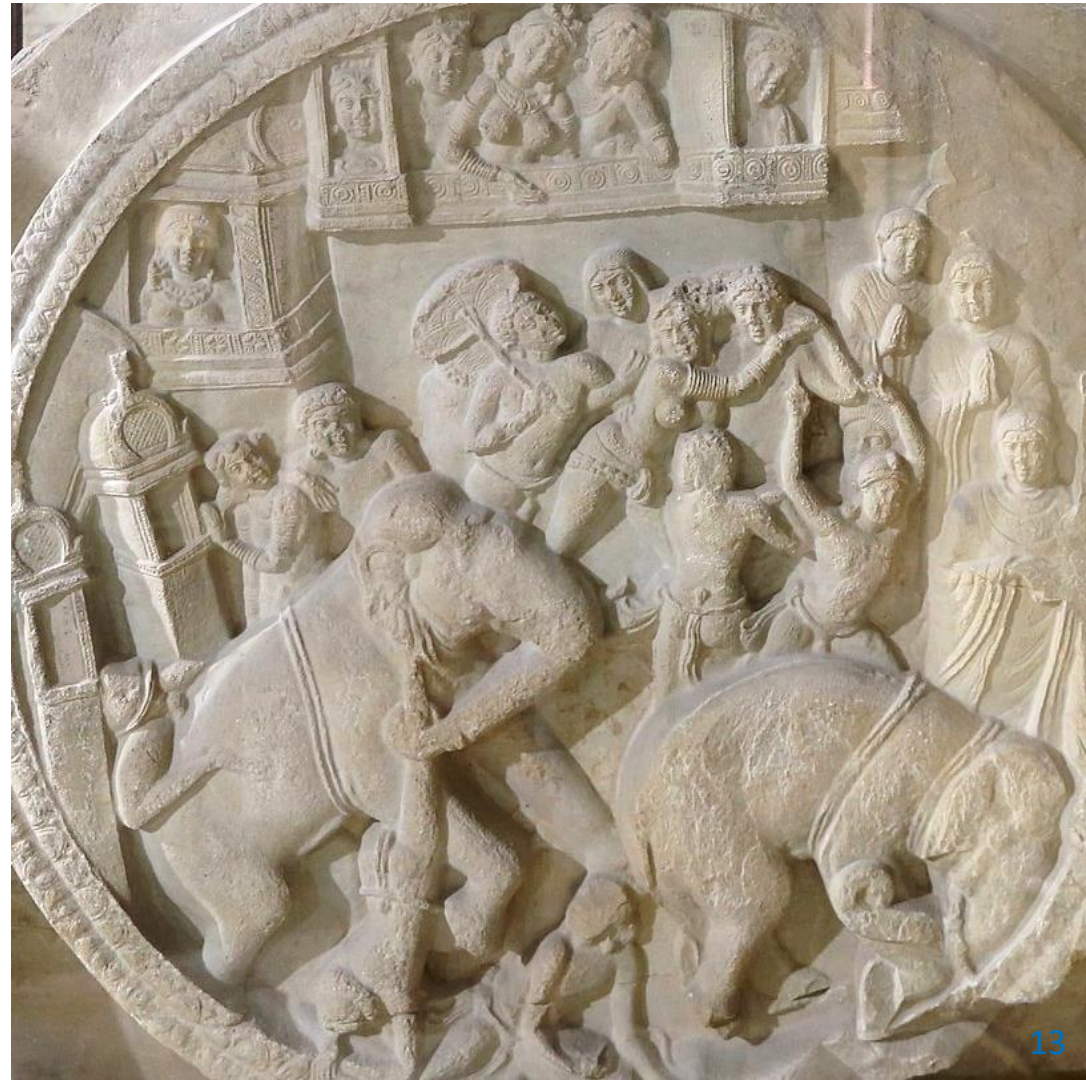
Buddha Subduing a Mad Elephant,
carved relief on Great Stupa,
Amarāvati, 3C CE, 35" dia.,
Government Museum, Chennai



B2a. Narrative reliefs... pillars

- Excellent representation of hurried action & peaceful resolution
- Action framed by gates at left, Buddha and monks at right
- Good organization of space, wealth of architectural details
- Buddha is human, not symbolic

