

The Transmission of the Four-Pointed Cape Motif: From Gandhāra to the East and West*

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Abstract: This article uses an art-historical perspective to examine the spatiotemporal transmission and stylistic evolution of the four-pointed cape costume in Buddhist images from Northwest India. This costume first appeared between the second century and the fourth century CE on certain Gandhāran sculptures of Kushan donors, and then, by the fifth century CE, in the bejewelled Buddha imagery, denoting the figures' dominating power. In the post-Gandhāran period between the sixth century and the eighth century CE, bejewelled Buddha images from north-eastern Afghanistan, northern Pakistan, and Kashmir adopted modified and stylised cape motifs that were influenced by Gandhāran, Iranian, and indigenous Indian traditions to different extents. Meanwhile, the stylised capes spread to Central Asia, Byzantium, and China, reflecting the influence of the late Buddhist art of Northwest India on the surrounding regions.

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Introduction

Nomadic tribes of the Hephthalites (also known as the White Huns) invaded the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent in the mid-fifth century CE. This led to the destruction of the Gandhāra civilization and its Buddhist culture.¹ The centre for Buddhist activities then transferred from ancient Gandhāra, which is now present-day north-western Pakistan and its surroundings, to the Karakoram and Hindu Kush regions, particularly to north-eastern Afghanistan, northern Pakistan, and Kashmir. With patronage from small local states, Buddhist followers in these mountainous areas continued to produce cult images along with their Brahmanical counterparts. They blended the Gandhāran sculptural tradition with foreign and indigenous ingredients, developing regional Buddhist art styles during an in-between period referred to as ‘post-Gandhāran’.²

The Buddhist art of Gandhāra, especially its Indo-Hellenistic stylistic essence, has attracted considerable attention since the nineteenth century CE. Buddhist relics dating back to the post-Gandhāran period, however, have only been extensively surveyed

¹ For brevity, the geographical and historical concept ‘Northwest India’ will be used in this article in a very broad sense to refer to the entire Buddhist-influenced area across Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Kashmir.

² The intermediate period between the downfall of the Buddhist institutions in Gandhāra and the Islamic conquest (around the sixth–eighth century) is also labelled as ‘late Buddhist’ or ‘pre-Islamic’. This article primarily uses the term ‘post-Gandhāran’ to underscore the cultural continuity of the Buddhist era of Northwest India.

in recent decades.³ The relation between these artistic traditions, and the extent that the latter regional one engaged in the overall construction process of the Buddhist visual world in early medieval Asia, await exploration. Given the paucity of written records, pictorial evidence is of great value in answering these questions. The ever-evolving motifs and patterns bear witness to the dynamic process in which traditional Gandhāran elements were received, reused, transformed, and further transmitted in the following centuries.

The so-called four-pointed cape provides an array of pertinent materials for this topic.⁴ With its unique appearance, including four jewelled triangular pieces of fabric covering the wearers' upper body, this kind of clothing distinctly identifies certain Gandhāran and post-Gandhāran iconographies of nobility and deities. Archaeological finds indicate that by the eighth century, images carrying this cape motif were widespread not only in the Buddhist sites of Northwest India but also along the overland trade artery generally known as the 'Silk Road' (Figure 1). While moving geographically, the cape's stylistic features altered, exhibiting the aesthetic preferences of people from different backgrounds. Both the symbolic and formal information that this costume carries warrant further analysis.

While previous scholarship on the 'bejewelled Buddha' has shown specific interest in the religious implications that the four-pointed cape might have as a major iconographic attribute,⁵ the historical route the motif took remains understudied. Using pictorial materials from ancient Northwest India, Central Asia, Byzantium, and China,

³ Notable discoveries belonging to this repertoire include the Buddhist rock carvings in Swat (ancient Uḍḍiyāna) and Gilgit, and the late monastic complexes in Afghanistan and Kashmir.

⁴ This cape costume's official name is not recorded in extant historical documents. This article uses the word 'four-pointed' because related Gandhāran sculptures bear a schematic depiction of the fourth section at the back, which attests to its original form.

⁵ Rowland first adopted this term to define the special type of crowned Buddha popular in post-Gandhāran Afghanistan and Kashmir that is adorned with a cape and pieces of jewellery; see Rowland, 'Bejewelled Buddha'.



