

# India and Neighbors



## Beginnings of Buddhism

p. 29-54 Buddhist Art

## REVIEW—

Last week we focused on the Hindu deities, their avatars and attributes. We also discussed the stories that informed the artwork while looking at the social and political, as well as, religious meanings.

It's important to note that Hindu beliefs, via the Vedas, predate Buddhism by at least 1500 years. However, we have no artwork of the gods until later.

Actually, Buddhist art came before Hindu art. So, similarities exist because of the earlier Indus Valley connections and local conventions.



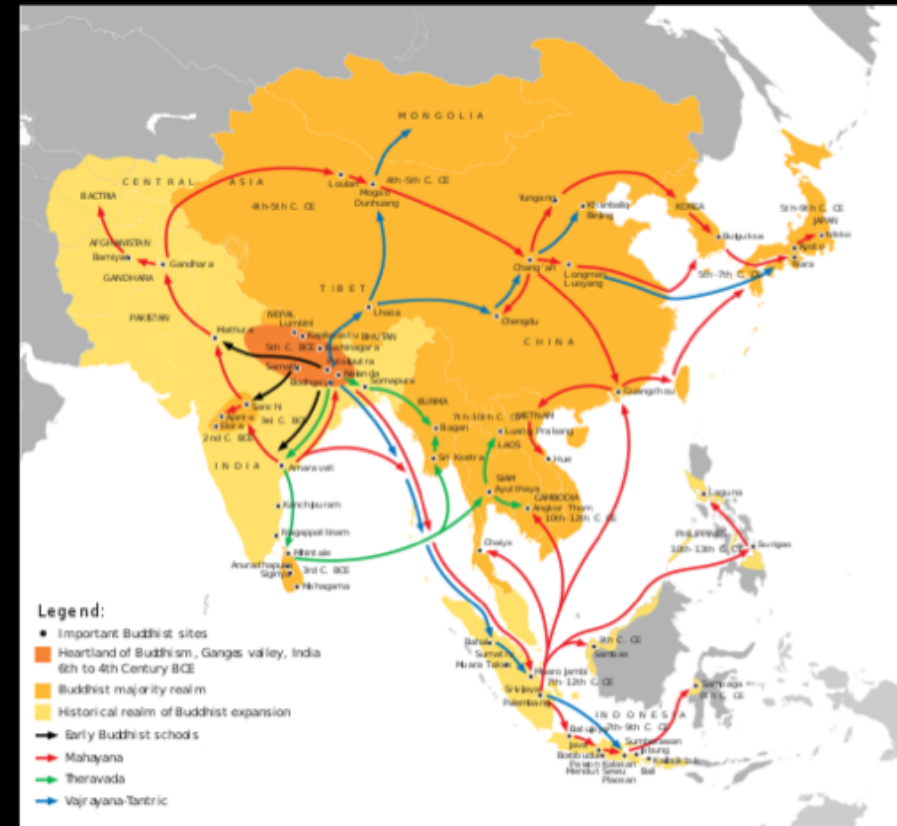
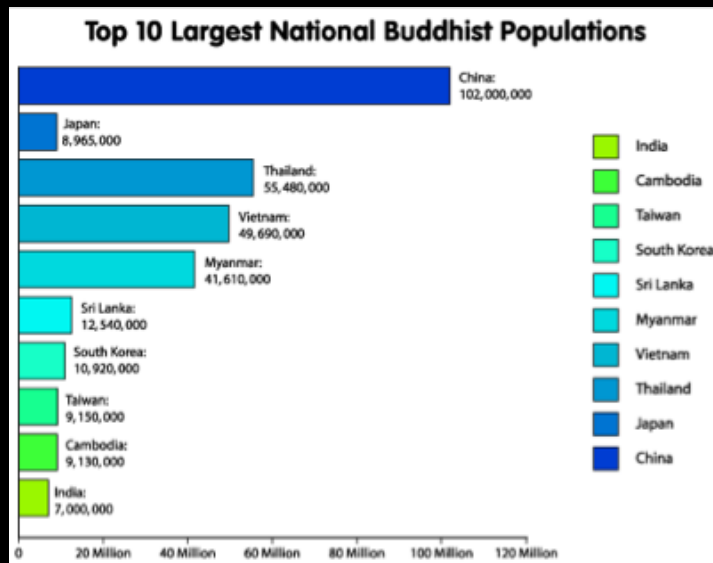
*This map shows where, in India, the Buddha lived during his life.*

*You can see that now, Buddhism has moved to other parts of Asia.*

# BUDDHISM—

Within Asian history, no other movement, religion or event has equaled the degree to which Buddhism has affected nearly every corner of Asia.

During its 2500-year history, we see change, persecution and integration as Buddhist development moved geographically across the continents.



*This map shows the movement of the different sects or directions within Buddhism that we discussed the week before last:*  
*Theravada*  
*Mahayana*  
*Vajrayana*

## BUDDHISM—REVIEW

One of the keys to success was the ability of the faith to adapt and evolve within different cultures and their existing beliefs.

This was done by harmonizing with earlier practices, by claiming a common origin with native gods and by emphasizing aspects of Buddhism that paralleled existing customs.