Buddha Subduing a Mad Elephant,
carved relief on Great Stupa,
Amarāvati, 3C CE



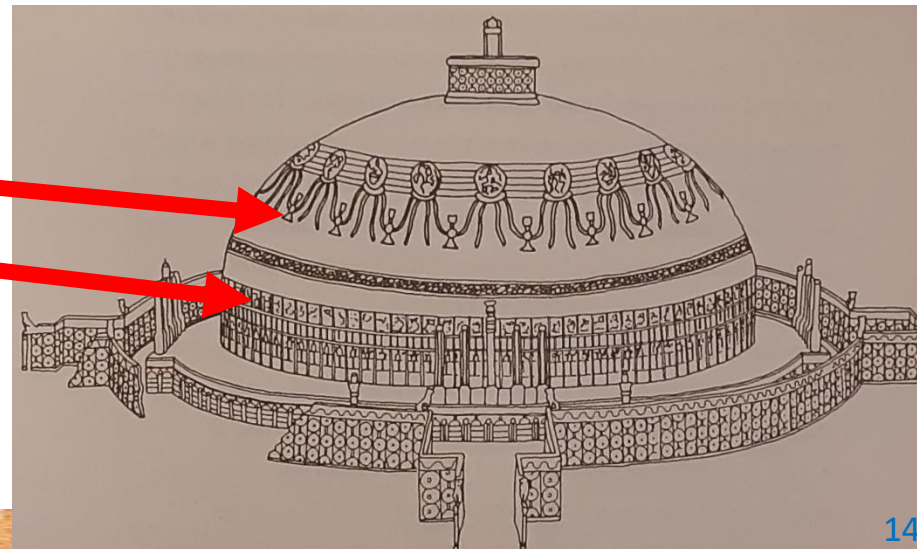
B2. Relief sculptures

B2b. Reliefs on stupa dome

- Originally: stone slabs on the dome and its **drum** were carved with random themes paid for by donors
- Later (2C): slabs were removed, re-carved on the reverse side, and replaced on the drum and dome
- 3 registers of slabs on dome: symbolic of **Buddha, dharma, sangha**

Dome

Drum



B2b. Reliefs on stupa dome

- On the stone slabs, the new carvings on the reverse side depicted the stupa itself
- **SO:** Our information on what the ruined Amarāvati stupa looked like
- **SO:** 3 registers & new carvings indicate greater monastic control of the program paid for by donors
- **Cf. Euro churches**

Limestone relief showing the stupa dome, 49"x34"x4", Great Stupa, Amarāvati, 2C CE, British Museum, London



B. Sātavāhana: Amarāvati

B3. Patronage

- Patronage according to donation inscriptions:
 - 2/3 from lay, with large proportion women
 - **SO:** Women had some economic independence
 - 1/3 from monastic, more nuns than monks
- Monastic supervisors coordinated the images so that they fit the program
- **SO:** Royal and aristocratic patronage was minimal here, as at Sanchi

