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### Book review of 'Gandharan Buddhism: Archaeology, Art, and Texts' edited by Pia Brancaccio and Kurt Behrendt

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events among the hill people of Darjeeling. He advocated *inter alia* separating the district from the plains of Bengal, an agenda remarkably similar to that of the more recent campaign for hill autonomy. Laden La was also a devout Buddhist and spent much of his time and patrimony helping local religious institutions and a number of social causes.

His biographers have repudiated roundly two major charges leveled against their subject. First, they argue against the common claim that, as Lhasa's police chief, Laden La was involved in a conspiracy (c. 1924) with some Tibetan officials to stage a coup of sorts by divesting the Dalai Lama of some of his temporal authority. Second, they challenge the idea that he had helped himself to funds that did not belong to him. The fact that Laden La continued to enjoy the confidence and trust of the Tibetan ruler to the very end of his days suggests the falsity of the first accusation—that he was a conspirator against the Dalai Lama. The riches that he acquired were an inheritance from an aunt and not the wages of any wrongdoing on the police officer's part.

The book, authored jointly by Laden La's granddaughter and her English husband, provides a useful contribution to a better understanding of some major events in Tibet's relations with the Raj in the first three decades of the twentieth century. It also furnishes interesting details of why the modernization drive in Tibet drew a blank. Well produced and lavishly illustrated, *A Man of the Frontier* draws heavily not only on Laden La's own massive papers, but also on the British National Archives (formerly the Public Record Office) in London and an impressive array of secondary sources. It boasts a number of plates and some rare photographs, and affords revealing insights into some of the major events in which the British and the thirteenth Dalai Lama were so intimately involved. Laden La was not only a keen observer but also an active participant in most of these events.

#### ENDNOTE

1. Parshotam Mehra, *Tibetan Polity, 1904-1937: The Conflict between the 13th Dalai Lama and the 9th Panchen Lama; A Case Study* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1976). In a recent study, the incumbent fourteenth Dalai Lama told his interlocutor that "on an official level" the relation between the ninth Panchen Lama and the thirteenth Dalai Lama was "difficult and negative, but in private there was a deep, special spiritual connection." See Thomas Laird, *The Story of Tibet: Conversations with the Dalai Lama* (London: Atlantic Books, 2006): 248.

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## GANDHARAN BUDDHISM: ARCHAEOLOGY, ART, AND TEXTS

EDITED BY PIA BRANCACCIO AND KURT  
BEHRENDT

Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006.  
336 pages, 112 black-and-white illustrations. ISBN  
9780774810807

### REVIEWED BY NANCY C. WILKIE

This volume of essays by some of the leading scholars in the field of Gandharan studies attempts to bridge disciplinary boundaries by bringing together evidence from the fields of art, archaeology, and texts to illuminate cultural and religious developments in the Gandharan region. The kingdom of Gandhara, centered on the Peshawar Valley in northwestern Pakistan, flourished from the first to the fifth centuries CE under its Buddhist rulers. During this time Gandharan culture, and especially Gandharan art, emerged as a unique synthesis of Greco-Roman, Persian and Indian styles.

The first chapter by John M. Rosenfield outlines the necessary precautions that must be observed when using archaeological evidence to date developments in religious doctrine. As he says, "the obstacles to correct interpretation of Kusana Buddhist sculpture are formidable" (p. 17). Most sculptures lack inscriptions, and many sanctuaries were destroyed, their artifacts widely scattered. Moreover, modern forgeries have corrupted the corpus and consequently our understanding of the development of artistic styles. A particular problem is that of using works of art to date developments in religious doctrine, a practice that too often leads to circular argumentation (p. 25).

The late Maurizio Taddei, to whom this volume is dedicated, further warns in Chapter 2 that inscriptions on sculptures are not to be trusted because they often employ an official "code" and thus are not always sincere or reliable (p. 41). In addition, there are instances of counterfeit ancient inscriptions, which can be difficult to recognize (p. 42). As a result, Taddei advocates an integrated approach, combining epigraphy, numismatics and art history—three fields to which archaeology can make significant contributions.

