

Consular Diptychs and Buddhist Diptychs: Another Way of Exploring Western Elements in Gandhara Art

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Abstract: The work in hand discusses the usage of diptych type objects in Western world and in Gandhara. The basic purpose of the research is to determine the origin of diptychs in this part of the world that when and why such objects were manufactured in Gandhara? To answer these questions diptychs in the Western World, referred to as the 'Consular Diptychs', are examined. The study throws light on their origin, function, shape, technique, material, iconography and significance. Comparative study of similarities and dissimilarities between the Western diptychs and the Gandharan diptychs is also a part of the investigation through which an attempt has also been made to establish a link between these two traditions. Moreover, final statement is formulated regarding origin of diptych type objects in Gandhāra. At the end, the Basket Man Type Buddhist Diptychs are discussed. This section primarily introduces these diptychs along with description of their iconographic details. Examples from Gandhāran reliefs are also included to analyze pictorial representation.

Keywords: Consular Diptychs, Western Elements, Byzantine, Buddha, Gandhara, Buddhist Art, Iconography, Miniature, Portable Shrines.

Introduction

Our understanding about Western elements in the Buddhist art of Gandhāra is primarily based upon the artistic and stylistic study of innumerable Gandharan sculptures and reliefs. As a source material these objects are so large in number that scholars hardly feel any need to consult Buddhist diptychs, if available, as is the case with the collection of British Museum London and the Metropolitan Museum of New York. The Present author, during his study of Gandhara art, came across a couple of diptychs having carving on both sides. The style of carving and the way different life episodes of the Buddha are depicted on these objects is so interesting and unique that it urged the present author to explore more in the field. As a result, more than thirty-two such pieces were collected. By looking at these tiny pieces one can understand high level of craftsmanship of Gandharan artists who carved the narrative art so skilfully. Such objects in the form of diptychs have so far been treated less important and perhaps this is the reason why most of the Gandharan experts such as Ackermann, Zwalf and Kurita did not catalogue the Gandharan diptychs.

Buddhist diptych type miniature portable shrines, as these are referred to in the present article, were used most probably as another medium of depicting life story of the Buddha. These have unique artistic, religious and social significance which lies way beyond their tiny size.

Whatever we have is either one wing or fragment of Buddhist diptychs. Interestingly majority of these come from unknown provenance. Unlike general sculptures and reliefs which have been recovered during excavations of many Buddhist sites, diptych type objects were found from far off areas, mainly alongside ancient routes connecting Gandhāra with central and eastern Asia.

Apart from iconographical character of Buddhist diptychs which is directly associated with life story of the Buddha, before and after enlightenment, firstly we should have some information about the introduction of the use of diptychs in Gandhāra. Did Gandharan artists borrow the idea of using diptychs or it had some indigenous origin? To answer the query first we must know what previous scholarship has suggested.

Use of Diptychs in Gandhara

In Gandhara majority of the diptychs were made of stone. Only fragments of these diptychs have been found, mostly from unknown provenance. They depict different events from the life of the Buddha and different Hindu deities. The origin of the diptychs, in Gandhara is the least debated topic in terms of tracing their structural and thematic origin. Previous scholarship represents diverse views of different scholars, art historian and archaeologist about the origin of portable shrines.

Existing Opinions about Provenance, Dating and Origin of Portable Shrines

When Cunningham (1887) found the fragment of a Buddhist diptych from *Sankasa* (an ancient Indian town) during his tours in the Gangetic provinces from *Budaon* to Bihar in 1867-68, he merely explained its iconography. Stein (1907) also found two fragments of the Buddhist diptychs and attributed them to Gandhara. Furthermore, Goetz (1964) and Taddei (1965) addressed style and subject matter of the “*Ekamukhalinga Type*” Hindu diptych. In 1965, Soper published the ivory diptych and focussed on reading its content and determining its probable provenance. Barrett (1967), Rowan (1985) and Yoshihide (2000) also discussed the ivory diptych. These scholars emphasized the contextual details of the diptych by carrying out a cross-examination with its stone counterparts from Gandhara and Kashmir. Rowan (1985: 252) made the following fascinating observation about the import of ivory:

This Asian ivory was not only a significant commodity of trade but also must have remained an important object of tribute as illustrated in the composite ivory in the Louvre known as the Barberini diptych.

Rowan’s statement broadens the perspective of tracing the origin of portable shrines, particularly of the diptychs, in classical traditions, which will be discussed later. The Barberini diptych is dated to around 6th century CE.