C. Kushan: History, Trade, Buddhism

C1. Kushan History

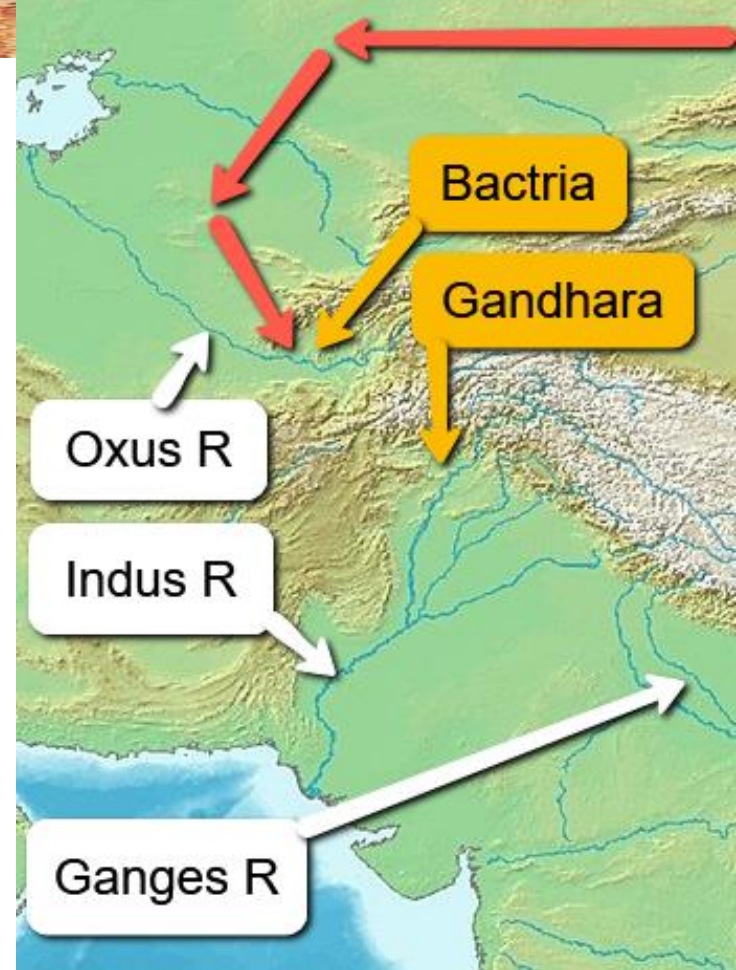
C2. Kushan Trade

C3. Buddhism in Kushan Empire

C. Kushan: History, Trade, Buddhism

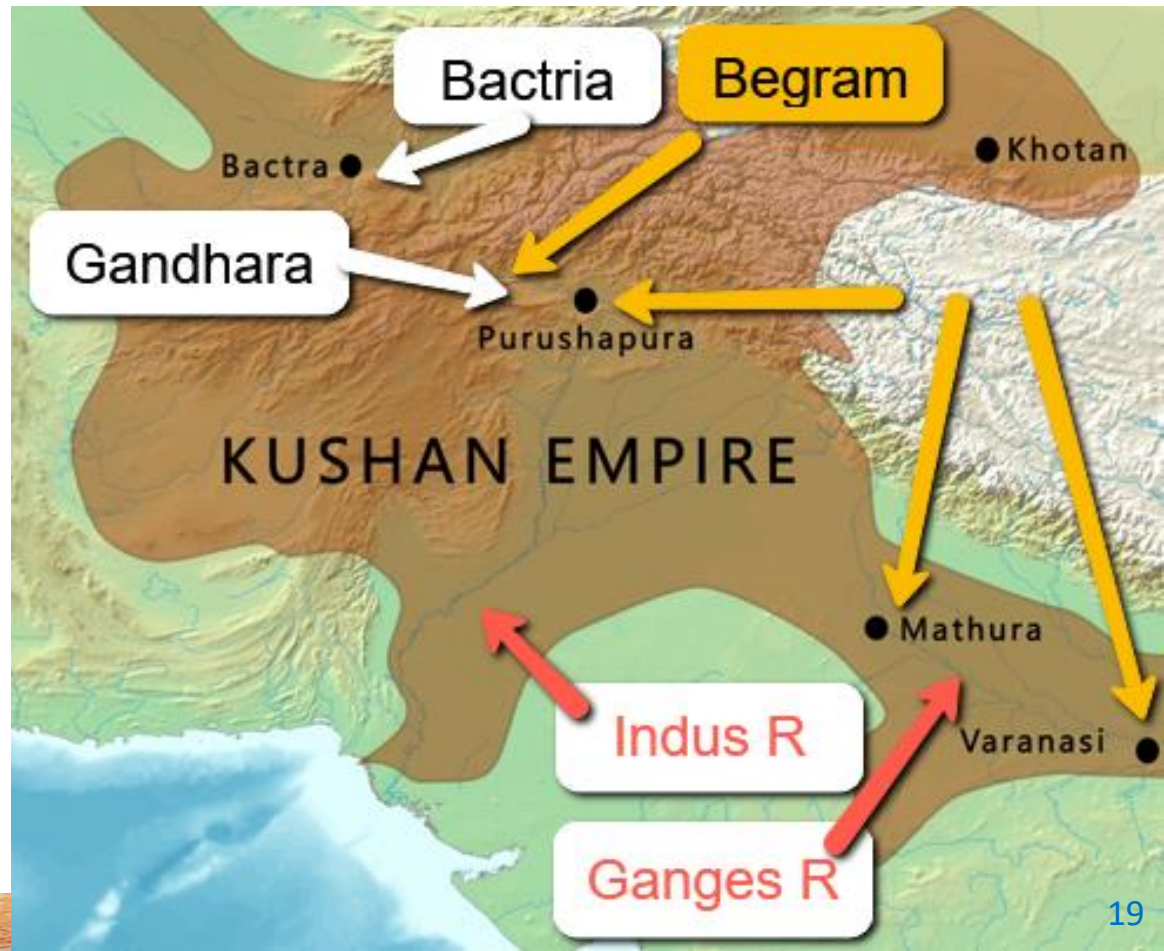
C1. Kushan History

- Branch Indo-European nomadic people (Yue Zhi) from W China
- From central Asia, migrated south to Bactria along the Oxus River, 2C BCE
- Adopted Hellenistic Bactrian art, converted to Buddhism
- 1C CE moved south into Gandhāra (Pakistan/Afghanistan)
- Emperor Kadphises
- Summit/extent of power under son Kanishka (sometime between 78-144 CE): from Gandhāra NW to Varanasi SE



C1. Kushan History

- Capitals: summer: Begram N; winter: Mathura S; alternate: Purushapura (Peshawar)
- Emperor Kanishka employed elements of Zoroastrianism in Kushan pantheon
- SO: Religiously eclectic Empire
- Fragmented into semi-independent kingdoms in 3C CE
- Indian Guptas pressed from the east in 4C CE



C. Kushan: History, Trade, Buddhism

C2. Kushan Trade

C2a. International art objects

- An era of trade... silk route from China to Rome
- Roman goods in India, Indian goods in Rome
- Kanishka sent envoy to Trajan in Rome
- Kanishka's gold coins show gods from Persia, Rome, Alexandria, Hellenized Orient (rel. eclectic, pol. diplomatic)
- Kushan emperors collected international "art" objects
- Some of these found in an excavation of palace in Begram, so-called Begram hoard or treasure
- Items include: Chinese lacquer, Indian ivory carvings, Roman glass, Hellenistic bronzes