FIG. 1 Related sites and regions in Northwest India and surroundings. Drawing by Li Yicong.

this article employs art-historical methodologies and clarifies the long-distance transmission and stylistic changes of this cape costume between the second century and the eighth century CE, as well as the underlying drivers behind these trends. Such case-oriented investigation further reveals the inter-cultural contacts in the Gandhāran and post-Gandhāran periods.

Early Specimens from Ancient Gandhāra

The earliest representation of people wearing a four-pointed cape was found on a set of Gandhāran sculptures from north-western Pakistan dating back to the second–third century CE. A statue of Pañcika (the Buddhist god of fortune) from the Buddhist site of Takhal near Peshawar provides a well-preserved example (Figure 2).⁶ In this complex group scene, a small, male donor stands beneath the central deity,

⁶ Cambon, *Pakistan*, 20–21.



FIG. 2 Pañcika with attendants and donors. Schist sculpture from the site of Takhal, Peshawar. Lahore Museum. From Kurita, *Gandhāran Art (II)*, Fig. 465.

clutching a bouquet in his right hand as a pious offering. Over his outerwear, the man wears a cape with a pointed hem that is carved with tiny scales resembling the texture of a coat of armour. The band collar and the border of the cape are plain. Another life-size statue in a Japanese private collection portrays a donor who holds a cube-shaped object in his hands (now damaged, probably a reliquary).⁷ The cape that he wears is plain with a carved band collar and beads running along the hem. Either the fabric was unadorned, like a piece of leather, or its surface carving has worn off. In addition to the cape, these figures wear boots, trousers, and a long-sleeved tunic tightened with a belt in Central Asian fashion. The outfit, including the dagger suspended from the belt, conveys the quality of the political elites of the powerful Kushan empire.

The heads of these figures have been removed and cannot be associated with specific individuals. Nevertheless, they illustrate the basic idea of ancestor veneration, which directed the artistic practice of the empire.⁸ In these stone images, the four-pointed cape is depicted realistically and used on ceremonial occasions with other aristocratic garments. Compared with the Central-Asian-styled costumes, which are almost ubiquitous in the visual world of the Kushans, however, this specific cape costume is rarely seen and was a late local creation. Although it is impossible to determine the exact place of its invention, the chronological and geographic distribution of early evidence confirmed its close cultural link with ancient Gandhāra. This area was one of the administrative headquarters of the Kushans beginning in the first century CE, and provided space for the development of imperial culture. Because the Gandhārans had familiarised themselves with this cape costume and uniformly carved its unusual, pointed hem on sculptures, garments of this kind might have been tailored in the locality for the ruling class before being depicted in figural imagery. Given the unobtrusive design of the earliest specimens, this costume might have also had some practical uses, such as protecting wearers from the cold or from weapons during war.

⁷ Quagliotti, 'Gandharan Donor', Fig. 7.

⁸ Rosenfield, *The Dynasty*, 27.



FIG. 3 Donor. Schist sculpture with unknown provenance. Hirayama Ikuo Silk Road Museum, Hokuto. From Hirayama Ikuo Silk Road bijutsukan, *Gandhara*, Plate 91.

The political power of the Sasanian Empire in Persia expanded eastward during the third–fourth century CE. The ensuing occupation reinforced the infusion of the Iranian concept of kingship and the associated artistic expressions into its tributaries in Central Asia and Northwest India. Driven by this compelling cultural current, the early model of the four-pointed cape evolved stylistically. On a small schist bust of a male donor in a Japanese private collection, the cape is framed with a flat pearl border and symmetrically ornamented with discs, crescents, and lobe-shaped patterns (Figure 3).

These emblems of brilliant light are typical elements of the Iranian decorative tradition. This figure wears a crown with an attached pair of ribbons—a conventional feature of the West Asian iconography of nobles and immortals. Thus, this imagery might represent a member of royalty in the late Kushan social context. By this time, the bejewelled cape, crown, and ribbons had clear symbolic meanings, denoting a privileged position or even deified secular authority.