In an exhibition catalogue related to the collection from The West Berlin State Museums, Härtel and Yaldiz (1982) mentioned two fragments of the Buddhist portable shrines, stating that these originated in the Gandharan regions and that they played an important role in the diffusion of Buddhist iconography and Gandharan styles. Pal (1984) attributes the origin of a “Basket Man Type” Buddhist diptych to the Northwest of the Indian Subcontinent.

According to Lerner and Kossak (1991) the Buddhist portable shrines seem to be a local invention of ancient Gandhara region, which can be dated to the 4th to 5th century CE. This was further accelerated in Kashmir in the form of Hindu portable shrines from the 5th to the 7th century CE. Sen-Gupta (2002: 43) describes the origin of these shrines in the following words:

Portable shrines owe their origin probably to amulets, which are of great antiquity in India and western Asia. Amulets served the purpose of protection from evil and were meant to be worn on the body. They are of pre-Buddhist origin, but they were taken over by Buddhists. Such amulets were worn by Buddhist nobles in the figural representations in the Bharhut sculptures which date from the 2nd century BCE. In Tibet, much later, Buddhists placed small clay votive images in relic boxes and wore them either at the neck or if large strapped across the chest.

Behrendt (2007) believes that the Buddhist portable shrines at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York belong to the 5th and 6th century CE, whereas Kashmir group of the portable shrines date between 5th to 7th century CE.

Critical Analysis of these Opinions

After analysing the above-mentioned statements concerning provenance, dating and origin of the portable shrines, it is necessary to point out that these opinions evolve around the subjective and stylistic study rather than tracing the thematic origin of these shrines. Moreover, whatever they have suggested is simply based upon observation and supporting evidences are lacking. Present author does not agree what Sen-Gupta has suggested as amulets are still being used in India and Pakistan and there is hardly any change in their shape and function. Apart from Rowan’s remarks about origin, it is interesting to note that despite having adequate knowledge of the foreign influences on the artistic traditions of Gandhara, nothing has been written on the role of Western elements to determine the origin of portable shrines. This leaves behind considerable doubt, making it imperative to look for the existence of such objects in the Western World.

Use of Diptychs in the Western World

In the Mediterranean World diptychs were used as “Consular” or “Imperial” diptychs during the late Roman and early Byzantine eras (Fig. 1). These consular diptychs were produced in the both parts, namely, Eastern and Western half of the Empire. Therefore, these are also known as Eastern consul diptychs and Western consul diptychs.



Fig. 1. The Lampadiorm Diptych Panel 400 CE
(After Olovsson, 2005, Plate 1).

Consular and Imperial Diptychs

The consular diptychs serve as an important source of information about the artistic and political happenings of the time. Delbrück (1929) prepared a corpus of such diptychs. The catalogue gives a detailed account of their historical and artistic context. Olovsson (2005) made the

second detailed study of the consular diptychs and focussed on the iconographical treatment of consular diptychs. Olovsson (2005: 1) states:

Beside the consular diptychs there are other types of official diptychs commissioned by late Roman dignitaries (magistrates, patricians, senators), 'imperial diptychs' - ivory assemblages of three or more panels with imperial personage as main figures - 'private' diptychs, and diptychs commissioned by priests.

Origin of the Consular Diptychs

According to the previous studies devoted to the consular diptychs and their origin (Capps 1927: 61-101; Cameron 2013: 174-207), these diptychs developed as part of an earlier tradition. The consular diptychs represent a developed form of the letters declaring the appointment of officers in the first century CE. The concept of using consular diptychs was taken from ancient writing-tablets which were presented the high officials at the time of taking charge of their respective offices (Capps 1927: 61). Cameron (2013: 175) has a similar view:

Although there is no direct evidence on the origin of the practice, there can be little doubt why what I would prefer to call presentation diptychs took the form they did. From as early as the first century C.E., formal letters of appointment to office were known as *codicilli*, 'little book', or in (literary) Greek *δέλτοι*, evidently because the imperial letter was despatched or presented in the form of writing-tablets, two or more flat, rectangular pieces of (usually) wood joined by cord or metal clasps, coated with wax on the inside surface of both leaves for writing.

Cameron (2013: 175f) further adds:

In earlier times the actual letter of appointment must have been written on the inside surface of a (probably wooden) diptych, running onto a third or more leaf if more space was required. But once diptychs began being made of ivory, that would no longer have been feasible.

These opinions clearly suggest that the idea of using diptychs evolved from earlier writing-tablets. It was later modified in the form of consular, imperial and private diptychs. This modification took a couple of centuries and during the last quarter of the 4th century CE. proper diptychs started to appear. These diptychs portrayed some

imperial figures, either standing or sitting.