C2. Kushan Trade

C2a. International art objects

- Imported Roman glass showing a Roman gladiator, 2C, found in Begram hoard
- Cf. Indian carved ivory statue of yakshi found in ruins of Pompeii (week 2)
- **SO: Art objects:**
 - Rome > India
 - India > Rome

Roman glass from Begram hoard, Roman gladiator, 2C CE, ca.6", Musee Guimet, Paris



C2. Kushan Trade... C2b. Coins

- Kadphises struck gold coins in imitation of Roman coins
- **SO:** Influence of Rome, sign of K's power



Roman coin, head of Trajan, 98-117 CE



Kushan coin, head of Kadphises laureate Julio-Claudian style, 1C CE

C2. Kushan Trade... C2b. Coins

- Coin of Kanishka with figure of Buddha on reverse
- Iconography:
 - Dressed in monastic robe,
 - Head halo (1a) / body halo (1b)
 - Ushnisha (2)
 - Elongated earlobes (3)
 - Rt hand performs abhaya mudra (4)
- LT: Greek word for Buddha (5)
- RT: Kanishka's monogram (6)
- SO: human Buddha; support for Buddhism; association of Kanishka with Buddhism



Coin of Kanishka, 1C, reverse:
figure of Buddha

C2. Kushan Trade... C2b. Coins

- Coin of Kanishka with figure of Kanishka himself on obverse
- More aesthetically primitive than Buddha image
- Affirms power: bearded, holds spear, wears crown, feet apart, baggy trousers and soft boots, tunic gathered at waist (= nomadic garb)
- Fire altar (Btm LT) derived from Persia... fire worship persists even in time of Buddhism
- **SO:** affirmation of royal power; recollection of nomadic origins; allows other forms of worship besides Buddhism



Coin of Kanishka, 1C, obverse:
figure of Kanishka

C. Kushan: History, Trade, Buddhism

C3. Buddhism in Kushan Empire

- Around beginning of Kushan times, changes in Buddhism in NW India
- From more austere monastic **Hinayana (Little vehicle)** to broader **Mahayana (Large vehicle)**
- More participation for lay community
- Devotion to **bodhisattvas**
- Buddha as a god, not just an inspired human
- Buddha in human as well as symbolic, form
- Then abandoned symbolic representation altogether

D. Kushan: Gandhara

D1. Introduction

D2. Buddha statues

D3. Bodhisattva statues

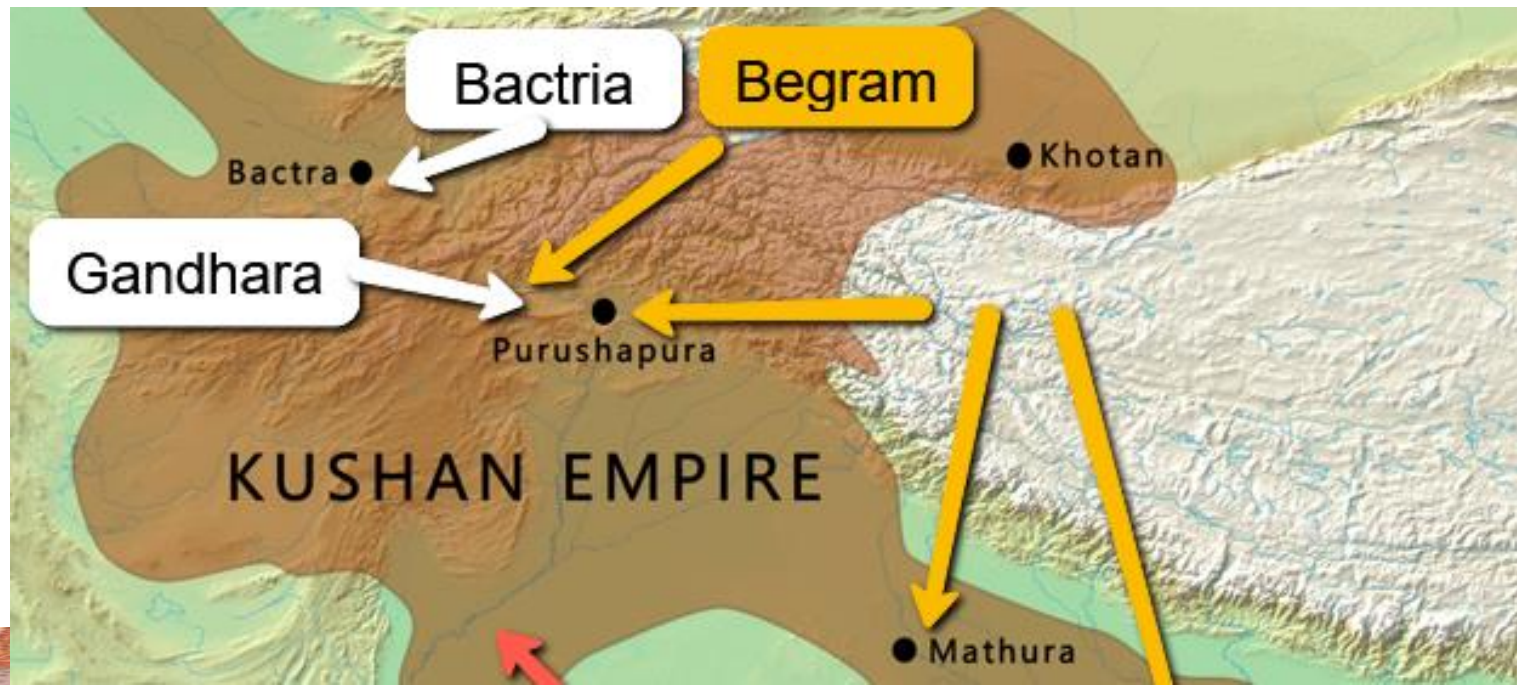
D4. Relief panel of the Life of the Buddha