Numerous sculptural remains dating back to the Kushan period have been recovered from Gandhāran sites in north-western Pakistan over the past two hundred years. Only a few of them document a four-pointed cape, however. This paucity of materials indicates the limited popularity of this costume even within the imperial territory. On the other hand, all related sculptures depict royal donors, suggesting that only a small group of people had sufficiently high rank to use this item after its invention.⁹ Local artisans then idealised this cape as an iconographic attribute, adding external decorative patterns to enrich its implications.

It is noteworthy that the visual account of the four-pointed cape is completely absent in typical Gandhāran narrative steles with a Buddhist theme. Icons of Buddhist gods wearing this costume were not created until the fifth century CE—the last phase of Gandhāran Buddhist art that is characterised by the production of isolated devotional statues. The finest extant example is a meditating Buddha at the Buddhist monastery of Jaulian in Taxila, who wears a cape over his monastic robe (Figure 4). This specimen shows special formal features differentiating it from the earlier ones dated to the Kushan period. The hem is slightly curved and edged with piping, while the band collar is engraved with connecting concentric squares. The cloth is studded with jewels as well, but the ornaments are sculpted into cylindrical units instead of two-dimensional patterns, imitating the technique of inlaying with gemstone in a more realistic manner.

Specimens of the cape associated with Buddhist deities also appeared at the fringe of ancient Gandhāra and varied in appearance. On a stucco fragment recovered from Haḍḍa, the cape is adorned with cres-

⁹ Klimburg-Salter, *The Kingdom*, 108.



FIG. 4 Seated Buddha wearing a cape. Stucco sculpture from the Buddhist monastery of Jaulian, Taxila. From Miyaji, 'Bamiyan no kazarareta butsuda', Fig. 15a.

cents and floral carvings, blending linear Iranian patterns with local flavour.¹⁰ Another fragment from the Buddhist site of Shnaisha Gumbat near Saidu Sharif in Swat bears a cape simply adorned with small roundels and fringed by a distinctive pleated ruffle.¹¹ Twisted strands tighten the pleat at each tip, exhibiting a naturalistic style rooted in the Gandhāran tradition. In both examples, there are engraved parallel lines beneath the cape, resembling the drapery treatments of a monastic robe. Over the garments, these headless figures wear a multi-strand jewelled necklace, which is a major attribute of the bejewelled Buddha in the post-Gandhāran period. Given the very similar pictorial scheme,

¹⁰ Currently located at the Guimet Museum (France). Taddei, 'Bejewelled Buddha', Fig. 55.

¹¹ Currently located at the Museum of Archaeology of the University of Peshawar (Pakistan). Rahman, 'Shnaisha Gumbat', Plate XLVa; Yousaf, 'Tripartite Cape', Fig. 1.

they can be seen as Gandhāran archetypes of this iconography. Although these small stucco torsos lack a high level of craftsmanship and do not follow a standardised scheme, they indicate an increasing affiliation of the four-pointed cape with Buddhist visual culture.

The iconography of Kushan noblemen dressed in a four-pointed cape was formed more than a century earlier than that of the Buddha dressed in the same costume. This apparent chronological gap suggests that the former inspired the latter to some extent. As the mid- to late-Gandhāran period was an important epoch during which Mahāyāna Buddhist teachings became pervasive, monks might have felt it necessary to construct a new and complicated iconographic system to visually represent Buddha's spiritual achievement and unparalleled position in the religious hierarchy.¹² They borrowed elements with appropriate meanings from the long-established Kushan and Sasanian visual lexicon of kingship to underscore the similarity between the Buddha and secular rulers. Stucco heads of crowned Buddhas recovered from Buddhist monastic complexes in Haḍḍa also illustrate the formation of novel cult images.¹³ Nevertheless, relevant examples are formally heterogeneous and insignificant in number, indicating that the intensified nomadic invasion interrupted this artistic experimentation.

Stylistic Characteristics of Post-Gandhāran Specimens

The military presence of the Hephthalites in Northwest India led to a visible lack of Buddhist artistic production. When a new nomadic power known as the Western Turks dominated this area in the mid-sixth century CE, however, religious centres and regional schools of Buddhist art started to thrive in north-eastern Afghanistan, northern Pakistan, and Kashmir. Local artisans embraced the Gandhāran image-making idea of decorating Buddha with a four-pointed cape, incorporating the primitive iconographic formulae of the bejewelled Buddha into new artistic trends. Inspired by this practice, Brahman-

¹² Rowland, 'Bejewelled Buddha', 23–24.

