

Iconographic Symbolism of the Prodigious Birth of Buddha Śākyamūni

Dr. Ghaniur Rahman*

Gandhāra sculpture has shown to be one of the most beautiful dialects of the spiritual language of Buddhism. This language has played an effective role as a medium to propagate the worldwide mission of the Buddha Śākyamūni. Gandhāra created and used a figurative sacred language furnished with meaningful signs, symbols and images, capable of explaining the Buddhist sacred message effectively.

Gandhāra sculpture is the style of Buddhist art that developed in present-day north-western Pakistan and eastern Afghanistan, roughly, from the first through the seventh centuries A.D. Gandhāra art represents several strands of thought because of its exposure to different cultural currents and artistic influences from Persia and the Greek-Roman Classical world, which effected its style to a great extent and gave birth to its identity.

One of the interesting aspects of the Gandhāra sculpture consists in the narrative representations of the episodes of the life of Buddha, which show an easy insight of the great Enlightened Teacher of Buddhism. The most interesting narratives are the representations of the prodigious events that happened during the life of Buddha Śākyamūni as a prince, or the miracles performed by him as a great transcendental teacher which resulted in mass conversions. The Great Being never favoured to preach his doctrine through performing miracles but, when needed, he did perform some to fulfil his worldwide mission of converting as many people as possible to the good law so that they can get rid of the cycle of innumerable lives full of sufferings.

* Assistant Professor, Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

The artistic medium facilitated the oral and textual mediums to the people who were unable to understand the comparatively complicated philosophical way of the teachings. Thus they were provided with the opportunity of knowing the life of their Lord through the expression language. In addition the artistic symbols and images provided them devotional centres to accumulate merits through their love for the Enlightened Master and taking inspiration for directing their lives.

According to J. Irwin:

“Gandhāra artists worked mainly in the service of texts, and what they give us is literary narrative in stone-not an art speaking its own aesthetic language”¹

What characterises this sculpture is the very different manner in which the narrative sculpture is represented. The sculpture of Gandhāra narrates the life of Śākyamūni in an independent manner, which finds itself neither in total agreement nor disagreement with the Indian and classical styles.²

Another characteristic of Gandhāra sculpture is the successive representation of narratives mostly in a linear horizontal scheme.³ Other important characteristics are the material used and the model that totally differ from those of other places and previous and contemporary schools in India. Though there are Stucco works in the latter phase the most outstanding material used is the blue-black schist stone. Unlike other Indian schools the Buddha of Gandhāra has a narrower Hellenised nose and has donned a drapery in Hellenised style.

After drawing a brief introduction to the Gandhāra sculpture we proceed with the narration of the prodigious birth of Buddha according to the Buddhist texts and Gandhāra sculpture.

The Prodigious Birth of Śākyamūni

Māyā, while standing under a śāla tree in the Lumbīnī grove, holding one of its branches, gave birth to Prince Siddhārtha (Śākyamūni). It is one amongst the several prodigious events that happened in the life of Śākyamūni. He was born from her right flank, and was received by the two most important Brahmanic gods, Brahmā and Indra.

1 Irwin, J., “The Mystery of the (Future) Buddha’s First Words”, *Annali [dell’] Istituto Orientale di Napoli*, 41,(Napoli: Istituto Orientale, 1981), p.633,

2 See Taddei, M., *Arte narrative tra India e mondo ellenistico*, (Roma: IsMEO, 1993), p.25,

3 Taddei, M., *Arte*, (1993), p.35. (For different Modes of Narrative schemes’ representations see: Vidya D., “On Modes of Visual Narration in Early Buddhist Art”, *Art Bulletin*, 72, 1990).

The important points to be noted, and on which most of the texts⁴ are unanimous, are: that Māyā gave birth during one of her usual outing to the pleasure gardens; that it did not take place in the palace of Kapilavāstu; that Māyā was standing while giving birth; and that she grasped a branch of a tree with her right hand at the final moment.⁵

Māyā, before the conception of the future Buddha, had opted for a religious life and had decided to abstain from any kind of sensual pleasure. It was during this period that she conceived the Bodhisattva and again it was her desire of concentration in a calm place like a forest or a grove, which was felt by her before the birth of the Bodhisattva. This desire took her to the Lumbini grove where she felt that the time had arrived to give birth and then the miraculous birth of the Bodhisattva took place.