D5. Gandharan reliquaries

D. Kushan: Gandhara

D1. Introduction

- Kushans fostered two different styles of buddha image, one for W part of empire (Gandhara) and one for plains of India (Mathura)
- Style called Gandhara(n), after the province in Pakistan where it was prevalent



D1. Introduction

- **Gandharan art derived from Greek art**
- **Entered the region with Alexander's armies 326 BCE**
- **Incorporated features of western origin: Greek and Persian clothing, cupids, atlas figures, swags and cornucopias**
- **Persisted over 3 centuries (1-3C CE)**
- **Probably imported Hellenistic stone-carvers from W**
- **Followed Roman practices: Readymade torsos to which specially commissioned heads & arms were added**
- **Added Persian halos and other signs specific to Buddha**

D1. Introduction

- Statue of a woman wearing helmet and carrying spear... version of Athena or Roma... here possibly city goddess or river goddess
- **SO:** Statue of a Greco-Roman goddess carved in Gandhara

Statue of Athena or Roma, late 2C, schist, ca. 33" high, Lahore Museum



D. Kushan: Gandhara

D2. Buddha statues

- Artists followed texts that listed Buddha's characteristics
 - **Ushnisha** (bump on head alluding to his wisdom)
(aesthetic reasons: topknot)
 - **Urna** (curl of hair between eyebrows)
(aesthetic reasons: a dot)
 - Sometimes a halo (a sign of divinity in India; cf. Persia)
- Greek style of perfect male physique, anthropomorphic gods

D2. Buddha statues

- **Standing Buddha (C, p.85, p2)**
 - **Toga-like robe (Greco-Roman)**
 - **Barefoot**
 - **Dot representing urna curl between eyebrows**
 - **Right hand missing, probably carved separately and then attached**
- **Source: Dehejia: Apollo (r/t powerful male physique) [?]**
- **Source: Craven: Roman nobility (r/t toga)**

Standing Buddha, Gandhara, stone,
1C CE, 3', Tokyo National Museum





Emperor Tiberius wearing toga, marble, 1C, 7' 10", Louvre, Paris



Roman senator with busts of his ancestors, 1C CE, marble, 5' 5", Capitoline Museums, Rome



Standing Buddha, 1C...

D. Kushan: Gandhara

D3. Bodhisattva statues

- Handsome figure with signs of worldly involvement: long dressed hair, moustache, turban, jewelry, rich non-monastic clothing
- i.e., dressed like a Kushan prince (except for the halo)
- Realistic treatment of the body
- **Craven:** Such a figure popular among merchant community, attracted by worldly goods, more than figure of the austere Buddha