¹³ Barthoux, *Hadda*, Plates 54c, 90a.



FIG. 5 Seated crowned Buddha wearing a cape. Ceiling painting of Eastern Grand Buddha Niche (Cave 155), Bāmiyān. From Higuchi, *Bāmiyān. Volume I (Murals)*, Plate 25-3.

ical believers started to decorate their deities with the same element. Specimens of the cape from the post-Gandhāran period are more abundant than in previous centuries, and based on geography and unity of form, they can be organised into four groups.

The first group contains specimens primarily from the famous Buddhist cave temples at the Bāmiyān Valley in north-eastern Afghanistan. Before the vandalism of these sites in the twenty-first century, they preserved at least seven fresco paintings of the bejewelled Buddha depicted with a Gandhāran-derived cape costume.¹⁴

¹⁴ Miyaji, ‘Bamiyan no “kazarareta butsuda”’, Figs. 2, 3, 6–10. The line illustrations indicate that two bejewelled Buddhas in Western Grand Buddha Niche (Cave 620) and Niche Ee (Cave 222) also wear a cape. These semi-circular capes

The now-damaged ceiling painting of Eastern Grand Buddha Niche (Cave 155) contained four early specimens of this group (Figure 5). According to the line illustrations published by Miyaji Akira, they were symmetrically adorned with small roundels. Their borders were straight and smooth, without any pendants, and the flat band collar common in earlier Gandhāran specimens was replaced by a pearl necklace with a jewelled end. The linear rendering of patterns and the overall modest look are reminiscent of Iranian two-dimensional decorations. Despite some indiscernible details, two cape motifs found at adjacent caves adopted a similar design, including the ones in Niche XII (Cave 740) and Niche Sa (Cave 176). Owing to the shift in ancient trade routes, the once-isolated Bāmiyān Valley received a massive infusion of material wealth after the sixth century, leading to the establishment of the powerful Buddhist kingdom ruled by the Turks.¹⁵ Based on carbon-14 dating and stylistic analysis, the fresco paintings in Eastern Grand Buddha Niche were assigned dates from the late sixth century to the early seventh century, while the bejewelled Buddha images in the other two caves were dated to the mid-seventh century.¹⁶ These highly stylised cape motifs were popularised with the rapid growth of local culture and represent a distinctive Bāmiyān type.

This type of cape was not only locally fashionable but also travelled to near and far neighbours of the Bāmiyān Valley along with Buddha images at a relatively early stage of the post-Gandhāran period. Evidence of this can be found on a metal figurine of a seated Buddha acquired from Kabul,¹⁷ a petroglyph bejewelled Buddha at the site of Chilās near Gilgit,¹⁸ and a set of seven stamped clay tablets

differ significantly from the Gandhāran pointed cape, however; consequently, they are beyond the scope of this article.

¹⁵ Kuwayama, *Hindukush*, 157–59.

¹⁶ Klimburg-Salter, 'Buddhist Painting', 147.

¹⁷ This special metal Buddha currently in a Japanese private collection only wears a cape without any other ornament. It has been assigned a date of around the sixth–seventh century. Miyaji, 'Bamiyan no "kazarareta butsuda"', 18–19, Fig. 13; Kubosō kinen bijutsukan, *Chūgoku*, Plate 73.



FIG. 6 Now-damaged Buddhist petroglyphs at the site of Chilās with seated crowned Buddha at the centre, Gilgit. Photograph by Li Jingjie.

with an identical Buddhist image acquired at the monastic complex of Gyaur-kala in Merv, Turkmenistan.¹⁹ The capes in these images apply linear patterns and a flat pearl border, which are directly related to a Bāmiyān model. The stamped bejewelled Buddha on the Gyaur-kala tablets, which marks a western limit to the transmission of this iconography beyond Northwest India, is particularly informative. This Buddha wears a triple-crescent crown bearing a pair of flying ribbons and a jewelled pearl necklace in addition to the cape costume. He is seated on a lotus platform with an aureole behind him, raising one hand to his chest while holding an object in the other. The entire pictorial composition is identical to the above-men-

¹⁸ This image has been coated with oil paint and completely destroyed along with other petroglyphs in this site (see Figure 6). Twist, 'Crowned Buddha', Fig. 19.