“As was the birth of Aurva from the thigh, of Prāthu from the hand, of Mandhatr, the peer of Indra, from the head, of Kaksivat from the armpit, on such wise was his birth.

When in due course he had issued from the womb, he appeared as if he had descended from the sky, for he did not come into the world through the portal of life; and, since he had purified his being through many aeons, he was born not ignorant but fully conscious.

With his lustre and steadfastness he appeared like the young sun come down to earth, and despite this his dazzling brilliance, when gazed at, he held all eyes like the moon.”⁶

Representation of the Episode in Gandhāra Sculpture:

The scene of the Birth of Śākyamūni is the most commonly depicted scene from the life of Śākyamūni in Gandhāra. Māyā, The mother of the Śākyamūni has been depicted in three different poses in Gandhāra sculpture while giving birth to Śākyamūni:

1. Her right leg supports her body with the left leg bent forward crossing over the right leg such as shown in plates 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.
2. Her right leg supports her body with left leg crossing behind her right leg such as shown in plates 7 and 8, while plate 9 can be

4 J.J. Jones (tr. by), *The Mahavastu*, Part II, (London, Luzac & Company, 1956), and, An Introduction to the Jataka Warren, H.C., *Buddhism in Translation*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1986), etc.

5 A. Foucher, *The Life of the Buddha According to the Ancient Texts and Monuments of India*, (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2003), p.30.

6 Aśvaghoṣa, *Buddhacarita or Acts of the Buddha*, Part II, translated by Johnston, E.H., (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1936), pp.4-5,

put in the same category but that pose shows a playful posture and movement forward.

3. She is standing without crossing any leg over or beneath but her body is a little bit bent towards her left side thus exposing her right side to facilitate the emergence of Śākyamūni. This type of depiction can be seen in plates 10, 11 and 12.

While standing in one or the other above mentioned pose she grasps the branch of the Śāla tree in her right hand at the final moment. This act is always depicted in the similar manner in all the representations. The emergence of the Bodhisattva is also always depicted in one mode as a fixed rule, although, his physical features vary. In most of the sculptures he is represented with the distinctive marks of a great man. A halo and *uśnīṣa* can be clearly seen in most of the sculptures as for instance in plate 2; nevertheless, there are others in which he is depicted with out hair on his head like other newborns such as in plate 7.

Her sister Mahāprajāpatī who, after the death of Queen Māyā seven days after the birth of the Bodhisattva, became his stepmother to raise him, assists māyā, always, on the right. A female attendant, right of Mahāprajāpatī, holds a palm branch or a peacock feather without any water vessel or a small box as in plate 2. The same female attendant in some other representations such as plate 4 is depicted with a water vessel and in plate 3 with a small circular box and a palm branch or a peacock feather, while the water vessel is absent. Another female attendant when represented according to the space availability holds a mirror behind Mahāprajāpatī, such as in plate 3.

The figure receiving the child on the left is identified as Indra/Śakra; behind him Brahmā is present on the occasion. They both are mostly sculptured in the birth scene, although, some times as in plate 2 only Indra is sculptured while Brahmā is not represented. The sculptor of this scene seems to have depicted only the most important characters, and to eliminate the other human and deva attendants because of the small space available. But this can be objected because the sculptor might have eliminated the human attendant in order to represent Brahmā. Nevertheless, the presence of thousands of devas and their maidens are mentioned in the text during the occasions of conception and birth of Śākyamūn.⁷ Given that *deva-s* are considered to be invisible and can be represented by the minimum presence as per the requirement of the different occasions, while humans had to be visible, more importance was given to the human attendants and, having more attendants, the

7 J.J. Jones, *The Mahavastu*, (1956), pp.2, 17.

importance of Māyā as a queen was supposed to be shown as much as possible. Perhaps Indra has been given more importance because he was a king god and thus was a more suitable choice to receive a prince. The joy in the heaven is also depicted: Here the celebration of the occasion by the celestial beings has been represented with the floating drums and harps as seen in the relief of plate 4 and 5.

