

THE ORIGIN OF THE BUDDHA IMAGE*

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"Nothing beyond what is self-developed in the brain of a race is permanently gained, or will survive the changes of time."

—FLINDERS PETRIE, in *Social Life in Ancient Egypt*

INTRODUCTION

THE question of the origin of the Buddha image is, of course, but a part of the general problem of the origin of Indian iconography and plastic types. In view of the thoroughly Indian character of mediaeval works it was natural in the first place to suppose that these types had been created and developed on Indian soil, and by Indian sculptors. This might well have seemed most obvious in the case of the Buddha figure, representing as it does, a conception of spiritual attainment altogether foreign to European psychology, and a formula quite un-European in its indifference to natural fact.

But it was soon realized, on the one hand, that the Buddha (Gautama, Śākya-Muni), in early Indian art, say before the first century A. D., is never represented in human form but only by symbols; and, on the other hand, that the Graeco-Buddhist or Indo-Hellenistic art of Gandhāra in the period immediately following presents us with an innumerable series of anthropomorphic images, certainly with some peculiarities of their own, but resembling in a general way the later Gupta and mediaeval images of India proper, not to speak of those of Farther India and the Far East. At once it was taken for granted that the idea of making such images had been suggested to the Indian mind from this outside source, and that Greek or at any rate Eurasian craftsmen had created the first images of the Buddha for Indian patrons on the foundation of a Hellenistic Apollo; and that the later images were not so much Indian as Indianized versions of the Hellenistic or, as it was more loosely expressed, Greek prototypes. This view was put forward, as M. Foucher himself admits, in a manner best calculated to flatter the prejudices of European students and to offend the susceptibilities of Indians: the creative genius of Greece had provided a model which had later been barbarized and degraded by races devoid of true artistic instincts, to whom nothing deserving the name of fine art could be credited.

From the standpoint of orthodox European scholarship the question was regarded as settled, and all that remained was to work out the details, a study which was undertaken by the founder of the theory in his already classic *L'art gréco-bouddhique du Gandhara*, and continued by Grünwedel and others, with this result at least, that the art of Gandhāra is now very thoroughly known. When, a little later, doubts were expressed from various quarters external to the circle of orthodox scholarship, doubts suggested rather by stylistic and *a priori* psychological considerations, than by purely archacological evidence, M. Foucher, the author most committed to the Greek theory, did not hesitate to suggest in

*In order to get a large amount of comparative material together on the plates, short and incomplete captions have

been printed there. A fuller record of the illustrations will be found in the list appended to the article.

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his genial way that in the case of European students, these doubts were only the result of aesthetic prejudice, in the case of Indian students, of nationalist rancour ("engouement d'aesthéticien ou rancune de nationaliste").¹

Times have changed. I cannot better indicate the nature of this change than by a quotation from Mr. Dalton's recent work on *East Christian Art*: "The principles governing this Christian art have received their due; that which the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries refused to consider has been regarded with favouring eyes. Thus aid has come from another side to those who have striven to combat the erroneous view that Early Christian art was nothing more than classical art in decadence. The very features for which Hellenistic art was once praised are now condemned as its worst. . . . In no other field of research have archaeology and criticism better helped each other to overcome ungenerous tradition." If the echoes of the battle on this front, "*Orient oder Rom*," are still to be heard, at any rate we no longer confuse the qualities of Hellenistic and Hellenic art; the deserved prestige of the latter no longer protects the former from destructive criticism.

In view of these facts, which it would be almost superfluous to recapitulate, were it not for the peculiar attitude assumed by the author of the Greek theory and his followers, it should now be possible to discuss the subject calmly and to substitute argument for rhetoric. However this may be, I propose to outline here the evidences that exist to support the more obvious, but not therefore necessarily erroneous, theory of the Indian origin of the Buddha image in particular and of Indian iconography generally. Need I protect myself by saying that I do not mean by this to deny the existence of foreign elements and influences traceable in Indian art? I do mean, however, to imply that the proper time and place for their study and analysis is after, and not before, we have achieved a general understanding of the internal development of the art. The matter is of importance, not because the existence of foreign elements in any art (they exist in all arts) is not of great aesthetic significance, but just because when too much stress is laid upon this significance, the way to a clear apprehension of the general development of the art is obscured.² The subject has bulked already far too largely in the literature of Indian

1. To this, and numerous other remarks by M. Foucher in the same vein, sometimes more suggestive of propaganda than of sober science, I might well reply in the recent words of Dr. Salmony (*Die Rassenfrage in der Indienforschung*, in *Socialistischen Monatsheft*, Heft 8, 1926) "Man darf ruhig sagen: Das europäische Urteil wurde bisher durch den Drang nach Selbstbehauptung verfälscht." In scientific writings, references to the nationality of those who do not or may not agree with us are not always in the best of taste; not all of M. Foucher's eloquence can make them gracious, and in any case they are no good substitute for reasoned argument.