¹⁹ Currently located at the Samarkand State University (Uzbekistan). Baums deciphered the inscriptions in the stamped image and pointed out that the entire images 'are represented in mirror image of their natural orientation'; see 'Inscribed Buddhist Tablets', 24, Fig. 3.

tioned bejewelled Buddha images in Bāmiyān caves that depict a seated princely Buddha holding an alms-bowl in his left hand. Images with the same iconographic features have never appeared elsewhere in Afghanistan and Pakistan; therefore, the tablets and the cape design might have been replicated directly based on a template from the Bāmiyān region.

Three specimens from other Buddhist sites of north-eastern Afghanistan constitute the second group, which features ornamental pendants and graceful curvature of the hem. On an early standing Buddha statue with unknown provenance, now located at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the studded concentric cylindrical units give the cape a three-dimensional effect, while the band collar is flat and engraved with squares (Figure 7). The outline of the cape's hem slightly stretches in a curve, contrasting with Bāmiyān specimens that generally present the hem in a precise triangular shape. These features must have stemmed from a Gandhāran model previously used by the Julian seated Buddha. Meanwhile, a row of irregularly shaped pendants hanging from the piping is an innovative addition. Such elements do not appear in extant Gandhāran specimens but were increasingly favoured by specimens in this group.

By the eighth century, this cape design was exclusively used by large, votive Buddhist sculptures in north-eastern Afghanistan. Related specimens vary in form, but uniformly exhibit a decorative effect that is much more complicated than the Bāmiyān type. A well-known bust of the bejewelled Buddha from Niche D of the Buddhist monastery of Fondukistān is adorned with a luxurious cape with geometric ornaments and rosettes.²⁰ Pendants are suspended not only from the pearl border but also from the attached ornaments and the short, jewelled band collar. The other example comes from the Buddhist monastery of Tapa Sardār, where a colossal Buddha once stood at Chapel 23 wearing a cape richly framed by four to five layers of fringes and pendants.²¹ As the post-Gandhāran period came to an end, the influence of this decorative technique also reached the

²⁰ Currently located at the Guimet Museum (France). Klimburg-Salter, *The Kingdom*, Fig. 37.



FIG. 7 Standing Buddha wearing a cape. Stucco sculpture with unknown provenance. After Kurita, *Gandhāran Art (II)*, Fig. 335.

Bāmiyān Valley. In the only bejewelled Buddha image dated back to the late eighth century CE at Niche I (Cave 530), the cape motif employs a linear rendering but has additional pendant elements and floral patterns, differentiating it from earlier Bāmiyān specimens. Thus, this group represents a typical Afghan type that has both a symbolic function and enhanced visual complexity. Despite the cultural uniformity and extraordinary quality exhibited by these images, however, related artistic production in Afghanistan ceased in the following century due to Arab occupation.

In remote northern Pakistan and Kashmir, portable sculptures made of expensive materials gained great popularity at a relatively late stage of the post-Gandhāran period. They have been generally placed under the heading of 'Kashmiri', although some were actually commissioned by the ruling class of ancient Gilgit.²² At any rate, a group of metal figurines of the bejewelled Buddha and the Hindu god Sūrya dating back to the seventh–eighth century provide specimens of the typical Kashmiri type (Figure 8).²³ Their design displays highly derivative and stylised features, more like a hybrid of the two above-discussed groups. The majority of them are symmetrically studded with one or three roundels in front and one on each side, imitating the modest design of the Bāmiyān type.²⁴ On two high-quality eighth-century figurines of the bejewelled Buddha related to the royalty of ancient Gilgit²⁵ and a rare stone sculpture

²¹ This colossal Buddha had been damaged before being recovered from this site. For a resorted image, see Taddei, 'Tapa Sardār', Fig. 11.