After observing these sculptures, differences of the same scene in several modes, two things can be suggested: (1) that the scenes were depicted differently, according to the space availability, and (2) that there were different workshops where the artisans worked following the requests of their customers. As many important centres there were as many were the styles. The study of these different styles can lead us to the existence of different artisan centres and, looking for the different centres, to find their location, succession, chronology, their original roots, whether the artisans were of Indian or foreign origin or both.

Iconographic Symbolism

Māyā (The Mother of Śākyamuni):

According to the Buddhist texts, from the time the future Buddha was conceived, four angels guarded to ward off all harm from both the future Buddha and his mother. No lustful thought sprang up in the mind of the future Buddha's mother; she experienced no body exhaustion. A womb, occupied by a future Buddha, is like the shrine of a temple, which can never be occupied or used again. It was for this reason that the mother of the future Buddha died, when he was seven days old and reborn in the Tūṣṭīta heaven.⁸

Māyā, the mother of Śākyamūni, was a human mother belonging to a noble family. But, after Śākyamūni had attained enlightenment, with the passage of time, she was raised to a superhuman level. She reached that high level to become the mother of the future Buddha because of the merits she accumulated. After she gave birth to Bodhisattva she died and reborn in the Tūṣṭīta heaven, where the Bodhisattva resided before taking birth as Siddhārtha (Śākyamūni).

Māyā is considered an illusion as well. "In beauty like padmā [lotus], in steadfastness like the earth, she was called Mahāmāyā, from her resemblance to the incomparable Māyā [illusion]."⁹ When the latter Buddhists had elevated the Buddha to a supreme level it was natural to

8 See, *Introduction to Jataka* (translated by Warren, H.C., *Buddhism in Translation*, 1986), p.45.

9 Asvaghosha, *Buddhacarita*, tr. E.H. Johnston, (1936), p.1.

avoid the idea of his having a normal human mother and thus it seems as if they considered her as an illusion created to form a medium for the transformation of the future Buddha from heaven to the human world. This suggestion comes to mind because of the fact that he was conceived in an unnatural way because his mother during that period did not live with his father: "Then without defilement she received the fruit of the womb, just as knowledge united with mental concentration bears fruit"¹⁰, and he was born in an unusual way because he issued from his mother's right flank, while she was standing, unlike other human beings: "Again, a Bodhisattva's mother is not delivered as she lies or sits down.....but in a standing position. And the Bodhisattva, mindful and thoughtful, issues from his mother's right side without doing her any harm."¹¹ The mode of birth reported by the Buddhist texts and Gandhāra art might intend to show the purity of Buddha contrary to the normal human (impure) birth. But at the same time assign a mysterious status to his mother as well.

He could have come to the human world without a medium (a human mother) but as he had to come to the human world which is an illusion itself, He thus would have opted for a human illusion medium instead of the World illusion. Thus he was in such a position to present a human example for the achievable enlightenment and the possible freedom from *samsāra*.

After the birth of Śākyamūni, his mother died or, in other words, the medium that was illusion extinguished, after giving birth to the truth and the light of knowledge. It also symbolises that when a light is lit the darkness has to extinguish. When the future Buddha arrived as a light of knowledge to the phenomenal world the darkness and illusion started fading and the first symbolic fading of illusion, darkness or ignorance was Māyā.

Buddha always proclaimed the depravity of sensual desires and thus it would not be fit for his mother to indulge in sensual pleasures.¹² It might be this reason that the mother of Śākyamūni died seven days after his birth.

While giving birth to Śākaymūni, Māyā is always represented holding the branch of a Śāla tree with her right hand.¹³ This fact symbolises her being devotee to the tree-spirits (Yāksa/Yāksini) and

10 *op.cit.*, p.2.

11 J.J. Jones, *The Mahavastu*, part.II, (tr). (1952), p.18.

12 *op.cit.*, p.3.