Function of Consular Diptychs

For more than a century, scholars have referred to these diptychs as consular diptychs. This terminology is self-explanatory and defines their utility. With the passage of time, their usage extended from an imperial to a personal level. Capps (1927: 62) suggested that the consular diptychs were chiefly issued by the consuls but their usage passed from them to other officials and was even adopted by private persons, who on certain family festivals, marriages for example, offered to their relatives this type of diptychs.

Delbrück (1929) explained the use of diptychs as a consular or another type of commemorative work. Olovsson (2005) also believes that consular diptychs were issued by ordinary consuls in order to commemorate their appointment. According to another opinion of “consular diptychs were made to be sent out as gifts” (Eastmond 2010: 745).

Cameron (2013) has studied the consular diptychs with reference to what he describes the ‘consular games’. He believes that the representation of certain games on these diptychs suggests that they were not only commissioned by the consuls but also by any official who provided games. These games were well-known among the Romans.

Materials

The consular diptychs were principally made of ivory but examples in wood, metal and bone have also been reported. Ivory was most probably imported from Egypt and reached Rome via Constantinople. It seems that complete tusks were provided directly to the carvers who then worked out the tusks for getting the desired shape.

Form and Technique

The consular diptychs show two carved panels joined with a hinge or clasp for opening and closing. Cylindrical hinges were attached to the inner edges of the panels for joining. These hinges are still visible on most of the consular diptychs. Olovsson (2005: 5f) mentions that Delbrück also observed a thin layer of wax applied to the inner surface of the diptychs, most probably used for writing inscriptions.

Most of the diptychs are rectangular and

represent a vivid figural treatment of their interior surface, set up differently into small and large registers. Most diptychs have a plain exterior. Some feature a slightly carved or grooved border.

As far as manufacturing technique is concerned, engravers were responsible for cutting and carving complete tusks according to the desired format. The tusks were given to carvers who first sawed them into two pieces and then cut them into different parts. At the second stage, these pieces were carefully and delicately carved using chisels, raps, drills and files; and finally, the panels were polished.

Iconographical Treatment

The consul is depicted in frontal position, standing or sitting, sometimes solitary and is often accompanied by attendants. He occupies a central part of the composition. His body gestures and the attributes in hands are quite significant. Whenever a consul is depicted in a sitting position, his lion throne is identical (see Olovsson 2005: Pls. 4, 5, 7, 9:1, 9:2, 9:3, 10, 11:1, 11:2, 11:3, 12, 13 and 15). In some consular diptychs the consul watches games in an arena, depicted in a lower register (see Olovsson 2005: Pls. 5, 8, 9:1, 9:2, 9:3, 11:1, 11:2, 11:3 and 19). It is fascinating to see that some diptychs epitomize in lower registers two tiny figures carrying money bags on their shoulders. They are pouring money into pots or directly to the consul’s feet (see Olovsson 2005: Pls. 7, 10, 13 and 16). On some occasions, a couple of winged creatures holding garlands are also depicted above the consul (see Olovsson 2005: Pls. 11:1, 11:2, 11:3, 15, 20 and 25). The whole imagery on the interior is framed inside a decorated border. The decoration usually takes the shape of grooves or floral and geometric patterns. The use of bead-and-reel design on the border of a diptych is also very interesting (see Olovsson 2005: Pl. 21).

Inscriptions

The consular diptychs are significant historical documents. These provide information about the political hierarchy of the late Roman and early Byzantine Empires. Most of the diptychs shows Latin inscriptions positioned variously beside the imagery. These inscriptions bear the names and titles of the consuls, officers or of their private owners. Generally, the name of the consul was

written along with the various titles he acquired during his service, (for more information, see Olovsson 2005).

Significance of the Consular Diptychs

The consular diptychs have historical as well as artistic significance. These not only serve as an authentic source of information but also display unique method of announcing appointment of the consuls. Capps (1927:63) believed that study of consular diptychs is very significant to the student of art history and archaeology considering the information which we can extract from these objects regarding the undated monuments of the period as well.

These diptychs also suggest the crucial use of ivory in a strictly secular sense by the Greeks, Roman and Byzantine Empires. A considerable evolution in ivory carving is also apparent. With the passage of time, ivory diptychs were also used as another medium depicting Christian narrative art.

Christian Diptychs

A short article about consular diptychs and Christian ivories mentions that during 6th/7th century, some of the consular diptychs were reworked and used by Church. This adaptation was gradual. Initially, names of martyrs, local bishops, reigning emperors and Christian saints were inscribed after making necessary erasures and substitutions. Subsequently, Christian narratives dominated the composition and scenes from the life of Jesus were illustrated on both wings of the ivory diptychs.