²² According to the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang's account, there was a small Buddhist country in Gilgit called Bolulo 鉢露羅. For a recent analysis of this country's Buddhist visual culture, see Twist, *The Patola Shahi*.

²³ The other two bronzes of Sūrya are currently located at the Los Angeles County Museum (USA) and the National Museum, New Delhi (India). Reedy, *Himalayan Bronzes*, Figs. K39; Pal, *Bronzes of Kashmir*, Plate 16.

²⁴ For four examples in private collections, see Twist, 'Crowned Buddha', Figs. 5, 14–15, 18.

²⁵ One is located at the Asia Society Museum (America) and dated to 714 CE. The other is from a private collection and dated to 715 CE. Pal, *The Arts*, Figs. 43–44.



FIG. 8 Sūrya wearing a cape with attendants. Bronze sculpture from Kashmir. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Samuel Eilenberg Collection, Gift of Samuel Eilenberg, 1987.142.341.

of this kind in Kashmir,²⁶ the attached ornaments are shaped into elaborate rosettes, akin to the decorative elements used by the typical Afghan type. These cape costumes are fringed by at least two layers of edgings; one mostly made of tight rows of beads and the other made of pendants. A pearl necklace covers their collars. The overall visual effect that this type of cape conveys is a sharp contrast between simplicity and complexity.

Due to the historical receptiveness of northern Pakistan and Kashmir to the indigenous culture of central India, a small group of specimens from these regions exhibits distinctive characteristics that can only be traced to Indian artistic tradition. For example, on two eighth-century brass bejewelled Buddhas, the collar of the cape is unadorned and falls loosely and naturally, resembling the texture of lightweight fabric.²⁷ The same structure can be found on Gupta sculptures from Sarnath—one of the major artistic centres in central India. As the post-Gandhāran period faded, the Gupta-influenced style became dominant on Kashmiri metal sculptures. The surface of some cape costumes became polished and free of adornments, resulting in a texture very similar to that of plain monastic robes in conventional Sarnath styles (Figure 9). Because Himalayan artisans frequently replicated Kashmiri Buddhist sculptures in medieval times, this Indian-influenced Kashmiri type naturally merged into Esoteric Buddhist art from the ninth century CE onwards.

The late Buddhist art of Northwest India is always dismissed as peripheral; however, the post-Gandhāran specimens of the four-pointed cape and related Buddhist images indicate that it was this artistic power that fulfilled the standardisation of the bejewelled Buddha imagery. In this process, craftsmen in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Kashmir developed the traditional Gandhāran cape costume into highly stylised motifs and popularised it in a religious context. They synthesised various decorative techniques that directly relate to Irani-

²⁶ Currently located at the Shri Pratap Singh Museum (Kashmir). Linrothe, *Collecting Paradise*, Fig. 1.29.

²⁷ From private collections. Twist, 'Crowned Buddha', Fig. 17. Siudmak, *The Hindu-Buddhist*, Plate 149.



FIG. 9 Standing Buddha wearing a cape. Brass sculpture from Kashmir. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Ben Heller, 1970.297.

an, Gandhāran, and indigenous Indian art to modify the cape motif, which further reveals the hybrid and diversified nature of the regional styles they created.

Spreading to the East and West

Buddhist sacred sites with cult images were popular attractions for travellers passing through Northwest India in both the Gandhāran and post-Gandhāran periods. Monks, merchants, and diplomats made their way from these post-stations to other junctions of the Silk Road network, promoting overland intellectual and material exchanges. Although the four-pointed cape did not merit a mention in historical literature, pictorial evidence from Central Asia, Byzantium, and China indicates that this unique cultural component was once spread in many directions.

Owing to its geographical proximity to Northwest India, ancient Sogdiana had been a station for the transmission of this cape costume in early times. Evidence of this can be found on a carnelian seal reportedly from this area and now located at the British Museum (Figure 10).²⁸ The engraved surface of the seal shows the frontal bust of a crowned royal couple. The male figure on the left wears a studded cape with a pointed hem, and a disk suspends from each tip of the hem. At least structurally, this unusual garment is parallel to post-Gandhāran models of the four-pointed cape. Historically, this kind of inscribed seal made of semi-precious stones was popular within the Central Asian cultural sphere where the Kushans, the Sasanians, and many nomadic or semi-nomadic people once established their rule.²⁹ This specific piece bears a Sogdian inscription reading ‘this seal is of [or from] Indamic, Queen of Zacanta’.³⁰ If the text was not a late addition, it possibly indicates the provenance of this seal and the existence of a long-lost regional political entity. Local administrators,

²⁸ For another example in a private collection, see Lerner, *Seals*, Plate AA2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 18–19.