13 *op.cit.*, p.17, speaks of a fig tree under which Māyā playfully stretched herself at the moment of giving birth to the glorious one.

also to facilitate Siddhārtha's birth from her right side. Yāksā-s/Yāksīnī-s are always symbolised by trees. Māyā is also sometimes considered to be a Yāksīnī who was visible in that name and form to facilitate the future Buddha's coming to earth. In this case it can be said that the being who was destined to be transcendental came to the human world through a semi-divine medium (a tree spirit which was the element of earthly fertility the Buddha passes through) but, being in the form of a human, it was necessary so that an example be set for the humans regarding the possibility of success to achieve mental liberation (*nirvāṇa*). Plate 1 (no.44 Kurita) is a good example of Yāksīnī and its resemblance with Māyā at the time of her giving birth to the Bodhisattva Siddhārtha.

Since the tree is considered as a place where the spirit of life resides, the connection is very apparent between the pose of Queen Māyā and yāksīnī, the ancient Indian spirit of the tree. Plate 44, is an independent statue of yāksīnī, and it is almost identical to the pose of Queen Māyā during childbirth.¹⁴

Yāksīnī

At the time of the birth of Śākyamūni, Māyādevī was shown in the typical pose of a Yāksīnī (the female tree spirit). Thus the sculptor elevated her to the level of at least that heaven being. When Buddha was elevated to the highest level of beings how could they forget that his mother was just a human like the others?

Yāksā-s and Yāksīnī-s are subject to the great king Vessāvana of the northern quarter of the world. The first heaven, which is just above the human state, is that of four Mahārājas of the four cardinal points of the world. These great kings, as the texts mentions, paid visits to Buddha Śākyamūni as stated in the Sutta 32, verse, 2 of the Dīgha Nikāya. Although there is mentioned the Yāksā-s who had faith in Buddha, and paid visits to him, according to the same sutta, most of the Yāksā-s were hostile to the *dharma*.¹⁵

Symbolism of the Tree:

The tree, as already mentioned above, is regarded as the abode of Yāksā-s and it is also connected with many fertility rituals. That is why it is visited more by women seeking offsprings or by newly married couples. According to the Buddhist tradition, the daughter of a farmer,

14 I. Kurita, *Gandhāra art 1: The Buddha's Life Story*, English/Japanese Edition, (Tokyo: Nigensha Publishing Co., 2003), p.302.

15 See, Sutta 32, and 19 of the *Dīgha Nikāya* (*The Long Discourses of the Buddha*) translated by Maurice Walshe, (Boston: Wisdom Publication, 1987).

Sujātā, who offered rice milk preparation to Siddhārtha (for eating) and, after eating he attained enlightenment, had actually come to worship the tree under which Bodhisattva Siddhārtha was meditating. The tree, already sacred, was sanctified further by the Buddha's attainment of enlightenment while he was sitting below it. It is now a tree that is a must in every Buddhist temple and monastery and has acquired the name *caitya-vr̥ksa* (the shrine tree).¹⁶

"... the Tree of life, synonymous with all existence, all the worlds, all life, springs up, out, or down into space from its root in the navel centre of the Supreme Being, Varūna, Mahāv̥ksa, Asūra, Brāhman, as he lies extended on the back of the waters, the possibilities of existence and the source of his abundance. That Tree is his procession [...] in a likeness (mūrta), the emanation of his fiery-energy (tejas) as light, the aspiration of his breath (prāṇa); he is its wise, indestructible mover (revivā)."¹⁷

"... Aśoka was said to have been taken before a tree bearing his own name (aśoka), known in India by its magnificent red flower, and there, due to the prestige that the sage Upāgūpta exercised over the gods, the emperor was able to converse with the dryad who lived under the bark. Consequently she had the rare privilege of seeing the infant Buddha born [...]. Other texts state that it was a fig tree, (plakṣa), which spontaneously bent down one of its branches towards Māyā's right hand. Still others opt for a śala, the most common species in the sub-Himalayan zone and the very same kind of tree that, eighty years later, shaded the death of the Blessed One. The important point to be remembered is that tradition attributed to Māyā, at the time, the sculptural pose par excellence, according to Indian aesthetics even of today."¹⁸

Human Attendants

In Gandhāra Sculpture the depicted human attendants are: Prajāpatī, the sister of Māyādevī, who after her death looked after the prince; Beside Prajāpatī, one or two other female attendants are also present, one of whom is mostly depicted with a palm leaf or a peacock feather. The same, or another lady attendant, holds a water vessel or a small box. Sometimes one of them holds a mirror.

