

THE PARINIRVĀṆA CYCLE AND THE THEORY OF MULTIVALENCE:

A STUDY OF GANDHĀRAN BUDDHIST NARRATIVE RELIEFS

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INTRODUCTION

The World without Him Who knew the world is like the day-maker without his light, or a great river deprived of its current, or a king who has lost his sovereignty. The world, deprived of the Best of men, exists and yet is not, like learning without intelligence, like investigation without discrimination, like a king without majesty, like the law without forbearance. The world, on losing the Blessed One, is like a chariot abandoned by the charioteer, or a boat by the steersman, or an army by the general, or a caravan by the leader, or a sick man by the physician. To-day the affliction of those who desire salvation is like a cloudless sky in autumn without the moon, like the air when there is no breeze, like the suffering of those who would live (but are dying).¹

Buddhacarita, Canto xxvii

The visual narratives that adorned and enlivened 1st - 3rd century CE Gandhāran *stūpas* present a series of sequential events from the life of Śākyamuni Buddha. The particular narrative moments that composed the overall arrangement varied from site to site, but within the area of Greater Gandhāra, the life of Śākyamuni Buddha was consistently represented by a series of panels commencing with his conception or early life and closing with his *parinirvāṇa* or the act of relic veneration. Complete narrative sequences have been found at the *stūpa* sites of Lorian Tangai, Marjanai, and Sikri, as well as the monastery of Nathu.² The selection of moments between these two life framing events—birth and death—were dependent upon the particular themes selected by the lay or monastic donors. Regardless of the overall theme of the *stūpa*—be it the enlightenment, teaching/conversions, or miracles—that was suggested through the particular events narrated on the drum, *harmikā*, or false gables of the *stūpa*, the *parinirvāṇa* was typically an essential aspect of each visual narrative sequence.

¹ E. H. Johnston, trans., *Āśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita or Acts of the Buddha* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2004 [1936]), 111.

² Kurt Behrendt, "Narrative Sequences in the Buddhist Reliefs from Gandhāra," in *Buddhist Stupas in South Asia: Recent Archaeological, Art-Historical, and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Jason Hawkes and Akira Shimada (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 83-93.

In addition to the consistent depiction of the *parinirvāṇa* at sites that have intact, complete narrative sequences, the popularity of this subject is further confirmed by the vast number of schist narrative panels that portray a series of events surrounding the specific moment of the *parinirvāṇa* of Śākyamuni Buddha (henceforth referred to as the Buddha). The significance of his *parinirvāṇa* merited the development of a cycle of seven visual episodes that repeatedly communicated specific aspects of the events surrounding his death. The introduction of this narrative cycle in Gandhāra during the 1st century CE reflects the larger socio-religious developments of South Asia. Parallels can be found in the Brahmanical funerary rituals that are described in the *gr̥hyasūtras* and the manner in which the Buddha's body was treated after his *parinirvāṇa*. An analysis of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle of narrative reliefs through an application of the theory of multivalence allows these themes to become apparent.

The multivalent nature of the images that compose the story of the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa* as it was understood in Gandhāra provides insight into the development of early Buddhist ritual practice. The multivalence of Gandhāran narrative reliefs can be expressed in different ways including references to non-Buddhist socio-religious traditions and double entendres that suggest multiple events or figures through a single depiction. Through these devices, Gandhāran narrative reliefs reveal the multifaceted ritual activity that occurred in the vicinity of *stūpas* and relics. These activities reflect the coeval development of Brahmanical *gr̥hya* (domestic) rituals and Buddhist forms of devotion in preceding centuries. An analysis of the seven episodes from the *parinirvāṇa* cycle alongside the *gr̥hyasūtras* demonstrates the intersection between early Buddhist and Brahmanical rituals. The incorporation of Kuṣāṇa, Central Asian, and Hellenistic elements also suggests the influence of these groups in Gandhāra as well, however the extent to

which these can be considered multivalent must be carefully considered since the traditions do not have a common historical background.

According to the Buddhist textual tradition, the precedent for ritual activity at *stūpa* complexes was set by the ritual preparation and initial veneration for the *śarīra*, body, of the Buddha immediately following his death. The same signs of veneration are performed later when the term is used in the plural to refer to his relics.³ As the narrative sequence of the *parinirvāṇa* progresses, there is a mirroring of the actions during the funeral of the Buddha (Episodes 1-6/ Figs. 1-54, 57) and later ritual activities at *stūpa* complexes (Episode 7/Figs. 55-60, 24, 36, 49, and 50). The forms of *pūjā* offered to the *śarīra* are also offered to the enshrined relics. The narrative representation of the creation of the relics on Gandhāran *stūpas* justified the presence of the *stūpa* on which they were placed and confirmed the practice of ritual devotion to the Buddha.

As Anuruddha stated in the above quote from the *Buddhacarita*, canto xxvii, with the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha there was the absence of something essential. The *dharma* (teachings of the Buddha) that had been transmitted to followers by the Buddha during his life through personal interactions could no longer be communicated in this same way. The physical absence of the Buddha created a problem in this transmission of knowledge from elder to student. Although the *dharma* or words of the Buddha could be communicated through oral and written textual traditions, this *dharmakāya* (body of *dharma*) did not fully reembody the Buddha. The installation of the relics of the Buddha in *stūpas* reconstituted the body of the Buddha—his *rūpakāya*— and provided the opportunity for *pūjā* (veneration/devotion) to be offered and *punya*

³ Gregory Schopen, “Monks and the Relic Cult in the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*: An Old Misunderstanding in Regard to Monastic Buddhism,” in *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India*, ed. Gregory Schopen (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1997), 99-113; John Strong, *Relics of the Buddha* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), xvi.

(merit) to be gained through an act of *darśan* with the Buddha himself. In this way the combined activities of lay and monastic practitioners at Gandhāran *stūpa* and *vihāra* complexes reunited the *rūpakāya* and *dharmakāya* of the Buddha and brought the Buddha into the present moment.⁴

Sites appropriate for Buddhist ritual and devotion are reportedly defined by the Buddha himself in early Buddhist texts. In the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta*, from the Pāli Canon's *Dīgha-Nikāya*, the monk Ānanda is concerned with the forthcoming absence of the Buddha that will result at the moment of his death because people will no longer have the opportunity to honor and learn from the Buddha.⁵ The Buddha instructs Ānanda that there are four locations that are worthy of visiting to invoke his presence (5.8). The Buddha says that these four sites will produce *saṁvejanīyāni* (enthusiasm or a sense of urgency, which will lead to better rebirths or possibly *nirvāṇa*) in *upāsaka* (male lay disciples) and *upāsikā* (female lay disciples), as well as the *bhikṣu* (male monks) and *bhikṣuṇī* (female monks).⁶ The four sites commemorate four significant moments from the life of the Buddha: Lumbini, the location of his birth, Uruvelā/Bodh-Gayā, the location of his *nirvāṇa* or enlightenment, Isipatana/Sarnāth, the location of his first teaching/the setting of the wheel of *Dharma* into motion, and Kuśinagarī, the location of his *parinirvāṇa*.⁷ Already a pattern is beginning to emerge that shows that the life of the Buddha is an essential component that shapes the narratives of the tradition and their ritual areas.

Continuing on, Ānanda communicates his concerns regarding the treatment of the Buddha's body upon his death. Again, the Buddha is prepared with a response,

⁴ Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 139.

⁵ Maurice Walshe, trans., *The Long Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Dīgha Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995 [1987]), 263-274.

⁶ Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, n. 425, 573.

⁷ Ibid., n. 426-429, 573.

Ānanda, they should be dealt with like the remains of a wheel-turning monarch....the remains of a wheel-turning monarch are wrapped in a new cloth. Having done this five hundred times each, they enclose the king's body in an oil-vat of iron, which is covered with another iron pot. Then having made a funeral-pyre of all manner of perfumes they cremate the king's body, and they raise a stupa at a crossroads. That, Ānanda, is what they do with the remains of a wheel-turning monarch and they should deal with the Tathāgata's body in the same way. A stupa should be erected at the crossroads for the Tathāgata. And whoever lays wreaths or puts sweet perfumes and colors there with a devout heart, will reap benefit and happiness for a long time.⁸

As the narrative proceeds, the solitary *stūpa* that the Buddha requested was not constructed to contain a single collection of his relics. Instead, shortly following his death, nine additional *stūpas* were erected in several of the *mahājanapadas* of the Gangetic plain, in what is now northern India. If the Buddha is considered to have died c. 400 BCE (c. 486 BCE in the Long Chronology and c. 370 BCE in the Short Chronology), then these eight initial *śarīrika* (bodily relic) *stūpas* and two *pāribhogika* (relic of use) *stūpas* were the only Buddhist monuments for around 130 years.⁹ There are numerous versions of the story of the installation of the relics, including an edition of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra* that maintains the creation of a single *stūpa*, but most conclude that ten *stūpas* were made in the immediate aftermath of the *parinirvāṇa*.¹⁰

According to texts such as the *Aśokāvadāna*, in the middle of the 3rd century BCE the Mauryan ruler Aśoka (r. c. 270 - 230 BCE), in an act of meritorious donation, legendarily opened seven of the original *śarīrika stūpas* and reestablished portions of their relics in 84,000 *stūpas*.¹¹ This politically and religiously motivated act was somewhat intended to propagate the Buddha's *Dharma*—given that Aśoka was a Buddhist *upāsaka*—but it was primarily meant to create a

⁸ Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 264.

⁹ Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 19-21. Jason Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks: Mobility and Exchange within and Beyond the Northwestern Borderlands of South Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 67-69.

¹⁰ Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 44 and 121.

¹¹ John Strong, *The Legend of King Aśoka: A Study and Translation of the Aśokāvadāna* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983), 109-118.

sense of stability across a massive expanse of land through the multivalent concept of *dharma*.¹²

The concept of *dharma* is quite complex and cannot fully be considered in this current project.

Patrick Olivelle identifies at least six different ways in which the poet Aśvaghoṣa plays with the term *dharma* in the first fourteen cantos of the *Buddhacarita* (c. 1st - 2nd century CE).¹³

The term *dharma* developed under the influence of kingship and Buddhism during a period of urbanization in the 5th - 4th century BCE.¹⁴ From this point on, the term *dharma* is rarely used in reference to ritual activities that derive from the Vedic tradition, but is frequently used to discuss activities that are *ācāra* (established rule of conduct), including normative customs of non-*brāhmaṇa* figures like *kṣatriyas* and ascetics.¹⁵ The term *dharma* as it is used in “Classical”¹⁶ Buddhist and Brahmanical texts is unique from the Vedic terms *dhárman* and *ṛta*.¹⁷ It is in this context that Aśoka embarked on his expansion of *dharma*. Although the efforts of Aśoka have been exaggerated, these acts—and many later endeavors including those of lay and monastic donors in Gandhāra—increased the number of sites appropriate for lay and monastic ritual devotion from the four sites originally prescribed by the Buddha and the original ten *stūpas*, to any site with a properly constructed *stūpa*. The perceived presence of the Buddha promoted pilgrimage to visit locations that demarcated the four primary moments from the life of the Buddha. Over time these four sites of pilgrimage, like the *śarīrika stūpas*, were multiplied. In

¹² Alf Hiltebeitel, *Dharma: Its Early History in Law, Religion, and Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 37-50.

¹³ Patrick Olivelle, trans., *Life of the Buddha by Aśvaghoṣa*, (New York: Clay Sanskrit Library, NYU Press and JJC Foundation, 2008), xliii-xlix.

¹⁴ Patrick Olivelle, “Explorations in the Early History of Dharmaśāstra,” in *Between the Empires: Society in India 300 BCE to 400 CE*, ed. Patrick Olivelle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 169-188.

¹⁵ Ibid., 176-177.

¹⁶ Ibid., 169-174.

¹⁷ Joel Brereton, “Dhárman in the Ṛg Veda,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32 (2004): 449-489.

addition to the sites of his birth, *nirvāṇa*, first teaching, and *parinirvāṇa*, four locations associated with miracles performed by the Buddha were also incorporated.

The *dharma* of the Buddha did not cease to exist upon his *parinirvāṇa*. The central matter addressed by Ānanda in his questioning of sites worthy of ritual practice and later in his concern with treatment of the Buddha's body after his *parinirvāṇa* was: How will one be able to be in the presence of the Buddha following his physical absence? The relics that were formed through the cremation of the Buddha's body still contained the essence of the Buddha and thus the presence of relics in the womb of a *stūpa* created the presence of the Buddha himself.¹⁸ The ability to establish Buddhist sacred areas through the installation of relics of the Buddha allowed the tradition to be transported beyond the homeland of the Buddha in northern India and Nepal and into the northwest, the area of Greater Gandhāra.

These *stūpas* established in Greater Gandhāra feature an architectural arrangement of narrative panels that is not seen elsewhere in South Asia. At most Gandhāran *stūpas*, the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha was featured in two sacred locations and represented in two different ways. These two narrative cycles of the life of the Buddha emphasize different aspects of his life—his role as royal *grhastha* (householder) and his role as a *buddha* (an enlightened being). The lower drum portion of the *stūpa* contained an elaborate series of events from his life, many of which function within the confines of the Brahmanical *āśrama* system and its associated rituals. These include his birth, childhood, education, marriage, birth of his son, and his funerary ritual. Narrative cycles that are located on the *harmikā*, the upper portion of the *stūpa*, do not emphasize *grhya* rituals, but rather the Buddha's path towards enlightenment.

¹⁸ Gregory Schopen, "Monks and the Relic Cult in the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*," 99-113.

A multivalent reading of the representation of the life of the Buddha at 1st - 3rd century CE Gandhāran *stūpa* sites may communicate the way that lay and monastic members of the early Buddhist community conceptualized *saṃsara*, the cycle of life and death. It is possible that the *pitṛyāna* (path of the fathers) is represented by the narrative cycle on the lower level of the *stūpa* and has a multivalent reference to the path of the laity who knew that they were destined for rebirth. Similarly, the narrative cycle on the upper portion of the *stūpa* could reference the *devayāna* (path of the *devas* [gods]) and reflect the ideal path of monks seeking liberation in addition to the enlightenment of the Buddha. The theory of multivalence can be used to interpret both the episodes that compose the visual narrative cycles of the *parinirvāṇa*, as well as the arrangement and function of the cycles at 1st - 3rd century CE Gandhāran Buddhist sites.

CHAPTER 1. BUDDHISM IN GREATER GANDHĀRA

The relics of the Buddha were of the utmost importance in the region of Gandhāra from the 3rd century BCE - 8th century CE. Legendary accounts tell of journeys that the Buddha made to the area, but it is well-known that he never travelled outside of the *mahājanapadas* near the Ganges River. Since the Buddha had never physically visited Gandhāra, there was a need to establish a physical connection to the historical Buddha. Aśoka's expansion of Buddhist ideology reached Gandhāra by the middle of the 3rd century BCE.¹⁹ At least two *stūpas*, the Dharmarajika *stūpa* in Taxila and the Butkara *stūpa* in Swāt, are thought to have been founded around the 3rd century BCE, though their association with Aśoka is unlikely.²⁰ While these sites may have Mauryan foundations, the primary phase of Buddhist activity, based on archaeological evidence, did not begin until the Śaka and Parthian periods (c. 1st century BCE - 1st century CE).²¹

The exact moment and circumstance of Buddhism's introduction into Greater Gandhāra is still unclear. Achaemenid (c. 5th - 4th century BCE), Hellenistic (c. 4th - 1st century BCE) and Mauryan (4th - 2nd century BCE) records begin to show the social and historical context of the area, but there are still large gaps in scholarly knowledge and consensus.²² The presence of inscriptions proves that an envoy was sent by Aśoka to the area of Greater Gandhāra by the 3rd century BCE, but the degree to which this expedition was intended to spread Buddhism is far from certain. While Aśoka was known to have been a Buddhist himself, his acts of propagation have been exaggerated in later hagiographies.

¹⁹ Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks*, 78-94.

²⁰ Kurt A. Behrendt, *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 39-40.

²¹ Ibid., 45-51; Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks*, 109.

²² Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks*, 78-109.

Geography of Buddhism in Greater Gandhāra

At this point it will be useful to set out the geographical parameters of this study of Gandhāran *parinirvāṇa* reliefs. Only narrative reliefs produced during the 1st - 3rd century CE (though it is possible that some narrative reliefs of the *parinirvāṇa* were produced or reused after the 3rd century CE)²³ that can assuredly be traced to *vihāra* and *stūpa* complexes in the area of Greater Gandhāra will be included in this discussion. Jason Neelis has noted that, “The distribution of Buddhist archaeological sites in Gandhāra and adjacent regions of the Northwest reveals connections between monastic networks and interregional itineraries through river valleys and across mountain passes.”²⁴ Advantageous access to these trade capillaries allowed for cosmopolitan commercial hubs to form in and around Greater Gandhāra.

The area of Greater Gandhāra was centered on the area surrounding the Peshawar Valley (Puruṣapura), near the confluence of the Swāt and Kabul Rivers. It was also near the Khyber Pass that provided access to Kapiśā and Bactria. Kapiśā and Bactria are two regions with close historical and cultural connections to Greater Gandhāra, including the Kuṣāṇa site of Surkh Kotal, but will not be covered in this study. From the Peshawar Valley, Greater Gandhāra extended north-northeast into the Swāt Valley (sometimes identified with the kingdom Uḍḍiyāna or Udayāna), located around the Swāt River and pushing into the Hindu Kush. Even farther north in the Hindu Kush was the region of Dir. Greater Gandhāra is bordered on the east by the area of Buner, near the Karakur Pass, and on the west by Bajaur near the Malakand Pass. These three mountainous border territories on the north, west, and east created a natural boundary for the region of Greater Gandhāra and positioned it at the center of multiple significant trade routes.

²³ Behrendt, *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra*, 234-54.

²⁴ Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks*, 235.

These paths encouraged continuous interaction between Greater Gandhāran, Central Asian, and Chinese merchants and pilgrims for several centuries.²⁵ Towards the south and southeast, Greater Gandhāra continued past the Indus River, towards the city of Taxila (Takṣaśīla), and down to the Punjab. Greater Gandhāra was in constant contact with the rest of the sub-continent of India via the *Uttarāpatha* and the *Dakṣiṇāpatha* routes.²⁶ The *Uttarāpatha* reached from Taxila in the northwest to Magadha in the northeast. The *Dakṣiṇāpatha* provided access to the Deccan region and southern India from the *doāb*, confluence, of the Ganges and Yamuna Rivers. It was by way of these routes that Buddhism moved in and out of Greater Gandhāran beginning in the 3rd century BCE. This study will refer to the area of Greater Gandhāra as Gandhāra, even though the area of Gandhāra has been associated with a small area in the Peshawar Valley on occasion.²⁷

Many of the narrative reliefs that are considered in this study of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle have been attributed to Gandhāra in general. In these cases, the collectors' records do not indicate the identification of the Buddhist *stūpa* or *vihāra* where they were discovered. Others have the slightly more specific provenances of Peshawar or Swāt, but this is still fairly generic and does not help contextualize the narrative reliefs. In particularly fortunate cases, the exact sites from which the narrative reliefs were taken have been recorded. Specific sites in the area of the Peshawar basin that are represented in this sample of Gandhāran narrative reliefs include: Jamāl Garhī, Loriyān Tāṅgai, Mamane Dheri, Ranigat, Sahrī Bahōl, Sanghao, Shaikhan Dheri, Sikri, and Takht-i-Bāhī. Buddhist sites in the Swāt region that are represented in this study include: Butkara, Malakand, Mīyan Khān, and Pānṛ. Even when the original site of a narrative relief is

²⁵ Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks*, 244-53.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 183-228.

²⁷ Richard Salomon, *Ancient Buddhist Scrolls from Gandhāra* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999), 3.

known, the works have rarely been found *in situ*, and their contexts are lost to time. Unless the narrative reliefs remain attached to a subsequent scene, the sequence and relationship of the panels must be tentatively reassembled based on careful analysis of the events. An extensive study of all Gandhāran narrative reliefs in public and private collections would be required to reassemble this body of art and reunite disintegrated narrative sequences.

Although the narrative reliefs produced in each of these particular areas within Greater Gandhāra express a unique character conveyed through their regional stylistic tendencies and personal artistic expressions, they share consistently similar narrative and iconographic representations.²⁸ The shared narrative selections and modes of visual representation can be accounted for through the presence of common Buddhist sectarian affiliations²⁹ and a shared set of established standards for the aesthetics and compositional arrangements of narrative reliefs at Gandhāran monastic and *stūpa* sites.³⁰ These similarities allow the narrative reliefs to be examined as a collective whole, despite problems regarding their precise original contexts.

Buddhist Textual Traditions in Greater Gandhāra

A corpus of Gāndhārī Buddhist texts written in Kharoṣṭhī script has been discovered within Gandhāra, however scholars are still in the process of determining the nature and development of Buddhism in Gandhāra. Careful comparisons of Chinese and Gandhāran Buddhist texts, along with records of trade and pilgrimage routes, have shown that Gandhāra was

²⁸ Behrendt, *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra*, 234-54.

²⁹ Andre Bareau, *The Buddhist Schools of the Small Vehicle*, trans. Sara Webb-Boin, ed. Andrew Skilton (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013 [1955]), 3-23.

³⁰ Lolita Nehru, *Origins of the Gandhāran Style: A Study of Contributory Influences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 65-102.

a hub for Buddhist activity from the 3rd century BCE - 8th century CE.³¹ The exact character of Buddhism that was practiced is still unknown and is best described as early Buddhism even in the 1st - 3rd centuries CE. The dating of sites in Greater Gandhāra is also still in a developmental phase (where it may stay pending a vast reexamination of all previously excavated sites), making it difficult to firmly establish a chronological development of Buddhist practices and their associated artistic productions. As Alf Hiltebeitel has explained,

With regard to individual teachings, there is no consensus as to which texts are the earliest, but it is widely agreed that the major edifice of the earliest Buddhist teachings lies in the first four Nikāya collections and some portions of the fifth, including the *Sutta Nipāta* and the *Dhammapada*. These collections comprise the bulk of the *Sutta Piṭaka*. If altogether they reflect social conditions of about 300 BCE, the period of the early Mauryas, and were given their current shape in that period, this means that the Mauryan period marks the end of about a century or so of undocumented oral canon formation and launches the beginning of several centuries of diversified documentable canon textualization.³²

The social and historical contexts that form the setting for the narrative of the life of the Buddha cannot be treated as historical fact. That the Buddha was anything like the prince of Aśvaghōṣa's *Buddhacarita* or the figure in the Pāli Canon should be highly doubted. Most narratives position the Buddha in a social context that reflects the Mauryan Period, rather than that of the Śākya Republic (*gaṇasaṅgha*)³³ from which the Buddha came.

Among the primary literary traditions associated with the representations of the life of the Buddha in early Buddhist narrative reliefs are the *Dīgha Nikāya* from the Pāli Canon, the Sanskrit *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, Aśvaghōṣa's court-epic the *Buddhacarita*, the Sarvāstivādin's *Lalitavistara*, Pāli *Nidāna Katha*, the Mahāsāṃghika's *Mahāvastu*, the

³¹ Salomon, *Ancient Buddhist Scrolls of Gandhāra*, 3-13.

³² Hiltebeitel, *Dharma*, 104.

³³ *Ibid.*, 158-60.

Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, the *Cariyāpīṭaka*, and the *Buddhavaṃsa*.³⁴ The *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* in the *Dīgha Nikāya* and the *Buddhacarita* have proven the most useful texts for arranging and understanding the representations of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle reliefs from 1st-3rd century CE Gandhāran sites in this study. Alfred Foucher first noted correlations between the *Buddhacarita* and depiction of the *parinirvāṇa* in Gandhāran narrative reliefs. Unfortunately, he took this comparison too far by claiming the Gandhāran narrative reliefs were the source of Aśvaghōṣa's description of the event.³⁵ This statement is too strong, but it shows the close affinity between the visual and textual narratives. While the images generally correspond with the textual narrative patterns, the narrative reliefs do not function as illustrations of the canonical and non-canonical Buddhist texts. Through an application of the theory of multivalence the narrative reliefs can provide insight into the development of early Buddhism that is not represented in the texts.

Although the *Dīgha Nikāya*, and the Pāli Canon, continued to develop until the 5th century CE commentary by Buddhaghōṣa in Sri Lanka (with further adjustments even since), the text is an essential tool that can shed light on the nature of early Buddhist practices. Until the discovery and translation of complete Sanskrit and Gāndhārī Buddhist texts, the Pāli Canon will continue to be referenced by scholars studying Buddhism in Gandhāra. The 1995 publication of the 1987 translation of the Pali Canon's *Dīgha Nikāya* by Maurice Walshe, a Buddhist scholar and practitioner, will be used in this study as a source for the literary narrative of the

³⁴ Vidya Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art: Visual Narratives of India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1997), 55-72; Frank E. Reynolds, "The Many Lives of Buddha: A Study of Sacred Biography and Theravada Tradition," in *The Biographical Process: Studies in the History and Psychology of Religion*, eds. Frank E. Reynolds and Donald Capps (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), 37-61; John Strong, *The Buddha: A Beginners Guide*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009), 1-18 and 194-99. Jonathan S. Walters, "Stūpa, Story, and Empire: Constructions of the Buddha Biography in Early Post-Aśokan India," in *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia*, ed. Juliane Schober (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 160-92.

³⁵ Alfred Foucher, *Life of the Buddha: According to the Ancient Texts and Monuments of India* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1963), 234.

Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta. This text will be used as an example of the *parinirvāṇa* as it was recorded in the Buddhist doctrinal context. This translation has been chosen because it contains a complete and reliable English translation of the narrative of the *parinirvāṇa*. The primary drawback in referencing this text is the fact that it is from the Pāli Canon and the narrative reliefs from Gandhāra are not immediately related to the sect that produced this text. Fortunately, narratives found in the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* and *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* have been identified as part of the oldest portions of the Buddhist literary tradition and show remarkable similarity between sectarian redactions.³⁶

The appearance of the visual narrative of the life of the Buddha in Gandhāra in the 1st century CE chronologically and geographically corresponds with the creation of the *Buddhacarita* by the poet Aśvaghoṣa. These are among the first times that the life of the Buddha was depicted in a linear narrative that traced the development of his life from before his birth through after his death in both visual and literary traditions. Patrick Olivelle and Alf Hiltebeitel have each examined the *Buddhacarita*'s relationship to other *dharma* texts and found that it belongs in the socio-cultural milieu between the time of Aśoka (4th - 2nd century BCE) and the *Mānavadharmasāstra* (2nd century CE).³⁷ In the *Buddhacarita*, the life of the Buddha is presented in conversation with contemporary epic literature and presents the Buddha as a hero of *dharma*. Hiltebeitel and Olivelle have both found Aśvaghoṣa to have made overt reverences to the epic narratives of Arjuna, Yudhiṣṭhira, and Rāma in his formation of the Buddha's life story.³⁸

³⁶ David L Snellgrove. "Śākyamuni's Final 'nirvāṇa,'" *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 36, no. 2 (1973): 399-411.

³⁷ Hiltebeitel, *Dharma*, 1-20; Olivelle, *Life of the Buddha by Aśvaghoṣa*, xvii-xxiii.

³⁸ Hiltebeitel, *Dharma*, 411-568 and 625-684; Olivelle, *Life of the Buddha by Aśvaghoṣa*, xx-xlix.

Aśvaghoṣa demonstrates how throughout his life the Buddha is able to isolate the *saddharma*, the true *dharma*, out from the many others that had developed between the 5th century BCE and the 1st century CE.³⁹ This narrative humanizes the Buddha and fully places him within a brahmanical society with a life of a *gṛhastha* (householder) dictated by life-cycle rituals preceded over and performed by *brāhmaṇas*, monks, and the laity. Narrative reliefs that depict the life of the Buddha at Gandhāran sites are a part of the same conversation about *dharma* as the *Buddhacarita* and the other “Dharma texts” that developed from the Vedic period through the Gupta period (c. 1500 BCE - 4th century CE).⁴⁰ As will be discussed below, the multivalent nature of Gandhāran Buddhist narrative reliefs allows them to provide insight into the way the life of the Buddha was understood in 1st - 3rd century Gandhāra beyond a simple narrative reading of the life of the Buddha. Gandhāran narrative reliefs reflect the common environment out of which early Buddhism and Brahmanical traditions developed.

Approximately 40 years after E. B. Cowell’s 1895 first translation of the *Buddhacarita* into English, E. H. Johnston formulated his English translation of Aśvaghoṣa’s *mahākāvya* the *Buddhacarita*. In addition to the three manuscripts that Cowell used, Johnston had access to a c. 1300 CE Sanskrit version of the text in the Kathmandu Library that was discovered in 1909.⁴¹ Johnston proved that this new, earlier manuscript was the exact document that had been used to produce the copies that Cowell had available for his translation. This allowed him to rectify errors in the earlier translation. Johnston also relied on Chinese and Tibetan versions of the *Buddhacarita* to reconstruct his complete Sanskrit text and English translation.

³⁹ Olivelle, *Life of the Buddha by Aśvaghoṣa*, xlv.

⁴⁰ Hiltebeitel, *Dharma*, 5-11.

⁴¹ Johnston, “Preface,” *Aśvaghoṣa’s Buddhacarita*, v-x.

The single remaining Sanskrit edition of the *Buddhacarita* is only preserved through the middle of the 14th chapter. Johnston concludes that due to the similarities between the Chinese and Tibetan versions, which both have 28 chapters, by the 5th century CE (and possibly earlier) a 28 chapter Sanskrit version of the text probably existed.⁴² Whether or not this was completed by Aśvaghoṣa is questionable, but the language throughout suggests the possibility. The fourteen chapters that are only found in the Tibetan and Chinese manuscripts include: 15.) *Turning the Wheel of the Law*, 16.) *Many Conversions*, 17.) *Conversion of the Great Disciples*, 18.) *The Instruction of Anāthapiṇḍada*, 19.) *The Meeting of Father and Son*, 20.) *Acceptance of the Jetavana*, 21.) *Progress of the Mission*, 22.) *The Visit to Āmrapāli's Grove*, 23.) *Fixing the Factors of Bodily Life*, 24.) *Compassion for the Licchavis*, 25.) *The Journey to Nirvāṇa*, 26.) *The Mahāparinirvāṇa*, 27.) *Eulogy of Nirvāṇa*, and 28.) *The Division of the Relics*. Although the recent translation of the *Buddhacarita* by Olivelle for the Clay Sanskrit Library is more true to the original *kāvya* tradition and reads more poetically, Johnston's translation includes the portion of the epic that narrates the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha. This section of the text is necessary for study of the visual renderings of this narratives of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle on Gandhāran *stūpas*.