³⁰ Simpson, *Afghanistan*, 81.



FIG. 10 Bust of a royal couple and Sogdian inscriptions. Cornelian seal, reportedly from Sogdiana. The British Museum, London, 1870,1210.3. Photograph © The Trustees of the British Museum.

who were exposed to the influential Kushan and Sasanian cultures, might have reused this cape costume along with traditional imagery of Kushan nobility to represent themselves.

Later specimens of the cape in a group of murals from the eighth century recovered from Penjikent, Tajikistan demonstrate a more direct influence of post-Gandhāran Buddhist art on Sogdian figural representation.³¹ For example, a female figure dressed in a tunic and a cape appears repetitively in the mural cycle from Room 50 of Sector XXIII (Figure 11).³² This specimen is adorned with roundels and a

³¹ Another example of a warrior wearing a cape can be found at Temple I of this site; see Compareti, 'Central Asian', Fig. 6.



FIG. 11 Legendary scene. Mural painting from Room 50 of Sector XXIII, Penjikent. The State Hermitage Museum, St. Peterburg, CA-16190. Photograph © The State Hermitage Museum/photo by Alexander Koksharov.

plain border without any pendant, which is remarkably similar to the discussed Bāmiyān type. At the time, different forms of bejewelled Buddhas had been publicly exhibited in Buddhist settlements in Afghanistan. As the Gyaur-kala tablets indicate, this iconography also expanded to Central Asia in the first half of the post-Gandhāran period. While there is no evidence that Sogdian artisans engaged in the construction of Buddhist monuments, they still had many chances to receive inspiration from popular Buddhist iconography. Although it would have been unusual for the female to wear the cape depicted in these murals, as the other examples suggest this costume

³² The line illustrations of the related four images have been published. Marshak, *Legends*, Fig. 60.

was exclusively for male aristocrats or gods, the woman has been interpreted as a legendary figure from an ancient heroic family.³³ This suggests that this costume's symbolic meaning remained constant and corresponded to the wearer's sacred status.

Such Central-Asian-styled figural imagery was probably a vehicle for the further transmission of the four-pointed cape motif, bringing it to Western Asia. For example, a piece of Byzantine silk from the Museum of Textiles in Lyon depicts a pair of crowned lion-hunters within a floral medallion.³⁴ Viewed from the front, each hunter figure wears a recognisable pointed cape with five slim triangular pieces of fabric suspended over his tunic. Each piece of the garment is decorated with a row of roundels and attached to a disk pendant at the tip. Considering the distinctive treatment of the hem and decorative devices, the cape seems to be an abstraction of the Gandhāran cape costume based on a post-Gandhāran model. The overall arrangement of clothing recalls similar figures in Penjikent paintings.

This piece of textile was produced domestically and brought to France as a diplomatic gift in the eighth century. The exotic pattern, on the other hand, can only be traced to foreign sources. Although the royal hunting scene, the flying ribbons, and the pearl roundels in this scene are Sasanian conventions, similar figural imagery carrying the same cape motif has never been found within the boundaries of Persia.³⁵ It is more likely that the Sogdians, who had already incorporated this cape motif into their artistic expression, provided an existing model for Byzantine silk workshops. Sogdian communities' affiliation with Iranian culture and commercial activities can account for the presence of Sasanian components in indigenous fabric design.

Another destination for the transmission of the four-pointed cape costume, and arguably the most important one, was China in the East. Related specimens are dated to the Tang Dynasty (618–907

³³ Marshak, *Legends*, 116.

³⁴ Muthesius, *Byzantine*, 25–26.