A Comparison between Western and Eastern Diptychs

The term “Western Diptychs” in the present study represents the consular diptychs whereas the term “Eastern Diptychs” is used for the diptychs from Gandhara and Kashmir.

Firstly, similarities between these two traditions will be discussed. The discussion is followed by highlighting differences between the consular and Gandharan diptychs.

Similarities

1. The Western diptychs are usually rectangular shape (cf. Fig. 2 with rest of

the Gandharan Diptychs). On the other hand, Eastern diptychs also give an impression of using rectangular as the main unit of manufacturing. It is further evidenced by analyzing shape of majority of the fragments of the Eastern diptychs.

2. The Western diptychs show two carved panels joined with a hinge or clasp to open and close. These hinges are still visible on majority of the consular diptychs. Similarly, the Eastern diptychs also show two carved panels joined with hinges or clasp to open and close. Cylindrical hinges were made on inner edges of the panels for joining. Spots of these hinges are still available on majority of the Eastern diptychs.
3. In the Western diptychs, the interior usually represents main field of the figural treatment. This feature is also prominent in the Eastern diptychs.
4. The interior surface of the Western diptychs is divided either into single, two or more than two panels or registers, each



Fig. 2. A Western Diptych. (After Delbrück, 1929 Vol. II, no. 20)

illustrating a different theme. Similarly, such division of the interior surface is also common in the Eastern diptychs. In some cases, the interior of Eastern diptychs has multiple divisions of these registers.

5. In the Western diptychs, the registers are framed inside a proper decorated border. The decoration usually depicts a pattern like bead-and-reel, floral and geometric designs. The eastern diptychs also show similar treatment. The decoration is usually in the form of tiny rectangular blocks which might be called "brick lining pattern".
6. Some of the Western diptychs have plain exteriors. In Eastern diptychs, examples with unadorned exteriors are also available.
7. Some of the Western diptychs have worked out interiors and exteriors. Likewise, majority of the Eastern diptychs also show carving on both sides.

Dissimilarities

1. The Western diptychs are considered descendants of "Writing Tablets". From as early as the first century CE, imperial letters were despatched or presented in the form of writing-tablets. Two or more flat, rectangular pieces usually made of wood joined by cord or metal clasps and coated with wax for writing on the inside surface of both leaves. On the contrary, such practice did not exist in Gandhara or Kashmir either in political or in religious context.
2. The Western diptychs are dated around 4th century CE. However, the tradition of using diptychs in Gandhara and Kashmir started around 5th century CE.
3. Majority of the Western diptychs was made of ivory. Diptychs made of either wood, metal and or bone have not been preserved. On the other hand, Eastern diptychs were manufactured in stone except for the ivory diptych.
4. The Western diptychs were used as commemorative objects. On the other hand, Eastern diptychs were exclusively used in religious context.

5. Western diptychs usually bear inscriptions on the interior surface. Examples with inscriptions on both wings of the diptych are also available. For this purpose, writing wax was applied on the surface. On the contrary, Eastern diptychs bear no inscription at all.
6. The main purpose of giving the above-mentioned comparison is to support the hypothesis that the idea of using diptychs in Gandhara and Kashmir is not indigenous. Gandhara art has long tradition of manufacturing tiny stone including tiny shrines and toilet trays. Although the Gandharan artists were familiar with tiny shrines but diptychs were still unknown. They learnt this idea from west and added it in the list of tiny shrines. Later, the idea was further accelerated to Kashmir. The impact of Western traditions is quite vivid considering the similarities that have been elaborated on.

Based upon the comparative analysis, it can be argued that the tradition of using diptychs reached Gandhara not before the early 5th century CE. Most of the fragments of the Buddhist in Gandhara and Kashmir, which have carving on both sides, were possibly made between the 5th and 7th century CE.

Basket Man Type Buddhist Diptychs

In general, the narrative art depicted on these diptychs corresponds to the Buddhist iconography of Gandhara. However, in some cases there are unusual themes which we do not find in Gandharan reliefs. For instance, on some fragments a seated man carrying a basket is depicted on exterior while interior of these shrines depicts various scenes from the life of the Buddha. This section of the present provides preliminary information about these portable shrines which are referred to as "Basket Man Type". At the same time an attempt has also been made not only to identify figural narration of these shrines but also to make comparative analysis of the iconographic scheme by adding parallel examples from traditional Gandharan sculptures and reliefs. So far following four fragments of "Basket Man Type" have been found.