Bodhisattva, 1-2C CE, schist, Musée Guimet, Paris



D. Kushan: Gandhara

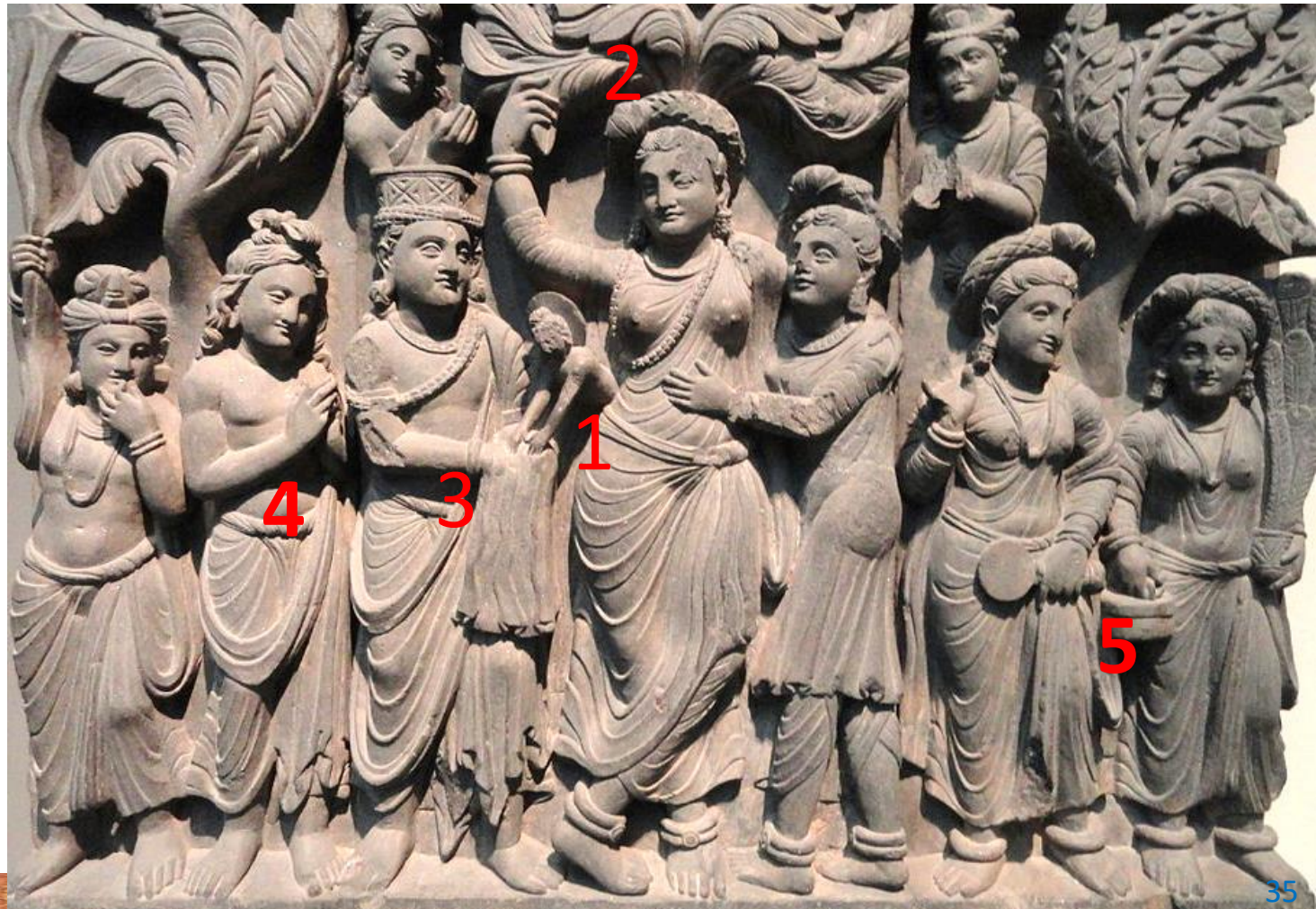
D4. Relief panel of the Life of the Buddha

- Four outstanding narrative relief panels from 2C now in Freer Gallery
- Originally from the base of monastery stupas
- Once Buddha could be depicted as human, many episodes from his life could be depicted (not previously possibly using symbols)
- Narrative program determined by monks
- One such program: The Four Great miracles, 2C CE
- Fine craftsmanship, great clarity... detailed iconography

Scenes from the life of the Buddha, carved schist, 2C CE, ca.26" x 114", Freer Gallery, Washington

First panel: Miracle of the birth

Infant buddha emerging from Queen Maya (1); who grasps a tree branch (2); at her RT is brahmanical procession, first Indra (3) receiving the babe, then Brahma (4); her LT are ladies in waiting (5)



Greco-Roman features: wreaths around women's heads (6); their long-sleeved blouses & gowns (7); cornucopia (8)

Indian features: ~ yakshi beneath tree (9) (cf. from week 2)

SO: Visual influence from local Indian & Hellenistic levant



Second panel: Miracle of the enlightenment

Sides: Assault of Mara's demons: soldiers w/ broadswords & armor (1a,b); figures with heads of monkeys and other animals (2a,b)

RT: figures riding camel, horse, elephant (3); Mara in fg, about to draw sword (4)

LT: porter with goiter and drum on back, drummer behind him (5)