The lady with a palm leaf or a peacock feather can be considered a typical attendant to fan her mistress to lessen the heat of Indian summers.

16 Kewal Krishan Mittal, «Significance of Some Buddhist Myths and symbols» in *Buddhist Art and Thought*, Ed. Kewal Krishan Mittal and Ashvini Agrawal, (New Delhi: Harman Publishing House, 1993), p.156.

17 A.K. Coomaraswamy, (1935), *Elements of Buddhist Iconography*, (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1935), p.8.

18 A. Foucher, *The Life*, (2003), p.30.

The presence of as many attendants as possible was to show a symbolic riches and high caste.

The Presence of gods

When the future Buddha left the heaven for the human world, innumerable gods and other celestial beings were present, and when he passed through the motherly illusion and arrived to the human world, there again the most famous gods, amongst whom are Indra (the king and thus the representation of action) and Brahmā (the priest and thus the representation of knowledge) were present to receive the future Buddha giving the occasion the necessary importance. It was also a reminder to the new born by the presence that he is destined to achieve the great objective for which his journey had already started.

Brahmā:

Brahmā as a god¹⁹ cannot be mistaken in the reliefs depicting the birth scene of Śākyamūni. He has a kind of *krobylos* *jāta* on his head. He is depicted both with and without a beard. He is also represented as a Brāhmanā.

The presence of Brahmā in the scene of the birth of Śākyamūni symbolises several developments. By the time of the use of art as an instrument of propagation there had already occurred changes in the basics of Buddhism and Brahmanism. The Mahāyāna sect of Buddhism seems to have played its role levelling the discrepancies between the two principle doctrines.

The presence of Brahmā was a message to the Brahmins that even their supreme god had welcomed and supported the Buddha Śākyamūni's coming to the human world. He not only had welcomed him at the time of his birth, but he had also pleaded him to teach to the humans and gods the truth he had discovered after his attaining of the enlightenment.

This was enough to reconcile the Brahmins to the Buddhist faith and to assure them that Buddha can be adored by both of them. But at the same time they represented the Brahmanic gods as the pupils of the great teacher who used to learn from him the way that leads to *nirvāṇa*. Thus, the Brāhman gods were made to occupy a level lower than that of the Buddha. Nevertheless, the important move was that Brahmā, Indra etc were divine beings for Buddhists as well like the Brahmins. It seems as, on the one hand the Buddhists were trying to establish their

19 Brahmā considers also the Brahmā gods as a class.

supremacy and on the other they were trying to reconcile with the Brahmans.

This also shows, on the one hand, that the society during that period had undergone a long process of change, a change of economic prosperity and thus a certain kind of tolerance in the society; on the other hand that the Buddhist and Vedic doctrines had evolved into full-fledged philosophies and mostly both together were patronised by state.

With this background Mahāyāna Buddhists took a full advantage to propagate the doctrine in different ways. Through art, as we have seen above, they propagated to the people that their gods had accepted the Buddha Śākyamūni as their teacher and the same should have been made also by them.

Sākra (sans. Sākra, pāli. Sākka) / Indra²⁰:

This episode, from the life of Śākyamūni in Gandhāra sculpture Sākra (the king of *devas* of Trāyastṛimśa), has been mostly depicted receiving the newborn. Sākra, the king of *devas*, wore a turban and he is often with out beard. But sometimes he has been represented with a beard. According to Grünwedel, the bearded Sākra has been fashioned by the artists after a Greek classical model- that of Zeus (Jupiter)-Zeus is the Greek! But according to C.Sivaramamurti, he has also been sculptured with out beard in the Gandhāra sculpture and that model for the Sākra, is that of a young Brāhman.²¹

The Buddhists consider *Sākra* as the Lord of *Trāyastṛimśa* heaven. He resides in the palace *Vejayanta*, rides the elephant *Erāvan* (Sanskrit *Airāvata*). Instead of being *purandara*, the destroyer of towns, as in Hindu mythology he is *purindada* the bestower of towns. His weapon is the thunderbolt (*vajra*) and he is ever vigilant to see that all is right with the world.²²

Sākra is said to have served Buddha Śākyamūni on many occasions of Buddha's life. When the first time Śākyamūni cut his hair locks and threw them away, it was Sākra who picked and enshrined it in Trāyastṛimśa heaven. When Śākyamūni wished to take a bath, it was Sākra who facilitated him lowering the branches of a tree over the bank of the river Nerañjara. The food offered by Sujāta to Śākyamūni was filled with divine sap by *Sākra*. After preaching his mother and other

20 Buddhism substituted God Indra of Brahmanism with Sākra.

21 See, C. Sivaramamurti, "Amarāvati Sculpture in the Madras Government Museum", in 'Bulletin of the Madras Government Museum, (Madras: 1977), p.85.