The traditional dates of the Buddha are c. 563-483 BCE. We know he was a prince, probably from the Nepal region.

*Note: area on previous map.*

*Notice in the chart on the previous page how few Buddhist live in India today compared to other Asian countries.*

*While Buddhism began there, it is not the predominant belief system now. Note the places where there are many more people.*

## BUDDHISM—History

During his life the Buddha was a great teacher of ethics. We do not know that he claimed religious leadership or attempted to form a religious order.

His world was undergoing rapid and violent political and social change so that his teachings must have become a source of great moral strength to the people who knew him.

It was a time in India when the merchant class was growing and there was an increasing preoccupation with economic and political power. As a result, people felt their freedoms being restricted.

There were many philosophers at this time, including the Buddha, who sought liberation through spiritual means.

## IMPORTANT

*The two main spiritual directions at this time were:*

*The Brahmins*—Orthodox, traditional rituals, based on the Upanishads. Lived as ascetics. This was their cast.

*The Shramanas*—wandering spiritual leaders who left society and lived together in the forest. All rejected a supreme god—Bramah. No cast system here. This is the group Shakyamuni joined when he renounced his princely life .

Eventually, the Buddha started one of 5 schools of the Shramana.

One of the others was Jainism, which is still existent today as one of the major Indian religious systems. It teaches extremely strict ethical behavior.

## BUDDHISM—History

It was two centuries after Buddhism had been in existence when a very powerful monarch **Ashoka** (who ruled from 272-231 BC) stimulated visual imagery.

Ashoka, once converted, erected edicts carved on stone and wood pillars. From Bengal to Afghanistan and into the south, pillars were used that followed earlier Indian beliefs...the axis mundi ideals that were first expressed in the rig Veda.

So, once again we see an already existing idea— the axis mundi (center of the world)— being appropriated by Buddhism. It makes sense since people already knew what the pillars meant.



*An Ashoka pillar erected in support of Buddhism.  
At this time the lion was a symbol of the Buddha.*



## BUDDHISM—History

**Ashoka** (who ruled from 272-231 BC) was the third ruler of the Indian Mauryan Empire. It was the largest ever in India and one of the largest of his time.

When he first began his rule he was considered an efficient but very cruel leader. The story goes that after what is considered one of the most brutal and bloody wars in history, Ashoka issued an edict expressing regret for the suffering his army inflicted. He vowed to renounce war and embrace the *dharma*.

*It is not exactly clear that he was referring to Buddhism when he used the word, dharma, but he did perpetuate Buddhist sites and texts. So, he's given credit for unifying India under Buddhism.*



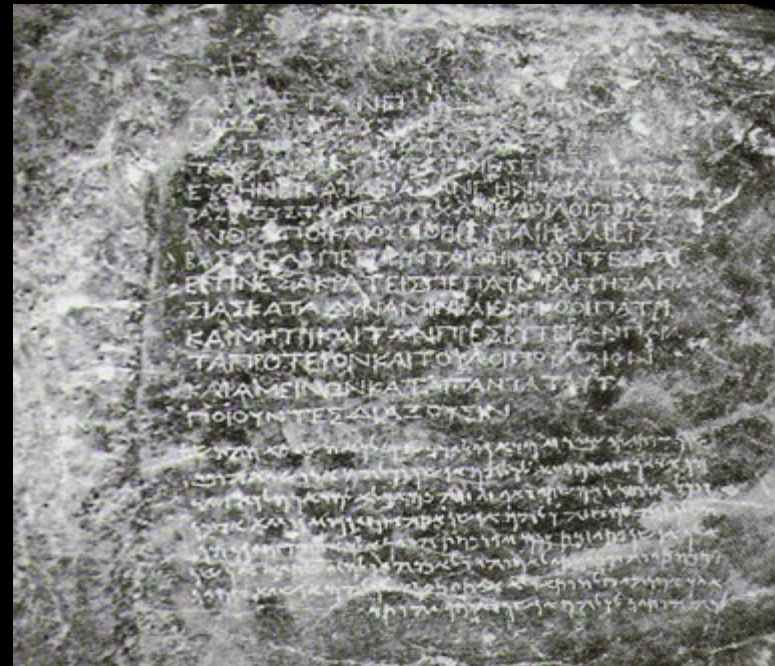
*An Ashoka pillar erected in support of Buddhism. At this time the lion was a symbol of the Buddha.*

## BUDDHISM—History

**Ashoka** began to issue one of the most famous edicts in the history of government and instructed his officials to carve them on rocks and pillars, in the local dialects and simply so people could understand.

In the rock edicts, Ashoka talks about religious freedom and religious tolerance, he instructs his officials to help the poor and the elderly, establishes medical facilities for humans and animals, commands obedience to parents, respect for elders, generosity for all priests and ascetic orders (no matter their creed), orders fruit and shade trees to be planted and also wells to be dug along the roads so travelers can benefit from them.

*Prior to Ashoka, Buddhism was a relatively minor force in India. He turned Buddhism into the State religion, using it as a way to reduce social conflict.*



*An Ashoka edict inscribed in Greek and Aramaic.*



## CONTEXT—History—Side Note:

Ashoka was not the only secular leader to unify people under one belief.