The *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* is known from multiple Chinese versions of the text, found in a few different forms, beginning with an edition first translated by the monk Faxian in the 2nd century CE. It was further developed through the compilation and translation of the entire text by the monk Dharmakṣema during the 5th century CE. Stephen Hodge suggests that the earliest phases of the text's history began around the 1st century CE in the Andhra region

⁴² Johnston, "Introduction," *Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita*, xiii-xxiv.

of India within the domain of the Sātavāhanas.⁴³ It is significant to note that more than thirty fragments of Sanskrit versions of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra* (in one of its earliest redactions) have been found in Central Asia and that these were likely transported from South Asia through Gandhāra via the *Uttarāpatha* and the *Dakṣiṇāpatha* routes.⁴⁴ This particular version of the *parinirvāṇa* narrative, with its elaborations on *buddhadhātu* and the nature of the “self” in Buddhist thought, does not seem to have influenced the visual narratives of the *parinirvāṇa* found at Gandhāran *stūpa* sites. Its divergences from the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* and *Buddhacarita* are not visible in 1st - 3rd century CE Gandhāran narrative reliefs.⁴⁵ Although the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* would have been circulating in Gandhāra by the 2nd century CE when Faxian visited the area, this particular text and its new Mahāyāna related developments do not have any immediate influence on the narrative depictions of the *parinirvāṇa*.

The visual representation of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle at Gandhāran *stūpa* sites shows a closer relationship to early Buddhist narrations of the life of the Buddha rather than later identifiably *Mahāyāna* texts. The two primary texts that can be used to verify the identity of narrative reliefs of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle in Gandhāra are the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* from the *Dīgha Nikāya* and the *Buddhacarita*. In addition to these Buddhist texts, Brahmanical texts

⁴³ Stephen Hodge, “The Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra: The Text and its Transmission,” (paper presented at the Second International Workshop on the Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra, Institute for Indology and Tibetology of the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität Munich, Germany, July 27-29, 2010, revised edition 2012), 1.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁵ Paul Williams, Anthony Tribe, and Alexander Wynne. *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2012), 118-21.

including the *dharmasūtras*/*dharmasāstras*, *grhyasūtras*, *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, and *Upaniṣads* also help to position the narrative reliefs within their larger socio-cultural context.⁴⁶

Historical Periods of Buddhism in Greater Gandhāra

The period and region that are examined in this study of the Gandhāran *parinirvāṇa* cycle of narrative reliefs coincides with and exceeds the temporal extent of the dynastic rulers identified as the Kuṣāṇa.⁴⁷ The influence of Kuṣāṇa rulers, especially Kaniṣka I (c. 127-151),⁴⁸ on the prosperous economic, social, and religious conditions of Greater Gandhāra, as well as regions as far north as Surkh Kotal in Bactria and south to Sāketa in Magadha are undeniable.⁴⁹ However, the extent to which these particular rulers actually patronized monastic and *stūpa* complexes in Gandhāra may be overstated. For example, Kaniṣka only takes on the persona of a great patron of Buddhism within later legends; there are only a handful of Buddhist sites associated with his patronage and his lifetime.⁵⁰ Kurt Behrendt has shown that the five inscribed schist images (with dates in yet to be determined eras) from Gandhāra cannot be firmly attributed to any specific phase of production, much less specifically to that of Kaniṣka or the Kuṣāṇa.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Patrick Olivelle, trans., *The Dharmasūtras: The Law Codes of Āpastamba, Gautama, Baudhāyana and Vasiṣṭha* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Patrick Olivelle, trans., *Upaniṣads* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Julius Eggeling, trans., *The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa According to the Text of the Mādhyandina School*, vol. 5, in *Sacred Books of the East*, vol. xlv, ed. F. Max Müller, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900); Hildebrandt, *Dharma*, 180-241; P. V. Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra*, vol IV (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1973 [1953]).

⁴⁷ Doris Meth Srinivasan, ed., *On the Cusp of an Era: Art in the Pre-Kuṣāṇa World* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 1-27.

⁴⁸ Harry Falk, "The Yuga of Sphujiddhva and the Era of the Kuṣāṇas," *Silk Road Art and Archaeology: Journal of the Institute of Silk Road Studies* 7 (2001): 121-36; Gérard Fussman, "The Riddle of the Ancient Indian Eras is Not Yet Solved," *Ancient India* 1 (2011): 239-59.

⁴⁹ Nicholas Sims-Williams, "Bactrian Historical Inscriptions of the Kuṣāṇa Period," *Silk Road Art and Archaeology: Journal of the Institute of Silk Road Studies* 10 (2012): 76-80.

⁵⁰ John M. Rosenfield, *The Dynastic Arts of the Kushans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 30.

⁵¹ Behrendt, *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra*, 281-87.

While there are very few inscriptions related to narrative reliefs and sculpture from Gandhāra, hundreds of reliquaries that once contained relics that enlivened *stūpas* with the presence of the Buddha also provide epigraphic evidence for the study of Gandhāran Buddhism, but these possess their own sets of problems.⁵² The presence of the Sarvāstivādin (with whom Kaniṣka is associated), Mahāsāṃghika, Kāśyapīya, and Bahuśrutīya (associated with Aśvaghoṣa) sects in the region are known through donative inscriptions, and the Dharmaguptaka and Mūlasarvāstivādin sects have been detected in Gandhāran texts.⁵³ Due to the formative state of research and limited available material related to Gandhāran chronology and patronage, it is quite challenging to make any substantial, conclusive statements regarding the influence of any particular individual donors or early Buddhist sects at Gandhāran *stūpa* and monastic sites.

The discovery and translation of the Rabatak inscription (found near Surkh Kotal), along with Harry Falk's findings on the date of Kaniṣka as c. 127 CE, have helped to clarify the chronological development and geographic extent of a portion of the Kuṣāṇa period.⁵⁴ The order of the Kuṣāṇas rulers is stated in this inscription as: Kujula Kadphises, Vima Taktu/Soter Megas, Vima Kadphises, and Kaniṣka.⁵⁵ These new findings are useful, but for now, it is best to consider the growth of Gandhāran Buddhist art in terms of general phases rather than attempting to assign precise dates for the developments that occurred from the 3rd century BCE - 8th century CE.

⁵² Stefan Baums, Elizabeth Errington, David Jongeward, and Richard Salomon, *Gandharan Buddhist Reliquaries* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012).

⁵³ Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art*, 184; Salomon, *Ancient Buddhist Scrolls from Gandhāra*, 166-71; Gregory Schopen, "The Bones of a Buddha and the Business of a Monk," in *Figments and Fragments of Māhāyāna Buddhism in India: More Collected Papers*, ed. Gregory Schopen (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 75-80.

⁵⁴ Nicholas Sims-Williams, "The Bactrian Inscriptions of Rabatak: A New Reading," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 18 (2004): 53-68; Falk, "The Yuga of Sphujiddhvaja and the Era of the Kuṣāṇas," 121-36.

⁵⁵ Michael Willis, *Buddhist Reliquaries from Ancient India* (London: British Museum Press, 2001), 46-49.

At this point, it will be most useful to consider the development of Gandhāran art in general phases that can be shifted into their correct chronological sequence as research progresses. In *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra*, Behrendt thoroughly analyzes four phases — Phase I, Phase II, Phase III, and Phase IV—of architectural production and their related artistic remains in order to present a comprehensive overview of the development and nature of sacred Buddhist areas in Gandhāra.⁵⁶ John Marshall (Director of the Archaeological Survey of India, 1902-1928) had previously attempted a similar categorization in *The Buddhist Art of Gandhāra: The Story of the Early School, Its Birth, Growth, and Decline* following his site specific works on Sāñcī and Taxila.⁵⁷ During his work at Taxila, Marshall identified two phases in the development of Gandhāran art.⁵⁸ The first phase lasted from the 1st - 2nd century CE and was primarily associated with the usage of stone for the production of images. The second phase was attributed to the 4th - 5th centuries CE and was characterized by the employment of stucco or clay more frequently than stone. Marshall also observed the prominence of narrative scenes of the life of Buddha during the first phase and a preference for iconic images of the Buddha and *bodhisattvas* in the second phase.

Marshall's initial attempt at ordering the growth of Buddhist art from Gandhāra was based on his knowledge of local archaeological excavations. According to him, the earliest period of Buddhist art in Gandhāra occurred during the Śaka period (c. 1st century BCE - 1st century CE) and was considered the artistic production's infancy. Gandhāran Buddhist art continued to develop during the Parthian period (c. 1st century CE), which Marshall called its

⁵⁶ Behrendt, *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra*, 255-67.

⁵⁷ John Marshall, *The Buddhist Art of Gandhāra: The Story of the Early School, Its Birth, Growth, and Decline* (Karachi: Department of Archaeology Pakistan, 1973).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 109-12.

childhood and early adolescence. Finally, Gandhāran Buddhist art progressed through later adolescence and maturity during the Kuṣāṇa period (c. 1st - 5th century CE). Marshall acknowledges that his work is by no means comprehensive and is simply the first step towards understanding the development of Buddhist art within Gandhāra.⁵⁹

Nearly forty-five years later, Behrendt expanded upon Marshall's initial division of Gandhāran art by categorizing four distinct phases of development. Based on Jason Neelis's study of the development of early Buddhism, specific periods and rulers can tentatively be associated with Behrendt's phases. Phase I lasted c. 200 BCE - c. mid to late 1st century CE. The earliest layers of Buddhist *stūpas* and related material remains from Greater Gandhāra can be attributed to Phase I. These layers were found at the sites of Taxila, Sirkap, the Dharmarājikā complex, and Butkara I.⁶⁰ Phase I corresponds with the presence of the Mauryas (c. 320 - 185 BCE), Indo-Greeks (c. 250 BCE - late 1st century BCE), Śakas/Indo-Scythians (c. 1st century BCE - 1st century CE), Indo-Parthians (1st century CE), and the early Kuṣāṇas (Kujula Kadphises: early - mid 1st century CE) in Gandhāra.⁶¹

Behrendt dates Phase II as c. mid to late 1st century CE - early 3rd century CE.⁶² During Phase II earlier sites were expanded and many new sites were constructed. Behrendt places the initial popular use of the life of the Buddha in the form of narrative reliefs on the surface of Gandhāran *stūpas* in Phase II. This phase also corresponds with Śakas/Indo-Scythians and Indo-Parthians, as well as the reigns of several Kuṣāṇa rulers including: Vima Taktu/Soter Megas (mid - late 1st century CE), Vima Kadphises (late 1st century CE), Kaniṣka (c. 127 - 150 CE), Huviṣka

⁵⁹ Marshall, *The Buddhist Art of Gandhāra*, xv-xvii.

⁶⁰ Behrendt, *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra*, 256-59.

⁶¹ Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks*, 78-146.

⁶² Behrendt, *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra*, 259-62.

(c. 153 - 191), Vāsudeva (c. 191 - 225), Kaniṣka II (c. 232 - 244), Vāsiṣka (c. 251 - 255) and Kaniṣka III (c. 268).⁶³

Phase III began c. early 3rd century CE and continued until a gradual decline in patronage of Buddhist sites during the 5th century CE.⁶⁴ Phase III was characterized by the widespread usage of devotional, iconic images and relic shrines in Gandhāran sacred areas. Following the disintegration of the Kuṣāṇa, a number of small regional powers came to the forefront, including the Western Kṣatrapas. By 319 CE Gupta control began to be exerted across India, similar to the earlier feats of Aśoka and the Kuṣāṇa.⁶⁵ Phase IV lasted from c. 5th century CE - c. 8th century CE.⁶⁶ As Behrendt has shown on multiple occasions, this final phase is characterized by the reuse and recontextualization of narrative relief panels and iconic images at Gandhāran sites in the centuries following their production.⁶⁷ The use of stucco and terra-cotta became more common at the end of Phase III and during Phase IV, but it was also used on occasion during Phases I, II, and III.⁶⁸

While the Kuṣāṇa would not have had much influence over the direct production of the visual material at monastic and *stūpa* complexes in Gandhāra (much of which would have been donated by the lay and monastic members of the Buddhist community), they may have indirectly influenced the works through their courtly patronage in other related areas. Kaniṣka is recorded as having received the Buddha's begging bowl and the poet Aśvaghoṣa in place of 200 million

⁶³ Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks*, 145.

⁶⁴ Behrendt, *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra*, 262-66.

⁶⁵ Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks*, 145-56.

⁶⁶ Behrendt, *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra*, 267.

⁶⁷ Kurt A. Behrendt, "The Ancient Reuse and Recontextualization of Gandhāran Images: Second to Seventh Centuries CE," *South Asian Studies* 25, no. 1 (2009): 11-27.

⁶⁸ Behrendt, *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra*, 277-81.

pieces of gold, however there is no historical evidence that this event occurred.⁶⁹ According to E. H. Johnston, the poet Aśvaghoṣa composed the *Buddhacarita* under the patronage of either Kaniṣka or Huviṣka.⁷⁰ While the attribution of Kaniṣka as the patron of this non-canonical Buddhist text is questionable, critical analysis of the text does place its production in the 1st - 2nd century CE within a courtly rather than monastic context.⁷¹

In this analysis of the seven episodes that compose the *parinirvāṇa* cycle in 1st - 3rd century Gandhāran narrative reliefs it is possible that courtly attitudes and notions of *rājadharmā* and *āśramadharmā* are incorporated into the imagery, especially in the performance of the *kṣatriya* born Buddha's funeral rites in the manner prescribed for a *cakravartin*. The legends associated with the Kuṣāṇa ruler Kaniṣka and the emphasis on his propagation of Buddhism are similar to the stories that surround the Mauryan ruler Aśoka's *dharma* spreading mission nearly four centuries earlier.

All of the narrative reliefs from the *parinirvāṇa* cycle that are included in this study can be placed in Phases I or II, since they have been attributed to the 1st - 3rd century CE. This designation, while it corresponds with the peak of Kuṣāṇa influence in the area, does not strictly reflect Kuṣāṇa artistic and cultural traditions. Elements incorporated from the Mauryan, Indo-Greek (or Hellenistic), Śaka/Indo-Scythian, and Indo-Parthian periods are evident in Gandhāran narrative art.⁷²

⁶⁹ Shoshin Kuwayama, "Pilgrimage Route Changes and the Decline of Gandhāra," in *Gandhāran Buddhism: Archaeology, Art, and Texts*, ed. Kurt A. Behrendt and Pia Branaccio (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), n. 17, 128-29.

⁷⁰ Johnston, *Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita*, xv-xvii.

⁷¹ Hiltebeitel, *Dharma*, 626-28.

⁷² Nehru, *Origins of the Gandhāran Style*, 65-102.

Nehru's study, along with Marshall's work and numerous other observations made in museum catalogs, provide thorough overviews of the Greek, Achaemenid, Parthian, and Roman influences that contributed to the production of the Gandhāran style of art. Multiple scholars have acknowledged the influence of earlier South Asian styles on the development of the Gandhāran style, including that of Bhārhut.⁷³ Nehru emphasizes that, as an outpost for both the Western Classical world and the subcontinent of India, Gandhāra was in an advantageous position.⁷⁴ Artists working in Gandhāra were able to select and disregard numerous stylistic elements that were then able to grow into the unique and definable Gandhāran style.

Nehru addresses the ways in which the artistic production in Bactria and Gandhāra were continuously influenced by Hellenistic, Parthian and Roman styles following the establishment of Greek cities in the 4th century BCE. Of particular significance for this project is her discussion of the transmission of stylistic tendencies from the Roman and Parthian Empires into Gandhāra before and during the time of the Kuṣāṇa occupation of Gandhāra. The Parthian style, seen at Palmyra (figs. 69 and 70) and Hatra, came into contact with the developing Gandhāran style, c. 1st century BCE - 1st century CE.

The strict frontal pose used to depict static figures and create contrast within active narrative compositions was possibly borrowed from the Parthian artistic tradition.⁷⁵ Colledge's multiple studies of Parthian art have led him to conclude that the figures presented with distinct frontality are deities, while those in profile represent human worshippers. This agrees with Vidya

⁷³ Nehru, *Origins of the Gandhāran Style*, 47-55; Domenico Faccenna, "The Artistic Center of Butkara I and Saidu Sharif I in the Pre-Kuṣāṇa Period," in *On the Cusp of an Era: Art in the Pre-Kuṣāṇa World*, ed. Doris Meth Srinivasan (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 165-200.

⁷⁴ Nehru, *Origins of the Gandhāran Style*, 64-68.

⁷⁵ Malcolm A. R Colledge, *The Art of Palmyra* (London: Westview Press, 1976), 125-30.

Dehejia's finding in her study of the "Modes of Narration" employed in early South Asian narrative art.⁷⁶ Two of the seven modes of narration that she has identified are considered monoscenic narrative. The remaining five modes of narration in Dehejia's categorization are "Continuous Narrative," "Sequential Narrative," "Synoptic Narrative," "Conflated Narrative," and "Narrative Networks." These two monoscenic forms of composition are divided into "Monoscenic Narratives: Theme of Action" and "Monoscenic Narratives: Being in State versus Being in Action."⁷⁷ In the first case, visual narratives are conveyed through a single scene that depicts any recognizable action from a Buddhist narrative. In the second type of monoscenic narrative focus is placed on a static figure—usually the Buddha in a key moment of his life—rather than those who participate in actions. Dehejia found that,

A static mode of monoscenic narration is frequently used by artists to present the viewer with scenes from the Buddha's life when the supremacy of the Buddha is the prime concern. In this mode, artists generally present the single, culminating episode of a story and focus thematically on the wisdom and presence of the Buddha.⁷⁸

This seems to align with Colledge's position on frontality in Parthian art and may reflect a shared artistic milieu that encompassed South and Central Asia in the early centuries CE.

Nehru examines the absorption of Roman stylistic influences into the Gandhāran milieu in a more delicate way than had previously been done by Ackermann.⁷⁹ In terms of representations of the *parinirvāṇa*, the usage of a reclining figure by Gandhāran artists for the static representation of the Buddha at the moment of his *parinirvāṇa* does have a visual association with the Roman funerary composition, but the transference was mediated by Parthian

⁷⁶ Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art*, 3-35.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 10-15.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁹ Nehru, *Origins of the Gandhāran Style*, 15-28. H. C. Ackermann, *Narrative Stone Reliefs from Gandhāra in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London* (Rome: IsMEO, 1975), 7-43.

art. According to both of these art historians, Gandhāran artists adopted the Greco-Roman traditions of depicting historical narratives in a sequential manner.⁸⁰

These statements are probably too strong. Explanations of the impetus for sequential narratives in Gandhāra should also consider the significance of *grhya* or domestic life-cycle rituals and the *āśramadharma* (regulated life-stages) that may have contributed to this new form of representation. In the following analysis of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle, the concept of multivalence will be used to introduce these notions into the discussion of early Buddhist narrative art.

⁸⁰ Nehru, *Origins of the Gandhāran Style*, 16-22. Ackermann, *Narrative Stone Reliefs from Gandhāra in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London*, 3-73.

CHAPTER 2. GANDHĀRAN STŪPAS AND NARRATIVE ART

Interest in relics is consistently present throughout the many phases of Buddhist occupation in Gandhāra, but the expression of the interest changes over time. Initially, relics which were enshrined within *stūpas* and used to enliven the sacred space with the presence of the Buddha were popular in Gandhāra. Relics are described in reliquary inscriptions and in canonical and non-canonical texts—including the *Buddhacarita*—as being equal to the life of and possessing the same qualities as the Buddha.⁸¹ Over time, narrative reliefs that depicted the life of Buddha were added to the exterior surfaces of Gandhāran *stūpas* to heighten the relationship of the site to the historical Buddha. With the incorporation of stone narrative reliefs in the context of Gandhāran *stūpas* came the visual representation of the Buddha's life in a linear fashion.⁸² Another shift particular to Gandhāra that is also seen during Phases I and II was the introduction of direct-access shrines that allowed personal contact with various types of relics.⁸³ *Stūpas* with visible bodily relics are recorded in the 5th - 7th century CE accounts of Chinese Buddhist pilgrims including Faxian, Song Yun, and Xuanzang. The *uṣṇīṣa* or skull bone of the Buddha is reported to have been housed in a *stūpa* in nearby Haḍḍa.⁸⁴

In addition to locally sponsored *stūpas* located near major cities and monastic sites (the latter the most common form in the area), a number of *stūpas* were constructed in Gandhāra to commemorate sites that became associated with the historical Buddha. *Stūpas* were erected at the locations of several *jātaka* stories, as well as for the housing of the non-bodily relics of the

⁸¹ Gregory Schopen, "Burial Ad Sanctos and the Physical Presence of the Buddha in Early Indian Buddhism," *Religion* 17 (1987): 125-28.

⁸² Maurizio Taddei, "Narrative Art Between India and the Hellenistic World," *Transcultural Studies* 1 (August 2015): 50.

⁸³ Behrendt, *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra*, 61-76.

⁸⁴ Kuwayama, "Pilgrimage Route Changes and the Decline of Gandhāra," 113.

Buddha, such as his shadow. The Buddha is said to have left the image of his shadow for a nāga king in a cave in Nagarahāra, in a town associated with the Dīpaṃkara *jātaka*.⁸⁵

During the early first century CE, the region of Gandhāra was a driving force behind a climactic moment in the history of early Buddhism. Studies by Neelis,⁸⁶ Hiltebeitel,⁸⁷ Olivelle,⁸⁸ and Bronkhorst⁸⁹ have begun to articulate the complex social situation out of which Gandhāran culture developed. They have individually begun to trace specific aspects of the cross-cultural engagement that was occurring throughout South Asia from the late Vedic period (second half of the first millennium BCE) up through the peak of Buddhism in the area (3rd century BCE - 8th century CE). It has long been known that following centuries of occupation by Hellenistic, Mauryan, and Central Asian powers in the region of the Hindu Kush and its many river valleys, a unique synthesis between foreign, *mleccha*, groups and South Asian traditions were visually expressed in the form of early Buddhist narrative reliefs.⁹⁰

Early Buddhist narrative reliefs dominated the artistic production of Gandhāra from c. 1st - 3rd century CE. The narrative reliefs of Gandhāra, following in the traditions already established at Bhārhut, Sāñcī, and Amarāvātī, depict the life of the historical Buddha, as well as his previous lives prior to his final one as Śākyamuni.⁹¹ While at Bhārhut, Sāñcī, and Amarāvātī

⁸⁵ Kuwayama, “Pilgrimage Route Changes and the Decline of Gandhāra,” 114.

⁸⁶ Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks*.

⁸⁷ Hiltebeitel, *Dharma*.

⁸⁸ Olivelle, *Life of the Buddha by Āśvaghoṣa*; Patrick Olivelle, ed. *Between the Empires: Society in India 300 BCE to 400 CE* (New York: Oxford, 2006); Patrick Olivelle, *Upaniṣads*; Patrick Olivelle, *The Āśrama System: The History and Hermeneutics of a Religious Institution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Olivelle, *The Dharmasūtras*; Patrick Olivelle, trans., *Manu’s Code of Law: A Critical Edition and Translation of the Mānava-Dharmaśāstra* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁸⁹ Johannes Bronkhorst, *Buddhism in the Shadow of Brahmanism* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Johannes Bronkhorst, *Greater Magadha: Studies in the Culture of Early India* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

⁹⁰ Nehru, *Origins of the Gandhāran Style*, 103-6.

⁹¹ Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art*, 75-182.

the *jātaka* tales and the narrative of the life of the Buddha were both frequently depicted, in Gandhāra the life of the historical Buddha Śākyamuni was favored over any other stories.⁹²

Related to the proliferation of biographical representations of the Buddha is a unique feature of Gandhāran art that has attracted much attention in the past. Some of the earliest known examples of the Buddha in anthropomorphic form in narrative contexts have been discovered in the *stūpa* complexes of Gandhāra.⁹³ In addition to narrative reliefs, early representations of the Buddha have been found on coins and reliquary caskets in Gandhāra, although each of these topics has its own unique set of problems that cannot be addressed in this project.⁹⁴ Prior to anthropomorphic representations, the Buddha was either suggested to the viewer through the use of symbols (the *cakra*, *triratna*, *bodhi* tree, footprints, etc.) which marked his presence or through the treatment of an unoccupied space as though the Buddha were physically present (an empty seat under the *bodhi* tree or the riderless horse Kanthaka with attendants).⁹⁵

The impetus to represent the Buddha in the image of man has caused vigorous debate between many scholars. Beginning in the early 20th century the topic was taken up by Foucher and Coomaraswamy.⁹⁶ Since their initial studies, van Lohuizen-de Leeuw, Dehejia, Huntington,

⁹² Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art*, 55-72.

⁹³ Behrendt, *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra*, 237; Domenico Faccenna, “The Artistic Center of Butkara I and Saidu Sharif I in the Pre-Kuṣāṇa Period,” 163-99.

⁹⁴ J. Cribb, “The Greek Kingdom in Bactria, Its Coinage and Collapse,” in *Afghanistan, ancien carrefour entre l'est et l'ouest. Indicopleustoi: Archaeologies of the Indian Ocean*, vol. 3, eds. Osmund Bopearachchi and Marie-Françoise Boussac (Turnout: Brepols, 2005), 207-25.

⁹⁵ Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art*, 36-54.

⁹⁶ Alfred Foucher, *L'art gréco-bouddhique du Gandhara*, 2 vols. (Paris: Leroux, 1905-18); A. K. Coomaraswamy, “The Indian Origin of the Buddha Image,” *The Art Bulletin* 9, no. 4 (1927): 287-328.

and Quintanilla have all reassessed the situation.⁹⁷ For the moment, the debates regarding the earliest identifiable representations of the Buddha in the form of a human are divided as to origins in the regions of Gandhāra and Mathurā around the 1st century CE, with most evidence leaning towards Mathurā.⁹⁸ The influence of Achaemenid, Parthian, Roman, Etruscan, Hellenistic, Śaka, and Kuṣāṇa artistic styles are also traceable through the presence of foreign trade objects and knowledge circulating in the multicultural economic centers of Gandhāra. In regards to the depiction of the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha in South Asia, Quintanilla found that,

Inauspicious elements were frequently left out of early Buddhist art of the second and first centuries BCE; therefore, scenes such as the Buddha's fasting are not to be found. Similarly, his hair (*cūḍa*) is depicted as a turban, not as hair, when it is worshipped in Indra's heaven. By the early first century CE, however, Buddhism was beginning to gain more stable patronage, and texts were beginning to be canonized. Art, then, began to include more details from the stories in literature. The death of the Buddha is an inherently inauspicious theme, and it is not to be found among the corpus of known reliefs dating from the second and first centuries BCE, such as those at Bharhut, Sanchi, and Amaravati...After the first century CE, the *parinirvāṇa* became a commonly represented scene in the art of Gandhāra, and it is encountered with some regularity in the Kuṣāṇa sculpture of Mathura of the second and third centuries CE, but it remained fairly rare in the art of the other regions of India.⁹⁹

The socio-cultural environment of Gandhāra undoubtedly contributed to the inception of the Buddha as a character in sequential narrative reliefs (the subject of this study), regardless of the precise origin of the representation of the Buddha in human form or the introduction of large-scale iconic Buddha images.¹⁰⁰ As Taddei observed, the linear narrative of the life of the Buddha

⁹⁷ J. E. van Lohuizen-de Leeuw, "New Evidence with Regard to the Origin of the Buddha Image," in *South Asian Archaeology 1979*, ed. Herbert Hartel, (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1981), 377-400; Vidya Dehejia, "Aniconism and the Multivalence of Emblems," *Ars Orientalis* 21 (1991): 44-66; Susan L. Huntington "Aniconism and the Multivalence of Emblems: Another Look," 22 (1992): 111-56; Sonya Rhie Quintanilla, *History of Early Stone Sculpture at Mathura, ca. 150 BCE – 100 CE*, (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

⁹⁸ Yuvraj Krishan, *The Buddha Image: Its Origin and Development* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1996), 28-48; Lohuizen-de Leeuw, "New Evidence with Regard to the Origin of the Buddha Image," 377-400; Quintanilla, *History of Early Stone Sculpture at Mathura, ca. 150 BCE – 100 CE*, 199-208

⁹⁹ Quintanilla, *History of Early Stone Sculpture at Mathura*, 197.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 221-48.

does not find a direct correlation with any Hellenistic art. The decision to incorporate a sequence of divided scenes in a sequential order with the intention of forming a narrative cycle of the life of the Buddha was unique to Gandhāra.¹⁰¹

Not only did the biography of the Buddha attract a new and more extensive form of representation in Gandhāra than had been produced in the areas of Northern and Central India, the narration of his life took precedence at *stūpa* complexes.¹⁰² In Gandhāra the narrative of the life of the Buddha was in direct contact with the relics of the Buddha through its placement on the drum of a *stūpa*. Gandhāran *stūpa* and *vihāra* complexes contained dozens of architectural *stūpas* of various sizes (not including reliquaries in the form of *stūpas*). Typically, Gandhāran sites featured a main, large *stūpa* that dominated the sacred area and contained an essential relic that brought the presence of the Buddha to the site. This main *stūpa* would have been surrounded by smaller *stūpas* and relic shrines that were donated gradually throughout the site's activity.¹⁰³

Behrendt has shown that the size of the narrative reliefs discovered at Gandhāran sites indicate that they would have been too small to adorn the central *stūpa* in almost all cases. This suggests that the narrative reliefs examined in this study were originally located on smaller *stūpas* rather than the large, main *stūpa*. Behrendt proposes that the depiction of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle on Gandhāran narrative reliefs reflects the possible or perceived relics inside the *stūpa*.¹⁰⁴ Since the exact nature of the relics found in these smaller *stūpas* is unknown—quite possibly they contained the relics of significant monks¹⁰⁵—the narrative reliefs could provide a

¹⁰¹ Taddei, "Narrative Art Between India and the Hellenistic World," 34-74.

¹⁰² Faccenna, "The Artistic Center of Butkara I and Saidu Sharif I in the Pre-Kuṣāṇa Period," 182-97.

¹⁰³ Behrendt, *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra*, 27-33.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 31.

¹⁰⁵ Gregory Schopen, "Burial Ad Sanctos and the Physical Presence of the Buddha in Early Indian Buddhism," 195-225.

relationship to the life of the Buddha that the *stūpa* was previously lacking. This shift to a more sacred location from its initial position on the *vedikā* railings and *torāṇa* at sites such as Sāñcī, Bhārhut, and Amarāvātī and the proliferation of donations of smaller *stūpas* attests to the increased significance of the life of the Buddha and its relationship to the cult of relics and *stūpa* veneration in Gandhāra.¹⁰⁶

Since the initial systematic study of the visual material recovered from Gandhāran *stūpa* and *vihāra* complexes began in the late 19th century,¹⁰⁷ art historical investigations surrounding the material objects found at these c. 3rd century BCE - 8th century CE¹⁰⁸ sites have primarily focused on two principle matters: the identification of the representations and the identification of stylistic tendencies and influences.