22 C. Sivaramamurti, "Amarāvati", (1977), p.86.

divinities when Buddha was returning to earth at *Sankāsīya* it was *Sākra* who created three ladders for his descent and even accompanied him together with *Mahābrahmā*, bearing on a parasol and chauri respectively on either side. According to a vow taken by *Sākra* in a previous birth when he was a *Cākravartin* he took upon himself the responsibilities of the defender of the faith and he is thus a protector of the Buddhist *Sāṅgha*.²³

Vajrapāṇi

Vajrapāṇi is the bearer of thunderbolt (*vajra*) like the god Indra, who is sculptured in many scenes accompanying Buddha in the Gandhāra Sculpture. Like *Sākra* (Indra), he is also shown in two ways in Gandhāra art: either with or without a beard. He is the vigilant attendant of Buddha. Grünwedel discusses the *Sākra-Vajrapāṇi* concept and comes to the conclusion that the two gods are derived from a single earlier one.²⁴

It seems that the three celestial beings: Indra, *Sākra* and Vajrapāṇi are the appearances of the one. It is not unfamiliar in Brahmanic religion that gods used to send their *avatāras* or personified powers to the human world to help their followers. Again, those gods, such as Viṣṇu, has the power to create illusion (*Māyā*) when wanted or that the whole world is an illusion created by the creator and there is no reality.

Buddha himself created illusion while performing the miracle of multiplying himself at Śrāvastī.

Vajrapāṇi may represent the thunder-god *Sākra* in all instances where he is needed for protection. According to the Buddhist legends, when something important is about to happen on earth, the throne of *Sākra* in the heaven becomes warm and he hastens down to interfere in the interests of right.²⁵

Given their desire to have a separate pantheon of gods and celestial system the Buddhists used to turn to the already existing celestial beings with slightly different names and thus it seemed as if they had other own gods. But Brahmans were familiar to those Buddhist gods and even Buddha or later Buddhists knew this. It was because of this reason that many Brahmans never hesitated to come to Buddha and ask him different

23 See, A. Grünwedel, *Buddhist Art in India*, (translated from the 'Handbuch' of Albert Grünwedel, by Agnes C. Gibson, Revised and Enlarged by Jas. Burgess, (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1910, p.90 & Sivaramamurti, C., "Amaravati", (1977), p.88.

24 C. Sivaramamurti, "Amarāvati", (1977), p.89.

25 See, A. Grünwedel, *Buddhist Art*, (1901), p.90.

questions and even became his followers like other Brahman teachers of that time.

Meanings in the Representational Mode of the Birth of Śākyamūni:

There are different versions, from where the prince was born, varying from the right flank, and right under arm or right hip. In any case, as Isao Kurita reports,²⁶ “this is related to a legend in the ancient Indian society that the royalty (ksatriya) bears a child from the right arm (symbol for military power) or right side.” But in the Gandhāra sculpture the only mode of depiction shows the Bodhisattva arising from the right side just above the right hip.

The later Buddhist text writers, like the artists, seem to have narrowed down the differences between Buddhism and Brahmanism or at least tried to reconcile them to the old religion. The text on which the Buddhist art is based, seem to have benefited from the Vedas. For example for the birth of their lord they looked for a suitable mode of birth which could show his greatness and the answer was found in R̥g Veda, where it is told that the god Indra had refused to be born in the normal way and insisted upon his coming forth from his mother's flank. It was this example that was followed and thus Śākyamūni had been always depicted issuing from his mother's flank.