In the West, this happened with Constantine in 333 (about 500 years later) when he unified the Roman Empire under Christianity.



*This is an enormous marble head of the Roman Emperor Constantine. Constantine had a vision in which the Chi Rho symbol of Christ appeared in a dream. He then had the symbol placed on the shields of his army. When they won the battle, he imagined it happened because Christ was on their side. He subsequently deemed it the 'official' religion of the Roman Empire. The rest is history. 😊*

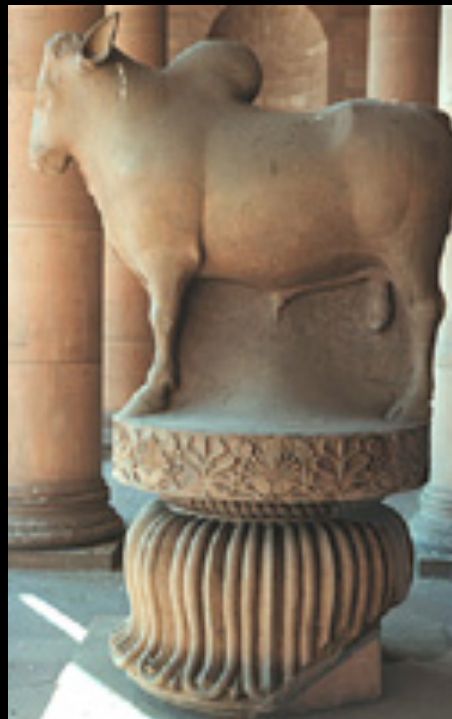
## BUDDHISM—Back to the Pillars

Instead of figures of the Buddha or portrayals of the stories of his lives, the early pillars consisted of symbolic elements---continuing ancient Indian pillar cults---with their elaborate capitals (rendered in the Persian style).

Earlier pillars with lotus pedal capitals were surmounted by animals such as lions, cows or elephants.

*Note: a capital is a sculptural element that sits on top of a column.*

*Bull Capital, 3rd century BC, Mauryan, India*



*Lion capital of column erected by Ashoka at Sarnath, India, ca. 250 BCE. Polished sandstone, approx. 7' high. Archaeological Museum, Sarnath*



## Pre Buddhist—History

This is a picture of the remains of part of the palace of Darius III, a powerful king of the Persian Empire.

These tall columns seen in the center were topped with animal images and predate the ones in India by just a couple of hundred years.

Side Note: The **axis mundi** (also *cosmic axis*, *world axis*, *world pillar* and *center of the world*) is a symbol representing the point of connection between sky and earth. It offers means of travel and correspondence between the two realms. It is also the place where the four compass directions unite, allowing treasure from heaven to be disseminated throughout the world. This places it at the center of the world: at its navel, the world's point of beginning.



*Persepolis* (royal audience hall in the background), Iran, ca. 521–465 BCE

On top are some of the Persian capitals. You can see some of these at the MET.

## Pre Buddhist—History

When Alexander the Great, the Macedonian leader of the Greek Army, destroyed the Persian Empire in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the artists traveled the Silk Road looking for new patronage.



Here are pictures of two Persian Capitals from Persepolis. Both are in museums.

## Pre Buddhist—History

The Silk Road had just opened increasing contacts with India as the road connected Rome with China.

If you follow the red line from the Arabian peninsula, through Persia, you can see how it intersects directly into North Western India.

The artists found their new patronage in the Mauryan Empire in India bringing with them, styles and ideas.



*This map of the silk road shows both the land (in red) and sea routes (in blue).*