Fragment from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

First fragment of a “Basket Man Type” diptych belongs to the collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. It measures 8.7 cm represents the right wing of a diptych. The museum’s record explains that this fragment came in 1987 from the Samuel Eilenberg Collection, as a gift from Samuel Eilenberg. Härtel and Yaldiz (1982: 62) published this fragment in the Central Asian art exhibition from the West Berlin State Museum, held in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Afterwards, Lerner and Kossak (1991: 110), Yoshihide 2000: 132), Sen-Gupta (2003: Pl. 12) and Behrendt (2007: 82, 2012: Pl. 16a) published this fragment.

The shrine’s exterior depicts a seated male figure, carrying a child above his shoulders (Fig. 3a). The child’s head is now missing. The male figure has a prominent curly beard, a moustache, broad cheeks, sharp eyes and a broad forehead. Half of his curly hair is tied up with a decorated band that runs across his forehead. The basket man wears what appears to be lower heavy garment, falling from the upper part of his left leg. His long boot is fastened near the ankle and has a decorated horizontal band at the top and another decorated vertical band on the lower part. From this outlook, he appears to be a Central Asian.

As far as depiction of basket man is concerned we are not sure either of the person or of the contents inside basket. Such representation is hard to find in general Gandharan sculptures and reliefs. The man could be a trader or a pilgrim or a traveller exporting or importing something to or from Central Asia.

The left hand of the basket man is placed at the bottom of a basket which he carries on his back. The basket is placed on a low platform. It appears that the basket man has either finished his journey or that he is about to depart. The basket is attached to the figure’s body by a rope running around his left shoulder. Nothing can be said about the basket’s contents. The basket is very carefully worked as is evident by the thin horizontal and vertical grooves. Its top border is embellished with five semi-circular double grooved petals. Above this level, a geometrically shaped garment covers the content of the basket. The man sits on

a rectangular platform. The upper and lower inner boarder of the platform are decorated by using brick lining pattern.

The interior of the fragment is divided into two registers, each depicting an important event of Śākyamuni’s life. The scenes are framed inside a prominent border with the usual brick lining, as seen on exterior platform. Lower body of a kneeling figure is visible on the top of the upper register.

The upper register represents “birth of Śākyamuni” (Fig. 3b). Standing Māyā wears a thin upper and a heavy lower garment. She also wears bangles, a necklace, earrings and a prominent headdress. Māyā stands with her head turned to her right and is holding the branch of a tree in her outstretched right hand. Her left hand rests upon the shoulder of an attendant and her legs are slanting to the viewer’s right. A child emerges from Māyā right side and is being received by turbaned Indra who is leaning forward with a piece of garment. In between Māyā and Indra, the new born, without a halo, in a frontal pose is once again depicted. Māyā is supported by an attendant on her left side who holds her from behind with her right hand. Behind her stands another female attendant. In the upper left corner of the relief, a half-length figure, overlooking the scene is also depicted.

Let us now compare this representation of the event to some general Gandharan examples (Cf. Ackermann 1975: Pls. IX, XXIIa, XXIVb, XXVIIb, XXXVIIa, & XLIIa. Faccenna 1962 Vol. II. Part 2: Pls. CXXVI-CXXVIIa. Faccenna 1964 Vol. II. Part 3: Pls. CCCLXXXVIIa, CDXLIX, CDLXIII, CDLXVa, CDLXVb, DXXIIa, DXXVa and DXXXVIa. Kurita 2003: Pls. V-VI. Figs. 31-43, 594 and 640. Zwalf 1996: Pls. 145-151).

In some of these panels, Śākyamuni is depicted emerging from Māyā’s right side. However, birth and seven steps of the new born are often depicted in a single panel, like our present fragment. In general, one can observe that the representation of Śākyamuni’s birth in Gandhara and in portable shrines followed the same pictorial tradition (cf. Fig. 4).

The lower register illustrates “death of the Buddha” (Fig. 3c). The Buddha is laying on his right side and his robe covers most of the body. His left hand is wrapped in drapery and the other



Figs. 3a–c. Exterior of the Fragment from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Acc. no. 1987.142.53. (After Behrendt 2007: 82)



Fig. 4. Birth and Seven Steps of Śākyamuni on a Relief from The Art Institute of Chicago, Samuel M. Nickerson Collection. Acc. no. 23.315. (After Kurita 2003: fig. 48)



Fig. 5. Death of the Buddha on a Relief from Peshawar Museum. Acc. no. PM_02826. (After Gandhara 2008: 23)

is placed underneath his face. There is a large pillow underneath his right hand. A flowering tree is depicted in top left corner of the register and touches the *uṣṇīṣa*.