Gandhāran narrative reliefs that depict the biography of the life of the historical Buddha were the primary form of visual material produced for use within the sacred areas of Gandhāran Buddhist sites during the 1st - 3rd century CE.¹⁰⁹ During the later phases of production in Gandhāra (c. 4th - 8th century CE), iconic imagery became the dominant form of visual representation at such locations. Following the shift towards iconic imagery, narrative reliefs continued to be used, but to a lesser extent. Narrative reliefs were still used for the *harmikā* and false gables that adorned *stūpas* and in subordinate roles on the base of iconic devotional images through the 8th century CE.¹¹⁰ This shift from an emphasis on the narrative of the life of the

¹⁰⁶ Faccenna, “The Artistic Center of Butkara I and Saidu Sharif I in the Pre-Kuṣāṇa Period,” 182-97.

¹⁰⁷ Upinder Singh, “Archaeologists and Architectural Scholars in Nineteenth Century India,” in *Indian Art History: Changing Perspectives*, ed. Parul Pandya Dhar (New Delhi: National Museum Institute, 2011), 47-57.

¹⁰⁸ Kurt Behrendt, *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra*, 268-87.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 268.

¹¹⁰ Kurt Behrendt, *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra*, 235-54.

Buddha to his iconic form has been attributed to gradual changes in Buddhist thought and practice that altered the demands of artistic production.¹¹¹

Gandhāran narrative reliefs of the life of the Buddha have been extensively studied in terms of their narrative and iconographic representations, as well as their stylistic expressions and developments as works of art. These approaches have provided a substantial foundation on which current scholars can build, however the field is still in need of much expansion. These previous endeavors on the part of archaeologists, art historians, historians, numismatists, linguists, and Indologists working in the multidisciplinary fields of both Gandhāran and early Buddhist studies, have resulted in the systematic identification of visual narratives and themes,¹¹² theories for the compositional¹¹³ and stylistic¹¹⁴ development of these visual narratives, their relationships to contemporaneous and subsequent literature,¹¹⁵ their function within *vihāra* and

¹¹¹ Jurying Rhi, “Bodhisattvas in Gandhāran Art: An Aspect of Mahāyāna in Gandhāran Buddhism,” in *Gandhāran Buddhism: Archaeology, Art, and Texts*, eds. Kurt A. Behrendt and Pia Brancaccio (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 151-82.

¹¹² Alfred Foucher, *Life of the Buddha: According to the Ancient Texts and Monuments of India* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1963); Harold Ingholt, *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957); Marshall, *The Buddhist Art of Gandhāra*; W. Zwalf, *A Catalogue of the Gandhāra Sculpture in the British Museum* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1996).

¹¹³ Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art*.

¹¹⁴ Jorinde Ebert, *Parinirvāṇa: Untersuchungen zur ikonographischen Entwicklung von den indischen Anfängen bis nach China* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH, 1985); Nehru, *Origins of the Gandhāran Style: A Study of Contributory Influences*; Srinivasan, ed., *On the Cusp of an Era*.

¹¹⁵ Hiltebeitel, *Dharma*; Gregory Schopen, ed., *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997); Williams, Tribe, and Wynne. *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition*.

stūpa contexts,¹¹⁶ and their roles in the broader socio-political and socio-religious contexts of early South Asia.¹¹⁷

Gandhāran Stūpas and Narrative Art: Architectural Context

There are five forms that narrative reliefs take in the context of 1st - 3rd century CE Gandhāran *stūpa* and *vihāra* complexes.¹¹⁸ These include: rectangular narrative panels, *harmikā* panels, false gables, complex epiphanic narrative scenes, and pedestal base panels. In addition to these five forms of narrative reliefs, there are also several variations of individual figures and motifs carved in relief that do not occupy a narrative context. These non-narrative reliefs will not be considered in this study.

The narrative and *harmikā* panels would have been arranged in an intentional sequence that portrayed a series of cycles of events from the life of the Buddha. These roughly rectangular reliefs include both smaller (approximately 15 x 20 cm) and larger panels (approximately 30 x 40 cm) that would have adorned the surface of *stūpas*.¹¹⁹ Convex rectangular slabs would have wrapped around the entire circumference of cylindrical drums in a clockwise sequence and flat panels, typically, would have been used for the *harmikā* and rectangular bases.¹²⁰ In addition to

¹¹⁶ Robert L. Brown, "Nature as Utopian Space on the Early Stūpas of India," in *Buddhist Stūpas in South Asia: Recent Archaeological, Art-Historical, and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Jason Hawkes and Akira Shimada (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 63-80; Étienne Lamotte, *History of Indian Buddhism: From the Origins to the Śāka Era*, trans. Sara Webb-Boin, under the supervision of Jean Dantine (Louvain-Paris: Institut Orientaliste de l'Université Catholique Louvain, 1988); Salomon, *Ancient Buddhist Scrolls from Gandhāra*; Gregory Schopen, "The Buddhist 'Monastery' and the Indian Garden: Aesthetics, Assimilations, and the Siting of Monastic Establishments," *The Journal of the American Oriental Society* 126, no. 4 (2006): 487-505. Kurt A. Behrendt, "Relics and Their Representation in Gandhāra," *Marg* 54, no. 4 (June 2003): 76-85.

¹¹⁷ Kurt A. Behrendt and Pia Brancaccio, eds., *Gandhāran Buddhism: Archaeology, Art, and Texts* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006); Bronkhorst, *Buddhism in the Shadow of Brahmanism*; Hildebrandt, *Dharma*; Olivelle, ed., *Between the Empires: Society in India 300 BCE to 400 CE*.

¹¹⁸ Behrendt, *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra*, 109-34 and 234-54.

¹¹⁹ Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art*, 184.

¹²⁰ Zwalf, *A Catalogue of the Gandhāra Sculpture in the British Museum*, 50-63.

these two types of sequential narrative relief panels, other architectural reliefs included stair risers, complex epiphanic narrative scenes, and vertically oriented, arched-rectangular slabs that functioned as false gables (fig. 24).¹²¹ Single narrative scenes are also found on the pedestal of iconic images, however these reliefs have a different function from those that formed a narrative cycle on the exterior of *stūpa*. These panels do not represent an episode from a cycle of reliefs, however due to the lack of provenance and the sometimes obtrusive removal of objects from their context, pedestal panels can take on the appearance of drum or *harmikā* panels.

Three of these five types of architectural narrative relief panels (all except for the stair risers and complex epiphanic narrative scenes) would have been found, possibly, on the main large *stūpa* and, primarily, on surrounding medium and small *stūpas* at Gandhāran sites. Narrative episodes from the *parinirvāṇa* cycle have been found in all three of these contexts and are represented in this study.¹²² The dimensions of the narrative reliefs (with the exception of Fig. 24, the false gable) used in this study reflect the size and shape of the smaller and larger slabs used for the drum, base and *harmikā*. The narrative slabs would have been fastened to the *stūpa*, with most wrapping around the drum's lowest level. The series of narrative reliefs found on this part of the Gandhāran *stūpa* would have consisted of a sequence of as many reliefs as it would take to encase the perimeter. Depending on the size of the *stūpa* and the relief panels, there could have been less than ten relief panels narrating the life of the Buddha or five times that many. Dozens of different episodes from the life of the Buddha are known to have been represented in narrative reliefs once located on *stūpas*, and it seems not to have been uncommon to have the

¹²¹ Zwalf, *A Catalogue of the Gandhāra Sculpture in the British Museum*, 183-206.

¹²² Behrendt, *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra*, 234-54.

same scene repeated on a single structure.¹²³ Due to the independent nature of *dāna*, gift giving, that was performed at monastic sites by the laity and *saṃgha*, the narrative reliefs reflect the personal selections of an interested public rather than the didactic transmission of the narrative of the Buddha as it is found in literature.¹²⁴

The panels that made up the *harmikā*, located just above the dome of the *stūpa*, would have consisted of four panels and seem to have been based on an established sequence. These four panels, well represented by the complete set (Fig. 65) located in the Freer Gallery of Art, regularly show the birth of the Buddha (Fig. 62), his enlightenment (Fig. 63), the first sermon (Fig. 64), and the *parinirvāṇa* (Fig. 17). The selection of these four scenes as the pivotal moments of the life of the Buddha is also seen in textual traditions. As was previously quoted, the Buddha is recorded as having suggested that these sites related to four major moments in his life should be the focus of Buddhist pilgrimage.¹²⁵ Behrendt shows that these narrative moments continued to be used to adorn the *harmikā* at least into the mid-5th century CE.¹²⁶ None of the examples in this project, however, post-date the 3rd century CE according to the current dates provided by their repositories. The primary significance of this sequence of events is related to both the directions that were given to Ānanda by the Buddha and the symbolic location of the *harmikā*, which will be explored later in this study.¹²⁷

These same four scenes also typically make up the narrative sequence of the smaller *stūpas* found surrounding the main *stūpa* at sites in Gandhāra. Some of the narrative panels are

¹²³ Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art*, 185.

¹²⁴ Susan L. Huntington, *Lay Ritual in the Early Buddhist Art of India: More Evidence against the Aniconic Theory* (Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2012), 16-17.

¹²⁵ Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 263.

¹²⁶ Behrendt, *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra*, 211-33.

¹²⁷ Adrian Snodgrass, *Symbolism of the Stūpa* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1985), 246-73.

slightly curved, while others fit together at right angles suggesting that the bases of some of the small *stūpas* were round, while others were square. Regardless of the shape of the *stūpa*, the narrative sequence was consistent. Each of the four sides of the square base or four quarters of the round base of the small *stūpa* would have presented one of the four key moments from the life of the Buddha. When the four key moments were depicted on the base of a small *stūpa* (as opposed to a *harmikā*) they were typically presented through a series of three to four episodes, each of which summarized one of the four events. For the *parinirvāṇa* cycle, the events of the arrival of Mahākāśyapa, the cremation of the Buddha, the guarding of the relics, the division of the relics, the transportation of the relics, and the veneration of the relics were arranged in a variety of combinations of sequences. In a similar way, the false gable (Fig. 24) presents a series of episodes that summarize the *parinirvāṇa* cycle, this time however in a single arched, vertical panel that would have been placed on the face of the *stūpa*'s dome. Narrative representations of the *parinirvāṇa* are consistent between the drum, *harmikā*, and false gables.

CHAPTER 3. THE PARINIRVĀṆA CYLCE OF NARRATIVE RELIEFS

Due to the lack of specific provenance for the majority of the narrative reliefs, a more effective study of the content and function of the panels, including their visual representations and interpretations, should revolve around a common theme rather than specific regional developments. This study will be limited to the narrative cycle of the *parinirvāṇa*. The decision to focus on this particular set of episodes from the life of the Buddha is for methodological purposes. The lack of architectural context makes it difficult to gain an accurate understanding of the function of 1st - 3rd century CE narrative reliefs on Gandhāran *stūpas*.¹²⁸ In light of this problem, this study will consider the function and usage of a set of episodes that create a cycle within the visual narrative of the Buddha's life. Since there are too few complete cycles of narrative reliefs in Gandhāra to establish a norm, the exact sequences used cannot definitively be established at this time.

Despite the lack of *in situ* narrative reliefs, the nature of the episodes that recur on thousands of Gandhāran narrative reliefs allow for them to be placed in relation to one another according to the recognizable sequence of the episodes within the narrative cycle.¹²⁹ Through this sequential arrangement of the content, a narrative cycle can emerge from within the larger narrative of the life of the Buddha presented at Gandhāran *vihāra* and *stūpa* complexes.¹³⁰ Systematic studies of the visual narrative of the *parinirvāṇa* as represented on Gandhāran *stūpas*

¹²⁸ Behrendt, *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra*, 288-95.

¹²⁹ Roberto Casati, "Methodological Issues in the Study of the Depiction of Cast Shadows: A Case Study in the Relationships between Art and Cognition," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 62, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 163-74.

¹³⁰ Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art*, 183-206.

have already been undertaken by Fidaullah Sehrai,¹³¹ Jorinde Ebert,¹³² and Kurt Behrendt.¹³³

Each of these art historians has identified a list of moments that they believe enumerate the visual representations related to the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha from the region of Gandhāra.

In *The Buddha Story in the Peshawar Museum*, Sehrai identifies the following nine episodes as completing the *parinirvāṇa* cycle: 1.) the death of the Buddha, 2.) the shrouded Buddha, 3.) the bier of the Buddha, 4.) the cremation of the Buddha, 5.) the guarding of the relics, 6.) the distribution of the relics, 7.) the cult of the turban, 8.) the cult of the *stūpa*, and 9.) the worship of the relics.¹³⁴ He does not elaborate upon the significance of this categorization; it is simply a method used by the curator to organize the representations of the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha found on the narrative reliefs in the Peshawar Museum.

In her study that examines the transfer of *parinirvāṇa* imagery from South Asia to China, Ebert has a similar, but slightly different, set of seven episodes that she has identified as narrating the cycle of the *parinirvāṇa*. Ebert's series of episodes consists of: 1.) the casketing of the body of the Buddha, 2.) the transportation of the body of the Buddha, 3.) the laying out of the coffin, 4.) the miracle of the immovability of the coffin, 5.) the burning of the body of Buddha, 6.) the distribution of relics by Droṇa, and 7.) the safekeeping of the relics in the *stūpa*.¹³⁵ Due to the fact that Ebert's text is in German, this is only a working list of Ebert's categorization of the episodes of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle.

¹³¹ Fidaullah Sehrai, *The Buddha Story in the Peshawar Museum* (Peshawar: Peshawar Museum, 1978), 49-71.

¹³² Ebert, *Parinirvāṇa*, 60-1.

¹³³ Behrendt, *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra*, 111.

¹³⁴ Sehrai, *The Buddha Story in the Peshawar Museum*, 49-71.

¹³⁵ Ebert, *Parinirvāṇa*, 60-1.

In *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra*, through an analysis of the architectural context of all of the remaining visual material from Buddhist sites in Gandhāra available to the author, Kurt Behrendt not only concludes that the *parinirvāṇa* cycle was one of the most frequently represented subjects from the life of the Buddha in Gandhāran narrative reliefs, but he lists the most popular moments of this event. Behrendt, like Ebert, identifies seven moments from the *parinirvāṇa* cycle of the narrative of the life of the Buddha. Behrendt's list includes: 1.) the *parinirvāṇa*, 2.) the coffin of the Buddha, 3.) the cremation, 4.) the display of the relics, 5.) the division of the relics, 6.) the transportation of the relics, and 7.) the worship of a *stūpa*.¹³⁶

In addition to the sets of the episodes from the *parinirvāṇa* cycle presented above, it is also important to consider John Strong's analysis of the description of the seven-step process for the creation and installment of the relics of the Buddha found in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*. While Strong's, or rather the Buddha's, list of funeral instructions do not directly coincide with either Behrendt, Ebert, Sehrai, or this study's enumerations, it can help explain the differences in categorization. These instructions that the Buddha provides Ānanda include that,

The body of a *tathāgata*, he says, should be (a) treated in the same manner as that of a *cakravartin* king. This means he should be (b) wrapped in alternating layers of new cloth and teased cotton wool (five hundred pieces of each) and (c) placed in a sort of sarcophagus made of an iron vessel (Pāli: *doṇī*, Skt.: *dronī*) filled with oil (Pāli: *tela*, Skt.: *taila*), which is then to be covered with another iron vessel. Throughout this period, implicit in the very notion of *śarīra-pūjā* (though not explicitly mentioned by the Buddha here) are (d) various ritual forms of veneration (*pūjā*) of the Buddha's body which I shall examine as a sort of excursus. Returning to the list, we then find the injunction that (e) the Tathāgata's body be cremated on the fire made with all sorts of odoriferous woods, (f) that his relics/remains be collected, and (g) that a *stūpa* be erected for him at a crossroads.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Behrendt, *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra*, 111.

¹³⁷ Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 100.

After conducting an examination of the corpus of 1st - 3rd century CE Gandhāran narrative reliefs available in international museums and private collections that depict moments from the *parinirvāṇa* cycle, and a comparison of those images with related textual material, this study has identified sixty 1st - 3rd century CE Gandhāran narrative reliefs that depict seven episodes which constitute the *parinirvāṇa* cycle. These seven moments from the *parinirvāṇa* cycle are repeatedly featured in Gandhāran narrative reliefs and would have been presented in a consistent “Sequential” mode of narration.

This selection of seven moments is based on comparative readings of Walshe’s translation of the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta*¹³⁸ and each of Johnston’s 1936,¹³⁹ Cowell’s 1894,¹⁴⁰ and Olivelle’s 2008¹⁴¹ translations of the *Buddhacarita*, though primarily Johnston’s. Through a comparison of their descriptions of the final conversions and conversations of the Buddha, his *parinirvāṇa*, the funeral rites performed for him, and the actions of his disciples, kings/the elite, the laity and the gods in the two texts, it becomes clear that while the order and significance of the events can vary between sects and texts, the overall structure of the narrative is the same whether presented in a canonical or non-canonical text.

The seven episodes of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle identified in this study are as follows:

1.) *The Parinirvāṇa of the Buddha and Śārīra-pūjā before the Arrival of Mahākāśyapa*, 2.) *The Parinirvāṇa of the Buddha and Śārīra-pūjā with Mahākāśyapa*, 3.) *The Cremation of the Body of the Buddha*, 4.) *The Guarding of the Relics*, 5.) *The Division and Distribution of the Relics*, 6.) *The Transportation of the Relics*, and 7.) *The Veneration of the Relics*.

¹³⁸ Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*.

¹³⁹ Johnston, *Aśvaghoṣa’s Buddhacarita*.

¹⁴⁰ E. B. Cowell, trans., *The Buddha-karita of Asvaghosha* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893).

¹⁴¹ Olivelle, *Life of the Buddha by Aśvaghoṣa*.

Despite the lack of *in situ* narrative reliefs and the inability of archaeologists and scholars to precisely reconstruct the main and subsidiary *stūpas* at Gandhāran complexes, the overall narrative cycle can be determined.

CHAPTER 4. THE THEORY OF MULTIVALENCE AND THE PARINIRVĀṆA CYCLE

The life of the Buddha was significant within Gandhāran visual narrative traditions because it justified the presence of relics and their central role in lay and monastic Buddhist ritual practice. This can be ascertained through the prolific construction of *stūpas* in Gandhara and the abundance of narrative reliefs at such sites. In addition to enlivening the site,¹⁴² the narrative reliefs and their arrangement at Gandhāran *stūpa* sites provides information regarding the nature and development of early Buddhist practices. A multivalent reading of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle of reliefs can reveal to a knowledgeable viewer the commonalities between Buddhist and Brahmanical funerary rituals.

Despite this obvious significance of the life of the Buddha, the exact function of and impetus for the representation of the sequential narrative of his life at Gandhāran sites has not been confirmed. Susan Huntington posits that the narration of the life of the Buddha was not of primary interest in early Buddhist art of South Asia until the appearance of the sequential narrative as seen in Gandhāra.¹⁴³ In her theory, acts of pilgrimage and veneration, not the life of the Buddha as a story itself, were the primary subject of narrative reliefs at earlier Buddhist sites such as Bhārhut and Sāñcī where the Buddha was not physically represented. In her view, when the setting suggests a location related to the life of the Buddha, it is because it is a *pīṭha*, a sacred location, that is being venerated at some point after the death of the Buddha. Dehejia similarly views the visual depictions of these settings as *tīrthas*, or sacred location. This, however, is only

¹⁴² Robert L. Brown, “Narrative as Icon: The Jātaka Stories in Ancient India and Southeast Asian Architecture,” in *Sacred Biography in the Buddhist Traditions of South and Southeast Asia*, ed. Juliane Schobner (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1997), 64-109.

¹⁴³ Huntington, “Early Buddhist Art and the Theory of Aniconism,” 405.

one of the possible interpretations in her opinion, since she sees early Buddhist art as multivalent—multiple concepts are expressed simultaneously in a single narrative panel.¹⁴⁴

Both art historians are here noting the association of *pīṭhas* or *tīrthas* with the above mentioned quote where the Buddha lists locations worthy of pilgrimage. In her theory of multivalence, Dehejia wisely notes that multiple layers of meaning can be interpreted from a single image. She asserts that as emblems of the Buddha, objects such as the *bodhi* tree, the *dharmacakra*, and the *stūpa*, through their multivalence, convey the *tīrtha* (location of the sacred event) and the presence of the Buddha simultaneously. Huntington does not agree with Dehejia that these emblems, which she calls *pīṭhas*, indicate the presence of the Buddha, but does admit that art has the inherent ability to convey multiple concepts at once.¹⁴⁵ The major difference in their arguments is the emphasis placed on equal simultaneous meanings by Dehejia and the varying degrees of significance in meaning identified by Huntington.

Without fully entering into the discussion of aniconism, it should be noted that Dehejia is specifically discussing aniconic representations of the Buddha, and is suggesting that the Buddha is indicated through indexical signs that suggest his presence.¹⁴⁶ While Huntington's primary problem with Dehejia's position—that the symbolic equation of emblems with the absence of the figure Buddha—is justified, she pushes the argument too far by dismissing the possibility that the presence of the Buddha is intentionally suggested. Even if the narrative panels do not show the anthropomorphic Buddha and are not read to contain an aniconic representation of him and do depict veneration at a later point in time, it is still possible that his presence could be

¹⁴⁴ Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art*, 36-54.

¹⁴⁵ Huntington, "Aniconism and the Multivalence of Emblems: Another Look," 114-5.

¹⁴⁶ Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art*, 41-2.

interpreted as being at that *tīrtha* or *pīṭha*. As was already stated, the Buddha told Ānanda that these locations would evoke his presence even after his *parinirvāṇa*.¹⁴⁷

Although the theory of multivalence emerged in the early 1990s as an explanation for the occurrence of aniconism in early Buddhist art of South Asia, a variation of the theory of multivalence can be used to begin to understand the function of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle and the contents of the narrative relief episodes from 1st-3rd century CE Gandhāran *stūpa* complexes.

Susan Huntington and Vidya Dehejia have made substantial contributions towards the understanding of early Buddhist art. The dialogue created in their publications on the subjects of aniconism and multivalence has provided a working set of concepts that can be used to interpret early Buddhist art. The topic of aniconism is not of concern *per se* in Gandhāra because the anthropomorphic Buddha is present in most narrative scenes (examples like Fig. 68 are rare exceptions), but it is important to consider aniconism due to its role in the development of the theory of multivalence as applied to early Buddhist art. The concept of multivalence, is very much applicable in the field of Gandhāran narrative art, however in a modified form from what developed out of Dehejia's and Huntington's works.

The theory of multivalence suggests that within the individual elements of a composition there exist multiple layers of meaning that are conveyed to the viewer/devotee both intentionally and through pre-existing mental associations.¹⁴⁸ This study proposes a method for applying the theory of multivalence to the context of 1st - 3rd century CE Gandhāran narrative reliefs through a preliminary case study of seven episodes from the *parinirvāṇa* cycle of reliefs. While this study

¹⁴⁷ Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 264.

¹⁴⁸ Karel R. van Kooij, "The Buddha Revisited: Ritualizing and Visualizing Sacred Places" *Marg: A Magazine of the Arts* 63, no. 2 (December 2011): no page numbers provided.

begins to explore the multivalence of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle, there are still many angles that could be pursued in future studies.

The idea of multivalence in visual narratives has an early South Asian counterpart in the literary and grammatical traditions of *śleṣa*. It is from this idea that both Huntington and Dehejia derived their initial understandings of multivalence in early Buddhist art, seemingly originally from John Huntington.¹⁴⁹ *Śleṣa* is the ability for a single Sanskrit statement to convey, simultaneously, multiple ideas when properly manipulated by its creator.¹⁵⁰ John Strong illustrates a relevant example of *śleṣa* in his interpretation of the term *tathāgata* (although he does not identify this as an example of *śleṣa*, he does use this as an example to show that there is a double-meaning at play in this Buddhist term). Due to the ambiguity created through *saṃdhi* in Sanskrit, this compound can be divided two ways. It can be read as both *tathā-āgata*, in which case the Buddha is referred to as the “thus-come-one”, while if it is read as *tathā-gata*, he is the “thus-gone-one”.¹⁵¹ Neither interpretation is incorrect, however they both highlight different aspects of the death of the Buddha. Knowing that this technique was long employed in literary traditions of South Asia, including the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* and the *Buddhacarita*, it is reasonable, as Dehejia and Huntington have suggested, to find a similar method at work in visual narratives as well.

This study has expanded upon the application of the theory of multivalence in an attempt to reveal the multiple perspectives and meanings conveyed through narrative reliefs that depict

¹⁴⁹ John C. Huntington, “The Iconography of Borobudur Revisited: The Concepts of *śleṣa* and *sarva[buddha]kaya*,” in *Ancient Indonesian Sculpture*, eds. Marijke J. Klokke and Pauline Lunsingh Scheurleer (Leiden: KITLV Press, 1994), 133-153.

¹⁵⁰ Yigal Bronner, *Extreme Poetry: The South Asian Movement of Simultaneous Narration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 3-9.

¹⁵¹ Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 230.

the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha. While Huntington suggests the study of the narrative reliefs in terms of representations, reminders, and reflections, these categories do not fit the study of Gandhāran art as well as they do the study of aniconic art.¹⁵² Instead, this study considers the basic Buddhist narrative as the primary representation and any additional layers of meanings as reflections of external influences and coeval socio-historical developments. Not only can the narrative reliefs that compose the *parinirvāṇa* cycle be considered to express multiple layers of concepts, but the overall cycle itself may as well. The *parinirvāṇa* cycle, as a sub-cycle in the life of the Buddha, can also be interpreted according to the theory of multivalence, as will be shown in the conclusion of this study.

First, the narrative reliefs of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle are considered as representations of a specific visual narrative with identifiable elements—including specific characters, settings, and events—that can be corroborated by contemporaneous Buddhist texts. In this way the narrative reliefs show a traditional connection to Buddhist practices as known in 1st - 3rd century CE Gandhāra. Second, the narrative reliefs also reflect the larger socio-cultural context out of which early Buddhism developed. These reflections vary greatly and could possibly be further divided in future studies, but for the time being these contextual studies will be considered together. These multivalent expressions can include a variety of concepts shared between Buddhist, Brahmanical, and other *śramaṇic* groups from the 5th century BCE that continued to develop through the activities of 1st - 3rd century CE Buddhist lay and monastic groups.

Through this examination of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle of narrative reliefs, a pattern has emerged that suggests that this cycle is one of many from the life of the Buddha that reflects the

¹⁵² Huntington, “Aniconism and the Multivalence of Emblems: Another Look,” 114.

concept of *āśramadharma* and Brahmanical *grhya* rituals. The *antyeṣṭi* (funeral sacrifice) and *śrāddha* (ancestral rituals) that are performed for the Buddha in the narrative relief cycle have multiple layers of meaning that are explored below. On occasion, another reflection of cross-cultural engagement can be observed through the incorporation of Kuṣāna, Central Asian, and Hellenistic elements that also appear in Gandhāran narrative reliefs, though the degree to which this can be interpreted as multivalence must be questioned. This third level of meaning seems to have more to do with the continuous movement of foreign groups (including, among others, merchants, artisans, and pilgrims) in the area of Gandhāra rather than with the development of the life of the Buddha in narrative form.¹⁵³ Multiple active trade routes and the presence of foreign coinage and objects bear witness to the active commercial center Gandhāra once was.¹⁵⁴

While the relationship between the funerary rituals of the Buddha and those of the Brahmanical traditions may have been circulating in the early Buddhist community, the concepts embodied and shared with the Central Asian and Hellenistic worlds may not have been as immediately available for viewers. Two large 1st century CE narrative reliefs from the Temple of Bel in Palmyra (figs. 69 and 70) bear striking compositional and stylistic—and possibly even ritual/conceptual—similarities with some of the episodes from the *parinirvāṇa* cycle in Gandhāra. Like Episodes Five and Six from the *parinirvāṇa* cycle, these two narrative panels depict a set of divided offerings placed on central altars (fig. 70) and a procession with ritual objects (fig. 69).

¹⁵³ Pia Brancaccio, “Close Encounters: Multicultural Systems in Ancient India,” in *On the Cusp of an Era: Art in the Pre-Kuṣāṇa World*, ed. Doris Meth Srinivasan (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 385-96.

¹⁵⁴ Neelis, *Early Buddhist Transmission and Trade Networks*, 183-228.

Although a comparison of Palmyrene and Gandhāran art calls attention to their similarities, it is unlikely that the average viewers/devotees at Gandhāran Buddhist *stūpas* would have created any type of mental association with the gods Malakbel and Aglibôl when they encountered narrative reliefs of the division of the relics by the *brāhmaṇa* Droṇa, despite the visual similarities. The analogous elements of Central Asian art and the Buddhist art of Gandhāra may more accurately be accounted for in terms of syncretism, rather than multivalence since the concepts developed from two different socio-religious contexts.¹⁵⁵ In the context of South Asian art, syncretism is the incorporation of foreign elements into a preexisting tradition wherein the nonnative figures or concepts are completely transformed, in some cases beyond recognition, by the appropriating culture.¹⁵⁶ This is distinct from the usage of multivalence in this study. The elements of Brahmanical *gṛhya* rituals that are incorporated into the early Buddhist tradition and Gandhāran narrative reliefs of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle are not significantly altered; their form and meaning is maintained because of fundamental similarities in Buddhist and Brahmanical funerary rituals.

The contrast of syncretism and multivalence is exemplified by the figure of Vajrapāṇi. This Buddhist figure—present in early Buddhist art, but absent from textual traditions—assimilates iconographic elements from the Hellenistic hero Herakles. While Vajrapāṇi takes on the appearance of Herakles—including his Nemean lion skin cloak and olive wood club—in the

¹⁵⁵ Jenny Rose, *Zoroastrianism* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 65-98.

¹⁵⁶ Shail Mayaram, “Syncretism,” in *Encyclopedia of Global Religions*, 2 vols., eds. Mark Juergensmeyer and Wade Clark Roof (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2012), 1250-2; Charles Stewart, “Syncretism and its Synonyms: Reflections on Cultural Mixture,” *Diacritics* 29, no. 3 (Autumn 1993): 40-62.

early Buddhist tradition, he maintains his identity as a Buddhist figure.¹⁵⁷ At most the heroic nature of Herakles has been syncretized with that of Vajrapāṇi, but a multivalent reading of the two figures was probably not intended in Gandhāran narrative reliefs. The prosperous trade routes that reached from Palmyra to Gandhāra—and beyond—allowed the transmission of artistic styles and religious ideas. As these ideas reached Gandhāra they were incorporated into local traditions, but as foreign concepts they did not retain their original meanings amongst unknowing viewers.