As a matter of fact, Indian (and Japanese) scholars have shown a singular humility, and perhaps some timidity, in their ready acceptance of all the results of European scholarship; see, for example, Gauranganath Banerjee, *The Art of Gandhara*, and Hellenism in Ancient India. Most of those who have expressed doubts regarding the Foucher theory have been European (Havell, Cohn, Laufer, Goloubew, Sirén, Kramrisch, etc.).

2. As remarked by Laufer, *Das Cūṭlakṣaṇa*, p. viii, note 1.

With some authors, Indo-Greek art has become a veritable obsession. The extent to which the dependence of Asiatic on Greek art has been pressed may be illustrated by the following examples: M. Blochet (*Gaz. des Beaux-Arts*, V, p. 114) recognizes Greek elements in Pahlāvi Rājput drawings, "dans laquelle on retrouve toutes [1] les caractéristiques de l'art indo-grec du Gandhara," and remarks that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries "les temples brahmaniques sont des répliques du Mausolée qu'Artémise avait fait construire et décorer par des praticiens grecs." G. de Lorenzo (*India e Buddismo Antico*, p. 45) suggests that Greek art, transformed and transported by Buddhism, may have animated the ancient art of the Aztecs and Incas of America. Jouveau-Dubreuil, *The Pallovas*, p. 7, calls the sculptures of Amaravāṭī "almost entirely Roman in workmanship."

art; my object in discussing it here is not so much to continue the controversy as to dismiss it.³

The subject can best be expounded under a series of heads, as follows: (1) What is the Buddha image? (2) The early representation of deities by means of symbols. (3) The necessity for a Buddha image. (4) Elements of the later anthropomorphic iconography already present in early Indian art. (5) Style and content: differentiation of Indian and Hellenistic types. (6) Dating of Gandhāra and Mathurā Buddhas.

1. WHAT IS THE BUDDHA IMAGE?

By the Buddha image, the ultimate origin of which is in question, I understand to be meant both the earliest Indian examples and the fully developed type as we meet with it in Gupta and mediaeval India, and in Farther India and the Far East. There can be no doubt that this fully developed type is the subject of M. Foucher's thesis, for he is careful to extend his filiation throughout the area and periods referred to. As he has also pointed out, the question of the origin of Jaina and Brahmanical types and iconography is equally involved; the Jaina figures, on account of their close resemblance to those of the Buddha, and because of the parallelism of the Jaina and Buddhist development, are here considered together with the Buddha type, while the Brahmanical figures, in order to avoid too great an extension of the field to be examined, are only incidentally referred to. The question of the origin of Bodhisattva types is inseparable from that of the origin of the Buddha figure.

It will suffice to illustrate a few examples of the fully developed type of which the beginnings are to be discussed. In plastic and ethnic character these figures are products of the age and place in which they are found, at the same time that their descent from some common ancestor is evident. Iconographically the types of Buddhas and even of Bodhisattvas (we are not here concerned with the later differentiation of innumerable many-armed forms) are few. For seated Buddhas there are five positions, one in which both hands held at the breast form the *dharmacakra mudrā*, one in which both hands rest palms upward on the lap in *dhyāna mudrā*, and three in which the left hand rests in the same way on the lap, the right hand either hanging over the right knee (*bhūmisparśa mudrā*) or resting on the knee palm upwards in *varada mudrā*, or raised in *abhaya mudrā*. Sometimes the left hand grasps the folds of the robe. In standing images the right hand is generally raised in *abhaya mudrā*, while the left holds the folds of the robe. Finally, there are reclining images. The robe in some cases covers one, in others both, shoulders. The drapery clings closely to the figure, and is felt to be almost transparent ("wet drapery"). The palms of the hands and soles of the feet are sometimes marked by symbols. Of physical peculiarities, the *uṣṇīṣa* or protuberance on the crown of the head is very evident, the *ūrṇā* or tuft of fine hair between the brows is commonly found, and the fingers are sometimes webbed. The hair is represented by short curls, turned to the right, and