Five figures are depicted below the Buddha's death bed. Starting from right to left, only the right arm of a seated figure, touching the Buddha's feet with his outstretched right hand, is visible. The second seated figure is turned to his right, with his right hand placed over his head. It looks as if he holds an object in his left hand. If the object is a *vajra*, he can be identified as Vajrapāṇi. The figure next to the assumed Vajrapāṇi is a monk in meditation facing the audience. His body is thoroughly covered except for his face. He is Subhadra. The fourth figure could be Ānanda, who is half-seated and turned to his right. He looks at another standing figure in front of him. The standing figure is striding to his left and is leaning forward to support Ānanda.

Behind the laying Buddha, two half-length figures are depicted. One of the figures holds either his garment or an unidentified object in left hand and the other hand, with the palm sticking out, is placed at body of the Buddha. The second figure is more dejected and like the former, holds either his garment or an object in left hand and his right hand is raised and touches his head.

These figures are expressive in their feelings of grief, sorrow and pain. Such a natural impression of feelings is quite common in Gandharan panels dealing with the same episode (Fig. 5, cf. Ackermann 1975: Pls. XVa, XXXIIIa, XXXVIIb, XLI, XLIIIb, XLIVb, XLV and LII. Faccenna 1962 Vol. II. Part 2: Pl. CXXVI (details are too fragmentary to identify). Faccenna 1964 Vol. II. Part 3: Pls. CCCLXXXIX-a and DXXXVII-b. Kurita 2003: Figs. 481-501, 639 and 640. Zwalf 1996: Pls. 230-231).

Moreover, our portable shrine's fragment

includes the main characters of the composition, namely Vajrapāṇi, Subhadra, Ānanda, and Mallas of Kuśinagara.

The missing leaf of the diptych certainly would have depicted “enlightenment” and “first sermon”, as Behrendt believes (2007:83). Such representation of the four primary scenes of the Śākyamuni’s life in this diptych again reflects a non-Gandharan source of visual narration, probably adopted from the Sarnath Gupta steles (cf. Foucher 1909: 147-184. Williams 1975: 171-192. Huntington 1987: 55-62).

Fragment from National Museum, Tokyo

This fragment of the “Basket Man Type” diptych is on display at National Museum, Tokyo. Its accession number is TC741. Only right wing of the diptych is preserved which measures 7.2 cm. It was published by Yoshihide (2000: 132, Pl.12).

At a first glance, the outer and the inner imagery of this piece look identical to the previous

fragment; however, a detailed study reveals some different contents.

The exterior surface of this fragment depicts a basket man but without carrying a child (Fig. 6a). The man has a moustache. He wears a comparatively thin upper garment that covers most of the upper body. His lower garment is quite short and is reminiscent of a typical Indian short lower garment. His sitting posture also differs from the former piece. Here, he sits on folded legs and wears shoes. His left hand is placed underneath the basket, attached to his body in a similar fashion as in the previous fragment. A small sunken box is visible in the upper and lower parts of the basket. Rest of the details are identical to the former fragment.

The interior of this shrine is divided into an upper and a lower register. The fragment’s upper register depicts “birth of Śākyamuni” (Fig. 6b). This time Māyā is standing in a different posture as compared to the previous fragments. Turbaned



Figs. 6a–c. Fragment from National Museum, Tokyo. Acc. no. TC741. (After Yoshihide 2000: 132)

Indra, standing in left corner of the register, holds the child who is depicted second time between Indra and Māyā. The attendant to Māyā's left is supporting the queen. There is another standing attendant behind the first and probably holds an umbrella. Above Māyā, two half-length figures are visible. This composition is quite close to Gandharan style except the standing position of Māyā (See Zwalf 1996: Pls. 145-146). Most often in the Gandharan sculptures Māyā's left leg crosses the right leg at ankle level (See Zwalf 1996: Pls. 145-146) instead of the right leg, as is the case in our fragment.

The fragment's lower register depicts "death of the Buddha" (Fig. 6c). The iconographical details of this panel are quite like those of the previous fragment. The Buddha is depicted in the same manner except his head, which is less elevated, and the arrangement of the seated figures and standing figures around the death bed of the Buddha.

Five figures, four seated and one standing, are depicted in front of the bed. From right to left, Subhadra is seated facing the viewer. The second figure is seated in a cross-legged position and with upraised arms. The third seated figure is slightly turned to his right and touches the death bed with his upraised right hand. The fourth figure, Ānanda, seems to be half seated turned to his right and is

supported by a standing in the left corner of the relief. He is Anuruddha, striding to his right and leaning forward to support Ānanda.