Removed from their initial contexts, Central Asian and Hellenist ideas and motifs were selectively chosen to express early Buddhist ideas, but do not convey multivalent meanings.¹⁵⁸ The theory of multivalence can be used to examine the relationship of Buddhist and Brahmanical practices that developed within the same geographic and temporal spaces because of their shared foundational concepts. Multivalence does not seem to be the best methodology for examining external artistic and social influences that were admitted via trade, conquest, and intermarriage.

Gandhāran narrative reliefs produced during the 1st - 3rd centuries CE organize the life of the Buddha in a way that reflects (yet also rejects) the *āśramadharma* or the *āśrama* system and its related *grhya* rituals. Even as Aśvaghoṣa portrays the Buddha as a royal householder who rejects the *āśramadharma*, throughout his life the Buddha still expresses knowledge and experience of Brahmanical life-cycle rituals.¹⁵⁹ Due to the multivalent nature of early Buddhist

¹⁵⁷ I-Tien Hsing, “Heracles in the East: The Diffusion and Transformation of His Image in the Arts of Central Asia, India, and Medieval China,” trans. William G. Crowell, *Asia Major* 18, no. 2 (2005): 103-154; Anna Filigenzi, “Ānanda and Vajrapāṇi: An Inexplicable Absence and a Mysterious Presence in Gandhāran Art,” in *Gandhāran Buddhism: Archaeology, Art, and Texts*, eds. Kurt A. Behrendt and Pia Branaccio (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 270-285. F. B. Flood, “Herakles and the ‘Perpetual Acolyte’ of the Buddha: Some Observations on the Iconography of Vajrapani in Gandharan Art,” *South Asian Studies* 5, no. 1 (1989): 17-27.

¹⁵⁸ Brancaccio, “Close Encounters: Multicultural Systems in Ancient India,” 385-96; Rose, *Zoroastrianism*, 65-98.

¹⁵⁹ Olivelle, *Life of the Buddha by Aśvaghoṣa*, xviii-xxii and xxxi-xliii.

narrative reliefs, the visual depictions are capable of revealing elements of Buddhist ritual and practice that are not explicitly stated in canonical texts. In order to fully consider the contents of the reliefs, Susan Huntington advocates for the study of South Asian art through internal evidence. By relying on internal evidence, which she defines as the components that are physically in the composition or properties that belong to the object, a more accurate understanding of the narrative can be gained.¹⁶⁰ This is not to say that these textual and social traditions are not similar—and in some cases nearly identical—to visual representations, but each area of study should be considered as independent components in the development of early Buddhist traditions.¹⁶¹ The narrative reliefs of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle can provide information regarding the life of the Buddha and lay and monastic ritual activity not explicitly found in texts.

On a primary level, the visual narratives function in a manner similar to that of the textual versions. They are representations of the traditional narrative of the life of the Buddha. Further, they are references to the larger socio-cultural milieu of both the Buddha and later practitioners. On their most literal level, the narrative reliefs reveal the narrative of the life of the Buddha with the static figure of the Buddha as the central focus. Beyond these identifiable moments that correspond with Buddhist *sūtras*, the reliefs, like the *Buddhacarita*, show that the Buddha was a full participant in the *āśrama* system from birth—only choosing to reject it in the middle of his life and to somewhat return to it at the time of his death. The active rituals and behaviors of Buddhist monks and the laity that are depicted around the static Buddha, as well as the treatment of the Buddha as a member of Brahmanical society allow the reliefs to be interpreted within a

¹⁶⁰ Huntington, “Aniconism and the Multivalence of Emblems: Another Look,” 134-37.

¹⁶¹ Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art*, 55-72; Brown, “Nature as Utopian Space on the Early Stūpas of India,” 63-80.

larger social context. An analysis of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle of episodes begins to identify some of the elements of Brahmanical society that were circulating between the time of the Buddha and 1st - 3rd century CE Buddhist communities.

The manner in which the life of the Buddha is presented at Gandhāran *stūpa* sites is cyclical. That is to say, the narrative sequence that represents the Buddha's life from birth through death (along with moments before and after) are composed of a series of episodes that form consecutive cycles and sub-stories within his life. A full study of the division of the many cycles of Gandhāran narrative reliefs cannot be explored in this study (though the idea is intriguing), but the *parinirvāṇa* cycle will provide a representative example.

Despite the limited evidence in Buddhist *sūtras* and *vinayas*, monastic figures were actively involved in the life-cycle rituals of lay members of the *saṃgha*, the householders of the Buddhist community.¹⁶² The presence of monastic figures was required during the funerary rituals of lay and monastic members of *saṃgha*, however their role and function at these events is not precisely recorded in the early textual traditions. Examinations of Gandhāran narrative reliefs have proven useful in identifying aspects of ritual practice and historical contexts that are not described in early Buddhist literature.¹⁶³ This is true for the many life-cycle rituals that were performed throughout the Buddha's life and in the lives of later practitioners, including those in Gandhāra. In the narrative of his life—in both *sūtra* and *kāvya* renditions—the Buddha is treated as though he lives in a Brahmanical society.

¹⁶² Gregory Schopen, "The Ritual Obligations and Donor Roles of Monks in the Pāli *Vinaya*," in *Bones, Stones, and Buddhist Monks: Collected Papers on the Archaeology, Epigraphy, and Texts of Monastic Buddhism in India*, ed. Gregory Schopen (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 72-85.

¹⁶³ Giuseppe De Marco, "The Stūpa as a Funerary Monument New Iconographical Evidence," *East and West* 37, no. 1/3 (December 1987): 191-246; Hans T. Bakker, "Monuments to the Dead in Ancient North India," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 50 (2007): 11-47.

The *grhyasūtras*, a set of texts from the *kalpasūtras* (which also includes the *śrautasūtras* and *dharmasūtras*) that deal with brahmanical rituals growing out of the Vedic tradition, focus on significant rituals in the life of a householder.¹⁶⁴ The events that are given particular attention and ritual instruction are “the procreation of children, their initiation and education, their eventual marriage, and finally death and funerary ceremonies.”¹⁶⁵ This same series of events is emphasized in the visual narration of the life of the Buddha at Gandhāran *stūpa* complexes. There are visual parallels in the narrative relief cycles of the Buddha’s birth, his reception/ bathing by Vedic gods, the visit of the *ṛṣi* Āsita, his education, his marriage to Yaśodhāra, and his death. The narrative reliefs show these events as highly ritualized and utilize many of the same settings, characters, activities, objects, and compositions.

In addition to narrating these typical *grhya* rituals, relief panels also included the depiction of the unique moments that depart from *āśramadharmā*—such as his abandonment of royal life, his quest for enlightenment at a young age, his achievement of *nirvāṇa*, and his subsequent teachings and miracles. As Olivelle has shown, in the *Buddhacarita*, the Buddha and his *saddharma* are placed in conversation with numerous other forms of *dharma* circulating in South Asia during the 1st - 2nd century CE.¹⁶⁶ By locating the Buddha in the *āśrama* system and having him reject it in order to find a supposedly better path to *nirvāṇa*—or *moskṣa*—the legitimacy of the Buddhist pursuit of liberation at any age is reaffirmed.¹⁶⁷

In his immense study of the concept of *dharma*, Hiltebeitel also traces the historical, social, and religious development and usage of the term *dharma* from its initial formation in the

¹⁶⁴ Hiltebeitel, *Dharma*, 182-189.

¹⁶⁵ Olivelle, “Explorations in the Early History of Dharmaśāstra,” 179.

¹⁶⁶ Olivelle, *Life of the Buddha by Āśvaghoṣa*, xvii-xlix.

¹⁶⁷ Hiltebeitel, *Dharma*, 656-83.

Vedas (with reference to both *ṛta*, cosmic order, and *dhárman*, upholder/foundation) through Ásvaghoṣa's c. 1st century CE examination of its multivalent meanings in the *Buddhacarita*. Instead of analyzing Buddhist and Brahmanical concepts of *dharma* as separate developments, Hiltebeitel, like Olivelle, proposes that these texts were actually produced in response to each other. He divides what he has categorized as twelve major and two minor classical “*Dharma* texts” into four chronological and thematic clusters.¹⁶⁸

Cluster 1 corresponds with the early Mauryan period and includes the Aśokan edicts, the *Āpastamba Dharmasūtra*, and the Buddhist Nikāyas. Cluster 2 coincides with the later Mauryan period and includes the Buddhist Abhidharma, Buddhist Vinaya, *Gautama Dharmasūtra*, and *Baudhāyana Dharmasūtra*. The texts in Cluster 3 are concurrent with or slightly later than the Śuṅga-Kaṇva period and include the *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Manu Smṛti*/*Mānavadharmasāstra*. Cluster 4 is attributed to the post-Kaṇva to early Kuṣāṇa period and includes the final two major classical “*Dharma* texts,” the *Vasiṣṭha Dharmasūtra* and Ásvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita*, and the two minor classical “*Dharma* texts” the *Yuga Purāṇa* and the *Prophecy of Kātyāyana*, as well as other unspecified minor texts.

Hiltebeitel's work on *dharma* can help define the multivalent concepts that are depicted in narrative reliefs from the *parinirvāṇa* cycle at Gandhāran monastic and *stūpa* sites. Many of the uses of *dharma* that are explored by Hiltebeitel can be related to *grhya* rituals. The various roles played by specific figures (the Buddha, monks, the laity, the elite and *kṣatriya*, both groups and individuals) are consistently represented as performing specific actions in Gandhāran narrative reliefs, their *dharma* is ritualized. In the *parinirvāṇa* cycle, these actions reflect and

¹⁶⁸ Hiltebeitel, *Dharma*, 8.

reinforce a set of designated roles assigned during the preparation of the Buddha's body for cremation and the creation and installment of the relics. Schopen has proven that the monastic community as a whole was not excluded from performing *pūjā* for either the *śarīra*, body, of the Buddha and or his *śarīrika*, relics.¹⁶⁹

Under the application of the theory of multivalence, narrative relief cycles at Gandhāran *stūpa* sites may be interpreted as conveying similar ideas. Along the square bases of *stūpas* and the drums of larger ones, the life of the Buddha is represented in a linear mode that progresses from his conception (or previous lives) through his funerary rites (the veneration at *stūpas* even centuries later may have still constituted these rites). The *harmikā* further emphasizes the four specific sites that the Buddha listed to Ānanda in the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* (5.8).¹⁷⁰ The four sites—his final birth, his *nirvāṇa*, his first teaching, and his *parinirvāṇa*—are the main events in his life that define him as a Buddha and distinguish him from a typical householder or other renunciates. The same is the case with smaller *stūpas* where on each of the four sides a sequence of episodes narrating these four events was depicted. It seems that when a limited amount of space or a particularly sacred component of the *stūpa* is involved the moments that produced his Buddhahood and ultimate liberation from *samsāra* (transmigration) are emphasized. The scenes that are shown on the lower drum, where more space was available, further elaborated upon his life story. It is in this architectural space that aspects of Brahmanical *grhya* rituals mainly appear. The *parinirvāṇa* cycle is unique in that it is emphasized in both cases. Two aspects of the life of the Buddha are highlighted through the narrative sequences of Gandhāran *stūpa* sites: that of his path towards absolute liberation and his life as a royal householder.

¹⁶⁹ Schopen, "Monks and the Relic Cult in the *Mahāparinibbāṇa-sutta*," 99-113.

¹⁷⁰ Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 263-74.

Rather than isolating particular emblems and studying them as abstract aspects of an overall composition, as was initially done by Vidya Dehejia, this variation of the theory of multivalence will engage with narrative elements—namely figures and their actions—and not emblems, that compose the overall story in an attempt to uncover multiple layers of meaning that are being conveyed.¹⁷¹ The goal of this application of the theory of multivalence is to shed light on the multicultural environment of Gandhāra as a hub of early Buddhism in which these images were produced. This application of the theory of multivalence is useful, though it is not exhaustive nor can it always be applied equally to every aspect of the narrative composition. Despite these drawbacks, it is a reliably systematic way to analyze and develop preliminary interpretations of the multiple layers of meaning in early Gandhāran Buddhist narrative reliefs.

¹⁷¹ Vidya Dehejia, “Aniconism and the Multivalence of Emblems,” 44-66.

CHAPTER 5. NARRATIVE RELIEF PANELS FROM THE PARINIRVĀṆA CYCLE

The *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha, as it is described in textual traditions, is itself multivalent. The Buddha from birth was possessed with the multivalent quality of a *mahāpuruṣa*. He was capable of achieving the status of either a *cakravartin* or a *buddha* in his present life. After having encountered the suffering that is inseparable from life, the Buddha abandoned the path of a *cakravartin* for one that would lead to his ultimate liberation from the cycle of *samsāra* upon his *parinirvāṇa*. It is curious that at his death the Buddha would request a return to the life from which he had previously turned away and one would expect there to be a clear reason why this is the case. Many scholars have offered opinions regarding the motivation for this reversion.

Strong suggests that underlying the Buddha's request to Ānanda is the fact that, "not only is he to be cremated *like* a *cakravartin* king, but he is also to be cremated *unlike* a *sannyāsin*."¹⁷² If the Buddha had been treated like a *sannyāsin* (a renunciate), his remains would have either been left to decay in a wayside location or immersed into water.¹⁷³ According to Jonathan Parry,

The ascetic, who has performed his own mortuary rites at the time of initiation, is already dead to the social world and is said to remain on earth as a wandering ghost. His corpse is either immersed or buried.¹⁷⁴

Taking this point even further, the Buddha is not dying in the manner of a *sannyāsin*, but as a *grhastha* (a householder).¹⁷⁵ He has returned to a life that revolves around rituals. The primary difference, as mentioned by Strong and explored in great depth by Kane, between these two modes of handling the deceased are the byproducts of the ritual and veneration awarded to the

¹⁷² Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 115.

¹⁷³ Jonathan Parry, *Death in Banaras* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 184-88.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 184.

¹⁷⁵ Bronkhorst, *Buddhism in the Shadow of Brahmanism*, 208-24.

dead.¹⁷⁶ The Buddha's request not only differentiates him from the *saṃnyāsins*, but it also reidentifies him with an elite version of a *gṛhastha* who still engages in rituals.¹⁷⁷

The concept of *āśramadharmā* developed alongside the formalization of the *gṛhyasūtras* in the late Vedic period.¹⁷⁸ Both of these systems were rooted in the performance of particular *saṃskāra* (life-cycle rituals) in the proper time of life and under the proper circumstances. Prior to the Buddha's departure from his *kṣatriya* home, he was a full participant in this *āśrama* system. According to tradition, he carried out all of the *saṃskāra* that were required for a *gṛhastha*. Narrative reliefs from Gandhāra also represent the birth, childhood, marriage, and family life of the Buddha not as an outsider, but as an active participant in the *āśramadharmā*.

The *āśrama* system initially consisted of three different paths that an individual could choose to pursue in life, but over several centuries it was transformed into a set of four temporary life stages.¹⁷⁹ By the 1st century CE, the four stages of the *āśrama* system consisted of the *bramacārin*, *gṛhastha*, *vānaprastha*, and *saṃnyāsin* phases. As an absolute renunciate from Brahmanical society, a *saṃnyāsin* abandoned his right to participate in rituals. As such, he was not granted a funeral that involved a specific ritual, but was left to decay in a wayside location. A death in such a manner would not have produced the relics of the Buddha.

The *antyeṣṭi* (the last rites or funeral sacrifice) were necessary for the Buddha because this funerary rite involved a careful cremation process that produced distilled relics of the Buddha.¹⁸⁰ The historicity of the selection of this ritual must be called into question since only

¹⁷⁶ Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, 179-266.

¹⁷⁷ Olivelle, *The Āśrama System*, 123.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 25-30.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 112-7.

¹⁸⁰ Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, 202-31.

this particular *saṃskāra* could create the relics that are venerated in early Buddhist practices. The narrative of the life of the Buddha could have introduced the concept of the funeral of the Buddha as a *cakravartin* to account for the presence of relic veneration.

Brahmanical funeral rituals are described in the multiple *grhyasūtras*.¹⁸¹ Kane states that, “It will be noticed that the Buddhist ritual, though simple, agrees closely with some of the rules of Āsv. gr.”¹⁸² The similarities between the *Āśvalāyana Grhyasūtra* and the last rites following the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha are found in the visual narratives, as well as the literary and doctrinal traditions. There are many elements of the Brahmanical funeral ritual that are excluded, but the ones that are present will be noted as they occur in each episode of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle.

For an as yet unknown reason, by the 3rd century BCE, the narrative of the Buddha evolved to include a funeral rite that produced relics that could be dispersed and utilized by practitioners in distant lands. The introduction of the concept of cremation was essential to this shift and appears to correspond with the interaction of late Vedic/Brahmanical groups—who had prescriptions for cremation—with those of Greater Magadha.¹⁸³ This development is intricately connected with the growth of urbanization, the emergence of *kṣatriya* powers (especially those associated with the *mahājanapadas*), and the flourishing of trade systems that connected the multiple regions of South Asia with Central Asia, China, and the Mediterranean, especially through Gandhāra. The tradition of early Buddhism was not isolated; it actively grew and evolved alongside contemporary traditions beginning in the 5th century BCE.

¹⁸¹ Hermann Oldenberg, trans., *The Grihya-Sūtras: Rules of Vedic Domestic Ceremonies*, part 1, in *Sacred Books of the East*, vol. xxix, ed. F. Max Müller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), 236-59.

¹⁸² Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, 235.

¹⁸³ Bronkhorst, *Greater Magadha*, 273-74.

As Bronkhorst concluded, “Once Buddhism had resolved the issue of how one could be a layman in society and yet be counted as a devout Buddhist, its competition with Brahmanism took a different shape.”¹⁸⁴ Buddhism was able to spread into multiple layers of society—including the worlds of the *kṣatriya* rulers and the householder members of the laity—beyond the confines of the monastic and Brahmanical domains. As will become evident through an examination of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle depicted in Gandhāran narrative reliefs, the funeral of the Buddha in the manner of a *cakravartin* engaged the laity, monks, and elite rulers in ways that were appropriate for their own lives. In this way, 6th century BCE - 3rd century CE Buddhist and Brahmanical concepts of *dharma* were referenced in Buddhist visual material. The various roles played by specific figures (the Buddha, monks, the laity, the elite and *kṣatriya*, both groups and individuals) are consistently represented as performing specific actions in Gandhāran narrative reliefs. It is now well established, in large part due to Gregory Schopen, that monks were not prohibited from handling the body and remains of the Buddha after death.¹⁸⁵ These actions reflect and reinforce the roles first noted during the preparation of the Buddha’s body for cremation and later in the creation and installment of the relics, as portrayed in the *parinirvāṇa* cycle of narrative reliefs.

The theory of multivalence can be used to interpret the underlying socio-religious impetus for the particular way in which the *parinirvāṇa* cycle was represented in Gandhāran narrative art. The multivalent representation of the Buddha as both a *buddha* and a *cakravartin/ghastha* would have been a widely available idea circulating in 1st - 3rd century CE Gandhāra. Upon viewing the narrative reliefs from the *parinirvāṇa* cycle, knowledgeable viewers would

¹⁸⁴ Bronkhorst, *Buddhism in the Shadow of Brahmanism*, 236; Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, 179-266.

¹⁸⁵ Schopen, “Monks and the Relic Cult in the *Mahāparinibbāna-sutta*,” 99-113.

have been able to contemplate the role of the Buddha in each position—as a *buddha* and as a *cakravartin*.¹⁸⁶ On one level, the Buddha’s funeral in the way of a *cakravartin* was included in the visual and literary narrative traditions to account for the practice of relic veneration. Further, a multivalent reading of this narrative also shows the Buddha’s return to his role as a *gr̥hastha* and a participant in life-cycle rituals. These two options reflect the paths of the *upāsaka/upāsikā* who still engaged in society and that of a *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī* who had renounced the social world.

The *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha is an essential component of narrative sequences on the lower portion of the drum and on the *harmikā* in Gandhāra. As has been explained above, the order and original context of the narrative reliefs considered in this study are not known, but the general cycle of events can be established. The seven episodes of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle identified in this study are: 1.) *The Parinirvāṇa of the Buddha and Śarīra-pūjā before the Arrival of Mahākāśyapa*, 2.) *The Parinirvāṇa of the Buddha and Śarīra-pūjā with Mahākāśyapa*, 3.) *The Cremation of the Body of the Buddha*, 4.) *The Guarding of the Relics*, 5.) *The Division and Distribution of the Relics*, 6.) *The Transportation of the Relics*, and 7.) *The Veneration of the Relics*. While various combinations of the episodes could have occurred, it is unlikely that these seven moments were ever represented in this exact order on a Gandhāran *stūpa*.

It seems as though Episodes One and Two would not have occurred in the same narrative sequence since, in most cases, they represent the same moments. If they were represented at the same sites, Episode Two would have likely been used for the *harmikā*, as will be discussed, and Episode One would have been incorporated into the larger life-cycle. These seven episodes function as categories that can organize collections of Gandhāran narrative reliefs into similar

¹⁸⁶ Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art*, 32-35; Brown, “Narrative as Icon: The Jātaka Stories in Ancient India and Southeast Asian Architecture,” 64-109.

groupings. The precise narrative moment represented varies within each episode, particularly Episode One. The variation depends upon the exact moment of the event that has been emphasized within the broader episode.

A few intact sequential orderings of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle have been documented, despite the lack of context in most cases. Architectural relief elements that included more than one episode per stone panel can elucidate the arrangement of now isolated images. The placement of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle is confirmed through complex narrative panels such as the false gable (fig. 24), complete sets of *harmikā* narrative relief panels (figs. 65 and 67), and the permanently affixed panels from smaller *stūpas* (figs. 25, 26, 27, 36, 37, 38, 47, 49, 50, 57, and 59).

While these sequences do not include every episode, they do corroborate the general order found in other categorizations of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle and related textual traditions. This false gable from Takht-i-Bahi features four primary scenes from the end of life of the Buddha. The topmost scene is unidentified, but appears to show the Buddha walking and teaching.¹⁸⁷ Below this scenes from top to bottom, are: Episode Two: *The Parinirvāṇa of the Buddha and Śarīra-pūjā with Mahākāśyapa*, Episode Five: *The Distribution of the Relics*, and Episode Seven: *The Veneration of the Relics*. The *harmikā* in the Freer Gallery depicts a typical sequence for this architectural feature: the birth of the Buddha, his *nirvāṇa*, his first teaching, and his *parinirvāṇa*. A rather unique example of a possible *harmikā* is in the Peshawar Museum (fig. 67).¹⁸⁸ All four reliefs were carved onto a single block of stone, thus making their sequence undeniable. Three of

¹⁸⁷ Robert L. Brown, "The Walking Tilya Tepe Buddha: A Lost Prototype," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute, New Series*, 14 (2000): 77-87; Robert L. Brown, "God on Earth: The Walking Buddha in the Art of South and Southeast Asia," *Artibus Asiae*, 50, no. 1/2 (1990): 73-107.

¹⁸⁸ D. B. Spooner, *Handbook to the Sculptures in the Peshawar Museum* (Bombay: Thacker and Company, 1910), 77-8.

the four sides directly relate to the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha (figs. 8, 30, 35), while the fourth side shows the Buddha seated in meditation, flanked by Indra and Brahma (fig. 66).¹⁸⁹

The still attached narrative panels that would have adorned smaller *stūpas* show all seven of the episodes considered in this study. Combinations include: 1.) *The Parinirvāṇa of the Buddha and Śarīra-pūjā without Mahākāśyapa* and *The Cremation of the Body of the Buddha*, 2.) *The Parinirvāṇa of the Buddha and Śarīra-pūjā with Mahākāśyapa* and *The Cremation of the Body of the Buddha*, 3.) *The Cremation of the Body of the Buddha* and *The Guarding of the Relics*, 4.) *The Guarding of the Relics* and *The Division and Distribution of the Relics*, 5.) *The Parinirvāṇa of the Buddha and Śarīra-pūjā without Mahākāśyapa*, *The Cremation of the Body* and *The Division and Distribution of the Relics*, 6.) *The Guarding of the Relics* and *The Division and Distribution of the Relics*, 7.) *The Parinirvāṇa of the Buddha and Śarīra-pūjā with Mahākāśyapa*, *The Transportation of the Relics* and *The Veneration of Relics*, 7.) *The Guarding of the Relics* and *The Veneration of the Relics*, and 8.) *The Transportation of the Relics* and *The Veneration of the Relics*.

Based on these eight configurations, the two *harmikās*, and the false gable, the sequential order of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle is generally suggested. This same narrative structure is found in the textual traditions of the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* and the *Buddhacarita*. Despite the lack of context, Gandhāran narrative reliefs from the *parinirvāṇa* cycle can be categorized as sequential episodes that allow the contents to be explored at an integrated level.

¹⁸⁹ H. Hargreaves, *Handbook to the Sculptures in the Peshawar Museum* (Calcutta: Government of India Central Publication Branch, 1930), 91-92; Ingholt, *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan*, 94, 96, and 99.

Episode One: Parinirvāṇa and Śarīra-Pūjā of the Buddha without Mahākāśyapa

The first episode represented in the *parinirvāṇa* cycle of narrative reliefs depicts the moment immediately following *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha and the beginning of *śarīra-pūjā* without the presences of the monk Mahākāśyapa (figs. 1-7, possibly also seen in figs. 8-10, 21, 22, 27, and 49). In both the *Buddhacarita* and the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta*, the Buddha was aware of his impending death. Following his final rainy season in the village of Venugramaka (Veṇumatī¹⁹⁰ or Beluva¹⁹¹) the Buddha engaged in a closing journey through the territories of Northern India (possibly depicted in the topmost panel of fig. 24). He entered the realm of Vaiśālī and visited the Cāpala caitya near the Markaṭa pool.¹⁹² At this location the Buddha once again encountered Māra, the embodiment of his enemy.¹⁹³ As Aśvaghoṣa described him,

When that great seer, who was born in a line of royal seers, sat down there with the pledge to win release, the world rejoiced, and yet Mara, foe of true dharma, shook with fright. The one that people in the world call god Kama, the one with flower arrows and colorful bow, the one who oversees the working of passions, that same one they call Mara, the foe of release.¹⁹⁴

Māra is assimilated with the concept of the god Kama, as well as the god of death Yama.¹⁹⁵ The term Māra developed a four-fold meaning that was expressed through four aspects. The four types of Māra are *devaputramāra*, *kleśamāra*, *skandhamāra* and *mṛtyumāra*. Through his attainment of *nirvāṇa* and *parinirvāṇa*, the Buddha defeated all four varieties of death and

¹⁹⁰ Johnston, *Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita*, 75.

¹⁹¹ Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 244.

¹⁹² Johnston, *Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita*, 75. Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 245-47.

¹⁹³ Patricia E. Karetzky "Māra, Buddhist Deity of Death and Desire" *East and West* 32 (December 1982): 75-92.

¹⁹⁴ Olivelle, *Life of the Buddha by Aśvaghoṣa*, 375.

¹⁹⁵ Alex Wayman, "Studies in Yama and Māra," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 3, no. 2 (1959): 112-131; Alex Wayman "Studies in Yama and Māra," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 3, no. 1 (1959): 44-73.

desire.¹⁹⁶ During this encounter with Māra on the bank of the Markaṭa, after a round of pestering, the Buddha acknowledged that he would achieve his *parinirvāṇa* in three months time. The environment responded to this decision,

At the moment that He abandoned His bodily life, the earth staggered like a drunken woman, and great firebrands fell from the quarters, like a line of stones from Meru, when it is colored with fire. Similarly Indra's thunderbolts flashed unceasingly on all sides, full of fire and accompanied by lightning; and flames blazed everywhere, as if wishing to burn up the world at the end of the aeon.¹⁹⁷

This response to the Buddha's fixing of his lifespan has similarities with Brahmanical foretellings of the time of death. The *Śāntiparvan*, the twelfth book of the *Mahābhārata*, identifies numerous types of signs that one encounters as the time of death approaches, much like the Buddha experienced.¹⁹⁸ The *parinirvāṇa* cycle of reliefs at Gandhāran *stūpa* and *vihāra* sites begins after these three final months, once the Buddha has reached the territory of the Malla. This study has not located any Gandhāran reliefs of the offering of the final meal in the Mallas town of Pāpā by Cuṇḍa.

Episode One shows the Buddha either in the moment of death or already having passed into *parinirvāṇa* in the town of Kuśinagarī. This episode narrates the immediate reaction of a large group of individuals to the *parinirvāṇa* and the performance of particular funeral rites for the Buddha in the manner of a *cakravartin*. As has been explained above, the multivalent role of the Buddha as a *cakravartin* at the moment of his death is represented in the narrative reliefs. This episode includes all narrative reliefs from the *parinirvāṇa* cycle in which the Buddha is shown laying on his side between twin *śāla* trees outside of the city walls of Kuśinagarī or

¹⁹⁶ Wayman, "Studies in Yama and Māra," 116-125.

¹⁹⁷ Johnston, *Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita*, 75.

¹⁹⁸ Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, 181.

carried on his funeral bier coffin (typically the right side, but figs. 3 and 5 are exceptions). He is surrounded by monastic, lay, and potentially divine figures with the noted absence of Mahākāśyapa. Mahākāśyapa is not present during this episode, and any scenes that feature him are included in Episode Two.

At least seven of the sixty images in this study belong to this episode. Due to damage or ambiguous representations, it is unclear in some cases whether or not Mahākāśyapa is present (figs. 8-10, 21, 22, 27, and 49). Beyond the static image of the Buddha in the state of his *parinirvāṇa*, three primary activities are represented in this episode. The narrative reliefs included in this moment depict the reactions of the monks and the Mallas of Kuśinagarī, the *śarīra-pūjā* (preparation of the body for cremation with the associated *pūjā* performed), and the transportation of the body of the Buddha by Mallas to the site of cremation.¹⁹⁹ In the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta*, the events depicted in Episode One do not mark the start of the text, but are found in the sixth and final section of the *Sutta*. The moments that are depicted in the narrative reliefs in the first episode of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle begin at verse 6.10 and continue with the reactions of the monks, laity, and gods in verses 6.11-6.12.²⁰⁰ In the *Buddhacarita*, the *parinirvāṇa* is explained at 26.92 in canto 26 entitled “The Mahāparinirvāṇa” and the reactions of the monks, laity, and gods continue through verse 60 of canto 27, “Eulogy of Nirvāṇa.”²⁰¹

In scenes where the body of the Buddha is stationary—compared to when his bier is carried to the cremation ground—he is depicted on an altar-like bed in the center of the composition (figs. 1-4). As Parry, though speaking of later Brahmanical traditions, has

¹⁹⁹ Schopen, “Monks and the Relic Cult in the *Mahāparinibbāṇa-sutta*,” 100-13.