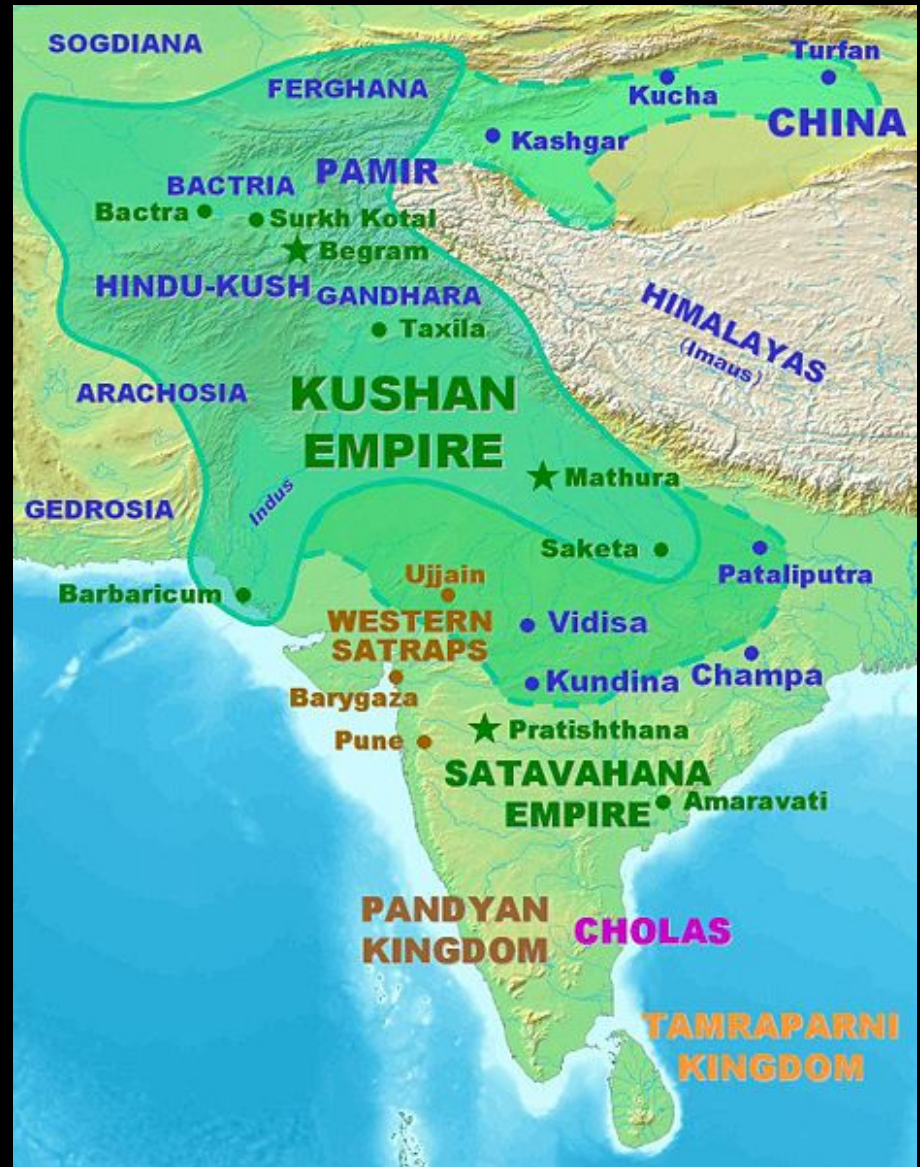


## BUDDHIST --History

Ashoka's capitals were the sites of some of India's first Buddhist sculpture.

He also supported rock-cut building resulting in the earliest Buddhist architectures.

Note names of cities and areas, in particular Gandhara and Mathura. We will be talking about them later in this lecture.



Map of early India.



## BUDDHIST –The Stupa

Much of the early Buddhist imagery was associated with the stupa, one of the three types of architecture. The other two associated with the monastery, the residence hall and the hall of worship (chaitya), which were made to be entered.

The stupa was not made to be entered. It is solid and monolithic.

Derived from Hindu burial mounds, it continued to perform the same role as a symbol of the Buddha's *parinirvana*, or final exit from this world.



Asoka Pillar in Bihar, and stupa. This is the site of the first Stupa

Most of the revered objects are associated with the life of the historical Buddha.

The early growth of Buddhism after his death in around 481 BCE was enhanced by the Indian King Ashoka's distribution of his ashes inside 84,000 stupas.

## BUDDHIST –The Stupa

So the Stupa, is an important form of Buddhist architecture, essentially a burial mound. It was believed to hold the ashes of the historic Buddha.

They became important pilgrimage sites because of the holy relics but also because they were built in sites associated with the Historic Buddha.

Since the stupas built by Ashoka were actually built 250 years after the death of the Buddha, there is a story to explain where he got the ashes. However, he built them to provide new converts to Buddhism some tools to help with their new faith— meditation and education.



All stupas were actually part of complex sites with other stupas, pillars and sculptures.

## BUDDHIST –The Stupa

One of the early sutras records the Buddha giving instructions on how to honor his remains after death. He stated his ashes were to be buried in a stupa at the crossroads of the mythical four great roads, the hub of a wheel, the place of Enlightenment.

Many stupas are placed on a square base, oriented to the four directions of the compass. Each side has a gate, which allows people to enter from any side. Each side also represents the four great events in the life of the Buddha: his birth (East), the Enlightenment (South), First Sermon (West) and Nirvana (North).

One of the most important and famous Stupas is the Great Stupa at Sanchi.



The Great Stupa (Mahastupa) was built at the birthplace of Ashoka's wife, Devi, in the village of Sanchi located on an important trade route in the state of Madhya Pradesh, India

## BUDDHIST –The Stupa

The stupa is thought to be a microcosm of the universe.

At the top is a yasti, or spire, which symbolizes the axis mundi. The spire is surrounded by a harmica, or fence, topped by chattras (umbrella-like objects), symbolizing royalty and protection.

The aim of the practitioners is to climb the metaphoric mountain of their own mind, ascending level by level to Enlightenment.

People do not enter the stupa, as it is a solid mound. But instead, circumambulate around the outside, climbing steps to various levels.