The figures standing behind the Buddha exceed as compared to the last piece. Two of the figures, in the upper right corner of the register, have raised their arms. The third figure has placed his left hand on the Buddha's body and the other over his head. Few petals in the upper left corner of the composition illustrate the tree. Such representation of the Buddha's death again corresponds to the usual depiction of "great decease" in Gandhara art.

The other wing of this diptych, like the former, probably would have depicted "enlightenment" in the upper and "first sermon" in the lower register.

Fragment from Museum of Asian Art, Berlin

The third fragment of the "Basket Man Type" diptych belongs to the Museum of Asian Art, Berlin.¹ The upper part of the diptych's left wing is preserved, measuring 4.3 cm. It was first listed by Härtel and Yaldiz (1982: 61, No. 04) and then by Yoshihide (2000: 132, Pl. 12).

The exterior of this fragment represents a similar surface treatment as we have seen on the former two fragments. It also depicts a basket man whose head and legs are no more intact (Fig. 7a). The figure seems to wear heavy garment that covers



Figs. 7a–b. Fragment from the Museum of Asian Art, Berlin. Acc. no. MIK III 4849. (Photo: Author)

most part of the body. His right hand, now broken, is placed underneath the basket, attached to the figure's back in the same fashion as the foregoing examples. Similarly, the surface treatment of the basket from its top to base is identical. Nothing can be said about the basket's contents. There is no child depicted on the shoulders of the basket man.

Only the upper register of this fragment has been preserved which depicts fasting Siddhārtha underneath the branch of a tree (Fig. 7b). He has long ears and a large *uṣṇīṣa*. His state of emaciation is illustrated by flat and broad shoulders, a skinny chest, a sunken belly and thin legs. Siddhārtha appears to be in conversation with the figures, depicted to his left. One of the figures depicted in the lower right corner of the register, is striding towards Siddhārtha while the second stands above the first and looks downwards. It appears as if the figure holds two different objects in both hands. The one in the left hand seems to be the *vajra*. Another possible object could be a robe for Siddhārtha.

A standing female, wearing heavy garment that falls right down to the ground is depicted in the left corner of the register. The second standing figure, probably a male, is depicted in the upper left corner. He wears a turban and thick garment that covers his whole body and has both hands joined in front of his chest. The whole composition is framed inside the usual decorated inner border.

From the iconographical representation, the episode illustrates the moment when gods see Siddhārtha practicing severe austerity. This composition can also be interpreted as the moment when mother of Siddhārtha comes from Trāyastriṃśa heaven and asks him to quit this unfruitful practice because she was afraid of possible death of her son, as gods had reported to her. The Bodhisattva did not pay attention to any of these visits until he decided to end the long practice of austerity himself.

A damaged Gandharan relief gives us a glimpse of the similar depiction (Fig. 8). We have already witnessed such representation of the scene in other fragments of the portable shrines and in the Gandharan reliefs.

We have three more examples of "fasting Siddhārtha" in portable shrines. In general, Gandharan reliefs on the other hand, we have very few representations of Siddhārtha practicing

austerity. Regardless of the wonderful pieces of fasting Siddhārtha in Lahore and in Peshawar Museum, we do not find panels depicting the visit of gods and Māyā during the Bodhisattva's fasting.

Fragment from National Museum, New Delhi

The fourth and final fragment of the "Basket Man Type" diptych measures 3.8 cm and it comes from a collection at National Museum, New Delhi. Only a part of the right wing of this Buddhist diptych is preserved and it is broken from top and bottom.

Stein found this fragment in Khotan (Cf. Kurita 2003: Figs. 182-192. Zwalf 1996: Pl.181). Yoshihide included the fragment in his work (2000: 132, Pl. 11). The exterior of this fragment represents the upper body of a basket man, carrying a child (Fig. 9a). The man's left arm is slightly bent and his elbow touches the basket. The basket is broken at the top and bottom but shows a similar surface treatment as we have already seen in the previous three fragments.