He warns, however, that not all archaeological investigations and publications are of equal value since many are tainted by shoddy work and/or "bombastic conclusions" (p. 52). He does have praise, however, for archaeologists from the Department of Archaeology and Museums of

Pakistan who have been engaged in rescue excavations in the Gandharan area, an activity that unfortunately, as he points out, has been opposed not only by art dealers but even by governmental officials who should be interested in activities of this sort. Since even a brief review of on-line auction sites produces numerous instances of Gandharan objects offered for sale, most without secure provenance, it is wise to be cautious when using such objects to interpret Gandharan beliefs and practices,

In Chapter 5, Shoshin Kuwiyama, in a revised and enlarged version of his 1987 study on the subject, uses textual evidence from Chinese sources to address how changes in pilgrimage routes brought about the decline of Gandhara. In the century between 520 and 630, the pilgrimage route in the eastern Hindukush or the western Karakoram ceased to be used and Chinese pilgrims no longer visited Gandhara. At the same time, the number of monks from India who arrived in China also decreased dramatically. By the seventh century the royal family of Gandhara was extinct, villages and towns were emptied and monasteries were in ruins. A new route through the western Hindukush brought about new commercial centers at Bamiyan and Kapisi at the expense of Gandhara.

In Chapter 6, Richard Solomon provides an illustration of one of the problems that artifacts without context have caused for Gandharan studies. Birchbark scroll manuscripts in the Kharosthi script and the Gandhari language of the first century CE have been known since their initial discovery in 1892, but many of these texts have since been lost or destroyed and the original archaeological contexts of those that have survived remain unknown. Since they are among the oldest surviving Buddhist manuscripts and most have no known parallels, these texts would be of immense value if they had been found in "proper" archaeological contexts. This is especially true since few texts and inscriptions are known from Gandhara in contrast to other regions of Asia where Buddhism once prevailed.

Robert L. Brown's discussion of stupa deposits in Chapter 8 also notes the difficulties caused by lack of context. Only a few reliquaries have been found with their contents intact and they are inadequately illustrated. Moreover, the single reliquary that is well illustrated was purchased by a London collector on the art market and lacks provenance.

In this chapter Brown set out to determine how the practice of placing precious objects in reliquaries developed among Gandharan Buddhists. Some of the most spectacular finds from the Gandharan cultural area are those from six graves of nomads excavated by Soviet and Afghan archaeologists at Tilya Tepe in 1978-79. Although the burials appear to be those of non-Buddhist Kusana royalty, the grave goods closely resemble those found in Gandharan Buddhist relic deposits. At the time that this chapter was written, it was believed that the more than 20,000 objects from the burials at Tilya Tepe had been stolen or destroyed during the period of turmoil that followed their deposition in the National

Museum of Afghanistan, Kabul. In 2004, however, this so-called "Bactrian Hoard" was re-discovered in an underground vault in the Presidential palace and as of this writing many of the objects are on display in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

Wealthy burials such as those at Tilya Tepe suggest to Brown that the practice of placing precious objects in reliquaries as offerings to the Buddha was adopted by Buddhists in Gandhara in imitation of royal burials in adjacent areas. Because many of these reliquaries contain objects of personal value but have no trace of bone or ash, they appear to have been donations to the Buddha rather than sacred deposits. In support of the argument that this practice was derived from royal Kushana burials the author points to resemblances between the reliquaries and cosmetic boxes found in the Tilya Tepe.

This volume of essays by thirteen experts in Gandharan studies, most of them Italians or Americans, provides a useful scholarly study of recent developments in the field. Not all of the articles, only a sampling of which have been summarized here, succeed equally in bringing together evidence from the disparate fields of art, archaeology, numismatics and textual studies; but the way now has been paved for further studies of this nature. Only through such endeavors will scholars be able to advance our understanding of Gandharan Buddhism, and for this alone the volume is a valuable addition to the literature.

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