²⁰⁰ Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 271-72.

²⁰¹ Johnston, *Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita*, 102-12.

explained, "...death, and more especially cremation, are symbolically constructed as a sacrificial offering of the self to the gods."²⁰²

In narrative scenes where the Buddha is not centered (fig. 3), there is usually damage to relief and the Buddha would have originally been the core of a fairly symmetrical image.

Flanking the bed of the Buddha are two *śāla* trees. In fig. 1 these trees are occupied by a *yakṣī* or *śālabhañjikā*, however the trees in 2 and 4 are not. The textiles that adorn the bed of the Buddha and the legs of the bed vary between reliefs. Doris Meth Srinivasan and Jorinde Ebert have both considered these features at length.²⁰³ The Buddha is fully wrapped in burial cloths that resemble his *saṃghāti* (monastic robes). In figs. 1-3 his face is covered, but in fig. 4 his face is shown. When the Buddha's face is depicted he is shown as though in a peaceful state of rest with his eyes closed. According to the textual traditions, the Buddha was wrapped in 500 layers of alternating cloths that were reduced to two after the cremation. The significance of this change has been debated by many scholars—including Jean Przyluski, Andrea Bareau, and Alfred Foucher.²⁰⁴ Strong has concluded, based on a comprehensive study of these past opinions, that the event represents the Buddha's dual role as both a *cakravartin* and a *buddha*.

Fig. 1 shows the burial shrouds of the Buddha covered in small carved flowers. In "The Nature and Use of the Bodily Relics of the Buddha in Gandhāra," Robert Brown explores the inclusion of small gold flowers in Gandhāran reliquaries (fig. 71) and their relationship to elite

²⁰² Parry, *Death in Banaras*, 158.

²⁰³ Ebert, Parinirvana, 95-115. Doris Meth Srinivasan, "Local Crafts in Early Gandhāran Art," in *Gandhāran Buddhism: Archaeology, Art, and Texts*, eds. Kurt A. Behrendt, and Pia Branaccio (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 243-269.

²⁰⁴ Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 101-5.

nomadic burials (fig. 72).²⁰⁵ Brown relates the presence of these golden flowers in reliquaries to the 1st century BCE-1st century CE royal burials at Tilya Tepe, in what is today northern Afghanistan. These opulent burials are thought to have belonged to one of the branches of the Kuṣāṇa who had not yet moved south into Gandhāra. At this site, there is evidence that hundreds of small gold flowers were sewn onto the burial shrouds of the royal figures (Figs. 72-73). Considering the potential relationship between the Tilya Tepe grave sites and the Kuṣāṇa who occupied Gandhāra during the period of production of the narrative reliefs in this study, it is possible that the flowers carved onto the burial shrouds of the Buddha in fig. 1 have a multivalent meaning. The carved flowers could depict the c. 1st century BCE - 1st century CE Central Asian tradition of adorning the elite deceased with an abundance of gold in addition to the textual explanation. According to the *Buddhacarita*, the *śāla* trees produced or cried down flowers in honor of the Buddha at the moment of *parinirvāṇa* in 26.98²⁰⁶ and additional flowers were cast down by elephants residing in Indra's heaven during the *śarīra-pūjā* in 27.66.²⁰⁷

This may be considered to be an example of the multivalence of *rājadharmā* that is reflected in royal burial of the Buddha. Verardi has shown through an analysis of sculptures of the Kuṣāṇa rulers from Maṭ and Surkh Kotal that, although they were foreigners not born into any *varṇa*, they did embrace the *cakravartin* ideal and attempted to emulate the model of a universal ruler.²⁰⁸ The concept of a *cakravartin* in the early Buddhist and Brahmanical traditions

²⁰⁵ Robert L. Brown, "The Nature and Use of the Bodily Relics of the Buddha in Gandhāra," in *Gandhāran Buddhism: Archaeology, Art, and Texts*, eds. Kurt A. Behrendt and Pia Brancaccio (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 183-209.

²⁰⁶ Johnston, *Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita*, 103.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 112.

²⁰⁸ Giovanni Verardi, "The Kuṣāṇa Emperors as Cakravartins," *East and West* 33, no. 1/4 (December 1983): 225-294.

is quite vague. The usage of the *cakravartin* ideal in the early Buddhist tradition shows the incorporations of Vedic/Brahmanical understandings of universal/cosmic authority and protection. The introduction of the *cakravartin* ruler cannot be separated from the coeval growth of *kṣatriya* influences beginning in the late Vedic period through the formalization of Buddhist narratives in the 3rd century BCE.²⁰⁹

The figure of Vajrapāṇi may be represented in figs. 1 and 2, however there is not enough clear iconography to determine his identity. Vajrapāṇi is not found in any early Buddhist text, but, as mentioned earlier, was consistently shown with the Buddha in Gandhāran narrative reliefs once the Buddha reached enlightenment. In fig. 1 the youthful figure with a full-head of hair by the head of the Buddha could be Vajrapāṇi, but there is no evidence of a *vajra*. Fig. 2 is damaged, but probably depicts Vajrapāṇi at the center of the composition, directly behind the bed of the deceased Buddha. Vajrapāṇi will not be considered in terms of multivalence in this study due to his complex foreign origins, as explained above.

An assembly of monks is present in these narrative reliefs (figs. 1-4). The number of monks varies from one to six and at least three of the monks can be specifically identified in this episode. Figure 1 provides an example of this. By the head of the Buddha are the monks Ānanda and Anuruddha. Their identities can be determined based on their behaviors and reactions to the death of the Buddha. In the textual traditions, as has been noted, Ānanda was deeply concerned with the death of the Buddha. He has not yet become an *arhat* and is not fully detached from the emotions of death. The monk Anuruddha is shown in many narrative reliefs pulling the distraught Ānanda up from the ground. In the *Buddhacarita* Anuruddha and Ānanda discuss the

²⁰⁹ J. Gonda, *Ancient Indian Kingship*, (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 123-8.

Buddha and his *dharma* throughout the night following the Buddha's death to reassure Ānanda. The gesture of Anuruddha in this relief may reference the emotional support that he provided Ānanda in the text.

The monk that is depicted seated in front of the Buddha's couch, in some cases with his back toward the viewer, can be identified as Subhadra. Subhadra's reaction to the death of the Buddha is exactly the opposite from that of Ānanda. Whereas Ānanda was not yet an *arhat*, Subhadra had recently—just prior to the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa*—reached this higher status as soon as he accepted the path of the Buddha. Rather than prostrate himself in mourning before the Buddha—like Ānanda—Subhadra meditates on the death of the Buddha. Positioned beside Subhadra in fig. 4 is a tripod with a water-pot. This *tridaṇḍin* is a reference to Subhadra's recent occupation as a renunciate. Ihsan Ali and Muhammad Naeem Qazi, in their study of narrative reliefs of the life of the Buddha in the Peshawar Museum, have suggested that this object may not simply depict Subhadra's water-pot, but may also show a vessel that holds the oil that would be used to cremate the Buddha.²¹⁰ This point is interesting, especially when compared with the similar position of the flame that is used to ignite the pyre in fig. 8. This potentially shows the participation of monks in the funeral of the Buddha and corroborates Schopen's findings in textual traditions.²¹¹

When the Mallas arrive in the *śāla* grove they lamented the death of the Buddha.²¹² They express their unique reactions in the visual representation, as is described in 27.59,

²¹⁰ Ihsan Ali and Muhammad Naeem Qazi. *Gandharan Sculptures in the Peshawar Museum (Life Story of Buddha)* (Mansehra NWFP-Pakistan: Hazara University, 2008), 256-257.

²¹¹ Schopen, "The Ritual Obligations and Donor Roles of Monks in the Pāli *Vinaya*," 72-85.

²¹² Johnston, *Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita*, 111; Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 272-3.

Thus some wailed piteously there, others brooded, bowed down like chariot-horses; some uttered cries, others flung themselves on the ground. Each man behaved in accordance with his nature (*sattva*).²¹³

This expressive display of the Mallas is conveyed through their upraised arms and strained facial expressions. Most of the narrative reliefs in Episode One depict three elite male Malla figures. These figures can be identified as such through their clothing which consists of an *uttarīya*, *paridhāna*, and *dhoti*, turbans with medallions adorning their hair, and excessive jewelry on their ears, chests, and arms. They are almost always found in a row behind the couch of the Buddha. While deities are present in Gandhāran representations of the *parinirvāṇa*, they are quite rare and do not occur in any of the narrative reliefs collected in this first episode. The similarity in appearance of elite *kṣatriya* and *devas* makes it difficult to differentiate the two if a distinguishing halo is not present to mark the divine figure. None of the figures depicted in episode one possess halos. It is, however, possible that the artist embraced the similarities of their iconography and was able to depict multiple figures through a single representation.²¹⁴

As previously stated, Vidya Dehejia has identified seven modes of narration in early Buddhist art. Three of these modes of narration are used in Gandhāran narrative art.²¹⁵ The overall narrative cycle is considered a “Sequential” mode of narration, with individual panels depicting single episodes separated by dividing motifs. She identifies images of the still Buddha as a “Monoscenic Narrative: Being in State versus Being in Action,” however, what she calls the “Continuous” and “Conflated” modes of narration are also used in Gandhāran narrative art. The “Continuous” mode of narration includes reliefs that depict a series of events within a single,

²¹³ Johnston, *Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita*, 112.

²¹⁴ Carolyn Woodford Schmidt, “Aristocratic Devotees in Early Buddhist Art from Greater Gandhāra: Characteristics, Chronology, and Symbolism,” *South Asian Studies* 21, no. 1 (2005): 25-45.

²¹⁵ Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art*, 183-206.

undivided panel. This mode is different from the “Sequential” mode of narration in that it does not separate each subsequent event. The “Conflated” mode of narration, like the “Continuous” mode, depicts multiple events within a single frame. The “Conflated” narrative is different from the “Continuous” mode because in this case a single figure can be interpreted as being represented in more than one moment in time. It is possible that there is a conflation between the representation of the *devas* and the Mallas and that two subsequent scenes have been condensed into one. In the narrative traditions the *devas* arrive to mourn the Buddha moments before the arrival of the Mallas who perform nearly identical actions.

These lamentations at the sight of the deceased Buddha’s body carry on through 27.61 in the *Buddhacarita*, at which point the Mallas and monks begin to perform the funeral arrangements of the Buddha as though he were a *cakravartin*.²¹⁶ This is shown in the narrative panels through the mourning of the figure, the wrapping of his body in particular shrouds, and the transportation of his body to the cremation grounds prior to an attempt at lighting the pyre.

A similar sequence of events is found in the *Āśvalāyana Gṛhyasūtra*.²¹⁷ This *kalpasūtra* is composed of four *adhyāya* (chapters). The last of these four contains eight *kaṇḍikās* (sections) that describe one variation of Brahmanical funerary rituals beginning with the preparation of the body for cremation through offerings granted to the newly formed ancestor. In *kaṇḍikā* 1 the deceased is transported to a sylvan location to prepare the body for cremation.²¹⁸ This is reflected in the Buddha’s funerary preparations within a *sāla* grove. Most of the Buddhist textual traditions do not include the cleaning of the body of the Buddha. As Strong has suggested, this

²¹⁶ Johnston, *Aśvaghoṣa’s Buddhacarita*, 113.

²¹⁷ Oldenberg, *The Grihya-Sūtras*, 236-59.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 236-7.

may be related to the presumed purity of the body of the Buddha.²¹⁹ It is also possible that this portion of the narrative was simply performed and not recorded. *Kaṇḍikā* 1 ends with the sprinkling of clarified butter onto the body of the deceased. This could be referenced through the vessel positioned next to Subhadra in fig. 4, possibly lending support to Ihsan Ali and Muhammad Naeem Qazi's interpretation of this as an oil vessel rather than a water vessel.

The narrative episode continues as the Mallas perform the specific funeral rites for the Buddha that will ultimately result in the creation of relics.²²⁰ The Mallas expressions of grief correspond with the acts of devotion that are associated with the *śarīra-pūjā* as they prepare his body for cremation. This episode is referenced in canto 27, "The Eulogy of Nirvāṇa," of the *Buddhacarita* in verses 27.61-27.72.²²¹ It coincides with verse 6.13 in the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* when the Mallas stop lamenting and begin the funeral preparations (6.14) that the Buddha had requested earlier in the text (5.10-5.12).²²² These activities continue through 6.18 in the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta*.²²³ These specific arrangements in the manner of a *cakravartin* are not requested in the *Buddhacarita*, however they are carried out by the Mallas. The reason behind this exclusion may relate to the fact that Aśvaghoṣa has the Buddha living in a world that already presumes Brahmanical society to be the norm. Therefore, just as King Śuddhodana, who is actively engaged in *gṛhasthadharma* (proper behavior of the householder) and *āśramadharma* (proper sequence of life stages), treated the Buddha as a *cakravartin* without question throughout

²¹⁹ Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 100.

²²⁰ Ibid., 98-123.

²²¹ Johnston, *Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita*, 112-3.

²²² Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 264 and 273.

²²³ Ibid., 272.

his life, it is possible that so too the Mallas knew the proper way in which to treat the Buddha after his death.²²⁴

The *śarīra-pūjā* in the Gandhāran visual narrative tradition corresponds with the types of lay ritual that Susan Huntington has identified as occurring in early Buddhist art. The rituals that she identifies are *pranāma* (salutation), offering garlands, *darśan* (viewing), *pūjā* (ritual of offering), *pradakṣiṇa* (clockwise circumambulation), participation in assemblies, *dāna* (generosity and gift giving), reverence to relics (*śārīraka* [bodily], *pāribhogika* [objects associated with the Buddha], and *uddeśika* [commemorative]), and pilgrimage.²²⁵ Through the combined representations of the monks, laity, and *yakṣis*, all of these actions are shown throughout the *parinirvāṇa* cycle, including in episode one. Kane has enumerated a similar set of offerings that are also described in the *grhyasūtras*.²²⁶

Figs. 5-7 depict the carrying of the funeral bier of the Buddha to the cremation grounds. While Faccenna and Taddei have identified fig. 5 as *Siddhārtha's First Experience of Death*, there is nothing visibly present that would visually differentiate these two moments.²²⁷ This study takes this wrapped figure to be the Buddha, as opposed to the first corpse that the Buddha encountered. The Buddha is usually shown with his head to the right to indicate that he was placed with his head towards the north, but it is possible that the cardinal direction and location of the relief of the *stūpa* affected the depictions in figs. 3 and 5. Similar to this carrying of the Buddha's funeral bier, *kaṇḍikā* 2 of the *Āśvalāyana Grhyasūtra* describes the transportation of

²²⁴ Hiltebeitel, *Dharma*, 642-3.

²²⁵ Huntington, *Lay Ritual in the Early Buddhist Art of India*, 8-28.

²²⁶ Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, 217-9.

²²⁷ Faccenna, Domenico and M. Taddei, *Sculptures from the Sacred Area of Butkara I (Swat, Pakistan)*, vol. 2, *Reports and Memoirs* (Rome: IsMEO, 1962-4), 72.

the body from the preparation grounds to the cremation ground.²²⁸ Specific directions and individuals are required to transport the body, much in the same way as the Buddha. The Buddha is always transported by either four male Mallas or *yakṣas* carrying the bier of the Buddha, in some cases accompanied by mourning female Mallas or *yakṣis* (figs. 5-7).

In 6.14-6.15 of the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta*, the Mallas encounter the immovability of the body of Buddha due to the intervention of the *devas*, possibly the *devas* Brahmā Sahampati and Sakka (Śakra or Indra) who spoke in 6.10 at the moment of the *parinirvāṇa*:²²⁹

And on the seventh day the Mallas of Kusinārā thought: ‘We have paid sufficient honor with songs and dance...to the Lord’s body, now we shall burn his body after carrying him out by the south gate.’ Then eight Mallas chiefs, having washed their heads and put on new clothes, declared: ‘Now we will lift up the Lord’s body,’ but found they were unable to do so. So they went to the Venerable Anuruddha and told him what had happened: ‘Why can’t we lift up the Lord’s body?’ ‘Vāseṭṭhas, your intention is one thing, but the intention of the devas is another.’ ‘Lord, what is the intention of the devas?’ ‘Vāseṭṭhas, your intention is, having paid homage to the Lord’s body with dance and song..., to burn his body after carrying him out by the south gate. But the devas’ intention is, having paid homage to the Lord’s body with heavenly dance and song..., to carry him to the north of the city, bring him through the north gate and bear him through the middle of the city and out through the eastern gate to the Mallas’ shrine of Makuṭa-Bandhana, and there to burn the body.’²³⁰

This event is not directly included in the *Buddhacarita*. There the Mallas are described as carrying the body through the middle of the city and out of the *nāga* gate. The meaning of this *nāga* gate is unclear. It could refer to the eastern gate that is associated with Indra. The term *nāga* can mean either serpent or elephant, both of which Indra is ideologically connected with through his associations with Vṛtra and Airāvata.²³¹ It could also simply refer to the gate as one of four

²²⁸ Oldenberg, *The Grihya-Sūtras*, 237-39.

²²⁹ Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 271.

²³⁰ Ibid., 273.

²³¹ Arthur Anthony Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1974), 54-66; S. K. Gupta, *Elephant in Indian Art and Mythology* (New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1983), 3-8.

dinnāga or directional gates. Regardless of the direction, the path that they take to perform the cremation on the other side of the city of Kuśinagarī, by the Hiraṇyavatī River and near the Mallas' shrine or *caitya* called Mukuṭa (*Buddhacarita*) or Makuṭa-Bandhana (*Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta*), is described as *śiva* or auspicious/sacred.²³²

The city-plan of Kuśinagarī from the time of the Buddha is not well known, but a map of the current site provides some insight into the path along which the Mallas carried the Buddha (fig. 74). The Hiraṇyavatī River mentioned in the *Buddhacarita* is located to the east of the city of Kuśinagarī and the map seems to confirm the exit through the eastern gate after the parade of the body. A comparison with a map of an ideal city based on the description in the *Arthaśāstra* (fig. 75) illuminates the significance of the path that the *devas* required the Mallas to take. In the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* the Mallas were inclined to bring the Buddha out through the south gate, while the *devas* wanted a path through the north. Based on the city described in the *Arthaśāstra*, the cremation grounds for the higher *varṇas* was located at the north and that for the lower *varṇas* was to the south. This could have influenced two different desired directions. Similar situations are explained by Kane in regards to the *Dharmaśāstras* and the carrying of the deceased to the cremation grounds.²³³ Another possible allusion in this event could be the concept of the multiple paths of the afterlife, namely the *devayāna* (path of the gods/liberation) and *pitṛyāna* (path of the fathers/rebirth) that are frequently found in Brahmanical texts.²³⁴ Despite that he was ultimately transported through the eastern gate, this struggle reveals the awareness of this two-fold past in the early Buddhist tradition. In this visual and textual narrative

²³² Johnston, *Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita*, 113; Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 273.

²³³ Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, 215-7.

²³⁴ Ibid., 187-9 and 201.

moment in the life of the Buddha, there could be a multivalent reference the Buddha's accomplishment of liberation and the acknowledgement of the *devas* in this feat.

Episode Two: Parinirvāṇa and Śarīra-Pūjā of the Buddha with Mahākāśyapa

The second episode within the visual narrative cycle of the *parinirvāṇa* corresponds with Episode One expect that it features the arrival of Mahākāśyapa and the confining of the Buddha and does not include the transportation of the bier (figs. 8-23, 24 and 26, possibly 27 and 49). The representations of monks, laity, *devas*, and *yakṣī* align with those in Episode One. Episode Two appears to be the most popular representation from the narrative cycle of the *parinirvāṇa*. At least eighteen of the sixty images in this study fit within this category. The popularity of this narrative moment comes from the multiple architectural usages that this episode served. The *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha was included in the narrative cycles on both the lower drum and the upper *harmikā*. From the pattern established in this study, Episode One is a more abbreviated scene and would have functioned in the larger narrative cycle, while Episode Two was more complex and was featured as part of the *harmikā*. Episode Two uses the “Conflated” mode of narration more clearly than any other episode in the *parinirvāṇa* cycle. This mode of narration allows more complex scenes to be depicted. In a single visual narrative the *parinirvāṇa*; the lamentations of the laity, monastics, and *devas*, the *śarīra-pūjā*, the arrival of Mahākāśyapa, and the devotion to the Buddha's feet all simultaneously occur.

In most cases Mahākāśyapa is depicted in Gandhāran narrative reliefs as a clean shaven monk with a staff. The figure positioned next to the coffin of the Buddha in figs. 9, 10, 11 and 21 have tentatively been identified as Mahākāśyapa, but could represent Subhadra. The figure

Subhadra is typically shown with a *tridaṇḍin*—either opened in the form of a tripod supporting a hanging sack or *kamaṇḍalu* (vessel) or closed with the three legs grouped together and the pot positioned over the left shoulder.²³⁵ Figs. 11 and 12 show Subhadra seated in front of the bed with the *tridaṇḍin* resting on his shoulder. Figs. 4, 13, 16-18, and 20 show the tripod opened and placed in front of the Buddha’s deathbed beside Subhadra. Figs. 9-11 and 21 show the figure usually identified as Mahākāśyapa holding the closed *tridaṇḍin* in place of his typical *khakkhara* (staff). In figs. 9-11 where this figure holds the *tridaṇḍin* he also wears a head covering. This head covering is not found in any examples in this study where Mahākāśyapa holds the *khakkhara*. Subhadra is shown with the head covering in figs. 4, 13, 17, and 20. Figs. 9 and 10 only depict one figure with a *tridaṇḍin*, leaving open the possibilities of both Subhadra and Mahākāśyapa. This idea is complicated by fig. 11 which features a seated Subhadra figure holding a *tridaṇḍin* with his back turned towards the viewer, as well as Mahākāśyapa arriving near the Buddha’s feet wearing a head covering and holding another *tridaṇḍin*. It is possible that a “Continuous” narrative is shown here and the figure of Subhadra is first shown arriving on the Buddha’s left and then later seated in front of the bed. Conversely, this head covering could simply refer to the fact that both of these monks were recently traveling, but the possibility that figs. 9-11 and 21 represent Subhadra and not Mahākāśyapa should be considered.

In the collection of narrative reliefs in this study, Mahākāśyapa is shown either near the feet of the Buddha (figs. 9-15, 18-24, 26, 29, and 49) or near his head (figs. 8, and 16-17), and never in front of or behind the couch. Narrative reliefs that depict Mahākāśyapa at the feet of the Buddha are usually still set in a *śāla* grove. Mahākāśyapa touches the feet of the Buddha with

²³⁵ Patrick Olivelle, *Ascetics and Brahmins: Studies in Ideologies and Institutions* (New York: Anthem Press, 2011), 231-248.

either his hands or his head in figs. 12-14, 18-20, 24, 26 (this also occurs in fig. 29 in Episode Three). In some reliefs, represented by figs. 13 and 15, the Buddha's feet are clearly unwrapped and presented before Mahākāśyapa. John Strong has noted in this context Kane's observation in his *History of Dharmaśāstra* that in some Brahmanical cremation rituals, the feet were left exposed, as is seen with the Buddha.²³⁶

In figs. 8-11 and 21 he enters the scene while displaying the *añjali* or *abhaya mudrā*. Figs. 15-17 depict Mahākāśyapa in conversation with the Ājīvika that informed him of the Buddha's death. The visual narrative of the episode of the arrival of Mahākāśyapa poses difficulty when trying to align it with the literary tradition. In the text, the arrival of Mahākāśyapa occurs once the body of the Buddha has been transported from the *śāla* grove, through the city of Kuśinagarī, and is relocated outside of the city walls, near the Malla's *caitya* called Mukuṭa. It is possible that these two visual representations of *śāla* groves shown in Episodes One and Two reference two separate groves that are visited by similar groups of people at different moments in time.

Another complication with this visual representation is that, in the literary tradition, the body of the Buddha would have already been enclosed in a coffin when the Malla attempt to set the funeral pyre on fire (fig. 29 in Episode Three is an exception that follows the textual tradition more closely). Despite the attempts to light the coffin before the arrival of Mahākāśyapa (fig. 8) and the depiction of the burning coffin (fig. 29 in particular displays the coffin), the Buddha in Episode Two is almost always shown simply in shrouds (figs. 8-10 depict the coffin and figs. 11-23, 24, 26, 27, and 49 depict shrouds). These deviations from the narratives found in literary

²³⁶ Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 111-2; Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, 202.

traditions could indicate that the area near the *caitya* is also a *śāla* grove or that a different sequence of events was known by the patrons and sculptors of 1st-3rd century CE Gandhāran narrative reliefs. Another viable option is that a “Conflated” mode of narration is being used to create a multivalent narrative expressing both Episodes One and Two in a single narrative frame.

Mahākāśyapa was not present at the death of the Buddha. He was traveling between the Malla cities of Pāvā and Kuśinagarī when an Ājīvika (represented by the nude figure holding a flower or cloth) told him that the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha had occurred (Fig.13, 15-17). In the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* the monk Mahākāśyapa arrives at the shrine (6.22) after failed attempts by the Malla to ignite the funeral pyre. The text states that the Malla had been unable to light the fire because the *devas* stopped them from igniting it (6.21) before Mahākāśyapa could pay his last respects.²³⁷ In the *Buddhacarita* Mahākāśyapa arrives (27.73) after the failed attempts to light the funeral pyre (27.72).²³⁸

After the body of the Buddha had been wrapped in burial shrouds and carried through the city, it was then placed in an oil-filled coffin (fig. 8-10).²³⁹ Both the wrapping of the body in pure burial shrouds and the practice of placing the body in an iron (or possibly wooden) coffin filled with oil are common features of Brahmanical funerals.²⁴⁰ This exact process is not described in the *Āśvalāyana Gr̥hyasūtra*, however in *kaṇḍikā* 3’s description of the laying out of the deceased’s sacrificial utensils on their body, those with hollowed regions are filled with oil.²⁴¹ This likely functioned both as a ritual offering and as a fuel for the cremation fire.

²³⁷ Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 275.

²³⁸ Johnston, *Aśvaghoṣa’s Buddhacarita*, 113.

²³⁹ Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 274.

²⁴⁰ Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 100-10; Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, 187-9.

²⁴¹ Oldenberg, *The Grihya-Sūtras*, 240-2.

It has been proposed that the body was placed in oil for purposes of preserving the body of the Buddha until the arrival of Mahākāśyapa.²⁴² This point seems reasonable, until one considers the fact that the body had been left unpreserved for seven days during the *śarīra-pūjā*. As Strong has shown, the various versions of the *parinirvāṇa* narrative are not consistent and multiple redactions could account for the apparent discrepancies and odd order of events.²⁴³ Bronkhorst suggests that the historical Buddha was not cremated, but preserved in oil while a single *stūpa* was constructed and into which his entire body was placed.²⁴⁴ Olivelle and Hiltebeitel have analyzed multiple moments in the *Buddhacarita* where deliberate references are made to the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*.²⁴⁵ One such reference, also noted by Strong, is to the preservation of Daśaratha's body in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.²⁴⁶ In these shared events, there is potentially a reference to each figure's *rājadharmā*.

The entering of the body into the coffin and the inability to light the funeral pyre prior to Mahākāśyapa's arrival mark the transition from the first episode to the second that begins with the ignition of the pyre upon the arrival of the monk Mahākāśyapa. A comparison between figs. 8 and 9 potentially demonstrates the arrival of Mahākāśyapa and the ignition of the pyre at that moment. Fig. 8 shows a group of seven monks standing around the flower covered coffin of the Buddha that has been placed atop a funeral pyre. A lamp is positioned at the center of the relief signifying the three attempts at igniting the fire. The monks appear confused because they do not know that the cremation cannot occur without the presence of Mahākāśyapa. In this way,

²⁴² Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 106-10.

²⁴³ Ibid., 106-10.

²⁴⁴ Bronkhorst, *Buddhism in the Shadow of Brahmanism*, 219-22.

²⁴⁵ Hiltebeitel, *Dharma*, 638-45.

²⁴⁶ Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 106.

Mahākāśyapa takes on the role of the eldest son in the funeral rites of the Buddha.²⁴⁷ While Olivelle and Hildebrandt have shown that Aśvaghoṣa deliberately alluded to well-known epics, the early Buddhist narrative of the funeral of the Buddha is not a reflection of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, but a reflection of shared Buddhist and Brahmanical cultural developments and the *dharma* of parents and children.

Although the texts describe the involvement of the *devas* (during the *parinirvāṇa*, the immovability of the coffin and the inability to light the funeral pyre), only one narrative panel in this episode depicts a haloed figure besides the Buddha. Fig. 12 includes a single haloed figure amongst the mourning laity and monks. This single *deva* is dressed in the same way as the Mallas and is most likely Śakra. However, in the *Buddhacarita*, after the *devas* and other celestials acknowledge the death of the Buddha, Māra and his hosts relish in the Buddha's passing.²⁴⁸ It is difficult to determine whether the figure has a joyous-grotesque facial expression or one of mourning. Although he may simply represent a *deva*, the possibility that this figure represents Māra should also be considered.

The second episode frequently embraces the “Conflated” mode of narration. This is epitomized by fig. 16 which provides one of the most complex narrative reliefs of the *parinirvāṇa*. Whereas most panels feature less than ten figures, this composition contains over forty figures of various types. At the center is the large, static Buddha. His bed is tilted, perhaps to indicate the earthquake that occurred at the moment he achieved his *parinirvāṇa*. Five monks are represented, including Mahākāśyapa talking with an Ājīvika, Subhadra seated in meditation, Anuruddha pulling Ānanda up from the ground, and an unknown monk who holds a *chauri* near

²⁴⁷ Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 115.

²⁴⁸ Johnston, *Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita*, 103-104.

the head of the Buddha. This monk with a *chauri* is also featured in figs. 8 and 11, and a Malla holds one above the Buddha in fig. 21. This is a sign of the Buddha's *cakravartin* status.

Two *śālabhañjikā* occupy *śāla* trees that frame the Buddha's bed in fig. 16. The figure of Vajrapāṇi is featured in front of the bed. In the surrounding space, the artist has crowded the space with twenty-eight elite figures. There are a few areas that show damage, and additional figures were certainly present. The depiction of the elite here again resembles that of *devas*, and a distinction between the two cannot definitively be drawn. Given this ambiguity and the missing figures, there may have originally been thirty to thirty-three figures represented who were meant to signify the lamentations of the *Trāyastriṃśa* devas as described in the *Buddhacarita* and *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta*.²⁴⁹ The ability to suggest two figures at once through the multivalent appearance of the *devas* and elites may have been embraced by artists or commissioning laity.