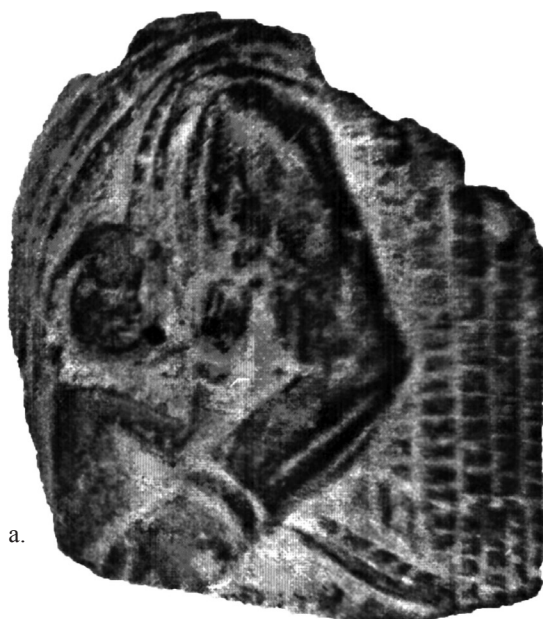
The interior of this shrine shows one intact and two broken scenes, at the top and the bottom (Fig. 9b). In the complete scene, the Bodhisattva is seated cross-legged on a lotus seat with his head turned to his right. He has a bare right shoulder. He holds a sword in his raised right hand, positioned in front of him. With his left hand, he holds his long hair which is brought forward. Two figures stand on each side of the Bodhisattva and witness the event.

These figures are mostly broken except for the kneeling figure under Bodhisattva's right hand and the half-length figure behind the Bodhisattva's head, both in *añjalimudrā*. The composition can be identified and understood by adding the Gandharan relief's fragment of unknown provenance (Fig. 10).

In terms of the decorative treatment of the diptych, the scene is framed inside the usual decorated inner border. The scene represents the Bodhisattva's cutting of hair. He is surrounded by gods. We have already seen different versions of the same episode not only in the Buddhist portable shrines but also in some of the Gandharan reliefs.



Fig. 8. The Fragment of a Gandharan Relief from Linden Museum
Stuttgart Acc. no.SA 32606 (After Kurita 2003: fig. 182)



Figs. 9a–b. Fragment from National Museum, New Delhi. Acc. no.Kh.003 g. (After Yoshihide 2000: 132).



Fig. 10. Siddhartha cutting his hair.
(Courtesy of Gandharan Archives Kurita)

Conclusion

Use of the consular and imperial diptychs as mentioned and briefed in this paper provides new insight into socio-political aspect of Western society. It tells us that how newly appointed officials were notified and informed about their selection as consulship. Diptychs made of ivory became trademark not only of political hierarchy of the society but also of nobles. Newly appointed consuls and nobles also adopted the same tradition and sent similar objects to their predecessors, friends and relatives. The titles used by consuls, officials and nobles, the way they depicted themselves, games, and gods, on these diptychs is very impressive. These objects are unique source of information about socio-political and religious composition of their society.

The present study has pointed out that diptychs were also manufactured in Gandhara as well as in Kashmir. Such objects were not in use in any

other part of ancient India. It is obvious that the tradition of using such objects would have some foreign origin. In this regard, consular diptychs provide us the best example to work with and extends our scope of understanding and studying Western elements in Gandhara art. From the present investigation, it can be concluded that the tradition of diptychs originated in the West and then travelled to Gandhara. The Gandharan artists borrowed this idea from the West and transformed it according to their own beliefs. They modified them technically as well as thematically. Thus, these diptychs developed entirely into a religious object depicting important episodes of the life of the Buddha. These were accepted and used as miniature objects of worship principally by travellers and missionaries. Such mobility possibly resulted either in loss or in breakage of these tiny objects. That is the reason why majority of these shrines are fragmentarily preserved.

From the above details, the present author believes that the earliest diptychs produced in Gandhara were manufactured with a plain exterior. Such fragments of diptychs should be dated to 5th and not to the 3rd century CE.

In term of iconography the narrative art represented inside Buddhist diptychs clearly reflects influences of conventional style of depicting life story of the Buddha. Depiction of four main events, Birth, Enlightenment, First Sermon and Death, follow similar pictorial tradition as carved on large reliefs. However, what is depicted on exterior of the fragments, represents unorthodox treatment of subject matter as is the case with basket man. We do not find parallel examples of the depiction of “Basket Man” in the main line of Buddhist art of Gandhara. In this case we are not sure either about the man or contents of the basket. If we interpret these diptychs as a medium of carrying Buddhist iconography towards Central and East Asian territories, it can also be presumed that the basket would have contained *Tripitaka* as Behrendt has proposed (2012: 304, fn.52). The man carrying the basket may depict group of individuals travelling from or to Gandhara via Silk route. So, to understand Buddhist narrative art of Gandhara, particularly with reference to those scenes which were not depicted on general sculptures and reliefs, study of such portable shrines is very much necessary. These objects would have played vital role towards the development of Buddhist iconography in Central and Eastern Asia. The study of diptychs is inevitable to extend our scope of understanding Western elements in Gandhara art.

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