The Great Stupa (Mahastupa) was built at the birthplace of Ashoka's wife, Devi. in the village of Sanchi located on an important trade route in the state of Madhya Pradesh, India



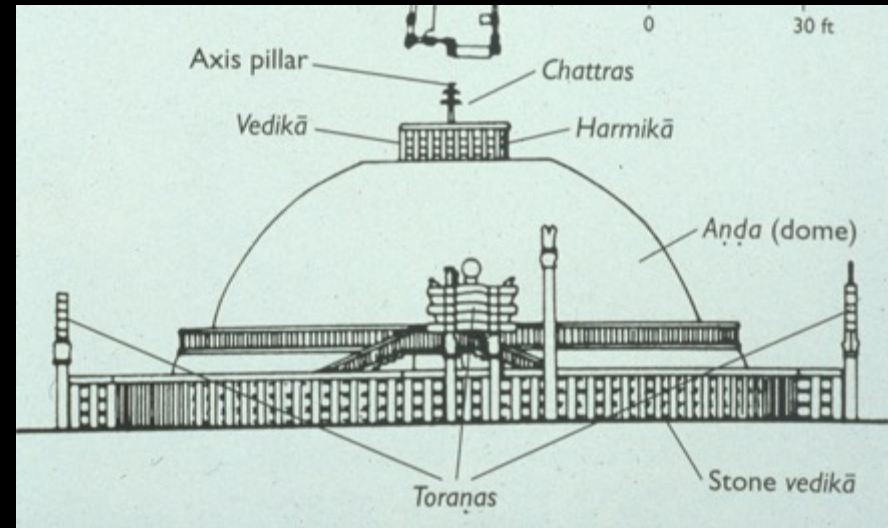
## BUDDHIST –The Stupa

The stupa is thought to be a microcosm of the universe.

The main body, the anda, was a simple, hemispherical dome set on a low platform. A single pillar emerged from the tip surmounted by circular disks.

The pillar and its umbrellas were enclosed by a square set of railings, a miniature version of the larger fence that surrounded the stupa proper. Enclosing the central pillar follows the traditional Indian custom of surrounding hallowed objects such as sacred trees and temples.

The umbrellas atop the main pillar (a continuation of the pillar cult employed by Ashoka) remained an essential ingredient of Buddhist cosmology, for the pillar represented the ‘world mountain’ or pivot of the universe.



*Umbrellas are also honorific emblems, reserved for auspicious monuments as well as individuals...the three umbrellas came to represent the Three Jewels of Buddhism:*

*The Buddha– the teacher*

*The Dharma– teaching*

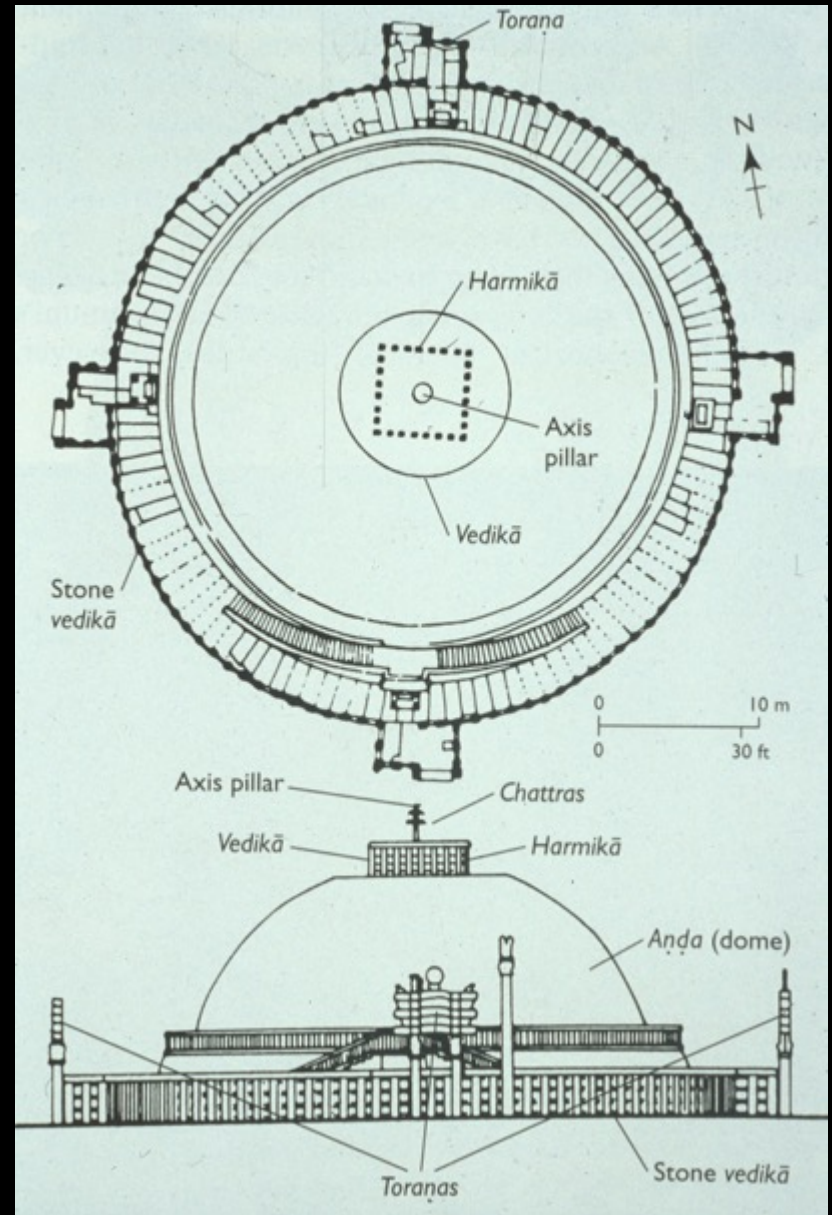
*The Sangha– the community*

## BUDDHIST –The Stupa

To complete the symbolism, the core of the monument, the sacred relics were buried and the internal forms of the stupa were arranged into geometric, magical designs...like that of the wheel.