“The only precaution that must be taken in order to banish any scruples on the part of worshipers was to announce that in so doing the divine child never so much as hurt her. In truth, it was said that this kind of spontaneous ‘Caesarean operation left not even the slightest scar. It was absolutely necessary that the Buddha's birth be superhuman, but it must not become inhuman.”²⁷

Māyā giving birth to Śākyamūni did not feel any pain because Tathāgatas are born with a body that is made of mind.²⁸

Appearance of the Seven Treasures

Another important event beautifully shown in the Gandhāra sculpture, which happened exactly at the same time of the birth of Śākyamūni:

According to Buddha Śākyamūni every great man bears seven treasures, which appear together with him.²⁹ Thus, according to the Buddhist text, seven treasures appeared with Buddha Śākyamūni.

26 Kurita, Isao., *Gandhara Art 1: The Buddha's Life*, (2003), p.302.

27 A. Foucher, *The Life*, (2003), p.30.

28 See, *The Mahavastu*, Part II, (1952), p.18.

According to the Introduction to the Jātaka:

“Now at the very time that our Future Buddha was born in Lumbīni Grove there also came into existence the mother of Rāhula, and Channa (Chandaka) the courtier, Kaludayi the courtier, Kanthaka the king of horses, the Great Bo-tree, and the four urns full of treasure.....These seven (The Future Buddha be counted as number 1 and the treasure together as number 7) are called the Connate Ones.”³⁰

It seems as if the depiction of the connate ones were not very popular in Gandhāra Art because just a few pieces are in display in Museums and Catalogues.

Although the scene shows only two appearances among the seven i.e. the birth of Kanthaka, the personal horse of the prince and the birth of Chnadka the personal attendant. These two played the most important role in Śākyamūni's flight from his home to become an ascetic and finally a Buddha.

Conclusion

The importance of the Gandhāra sculpture as a record of the history, medium of communication and propagation is clear from the above discussion. When we go through the text we try to understand the meanings and purpose why it was written. When we go through the artistic narrations we see different images and symbols, which not only remind us one or another occasion. In addition the material employed, the style and the dresses worn by the images tell us whatever is possible about the culture, economy, religion and eventually influences from other cultures and environments.

The Gandhāra sculpture has proved to be a very effective expressive language within the world art galaxy. It is an art, which served as an instrument of propagation of a religion, which flourished more than two thousand years ago and it is still an instrument to narrate the history of that past religion, philosophy and other aspects of the society of the time. The Gandhāra sculpture is so complete in its function and aesthetics that it has proved to be one of the important members of the past and present historical world civilizations.

29 Sūta 63.5, *Dīgha Nikāya*, The Long Discourses of Buddha, translated by Maurice Walsh, (Boston: Wisdom Publication, 1987).

30 *Introduction to the Jātaka*, translated by H.C. Warren, *Buddhism in translation*, (1986), p.48.



Plate no.1. This is an independent Yāksṇiṇi representation which is identical with the pose of Māyā at the time of her giving birth to the future Buddha (Kurita, I., *Gandhāra Art*, (2003), Fig. No.44)



Plate no. 2, Birth of Budhisattva Śākyamūni, part of a stupa base or *harmika*, Grey Schist, H. 23.5 cm, W. varies between 34.3 cm and 34.9 cm, Provenance Unknown, (Zawlf, W., *A Catalogue*, (1996, Fig.No. 145)



Plate no. 3, Birth of Śākyamūni, grey schist, H. 67 cm, W. 85 cm, Provenance unknown, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., U.S.A., (Craven, Roy C., *Indian Art*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1976, Fig. No. 52)