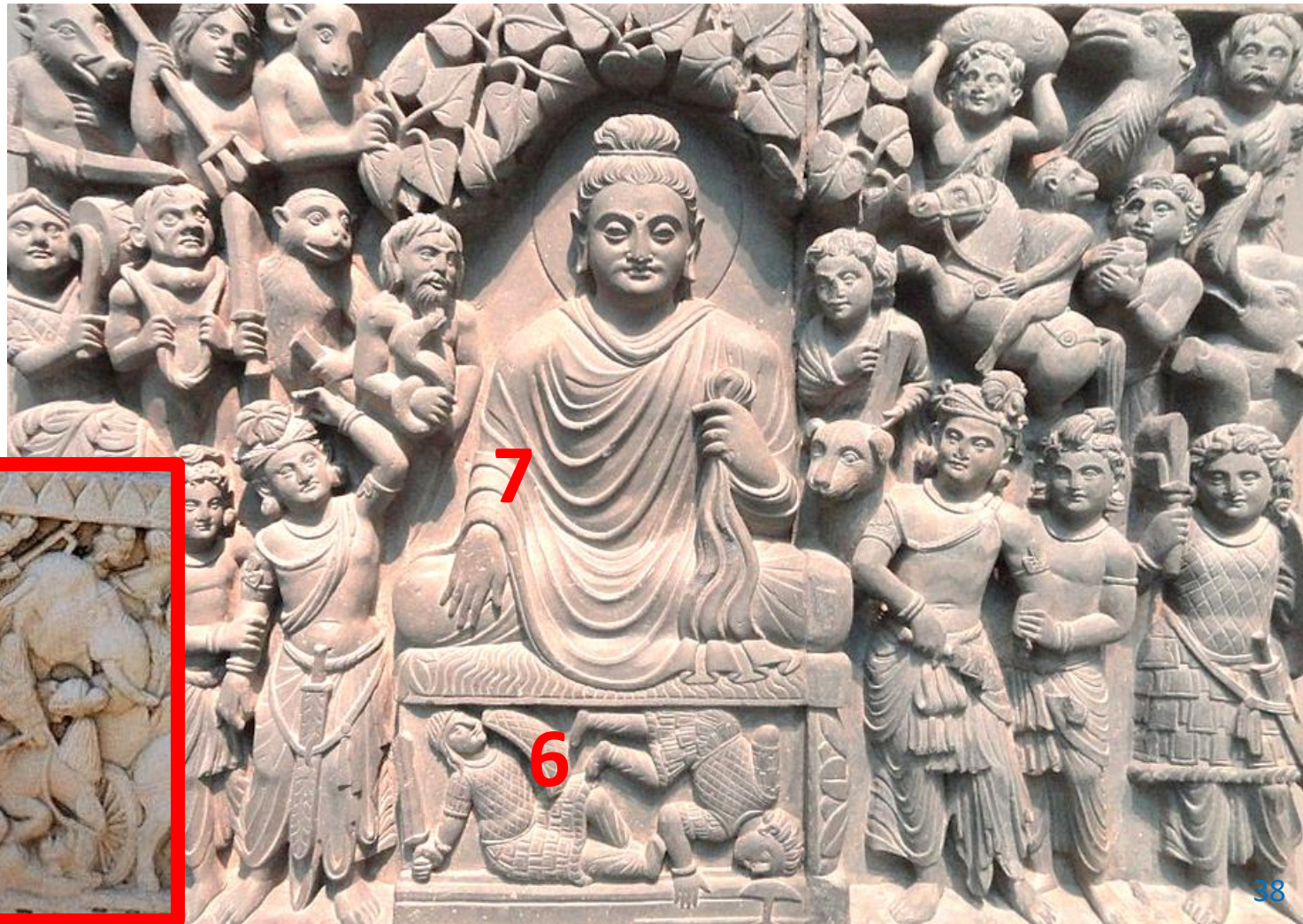
CTR: Human Buddha sitting under bodhi tree



Center: Buddha:

2 fallen soldiers below throne (symbolizing B's conquest) (6); right hand in bhumi sparsha mudra, common iconography (7)

Cf.: agitated presentation at Sanchi (detail)



Third panel: Miracle of the first sermon in the Deer Park

- Buddha preaches to monks and laypersons
- Buddha blesses monks and devotees (1)
- Under his seat: Wheel of Law & two deer, referring to the location (2)
- Behind Buddha's left shoulder: Bearded figure of Vajrapani, "bearer of the thunderbolt," attendant bodhisattva common in Gandharan art (3)



Fourth panel: Miracle of the Great Passing Away

Fourth panel: Miracle of the mahāparinirvāna (great passing away)

- Chieftains are unrestrained in grief (1), monks are calm (2)



D. Kushan: Gandhara

D5. Gandharan reliquaries

- Gold repoussé reliquary from Bimaran, 1-2C CE
- Craven: ~ precious object from Euro Middle Ages
- Cf. Roman sarcophagi & Karli chaitya windows

Gold reliquary, Bimaran (Afghanistan), gold inset with rubies, 1-2C CE ca. 3", British Museum, London



Greco-Roman influence:

- Adapted from Roman sarcophagi from 1-2C:
 - Eagles fill spaces between windows
 - Figures within arcade

Roman Marble Arcade Sarcophagus depicting Dionysus, Maenads, a Satyr, and Pan; c. 190-200 AD, Rome



Buddhist chaitya influence:

- Windows have shape of chaitya windows
- e.g., over entrance door at Karli, 1C CE



Main entrance to Karli chaitya, 1C CE

E. Kushan: Mathura

E1. Comparison: Gandhara & Mathura

E2. Imperial galleries at Mat

E3. Railing pillar statues

E4. Bodhisattvas and Buddhas

E. Kushan: Mathura

E1. Comparison: Gandhara & Mathura

- Mathura (85mi S of Delhi) a religious site before Kushans... Jains and Buddhists... assoc. w/ Lord Krishna
- Kushan winter capital