The stone railings that surrounded the Sanchi stupa in Madhya Pradesh were based on wooden prototypes with right-angled gates, which alluded to the ancient swastika emblem but also relates to earlier gates used by farmers to keep out cattle.

Four gateways, the **toranas**, indicated the cardinal directions and with their crossbars and pillars covered in relief carvings...instructions...stories and illustrations...all there to engage visitors as they begin their worship.



This drawing shows the ground plans of the stupa from the side (at the bottom) and from the top (at the top).



## BUDDHIST –The Stupa--Sanchi

Though the most important of the early Stupas are the remains at Bharhut, only portions of this is left...however, we can imagine the design based on ones like Sanchi.

Sanchi was once the economic crossroads of northern India---one reason for its continued patronage.

The site consisted of a complex of buildings, including at least three Stupas. Stupa1, or the Great Stupa, was rebuilt several times, the present one dates from the first century BC

The early Stupas have an abundance of imagery—the genre scenes, Jataka tales and figures presenting many narrative scenes.



The Great Stupa (Mahastupa) was built at the birthplace of Ashoka's wife, Devi. in the village of Sanchi located on an important trade route in the state of Madhya Pradesh, India

It's important to realize that all parts and all images have meaning. )

## BUDDHIST –The Stupa--Sanchi

Sanchi's relief carvings are confined to the four gateways (or toranas). Each gate is divided into three parts...the upper section is covered with narrative scenes.

The space is filled with humans, animals and Buddhist symbols, such as stupas, lotuses and trees. The spiral at the end represents the scrolls that were carried from village to village by wandering storytellers.



Even though the carvings are high above the head of the viewers it is carved in deep relief, making them viewable from below.



## BUDDHIST –The Stupa--Sanchi



Detail of lions, trident, elephants, lotus, and a yaksha (we will talk about him in a minute).

At this point in Buddhism, there were no images of the Buddha in human form, only symbols.

## BUDDHIST –The Stupa--Sanchi

Certain items on the gateways indicate a milestone in Buddha's life and thereby symbolize his presence – a lotus flower (birth), a rider-less horse (renunciation), the Bodhi tree (enlightenment), a pair of slippers or feet (first step after enlightenment), a wheel (first sermon at Sarnath) or an empty throne (nirvana).



The feet prints of the Buddha and people worshiping the tree, a symbol of the Buddha.



## BUDDHIST –The Stupa--Sanchi

Carved on the gateways you will find various stories from the Jataka tales – stories from the earlier lives of Buddha as a Bodhisattva searching for enlightenment. Much artwork depicts stories from the Jataka tales.

The Northern Gateway - Jataka tale of Vasantara reiterating importance of sacrifice.

*From left Vasantara is shown leaving the palace with children, then staying with a hermit after giving away both his children.*



Monkeys worshipping the wheel.



## BUDDHIST –The Stupa--Sanchi

Side Note: **The Jataka Tales**— are stories from previous and future lives of the historic Buddha, Guatama Buddha. Written in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, these many poems tell stories of previous lives of the Buddha as both human and animal. In most cases, the Buddha shows up to help people.

There are also gods of the Hindu Pantheon sculpted at Sanchi.

Like this image of Laksmi the Goddess of wealth, and another of Indra, the ruler of the heavens (from the Vedas)and Brahma the creator.



Hindu (and pre-Hindu) goddess, Laksmi, seated on a lotus throne, with elephants.



## BUDDHIST –Stupa

Although none of the early monuments stand, carvings illustrate stupas of enormous size and greater decorative richness existed.

Many of the same elements are present -- empty thrones, bodhi trees, lions, wheels, pillars and other symbols of the Buddha, including crowds of worshipers.

There is no empty space, the entire surface is filled with figures.

Page 40– book.

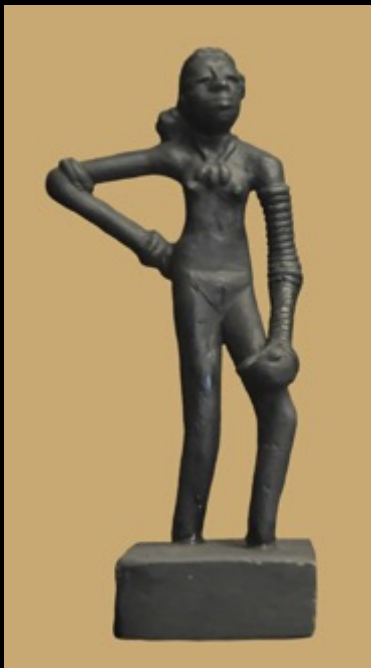


27 Stupa, relief, c. 2nd century, from Amaravati, India. White marble, h. 170 (66 $\frac{1}{2}$ )

## BUDDHIST –The Stupa--Sanchi

Another visual connection is provided by female bracket figures.