Few women are represented in the *parinirvāṇa* cycle of narrative reliefs. The *Śālabhañjikā* are necessarily always female. Srinivasan has suggested that the female in fig. 13 is not simply a *śālabhañjikā*, but the Buddha's mother Māya.²⁵⁰ In addition to these two possible interpretations, there is a third possibility that should be considered. In some textual versions of the *parinirvāṇa*, Ānanda provides the male Mallas and their families with the opportunity to visit the Buddha one last time before his death. During one of these personal encounters, a weeping woman sullied the robes of the Buddha.²⁵¹ Srinivasan does not consider the possibility that this multivalent image could also depict this event as well. An additional female figure may be

²⁴⁹ Johnston, *Aśvaghōṣa's Buddhacarita*, 103; Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 271-5.

²⁵⁰ Doris Meth Srinivasan, "From Roman Clipeata Imago to Gandhāran Image Medallion and the Embellishment of the Parinirvāṇa Legend," in *Architects, Master Builders, Craftsmen: Work-yard Organization and Artistic Production in Hellenistic Asia*, ed. Pierfrancesco Callieri (Rome: Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, 2006), 247-69.

²⁵¹ Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 112.

depicted in fig. 16. At the far proper left side of the narrative panel there is a damaged section that has altered the upper half of a figure. Although the face of figure is missing, the rendering of large anklets, only found on female figures, suggests that this figure must be a woman. Her identity is unclear, but she could be one of the Malla women who venerated to the Buddha. This befits the Brahmanical tradition wherein women are not responsible for the actual funeral preparations, but they are present to actively lament the deceased.²⁵²

Episode Two conveys the same multivalent aspects of the Buddhas funeral as the panels in the first episode—which emphasized his role as a *cakravartin* and a *grhastha*—with a few additions. The “Continuous” and “Conflated” modes of narration frequently used in Episode Two express the actions of the living beings and the carrying out of *grhasthadharma*. The expected reactions and roles of family members, including the eldest son represented by Mahākāśyapa and females, are included in these narrative reliefs and reference the common funerary rituals in early Buddhist and Brahmanical traditions.

Episode Three: The Cremation of the Body of the Buddha

Episode Three depicts the cremation of the Buddha and includes narrative reliefs that show the burning funeral pyre (figs. 25-30, 47). Seven of the sixty narrative reliefs in this study show the burning cremation pyre. After the arrival and reverence of Mahākāśyapa towards the Buddha, the funeral pyre with the coffin of the Buddha is said to have spontaneously ignited. The *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* recounts this episode in verse 6.22.²⁵³ Similarly, the *Buddhacarita*

²⁵² Parry, *Death in Banaras*, 152-8.

²⁵³ Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 275.

describes the immediate lighting of the fire upon Mahākāśyapa's arrival in verse 27.74.²⁵⁴ In fig. 8 a portable-fire stand is positioned directly under the funeral pyre as the monks attempt to light the pyre.²⁵⁵ This fire-stand is not depicted in any narrative panel from Episode Three, presumably because the Buddha's pyre was self-ignited.

Typically the cremation of the Buddha is represented in Gandhāran narrative reliefs through the depiction of two male Malla figures (fig. 27-29, and 47) or undertakers with head coverings (figs. 25, 26, and 30), each standing on either side of the lit funeral pyre. In most reliefs the moment depicted is towards the end of the cremation, when the attendants of the fire pour fragrant waters over the fire to extinguish it. Figs. 28 and 29 show "Conflated" narratives that expand each narrative's timeframe. Fig. 29 depicts the arrival of Mahākāśyapa and his encounter with the feet of the Buddha after the cremation has begun. The Buddha's feet are shown emerging from the iron coffin and possibly depicts the immediate lighting upon his veneration. Fig. 28 may show the same "Conflated" narrative. A large group is shown assembled behind the pyre and a single monastic figure stands to the proper left of the pyre. The Mallas and undertakers who continue to attend to the Buddha throughout the process of cremation by tending to the fire provide another reference to *gr̥hasthadharma*.²⁵⁶ They are obliged to perform the funerary rituals of their fellow *kṣatriya*.

In verse 6.23 of the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* the Malla are described as helping to put out the fire alongside a stream of water from the sky and others from the *śāla* trees. This description may be related to the presence of the second grove of *śāla* trees in Episode Two (there are no

²⁵⁴ Johnston, *Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita*, 113.

²⁵⁵ Giovanni Verardi, *Homa and Other Fire Rituals in Gandhāra* (Naples, Italy: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1994), 25-27.

²⁵⁶ Hildebeitel, *Dharma*, 185-9.

trees or background information that indicate the location of the third episode) and the presence of flowers on the coffin during cremation (fig. 29).

The burning fire is a reference to the necessity of this cremation process for the creation of the relics and turns the Buddha into a sacrifice. Through his self-ignition, the Buddha took on the role of both sacrifice and sacrificer. Parry explains,

Who then is the sacrificer? The dying person, or the one who lights the pyre? The answer I believe is both. The two are equated, and both are reborn through the sacrifice—the father on a new and higher plane, and the son as his father’s replacement in the world which the latter just left.²⁵⁷

The fire could also serve as a reference to the offering of *homa* (fire), which Verardi proposes were used during rites of passage that were practiced within the early Buddhist community based on evidence found in Gandhāran narrative reliefs.²⁵⁸ He argues that the *homa* ritual is connected to the later development of *dhūnī* (personal fire/symbol of asceticism). Both of these ideas developed out of the late Vedic period and were rooted in the concept of the internalization of ritual activity.²⁵⁹ Following Verardi, Bivar and Tadikonda have also explored the depiction and ritual function of *homa* and fire-altars in Gandhāran Buddhist art.²⁶⁰ Tadikonda ultimately finds a multivalent association between the Buddha and Agni.²⁶¹ All of these scholars consider the influence of Zoroastrian and other Central Asian influences, but the primary reference of both the

²⁵⁷ Parry, *Death in Banaras*, 184.

²⁵⁸ Verardi, *Homa and Other Fire Rituals in Gandhāra*, 25-29.

²⁵⁹ Clemens Cavallin, “Sacrifice as Action and Actions as Sacrifices: The Role of Breath in the Internalisation of Sacrificial Action in the Vedic Brāhmaṇas,” in *Vedic Investigations*, eds. Asko Parpola and Petteri Koskikallio (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2016), 19-35.

²⁶⁰ A. D. H. Bivar, “‘Fire-altar’ Subjects in the Art of Gandhāra,” *East and West* 55, no. 1/4 (December 2005): 35-39; Kalpana K. Tadikonda, “Significance of Fire Altars Depicted on Gandharan Buddhist Sculptures,” *East and West* 57, no. 1/4 (December 2007): 29-43.

²⁶¹ Tadikonda, “Significance of Fire Altars Depicted on Gandharan Buddhist Sculptures,” 42.

fire-altars and the cremation fire pertain to corresponding Brahmanical and Buddhist funerary traditions.

The cremation of the dead is described in *kaṇḍikā* 4 of the *Āśvalāyana Gṛhyasūtra*.²⁶² It is during the process of the cremation and the consumption of the body through the fire that one enters either the path of the *devayāna* or the *pitryāna*. The *Āśvalāyana Gṛhyasūtra* describes the smoke as symbolic of the exit from this life. In the case of the Buddha this is particularly significant because a knowledgeable viewer would be aware of the fact that the Buddha reached *parinirvāṇa* and would not be returning in another life. As such, the life-cycle ritual performed for the Buddha at his death—in his returned state of a *gṛhastha*—represents the end of the cycle of *saṃsāra*.

Episode Four: Guarding of the Relics

Episode Four represents the guarding of the relics of the Buddha by the Malla of Kuśinagarī (Figs. 25 and 31-38). Nine of the sixty narrative reliefs included in this study belong to this episode. In the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* this event is described in the same verse as the cremation of the Buddha.²⁶³ In the *Buddhacarita* the weeklong guarding of the relics by the Malla is told in the segment directly following the cremation (27.76-27.84).²⁶⁴ The compositional arrangement of two figures symmetrically on each side of the relics is quite similar to the composition of Episode Three. While exclusively men are shown attending the

²⁶² Oldenberg, *The Grihya-Sūtras*, 242-5.

²⁶³ Walsh, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 275.

²⁶⁴ Johnston, *Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita*, 114.

cremation fire, both women and men are shown guarding the relics. This demonstrates the different gendered roles in this *antyeṣṭi* ritual.²⁶⁵

There are two ways that the guarding of the relics of the Buddha by the Malla of Kuśinagarī are represented. In figs. 25 and 33-38 two figures, either female or male, protect the relics of the Buddha in a single, undivided pile, prior to its division and distribution. Figs. 37 and 38 may not belong to the *parinirvāṇa* cycle. Physical relics of the Buddha were frequently accessible in Gandhāra, as has been discussed above, and these reliefs may better fit the seventh and final episode. Figs. 31 and 32 depict the moment just prior to the guarding of the relics. These two reliefs suggest the carrying of the relics into the fortified city of Kuśinagarī, however the relics are not clearly shown. Figures 33 and 36 show female figures guarding the relics, while figures 25, 31, 32, 34, 35, 37, and 38 place men in this position. In some examples (figs. 29, 34 and 36) a third figure is shown crouched in front of the relic that has been placed on a couch. In all but one example where the relics are present they are concealed beneath a cloth. Figure 36 is unique in that it appears that the female guards are lifting the cloth in order to reveal the contents of the relic to the crouched figure. The object that is hidden away in all of the other narrative reliefs has the same cross-hatched design as the relic balls formed by Droṇa in the following episode. This is the only narrative relief that reveals the single bodily of relics of the Buddha.

A multivalent reading of this narrative relief reveals similarities in this week long protection of the relics in a single form by the Malla with Brahmanical practices. This episode reflects *kaṇḍikā* 5 of the *Āśvalāyana Gṛhyasūtra* wherein the remains from the cremation fire, the *asthi* (remainders of bone), are collected and placed in an urn which is then circumambulated

²⁶⁵ Parry, *Death in Banaras*, 152-8.

three times.²⁶⁶ This ritual, called the *asthisamcayana*, occurs ten days after the cremation.²⁶⁷

Further, the guarding of the relics of the Buddha in a single reconstituted set for a regulated period of time may reflect the beginning of the Brahmanical post-cremation *śrāddha* rituals.²⁶⁸

The female guardian figures may also reflect external influences. The female figures that are shown guarding the relics of the Buddha could be personifications of the city of Kuśinagarī. These female figures may reflect the incorporation of the iconography of the Hellenistic figure Tyche as the patron-protector of cities.²⁶⁹ The Central Asian protectress and bringer of abundance Ardoxsho—who was popular amongst the Kuṣāṇa—may also be referenced in this episode.²⁷⁰ Over time Ardoxsho, who was herself syncretized with Tyche, was assimilated with Śrī-Lakṣmī. Kuṣāṇa, Central Asian, and Hellenistic religious concepts and aesthetics undoubtedly entered the repertoire of Gandhāran art, but these syncretic elements do not have the multivalent meanings that the Brahmanical and Buddhist aspects share. As Pia Brancaccio has observed,

The Northwest, which witnessed the convergence of heterogeneous cultures throughout its history, became visually polyglot. Therefore its art displays a nonchalant variety of motifs of diverse provenance that came into the region with waves of people and was locally elaborated in a unique and long lasting Gandhāran fashion.²⁷¹

Due to the commonalities in their funerary rites, the multivalent narrative reliefs included in Episode Four are capable of communicating the shared ritual practices between Buddhist and Brahmanical traditions.

²⁶⁶ Oldenberg, *The Grihya-Sūtras*, 245-6.

²⁶⁷ Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra*, 240-5.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 262-6.

²⁶⁹ Ladislav Stančo, *Greek Gods in the East: Hellenistic Iconographic Schemes in Central Asia* (Prague: Karolinum Press, University Charles, 2012), 192-9.

²⁷⁰ Rosenfield, *The Dynastic Arts of the Kushans*, 74-5.

²⁷¹ Brancaccio, “Close Encounters: Multicultural Systems in Ancient India,” 396.

Episode Five: Division and Distribution of the Relics

Episode Five, identified as the distribution of the relics in the visual narrative cycle of the *parinirvāṇa*, shows the division of the relics into eight portions by the *brāhmaṇa* Droṇa (figs. 39-48, and 24). Ten of the sixty narrative reliefs in this study feature this episode. The fact that Droṇa is already aware of the number of relics that he must produce demonstrates that the eight *kṣatriya* rulers, including the Malla of Kuśinagarī, had already demanded a portion of the relics to be installed for worship in their own territory. Canto 28 (the final chapter) in the *Buddhacarita* is entitled “The Division of the Relics” and deals with this process that happens immediately following the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha (5th century BCE) up through the redistribution of the relics by Aśoka during the Mauryan period (3rd century BCE). The exact act of the division of the relics by Droṇa occurs in verses 28.16-28.53.²⁷² In the *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* this episode is briefly addressed in verses 6.25-6.26.²⁷³

In visual narrative representations, this episode is consistently arranged with Droṇa working behind a table with relics (Figs. 39, 40, and 42-47) or reliquaries (Fig. 24, 41, and 48) in front of him. Typically up to eight kings are shown behind him as they arrive to receive their portion of the relics. Sometimes the individual figures are still holding their own reliquaries as they wait for the relics from Droṇa and other times Droṇa has taken possession of the vessels in order to fill them with the relics of the Buddha.

In *kaṇḍikā* 5 of the *Āśvalāyana Gṛhyasūtra* the bones that remain following the cremation are collected, placed in an urn, and buried.²⁷⁴ The same process occurs in the narrative

²⁷² Johnston, *Āśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita*, 117-21.

²⁷³ Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 276.

²⁷⁴ Oldenberg, *The Grihya-Sūtras*, 245-6.

reliefs from Gandhāra, except eight urns are filled instead of one and they are ultimately encased inside of *stūpas*, rather than buried in the ground.

Verardi first noticed in his study of the depiction of *homa* rituals in Gandhāran narrative art that the relics produced by Droṇa bore a resemblance to the *piṇḍas* used in *śrāddha* (ancestral) rituals.²⁷⁵ John Strong (via Phyllis Granoff) has also noted the similarities between the number and appearance of the balls formed out of relics by the *brāhmaṇa* Droṇa and the Brahmanical *navasrāddha* ritual. In a 2002 conversation, Granoff told Strong that the addition of two *paribhoga* relics (relics of use or non-bodily relics), the *kumbha* (urn/pitcher) used by Droṇa and the fire ashes collected by the Pippalāyans, to the original division of the eight *śarīrika* (bodily) relics may reflect the usage of ten *piṇḍa* (rice balls) used during the Brahmanical *navasrāddha* ritual.²⁷⁶ In this ceremony, each day for ten days following the death of a person, a single *piṇḍa* is laid out to pay homage to a family member.²⁷⁷ This is similar to Robert Brown's observation that the crosshatched patterned relic-balls found on the narrative reliefs show that ashes were not inserted into the reliquaries, but that they relic-balls were formed from a combination of substances.²⁷⁸

Prior the introduction of the episode of the division of the relics into the *parinirvāṇa* cycle the distribution of the relics was represented as a battle scene. At Sāñcī, this episode is depicted on the west *torāṇa* by a war fought by *kṣatriyas* riding on horses and elephants. It is possible that in Gandhāra the battle has been reimagined as a sacrifice. An analogy can be drawn

²⁷⁵ Verardi, *Homa and Other Fire Rituals in Gandhāra*, 25-7.

²⁷⁶ Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 119-20.

²⁷⁷ Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, 262-6.

²⁷⁸ Brown, "The Nature and Use of the Bodily Relics of the Buddha in Gandhāra," 184-5.

between the relationship of *brāhmaṇas* to sacrificial rites and *kṣatriyas* to battles. This is primarily reflected in the epic battle of the Mahābhārata.²⁷⁹ Reich summarizes,

A central trope in the Mahābhārata is the triple equation of the sacred order (dharma) with sacrifice (*yajña*, *medha*, *vahni*), on the one hand, and with strife (*raṇa*, *āhava*, *yuddha*), on the other hand.²⁸⁰

By this, Reich means that there is an mirroring of the sacrifice (*yajña*), the offering (*medha*), and the means of conveyance (*vahni*) in the battle undertaken with delight (*raṇa*), the battle as a sacrifice (*āhava*), and the battle fought as the playing out of the sacrifice. In the fifth episode of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle, a reversal of this analogy has occurred. Whereas, in earlier Buddhist narrative art, the *kṣatriyas* were shown engaging in a battle, at Gandhāra this battle has been transformed into a sacrifice presided over by a *brāhmaṇa*.

Episode Six: The Transportation of the Relics

The sixth episode is represented in narrative reliefs through the depiction of at least one of the eight *kṣatriya* rulers returning to their homelands to install their portions of the relics (figs. 49-54, 57). These *kṣatriya* rulers and their territories included: the Malla of Kuśinagarī, Ajātaśatru of Magadha, the Licchavis of Vaiśālī, the Śākya of Kapilavastu, the Malla of Pāvā, the Bulakas of Calakalpa, the Krauḍyas of Rāmagrāma, and the *brāhmaṇas* of Viṣṇudvīpa.²⁸¹ Seven of the sixty reliefs in this study feature this episode. The kings illustrated in these narrative reliefs are shown riding various animals including horses (Figs. 49, 50, 52, and 57), elephants (Figs. 50 and 54) and camels (Figs. 49, 51, and 53). In most cases there is no way to identify the

²⁷⁹ Tamar C. Reich, "Sacrificial Violence and Textual Battles: Inner Textual Interpretation in the Sanskrit Mahābhārata," *History of Religions* 41, no 2 (Nov., 2001): 142-169.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 145.

²⁸¹ Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 118.

kṣatriya rulers based on the animals that they ride and the attire that they wear. Some of the narrative reliefs include an upper band with a chain of figures each beneath their own arch that may represent the adoration paid by the people of each town as the relics passed through their territory (figs. 50) or a row of Buddha figures seated in *padmāsana* with hands in *dhyāna mudrā* (Fig. 49).

The *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* does not narrate this specific moment; the story jumps from the distribution of the relics by Droṇa in verses 6.25-6.26 to a list of the kings and places where they installed the relics within *stūpas* in verse 6.27.²⁸² The *Buddhacarita* in its extensive telling of the division of the relics recounts the kings' joyous travels home with their portions of the relics in verse 28.54.²⁸³

This narrative episode shows the *kṣatriyadharma* of the rulers who have secured relics for their territories.²⁸⁴ As was explained above, the dispersal of the relics of the Buddha was essential for expanding the number of sites that would become appropriate for Buddhist lay and monastic practitioners. While most of the narrative panels in this episode are intended to depict the transportation of the relics by the rulers listed in the *Buddhacarita* and *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta*, one narrative relief may be an exception. Fig. 51 clearly shows a group of individuals dressed in Central Asian nomadic clothing riding Bactrian camels. Since the date of this relief is unknown, the particular nomadic influence cannot be determined.

In addition to its primary meaning, fig. 51 has two other possible interpretations. It could simply reflect the desire of local Gandhāran Buddhist practitioners to situate themselves within

²⁸² Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 276-7.

²⁸³ Johnston, *Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita*, 121.

²⁸⁴ Hildebeitel, *Dharma*, 525-34.

the biography of the historical Buddha. There is no textual or historical precedent for this representation, and it must be perceived as fanciful. Alternatively, this narrative representation could also be a reference to the later apocryphal Buddhist story of King Uttarasena. According to Xuanzang, Uttarasena—who was considered to be a descendent of the same Śākya lineage as the Buddha²⁸⁵—the was a ruler of Udyāna in the Swāt Valley who received a portion of the relics of the Buddha from Droṇa.²⁸⁶ Both the traditional and Gandhāran influenced versions of the narrative may be suggested through a multivalent representation of this episode.

Episode Seven: The Veneration of the Relics

The seventh and final episode that is represented in the cycle of the *parinirvāṇa* reliefs is the installation of the relics in a *stūpa* and the ritual activity performed in their presence (figs. 55-60, 24, 36, 49, and 50). Ten of the sixty narrative reliefs in this study depict this episode. These compositions include a series of ritual activities carried out by lay and monastic devotees as they actively venerate *stūpas*. The *Mahāparinibbāṇa Sutta* describes the creation of ten *stūpas* built to house the original eight relics possessed by the *kṣatriya* rulers, the *kumbha* (urn/pitcher) used by Droṇa, and the embers of the fire obtained by the Moriyas of Pippalivana (a *brāhmaṇa* from Pippalāyana²⁸⁷) in verse 6.27.²⁸⁸ Verse 6.28, the final verse of the *Sutta*, narrates later events surrounding the relics, but it does not include their redistribution by Aśoka.²⁸⁹ In the *Buddhacarita*, the safekeeping of the relics in *stūpas* and the activities performed at the sites are

²⁸⁵ Max Deeg, “Secular Buddhist Lineages: The Śākyas and their Royal Descendants in Local Buddhist Legitimation Strategies,” *Religions of South Asia* 5, no. 1/2 (2011): 191-7.

²⁸⁶ Strong, *Relics of the Buddha*, 119-120.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 119.

²⁸⁸ Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 277.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 277.

narrated in verses 28.56-28.73, ending one verse before the closing line of the text.²⁹⁰ In this account, the redistribution of the relics by Aśoka is described in depth.

Whether or not the active worship of *stūpas* depicted on 1st - 3rd century CE Gandhāran narrative reliefs depict the initial veneration at their installation or devotion anytime in the centuries between the *parinirvāṇa* and the production of these reliefs is unclear. The same signs of offering that were given to the Buddha's body during the *śārīra-pūjā* are again shown in Episode Seven. The acts of *praṇāma* (salutation), offering garlands, *darśan* (viewing), *pūjā* (ritual of offering), *pradakṣiṇa* (clockwise circumambulation), participation in assemblies, *dāna* (generosity and gift giving), reverence to relics (*śārīraka* [bodily], *pāribhogika* [objects associated with the Buddha], and *uddeśika* [commemorative]), and pilgrimage are performed by the laity, monastic figures, and *devas*.²⁹¹

Although largely removed from the problem of aniconism, Gandhāran narrative reliefs of the worship of the *stūpa* have a position in the conversation on aniconic representations in early Buddhist art. As Susan Huntington has repeatedly posited, images that depict locations associated with the life of the Buddha are not necessarily intended to narrate the life of the Buddha. Relief panels that display acts of *pūjā* at specific sites from the Buddha's life do take place in the same location as the narrative events, at *tīrthas*, but they are not located at the same moment in time. The acts of worship performed by the lay, monastic, and divine communities serve a multivalent function. They are capable of invoking the concepts of both the initial installation of the Buddha's relics in eight *śārīra stūpas* following his *parinirvāṇa*, as well as continued ritual activity at these sites and the construction of countless others.

²⁹⁰ Johnston, *Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita*, 121-4.

²⁹¹ Huntington, *Lay Ritual in the Early Buddhist Art of India*, 10-27.

A comparison of fig. 56, a 2nd-3rd century CE relief of the *Adoration of a Stūpa form Gandhāra* with fig. 61, early 2nd century BCE *Worship at a Stūpa* from the railing of the *stūpa* at Bhārhut demonstrates Huntington’s argument. Since the relief from Gandhāra is part of a series of sequential narratives, this image does not represent the *parinirvāṇa* in its entirety, but the final stage of the relic creation and installation process. The actual *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha—his final extinction upon his reentry into the fourth *dhyāna*—is represented in the first or second episodes of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle. The *stūpa* is not present in Gandhāran narrative reliefs until the seventh episode of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle. The life of the Buddha is not represented in a sequential format with an anthropomorphic Buddha at Bhārhut, so the exact moment in time represented is less clear. It would seem that the Buddha had long passed away by this point based on the presence of the *stūpa*, but the possible usage of aniconic emblems complicates this.²⁹²

The question arises, to what extent does the *stūpa* represent or even reembody the Buddha. As it has been shown, Ānanda was extremely concerned with the manner in which the body of the Buddha should be handled after his death and with how one could be in the presence of the Buddha after his death. Both of these bouts of questioning were narrative devices that were used to justify the existence and usage of relics and *stūpas*. If the installation of a portion of the Buddha’s relics was enough to imbue the location with presence of the Buddha, then there is no problem identifying the worship of a *stūpa* with the multivalent concept of offering signs of worship to the Buddha.

It is unlikely that the Gandhāran representations of *stūpa* worship are emblematic of the Buddha himself since they are part of a sequential narrative. They do, however, in a sense show

²⁹² Huntington, “Shifting the Paradigm: The Aniconic Theory and Its Terminology,” 163-186.

the adoration of the Buddha in a new form. The Bhārhut relief does not rely on a “Sequential” mode of narration and can be considered to show either a “Monoscenic Narratives: Being in State versus Being in Action” or a “Synoptic” narrative.²⁹³ Through a multivalent reading of the Buddha in the “Monoscenic Narratives: Being in State versus Being in Action” mode of narration, in fig. 61 he is represented by the static *stūpa* that is actively offered signs of *pūjā* by richly adorned lay figures and celestial garland bearers. It is possible that this panel also uses the “Synoptic” mode of narration, thus depicting in one relief all seven of the sequential episodes that are expanded by the “Sequential” mode at Gandhāran *stūpa* and *vihāra* sites.

Elizabeth Errington proposes that the narrative relief from the British Museum (fig. 56) represents the dedication of a *stūpa*, not just a generic *pradakṣiṇa* at a *stūpa* some time after installation.²⁹⁴ This point is interesting, especially when one considers the scale of the figures to the *stūpa*. In most Gandhāran narrative reliefs that show a *stūpa* and human figures in the same space, the people are the same size as the *stūpa* and the *stūpa* does not have stairs. It is possible that these reliefs do not skew the scale of the figures and the *stūpa*, but are instead representative of the many smaller votive or commemorative *stūpas* that have been found in the main court areas of most Gandhāran *stūpa* complexes. In terms of their placement within the sequential narrative of the *parinirvāṇa*, the *stūpas* could represent the installation of the Buddha’s remains in the eight regions of northern India. The manipulation of the scale of the figures allows for the images to convey both the final step in the funeral process that the Buddha requested and the practice of installing additional votive *stūpas* at 1st - 3rd century CE Gandhāran sites.

²⁹³ Dehejia, *Discourse in Early Buddhist Art*, 83-109.

²⁹⁴ Elizabeth Errington and Joe Cribb, *The Crossroads of Asia: Transformation in Image and Symbol in the Art of Ancient Afghanistan and Pakistan* (Cambridge: Ancient India and Iran Trust, 1992), 172-3.

Only two of the reliefs in this study, figs. 55 and 60, depict a *stūpa* with a staircase. These are probably representative of the larger, main *stūpas*, rather than smaller votive *stūpas*. Fig. 55, *Worship of the Stūpa*, depicts three rows of diminishing monks that suggests a recession of space. At least eight monks stand on the left side of *stūpa* with their hands in *añjali mudra* as they offer *praṇāma* to the relics in the *stūpa*. To their right is a single visible set of stairs that appears to invite the devotee to surmount the square plinth below the *aṇḍa* of the *stūpa*. The relief is damaged and a second group of devotees probably flanked the opposite side of the structures. Despite the presence of the staircase, the figures appear much too large to ascend them and circumambulate the *aṇḍa*, as would have been done at sites such as Sāñcī. Through an analysis of archaeological remains of Gandhāran *stūpas*, Shoshin Kuwayama has found that the amount of space on the plinth, even on the main *stūpa*, would not have been large enough for any acts of *pradakṣiṇa*.²⁹⁵ This could reflect an unknown shift in ritual activity at Gandhāran sites.²⁹⁶

Among the many changes in Buddhist art and architecture that occurred in Gandhāra is the addition of a square plinth below the dome of the *stūpa*, occasionally with at least one staircase ascending the base. All of the *stūpas* incorporated into Gandhāran narrative reliefs in this study have a square bases. At earlier Buddhist sites, including Sāñcī and Bhārhut, *stūpas* were semi-hemispherical and framed by a *vedikā* that created a path for *pradakṣiṇa*. This is exemplified by the *stūpa* shown in fig. 61. In some cases a second, accessible pathway was created against the surface of the *stūpa*. The *vedikā* and associated *torāṇa*, as previously discussed, contained all of the sculptural reliefs at early Buddhist sites.

²⁹⁵ Shoshin Kuwayama, “Kañjūr Ashlar and Diaper Masonry. Two Building Phases in Taxila of the First Century A.D.,” in *On the Cusp of an Era: Art in the Pre-Kuṣāṇa World*, ed. Doris Meth Srinivasan (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 204.

²⁹⁶ Behrendt, *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra*, 52-4.

During the 1st century CE, Gandhāran *stūpas* began to incorporate a square plinth below the dome of the *stūpa* and the *vedikā* was gradually abandoned. Alongside these developments was the incorporation of narrative relief panels onto the surface of the *stūpa*. As both the narrative panels and archaeological remains show, the plinth—even when a staircase was available—was not used as a platform for *pradakṣiṇa* nor was it used to elevate the viewer to the level of the narrative panels.²⁹⁷ Over time relic shrines were introduced and formed a *pradakṣiṇa* path around the main *stūpa* at some Gandhāran sites.²⁹⁸ Faccenna has shown that stone, stucco, and glass *pradakṣiṇa* paths can be found on the ground level surrounding *stūpas* at a number of Gandhāran Buddhist sites.²⁹⁹ Together these shifts reflect changes in ritual activity—likely related to the veneration of relics—during the many centuries of Buddhist presence in Gandhāra.

Behrendt has suggested that the plinth functionally replaced the *vedikā* and was intended to protect the relics inside, which have been shown to be of the utmost importance in Gandhāra.³⁰⁰ Earlier in the late 20th century, Kuwayama proposed that the elevated podium was introduced into Gandhāra from Imperial Roman sepulchral monuments. He found similarities in the construction techniques used by Roman architects—specifically at the mausoleum of Augustus, c. 28 BCE—and those used in 1st century CE *stūpas* in Andhra Pradesh and Gandhāra.³⁰¹ The limited amount of elapsed time between the development of this technique in Rome and its application in South Asia creates complications for this argument. While

²⁹⁷ Brown, “Narrative as Icon: The Jātaka Stories in Ancient India and Southeast Asian Architecture,” 64-109.

²⁹⁸ Behrendt, *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra*, 59.

²⁹⁹ Domenico Faccenna and D. Gullini, *Reports on the Campaigns, 1956-1958 in Swat (Pakistan) Site of Butkara I* (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico dello Stato Libreria, 1962), 103-53.

³⁰⁰ Behrendt, *The Buddhist Architecture of Gandhāra*, 51-6.

³⁰¹ Shoshin Kuwayama, “Notes on the Introduction of Square Podium to the Taxilan Stupa,” *Orient* 14 (1978): 23-34.