E1. Comparison: Gandhara & Mathura

- cf. Gandhara Buddhas based on Roman prototypes
- VS Mathura buddhas based on yaksha prototypes

- cf. Gandhara sculptors' version of human Buddha:
 - Schist stone
 - Austere
 - Robe in string-like folds
- VS Mathura sculptors' version:
 - Red sandstone
 - Smiling face
 - Eyes look at viewer
 - Monastic robe leaves one shoulder bare
 - Robust body

E1. Comparison: Gandhara & Mathura

- **Criticism r/t political views:**
 - Early Euro students of Indian art praised Gandharan art as the greatest Indian art
 - Later Indian nationalist critics call Gandharan art imitation of an imitation, while Mathura art is powerful
- **Scholarly arguments:**
 - Euro scholars (like Alfred Foucher) said Buddha image was created by Hellenistic artisans.
 - Indian scholars (like Ananda Coomaraswamy) said the Mathura Buddha was primary.
- **Dehejia:** Both areas evolved the Buddha image independently; artisans responded to needs of worship in their area; styles are not derived one from the other.
- **SO:** Distinction between the two styles, each has its relevance.

E. Kushan: Mathura

E2. Imperial galleries at Mat

- Kanishka's 2 dynastic shrines ("royal galleries"), one N at Surkh Kotal (W of Kabul), one S at Mat (near Mathura)
- Both displayed statues of Kushan rulers
- Never before or since did a ruling dynasty in India commemorate itself in this way
- Surkh Kotal figures are in ruins
- Mat statues in red sandstone are extant, in Mathura Museum

E2. Imperial galleries at Mat

Example #1. Enthroned King Vima Kadphises

- Missing head, damaged knees, fractured at waist
- Regal presence, “impatient” left arm & right arm at chest, alert lions flanking the throne... elevated foot-rest... sense of authority
- carved with simplicity... primitive vigor (characteristic of Mathura sculpture)
- Heavy clothing (?), alien to the hot Mathura region

King Vima Kadphises, red sandstone, late 1C/early 2C, 6'10", Mathura Museum



Example #2. Standing Emperor Kanishka

- Stands erect, stiff mantle, padded boots... typical northern dress
- Impression of authority & power
- Inscription along bottom of coat: “Great King, King of Kings, Son of God, Kanishka”
- Resemblance to the coin portraits of Kanishka



King Kanishka, red sandstone, 2C, 5'4", Mathura Museum



E. Kushan: Mathura

E3. Railing pillar statues

- Mathura continued practice of stupas surrounded by railings on which:
- Sensuous female figures / yakshis of vivacity and vigor



Relief statues of yakshis on railing pillars of Mathura stupa at Kankali Tila, red sandstone, 2-3C, ca. 50", Indian Museum, Kolkata



E3. Railing pillar statues

- **Dehejia: Smooth inflated voluptuousness gives them buoyancy and life**
- **Anatomy (?)**
- **Bracelets on arms, bangles on feet**
- **Stand on supporting dwarfs (~ Siva Nātarāja)**
- **Monumental frontality characteristic of Kushan art**



E. Kushan: Mathura

E4. Bodhisattvas and Buddhas

- Standing bodhisattva: Dedicated by Bala in 3d year of Kanishka's reign
- Shakyamuni (as bodhisattva)
- Transformation of yaksha > bodhisattva w/iconography:
 - Monastic robe
 - Lion between feet (refers to "lion of the Shakya clan")
 - Usually halo (not here)
- Cf. Gandhara's bodhisattvas in more worldly attire

Bodhisattva Shakyamuni, Mathura style, 2C CE, red sandstone, 8'2", Archeological Museum, Sarnath



E4. Bodhisattvas...

- Yaksha, 2C BCE



- Gandhara bodhisattva 1-2C



E4. ...and Buddhas

- **Seated Buddha on lion throne, late 1C**
- **iconography:**
 - Under bodhi tree
 - Scalloped halo
 - Attended by heavenly beings and whisk-bearers
 - pronounced **abhaya mudra** (RT hand) & alert left arm: air of activity w/ no parallel in Gandhara art
 - wheels symbolic of **dharma** on RT palm and exposed soles of feet
 - **Ushnisha** on top of head

Buddha on lion throne, Mathura, 1C CE, red sandstone, 27", Mathura Mus.



E4. ...and Buddhas

- This Mathura Buddha entirely Indian
- Not ~ Gandhara buddhas wrapped in Roman togas
- Dressed like true Indian from warmer area... garment covers only one shoulder and wraps along upper left arm
- Gathered transparent textiles characteristic of Mathura
- **Craven: Masterpiece of Kushan sculpture**



History of the Art of India, Part I: Origins to Mughals OLLI Spring 2024 Week 3



Sātavāhana and Kushan Art and Architecture