Sensuous and moving as if dancing, These figures are connected visually and conceptually to the Little Dancer, Mohenjo-daro, Pakistan, ca. 2600–1900 BCE.



Remember her?



Yakshi, detail of eastern gateway, Great Stupa, Sanchi, India, mid first century BCE to early first century CE.



## BUDDHIST –The Yakshi

In both Bharhut and Sanchi are standing male and female figures, some adopt poses of adoration with hands clasped at chest, other carry objects. Their function is to ensure fertility – expanded to the earth, wealth and good fortune.



The Yakshi is the female figure. They are all beautiful and voluptuous, sharing common characteristics. They are symbols of fertility in Hindu, Buddhist and Jain faiths.

The Yaksha is the male.



Yakshi, at the Great Stupa, Sanchi, India, mid first century BCE to early first century CE.

## BUDDHIST –The Yakshi

These are images of fertility expand to all prosperity associated with agrarian cultures.

They provide the models for the earliest images of the bodhisattva or even the standing Buddha's that come later.

*The Yaksha and Yakshi are also discussed as the source of image for the Hindu deities. because they predate both Hindu and Buddhist art, they are related to both.*

*Yaksha, 1st century,  
Kushan period, India.  
p. 44-45*



Male and female figures,





We've talked about this before but, in the early years of Buddhism there were no representations of the Buddha. Instead, the Buddha was represented by symbols. All were symbols associated in some way with the historic Buddha like, pillars, trees, thrones, wheels, animals and stupas, or to fertility. Eventually we begin to see images of the Buddha and bodhisattvas.

On the image at the far left, the Buddha is symbolized by lions, in the center, individuals worshipping the wheel, and a very popular symbol, the footprint of the Buddha.

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE IMAGE OF THE BUDDHA

Scholars have differing explanations for why there are no human images of the Buddha in the first several hundred years.

However, when we begin to see human images of the Buddha, the earliest depart from the yaksha and yakshi statues seen at the Stupa sites, like Sanchi and the yogic ideal from the early Indus

Valley seals we have looked at earlier.



Yaksha, 1st century, Kushan period, India. P. 39 book.



Yakshi, at the Great Stupa, Sanchi, India, mid first century BCE



Seal with seated figure in yogic posture, from Mohenjo-daro, Pakistan, ca. 2600–1900 BCE



## FLASHBACK— REVIEW WK 3

Because both Buddhism and Hinduism grew out of the Indus Valley Civilization, there are many connections and the early history is the same.

We have looked at the mother goddess figures before.

Female figure and the goddess were overshadowed by male deities during the Vedic period, they re-emerged taking various forms.

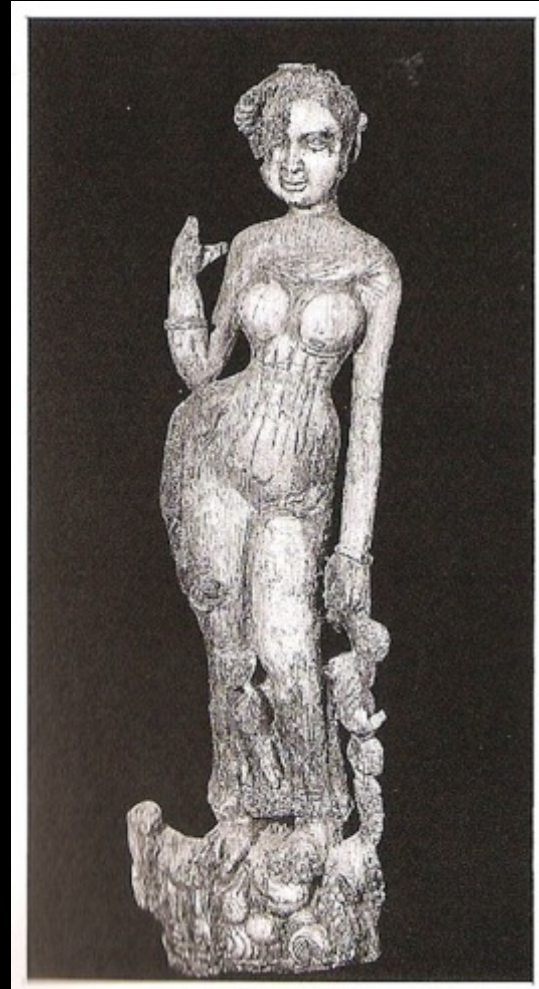
Among the earliest female figures in Buddhist art were the Yakshas and Yakshis, sensuous images of fertility and abundance. The yakshi is related to these earlier fertility figures.



Proto-Hindu mother goddesses, Mohenjo Daro, 3000 BCE



Seated Mother Goddess, India, 1st century



Yakshi, or river goddess, 1st century. Afghanistan  
Page 21

## EARLY BUDDHIST IMAGES

They represent the practice in Indian art of using images as protectors and emblems of abundance. So, while we may think fertility relates to reproduction, here it is expanded to mean abundance in a broader sense.