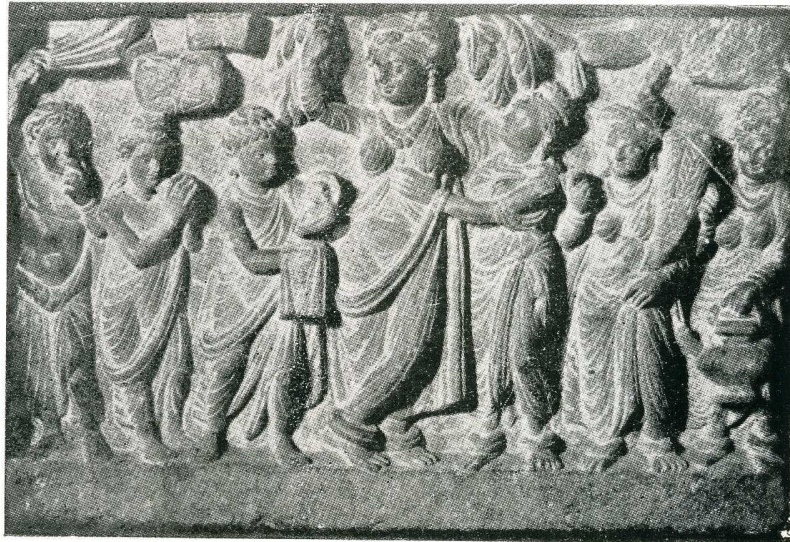


Plate no. 4, Birth of Budhisattva Śākyamūni, schist stone, H. 32 cm, L. 41.8 cm. Provenance unknown, The British Museum, A.M.- 126, (Rishi Raj Tripathi, *Master Pieces in the Allahabad Museum*, Allahabad, Allahabad Museum, 1984, Fig. No. 14)



Plate no. 5, Birth and Seven Steps of Śākyamūni, grey schist, H. 27.3 cm, W. 52.1cm, Provenance unknown, the Art Institute of Chicago, Samuel M. Nickerson Collection No. 23.315, (Kurita, Isao, *Gandhāra Art*, 2003, Fig. No. 48)



Plate no. 6, Birth of Śākyamūni, Stone, H. 18 cm, L. 24 cm, Provenance unknown, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, (Ackermann, H. C., *Narrative Stone Reliefs*, 1975, 3305-1883 I.S., Pl. XXXVII a)



Plate no. 7, Birth of Śākyamūni, grey schist, H. 16cm, W. 32cm, from Zurum Kot, Private Collection Japan, (Kurita, Isao, *Gandhāra Art*, 2003, Fig. No. 33)



Plate no. 8, Birth of Śākyamuni, Green Schist, H. 27 cm, w.27cm, from Swat, Private Collection Japan, (Kurita, Isao, *Gandhāra Art*, 2003, Fig. No. 36)



Plate no. 9, Birth and Seven Steps of Śākyamūni, stone, H. 26 cm, W. 48 cm, Provenance unknown, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, (Ackermann, H. C., *Narrative Stone Reliefs*, 1975, I.M. 109-1927, pl. IX)



Plate no. 10, Birth of Bodhisattva Śākyamūni, grey schist, H. 21.3 cm, W. 18.8 cm, D. 5.5 cm, Provenance unknown, The British Museum, (Zwalf, W., *A Catalogue*, 1996, Fig. No. 147)



Plate no. 11, Birth of Śākyamūni, green schist, H. 39 cm, W. 28 cm, probably from Swat, Private Collection Japan, (Kurita, Isao, *Gandhāra Art*, 2003, Fig. No. PI-VI)

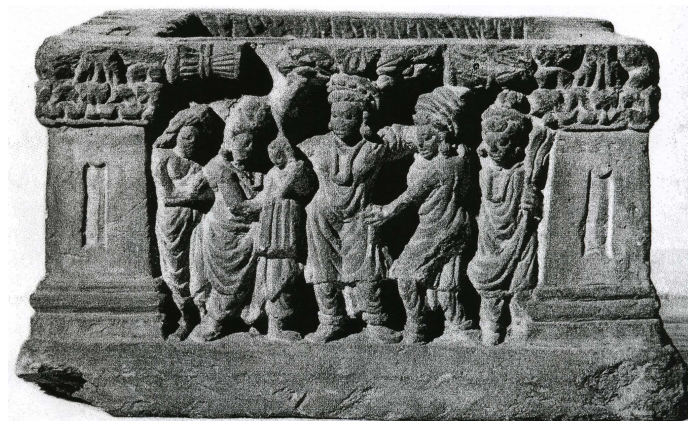


Plate no. 12, Birth of Śākyamūni, H. 18 cm, L. 38 cm, Provenance unknown, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, (Ackermann, H. C., *Narrative Stone Reliefs from Gandhāra in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London*, Rome, IsMEO, 1975, I.M. 297-1921, pl. XLII a)