3. I have quite recently (*The Indian Origin of the Buddha Image*, in *Journ. Am. Or. Soc.*, XLVI, 1926) assembled a series of quotations, mainly from authors committed to the Greek theory, sufficient to suggest the outlines of the true history of the Buddha image. That the reader will have consulted these references is here

taken for granted. I may also refer to a review of the last published part of *L'art gréco-bouddhique du Gandhara*, published in the *Ostasiatische Zeitschrift*, N. F., 1, 1924, pp. 51-53, and to the essay on Buddhist primitives in my *Dance of Siva*; in the latter I would now present certain points in a different way.

forming little protuberances which cover the whole of the head and the *uṣṇīṣa*. The ears are elongated by the weight of earrings worn before the adoption of the monastic robes. Some kind of confusion between the Buddha and Bodhisattva type is indicated by the existence of a Buddha type with crown and jewels; strictly and normally, the Buddha should be represented in monastic robes, the Bodhisattva, whether Siddhārtha or any other, in secular royal costume. The Bodhisattvas are represented in less rigid positions, never, for example, with hands in *dhyāna mudrā*; they are commonly distinguished by attributes held in the right or left hand, Vajrapāṇi by the *vajra*, Padmapāṇi by the rose lotus, Avalokiteśvara by the blue lotus, Maitreya by the *amṛta* flask; these attributes may be held in either hand, but the right hand is often raised in the pose of exposition (*vyyākhyāna mudrā* or *cin mudrā*, sometimes called *vitarka*). Bodhisattvas are further distinguished by symbols indicated in the headdress, for example the Dhyāni Buddhas in the crowns of Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī, the stupa in that of Maitreya; and in some cases by their "vehicles," Mañjuśrī, for example, often riding on a lion. Each and all of these deities are almost invariably represented as seated or standing on an expanded rose lotus flower, with or without a lion throne or "vehicle" in addition. Jinas or Tīrthanākaras are represented like Buddhas seated in *dhyāna mudrā*, but generally nude, and otherwise only to be distinguished by special signs, such as the *śrīvatsa* symbol on Mahāvīra's breast, or by their attendants.

Fundamentally then, there are two Buddha-Jina types to be considered, that of the seated Buddha or Jina with hands resting in the lap or in one of a few other positions and that of the standing figure with the right hand raised in *abhaya mudrā*, both types being represented in monastic robes, and neither carrying attributes; and one Bodhisattva type, seated or standing, in secular costume and usually carrying attributes.

The fully evolved types described above are illustrated in Figs. 1, 5, 31, 40, 62-64, 66-73.

2. THE EARLY REPRESENTATION OF DEITIES BY MEANS OF SYMBOLS

It is extremely doubtful whether any of the Vedic deities were anthropomorphically represented in the Vedic period, that is to say, before the time of Buddha. References to images, however, become common in the later additions to the Brāhmaṇas and Sūtras and in the Epics; while a well-known passage of Patañjali, commenting on Pāṇini (V., 3, 99) refers to the exhibition of images of Śiva, Skanda, and Viśākha. Very probably, we may regard the symbolic method as, broadly speaking, Aryan, the anthropomorphic as aboriginal (Dravidian), or as respectively "Northern" and "Southern" in Strzygowski's sense. Images may have been characteristic of aboriginal religious cults from a remote time, only making their appearance in Brahmanical literature at the time when popular belief was actively affecting Brahmanical culture, that is to say in the early theistic period, when *pūjā* begins to replace *yajña*. We find traces of this aboriginal iconolatry not only in the early figures of Yakṣas, but also in such passages of the Gṛhya Sūtras as refer to the moving about of the images of bucolic deities, and the making of images of Nāgas for the Nāga Bali. In the early votive terra cottas, all apparently non-Buddhist, and usually representing goddesses, and as a subordinate element in early Buddhist and Jaina art, we find a well-developed and quite explicit popular iconography.

Here, however, we are concerned with the symbolic or aniconic method, which was at one time so universal, at least in orthodox and official circles, as to constitute by itself a