Kuwayama does not see any relation between Hellenistic architecture and the introduction of the plinth, Faccenna thinks Hellenistic influences via Bactria and the Central Asia should be considered.³⁰² These propositions begin to address the introduction of the square plinth into Gandhāran architecture, but have not yet fully explained its presence.

Additionally, given the relationship between Buddhist and Brahmanical funerary traditions that has been shown in this study through the application of the theory of multivalence, a South Asian impetus for the introduction of the plinth should be considered as well. Kane describes a number of Brahmanical ritual processes for the establishment of sepulchral monuments that do not differ greatly from the founding of Buddhist *stūpas*.³⁰³ Johannes Bronkhorst views the placement of relics within a *stūpa* as a Buddhist response to Brahmanical ideals of purity.³⁰⁴ He proposes that the relics were hidden away within mounds and adorned with visual material (permanent and impermanent) in order to disguise the appearance of the impure bodily relics. In *Buddhism in the Shadow of Brahmanism*, Bronkhorst traces the usage of sepulchral mounds in the area of Greater Magadha to a period prior to the introduction of *stūpas* in the Buddhist tradition.³⁰⁵ He cites references found in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* that criticize practices involving the veneration of bodily remains. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* states,

Four cornered (is the sepulchral mound). Now the gods and the Asuras, both of them sprung from Prajāpati, were contending in the (four) regions (quarters). The gods drove out the Asuras, their rivals and enemies, from the regions, and being region less, they were overcome. Wherefore the people who are godly make their burial-places four-

³⁰² Kuwayama, “Notes on the Introduction of Square Podium to the Taxilan Stupa,” 27-33; Faccenna, “The Artistic Center of Butkara I and Saidu Sharif I in the Pre-Kuṣāṇa Period,” 173-5.

³⁰³ Kane, *History of Dharmaśāstra*, 245-55.

³⁰⁴ Bronkhorst, *Buddhism in the Shadow of Brahmanism*, 195-206.

³⁰⁵ Ibid., 193-224.

cornered, whilst those who are of the Asura nature, the Easterners and others, (make them) round, for they (the gods) drove them out from the regions. He arranges it so as to lie between the two regions, the eastern and the southern, for in that region assuredly is the door to the world of the Fathers: through the above he thus causes him to enter the world of the Fathers; by means of the (four) corners he (the deceased) establishes himself in the regions, and by means of the other body (of the tomb) in the intermediate regions: he thus establishes him in all the regions.³⁰⁶

Bronkhorst, among others, consider the Asuras—who are criticized for their funerary monuments—to be Buddhists or their ascetic precursors. While it is possible that the text is denouncing Buddhist activity, the exact target of their attack is not confirmed. It is possible that the Asuras have a connection to the Vedic figure Varuṇa and Brahmanical society and do not reference the Buddhist practices at all.³⁰⁷ In his study of the relationship between the Kuṣāṇa rulers and the *cakravartin* ideal at the site of Maṭ, Verardi shows that the *daṇḍa* held by Kaniṣka features the *makara* that is associated with the authority of Varuṇa and the *rājasūya* (ritual consecration of a king).³⁰⁸ The criticism in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* could relate to the practices of *kṣatriyas* rather than those of Buddhists or ascetics.

The primary difference between the funerary monuments described in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* are their shapes—round, perceived as wrong, compared with those correctly constructed in the form of a square. This distinction could reflect the round shape of early Buddhist *stūpas*, as seen at Sāñcī and Bhārhut (fig. 61), before *stūpas* developed a square plinth in Gandhāra. Just as Gandhāran reliefs of the life of the Buddha incorporated *gr̥hya* rituals into

³⁰⁶ Eggeling, *The Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, 423-4.

³⁰⁷ Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, 22-9.

³⁰⁸ Verardi, “The Kuṣāṇa Emperors as Cakravartins,” 260-5.

their narration of the Buddha's funerary rites, Gandhāran architecture could have also been influenced by Brahmanical architectural traditions.

Despite the perceived criticism that Buddhist *stūpas* received in early Brahmanical traditions, both groups had prescriptions for the construction of burial mounds. Kane shows that beyond the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, numerous *grhyasūtras* and *śrautasūtras* provide descriptions that detail the entombment of cremated remains in a monument.³⁰⁹ Through its incorporation of the construction of monuments over cremated remains, the early Buddhist tradition could have been trying to align itself with other socially accepted forms of burial and ritual. Through this multivalent interpretation of Episode Seven, the shared origins of Buddhist and Brahmanical funerary monuments have become evident and can help to explain the specific developments that occurred in Gandhāran Buddhist ritual practice.

³⁰⁹ Kane, *History of Dharmasāstra*, 246-247.

CONCLUSION

This study has found that these seven episodes best describe and categorize the moments that occur within visual narrative cycle of the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha. Based on their consistency and frequency it can be concluded that the depiction of these particular episodes compose the *parinirvāṇa* cycle. The *parinirvāṇa* cycle functions as one of the many life stages of the Buddha within the larger narrative cycle of the life of the Buddha at 1st - 3rd century CE Gandhāran Buddhist sites.

It was necessary, in the early Buddhist tradition, that the Buddha's body be cremated in order to explain the presence of his relics and their associated *stūpas* and that the representation of the creation of the relics on Gandhāran *stūpas* further authenticated the narrative of their production. While the Buddha shares many characteristics with *saṃnyāsins*, he is not identified with this term in the Buddhist tradition. The Buddha is a *śramaṇa* (an ascetic) who ultimately does not chose to renounce his elite lifestyle at the end of his life like a *saṃnyāsin*. The Buddha abandoned his life of pleasure when he could still enjoy his time as a *gṛhastha* and entered the *āśrama* of renunciation at the incorrect time according to *āśramadharmā*. While the Buddha rejects the precise progression of life-stages, he still engages in the most essential rituals of a *gṛhastha*. This is exemplified by his funeral in the manner of a *cakravartin*.

Many of the South Asian traditions that were developing in the c. 6th - 5th century BCE struggled with the concept of *samsāra* and sought a path toward liberation. In his quest for *nirvāṇa*, the Buddha initially reached his goal of enlightenment when he was awakened at the age of thirty-five, but he did not fully achieve his *mahāparinirvāṇa* until his death at age

eighty.³¹⁰ The coeval developments, practices, and interactions of Buddhist and Brahmanical traditions within this geographic and historic period contributed to the form of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle that is represented on 1st-3rd century CE Gandhāran *stūpas*. This analysis of the *parinirvāṇa* cycle, through an application of the theory of multivalence, has begun to identify and explore how early social interactions led to the development of the narrative of the Buddha's funeral. This project has highlighted some of the shared and unique aspects of each culture.

The setting of the life of the historical Buddha (c. 5th century BCE) in northern India is not surprising given the social developments of the area at that time. This region was the home to a number of ascetic groups, including Jains and Ājīvakas, who engaged in ritual and meditative activity while withdrawn from society. The very present need to retreat from society evident in these c. 8th - 4th century BCE traditions is a reflection of the growth of organized, settled society in the area. The territory in which these groups developed encompassed the historic domains of Magadha, Kosala, Kāśī, and Vṛjī, among others that gave rise to a new social structure that allowed individuals to explore paths beyond that of the Vedas.³¹¹

The division of power between these new strong leaders who maintained their territory year round and those entrusted with the Vedic rituals contributed to the categorization of *kṣatriyas* and *brāhmaṇas*. The Buddha as a *kṣatriya* reflects the growth of political powers in this period and area alongside the emergence of other *śramaṇic* traditions.

One of the primary concerns of many of these ascetic groups in northern India, as well as in the earlier Vedic tradition, was death and the afterlife. The topic of death repeatedly shows up

³¹⁰ Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*, 245.

³¹¹ Bronkhorst, *Greater Magadha*, 13-72; F. Raymond Allchin, Bridget Allchin, D. K. Chakrabarti, R. A. E. Coningham, and George Erdosy, *The Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia: The Emergence of Cities and States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 75-122.

in the *Upaniṣads* and in Buddhist literature. As Olivelle pointed out, 6.2 in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* during the discussion of the “Five Fires” the two paths of death following cremation are described in the following way:

The people who know this, and the people there in the wilderness who venerate truth as faith—they pass into the flame, from the flame into the day, from the day into the fortnight of the waxing moon, from the fortnight of the waxing moon into the six months when the sun moves north, from these months into the world of the gods, from the world of the gods into the sun, and from the sun into the region of lightning. A person consisting of mind comes to the regions of lightning and leads him to the worlds of *brahman*. These exalted people live in those worlds of *brahman* for the longest time. They do not return. The people who win heavenly worlds, on the other hand, by offering sacrifices, by giving gifts, and by performing austerities—they pass into the smoke, from the smoke into the night, from the night into the fortnight of the waning moon, from the fortnight of the waning moon into the six months when the sun moves south, from these months into the world of the fathers, and from the world of the fathers into the moon. Reaching the moon they become food. There the gods feed on them, as they tell King Soma, the moon: ‘Increase! Decrease!’. When that ends, they pass into this very sky from the sky into the wind, from the wind into the rain and from the rain into the earth. Reaching the earth, they become food. They are again offered in the fire of man and then take birth in the fire of woman. Rising up once again to the heavenly worlds, they circle around in the same way.³¹²

The ultimate goal of the “worlds of *brahman*” in the context of the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* can be compared with that of *nirvāṇa* in the early Buddhist tradition. Both of these traditions reflect the idea that there are steps that people can take to release themselves from the cycle of rebirth.

As Olivelle points out,

The sun is viewed as a lid that covers the only opening in the vault of heaven, the only door to freedom; the sun permits the liberated individuals to pass through that opening and escape to the immortal condition outside the universe.³¹³

Aware of this notion, A. K. Coomaraswamy speculated that the source of the halo that surrounds the heads of the Buddha and *bodhisattvas* in South Asian art could be this Vedic disc that

³¹² Olivelle, *Upaniṣads*, 81-84.

³¹³ Ibid., xlviii.

symbolized the sun.³¹⁴ It is possible that the halo is a multivalent symbol that incorporates both Vedic and Zoroastrian ideas. The interesting representation of an enthroned halo/golden disc in fig. 68 is probably related to this concept, since it is only due to the Buddha's *nirvāṇa* that he will be able to lift the lid of liberation.

Not only do the narrative panels from the *parinirvāṇa* cycle possess the ability to be read in terms of multivalence, but the overall narrative cycles presented on the *stūpas* do as well. The two paths, that of the *devayāna* and *pitṛyāna* are potentially referenced in the architectural placement of narrative cycles on Gandhāran *stūpas*.

The lower narrative cycle that incorporates the *parinirvāṇa* cycle into the larger life-cycle of the Buddha shows his role as a *gṛhastha*. In these reliefs, the Buddha is fully engaged in Brahmanical rituals—especially prior to his *nirvāṇa*. This cycle of events could correspond with the path of the *pitṛyāna* and relate to the path taken by the laity in the afterlife. The upper narrative cycle of the life of the Buddha is found on the *harmikā*. The two examples of *harmikās* provided in this study (figs. 65 and 67) show events that are particular to the Buddha's final life and *parinirvāṇa*. This upper level could reference the path of the *devayāna*, the path to liberation. It should be noted that Snodgrass considers one of the symbolisms of the *harmikā*—which is a still poorly understood aspect of the *stūpa*—to be that of the “sun door.”³¹⁵ As such, this structure is the exit out of which the Buddha attained *nirvāṇa*. The selection of narrative reliefs for the *harmikā* seem to confirm his hypothesis that this is the path of the *devayāna*.

It is possible that the path of the *pitṛyāna* was represented on the lower level and had a multivalent reference to the path of the *upāsaka/upāsikā* who were destined for rebirth.

³¹⁴ Coomaraswamy, “The Indian Origin of the Buddha Image,” 305-306.

³¹⁵ Adrian Snodgrass, *Symbolism of the Stūpa* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1985), 268-73.

Similarly, the upper path which provided access to the *devayāna*, and hence liberation, may reflect the ideal path of a *bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī*, in addition to the accomplishment of the Buddha. In this way, a multivalent reading of the visual narrative cycle of the *parinirvāṇa* of the Buddha at 1st - 3rd century CE Gandhāran *stūpa* sites can communicate the way that lay and monastic members of the early Buddhist community conceptualized *saṃsara* and how they engaged in ritual activity.

FIGURES



Episode 1

Fig. 1 *Parinirvāṇa (Śarīra-Pūjā of the Buddha)*, c. 100 CE, Gandhāra, stone, 19.1 x 30.5 cm, Honolulu Museum of Art, Honolulu, Hawai'i, accession no. 2719, purchased 1928

Image Source: Wikimedia Commons <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File
'Parinirvana'%2C_India%2C_Gandhara%2C_c._100_CE%2C_stone
%2C_Honolulu_Academy_of_Arts.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%3A'Parinirvana'%2C_India%2C_Gandhara%2C_c._100_CE%2C_stone%2C_Honolulu_Academy_of_Arts.JPG)>

* The images sourced from Wikimedia Commons have been confirmed to correspond with the correct works of art



Episode 1

Fig. 2 *Death of the Buddha*, 1st-3rd century CE, Butkara, Swat, Gandhāra, black schist, 28.5 x 22 cm, Swat Museum, Mingora, Pakistan, accession no. A.M.S. INV: NO: 2437

Image Source: M. Ashram Khan, *Gandhāra Sculptures in the Swat Museum* (Saidu Sharif, Swat, Pakistan: Archaeological Museum, 1993), 104, fig. 70.



Episode 1

Fig. 3 *The Buddha's Death*, 1st-3rd century CE, Butkara I, Swat, 11.5 x 13.5 cm, stone, Museo Nazionale d'arte Orientale (National Museum of Oriental Art), Rome, Italy, Inv. No. 3591

Image Source: Domenico Faccenna and M. Taddei, *Sculptures from the Sacred Area of Butkara I (Swat, Pakistan)*, vol. II, *Reports and Memoirs* (Rome: IsMEO, 1962-1964), 73, Pl. CCLXXXVIIIa.



Episode 1

Fig. 4 *Death of the Buddha*, 1st-3rd century CE, Takht-i-Bahi, Gandhāra, stone, 15.2 x 21 cm, Peshawar Museum, Peshawar, Pakistan, accession no. 1319 A, 1909

Image Source: Harold Ingholt, *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1957), 94, fig. 140.



Episode 1

Fig. 5 *Transportation of the Body*, 1st-3rd century CE, Gandhāra, stone, Museo Nazionale d'arte Orientale (National Museum of Oriental Art), Rome, Italy, INV. 4360

Image Source: Faccenna and Taddei, *Sculptures from the Sacred Area of Butkara I*, 72, Pl. CCLXXXIVa.



Episode 1

Fig. 6 *Bier of the Buddha*, 2nd-3rd century CE, Shaikhān Dheri, Gandhāra, 20.33 x 20.33 cm, stone, Peshawar Museum, Peshawar, Pakistan, accession no. 2045/PM_02835

Image Source: Fidaullah Sehrai, *The Buddha Story in the Peshawar Museum* (Peshawar: Peshawar Museum, 1978), 58, fig. 64.



Episode 1

Fig. 7 *The Buddha's Obsequies*, 1st-3rd century CE, Butkara I, Swat, 35.5 x 31.5 cm, stone, Museo Nazionale d'arte Orientale (National Museum of Oriental Art), Rome, Italy, Inv. No. 2549

Image Source: Faccenna and Taddei, *Sculptures from the Sacred Area of Butkara I*, 73, Pl. CCLXXXVIIIb.



Episode 2

Fig. 8 *The Coffin of the Buddha*, 1st-3rd century CE, Gandhāra, stone, 47.6 x 47.9 cm, Peshawar Museum, Peshawar, Pakistan, Gai Collection

Image Sources: Ingholt, *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan*, 95, fig. 144.



Episode 2

Fig. 9 *The Coffin of the Buddha*, 1st-3rd century CE, Sanghao, Gandhāra, stone, 29.2 x 33 cm, Lahore Museum, Lahore, Pakistan, accession no. 1111

Image Sources: Ingholt, *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan*, 94-95, fig. 143.



Episode 2

Fig. 10 *The Coffin of the Buddha*, 3rd century CE, Mīyan Khān, Gandhāra, stone, 28.9 x 33 cm, Indian Museum, Calcutta, India

Image Source: Jorinde Ebert, *Parinirvāṇa: Untersuchungen zur ikonographischen Entwicklung von den indischen Anfängen bis nach China* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH, 1985), Tafel 15, fig. 26.



Episode 2

Fig. 11 *Parinirvāṇa of the Buddha*, 3rd century CE, Gandhāra, schist, 27.3 x 32.5 x 7.2 cm, Museum für Asiatische Kunst (Museum of Asian Art), Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (National Museum in Berlin), Berlin, Germany, accession no. I 80

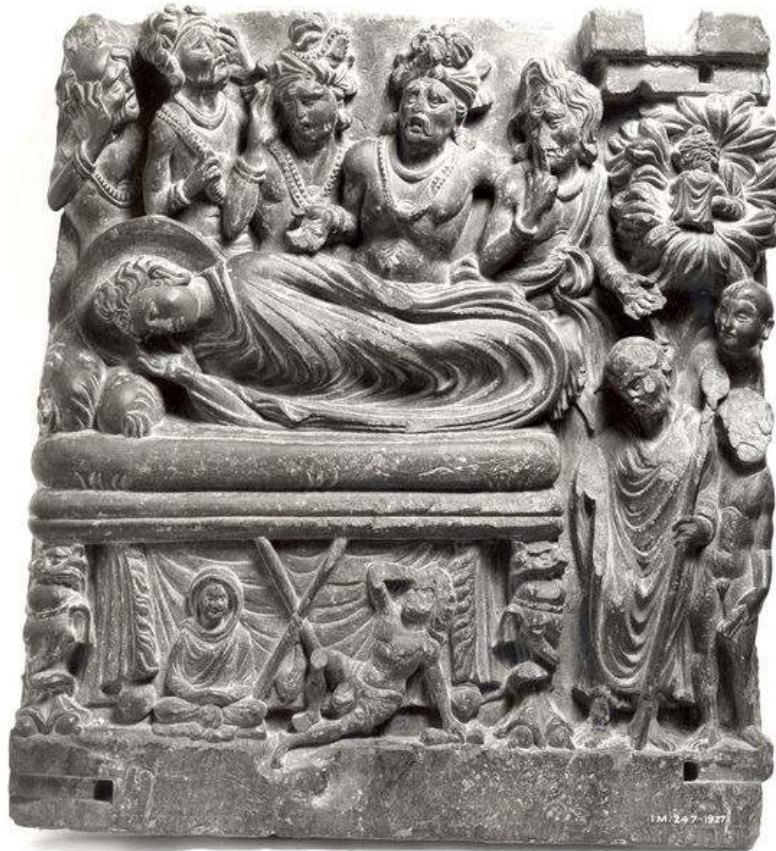
Image Sources: ARTstor <<http://library.artstor.org.eres.library.manoa.hawaii.edu/library/secure/ViewImages?id=8zZXajAhOy81MUA7eD94QHssXnou&userId=gDVAdzom&zoomparams=&fs=true>>



Episode 2

Fig. 12 *Parinirvāṇa*, 2nd-3rd century CE, Gandhāra, grey schist, 29.8 x 41.1 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession no. 67.43.13, gift of Paul E. Manheim, 1967

Image Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art <<http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/38209>>



Episode 2

Fig. 13 *Parinirvāṇa*, 2nd-3rd century CE, Loriyan Tangai, Gandhāra, schist, 53 x 48 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, accession no. IM.247-1927

Image Sources: Victoria and Albert Museum <<http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O25035/mahaparinirvana-sculpture-unknown/>>



Episode 2

Fig. 14 *Death of the Buddha*, 1st-3rd century CE, Gandhāra, stone, 21 x 24.13 cm, Lahore Museum, Lahore, Pakistan, accession no. 224

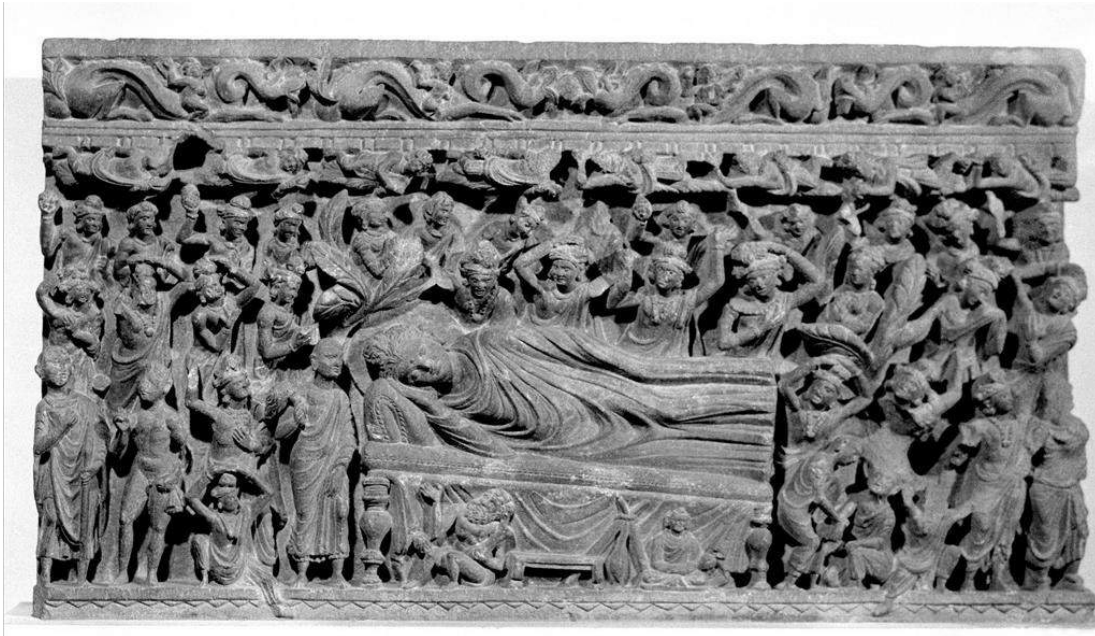
Image Source: Ingholt, *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan*, 94, fig. 141.



Episode 2

Fig. 15 *Parinirvāṇa*, 2nd-3rd century CE, Takht-i-Bahi, Gandhāra, schist, 27.2 x 44.3 cm, British Museum, London, registration no. 1899, 0715.9

Image Source: British Museum <http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=225382&partId=1>



Episode 2

Fig. 16 *Parinirvāṇa*, 1st-3rd century CE, Loriyan Tangai, Gandhāra, 45.72 (h) cm, schist, Indian Museum, Calcutta, accession no. 5147

Image Sources: ARTstor <<http://library.artstor.org/library/secure/ViewImages?id=%2BSxbbj5NJjU7&userId=hDFBeDUr&zoomparams=&fs=true>>



Episode 2

Fig. 17 *Parinirvāṇa*, late 2nd - early 3rd century CE, Gandhāra, 67 x 289.8 x 9.8 cm (dimensions only provide for entire set of four reliefs), stone, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D. C., accession no. F1949.9

Image Source: Freer Gallery of Art <http://www.asia.si.edu/collections/edan/object.php?q=fsg_F1949.9a-d&bcrumb=true>



Episode 2

Fig. 18 *Death of the Buddha*, 2nd-3rd century CE, Jamal Garhi, Gandhāra, 21.60 x 22.87 cm, stone, Peshawar Museum, Peshawar, Pakistan, accession no. 1883/PM_02829

Image Source: Ihsan Ali and Muhammad Naeem Qazi, *Gandharan Sculptures in the Peshawar Museum* (Mansehra NWFP-Pakistan: Hazara University, 2008), 256.



Episode 2

Fig. 19 *Death of the Buddha*, 2nd-3rd century CE, Takht-i Bahi, Gandhāra, 19.06 x 36.85 cm, stone, Peshawar Museum, Peshawar, Pakistan, accession no. 775/PM_02828

Image Source: Ingholt, *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan*, 94, fig. 139



Episode 2

Fig. 20 *Death of the Buddha*, 2nd-3rd century CE, Sahri Bahlol, Gandhāra, 27.96 x 39.40 cm, stone, Peshawar Museum, Peshawar, Pakistan, accession no. 130/PM_02827

Image Source: Ingholt, *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan*, 93-94, fig. 138.



Episode 2

Fig. 21 *Death of the Buddha*, 2nd-3rd century CE, Gandhāra, 24.15 x 48.40 cm, stone, Peshawar Museum, Peshawar, Pakistan, PM_01957

Image Source: Ali and Qazi, *Gandharan Sculptures in the Peshawar Museum*, 258.



Episode 2

Fig. 22 *Death of the Buddha*, 2nd-3rd century CE, Sahri Bahlol, Gandhāra, 26.69 x 34.31 cm, stone, Peshawar Museum, Peshawar, Pakistan, PM_02826

Image Source: Ingholt, *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan*, 92-93, fig. 137.



Episode 2

Fig. 23 *Shrouded Buddha*, 2nd-3rd century CE, Mamane Dheri, Charsadda, Gandhāra, 13.98 x 20.33 cm, stone, Peshawar Museum, Peshawar, Pakistan, 975-M/PM_02825

Image Source: Ali and Qazi, *Gandharan Sculptures in the Peshawar Museum*, 260.



Episodes 2, 5, and 7

Fig. 24 (A-D/top-bottom panels) *Unidentified (A), Parinirvāṇa (B), Distribution of the relics (C), Cult of the Stūpa (D)*, 1st-3rd century CE, Takht-i-Bahi, Gandhāra, schist, 44.5 x 43.2 cm, Peshawar Museum, Peshawar, Pakistan, accession no. 1846, 1912-13

Image Sources: Ingholt, *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan*, 102, fig. 167.



Episode 3

Fig. 25 *Cremation of the Buddha (proper left) and Guarding of the Relics (proper right)*, 1st-3rd century CE, Gandhāra, grey schist, Indian Museum, Calcutta, India, no. 13854

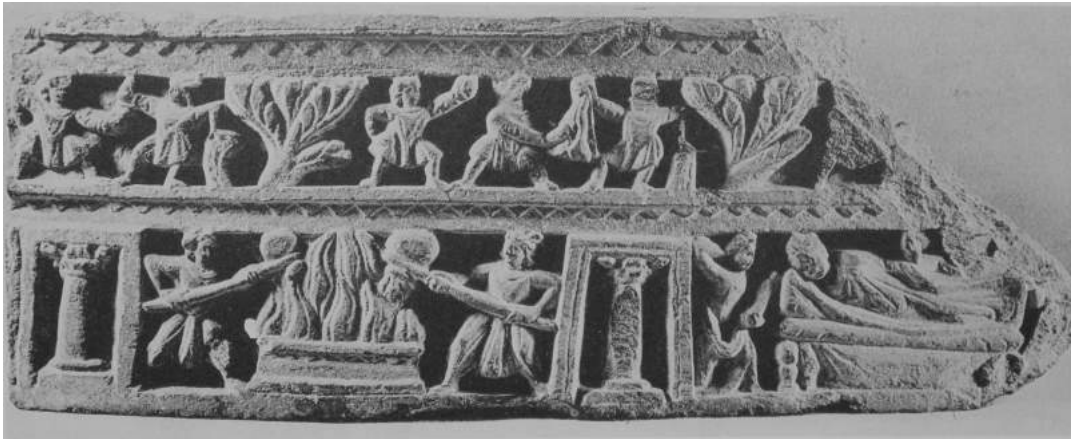
Image Source: ARTstor <<http://library.artstor.org/library/secure/ViewImages?id=8DNQZjU4ODA5Jy80fTJrKngqVXYsel5%2BfQ%3D%3D&userId=hDFBeDUr&zoomparams=&fs=true>>



Episode 3

Fig. 26 *Parinirvāṇa (proper left) and Cremation of the Buddha (proper right)*, 1st-3rd century CE, Peshawar Valley, Gandhāra, grey schist, 28 x 45 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, accession no. IM.215-1921

Image Sources: ARTstor <<http://library.artstor.org/library/secure/ViewImages?id=%2BSxbbj5MKzUwLQ%3D%3D&userId=hDFBeDUr&zoomparams=&fs=true>>



Episode 3

Fig. 27 *Death of the Buddha (proper left) and Cremation of the Buddha (proper right)*, 1st-3rd century CE, Gandhāra, stone, 16.2 x 43.8 cm, Peshawar Museum, Peshawar, Pakistan, accession no. 697

Image Source: Ingholt, *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan*, 94, fig. 142.



Episode 3

Fig. 28 *Cremation of the Buddha*, 1st-3rd century CE, Gandhāra, schist, 10.6 cm (h), Allahabad Municipal Museum, Allahabad, India, National Documentation No. NM-ALH-68845

Image Source: ARTstor <<http://library.artstor.org/library/secure/ViewImages?id=%2BSxbbj5ILzMz&userId=hDFBeDUr&zoomparams=&fs=true>>



Episode 3

Fig. 29 *Cremation of the Buddha*, 2nd century CE, Gandhāra, 31 x 29 x 6 cm, Museum für Asiatische Kunst (Museum of Asian Art), Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (National Museum in Berlin), Berlin, Germany, accession no. I 5971

Image Source: Museum für Asiatische Kunst (Museum of Asian Art), Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (National Museum in Berlin) <<http://www.smb-digital.de/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface&module=collection&objectId=981572&viewType=detailView>>



Episode 3

Fig. 30 *Cremation of the Buddha*, 1st-3rd century CE, Takht-i-Bahi, Gandhāra, stone, 15.2 cm, Peshawar Museum, Peshawar, Pakistan, accession no. 1319 B, 1909

Image Source: Ingholt, *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan*, 96, fig. 158.



Episode 4

Fig. 31 *The Urn Carried into Kusinagara*, 1st-3rd century CE, Gandhāra, stone, 20.6 cm, Lahore Museum, Lahore, Pakistan, accession no. 148

Image Source: Ingholt, *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan*, 97, fig. 151.



Episode 4

Fig. 32 *Guarding of the Relics*, 2nd-3rd century CE, Jamal Garhi, Gandhāra, 20.33 x 40.67 cm, stone, Peshawar Museum, Peshawar, Pakistan, accession no. 1894/PM_02834

Image Source: Sehrai, *The Buddha Story in the Peshawar Museum*, 59, fig. 66.