The yakshi remained prominent in Indian art but these voluptuous females seldom appear in Buddhist art unless under direct Indian influence.

The fertility figures became especially prominent during the Kushan period (late 1<sup>st</sup> cent BCE to late 3<sup>rd</sup> cent CE).



Yakshi from Didarganj (ca 300 B.C.)

Yakshi, or river goddess, 1st century.  
See page 42-43 in book.

**Female attendant, 1<sup>st</sup> century, India.**



## EARLY BUDDHIST IMAGES

Equally powerful, the male yaksha was less consciously sensual.

They provided the ideal for subsequent images in the Buddhist pantheon, including the Buddha and Bodhisttvas.

The growing schism resulting in the Mahayana school, created the need for additional images.

This process was aided by the political and cultural changes brought about by the mixture of people migrating into the area, mostly the Kushan people from Central Asia.



*Yaksha*, 1st century.

*Buddha*, late 1st Century,  
Mathura region

NOTE: similarities in images.  
This is a very early statue of  
the Buddha.

See page 44-45 in book.



## EARLY BUDDHIST IMAGES--Mathura

The Kushan kingdom was centered in two areas; one around Mathura, in the north-central India and the other in Gandhara.

In Mathura there appeared sandstone images of the Buddha, similar to the yaksha figures on Bharhut and Sanchi.

Capturing the ideals of yogic control, containers of the 'vital breath', rather than a replica of the physical body.



*Buddha seated on lion throne, from Mathura, India, second century CE. Red sandstone, 2' 3 1/2" high. Archaeological Museum, Muttra.*



Seal with seated figure in yogic posture, from Mohenjo-daro, Pakistan, ca. 2600–1900 BCE



## EARLY BUDDHIST IMAGES-- Mathura

**The Indian Buddha** image portrays the traditional figure of the meditative yogin, transcendent in mental powers but part of the world.

At the same time he is surrounded by images of radiance and abundance, the sun disc (parts are broken here) and trees, the throne supported by lions, the wheel, and two attendants emphasize his royal position.

While the humble robe, yogic posture and gesture of reassurance embody the spiritual message.



*Buddha seated on lion throne, from Mathura, India, Sandstone, 2<sup>nd</sup> century.*

See similar on p. 46 left.

## EARLY BUDDHIST IMAGES--Gandhar

In the Gandharan images of the Buddha we see, similarities— the lion throne, the yogic posture, the nimbus behind his head.

But the most striking difference is the addition of a toga, an inappropriate garment for someone living in India, and the facial features which indicate an interest in realism.

Gandharan art continued throughout most of the first millennium in Afghanistan and at least until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The area had become a second holy land for Buddhist, visited by pilgrims from south and east Asia, enhanced by the belief that early events in the Buddha's life had occurred there.



*Meditating Buddha, from Gandhara, Pakistan, second century CE. Gray schist, 3' 7 1/2" high. Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh.*

## EARLY BUDDHIST IMAGES--Gandhar

The north-western region of Gandhara, is the area where Alexander the Great ended his eastern march. (see earlier slides)

This different stylistic version of the Buddha is attributed to styles associated with Greece.



*Two examples of Greek Art. Notice the attention to naturalistic depictions of the human body. Also notice the toga.*



*Meditating Buddha, from Gandhara, Pakistan, second century CE. Gray schist, 3' 7 1/2" high. Royal Scottish Museum, Edinburgh.*



## EARLY BUDDHIST IMAGES--Gandhar

Gandaharan Buddhist art tends to focus on stories of the life of the historic Buddha. In more realistic styles, that are similar to Greek.



*Emaciated Buddha, 2nd-3rd Century, Kushan  
Page 47 book.*



*Standing Buddha, from Gandhara,  
Pakistan (note similarity to Greek statues  
in previous slide)*

## THE BODHISATTVA-Last thing for this week

Two weeks ago we talked about the evolution of different directions in Buddhism, from the Theravada (tradition of the elders), to Mahayana tradition.

The Mahayana placed more importance on personal devotion and universal opportunity for salvation. With this comes the bodhisattva, a savior figure who defers nirvana to aid others toward salvation.

Many of the earliest images of the Buddha were accompanied by pairs of bodhisattvas (enlightened beings), most of who later became the focus of their own cults.

*Mahayana traditions also opened the door for extremely large scale images of the Buddha. We will look at these next time.*



*Preaching Buddha on lotus throne, flanked by two bodhisattvas, 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century, from Gandhara, Pakistan*

Note: tree over his head.

Similar to p. 48 book.

## REVIEW week 5

We covered a lot this week:

- Reviewed the movement of Buddhism throughout Asia.
- Early history of Buddhism in India
- The Stupa, especially, the Stupa at Sanchi
- Early images of the Buddha and style change
  - Mathura
  - Gandhara
- Expanded images of the Mahayana tradition

## NEXT WEEK

Next week I am actually combining the readings for week 6 and 7, into one lecture. They are both on Buddhist and Hindu architecture and image development.

I'm doing this because your next Analysis paper will be due Week 6. So, you won't have an annotation due that week. See website for information.