³⁵ Until now, only a Sasanian silver plate has been found to bear figural patterns with short capes, but these capes are structurally different from the Gandhāran-derived ones; see Klimburg-Salter, *The Kingdom*, 106, Fig. 44.



FIG. 12 Standing Buddha wearing a cape. Brass sculpture from Kashmir. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Ben Heller, 1970.297.

CE) and are situated in a pure Buddhist setting. A seated crowned Buddha on a silk banner from Cangjing dong 藏經洞 (Library Cave), Dunhuang has long attracted scholarly attention (Figure 12). The Buddha performs the gesture of earth-touching and is dressed in a monastic robe that leaves his right arm bare. With these iconographic features, the image can be identified as a replica of the famous Indian

icon, *Puti jiaye ruixiang* 菩提伽耶瑞像 (auspicious image of Bodhgaya) introduced by Chinese pilgrims. However, the Buddha also wears a pointed cape that has pendants attached to the curved hem, just like a post-Gandhāran bejewelled Buddha. This unique image thus has been interpreted as a compound of the two iconographies.³⁶

Although sculptures of Buddha touching the earth with his right arm unclad are common in Northwest India, none of them incorporates a cape as an attribute. The cape motif must have been absorbed into other iconographic systems somewhere away from its original cultural context. As Buddhist sculptures produced in China between the seventh century and the eighth century CE show, in a typical scene of *Puti jiaye ruixiang*, Buddha figures are usually adorned with a crown and body ornaments, resembling the imagery of the bejewelled Buddha.³⁷ Chinese painters who gradually became familiar with foreign Buddhist icons might have incorporated the cape costume from the latter iconography into the former as a novel decorative element. To follow the new trend of favouring floral patterns in the decorative art of the Tang Dynasty, they might have then redesigned this costume. As a result, this special Chinese specimen from Dunhuang seems to be double-layered, resembling a flower in blossom.

Finally, even more Chinese variants of the four-pointed cape can be found on the crowned Buddha figures constituting the 'Thousands Buddha' relief at Leigutai nandong 擂鼓台南洞 (Southern Cave of the drum-beating platform), Longmen. These capes use bead chains as a border, indicating a general formal link with post-Gandhāran models, but cannot be directly related to any existing specimens from Northwest India (Figure 13). Kuno Miki proposed that these figures, which perform a wide range of gestures such as meditation, earth-touching, and preaching, belong to a repertory of the bejewelled Buddha that came to Longmen from Kashmir via Khotan. As she dated the cave to the late seventh or early eighth century CE, it was chronologically possible for constructors to be recep-

³⁶ Rowland, 'Bejewelled Buddha', 23

³⁷ Hida, 'Tangdai putijiaye', 33–38.



FIG. 13 Seated crowned Buddha wearing a cape. Stone sculpture from Leigutai nandong, Longmen. Photography from the exhibition 'Buddha's Light of the Northern Wei and Tang Dynasties', Guangdong Museum, 2020.

tive to such influences, either directly or indirectly.³⁸ Attention may also need to go to the eye-catching double-headed Buddha sculpture at Nankan 南龕 (Southern Niches) Niche 83 in Bazhong, the third known Buddha figure of the Tang period performing the gesture of earth-touching and wearing a short cape. Its iconographic sources are rather complicated and should be separately discussed. Currently, more evidence is needed to determine the relation of these images to the aforementioned Dunhuang Buddha. These local creations have nevertheless heralded the constant adaptation of this cape motif, as well as many advanced foreign artistic sources, to the increasingly influential Buddhist environment in medieval China.

Conclusion

In the past, Gandhāran Buddhist art was deemed to have come to an abrupt end after the nomadic invasion. By tracking the four-pointed cape costume in different times and regions, this case study demonstrates the persistence of Gandhāran components. Owing to the extensive network of traffic across ancient Asia, this unique cape motif was reshaped by diversified artistic styles, and travelled to and localised in both Buddhist and non-Buddhist worlds in early medieval times. The popular Buddhist iconography developed by the regional artistic schools in post-Gandhāran Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Kashmir actively drove the transformation and transmission of this cultural element, highlighting the vitality of the late Buddhist art of Northwest India.

³⁸ Kuno, 'Longmen shiku', 8, 12–13, Figs. 3, 12.

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