Episode 4

Fig. 33 *Worship of the Relics*, 1st-3rd century CE, Loriyan Tangai, Gandhāra, schist, Indian Museum, Calcutta, India, accession no. 13764

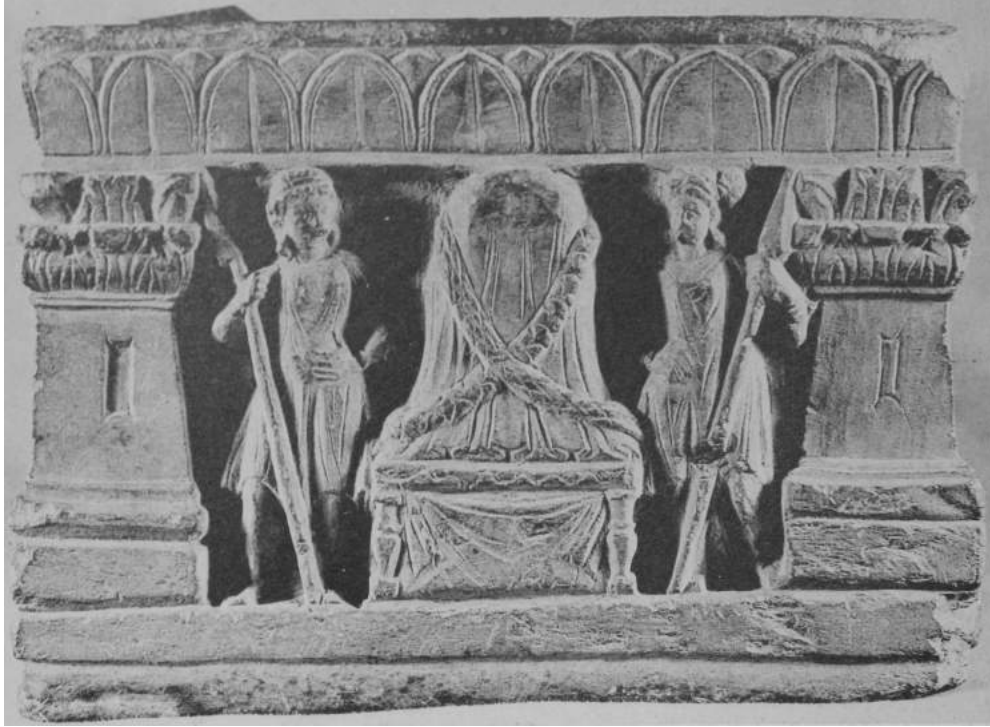
Image Source: ARTstor <<http://library.artstor.org/library/secure/ViewImages?id=8DNQZjU4ODA5Jy80fTJrKngqVXYsel99fQ%3D%3D&userId=hDFBeDUr&zoomparams=&fs=true>>



Episode 4

Fig. 34 *Guarding of the Relics*, 2nd-3rd century CE, Malakand, Swat, Gandhāra, black schist, 43 x 24 cm, Swat Museum, Mingora, Pakistan, accession no. A.M.S. INV: NO: M.K. 76

Image Source: Khan, *Gandhāra Sculptures in the Swat Museum*, 108, fig. 73.



Episode 4

Fig. 35 *Guarding the Urn*, 1st-3rd century CE, Takht-i-Bahi, Gandhāra, stone, 15.2 cm, Peshawar Museum, Peshawar, Pakistan, accession no. 1319 C, 1909

Image Source: Ingholt, *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan*, 99, fig. 158.



Episode 4

Fig. 36 *Two Events in the Life of the Buddha*, c. late 1st century CE, possibly Sikri, Gandhāra, 18 x 29.5 cm, chlorite mica schist, University of Missouri-Columbia Museum of Art and Archaeology, Columbia, Missouri, accession no. 74. 128, gift of Samuel Eilenberg

Image Source: Sarla Nagar, *Gandhāran Sculpture: A Catalogue of the Collection in the Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri-Columbia* (Columbia, Missouri: The Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Missouri-Columbia, 1981), 20-21, fig. 12.



Episode 4

Fig. 37 *Worship of the Relics*, 2nd-3rd century CE, Gandhāra, 15.25 x 27.96 cm, stone, Peshawar Museum, PM_02839

Image Source: Ali and Qazi, *Gandharan Sculptures in the Peshawar Museum*, 267.



Episode 4

Fig. 38 *Worship of the Relics*, 2nd-3rd century CE, Sahri Bahlol, Gandhāra, 11.44 x 53.38 cm, stone, Peshawar Museum, Peshawar, Pakistan, accession no. 153/PM_02841

Image Source: Ali and Qazi, *Gandharan Sculptures in the Peshawar Museum*, 267.



Episode 5

Fig. 39 *Distribution of the Relics*, 2nd-3rd century CE, Gandhāra, 22.87 x 66.08 cm, stone, Peshawar Museum, Peshawar, Pakistan, PM_02830

Image Source: Sehrai, *The Buddha Story in the Peshawar Museum*, 59-60, fig. 67.



Episode 5

Fig. 40 *Distribution of the Relics*, 2nd-3rd century CE, Gandhāra, 19.06 x 31.77 cm, stone, Peshawar Museum, Peshawar, Pakistan, accession no. 2043/PM_0192

Image Source: Ingholt, *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan*, 98, fig. 154.



Episode 5

Fig. 41 *Division of the Relics*, 1st-2nd century CE, Gandhāra, schist, 22.5 x 37.5 cm, British Museum, London, registration no. 1966, 1017.1

Image Source: British Museum <http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=223786&partId=1>



Episode 5

Fig. 42 *Distribution of the Relics*, 2nd-3rd century CE, Gandhāra, stone, 11.11 x 16.51 x 3.81 cm, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, accession no. M.84.151

Image Source: Los Angeles County Museum of Art <<http://collections.lacma.org/node/248943>>



Episode 5

Fig. 43 *Distribution of the Relics*, 1st-3rd century CE, Butkara, Swat, Gandhāra, black schist, 32 x 17 cm, Swat Museum, Mingora, Pakistan, accession no. A.M.S. INV: NO: 3092

Image Source: Khan, *Gandhāra Sculptures in the Swat Museum*, 109, fig. 74.



Episode 5

Fig. 44 *Distribution of the Relics*, 2nd-3rd century CE, Gandhāra, stone, Zenyōmitsu-ji Temple, Tokyo, Japan

Image Source*: Wikimedia Commons <<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:EndAscetism.JPG>>



Episode 5

Fig. 45 *Distribution of the Relics*, 2nd-3rd century CE, Gandhāra, stone, 13 x 22 x 4.2 cm, Museum für Asiatische Kunst (Museum of Asian Art), Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (National Museum in Berlin), Berlin, Germany, accession no. I 49

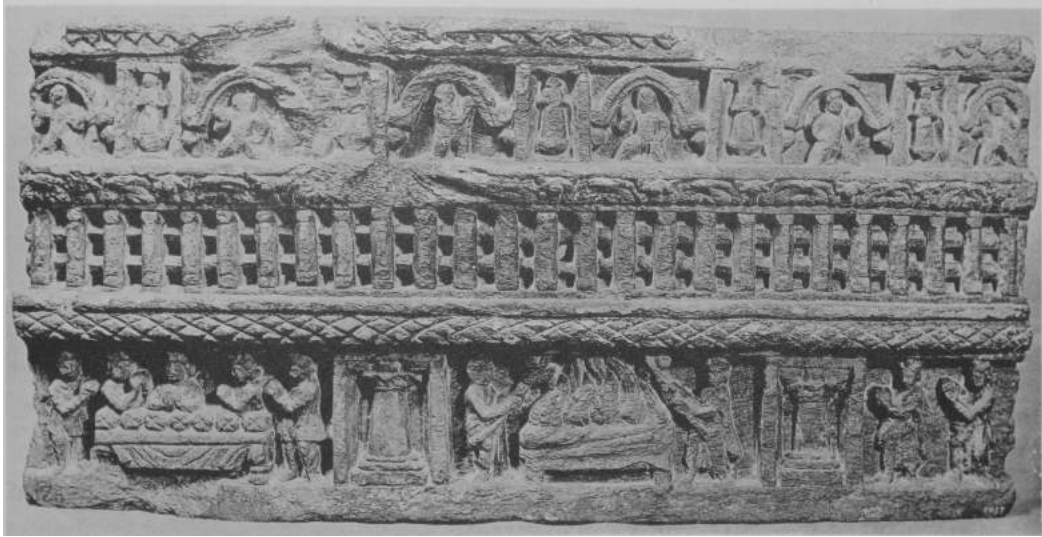
Image Source: Museum für Asiatische Kunst (Museum of Asian Art), Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (National Museum in Berlin <<http://www.smb-digital.de/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface&module=collection&objectId=1713252&viewType=detailView>>



Episode 5

Fig. 46 *Distribution of the Relics*, 1st-3rd century CE, Ranigat, Gandhāra, stone, 22 cm, Lahore Museum, Lahore, Pakistan, accession no. 139

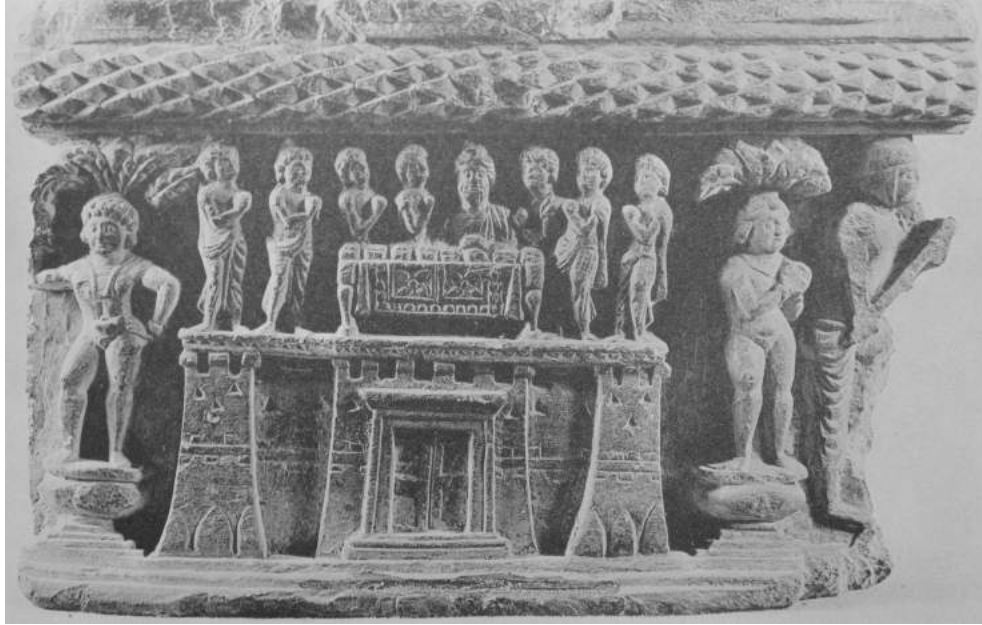
Image Source: Ingholt, *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan*, 98, fig. 153.



Episode 5

Fig. 47 *Unidentified (proper left, possibly Śarīra-Pūjā), Cremation of the Buddha (center) and Distribution of the Relics (proper right)*, 1st-3rd century CE, Sikri, Gandhāra, stone, 21.3 x 43.2 cm, Lahore Museum, Lahore, Pakistan, accession no. 2037

Image Source: Ingholt, *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan*, 96, fig. 147.



Episode 5

Fig. 48 *Distribution of the Relics*, 1st-3rd century CE, Gandhāra, stone, 15.2 x 23.8 cm, Peshawar Museum, Peshawar, Pakistan, accession no. 1973

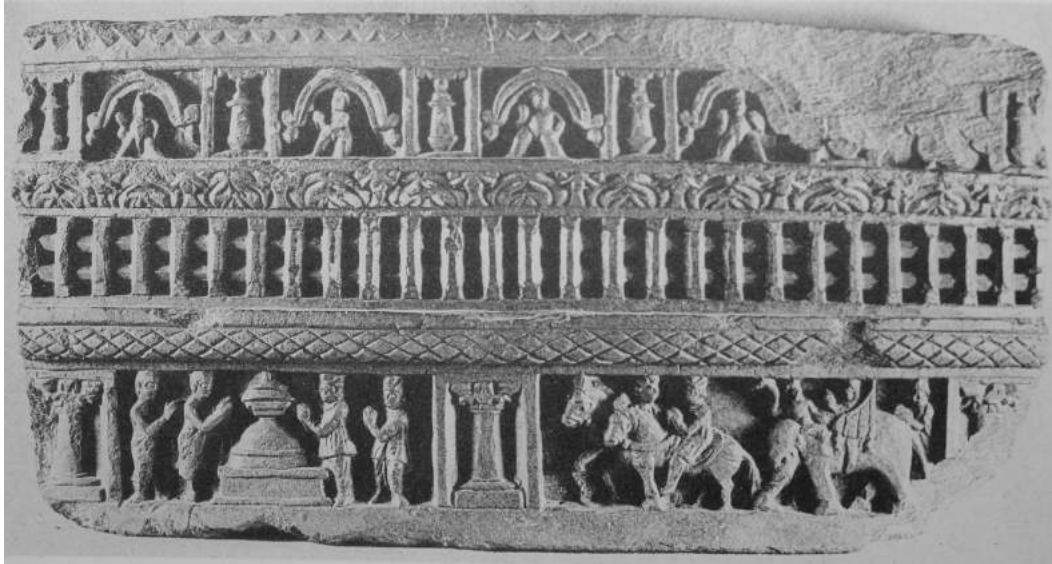
Image Source: Ingholt, *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan*, 97, fig. 152.



Episode 6

Fig. 49 *Death of the Buddha (proper left), Transportation of the Relics (center), Cult of the Stūpa (proper right)*, 1st-3rd century CE, Sikri, Gandhāra, stone, 19.1 x 58.1 cm, Lahore Museum, Lahore, Pakistan, accession no. 2030

Image Source: Ingholt, *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan*, 95-96, fig. 145.



Episode 6

Fig. 50 *Transportation of the Relics (proper left) and Cult of the Stūpa (proper right)*, Sikri, Gandhāra, stone, 21.6 x 43.2 cm, Lahore Museum, Lahore, Pakistan, accession no. 2061

Image Source: Ingholt, *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan*, 97, fig. 149.



Episode 6

Fig. 51 *Transportation of the Relics*, 1st-3rd century CE, Gandhāra, stone, 20.6 cm, Lahore Museum, Lahore, Pakistan, accession no. 1172

Image Source: Ingholt, *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan*, 97, fig. 150.



Episode 6

Fig. 52 *Transportation of the Relics (Horses)*, 1st-3rd century CE, Panr, Swat, (F. (3)), Gandhāra, green schist, 24 x 17 cm, Swat Museum, Mingora, Pakistan, accession no. A.M.S. INV: NO: P. 673

Image Source: Khan, *Gandhāra Sculptures in the Swat Museum*, 114, fig. 77.



Episode 6

Fig. 53 *Transportation of the Relics (Camel)*, 1st-3rd century CE, Panr, Swat, (F. (3)), Gandhāra, green schist, 24 x 17 cm, Swat Museum, Mingora, Pakistan, accession no. A.M.S. INV: NO: P. 673

Image Source: Khan, *Gandhāra Sculptures in the Swat Museum*, 112, fig. 76.



Episode 6

Fig. 54 *Transportation of the Relics (Elephant)*, 1st-3rd century CE, Panr, Swat, (F. (3)), Gandhāra, green schist, 24 x 17 cm, Swat Museum, Mingora, Pakistan, accession no. A.M.S. INV: NO: P. 673

Image Source: Khan, *Gandhāra Sculptures in the Swat Museum*, 114, fig. 78.



Episode 7

Fig. 55 *Worship of the Stūpa*, 2nd-3rd century CE, Gandhāra, stone, 27.8 x 27.8 x 6 cm, Museum für Asiatische Kunst (Museum of Asian Art), Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (National Museum in Berlin), Berlin, Germany, accession no. I 5760

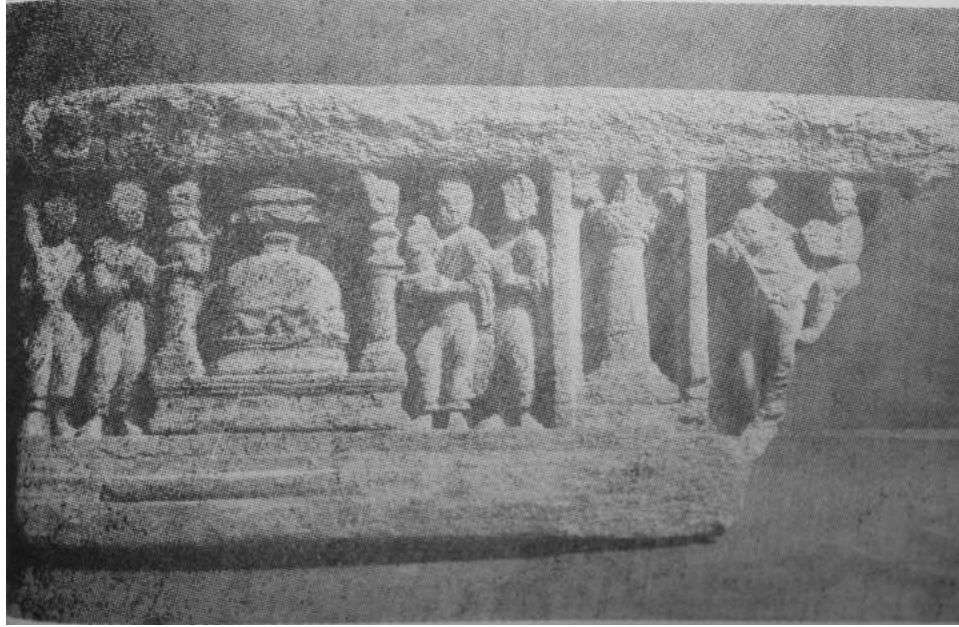
Image Source: Museum für Asiatische Kunst (Museum of Asian Art), Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (National Museum in Berlin) <<http://www.smb-digital.de/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface&module=collection&objectId=981612&viewType=detailView>>



Episode 7

Fig. 56 *Adoration of a Stūpa*, 2nd-3rd century CE, Gandhāra, 15 x 19.3 x 5 cm, green-grey schist, British Museum, London, registration no. 1902, 1002.29

Image Source: British Museum <http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=225296&partId=1>



Episode 7

Fig. 57 *Cult of the Stūpa*, 1st-3rd century CE, Malakand, Swat, Gandhāra, black schist, 53.5 x 24 cm, Swat Museum, Mingora, Pakistan, accession no: A.M.S. INV: No. MK: 13

Image Source: Khan, *Gandhāra Sculptures in the Swat Museum*, 115, fig. 79.



Episode 7

Fig. 58 *Cult of the Stūpa*, 1st-3rd century CE, Gandhāra, 10.8 x 19.1 cm, Lahore Museum, Lahore, Pakistan, accession no. 627

Image Source: Ingholt, *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan*, 98-99, fig. 157.



Episode 7

Fig. 59 *Cult of a Reliquary*, 1st-3rd century CE, Gandhāra, stone, 16.2 x 33.5 cm, Peshawar Museum, Peshawar, Pakistan, accession no. 1151

Image Source: Ingholt, *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan*, 98, fig. 155.



Episode 7

Fig. 60 *Worship of the Stūpa*, 2nd-3rd century CE, Shaikhān Dheri, Gandhāra, 29.22 x 29.23 cm, stone, Peshawar Museum, Peshawar, Pakistan, PM_02840

Image Source: Ali and Qazi, *Gandharan Sculptures in the Peshawar Museum*, 275.



Fig. 61 *Parinirvana/Worship at a Stūpa*, early 2nd century BCE, from the railing of the *stūpa* at Bhārhut, Madhya Pradesh, India, sandstone, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D. C., accession no. F1932.26

Image Source: Freer Gallery of Art < <http://www.asia.si.edu/collections/edan/object.php?q=10007> >



Fig. 62 *Birth of the Buddha*, late 2nd - early 3rd century CE, Gandhāra, 67 x 289.8 x 9.8 cm (dimensions only provide for entire set of four reliefs), stone, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D. C., accession no. F1949.9

Image Source: Freer Gallery of Art <http://www.asia.si.edu/collections/edan/object.php?q=fsg_F1949.9a-d&bcrumb=true>



Fig. 63 *Enlightenment/Defeat of Māra*, late 2nd-early 3rd century CE, Gandhāra, 67 x 289.8 x 9.8 cm (dimensions only provide for entire set of four reliefs), stone, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D. C., accession no. F1949.9

Image Source: Freer Gallery of Art <http://www.asia.si.edu/collections/edan/object.php?q=fsg_F1949.9a-d&bcrumb=true>



Fig. 64 *First Sermon*, late 2nd-early 3rd century CE, Gandhāra, 67 x 289.8 x 9.8 cm (dimensions only provide for entire set of four reliefs), stone, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington D. C., accession no. F1949.9

Image Source: Freer Gallery of Art <http://www.asia.si.edu/collections/edan/object.php?q=fsg_F1949.9a-d&bcrumb=true>



Fig. 65 *Complete set of harmikā narrative relief panels* (L-R: figs. 17, 63, 64, and 65)



Fig. 66 *The Buddha in Meditation Flanked by Indra and Brahma*, 1st-3rd century CE, Takht-i-Bahī, Gandhāra, stone, 15.2 x 21 cm, Peshawar Museum, Peshawar, Pakistan, accession no. 1864/1319, 1909

Image Source: Ingholt, *Gandhāran Art in Pakistan*, 118, fig. 243.

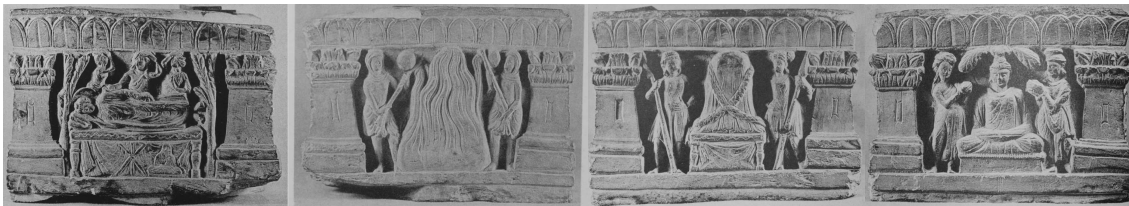


Fig. 67 *Complete set of narrative relief panels* (figs. 8, 30, 35, and 66)



Fig. 68 *Entreaty to Preach the Doctrine*, 1st-2nd century CE, Gandhāra, 26.7 x 23.5 cm, green schist, British Museum of Art, London, museum no. 1966, 1017.2

Image Source: British Museum of Art <http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details/collection_image_gallery.aspx?assetId=253301001&objectId=223785&partId=1>



Fig. 69 *Bel Temple Beam Relief Representing a Sanctuary with Two Gods, Malakbel (center) and Aglibôl (right)*, c. 32 CE, Temple of Bel, Palmyra, 1.60 m, stone

Image Source: University of Oxford Manar al-Athar Photo Archive <http://www.manar-al-athar.ox.ac.uk/dams/pages/view.php?ref=19741&search=%21collection424&order_by=field8&sort=ASC&offset=48&archive=0&k=>>



Fig. 70 *Bel Temple Beam Relief Representing a Religious Procession*, c. 32 CE, Temple of Bel, Palmyra, 2 m, stone

Image Source: University of Oxford Manar al-Athar Photo Archive <http://www.manar-al-athar.ox.ac.uk/dams/pages/view.php?ref=19769&search=%21collection424&order_by=field8&sort=ASC&offset=48&archive=0&k=>>



Fig. 71 *Reliquary with contents*, c. 1st century CE, Pakistan, 6.5 cm, schist with objects of copper, gold, rock crystal, and pearl objects, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession no. 1987.258.2a–q, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Uzi Zucker, 1987

Image Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art <<http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/38115?sortBy=Relevance&ft=reliquary+gandhara&offset=0&rpp=20&pos=7>>



Fig. 72 *Gold flowers pierced for attachment to clothing*, Burial 4 at Tilya Tepe

Image Source: Robert L Brown, “The Nature and Use of the Bodily Relics of the Buddha in Gandhara,” in *Gandhāran Buddhism: Archaeology, Art, and Texts*, eds, Kurt A. Behrendt, and Pia Branaccio (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 194, fig. 8.8 (“after Sarianidi, *Bactrian Gold*, illus. 1”).

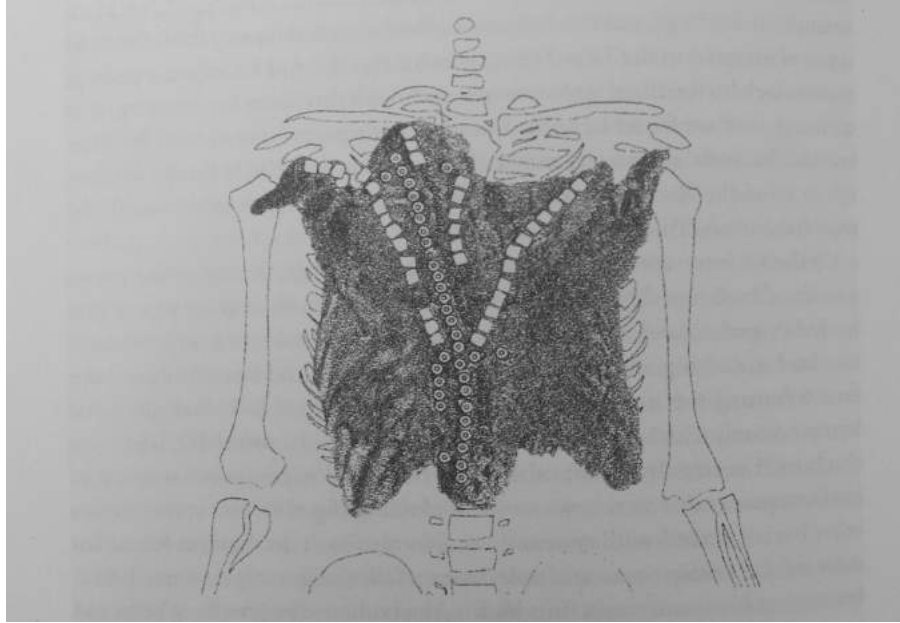


Fig. 73 *Drawing showing placement of gold decoration sewn on clothing of male, Burial 4 at Tilya Tepe*

Image Source: Brown, “The Nature and Use of the Bodily Relics of the Buddha in Gandhara,” 194, fig. 8.9 (“drawing based on Sarianidi, ‘The Golden Hoard of Bactria,’ illus. on p. 63”).

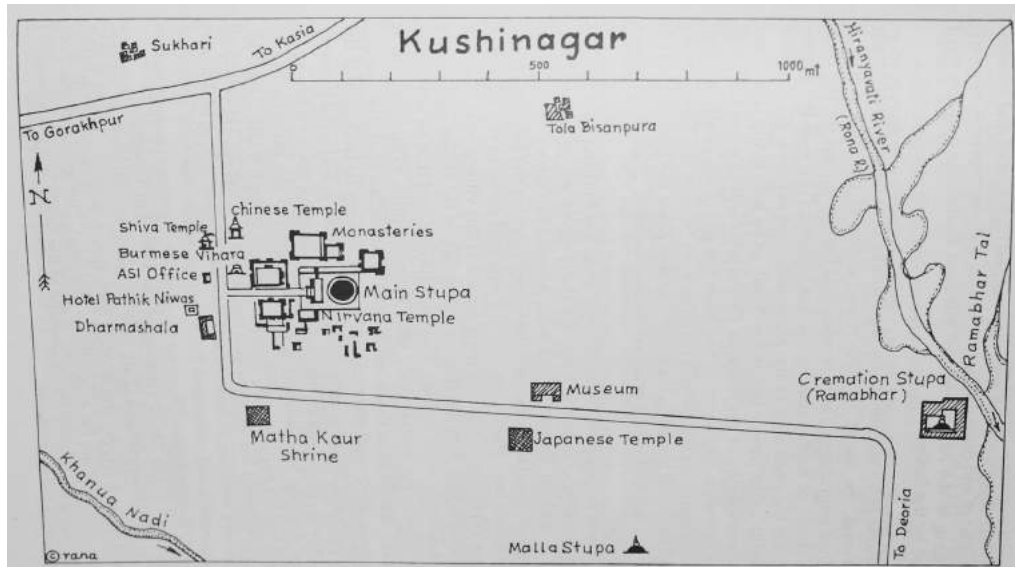


Fig. 74 Kushinagar and its environment

Image Source: Rana P. B. Singh, *Where the Buddha Walked: A Companion to the Buddhist Places of India* (Varanasi, India: Indica Books, 2003), 255, fig. 92.

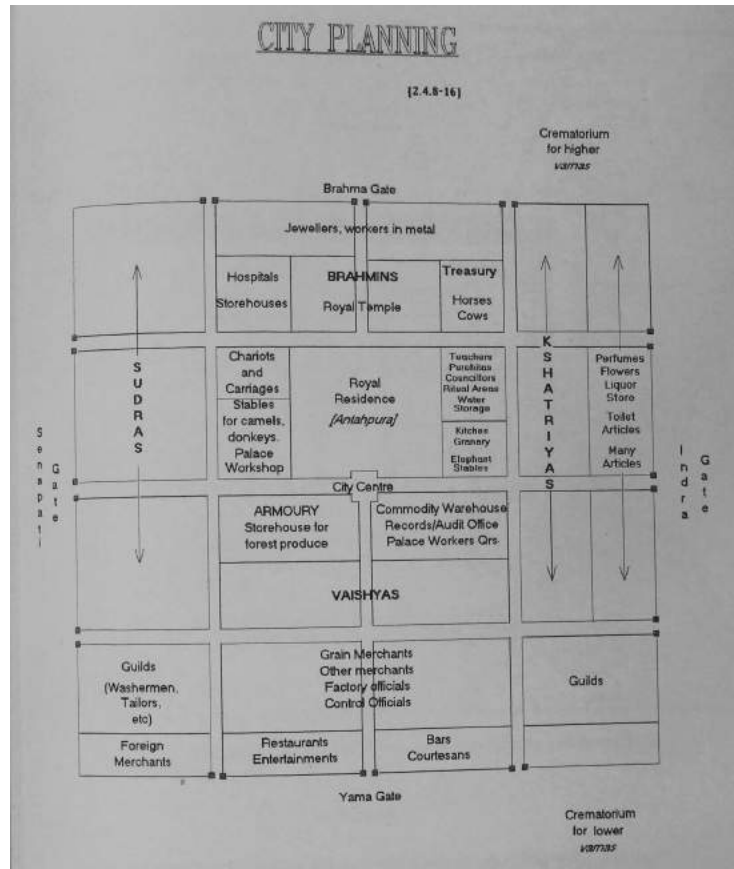


Fig. 75 Layout of a fortified settlement, according to the Arthaśāstra

Image Source: F. Raymond Allchin, Bridget Allchin, D. K. Chakrabarti, R. A. E. Coningham, and George Erdosy, *The Archaeology of Early Historic South Asia: The Emergence of Cities and States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 227, fig. 11.5 (courtesy L. N. Rangarajan).

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